The History of the Jacob Cycle in Recent Research

An Introduction to the Volume

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The wide-ranging international SNF-project "The History of the Pentateuch," of whose research the present volume is a part" which research the present volume is part of, is a joint venture of the universities of Zurich, Lausanne, and Tel Aviv, directed by Konrad Schmid (Zurich), Christophe Nihan and Thomas Römer (Lausanne), and Israel Finkelstein and Oded Lipschits (Tel Aviv). The project has pursued the goal to develop new methodologies by combining literary, archaeological, and historical approach in order to better understand and evaluate the historical realities behind various Pentateuchal texts and traditions by combining literary, archaeological, and historical approaches.[1] The Pentateuch is one of the most important and most intensively researched bodies of literature in the Western world and has been of enormous significance across history, literature, culture, and religion. Critical analysis of the Pentateuch arose in the eighteenth century and has progressed significantly until the present day.[2] However, since the Pentateuch (and this is also true for most of biblical literature in general) is to be understood as *Traditionsliteratur,* it is a considerable challenge to reconstruct the history and growth of a corpus of literature that largely obscures the time, place, and authorship of its various texts.

In this field of research, it is essential to combine exegetical and historical approaches in order to reconstruct the history of the Pentateuch as well as its constituent traditions. The Jacob Cycle (Gen 25–35) is uniquely qualified to facilitate investigation along the various lines of inquiry of the larger project. Since from the birth of historical-critical scholarship in the eighteenth century, numerous

[1] For an example of the methodology envisaged here, see the following articles on the history and exegesis of the Abraham and the Jacob Cycles: Finkelstein/Römer, "Comments," 321–330; Lipschits/Römer/Gonzalez, "Pre-Priestly Abraham Narratives," 261–296.

[2] For the recent debates see Dozeman/Schmid/Schwartz (ed.), *The Pentateuch. International Perspectives on Current Research;* Römer, "Zwischen Urkunden, Fragmenten und Ergänzungen. Zum Stand der Pentateuchforschung," 2–24; idem, "Der Pentateuch," 53–166; Schmid, "Der Pentateuch und seine Theologiegeschichte," 239–271; Kratz, "The Analysis of the Pentateuch: An Attempt to Overcome Barriers of Thinking," 529–561; and Gertz *et al.* (ed.), *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America.*

theories have been proposed regarding the historical location, literary growth, and both narrative and political functions of its texts.[3]

Untangling the growth of the Jacob Cycle and the historical realities behind it is of enduring interest, as the studies on the Jacob Cycle in recent years indicate.[4] The Jacob Cycle seems to be one of the oldest origin traditions preserved in the Hebrew Bible. In the wake of Erhard Blum's groundbreaking monograph from 1984 on the composition of the patriarchal narratives,[5] it has been argued over the past three decades that the Jacob story (Gen *25–35) should be interpreted as an originally independent literary unit with its own historical setting, tradition history, and complex literary history. Only later was it then incorporated into larger narrative threads like the patriarchal narratives (Gen *12–50) and the Priestly Writings (P).[6] This has become established as the primary composition-critical model – at least within research in continental Europe[7] – in contrast to the traditional Documentary Hypothesis,[8] or the so-called Neo-Documentary Hypothesis,[9] according to which the Jacob Cycle would have merely constituted an episode in a much longer work, such as the Yahwistic or the Elohistic narratives.

Identification of the Priestly version of the Jacob narrative is relatively straightforward, typically comprising Gen 25:19–20, 26b; 26:34–35; 27:46–28:9; 31:17–18; 33:18*; 35:(6?) 9–15, 22b–29[10]. It is important to note that the bulk of the non-Priestly material in Gen 25–35 is indeed pre-Priestly, as has become clear in recent decades. Within this older non-P material, three major traditions are typically identified: the Jacob-Laban episode in Gen 29*–31, probably containing the oldest material (possibly even dating to the early first millennium), as Albert

[3] For the debate see Römer, "Der Pentateuch," 53–166.

[4] Among the major contributions of the past years see, e. g., Assis, *Identity in Conflict*; Blum, "Jacob Tradition," 181–211; Brett/Wöhrle (ed.), *The Politics of the Ancestors*; de Pury, "Jacob Story," 51–72; idem, "Le cycle de Jacob comme légende autonome des origines d'Israël," 93–108; Finkelstein/Römer, "Comments," 321–330; Köckert, "Wie wurden Abraham- und Jakobüberlieferung zu einer 'Vätergeschichte' verbunden?," 43–66; Kratz, "Die Verheißungen an die Erzväter: Die Konstruktion ethnischer Identität Israels," 35–66; Lipschits/Römer/Gonzalez, "Pre-Priestly Abraham Narratives," 261–296; Na'aman, "Boundaries," 3–12; idem, "The Jacob Story," 95–125; Schmid, "Von Jakob zu Israel," 33–67; Sergi, "The Gilead between Aram and Israel: Political Borders, Cultural Interaction and the Question of Jacob and the Israelite History," 333–354; Weingart, "'Jakob hatte zwölf Söhne' (Gen 35,22): die Konstruktion kollektiver Identität im alten Israel," 53–58; and Wöhrle, "Koexistenz," 35–66.

[5] Blum, *Vätergeschichte;* with several refinements and corrections in his subsequent publications, see esp., Blum, "Jacob Tradition," 181–211.

[6] Against Na'aman, "The Jacob Story," 95–125, who argues for a unified patriarchal cycle (containing Abraham and Jacob) dating to the exilic period.

[7] For the debate see the overview by Römer, "Zwischen Urkunden, Fragmenten und Ergänzungen. Zum Stand der Pentateuchforschung," 2–24.

[8] See for the patriarchal narratives: Ruppert, *Genesis*.

[9] Baden, *Composition*.

[10] Cf. de Pury, "Der priesterschriftliche Umgang mit der Jakobsgeschichte," 43–72; Finkelstein/Römer, "Comments," 334–335.

de Pury has argued;[11] the Jacob-Esau tradition(s) in Gen 25, 27, 32, 33, and the etiology of Bethel in Gen 28*. These three traditions have experienced their own independent development and growth, but were joined at a certain point in their history into the first literary edition of the Jacob narrative.

This early Jacob narrative seems to be of Northern origin, as indicated by the locations mentioned in the Cycle: The main locations are Bethel, Penuel, Shechem, and Mahanajim, all indicative of the North.[12] In light of recent research, the close connection of the Cycle to Bethel is especially striking, which is identified as both the starting and ending point of Jacob's wanderings (*28:10–22; 35:6–7), including instituting an offering at the sanctuary (28:20–22). Bethel served as a functioning sanctuary before the downfall of the Northern Kingdom,[13] and as recent research has emphasized, Bethel's centrality to the overall structure of the Jacob Cycle indicates that its core material should be dated before 722 BCE. The first recording of the Jacob story was seemingly undertaken during the reign of Jeroboam II (787–747 BCE) in the 8th century, probably at Bethel, and served as a kind of "origin myth" of the Northern Kingdom in its "golden age" under the successful Northern king – a theory that was put forth prominently by Erhard Blum and Albert de Pury[14] and has since gained wide acceptance among scholars. It thus appears that the Jacob tradition was transmitted at Bethel and owes its literary survival beyond 722 BCE primarily to the later redactional connection with the Abraham and Isaac traditions from Judah.

In spite of the previous consensus in the field as sketched above, new studies and current archaeological findings have scrutinized several of the "certainties" in these questions, leading to debate on whether some of the basic assumptions should be modified or even rejected. To name only a few: Does P's Jacob cycle, with its considerable attention on intermarriage and Bethel, show that P was mainly interested in cult and family issues, which would then possibly point to a historical location of its authors under Persian rule? Guy Darshan (*in this volume*) likewise raises an intriguing question concerning the identification and attribution of texts to the Priestly stratum. Which parts of the Cycle do actually inherit this Northern geography in light of the Northern orientation of non-Priestly or pre-Priestly material, and is it not possible that an independent Southern version of the Jacob narrative may have existed (Gen *25.27) that was only later joined with the more Northern-oriented Jacob-Laban episode, as has been suggested by Jakob Wöhrle (Gen *29–31; *in this volume*)? Which "Israel" would Jacob then represent in the Jacob cycle, and would this already include the conception of "Israel" comprising twelve tribes (see Christian Frevel, *in this*

[11] De Pury, "Jacob Story," 51–72.
[12] See Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom*.
[13] Finkelstein/Singer-Avitz, "Reevaluating Bethel," 33–48.
[14] See Blum, "Jacob Tradition," 181–211, and de Pury, "Jacob Story," 51–72.

volume)?[15] How can the development of the concept of Jacob/Israel during the literary growth of the Cycle be described? In any case, the Jacob Cycle was eventually merged with the Southern-oriented Abraham Cycle (see Konrad Schmid, *in this volume*); what historical realities does the Jacob-Laban section reflect in what seems to be the oldest layer in the Jacob Cycle (see Friederike Neumann, *in this volume*)? An additional aspect that remains obscured is why Esau/Edom is put into such a close relationship with Jacob/Israel, since there are no immediate connections between Israel and Edom as political entities, if one opted for a Northern origin of the Jacob Cycle (see Benedikt Hensel, *in this volume*). Finally, the literary place of Bethel and the literary-historical attribution of certain Bethel texts in the Jacob Cycle should also be discussed in the light of the recent archaeological findings at Bethel (see Aharon Tavger, *in this volume*).

This volume offers comprehensive insights into new approaches and research questions. *Konrad Schmid* devotes his chapter "Shifting Political Theologies in the Literary Development of the Jacob Cycle" to what could be understood as the most debated issue in modern scholarship: the political dimension of the Jacob narrative. The historical-political framework in which Jacob stands for Israel, Edom for Esau, and Laban for Aram has become common among recent scholars since the studies of Erhard Blum and Albert de Pury. As Blum argues,[16] this dimension of the Jacob story should be assigned to its earliest literary version. Nevertheless, as Schmid demonstrates in his article, the narrative flow of the Jacob Cycle is not merely a linear representation of corresponding events; the Cycle develops its own narrative world, and this "world" changed throughout the process of the Jacob Cycle's redaction and growth. As part of the ongoing discussion (see also the contributions by Friederike Neumann, Jakob Wöhrle, Benedikt Hensel, and Christian Frevel in this volume concerning related issues), Schmid addresses several aspects of the political implications of the Jacob Cycle including its Northern origin, connections with the South, and affiliation with Haran. Alongside his identification of the various political dimensions throughout the Jacob Cycle, Schmid develops a detailed model of its literary growth ranging from the 9th/8th centuries into the Persian period. Thus, the literary growth of the Jacob texts in Gen 25–35 would mirror the political history of Israel and Judah from the 9th to the 4th centuries BCE.

Friederike Neumann's chapter concerns "Jacob, Laban, and the Two Daughters: Insights into the Formation of the Jacob-Laban Story (Genesis 29–31)." Beginning from the recent research detailed above, Neumann aims to demonstrate how literary and redactional analysis in conjunction with archeological insights can illuminate the formation of texts. She uses the Jacob-Laban story as an example

[15] See also Tobolowsky, *The Sons of Jacob and the Sons of Herakles: The History of the Tribal System and the Organization of Biblical Identity* and Weingart, "'All These Are the Twelve Tribes of Israel'," 24–31.

[16] Blum, *Vätergeschichte*.

for such reassessment in the light of recent Pentateuchal research. In particular, the relationship between Jacob and his relative Laban is central to Neumann's endeavor, reflecting the ambivalent relationship between the Israelites and the neighboring Arameans. In the first section of the chapter, Neumann delineates the primary layer of the Jacob-Laban story by presenting representative text passages, thus showing that the earliest layer of the Jacob-Laban story is characterized primarily by Laban's two daughters. Secondly, the historical background of the earliest Jacob-Laban story is assessed in a manner that understands the Gilead region as a single cultural unit bordering Israel and Aram. It seems that the primary Jacob-Laban story originates from this area, and probably the first half of the 9th century BCE. Finally, Neumann delineates the purpose of the earliest Jacob-Laban story by showing that its primary layer addresses an important topic with significant political implications: marriage as mirroring relationships of corresponding nations. The motif of Laban's two daughters reflects the inconsistent relations between Israel and the neighboring Arameans. The resultant separation concluding the story enables Israel to live in his own place and his own land, emphasizing both the close relationship between these two groups as well as the essential detachment of one group from the other. This political perspective is represented especially in the earliest layer of the story.

The extensive article "Edom in the Jacob Cycle (Gen *25–35): New Insights on Its Positive Relations with Israel, the Literary-Historical Development of Its Role, and Its Historical Background(s)" by *Benedikt Hensel* investigates the role of Edom within the Jacob narrative, which still constitutes a heavily disputed problem in reconstructing the formation of the Jacob Cycle. Furthermore, the question of Edom's role is supplemented here for the first time with an inquiry raised by the most recent archaeological findings from territory of Edom. As opposed to the classic stance in the field still prevalent today, in which the relations between Israel and Edom as reflected in the Jacob Cycle are assigned to specific historical circumstances sometime between the 8th and 6th centuries BCE, the latest historical research has revealed that the kingdom of Edom was relevant for the history of the Southern Levant and the literary history of the Hebrew Bible beyond this short period of time. The history of Edom should be traced not only through the entire Iron Age I/II, but also into the Hellenistic period, especially since the history of Edom had a twofold trajectory following its fall in 552 BCE – one in Edom, and one in Idumea.

This article pursues three major objectives: 1) describing the historical Edom in light of the most recent archaeological and historical research; 2) investigating Edom's role within the narrative of the first literary edition of the Jacob Cycle; 3) exploring the role of Edom throughout the various redactional processes of the Jacob Cycle during the exilic and Persian periods. The primary hypothesis is that Edom's role in the Jacob Cycle underwent a particular series of developments throughout its literary growth. This resulted in a conception of "Edom"

that developed alongside its conception of "Israel" in a process roughly spanning the 8th to the 5th/4th centuries BCE. Hensel proposes that the early Jacob Cycle (Gen *25, 27, 29–31, 32–33) should be understood as a post-722, yet still 8th century "exilic" tradition of Northern (and thus Samarian) origin. For the redactional processes, emphasizing positive Israel-Edom relations *after* 586 BCE, Hensel proposes that they represent a deliberate counter-image to the portrayal of Edom in other parts of biblical literature after 586 BCE, which is overwhelmingly negative. This notion of Edom could then either a) substantiate claims to Judean settlements in Idumea ("Edom"), or b) represent the integration of the (ex-)Judean (Yahwistic) settlements or individuals within the west-Edomite/Idumean regions in the 6th/5th centuries BCE (and continuing into the Persian and Hellenistic periods).

In "Jacob from Israel and Jacob from Judah. Reflections upon the Formation and the Historical Backgrounds of the Jacob Story," *Jakob Wöhrle* develops an intriguing hypothesis on the literary growth of the Jacob Cycle. As he demonstrates, current scholarship remains far from a consensus concerning the formation and the historical background of the Jacob story. The details of the Jacob story's literary prehistory constitute the primary focus of the debate, especially the complexity of the proposed redaction-historical model, the temporal and geographic setting of the Jacob story and its various literary strata, and, against this background, the larger intention of the Jacob story in its constituent parts as well as in its general structure. Wöhrle's article enters this debate and probes the historical and geographical background of the Jacob story. Firstly, he deals with the formation of the non-Priestly Jacob story, then he discusses the intention of the Jacob story on its (main) literary levels. Finally, Wöhrle explores the historical and geographical location of the Jacob story in these (main) literary levels. One of the primary outcomes is Wöhrle's elaboration on the origin(s) of the Jacob tradition(s), with the early non- and pre-Priestly Jacob Cycle seeming to be a combination of two independent Jacob traditions – a Judean version of the Jacob narrative (Gen 25; 27*, together with 26) and an older Israelite Jacob narrative (Gen *29–31, the Jacob-Laban tradition). Wöhrle holds that the redactional link between the two Jacob traditions is to be found in the (likewise composite) Gen *32–33, which seemingly mirrors Judah's efforts to find allies in the neighboring regions under the Babylonian rule in the early 6th century.

Christian Frevel's contribution "Jacob as Father of the Twelve Tribes. Literary and Historical Considerations" discusses the complex process of tradition building in which "Israel" became a composite nation of common ancestry. It analyzes the extra-biblical evidence for "Israel" and "Judah" and contrasts the biblical record against this background. Historically, there is neither any evidence that "Israel" had a common ancestry of biological kinship, nor that there was a full-fledged nation "Israel" before the Omride state in the North in the 9th century BCE. The designation of Judah as "Israel", unattested in the extra-biblical

record, is rooted in Northern superiority over Judah in the 9th/8th centuries and unfolded literarily only with the prophets, from a Judean viewpoint. Literarily, the analysis in this article proves that the twelve-tribe system and almost all mentions of twelve sons/brothers/tribes stem from post-Priestly additions from the 5th/4th centuries BCE. Hence, the earlier use of the term "Israel" including Judah and the use of "Israel" denoting Judah in the biblical record calls for an explanation. The literary growth of the Jacob Cycle gives evidence that it linked Northern and Southern perspectives to create a figure for collective identification already before "Israel" had explicitly become the twelve-tribe nation of Jacob's sons. In conjunction with the Northern perspective from the pre-exilic exodus-conquest narrative, the figure of Jacob implicitly established "Israel" as an entity that included the South. In Frevel's view, there had been an *implicit indication* rather than an *explicit concept*, which was then taken up in (post-)Priestly reception. The enmity between Jacob and Esau, already present in the pre-exilic composition, is explained against the background of the historical development of Judah in the 8th/7th centuries BCE, particularly in the southern border zone of the Negev.

Guy Darshan's article "The Priestly Account of the End of Jacob's Life: The Significance of Text-Critical Evidence" raises the intriguing question of the attribution of certain texts to the Priestly layer. Despite the consensus among scholars regarding the distinctiveness of the Priestly layer in the Pentateuch, several texts remain disputed, and a few others that are part of the Priestly stratum may yet remain unidentified. The disagreement over the identification of several Priestly passages extends to the final chapters of Genesis, especially chs. 47–50. It is Darshan's view that the prevalent limitation of "the Jacob narratives" to Gen 25–35 may be misleading, since a sizeable portion of the traditions about Jacob are found in the next pericope, the Joseph story (Gen 37–50). This is especially true regarding the Priestly traditions about Jacob; in fact, the Priestly narrative in the final chapters of Genesis, particularly Gen 47–50, is primarily devoted to Jacob. The survey of his final days, his descent to Egypt with his sons, the long description of his deathbed testament, and the report of his death all lie at the heart of the Priestly account in the final chapters of Genesis. This Priestly narrative in Gen 47–50, with its affinity to the Priestly account of the early days of Jacob in Gen 25–35, comprises the focus of this chapter. Darshan seeks to demonstrate the importance of textual criticism to the identification of the different strata in these chapters, and to suggest a new explanation for the original literary form and purpose of the Priestly layer therein.

The sanctuary of Bethel is mentioned in the Bible as the most important cultic place of the Northern Kingdom. Although the identification of the city of Bethel at the village of Beitin has found widespread agreement, intensive excavations at the site have failed to discover remains of a temple. *Aharon Tavger's* chapter "'And He Called the Name of that Place Bethel' (Gen 28:19): Historical Geography and

Archaeology of the Sanctuary of Bethel" presents the most recent findings and excavation results. As Tavger demonstrates, a critical reading of the biblical texts describing the cultic site of Bethel, including the story of Jacob's dream at Bethel, reveals that the sanctuary was not comprised of monumental structures and should be understood as an open-air space on a hill outside the city. Parallels of such a phenomenon are not uncommon in the biblical and archaeological accounts of ancient Israel. Tavger's essay proposes a new identification for the Bethel sanctuary at a site at Elevation Point 914, a prominent hill located 900 meters east of the village of Beitin. According to archaeological activity in the area, this is the only site containing Iron Age II remains, and it fits well with other biblical descriptions of the cultic site. Tavger presents a careful and critical reading of the biblical texts describing the cultic site of Bethel, among them the story of Jacob at Bethel. He concludes based upon geographical, topographical, and archaeological considerations that this site seems to have been operated as an open-space site on a hill outside the city where people gathered, wept, and feasted. The site at E. P. 914, which includes a flat plateau containing a plethora of Iron Age material, serves as the most appropriate candidate for the identification of Bethel's cultic site. Yet, future archaeological studies and textual studies will be needed in order to further reevaluate the role of the Bethel sanctuary – in history as well as in the Hebrew Bible.

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