A great deal can be learned about the background and purpose of Biblical narratives as well as the antiquity of the traditions within them, by an examination of geographic and ethnic terminology. Two such terms in the Old Testament are “Amorite” and “Hittite” 1). It has been frequently assumed in the past that these terms are evidence of a very ancient level of the tradition quite apart from the literary sources in which they may be found. The present investigation will call into question the correctness of this assumption and will suggest that certain ideological purposes often lie behind the employment of these terms; that is to say, the use of the terms was rhetorical rather than historical.

I. THE USE OF “AMORITE” AND “HITTITE” IN NON-BIBLICAL SOURCES

Our historical knowledge of the Amorites and Hittites is dependent upon the vast amounts of extra-Biblical materials dating from the second millennium B.C. which have come to light in recent years. From the early second millennium B.C. onward, the whole of the Fertile Crescent from Iraq to Syria-Palestine was dominated by a rather homogeneous and advanced urban civilization of West-Semitic peoples 2). As a convenience modern scholars have given them the ethnic designation of “Amorite”, but in one respect this is quite mis-

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1) It might have been useful to include the term “Canaanite” also, but this would have greatly increased the size of the present study. The scope and conclusions of À. Van Selms, “The Canaanites in the Book of Genesis”, OTS 12 (1958), 182-213, are quite different from the present study. This suggests that another examination on a broader scale of the term “Canaanite” is needed. I wish to express my appreciation to Professor F. V. Winnett who kindly read an earlier draft of this paper and offered many helpful suggestions. However, I take full responsibility for the views expressed within it.

leading 1). “Amorite” is derived from the Akkadian term amurrā, used for the general direction “West”, as well as to designate nomadic peoples of the Syrian desert and steppe-land. As early as the Mari texts (ca. 1750 B.C.) it was also applied to a kingdom of central Syria, its chief city being Kadesh on the Orontes 2). This kingdom of Amurru continued to have considerable political importance in the second half of the second millennium B.C. as is known from Hittite and Egyptian sources of this period 3). With the coming of the Sea-peoples and the Arameans, ca. 1200 B.C., the kingdom of Amurru was obliterated and “Amorite” no longer had a precise ethnic or political connotation. What is important to note is that the term “Amorite” was never used during the second millennium B.C. in contemporary sources for any part of Palestine or Transjordan, even though there is extant a large body of literature from Egypt throughout this period which relates directly to Palestine and which makes use of a variety of terms for the region 4).

Similarly, in the Egyptian and cuneiform texts of the second millennium B.C. down to ca. 1200 B.C., the Hatti land, i.e., the “land of the Hittites”, stood for the homeland of the successive Hittite kingdoms of Anatolia 5). It is true that from the fourteenth century B.C. onward the Hittites did carve out in Syria an empire of vassal states, its southern boundary being the kingdom of Amurru. But there is no evidence that it held any territory south of this region, this being under the control of Egypt. This situation continued until the end of the Hittite empire, ca. 1200 B.C.

Now, nowhere in the Old Testament does the use of “Amorite” and “Hittite” correspond to what we know about these historical peoples in the second millennium B.C. The best explanation for the

1) My own use of “Amorite” in The Hyksos should perhaps be changed to “Nort-West Semitic”.