Ancient Mesopotamia Outline by DBL for Prof. Ninnes Class

I. Egyptian Texts
   a. Creation by Atum
   b. Story of 2 brother (relates to Joseph/Potiphar wife episode)

II. Sumerian Texts
   a. Gilgamesh Tablet #11 (relates to Noah Flood Account)
   b. Enki and Ninhursag (Paradise tale)

III. Akkadian Myth
   a. Legend of Sargon (Sargon mentioned in Hebrew Bible)
   b. Accadian word “Rakiah” means “copper beaten dome” (compare with term in Bereshit meaning “firmament”)

IV. Hittite Texts
   a. The Moon that fell from Heaven (worship moon)

V. Ugaritic Texts
   a. Poems about Baal and Anath (Elijah attacks Baal prophets on Har Carmel)

VI. Legal Texts
   a. Code of Hammurabi (parallels with Pentateuchal Case Laws)
      i. Goring ox (Ex. 21:28-36)
      ii. Sharecropping (Lev. 19:23-25)
      iii. Adultery (Deut. 22:22)
      iv. Two men fight cause miscarriage (Ex. 21:22-25)
      v. Kidnapping (Ex. 21:16; Deut 24:7)

VII. Texts in Mesopotamian Libraries included:
   i. Literary texts as well as governmental and business records that may have existed in these collections include The Epic of Gilgamesh which has a flood account,
   ii. The Egyptian Story of Two Brothers which some suggest has parallels with the Joseph/Potiphar wife episode,
   iv. The Code of Hammurabi (1792-1749 B.C.E.) has laws regarding the goring ox (Ex. 21:28-36), false accusation (Deut 5:20; 19:16-21; Ex. 23:1-3), kidnapping (Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:7), sharecropping (Lev. 19:23-25), adultery (Deut. 22:22), incest (Leviticus 18:6-18), two men fight and cause a miscarriage (Ex. 21:22-25), “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” etc. Rabbinic tradition however interpreted these case laws often very differently than the ancient Near East cultures for example with regards to lex talionis.

VIII. Libraries of Ancient Mesopotamia and Middle East
   a. Ur- birthplace of Avraham
      i. Archeologists have found in Ur, the birthplace of Abraham, cuneiform (wedge shaped writing) tablets (ca. 2100-1948 B.C.E.) classified by
topic and stored in clay boxes called saduppu, (see Kramer, Samuel Noel and They Wrote on Clay).

b. Egyptian Archives

Records exist of Egyptian libraries from Khufu (Cheops) a monarch of the Fourth Dynasty (ca. 2600 B.C.E.) down to Ramses (1300 B.C.E.) thought by some archeologists to have enslaved the Hebrews to build store houses in Pitham and Ramses. Ramses library contained 20,000 rolls in Thebes. Moses goes between Goshen and Thebes in one night which would not have been possible if Ramses did not move the capital from Avaris to Thebes. The mummy of the grandson of Ramses, Mernepthah with battle wound, has been found, and the Mernepthah Stele sports an inscription with mention of "benai Yisrael" with whom Mernepthah engaged in battle, possibly during the period of Shirat haYam or later Joshua.

c. Mari Archives in Syria

i.

An archives was excavated at Mari in Syria where clay tablets written in the Babylonian language were uncovered in the palace of King Zimrilim. The Mari documents may describe some parallel situations to those in Genesis such as:

(1) the suzerain-vassal relationship which some have compared to the stipulation structure of the Ten Commandments,
(2) primogeniture of the eldest son receiving a "double portion"
(3) the custom of offering one's female handmaid as a suragate mother if the main wife of a patriarch was barren, which may have parallels with Sarah offering Hagar to Avraham, although Sarah sees to Yitzak meriting being the rightful inheritor.

d. Ashur in Assyria

i.

Archeologists at the ancient capital of Assyria, Ashur, have uncovered tablets from over fifty archives. One of the archives was founded by Tiglath Pileser I who dates from around the period of King David- the Hebrew King chosen by Samuel who made Jerusalem the capital in 1000 B.C.E. and who is mentioned in an inscription from Tell Dan. Tiglath Pileser III of Nimrud is mentioned in 2 Kgs. 15:29, dating from the period of Isaiah. Other kings of the ancient Israel in the Bible such as Omri and Ahab (the time of Elijah and Elisha) are mentioned in inscriptions also, as well as Ezra and Nehemiah in the Cyrus Cylinder.

e. Nineveh library of Ashurbanipal

i.

The library of Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.E.) at Ninevah, the city to which Yonah flees, and the city whose destruction in 612 B.C.E. is celebrated by the prophet Nahum was excavated by Austen Layard in 1849. Tablets were grouped together by series (iskaru) and by subseries (pirsu), arranged by numbers, indexed at
the rims. Finding lists were often inscribed on the wall near the door.

f. Alexandrian Library= glory of Hellenic World
a. Zenodotus
The Glory of the Hellenic world was Zenodotus' Alexandrian library which later organized scrolls based on
b. Pinakes- Callimachus' (305-240 BCE) 120 volume catalog, the Pinakes. The walls of the halls were lined with Armaria, or lockers in which scrolls were deposited (see Parsons, E.A. The Alexandrian Library).
c. A copy of Aristotle's lost study of _Comedy_ that complemented his _Poetics on Tragedy_ was said to be housed in the library,
d. Longinus reads Septuagint there noted in Peri Hupsos - a copy of the Septuagint (the Hebrew Bible in Greek) which Longinus in his work "On the Sublime (Peri hupsos) calls the most sublime work ever written (see Stern, Menachem, Greek and Latin Authors on Jews).

g. Beit HaMikdash (Temple) Archive

1) Sefer Hayashar
In II Samuel 1:17 a military collection of war songs referred to as _The Book of Jashar_ is cited when we read, "And King David intoned this dirge over Saul and his son Jonathan- King David ordered the Judites to be taught the song of the Bow. It is recorded in the _Book of Jashar_. The Sefer Hayyasar appears in these contexts of David's lament for Saul and Jonathan, and also Joshua's command to the sun and moon which miraculously stood still. A third probable excerpt appears in I Kings 8:12-13, a couplet imbedded in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Beit HaMikdash which survives in fullest form in the Septuagint where it appears directing the reader to "the Book of the Song" (biblio tes odes). I Kings 8:12-13 appears to be a couplet taken from an ancient song establishing G-d's supremacy over nature and ritual when we read, "then Solomon declared, 'The L-rd has chosen to abide in a thick cloud: I have now built for You A stately House, A place where You May dwell forever." Rashi notes that the book of Jashar refers to one book- The Torah, the book of yesharim- the upright, the avot, Avraham, Yitzak, and Yakov, who are referred to as the upright/just. A central theme of the Torah enunciated in Deuteronomy 6:18 is, "And you shall do what is upright and good." The book of Jashar also appears in Joshua 10:13.

(2) Sefer Milhamot HaShem
In Numbers 21:14 we find mention of a scroll titled, _The Book of the Wars of Hashem_. We read, "From there they set out and encamped beyond the Arnon, that is, in the wilderness that extends from the territory of the Amorites. For the Arnon is the boundary of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. Therefore the Book of the Wars of Hashem speaks of... Waheb in Suphah, and the wadis: the Arnon with its tributary wadis, stretched along the settled country of Ar, hugging the territory of Moab. According to Ibn Ezra, Milhamot Hashem was a separate book which together with the Book of Jashar, were anthologies of early songs describing the saga of Israel's battles at the beginning of its national
existence during the period of Moses and Joshua. Only three small fragments survive, but according to the Ramban (v.13), a fourth fragment, the victory poem of Sihon (v.27-30) was included. Interestingly the citation of Milhamot HaShem appears in a prose context in which two other ancient texts, _The Song of the Well_ (Num. 21:17-20) and the Amorite _Song of Heshbon_ (Num. 21:27-50) are quoted. Both Ramban and Rashi refer to "the miraculous wondrous victories" including the parting of the Reed Sea and other military conquests recounted in Milhamot Hashem. The _Song of the Well_ celebrates G-d providing Israel with water (cf. Song at the Sea, Exodus 15:1-8; Song of Deborah, Judg.ch.5). It is an etiology for the toponym Beer, "well" (v.16). Milhamot Hashem in the Biblical period is not the direct equivalent of the title of Gersonides (Ralbag's) most important medieval philosophic work, _The Wars of the L-rd_. In the Medieval Rabbinic mind, the wars of Hashem are the Makloket (debates) in the Talmud, and the Yeshivot Buchrim (students) as soldiers of halakhah, are the soldiers who fight these philosophic and legal wars in their learned animated discussions. It is felt by some Haredi Jews that the existence of these intellectual wars of Hashem waged by the armies of Yeshivah students protect the state of Israel.

(3) _Sefer HaBrit_

A further important scroll kept in the First Temple archive is referred to as _The Scroll of the Law_. This work was found by the reforming King Josiah's priest Hilkiah (I. Chr. 5:39-40; Ezra 7:1-2). It was subsequently given to the scribe named Shaphan. We read, "And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the Scroll of the Law in the House of Hashem," and Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan, and he read it." Rashi comments that the Scroll of the Law was hidden under a layer of stones where they had concealed it when Ahaz burned the Torah, also quoted by Redak, Abarbanel, and Mezudath Dovid. Wicked kings such as Ahaz (743-727 B.C.E.), sealed the Torah, Manasseh (698-642 B.C.E.) cut out the holy names, and Amon (641-640 B.C.E.) burnt the Torah (Shem Ephraim), but the good King Josiah (639-609 B.C.E.), like the good reforming King Hezekiah (727-698 B.C.E.) before him (2 Kings 22:8, 10, 12, 14; 23:4, 24:2, Chr. 34:14, 15, 18, 20,22), did away with idolatry and sought to restore the Torah to its place of glory. Redak conjectures that during the reigns of the wicked Manasseh and Amon, the Torah was forgotten and idolatry was rampant. The Malbim draws a moral reflection by commenting that while some work to repair the physical condition of the outer Temple, the inner Temple or Torah of Hashem wherein His Shechinah rests, risks being neglected.

(4) _Chronicles of Kings of Israel and Judah_

In I. Kings 14:19 a work titled, _The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel_ is cited regarding the wicked King Jeroboam who established golden calves in Dan and Bethel. We read, "the other events of Jeroboam's reign, how he fought and how he ruled, are recorded in the Annals of the Kings of Israel." His work of Chronicles is not to be identified with the Biblical book of that name at the end of the Torah signing off with the dream of all Jews and fulfillment (chronos plethorei) of all world history whereby King Cyrus of Persia allows for the building of the Beit Hamikdash.
(5) *Midrash of Iddo*

Further works found in the Beit Hamidrash may have included The Midrash of Iddo (2 Chronicles 13:22) and the Midrash of the Book of the Kings (2 Chronicles 24:27). Redak comments that the midrash of the prophet Iddo is called Midrash because it was always sought (nidrosh) to see the events of each king's reign. Gertner (Terms of Scriptural Interpretation: A Study in Hebrew Semantics, BSOAS, 1962a:10-11) states that midrash refers to a narrative or account, and Zeitlin (Midrash: A Historical Study, JQR, ns. 44, 1953: 24-25) claims that in Chronicles the term midrash refers to a book in which were recorded the inquiries of the kings and the answers and explanations of the prophets. Lieberman (Hellenism in Jewish Palestine, JTS, 1950:48) argues that midrash did not have a technical meaning in Chronicles. Lieberman comments, "However some copies of the Hexaena translate Midrash (in II Chron. 13:22) enquiry, which is the exact equivalent of our word. "Ezra has set his heart to inquire into the Law of the L-rd (Ezra 7:10)." The Hebrew "Lidrosh" is correctly translated by the Septuagint to "inquire." Finkelstein (The Origin of the Synagogue, PAAJR 3, 1930:56) suggests that midrash of the prophet Iddo was a collection of oracles and that the midrash of the book of Kings was "probably our book of Kings." Cassuto has suggested that archaic works such as Shirat HaYam (Ex.15:1-18), The Song of Miriam (Ex. 15:21), the Song of Moses (Deut.32), The Song of Deborah (Judg.5), and the Song of Hannah (I. Sam 2:1-10) may through redaction derive from previous ur-texts. Cassuto's theory is not Orthodox in that Orthodox hold "Moses received the Torah from Sinai..." and Rashi notes that since it says, "Torah" and not "HaTorah" it refers to the written and oral torah also.

(6) *Records of Fathers (see Jeremiah)*

According to Michael Harris, in the Temple in Jerusalem, "in a most secret place" which was open to only a few priests, sacred scrolls were kept, i.e. Jeremiah speaks of "the book of the records of the Fathers (avot)" that was kept, and Ezra speaks of "rolls" being kept in a scribe's chamber. After the Hebrews returned from Babylon in 516 B.C.E. exactly 70 years after Nebuchadnezzar's sacking and destruction of Jerusalem, Nehemiah and Ezra reassembled the Temple library to reform the sacred archive. Scholarly debates exist whether the library was burned when Antiochus captured Jerusalem (ca. 2nd century B.C.E.) and which was reestablished by Judas Maccabeus.

(7) *Library of Nehemiah*

2 Maccabees 2:13-15 mentions that "Nehemiah founded a library and collected books about the kings and prophets, the writings of King David, and letters of votive offerings."

During the period of the Macabees this library may have purged itself of Greek influences such as the text of Ben Sira, as reflected in the spirit of the later Tannaitic period when Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai in the mishnah in Maseket Yadavim (4:6) notes that the Pharisees (rabbinic Jews) unlike the Sadducees (wealthy Hellenized Jews), do not hold in high regard the works of Homer (Sifrei Hamiram).

(8) *Sefer Yihusin and Megillot Yuhasin*

a) See Josephus (Ag. Apion 1:31)
b) genealogical records in Jerusalem and Tiberia (Jos. Life 38) and Sepphoris (Kiddushin 4:5) and Gedara (Esther Rabba 1:3)
c) needed to serve in MaMadot
   - priestly Levitical rotations to serve in Temple
d) needed to marry bat Kohen (see Kiddushin 4:4
e) Herod burned genealogical registers to conceal his own Edomite origin (see Josephus Wars 2:247) and he murdered one of his wives and had her brother drowned to destroy their priestly genealogical lineage.