ISRAEL'S HOUSE: REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF BYT YŚR'L IN THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE LIGHT OF ITS ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN ENVIRONMENT

Daniel I. Block

In the OT the nation of Israel is referred to in a variety of ways. Recalling the traditions of their putative ancestor, the poets and prophets of Israel frequently employ “Jacob” as a collective eponymous designation for their nation.\(^1\) Several interesting features characterize this usage. First, in two-thirds of these texts Jacob is paralleled with another designation for the nation, usually “Israel” itself.\(^2\) Surprisingly, Jacob is overwhelmingly favored as the a-word in the pair.\(^3\) Furthermore there appears to be a pronounced tendency to combine

\(^*\)Daniel Block is associate professor of Old Testament at Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.


\(^3\)Exceptions are Deut 33:28; Isa 10:20; 41:8, 58:1; Ezek 20:5; Hos 12:3; Pss 81:5, 85:2, 105:6, 23, 114:1; Lam 2:3. This runs counter to the commonly held view that a-words are usually the more common words, whereas b-words are rarely used in prose. Cf. the note by J. J. Boling, “Synonymous Parallelism in the Psalms,” JSS (1960) 223–224.
the name with another noun in genitive constructions. Of interest also is the frequent appositional association of Jacob with “my/his servant” (‘bdy/w). Finally, Jacob appears to have been especially appropriate as a vocative term.

Much more common, however, is the name Israel, which occurs 2,517 times, frequently in combination with other terms, thus producing compound forms of the name. Especially important are the expressions bny yšr‘l (hereafter “bny Israel”), byt yšr‘l and zr‘ yšr‘l. Having previously investigated the significance of the first of these, the present study will focus on the usage and significance of byt yšr‘l. The procedure followed will consist of two major parts: (1) an examination of the significance of byt yšr‘l in the light of its OT context, and (2) an examination of the use of the byt-GN (“geographical name”) form as a national designation in the cognate Semitic texts. In the conclusion we will seek to synthesize the findings to arrive at a clearer understanding of the use of byt yšr‘l (hereafter “byt Israel”) as a self-designation by the Hebrews.

I. THE DATA

1. Frequency and distribution. The expression byt Israel occurs 146 times in the OT, accounting for almost six percent of the references to Israel. As Table 1 indicates, the distribution of the form is extremely uneven. The eighty-three appearances in Ezekiel represent fifty-five percent of the total. Other significant concentrations are found in Jeremiah (20×) and Amos (8×, or one-fourth of all the references to Israel in this book). When compared with that of bny

4 (1) Designations for the people of Israel or segments thereof: (a) bny yq̄b: Gen 49:2; 1 Kgs 18:31; 2 Kgs 17:34; Mal 3:6; Pts 77:16; 105:6; (b) zr‘ yq̄b: Isa 45:19; Jer 33:26; Pts 22:24; cf. Isa 65:9, whws‘ty myq̄b zr‘; (c) byt yq̄b: Exod 19:3; Isa 2:5, 6; 8:17; 10:20; 14:1; 29:22; 46:3; 48:1; 58:1; Jer 2:4; 5:20; Ezek 20:5 (zr‘ byt yq̄b); Amos 3:13; 9:8; Obad 17, 18; Mic 2:7; 3:9; Ps 114:1; cf. the literal use in Gen 46:27; (d) nbyt yq̄b: Isa 49:6; (e) s‘r‘s‘ryt yq̄b: Isa 10:21; Mic 5:6, 7; (f) r‘s‘y yq̄b: Mic 3:1; (g) plytt byt yq̄b: Isa 10:20.

(2) Designations for the places of residence in Israel: (a) hly yq̄b: Jer 30:18; Mal 2:12; (b) nwt yq̄b: Lam 2:2; (c) mknhn yq̄b: Pts 87:2; (d) nhlt yq̄b: Isa 58:14.

3 Designations for the God of Israel: (a) l’lhtym yq̄b: Isa 2:3; Mic 4:2; Pts 46:8, 12; 94:7; 114:7; 146:5 (all //yhw); Pts 20:2; 84:9 (both //yhw sb’, 81:2 //lhtym); also 2 Sam 23:1; Pts 75:10; 76:7; 81:5; (b) qdwš yq̄b: Isa 29:23; (c) byr yq̄b: Isa 49:26; 60:16; Pts 132:2, 5; (d) mlk yq̄b: Isa 41:21.

(4) Other associations: hly yq̄b: Jer 10:16; 51:19; s‘m yq̄b: Isa 44:5; kbdw yq̄b: Isa 17:4; g wn yq̄b: Amos 6:8 (in negative sense); 8:7; Pts 47:5 (both positive); wn yq̄b: Isa 27:9; sbyt(wt) yq̄b: Ezek 39:25; Pts 85:2.


6Num 24:5; Isa 2:5 (byt yq̄b); 40:27; 41:14 (twl’t yq̄b); 43:1, 22; 44:1 (yq̄b ‘bdy), 2, 21; 46:3 (byt yq̄b); 48:1 (byt yq̄b), 12; Jer 2:4 (byt yq̄b); 46:27, 28 (‘bdy yq̄b); Mic 2:7 (byt yq̄b); 3:1, 9.

7For a table illustrating the frequency and distributions of each of these expressions see our previous study, “Israel”—‘Sons of Israel’: A Study in Hebrew Eponymic Usage,” SR 13/3 (1984) 322–323.

8Cf. n. 7.

9The expression zr‘ yšr‘l deserves its own study.

10Note the total absence of byt Israel from late historiography (Ezra-Chronicles).
Israel, the usage of *byt* Israel was governed by totally different considerations. Neither chronological proximity to the earlier tribal days nor a specific literary style determined its usage. If Jeremiah and Ezekiel—for whom the form appears to have been a distinctive literary device—are excepted, the distribution of the expression is quite evenly divided between historical narrative and prophetic writings.

As Table 1 illustrates, *byt* Jacob occurs twenty-one times. Only in Gen 46:27 is the expression used in a narrowly literal sense encompassing the immediate household of Jacob the patriarch. Everywhere else it occurs as a collective designation for the nation, usually serving simply as a stylistic variant to *byt* Israel. Apart from Exod 19:3 where *byt* Jacob is paralleled with *bny* Israel, these texts are restricted to the prophetic and poetic writings of the OT.

2. **Usage.** At first sight, the historians of Israel appear to have employed *byt* Israel simply as a stylistic variant of *bny* Israel. In each Pentateuchal context in which it occurs the latter form predominates. In 1 Samuel 7, where the expression appears twice (vv 2, 3), it is alternated with Israel (vv 9–10), “all (kl) Israel” (v 5), “men of (nṣy) Israel” (v 11) and “sons of (bny) Israel” (vv 4, 6–8). On the other hand it may be argued that *bny* Israel stresses the plurality of individuals of whom the whole consists, whereas *byt* Israel places the emphasis on the nation as a unified body. This would explain the ease with which the latter is paralleled with *kl hʾdḥ*, “all the congregation,” in Num 20:29. Similarly, the adoption of this expression in Josh 21:45 may serve to highlight Yahweh’s promise of the land of Canaan to the nation rather than to the individuals of whom it consisted. In each occurrence in Samuel–Kings a strong corporate stress is observable. According to 1 Sam 7:2 the absence of the ark from the central sanctuary caused corporate lamentation after Yahweh. This was transformed into corporate celebration when the ark was finally brought home to Jerusalem.

After the institution of the monarchy, *byt* Israel tended to become increasingly political—even dynastic—in overtness. The tragedy at Mount Gilboa caused David to weep for “the people of Yahweh, even the house of Israel” (ʾm *yhw* *mbt* yṣrʾl, 2 Sam 1:12). The association of *byt* Israel with the ʾm *yhw* might suggest a collective religious sense here, but this connotation is absent from Mephibosheth’s strictly secular comment in 16:3: “Today *byt* Israel will restore

---

11Note the broader contexts of Exod 16:31; 40:38; Lev 10:6; 17:3, 8, 10; Num 20:29.

12Cf. A. R. Hulst’s conclusion that in Deuteronomy *bny* Israel stresses “die empirische Pluralität,” whereas Israel by itself emphasizes the “Einheit” of the nation; “Der Name ‘Israel’ im Deuteronomium,” *OTS* 9 (1951) 82. This concurs with W. Zimmerli’s comment (Ezekiel [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 2. 564): “Here there is expressed the family solidarity, the all-embracing total entity of this Israel”; cf. idem, “Israel im Buche Ezechiel,” *VT* 10 (1960), esp. 79–90.


142 Sam 6:5, 15. Verse 19 indicates that the *byt* Israel consisted of “all the people, all the multitude of Israel, both men and women” (*lkl hʾm lkl hmun yṣrʾl lmʾyš wʾdʾ ʾḥ*).
### Table 1

**Frequency, Distribution and Genre of byt Israel and byt Jacob in the OT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>byt Israel (146)</th>
<th>byt Jacob (21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exodus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leviticus</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotals</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Samuel</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Samuel</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kings</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotals</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremiah</td>
<td>15*</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezekiel</td>
<td>82**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosea</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amos</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obadiah</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micah</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zechariah</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotals</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalms</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Totals</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The full expression in 23:8 is zar byt yšr’l.
**The full expression in 44:22 is zar byt yšr’l.
***The full expression in 20:5 is zar byt yšr’l.

the kingdom (mmlkwt) of my father to me.” After the division of the kingdom the expression is applied exclusively to the northern kingdom, in juxtaposition to Judah. In 1 Kgs 12:21 Rehoboam assembles all byt Judah and the tribe of Benjamin against byt Israel. In 20:31 Ben-Hadad of Aram is reminded by his servants of the merciful reputation of the kings of byt Israel. A final text, 2 Sam 12:8, is noteworthy because of the effective play on the word byt. On the one hand Nathan reminds David that he has been given “the house of your master” (byt ‘dnyk); on the other he has also received byt Israel and Judah.

The outstanding characteristic of the use of byt Israel in the prophets is its
vocative function. The critical circumstances immediately preceding the fall of the northern kingdom in the eighth century, and Judah toward the end of the seventh and the beginning of the sixth, contributed to the adoption of this hortatory device. The scope of the expression fluctuated in the prophets between the entire nation on the one hand and the northern kingdom alone on the other.

Ezekiel's use of *byy* Israel deserves special comment. In a general sense the prophet is charged to minister to *byy* Israel, to renounce her evil, and to declare her future prospects. Elsewhere the name is applied specifically to the northern kingdom even though it had long since disappeared, the exiles of Judah in Babylon, and the remnant in Jerusalem. In several contexts *byy* Israel is paired with "my people" and contrasted with the nations (*gwyyn*). According to this prophet *byy* Israel has elders, possesses a register of its citizens, and has a wall surrounding it. Why Ezekiel, the prophet who is


16 See the references in Hosea and Amos in n. 15.

17 Cf. the references in Jeremiah and Ezekiel in n. 15. Interestingly, after the fall of Jerusalem Ezekiel uses the phrase in a vocative sense only twice. The absence of *byy* Israel from Deuteronomy, which is cast as a sermonic address, may suggest a chronological distance between this work and the two prophets.

18 This is frequently indicated by pairing *byy* Israel with *byy* Jacob (Isa 14:1–2; 46:3; Jer 2:4; Mic 3:9) or Jacob alone (Ezek 39:25; Mic 1:5; 3:1). Elsewhere this is indicated by the context; so Isa 5:7; 63:7; Jer 2:26; 9:25; 31:33; 33:17; Amos 9:9; cf. Ps 98:3; 115:12.

19 Note the reference to the two houses of Israel in Isa 8:14. A specifically northern interpretation is indicated by the juxtaposing of *byy* Israel with *byy* Judah; so Jer 3:18; 5:11; 11:17; 31:27, 31 (cf. v 33, where *byy* Israel includes both houses); 33:14; Zech 8:13; cf. also Isa 5:7 (Hebrew: Judah). Hos 6:10; 12:1 parallel *byy* Israel with Ephraim. Elsewhere the broader contexts of Jer 48:13; Hos 1:4, 6; Amos 5:1, 3, 4; 6:1, 14; 7:10 suggest the more restricted scope.


23 4:3, 4, 5; 9:9; 37:16.

24 11:15.

25 12:10: *hnšy* *hmš* *hzh byrwšlm *wkl* *byy* *yšr*l *šr* *hmḥ btwkm.


27 8:11, 12.

28 13:9: *ktb* *byy* *yšr*l.

29 13:5.
otherwise recognized for his emphasis on the responsibility of the individual for his own welfare, should have preferred this form to the simple name Israel or bny Israel is not clear. It may be speculated that on the verge of the collapse of the nation as an independent political entity he deliberately adopted an expression with strong cohesive overtones. On the other hand, since he wrote from Babylon the form may suggest a Mesopotamian literary influence on his writings.

3. Antithetical evidence. Byt Israel is juxtaposed with antithetical expressions in only four contexts. Lev 17:8, 10 distinguishes the members of byt Israel from the gr hgr bwkm, “the sojourner who sojourns in their midst.” However, the text is of little value for determining the unique emphasis of byt Israel because of the free interchange of the expression with bny Israel in the context. A similar alternation occurs in 22:18, in which Moses is charged to speak to Aaron, his sons and all bny Israel. The actual statement to be made, however, distinguishes between “the men from the house of Israel” (yš mbby yšr ’l) and “the sojourner in Israel” (hgr byšr ’l). According to the succeeding verses both may offer sacrifices to Yahweh, a privilege denied the stranger (bn nkr) in v 25. Indeed the latter’s produce is not to be received even if offered by an Israeliite. Ezek 14:7 is similar to Lev 22:18 in insisting that the same laws concerning idolatry apply to both byt Israel and the sojourner (gr) in their midst.

Isa 14:1–2 is more helpful. The prophet speaks in v 1 of the sojourner (hgr) attaching himself to byt Jacob, which in the context is paralleled with byt

30 The independent form Israel appears only in 13:4; 37:28; 44:10. Israel occurs in appositional relationship to “my people” seven times (14:9; 25:14; 36:8, 12; 38:14; 16; 39:7) and with the preposition bê- ten times (12:23; 14:7; 18:3; 20:5; 39:7; 11; 44:28; 29; 45:8, 16). Otherwise a variety of construct combinations is used, depending upon the requirements of the context—e.g., ‘dmt yšr ’l, 17x; hry yšr ’l, 16x; ’lhy yšr ’l, 7x; sbty yšr ’l, 7x; etc. For additional expressions and full discussion see G. A. Danell, Studies in the Name Israel in the Old Testament (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksell, 1972) 238–260; W. Zimmerli, “Israel im Buche Ezechiel,” VT 10 (1960) 76–80. Byt Israel may well have been rejected in these instances because of a reluctance to extend the construct chain beyond two members.

31 The form appears only in 2:3; 4:13; 6:5; 35:5; 37:16, 21; 43:7; 44:9, 15; 47:22; 48:11. Some of these have been questioned on text-critical grounds; cf. Zimmerli, Ezechiel, 2. 564.


33 The two words for “attaching” used here are both relatively rare. The word sph occurs only four times—each time, however, in a different stem. In 1 Sam 2:36 (Qal) it is used of appointing one to a professional (in this instance priestly) office. Hab 2:15 (Piel) uses it in the context of mixing drink, adding ingredients. In Job 30:7 (Pual) the verb is descriptive of young fools gathering to taunt Job. The closest parallel to Isa 14:1 is found in 1 Sam 26:19 (Hithpael). Here David complains of Saul’s men having drawn him out of the land in order that he (David) should have no attachment with the inheritance of Yahweh. The second verb, lwh, appears more frequently, but Qoh 8:15 represents the only example of its usage in the Qal stem. Here it bears the sense “to commit oneself to”—e.g., the pursuit of pleasure. Only the Niphal stem occurs elsewhere. In each instance the connotation of “joining” in some type of relationship is obvious: (1) marital union, Gen 29:34; (2) political alliance, Ps 83:9; (3) joint religious service, Num 18:2, 4; (4) a people attaching itself to a deity, Jer 50:4–5 (bny Israel and bny Judah to Yahweh); Zech 2:15 (many nations becoming his people); but note especially Isa 56:3–6, which speaks of the foreigners (bny nkr) joining themselves to Yahweh to
Israel. According to v 2 the “peoples” (‘mym) who will bring the Israelites back to their own land will themselves become the servants and captives of the byt Israel. The text clearly distinguishes between byt Israel and outsiders who would identify with them on the one hand and those who will be subject to them on the other.

4. Other examples of byt-GN in the OT. Proper names with a prefixed byt are common in the OT.34 Two types of names, however, should be distinguished: toponyms and eponyms. The most striking feature of the former is the absence of any place name of the form byt-GN in which GN also occurs as a personal name. Most reflect the veneration of a deity at the site35 or some physical or biological feature associated with it.36 Occasionally moral qualities will appear in the genitive position.37 Each of these forms assumes a more literal meaning of byt than is reflected in byt Israel.

In contrast to this common usage, byt precedes other eponyms relatively rarely. In each occurrence the genitive is a personal name that also appears with great frequency in the patriarchal narratives.38 Since these names are all closely associated with that of Israel/Jacob they provide little additional assistance in the interpretation of the significance of byt in byt Israel.39

Having summarized the ways in which byt Israel is used in the OT we turn now to an interpretation of the data. What is the significance of the prefixed byt in this compound form of the name? In our earlier study we concluded that as a self-designation the form bny Israel reflected an Israelite perception of

minister to him, to love his name, and to be his servants, contra Lev 22:25 above; (5) proselytes who are said to attach themselves to another people rather than a deity, Isa 14:1; Esth 9:27. Cf. also Dan 11:34 on the possibility of a hypocritical alliance.

34Cf. BDB 110–112.

35The byt-DN (“divine name”) in such cases is to be viewed as the residence of the deity—e.g., byt El, Josh 18:13; byt Dagan, 15:41; byt Anath, 19:38; byt Shemesh, 19:38; perhaps also b‘strh for byt ‘strh, “house of Astarte,” 21:27; so W. Boree, Die alten Ortsnamen Palästinas (2nd repr. ed.; Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1968) 79. All the Palestinian names containing the element byt are listed on pp. 75–81.


38Byt Esau, Obad 18 (bis); byt Isaac, Amos 7:16; byt Jacob, Gen 46:27 + 20x (cf. n. 4 above); and before the eponyms of the tribes of Israel. Cf. BDB 110.

39Interestingly, when Obadiah uses the form byt-GN he uses the personal name of the eponym as the genitive and not that of the national name, Edom. This may suggest that the association Esau-Edom rests upon different foundations than that of Jacob-Israel. However, since byt Esau occurs only here the evidence is too limited to confirm or refute this hypothesis. In addition to the names cited, note also byt Eden, Amos 1:5. This name does not fit into either category, being paralleled exactly by the Akkadian form, bit-Adini, on which see below. For further discussion cf. A. Malamat, “Amos 1:5 in the Light of the Til Barsip Inscriptions,” BASOR 129 (1953) 25–26, as well as our own “Israel”—’Sons of Israel’” 313, 316.
descent from a common ancestor. Is the same true of byt Israel? This question may be answered only by examining the broader use of the term byt in the OT and the byt-GN form in the cognate languages.

II. THE GENERAL USAGE OF BYT

With its more than two thousand appearances, byt seems to have been one of the most frequently-used Hebrew substantives.40 Although its significance varied greatly from one context to another, in its basic meaning byt represented a building that served as a dwelling, a residence. Frequently, however, byt was used in a derived sense to designate a “household, family”—i.e., those who resided in the same dwelling. Not surprisingly a byt could consist of more than the parents and the immediate children. Noah’s included the wives of his sons (Gen 7:1, 7); Jacob’s included his grandchildren.41 Abraham’s byt incorporated 318 trained men, and that long before he had any children of his own (14:14). Servants, whether born in the house or purchased from outside, were included (17:23, 27). Although the word byt is not employed in the context of Exod 20:10, since they are subject to the head of the house it is implied that even aliens and livestock were considered to belong.

In a patriarchal society such as Israel’s the byt was dominated by the father (’b). The word ’b itself connotes not only kinship but also authority.42 The father was the lord of the house,43 even of his wife.44 Children and servants alike honored him.45 In return, in him they also found their security.46 So important was the father in the household that the adoption of byt ’b as a designation for the family was a natural development.47


41Gen 46:27. The female members of a byt were subject to special customs. An unmarried daughter belonged to the byt of her father (Num 30:3 ff.). When she married she would join the byt of her husband (30:10). If a woman should lose her husband either through death or divorce while in a state of childlessness, she would return to the byt of her father (Lev 22:13; cf. Num 30:10 ff.).


43B’t hbyt, Exod 22:7.

44The term b’t is commonly used in the sense of “husband”; Gen 20:3; Exod 21:3, 22. See further J. Mulder, “b’t: ba’al,” TDOT, 2. 182.

45Exod 20:12; Mal 1:6.

46Ps 27:10; Lam 5:3.

It should be emphasized, however, that although the byt could often include servants and other outsiders the foundation of this social unit was the blood relationship that existed among the primary members.\(^{49}\) Marriage signified the departure of the male adult from his father and mother (Gen 2:24) and the establishment of his own byt (Num 30:10). The selection of an appropriate wife was a critical task, for her function was not only to attend to the physical well-being of the family (Prov 31:10 ff.) but especially to provide the 'b with children. To have children was to build the byt;\(^{49}\) not to have them was the cause of great shame.\(^{50}\) The importance of kinship by blood lies at the heart of the patriarchal narratives. Abraham was called to leave his kinsmen (mwldt) and his byt 'b in order that his own might grow in new creative directions (Gen 12:1–3). However, this growth was frustrated by Sarah's inability to conceive. Nevertheless all alternative schemes were rejected: Neither Eliezer, the designated heir (bn msq bytw, 15:2), nor Ishmael the son of the Egyptian handmaiden (17:15 ff.) could substitute for the actual son of Abraham and Sarah. This concern for the blood ties continued in the search for a wife for Isaac,\(^{51}\) as well as the latter's final instructions to Jacob (28:1 ff.). It was these marriages that ultimately produced the byt Jacob—consisting of seventy members, fathers, children and grandchildren\(^{52}\)—that made its descent into Egypt.

According to the subsequent narratives, consciousness of membership in the household of Jacob was never forgotten in spite of the increasing size and complexity of the group. The hierarchical organization of the nation that emerged from Egypt was based upon an awareness of lineal descent from the ancestor, the dimensions of which are reflected in the genealogies.\(^{53}\) These are by definition concerned with kinship ties; servants and slaves were not normally in-

\(^{49}\) Cf. Pedersen, Israel 51–54.

\(^{49}\) Note the idiom "to build a house for someone," bnh byt l-, 1 Sam 2:35; 2 Sam 7:27; 1 Kgs 11:38. Cf. also "to make a house for someone," 'sh byt l-, Exod 1:21; 1 Sam 25:28; 2 Sam 7:11; 1 Kgs 2:24.

\(^{50}\) The grief of one who has failed in this vital respect is given classic expression by Rachel in Gen 30:1.

\(^{51}\) Abraham's servant is to get her from his mwldt (Gen 24:4), his byt 'b and his msphh (24:38).

\(^{52}\) Gen 46:27. Note that in the context not a word is said about servants or other associates of the family; only blood relatives are counted.

\(^{53}\) This hierarchical structure is reflected in Josh 7:14–18 and may be represented diagrammatically as follows:

\[
\begin{array}{ccccccc}
  & A & & B & & B & & B \\
  & C & & C & & C & & C \\
  & DDD & & DDD & & DDD & & DDD \\
\end{array}
\]

(A = 'm; B = šbt; C = msphh; D = byt 'b)

For fuller discussions of the interrelationships among these entities see de Vaux, Ancient 8, 12, 22; Gottwald, Tribes 245 ff.; Milgrom, “Priestly” 79–81; F. I. Andersen, “Israelite Kinship Terminology and Social Structure,” BT 20/1 (1969) 29–39.
cluded. Consequently, although the term *byt was applied to each new family unit, not only could the descendants of the various tribes be designated as *byt Judah, *byt Ephraim, *byt Benjamin, etc., but the entire nation continued to be known as *byt Israel/Jacob. It may therefore be concluded that overtones of kinship underlie the Hebrew use of *byt-GN, particularly when employed as a self-designation, although perhaps to a slightly lesser degree than in the expression *bny Israel.54

III. BYT-GN IN THE COGNATE LANGUAGES

The root *byt, "house," appears to have been common to all Semitic languages.55 Fortunately, for the purposes of this discussion the form *byt-GN has been attested in a variety of contexts, permitting a firm basis of comparison with the Hebrew usage.

1. Bit-GN in Akkadian writings. The term bitu(m) occurs frequently in Akkadian texts. Its broad range of meanings parallels the Hebrew usage in many respects.56 Especially important for our purposes are the numerous occurrences of the expression bit-GN in which the proper name designates a geographic or tribal entity.57 It remains to be determined whether the phrase implies a recognition of ethnic cohesion as was observed to be operative in the Hebrew counterpart.

Several rather severe limitations frustrate the search for a satisfactory answer to this question. First, most of these names appear only as just that: the names of regions or tribes listed along with many others, tribes that were conquered by the Assyrian and Babylonian kings. Consequently their value for us is little more than statistical; at best they may reveal some hierarchical

54It is these overtones of kinship that underlie the application of *byt 'b in a special sense to a royal dynasty. These are frequently identified by the name of the first occupant of the throne from a given line; e.g. *byt Saul, 2 Sam 3:1 et passim; 9:1, 2, 3, 9; 16:5, 8; 19:17; *byt David, 3:1, 6; 1 Kgs 12:19 (= 2 Chr 10:19), 20, 26; 13:2; 14:8; 2 Kgs 17:21; Isa 7:2, 13; 22:22; Jer 21:12; Zech 12:7, 8, 10, 12; 1 Chr 17:24; *byt Jeroboam, 1 Kgs 13:34; 14:10, 13, 14; 15:29; 16:3; 21:22; 2 Kgs 9:9; 13:6; *byt Baasha, 1 Kgs 16:3, 7; 21:22; *byt Jehu, Hos 1:4. Notice, however, *byt Ahab instead of *byt Omri, 2 Kgs 8:18, 27 (3x); 9:7, 8, 9; 10:10, 11; 21:13; Mic 6:16.


56CAD, 2. 282–295, divides the various meanings of bitu into the following categories: (1) house, dwelling, shelter (of animals), temple, palace; (2) manor, estate, encampment of nomads; (3) room (of a house, palace or temple); (4) container, repository, housing; (5) place, plot, area, region; (6) household, family, royal house; (7) estate, aggregate of property of all kinds. Numerous references are provided. Cf. also AHW 132–134.

57For listings see S. Purpola, Neo-Assyrian Toponyms (AOAT 6; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Becker Kevaläer, 1970) 75–92, where more than 110 entries are cited. Cf. also Reallexikon der Assyriologie, 2. 33 ff. (hereafter cited as RLA).
structures. Therefore, the Akkadian scribes were disappointingly inconsistent in their application of determinatives, alternating among māt ("land"), āl ("city") and mār ("son"), or omitting them entirely. Third, and perhaps most seriously, bit in the sense of ruling dynasty and bit meaning tribal unit are not carefully distinguished. As a result it is often impossible to determine whether a given text is dealing with the ruling house of a tribe or with the tribe itself. On the other hand it is possible that in some cases the name in the genitive position of bit-GN may have been recognized as both the ancestor of the tribe and the founder of the dynasty. Finally, unlike the Hebrews, who demonstrated their keen interest in ancestral traditions by committing them to writing, not a trace of similar literature has survived in Mesopotamia. The records of the ancestral heritages of the monarchs are not to be confused with national traditions.

See for example the records of the campaigns of Sennacherib in D. D. Luckenbill, The Annals of Sennacherib (OIP 2; Chicago: University Press, 1924) 52–54. In this particular campaign, the scribe records the following conquests: (1) 33 strong, walled cities and 250 hamlets within the borders (li-mi-tu) of Bit-Dakkuri, including, among others, Bit-Sa-na-na, Bit-Ra-hi-e, Bit-Ku-dur-ri; (2) 8 strong, walled cities and 120 hamlets of Bit-Sā′-al-ī; (3) 39 strong, walled cities and 350 hamlets of Bit-A-muk-ka-a-ā, including Bit-Ta-ū-ra-a, Bit-Ba-nu-ša-ū, Bit-Il-ma-ša-ma-ā, Bit-Di-ni-ša; (4) 8 strong, walled cities and 100 hamlets within the borders of Bit-La-ki-ī, including Bit-Za-di-ia. According to these lists Bit-Dakkuri, Bit-Sa′li, Bit-Amukkan and Bit-Yakin, each with the land determinative, appear to be larger units, with subdivisions identified on the basis of urban centers, of which some are likewise designated as "houses."

Of the subgroups listed in the previous note only Bit-Zabidia is named elsewhere, and that only on one occasion.

See for example the references to the northern kingdom of Israel as Bit-Hū-um-ri-a and variations; ANET 284–285; cf. 280–281. Hū-um-ri (Omri) was neither the eponymous ancestor nor the first monarch of Israel. His significance to the neo-Assyrians may be attributed either to the latter's perception of him as having founded the state capital in Samaria or to his occupation of the throne when neo-Assyrian political ambitions first began seriously to touch Israelite interests. This occurred first under Aššur-nasir-apli, a contemporary of Omri. Cf. H. W. Saggs, "The Assyrians," in Peoples of Old Testament Times (ed. D. J. Wiseman; Oxford; Clarendon, 1973) 158. This designation of Israel as Bit-Omri contrasts sharply with the OT usage. In the latter the nation is never identified as "the house" of its monarch or ruling dynasty. Cf. n. 54 above. Furthermore, this particular dynasty is never identified as byt Omri but always as byt Ahab. T. Ishida, "The House of Ahab," IEJ 25 (1975) 135–151, attributes this alteration to the Deuteronomistic religious perspective of Israelite historiography. If D. J. Wiseman's reconstruction of a lacuna in one of Tiglath-Pileser's inscriptions is correct, the identification of Aram Damascus as Bit-Ha-za-ili may represent a similar case. "A Fragmentary Inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III from Nimrud," Iraq 18 (1956) 120 ff. Cf. H. Tadmor, "The Southern Border of Aram," IEJ 12 (1962) 114–122.

In fact, even where the texts are clear the Assyrian interpretation appears to be erroneous. On the black obelisk Jehu is identified as Ia-ù-a mār Hū-um-ri (ANET 280), although it is known from 2 Kgs 10:1–17 that, far from being a member of the dynasty, he was responsible for its extermination and replacing it with his own. Note also the designation of the northern dynasty as byt Jehu in Hos 1:4. Expressions such as this Akkadian form may therefore signify no more than that Jehu was a successor of Omri or that he was from "Humri-land." So A. Ungnad, "Jaua, Mār Humri," OLZ 4 (1906) 224–226.

In view of these limitations a great deal of caution must be observed in handling the data. It is impossible to prove definitively or to refute the common ethnic roots of any of the Mesopotamian tribes that come under the name bit-GN. At best one may speak in terms of probabilities. But it is to be expected that, if the form bit-GN does reflect a common ethnic heritage, hints of this consanguinity should occasionally be dropped.

The first hint derives from the common use of bitu for "household, family." That the bitu as an economic unit could include servants and slaves as well as the members of the actual family is clear from the Babylonian laws. However, the core of the bitu consisted of the father (abu), his wife (aššatu), and the children of that marriage. In the patriarchal Mesopotamian society the father was considered to be the lord of the house. The use of the expression bit abim, one of the central concerns of the law code of Hammurapi, is of special interest. Full membership in the bit abim, indicated by the rights of inheritance, was normally open to the children of the man (awilum) and his wife. However, under special circumstances if a slave woman bore children fathered by the awilum these could also share in the privilege. Adopted children too were to share in the inheritance, but under certain conditions they could also return to their paternal homes (i.e., their own bit abim). On the other hand, even for seigniors the threat of being cut off from the bit abim hung over those guilty of moral offenses against the family. The obvious importance of blood relationships in these texts confirms overtones of kinship in the Akkadian usage of bitu when followed by an appropriate genitive.

Although in its essential meaning bit abi referred to the nuclear family, the expression could be applied to social units of ever-increasing size. According to ABL 1074:8–9, one bit abi is presented as a larger entity containing a qinnu

64E.g. TCL 13, 193:10, PN ("personal name") PN2 aššat-šu PN3 PN4 PN5 PN6 marš-šu PN7 ún PN8 maršša napha 8 LÚ a-me-šu-ut-tuš LÚ. UN nes bit-šu, "PN (himself), his wife PN2, his sons PN3, PN4, PN5, PN6, his daughters PN7 and PN8, together eight persons, his entire family."
65Cf. "The Code of Hammurabi," ANET, 171, #129, and 173, #161, where he is called be-el aš-sat-im, "owner of a wife." Hereafter the code will be referred to by CH and number of the article only.
66Note CH #165–184.
67CH #165, 166, 167.
68CH #170, 171.
69CH #191.
70CH #186, 189, 190, 193.
71CH #158, ina bit abim innassah, for having engaged in sexual relations with his stepmother. The punishment for the same offense with his mother was for both to be burned (CH #157). The verb nasášum is used in CH #168, 169 of removing a son's title to a share in the father's estate.
72For numerous other references to similar usage from other documents see CAD, 1. 73–74.
as a subunit: "This family belongs to the clan Belšunu." 73 The hierarchical tribal social structure is reflected even more explicitly in ABL 877:12–17: "Il-lat, son of Marduk, son of Bauershe, family of the Buletera clan, his ancestral house is outside the gate of the Gula (temple)." 74 Noteworthy here is the substitution of the name of the person fulfilling the role of father, Buletera, in place of abi. It is this usage that also underlies the lists of Sennacherib's Chaldean conquests. 75

In an extended sense bitu was commonly used of paternal estate—not only of movable property, 76 but also of real estate. Thus a patrimony could consist of a garden, a field, or even a manor. 77 On the other hand, although one paternal estate could be divided into several "houses" the expression bit abi continued to have reference to the ancestral castle, the family seat. 78 This semantic process developed still farther, to the point where bitu could be applied to a plot of land or geographic region independent of any inheritance connections. 79 Only in such cases have the kinship overtones receded completely.

We would be greatly assisted in confirming the kinship connotations of the expression bit-GN if it could be demonstrated that when it is employed in a tribal or geographic sense the name appearing as the genitive represented a bona fide personal name. Unfortunately many of the names so used are unattested as names of individuals. It is possible that the personal-name determinative prefixed to many of these reflects memories of the founders of these houses—i.e., the eponymous ancestors. 80 On formal grounds there does not seem to be any reason for rejecting many of those accompanied by this determinative as personal names. 81 Several have appeared in contexts in which they have been interpreted as individuals, suggesting that the personal-name determinatives were not entirely fictitious. 82

73 As translated by CAD, 1. 73. On qinnum see AHW, 922.

74 As translated by CAD, 1. 75.

75 Cf. above, n. 58. Cf. also the use of bel biti to refer to the chief of a tribe; CAD, 2. 295. These kinship connotations are especially important in the use of bit abi to refer to a ruling dynasty; cf. CAD, 1. 74.

76 CH #183.

77 For references see CAD, 1. 74–75.

78 Ibid., 75. Cf. n. 56 above.

79 CAD, 2. 292–293. Cf. also Jer 31:27 where, however, kinship overtones may still be present.

80 Of the more than 110 toponyms with the prefixed bit listed by Parpola, half occur with this determinative.

81 Compare the forms of the names with the personal-name determinative listed by Parpola with those cited by K. L. Tallqvist, Assyrian Personal Names (Acta Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae 43/1; Helsingfors: 1914), and discussed by J. J. Stamm, Die akkadische Namengebung (MVAG 44; Leipzig: 1939).

82 E.g. Adini, WO 4 (1967) 34, vi:6–7. So interpreted by E. Ebeling, "Adini," RLA, 1. 36; J. A. Brink-
Of special interest in this regard are the major Chaldean tribes—the Bit-Amukani, Bit-Dakkuri and Bit-Yakin peoples. Several features, apart from the prefixed *bit* and the personal-name determinative, suggest that here we have to do with tribes whose basis of unity was descent from a common ancestor. First, these names are never used of cities or associated with specific geographic locations. Second, the members of the tribes are regularly identified as *mār-PN*, the genitive being the name of the supposed ancestor. Since the names are not applied to cities, this usage should probably not be equated with the common Assyrian designation of a citizen of a city as “the son of the city.” This suggests that these groups had not yet developed politically beyond tribal status.

It is obvious that the search for the origins of the peoples referred to by the Assyrians as *bit-GN* cannot be completed without a great deal more information. However, it does appear that in some instances, especially with respect to the Chaldean tribes, the form might reflect a perception of tribal identity based on descent from a common ancestor. As in the case of Hebrew usage, this interpretation does not demand absolute ethnic purity. It is known that inter-marriage was practiced at least among the leading families of the tribes. It is also quite likely that outsiders were often incorporated into the tribe, either voluntarily or by coercion.

---


---

83Cf. the Arameans who are also found in southern Mesopotamia but whose “tribal” names appear elsewhere only as city names. *PKB* 271 suggests that their identification among the Aramean tribes may have been an Assyrian fabrication.

84Cf. the use of gentilics for the Arameans; *PKB* 267 n. 1716; 273 n. 1762. This Chaldean usage applies even to the chieftains—e.g. *a-di-ni már da-ku-ri*, *WO* 4 (1967) 34, vi:6.

85Cf. our discussion, “‘Israel’—‘Sons of Israel’,” 309–310. Significantly, although several northern Aramean states were also identified by the *bit-GN* form (e.g. Bit-Adini, Bit-Bahiani, Bit-Ḥalupe, Bit-Zamani) and although their citizens could be referred to as “sons of *bit-GN*,” the personal-name determinative never appears before the genitive. Contrast this with the Chaldean Bit-Adini, which seldom appears without the determinative.

86The occasional reference to the leaders of Bit-Yakin as “king of Sealand” and the collective designation of the chieftains as “kings of Chaldea” (*šarrāni [šal] māt Kaldi*), *Iraq* 25 (1963) 56 line 47, need not indicate otherwise. See *PKB* 264 n. 1704 for additional references to the use of *šarrum* for the rulers of these tribes. The process of sedentarization is described by H. Klengel, *Zwischen Zelt und Palast: Die Beziehungen von Nomaden und Sesshaftaen im alten Vorderasien* (Vienna: Schroll, 1972) 135–136.

87Cf. *PKB* 265 n. 1707.
2. Byt-GN in Northwest Semitic texts. Outside Mesopotamia examples of tribal and national names using the form byt-GN are rare. The nearest the cuneiform texts of Ugarit come is the application of the expression bit abi to a family seat or ancestral castle.\textsuperscript{88} Unfortunately, however, as in so many instances from Mesopotamia, this text concerns the fortunes of a dynasty, not a tribe. From the alphabetic texts the Keret epic speaks of a bt hbr.\textsuperscript{89} Habur, however, is not the name of a person but of a city, the home of Keret.\textsuperscript{90}

The data provided by Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions are no more satisfying. The expression bt/byt 'b occurs frequently with the sense “dynasty, royal house,”\textsuperscript{91} but bt/byt-GN forms are rare. However, two eighth-century B.C. references deserve comment. Exactly who is meant by bt mpš in the Karatepe inscription is not clear.\textsuperscript{92} It could be argued on the basis of KAI 26 A II:13–16 that bt mpš is treated as the equivalent of “the Danunites” (dnunym).\textsuperscript{93} Both are clearly associated with the plain of Adana and may be viewed as inhabitants thereof. On the basis of KAI 26 A I:13–16\textsuperscript{94} and A III:8 ff.,\textsuperscript{95} however, this interpretation is unlikely. Furthermore, if the tradition of Stephanos is to be


\textsuperscript{89}1 Keret 82, 173; ANET 143–144.


\textsuperscript{92}KAI 26 A I:16; II:15; III:11; C III:12. Cf. PI 15; ANET 653–654.

\textsuperscript{93}“I have built it (the city of Azitawadda) . . . with plenty to eat and well-being and in a good situation and in peace of mind to be a protection for the Plain of Adana (‘mq ‘dn) and the House of Mups (bt mpš), for in my days the country of the Plain of Adana had plenty to eat and well-being, and the Danunites (dnunym) never had any night in my days”; ANET 654.

\textsuperscript{94}The text speaks of evil men who were not subservient to bt mpš. Azitawadda, however, was able to subdue them, thus bringing peace to the Danunites.

\textsuperscript{95}This passage speaks of the inhabitants of the city of Azitawadda prospering and serving Azitawadda and bt mpš in large numbers.
relied upon, Adana was founded not by Mupsh but by a person named Adanos.\textsuperscript{96} Consequently \textit{bt mps} should be viewed as the name of the dynasty, considered to have been founded by a man named Mupsh.\textsuperscript{97}

From the Aramaic texts we learn of \textit{byt gš},\textsuperscript{98} a northern Aramean state with its capital Arpad.\textsuperscript{99} According to Sefire II B:10 \textit{byt gš} as well as \textit{byt sll} are threatened with a curse should they break the treaty that Bir-Ga'yah king of KTK has made with them. From the context the identity of \textit{byt gš} is not clear. If both entities are understood as toponyms,\textsuperscript{100} these represent important parallels to \textit{büt-GN} in Akkadian and \textit{byt-GN} in Hebrew. However, it is possible to interpret the form much more narrowly—i.e., as a designation for the dynasty founded by \textit{gš}.\textsuperscript{101} In the present context the expression seems to refer to those mentioned in Sefire II B:2–3: Arpad and its people, Mati"el, his sons, his nobles, his people (\textit{m}).\textsuperscript{102} If this interpretation is correct, \textit{byt gš} serves as a collective expression for the inhabitants of the state ruled by Mati"el. It must still be determined, however, how the state came to be known as \textit{byt gš}. Unfortunately,

\textsuperscript{96}As reported by Stephanos of Byzantium; cf. M. C. Astour, \textit{Hellenosemitica: An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact} (Leiden: Brill, 1965) 38–39. The etymological relationship between \textit{dn} and \textit{dnunym} is not clear, but the problem need not detain us here. For discussions see ibid., p. 14: \textit{PI} 56, who derive them from different roots; contra E. Laroche, “Études sur les hieroglyphes Hittites,” \textit{Syria} 35 (1958) 263–275; \textit{KAI}, II, 39, who treat the initial \textit{aleph} of \textit{dn} as prothetic and thus derive the two from the same root.

\textsuperscript{97}This name is probably to be connected with the Mopsus of Greek legend. Two years prior to the conclusion of the Trojan War this prince, the son of Rhakius of Clarus and Manto, daughter of Teiresias, is supposed to have embarked on a series of adventures, along with a band of followers, which led him as far as Pamphylia and Cilicia. In the former region he is purported to have founded the cities Aspendus and Phaselis; in the latter, Mopsuestia (“Mopsus’ hearth”) and Mallis. His influence appears to have extended to the plain of Adana. The Luwian form of the name, which exchanges \textit{k} for \textit{p}, may also be remembered in the name of the south Phrygian city of Moxopolis, another of his foundations, as well as the tribal name Moxiani, from western Phrygia. See further R. D. Barnett, “Phrygia and the Peoples of Anatolia in the Iron Age,” in \textit{CAH}, 3d ed., vol. II/2: \textit{History of the Middle East and the Aegean Region} c. 1380–1000 B.C. (ed. I. E. S. Edwards et al., Cambridge: University Press, 1975) 441–442; \textit{PI} 43–45. For a different interpretation see Astour, \textit{Hellenosemitica} 53–67, who sees \textit{mpš} primarily as a divine name.

\textsuperscript{98}In several Akkadian texts \textit{gš} appears with a prothetic \textit{a}-, which E. Puech compares with the prothetic \textit{aleph} of Adana, cf. \textit{dnunym} (\textit{KAI} 24 and 26); “Un ivoire de Bit-Gusi (Arpad) a Nimrud,” \textit{Syria} 55 (1978) 165 n. 8.


\textsuperscript{102}If the restoration of Dupont-Somer is correct.
apart from this text, byt gš has appeared on only one fragmentary Aramaic text, which reads l'[trsmk] byt gš, “to [Attarsumuki] of Bit-Gusi.” Otherwise even the Sefire inscription appears to exchange byt for br/bny. Again the expression has been associated with both the territory and/or the subjects of Matišel and the dynasty he represented. The eighth-century B.C. inscription of Zakkar of Hamath names a certain brgš next to br Hazael in a list of kings allied against Zakkar. It is apparent that here gš is understood as a dynastic title, suggesting that elsewhere too byt gš signifies either a dynasty or a state identified after its ruling house. Consequently the origins of the name are not to be found in an eponymous ancestor of the people of Arpad.

This interpretation is confirmed by the evidence of the neo-Assyrian royal annals. From the time of Ashurnasirpal (883–859 B.C.) comes the form ʼGu-u-si ʼIa-ha-na-a-a, the name of a king bringing tribute. The name distinguishes between the man Gusi and his country Yahan. The annals of Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.) frequently speak of Arame, a son of (A)gusi. More than one hundred years later Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 B.C.) encounters Matišilu mär ᾁ- gu-usi. In a list of villages the form Bit-A-g[u-si] appears, while another text uses māt Bit-A-gu-si. It appears that by this time the entire region ruled from Arpad was being identified by the name of the ruling dynasty in precisely the same way that Israel was being referred to as Bit-Ḥumria and Aram Damascus as Bit-Ḥaza’ilu. Consequently we are left with

103 See also the broken segments I A:16 and I B:11, which are to be restored on the basis of II B:10.


105 Cf. I B:3, ’m bny gš.

106 KAI, II, 247.

107 Fitzmyer, Aramaic 40.

108 KAI 202:5; ANET 655–656.

109 ARAB, 1. par. #477.


112 ARAB, 1. par. #813.


no Aramaic or Phoenician witnesses to the byt-GN form in which overtones of national unity based on descent from a common ancestor are reflected.

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The employment of the expression byt Israel as a self-designation by the Hebrews represents a usage unattested outside the OT. But the form is not restricted to the name Israel; the Israelites also identify themselves as byt Isaac and much more frequently as byt Jacob. Where individual tribes of Israel are concerned, byt often appears before the eponymous tribal name. The double occurrence of byt Esau as a designation for Edom in Obad 18 confirms that the byt-GN form was used not only as a self-designation but also was applied to the Transjordanian nations, with the name in the genitive position being that of the perceived eponymous ancestor. This observation, combined with the general understanding of a byt as being primarily (though not exclusively) a kinship unit, supports the hypothesis that when Israelites identify their nation as byt Israel they are employing a collective expression that assumes a nation that is essentially an ethnic unity. Such overtones, however, are probably not as strong as in the cases of zr' Israel and bny Israel.

Since such use of the byt-GN form is not known from the Phoenician and Aramaic texts of the same period and is absent from all Akkadian references to the Northwest Semitic nations, it may be proposed that the expression reflects a unique Hebrew perception of national self-consciousness. To be sure, in these contexts the form byt-GN appears to have been in common use, even as a means of identifying a state, but the significance of the expression was fundamentally different. In every one of these instances a territorial state, as opposed to a nation state, is involved,116 and in every case the name derives from that of the recognized founder of a ruling dynasty. The neo-Assyrians even applied this form (albeit erroneously) to the northern kingdom of Israel.

By way of contrast, however, it should be emphasized that, apparently lest realm and dynasty be confused, the Hebrew historians studiously avoided the identification of their nation, byt Israel, with the various dynasties. Neither the united kingdom of Israel nor Judah is ever called byt Saul or byt David. Similarly the northern kingdom is never referred to as byt Jeroboam, byt Omri or byt Jehu.117 The nations represented the houses of their ancestors, not of the


117 Cf. n. 54 above for references. Note also the following: 2 Sam 3:10, which speaks of transferring the kingdom from byt Saul and establishing the throne of David over Israel and Judah; 1 Kgs 12:20, the tribe of Judah followed byt David; 12:26, "the kingdom will return to byt David"; 14:8, the kingdom is torn away from byt David (cf. 2 Kgs 17:21); 14:14, a king over Israel will cut off byt Jeroboam; Jer 33:17, David would never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel (ks' byt yšr';) Ezek 12:10, reference to the prince of Jerusalem and all byt Israel in it; 43:7, Yahweh will dwell among the bny Israel forever; neither byt Israel nor their kings will defile his name again; Hos 1:4, Yahweh will punish byt Jehu and put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel (mmikut byt yšr';) 5:1, O priests!!/O byt Israēl!!/O byt hmilk!
kings-come-lately. Their sense of unity transcended mere political considerations. It was founded upon a conviction of consanguinity and kinship.118

118I am indebted to my student Kathryn A. Brogan for her assistance in the preparation of this paper. Any deficiencies in the presentation, however, are my responsibility.