The Book of Genesis

Composition, Reception, and Interpretation

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## CONTENTS

Preface ................................................................. IX
Abbreviations ......................................................... XI
List of Contributors ................................................ XXI

### PART ONE

#### GENERAL TOPICS

The Study of the Book of Genesis: The Beginning of Critical Reading . . 3
  Jean-Louis Ska

Genesis in the Pentateuch ........................................ 27
  Konrad Schmid

Historical Context .................................................. 51
  Ronald Hendel

Literary Analysis .................................................... 83
  Robert S. Kawashima

### PART TWO

#### ISSUES IN INTERPRETATION

The Formation of the Primeval History .......................... 107
  Jan Christian Gertz

Food and the First Family: A Socioeconomic Perspective .......... 137
  Carol Meyers

Abraham Traditions in the Hebrew Bible outside the Book of Genesis 159
  Thomas Römer

The Jacob Tradition ............................................... 181
  Erhard Blum

Genesis 37–50: Joseph Story or Jacob Story? .................... 213
  Richard J. Clifford
Joseph and Wisdom .................................................. 231
   Michael V. Fox

How the Compiler of the Pentateuch Worked: The Composition of
   Genesis 37 .............................................................. 263
   Baruch J. Schwartz

The World of the Family in Genesis ................................ 279
   Naomi A. Steinberg

PART THREE
   TEXTUAL TRANSMISSION AND RECEPTION HISTORY

Genesis in Josephus .................................................. 303
   Christopher T. Begg

Cain and Abel in Second Temple Literature and Beyond .......... 331
   John Byron

Genesis in the Dead Sea Scrolls .................................... 353
   Sidnie White Crawford

Genesis and Its Reception in Jubilees ................................ 375
   C.T.R. Hayward

Textual and Translation Issues in Greek Genesis .................. 405
   Robert J.V. Hiebert

When the Beginning Is the End: The Place of Genesis in the
   Commentaries of Philo ............................................. 427
   Gregory E. Sterling

The Reception of Genesis in Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum
   Biblicarum .............................................................. 447
   Rhonda J. Burnette-Bletsch

Genesis in the New Testament ...................................... 469
   Craig A. Evans

Genesis in Aramaic: The Example of Chapter 22 .................. 495
   Bruce Chilton

The Vetus Latina and the Vulgate of the Book of Genesis ........ 519
   David L. Everson

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GENESIS AND THEOLOGY

The Theology of Genesis ................................................. 635
  Joel S. Kaminsky

Genesis in the Context of Jewish Thought ............................ 657
  Marvin A. Sweeney

Genesis and Ecology .................................................. 683
  Terence E. Fretheim

INDICES

Scripture and Other Ancient Writings ................................. 709
Modern Authors ........................................................ 751
THE JACOB TRADITION

Erhard Blum

I. Boundaries and Themes of the Story of Jacob in Genesis

From a canonical perspective, the stories of Jacob (and Esau) represent the *toledot* (= [story of] descendants) of his (/their) father which begin with the *toledot*-formula for Isaac in Gen 25:19 and end with Isaac’s death and burial by his two sons at Mamre in 35:27–29. They are followed immediately by the *toledot* of Esau (36:1) and then by the *toledot* of Jacob (cf. 37:2 and 50:12–13), which comprise the Story of Joseph and his brothers.¹ At the same time, that well ‘delimited’ tradition of Isaac’s sons shows some diversity in terms of narrative coherence: while ch. 25B² to 33 (without ch. 26!) form a remarkably integrated story with regard to plot, theme(s) and narrative art, the subsequent chs. 34 and 35 cover Jacob’s way from Shechem to Hebron with rather loosely connected episodes and notes.

Gen 26, comprising a small cycle of narratives about Isaac and the Philistines, does not form an integral part of the Story of Jacob.³ Isaac and Rebekah do not seemingly have children here as could be expected after ch. 25B. Moreover, a household with children would contradict Isaac’s pretense presenting Rebekah as his sister (26:7–11) from the start. Nevertheless, some tradent apparently found it appropriate to fill the time-gap between the young family of Isaac in 25B and the episode expecting his death in 27 with narratives about Isaac and his wife⁴

¹ For a detailed description of the structure built by the *toledot*-formulae and by stereotyped notes of death and burial throughout the story of the ancestors cf. Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984), 432–446.

² In this contribution, “Gen 25B” will serve as an abbreviation for “Gen 25:19–34.”


⁴ Another aspect supporting this juxtaposition might have been the theme of blessing elaborated so much—though in different ways—in both ch. 26 and 27; cf. J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (SSN 17; Amsterdam: van Gorcum, 1975), 113–115.
that originated in their own place and time\textsuperscript{5} different from the cycle about Jacob.\textsuperscript{6}

Therefore, the main Story of Jacob is to be found in Gen 25B\textsuperscript{*}; \textsuperscript{*} 27–33. With regard to its main characters and places, its plot has a clear tripartite structure, which is only slightly extended by two (or three) scenes of an unexpected encounter of the main protagonist with God (or divine beings) which mark major turning points in the story:

A. Jacob and Esau—in Canaan: 25B+27

C. Jacob’s encounter with God at Bethel: 28:10–22

B. Jacob and Laban—in Aram: 29–31(32:1)

C’. Jacob’s encounter with God(/gods) at (Mahanaim and) Penuel: 32:(2–3) 23–33


This story is built out of smaller episodes and scenes which are mostly characterized by the unity of characters and place, as well as by an individual line of tension. On the basis of this episodic narration Hermann Gunkel spoke of a “Jakob-Esau-Laban-Sagenkranz” (“Jacob-Laban-Esau cycle of tales”), a description which was in line with his general assumption that the narrative tradition in the Bible started with small, rather simple units, which were later intertwined into larger ‘cycles.’ Nevertheless Gunkel himself already recognized that at least the last part (A’) of our story presupposes basic components of both, A and B.\textsuperscript{7} One should go further: part A’ functions as a real finale leading to a climax that throws new light on the story as a whole. We have reason, therefore, to speak not merely of a “cycle of tales,” but of a major integrated story with themes of its own.

Two of its main themes are ‘strife’ and ‘blessing.’ Often, though not always, both themes are actually combined into one: ‘struggle for blessing,’ especially with regard to the twins, Jacob and Esau. Their struggle begins in

\textsuperscript{5} In general terms, Gen 26 clearly has a southern-Judahite context in contrast with the northern setting of the Jacob-tradition (see section IV), showing well-known affinities with the Abraham traditions.

\textsuperscript{6} According to Reinhard G. Kratz, \textit{Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments: Grundwissen der Bibelkritik} (UTB 2157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 272, the nucleus of Gen 27 (vv. 1–4, 5b, 18a, 24–27b2, 28) knew only Esau as eldest son of Isaac, continuing several Isaac episodes from ch. 26. However, one might ask whether the supposed nucleus forms a coherent unit with a narrative purpose.

\textsuperscript{7} Hermann Gunkel, \textit{Genesis übersetzt und erklärt} (3rd ed.; HKAT 1/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), 292.
their mother’s womb (25:22), and the birth reveals Jacob’s ambition to be
the first one by grasping Esau’s heel (25:25–26). This ambition seems to
belong to his nature, for in the first scene narrated after their birth he
seizes an opportunity to correct his disadvantage and makes Esau sell his
birthright for a lentil stew (25:29–34). At the same time, the note about
Isaac’s love for Esau, the hunter, and Rebekah’s love for Jacob (25:28) indi-
cates an involvement of the parents into their sons’ rivalry. This sets the
stage for the decisive act in Gen 27, in which the old father wishes to
give his blessing before his death to the beloved son Esau, but it is Jacob
who, instructed by his mother, actually gets this blessing through cunning
actions and trickery. Now, in his pain after the imposture, Esau declares that
Jacob’s very name reveals his real nature, hearing it with a second meaning,
“deceiver”; high emotions seem to enable the coarse man to express this
in impressively designed sentences, somewhere between prose and poetry
(27:36):

Perceiving the artfully narrated drama of the father’s growing distress and
Esau’s despair (27:30–36), the reader cannot but identify with the betrayed
father and with Esau who fell victim to his brother. It does not come as
a surprise that this conflict, initially treated on Esau’s side with a dull
lack of interest, now bursts into open hatred; accordingly Jacob must /f._asc/l.f._ee
from his father’s house (27:42–45; 28:10). Nevertheless, the situation is not
drawn in a black and white manner altogether, for the reader will not for-
get the oracle in which YHWH predicted the supremacy of the younger
son from the outset which was granted later through the paternal bless-
ings (cf. 25:23 with 27:29, 40). For the time being the question remains: how
do Jacob’s trickster character and the divine intervention in his favor corre-
late?

Jacob’s encounter with YHWH and his celestial sta/f._ff on his way to
Rebekah’s brother Laban (Gen 28) continues the narrative line of divine
assistance for Jacob who connects this assistance with the hope for his
return be-ˇsalom to his paternal family (bet ’abi) (28:21). In Aram, however,
Jacob is reminded of his past as a trickster when Laban gives him Leah after
he has worked seven years for Rachel. In answer to his reproach: “Why have

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8 See further below pp. 185–186.
you deceived me?” Laban holds up a mirror to Jacob: “This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn.” Jacob’s exposition as le trompeur trompé, however, appears to be the start of a new chain of cheating with Laban as the main victim. Thus it is his daughter Rachel who steals the household gods during Jacob’s secret departure from Laban and hides them from her father—showing a bit of cunning worthy of both, her father and her husband (31:19, 33–35).

In return, it fits the pattern of God’s recurrent care for people who are in an unfavorable position that YHWH “opened the womb of Leah,” because she was unloved, whereas Rachel remained “barren” (29:30–31). This causes a bitter strife within Jacob’s own family, a continued struggle between the two women for their husband’s love and for children as a criterion for their relative standing in the family. Both make use of their maids for that purpose. Leah, however, will not find Jacob’s love, and Rachel will be heard by God and conceive only in the very end (30:22–24).

The other conflict between Laban and Jacob is again about the blessing (30:25–43): Being aware that Jacob’s work in service to him is blessed by YHWH, he does not want let him go home. Instead, he accepts a deal offered by Jacob which looks highly profitable for Laban, because Jacob’s share should consist only of rare kinds of sheep and goats. Using cunning tricks, however, Jacob manages to increase his own flock immensely at Laban’s expense. The implied logic seems clear: Laban is falling victim to the trickster Jacob in the very same field in which he had succeeded to exploit his nephew, i.e. in Jacob’s work for him. In the following chapter, however, a pointed flashback in the speech given by Jacob to his wives brings a different reality to light: Jacob’s skills as shepherd are not the reason for his wealth but rather God’s hidden intervention, revealed by a divine messenger (31:9–12). Divine speeches in dreams, one addressed to Jacob (31:13), the other to Laban (31:24, 29), also initiate Jacob’s ‘escape’ from Aram and prevent an outraged Laban from using force against Jacob’s camp. Instead, both parties come to an agreement after a lengthy, but pointed dispute. They make a treaty in Gilead at a place called Mizpah, in which Jacob promises to treat Laban’s daughters well, and both make a commitment not to go beyond that place into the territory of the other to do harm. The gods of the Father of each side will be guarantors of the treaty (31:53–54).

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9 The use of ḫṣwr (instead of ḥqtnh) calls to mind Gen 25:23b where—in turn—bkwr seems to be consciously avoided.
Following this reconciliation and in pointed contrast to it, the unsolved conflict with his brother immediately catches up with Jacob, anticipated by still another encounter with a ‘camp of divine beings.’ Facing the imminent meeting with Esau and his 400 men (32:7), he takes two preventive measures. At first he divides his camp (mḥnh) into two in order to save a remnant in case Esau will attack (32:8–9). Then he transforms parts of his company (mḥnh) into a present/tribute (mnḥḥ), split into several herds, and sends them ahead in an attempt to appease Esau’s ‘face’ (panim) (32:14–21). On that night at the ford of the Jabbok, however, he has to prevail ‘face to face’ against another opponent whose divine identity is only gradually revealed, both to Jacob and to the reader (32:23–33). In wrestling with God Jacob wins the blessing all over again—just before the meeting with Esau. Moreover, the new name he receives marks his change: He is a ‘new man,’ not “the trickster” (y’qḥb) anymore, as Esau had rightly called him, but “he who was in strife with God (about his blessing)” (yšr’l)! The initial tension between the divine oracle to Rebekah in 25:23 and Jacob’s unambiguous presentation as a deceiver is solved here. But the divine solution comprises both, the blessed one and the unblessed one, as the finale of the finale shows: Seeing Esau in the morning light of the next day near Penuel, Jacob “bows down to the ground seven times” before his brother (33:4). This suggests an almost verbatim reversal of the blessing that Isaac had given to Jacob in 27:29. In other words: the blessed one, as he bows to the unblessed one, gives up any triumphant claim on his superior status. At the same time,

10 With regard to the supposed structure of time in 32:14a, 22 see below note 72.
11 The narrative refinement of the Penuel episode exceeds that of any other part of the Story of Jacob. It marks the center of the last part (C’) between Jacob’s preparation and his meeting with Esau, but has a meaningful prelude in the short note about Jacob’s encounter with the divine messengers at Mahanaim (32:2b–3), which in turn mirrors the Bethel-episode in 28:11–19 in several aspects. See the fine exegesis of the Penuel story in its context by Hermann Spieckermann, Der Gotteskampf. Der Gotteskampf: Jakob und der Engel in der Bibel und Kunst (Zürich: TVZ, 1997).
12 It is possible that the narrator understood ʾḥym in 32:31 in the sense of “a god/divine being,” identifying the anonymous fighter with one of the “divine camp,” who met Jacob already in 32:2. Even in this case the “man” is thought of as acting as God’s representative and Jacob’s fright (v. 31) would be justified. It is not clear to me why such an understanding should require a direct sequence of 32:2–3 and 32:24–30; pace Tzemah Yoreh, “Jacob’s Struggle,” ZAW 117 (2004): 95–97.
13 The wording “You shall no longer be called ...” does not function as a formula used in a registry office, but is used here to introduce a second name emphasizing the ‘sense’ of the new name. In a similar, even more emphatic manner the name “Israel” is introduced in the P-layer (35:10); nevertheless P continues, constantly using “Jacob.”
however, Esau shows—by embracing and kissing his brother—that he, on his part, has given up the old strife (33:4; cf. also 33:9b). As Jacob/Israel himself sums up, he cannot but interpret the happy end, hinting gratefully at his nocturnal encounter at Penuel, through this parallel wording:

The major lines of the whole story come here to an end. The drama of the brothers is wound up by a narrative ‘formula of separation’ in 33:6–17a which mirrors a parallel formula in 32:1b, 2a (Laban and Jacob). In 33:7 the formula introduces a few etiological notes marking Jacob’s way through Sukkot and Shechem (33:8*, 20), probably also Bethel (35:6*–7*), and up to the place of Benjamin’s birth and Rachel’s tomb on the way to Efrat (35:16–20). By the time of this epilogue, Jacob/Israel has returned to Cisjordan, and with Benjamin the number of the bne yiśra’el is full (cf. 30:24!).

Last, but not least, the story has a dimension which is fundamental to all the outlined aspects of meaning when read in the perspective of the narrator and his addressees: it is part of their own—collective—‘biography.’ From the beginning, readers know that the child described at his birth as ‘admoni, k’aderet še’ar represents Edom, and that Jacob is Israel. It is the story about the origin of peoples (goyim) and their environment. According to the genealogical conception of all groups in which social structures are based primarily on relations of kinship, the (hi)story of tribes or nations begins with individual families. Thus stories of origins (Ursprungsgeschichten) tell family stories with which the hearers/readers see themselves in a continuity of descent. In addition, the narrated world and the addressees’ world are etiologically correlated. In this correlation it is essential that the ancestors as characters in a plot do not “stand for” ancient tribes or peoples, but they are those tribes or peoples. Therefore the popular attempts in modern research to ‘decode’ these stories like allegories in order to reconstruct ancient histories are projections which miss the semantics inherent to those traditions.

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15 With regard to these etiological notes see further below before n. 49.
II. Redundancy as a Stylistic Device in the Story of Jacob

The eminent skill of the storyteller(s) in the Story of Jacob—the narrative art in select episodes as well as in its whole—has drawn considerable attention in scholarly work. Suffice it to mention here the sensitive ‘classic’ commentators (like Gunkel or Gerhard von Rad within a historical-critical framework, or Benno Jacob with a more traditional-apologetical approach) or the pioneering literary readings of J.P. Fokkelman.\(^{16}\) In the present context the narrative shape of our story in its whole range cannot be discussed adequately. Some stylistic phenomena, however, should be pointed out because of their fundamental significance concerning the narrative ‘logic’ of our texts which seems to be significantly different from modern textual concepts. These stylistic features might be subsumed under an ‘intentional redundancy’ which covers several phenomena on different textual levels.

Especially in the realm of discourse with longer speeches, there are structures quite similar to the *parallelismus membrorum* in poetic verses. The clearest examples can be found in the dispute between Laban and Jacob in Gen 31:36–44. Reading sentence for sentence reveals semantically paired structures almost throughout. There is, of course, no regular rhythm or meter, but instead the structures are quite often underscored by alliteration, rhyme, and so on.\(^{17}\) It seems to be a rhetorically elaborated prose that aims to express the speaker’s emotions and to heighten its persuasive force. In 31:45–54, such parallel structures are motivated by factual complexity: the episode plays etiologically with a compound toponym (“Mizpah [in] Gilead”) intertwining the introduction of two cultic installations (heap/\textit{gal} and pillar/\textit{masseba}) and two material aspects of the agreement (Laban’s daughters / good neighborly relations) between the partners of the treaty.

Another, less formal device for enriching the complexity of the narrated world is to connect different elements in that world through their linguistic signs. Common means are variations, allusions, puns, and so forth between words, phrases, sentences, etc., on the levels of sound/orthography, syntax

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\(^{17}\) See also Gen 27:44b, 45a. Such features are, of course, not restricted to our story; see for instance Amos 7:10–17 or Combination I of the Deir ‘Alla Plaster Texts.
or meaning. These features belong to what Isac Seeligmann called the Spiellelement in the Hebrew Bible. Certainly, such “plays” function in our stories not just as l’art pour l’art but as a means of pointing to the nature of things/persons or to a deeper connection between them. In this sense, most onomastic etiologies are based on (often creative) word-plays. In our story, however, we have Esau’s emphatic interpretation of Jacob’s name as “deceiver” (27:36) besides the explicit derivation of “Jacob” in 25:26 (from ‘aqeb—heel). Esau’s own name is derived from še’ar—“hair” (25:25); apparently this somewhat imprecise pun is chosen because it enables an implied, but clear play with še’ir, one of the names of Esau’s future land. His second name “Edom” is explained in the scene with the lentil stew (25:30), but already alluded to at his birth (25:25). Redundant allusions or interpretations like these should not be seen as odd or contradicting features but as intentional representations of a multifaceted reality, as indications of an integrating ‘deep structure’ behind. Thus the meaningful connection of Jacob’s encounters with the divine messengers and with his brother Esau is indicated by the reiteration of the messenger and camp motifs. The latter provides a Leitwort (mḥnh) that is taken up by a recurrent word field built through paronomasia: mḥnh—mnḥa—ḥnn—ḥn. Together with other key words like ra’ah, panim, šalah, ‘abar, šem, brk these expressions build a tightly intertwined texture that lends a highly elaborated shape to the narrative finale of the whole story. The texture has its culmination in the episode of Jacob’s fight at the Jabbok which is shaped in multiple, dense paronomasia around the names “Jacob” (ybq, kp, √yq, √’bq), “Israel” (√šrḥ, ’elohim), “Jabbok” (see “Jacob”), and “Peniel” (ra’itti ’elohim panim ’el panim). Obviously, the author had some ambition to form his narrative in a most com-

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plex and artistic way which challenges and—at the same time—guides the reader to reveal its concealed meanings, or as Erich Auerbach would have called it: *die Hintergründlichkeit*.

With regard to the macro-level we find intentional redundancy in structures of thematic or episodic parallelisms/repetitions. Thus Gen 25B, though doubling in some sense the struggle for the blessing, functions as a prelude to Gen 27 which intensifies the story about the twins' strife. As has long been observed, Jacob's encounter with God in Gen 28 has its meaningful narrative counterpart in the Jabbok episode. Moreover, the latter's prelude, the meeting with the divine camp in 32:2b–3, appears to be built consciously as a 'duplicate' of essential parts of the Bethel episode mirroring the transitional position of ch. 28 in Jacob's *vita*. In terms of plot, the antagonism between the sisters Leah and Rachel echoes the strife between Jacob and his brother, whereas its narrative elaboration shows parallel structures only to a limited extent. In contrast, the story of Jacob's wealth at Laban's expense is told twice (30:28–43; 31:4–12, 41–42)—in great detail and out of two divergent perspectives (see above), recalling the 'stereometric' dimension of some *parallelismus membrorum* in OT poetics. In this case, however, there remain some inconsistencies between the parallel accounts that demand further explanation (see below).

The narrative elaboration in parallel structures reaches its climax in Gen 32–33. We already mentioned the meaningful duplication of the Jacob-Esau encounter in the realm of the divine. In addition, the meeting in the human sphere is anticipated by Jacob's doubled but complementary preparations already outlined. Both actions are taken up successively in the actual meeting with his brother; nevertheless they are smoothly intertwined here into one thread: the 'splitting' of the family according to the children's mothers (33:1–7) mirrors the preventive action in 32:8–9, both marked by *wyḥš* (32:14 and 33:1). The account, however, also recalls in some respects the sending of the *minḥah* (32:14–22). Conversely, the brother's talk about that present

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20 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Francke: Bern 1946), 5–27, with his famous comparison of Homer's *Odyssey* (Book 19) with Gen 22.
21 Evidently, Gen 27 can not be read without 25B.
22 Gen 33:1–7 basically corresponds to 32:1–9; 33:8–11 refers mainly to the 'tribute' of 32:14–21.
23 Cf. the sending/presentation in stages; the formulation 'br ḫpny in 33:3 as in 32:17 together with the factual reversal: Jacob not coming "behind" (32:19b, 21a) but "in front" (33:3a); the expression ḥmn ḥym (33:5b // 33:11!) as part of the key word cluster with mnḥḥ etc.
refers back not only to 32:14–22 but also to the sending of the messengers in 32:6. Obviously one major aim of such a ‘prolonging’ narration is the creation of a dramatic effect; from 32:4 on, an increasing suspense is built up. Moreover, it is due only to the bold narration of Jacob’s encounter with Esau that an overall balance with the first part of the story and its heavy episodes in Gen 25B; 27 and 28 is reached. Last, but not least, it provides the material for a subtle theology of blessing. The manifold poetic Bauformen in this prose are the necessary precondition for those achievements.

III. The Issue of Diachronic (Dis)Unity

The Story of Jacob as it has been treated so far in a synchronic perspective is different from the canonical Jacob tradition in Genesis. Several texts like Gen 26 or 34 have been excluded on the basis of such aspects as the narrative (in)coherence of the plot, style, and so on. The necessary interaction between synchronic and diachronic approaches becomes evident here: insofar as the synchronic reading attempts to understand the text in question as a whole, it necessarily presupposes the diachronic unity and intentional independence of that text. Thus literary connections transcending the supposed unity falsify that supposition unless they belong diachronically to a different context. If so, how can we avoid the obvious danger of creating our own imaginary text units through circular arguments? It all depends on a careful procedure relying on the convergence of different mutually independent data. Though the full inquiry which would be needed cannot be offered in this context, some crucial distinctions shall be explicated. Fortunately, we can start with diachronic positions which are widely accepted in modern exegesis.

The Priestly Layer

The identification of the Priestly layer (“P”) in Genesis is almost undisputed (in the main lines) since the basic study of Theodor Nöldeke (1869). In Gen 25–35, there are about 29 Priestly verses: Gen 25:19–20, 26b; 26:34–35; 27:46–

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24 Gen 32:6: “... and I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.” // 33:8: “He said, ‘What do you mean by all this company that I met?’ He answered, ‘In order that I may find favor in my lord’s sight.’ ”

25 Theodor Nöldeke, “Die s.g. Grundschrift des Pentateuchs,” in Untersuchungen zur Kritik des Alten Testaments (Kiel: Schwers, 1869), 1–144.
28:9; 31:17–18; 33:18aβ; 35:6(?) 9–15, 22b–29. As indicated above, 25:19–20 and 35:27–29 provide a seamless frame constituting the toledot of Isaac which include Priestly and non-Priestly material on Isaac’s descendants. At the same time the major P-pericopes (27:46–28:9; 35:9–15) clearly duplicate and contradict important non-P-episodes (Isaac’s blessing in ch. 27; Jacob in Bethel, 28:11–22), an observation which seems to support the conception of an independent P-source. Nevertheless, the data in the Jacob tradition raise serious questions with regard to this widely accepted understanding of P.

First, it is obvious that the Priestly texts listed above are far from constituting a complete narrative strand. The gaps are substantial, and not only concerning Jacob’s sojourn at Paddan Aram. The omission of major parts of the Priestly strand can, of course, not be excluded, though it does not fit the common view that the redactors generally preferred the P-texts to the non-P-tradition. Second, a closer examination reveals that the major P-pericopes show odd references to the pre-Priestly parallels with interesting diachronic implications. The best example is probably the Bethel text in Gen 35 and its counterpart in Gen 28. These two episodes provide a textbook example of a literary doublet indeed. The same event is described twice: after a divine revelation (including promises to the Patriarch), Jacob erects a Massebah in Gen 35 (exactly as in ch. 28), pours oil over it (as in 28), and names the place “Bethel” (as in 28). There is not even an attempt to harmonize the traditions. How is this juxtaposition of the pericopes in our Genesis to be understood? The key for an answer lies in the different skopoi of the passages: As hieros logos, Gen 28 deals mainly with the place whose holiness Jacob discovers, and with the stone that he dedicates as a Massebah. Genesis 35 employs exactly these two elements, in part in identical language. At the same time, however, the message is inverted: Bethel is no longer the place at which YHWH dwells—the “house of God” or the “gate of heaven” (as in Gen 28)—but is now described three times, redundantly, as “the place at which he (God) spoke with him” (vv. 13, 14, 15) and from which God “ascended” (v. 13). Accordingly, the cult stele in Gen 28 now

26 Martin Noth, Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1948; repr., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960), 17–18, assigns (as many others) only v. 18aβ to P. Cf., however, Gen 12:5; 35:27; 36:6; and 46:5–6.

27 See Nöldeke, “Grundschrift,” 27. Since Julius Wellhausen, Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments (3rd ed.; Berlin: Reimer, 1899), 322, v. 14 is mostly assigned to a non-Priestly source; but then the explanation of the given text remains a riddle; cf. Blum, Komposition, 266–267 with n. 22.

28 As in other cases, the introduction with the toledot-formula has replaced an older narrative opening.
functions as a memorial to the divine speech (v. 14a) and the anointing of the massebah appears transformed into an ad-hoc libation (v. 14b). This means that Gen 35 employs the narrative framework of the hieros logos in order to negate its etiological point! In other words, the Priestly tradition of Gen 35 has revised the old Bethel story by juxtaposing his “contra-version” to it. Still one might ask if the proposed reading of 35:9–15 necessarily requires the juxtaposition of both episodes in the same context. It is possible that the P-author not only knew the older tradition himself but could rely on his addressee’s knowledge as well. Such a reasoning, however, cannot explain all the data: given the meaning of 35:9–15 as an intentional ‘retelling’ of Gen 28:11–19, its proper place in an independent literary work would not be at Jacob’s return from Paddan Aram but at the very position of the older Bethel episode. Such a possibility, however, must be excluded from the outset for any P-context because of the proximity of Isaac’s blessing (28:1–9).29 In other words, the given structure of two extended blessings for Jacob, one before his departure to Laban (28:1–9) and the other at his return (35:9–15), offers the optimal condition for an intertwining of these pericopes with the non-P-narrative. Should this be considered a pure coincidence?

Based on these data and similar ones in other parts of “P” on the one hand and on the well known features indicating an occasionally high degree of ‘independence’ of the P-strand on the other hand, I propose that the P-tradition be seen as a literary layer that was conceived separately (in its main parts) but with the intention of a combined ‘edition’ including the non-Priestly ‘Vorlage.’ “P” can then neither be defined as ‘source’ nor as ‘redaction’; rather one should speak of a ‘composition’ or ‘edition’ showing a peculiar history of production.30

Non-Priestly Expansions

The major non-Priestly Jacob episodes which are not part of the primary Story of Jacob, Gen 34 and 35:1–5(6–7), belong to quite different contexts. Genesis 34 shows the sons of Jacob no more as the “tender” children of

29 Albert de Pury, “The Jacob Story and the Beginning of the Formation of the Pentateuch,” in A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Scholarship (ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid; SBLSymS 34, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 64–65, suggests that 35:9–15 be split in order to place 35:6a, 11–15 before Jacob’s stay with Laban and 35:9–10 at his return. Consequently, he drops the undisputed Priestly blessing in 27:46–28:9; perhaps by mistake? But see the paraphrase (on p. 64).

30 For a detailed discussion see Erhard Blum, Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch (BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 229–285.
33:11, but as revenging their sister’s rape by murdering the men of Shechem and plundering the city. Guided by the implicit evaluations the readers expect a negative judgment on the main protagonists Simeon and Levi. This judgment, however, will be heard only in the poem called the “Blessing of Jacob” spoken before his death (49:5–7). The short report about Reuben’s intercourse with his father’s concubine in 35:21–22a shows the very same structure: its open ending builds up a suspense that will be maintained until 49:3–4. Read in this perspective, both Gen 34 and 35:21–22 represent etiological traditions explaining the peculiar status of the tribes in question, in this case that of Simeon and Levi and their being “divided” and “scattered” in Israel. At the same time, the curses against the first three sons prepare for the exaltation of Judah who actually gains the blessing of the firstborn in 49:8–12. Whatever the case, we are dealing here with a rather late pro-Judahite (pro-Davidic) thread of traditions in the stories of the ancestors.

Genesis 35:1–7 in its present form clearly builds upon ch. 34 (cf. 34:30–31; 35:5), and most probably also upon an older note about Jacob building an altar at Bethel called ‘el bet’el in 35:6*, 7.

In the given text, the name ‘el bet’el refers to the place, i.e. Bethel; the resulting semantics, however, seem odd. The nearby note in 33:20 shows with wysb ... mzbh an unexpected construction as well. Here, the altar gets the name ‘el ‘elohye yisra’el. Wellhausen already suggested that an original mshb has been substituted with mzbh. The possibility that the strange mqwm in 35:7 was inserted in order to replace an older mzbh (v 7a±!) suggests itself even more. Probably, some later tradent did not like such a bold authorization of an altar at Bethel by the Patriarch. Nevertheless, the names of the cultic objects still form valuable sources for early religion in Israel: ‘el ‘elohye yisra’el, i.e. “El is the god of Israel/El, the god of Israel,” points to a pre-Yahwistic ‘Israel’ in the Shechem-area worshipping the high god El. Likewise, ‘el bet’el can be interpreted as “El is in Beth-El/El of Bethel” reflecting the non-Yahwistic pre-history of that Israelite cult-place. As part of the Story of Jacob, however, the component ‘el does not function as a proper name but as the appellative with the connotation “strong,” “powerful,” “mighty,” etc. This is confirmed by the intra-textual correspondence between 35:7 and the divine self-introduction in 31:13: ‘anoki ha’el bet’el meaning “I am the god [who is in] Bethel.” Moreover, according to the narrative logic Jacob comes full circle in 35:7, referring to his departures to and from Aram, both marked by the ‘god dwelling in

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32 Wellhausen, Composition, 48 n. 1.
33 The phrase is linguistically correct; see Blum, Komposition, 63 n. 11, 189; pace Axel Graupner, Der Elohist: Gegenwart und Wirksamkeit des transzendenten Gottes in der Geschichte (WMANT 97; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002), 254–245; his presumption that an irregular construction was chosen in order to avoid the Tetragrammaton ignores the resumption of an ‘idiomatic’ phrase (35:7).
Beth-el.' At Shechem in 33:20, Jacob is closing a narrower circle: the use of Jacob's new name “Israel” points back to the encounter at Penuel. Thus the naming of the presumed masseba sounds like a summarizing confession: “(Indeed,) a mighty god is Israel's god!”

At the same time, Gen 35:1–5 stands in a frame of reference which is wider than the contexts of Gen 34 and the older Story of Jacob: the verses show strong connections to Josh 24, constituting a kind of typological correspondence between the acts of Jacob/Israel in Shechem under the ’lh and of Joshua at that same place. This connection is tightened further by an explicit reference back to Gen 33:19 in Josh 24:32, which is mediated by the short notes about Joseph’s bones (50:25–26; Exod 13:19); this implies that we are here dealing with references within one and the same literary work. Such an idea is supported by the peculiar statement in Josh 24:2 that “your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods” (NRSV), which has been derived from our Jacob tradition in a classic inner-biblical midrash. That is, those “foreign gods” among Jacob’s household which he put away were none other than the “gods” of Laban (Gen 31:30, 32), the son of Nahor (29:5), i.e. the teraphim that Rachel had stolen from her father’s house (31:20) beyond “the river” (31:21). Whereas these teraphim play merely a folkloristic role in the ancient story, the tradent-exegete of Gen 35:1–5//Josh 24 has transformed them into a fundamental theological issue, i.e. the “foreign gods” worshiped beyond the Euphrates.

With regard to the place of the Gen 35*//Josh 24-stratum in the literary history of the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets, there are strong indications that these texts belong to a late compositional stratum which aimed to constitute a hexateuchal “Book of the Torah” (Josh 24:26).34

Finally, we shall discuss a third group of non-Priestly passages skipped over in the synchronic description above: the divine promises given to the ancestor or cited by him. In the realm of the Jacob tradition, the divine speech addressed to Jacob at Bethel in Gen 28:13a*-15 forms the most prominent example of this genre. After God’s self-introduction “I am YHWH, the god of your father Abraham and the god of Isaac,” the piece begins in v. 13b with the promise to Jacob to give him and his descendants the land on which

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34 For a more detailed discussion see Blum, Komposition, 35–61, and more recently Blum, “The Literary Connection between the Books of Genesis and Exodus and the End of the Book of Joshua,” in A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Scholarship (ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid; SBLSymS 34, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 96–104.
he is sleeping. Verse 14 comprises the promises to multiply his descendants like the dust of the earth and that all the families of the earth will bless themselves/one another by Jacob/Israel as the example of a blessed one.\textsuperscript{35} Finally, the promise in v. 15 refers to Jacob’s actual situation: God will preserve him on the way and bring him home. Apart from the last one all the promises have parallels in the other ancestor traditions. Most significant are the apparent connections to divine speeches at the beginning of the stories of Abraham (12:3b; 13:14–17). In our context, this evidence raises the question of how the relationship between these promises and the main narrative about Jacob should be diachronically defined.\textsuperscript{36} Fortunately, this can be discussed without having come to firm conclusions about literary-critical issues in Gen 28. It is sufficient at this stage to compare how both the promises on the one hand, and the narrative on the other, treat the topics of land and people.

In the narrative the idea that the brothers Esau and Jacob will have a land to live in appears to be taken for granted; it is a natural matter. The question of which land is destined for each one is settled by way of etiological allusions or implications. Thus the intended readers know right from Esau’s birth where the home of the “hairy red” boy will be. His father’s prediction in 27:39b makes a further allusion to this and 32:4 and 33:14 can presuppose the \textit{fait accompli} without further explanation. Jacob’s/Israel’s land is implicitly and \textit{pars pro toto} marked by several places, mostly named by Jacob himself on his way (Beersheba, Bethel, Gilead, etc.). The ‘frontier’ treaty in the mountains of Gilead at Mizpa (31:23–53) with Laban, the Aramean (31:20, 24), implies the fact that Jacob has reached here his ‘own land’ as well. Isaac’s blessing also assumes this line of thought: its theme is not the assurance of land to his son, but the land’s abundant fecundity and its rich fruits (27:28).

\textsuperscript{35} For this understanding of \textit{brk} (nif.) \textit{b-} see, inter alios, Blum, \textit{Komposition}, 350–353, and recently Zakovitch, “Implied Synonyms,” 837–838; for a different view, see Keith N. Grüneberg, \textit{Abraham, Blessing and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in its Narrative Context} (BZAW 332; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003).

In contrast, in the divine speech of 28:13 the focus has shifted significantly. Now, the possession of the land itself has become the subject. What was formerly the unquestioned presupposition now forms the explicit assertion. A similar shift occurs in the ensuing promise in v. 14a: the promise of countless descendants transcends the narrated world by anchoring the great future of the people in God’s word. Regarding the theme of blessing (v. 14b) one might prima facie see a correspondence between the promise in 28:14b and Laban’s statement in 30:27b: “YHWH has blessed me because of you.” The context, however, shows that Laban benefits from the blessed Jacob’s work with his flock. That is not the proper meaning of 28:14b, regardless of whether one sees here a promise that Israel will be the universal paradigm for a blessed one or—according to the Christian tradition—the mediator of a universal blessing.

What is then the *raison d’être* of these promises which relate to the fundamental conditions of Israel’s existence? Jan Hoftijzer has introduced an important idea concerning this issue some decades ago. According to him the patriarchal promises reflect the experience of national catastrophes since the destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians, which shook the unquestioned confidence in Israel’s/Judah’s existence in their land. Prophetic texts like Ezek 33:24 or Isa 51:2 indicate, in fact, the major significance of the ancestor traditions in the exilic discourse on Israel’s future. It was probably in this period that greater compositions of the ancestor stories were formed with the divine promises as constitutive elements. At any rate, it seems compelling that the main narrative in Gen 25B;* 27–33 did not yet comprise the promises in 28:13b–14.

The prayer of Jacob in Gen 32:10–14 contains two references to previous revelations of YHWH: v. 10b alludes to 31:3, v. 13 to the promise in 28:14a. The prayer as a whole has been recognized as a later insertion by Gunkel et al. Apparently, this

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37 Hoftijzer, *Verheissungen*. This work did not get the attention it deserved among his fellow scholars until the 1970s.

38 This is in contrast to the dating in the Davidic-Solomonic era, which was dominant in earlier research.


40 Gunkel, *Genesis*, 357. For a detailed discussion see Blum, *Komposition*, 155–157 (with reference to older literature).

relatively late Einschreibung intends to show the patriarch as an exemplary pious man (already before the Jabbok episode), adding a further theological dimension to the final act. Gen 31:3 has a similar tendency: Jacob’s initiative to return to his home is governed completely by an explicit divine order.

**Source-Criticism in the Jacob Story**

The foregoing analysis did not adhere to any variant of the documentary hypothesis, which had been prevalent in Pentateuchal criticism since the nineteenth century, but has lost its predominance in the last decades, at least in German-speaking research. Since the distinction between “J” and “E” still plays an important part in the international discourse, it seems appropriate to discuss its performance in the Story of Jacob more in detail. ‘Spot checks’ of three representative passages—Gen 28:10–22; Gen 31, and Gen 32–33—shall serve this purpose.

(a) Gen 28:10–22 is one of the few episodes in the Pentateuch in which the separation of supposedly interwoven threads of J and E is defined almost unanimously by different source critics. For methodological reasons, however, we shall begin with a look at the literary shape and structure with as little bias as possible. Starting from the narrative center, one finds Jacob’s dream (vv. 12–15) presented as a carefully described scenery:

The scene comprises three elements or agents: a ramp (slm), divine messengers (ml’ky ‘lyym), and YHWH. Each one is introduced by an opening w’hinneh (“and behold”) and an impressive syntactical ostinato: each sentence is built following the basic pattern subject—participle—locative adjunct/complement. The first w’hinneh governs two sentences describing the ramp; the second w’hinneh introduces one sentence with two participles; and the third one gives the basic pattern with YHWH as focus. The

without loss of continuity, 14a being a natural continuation of 9. The insertion gives an interpretation of the ‘two camps’ at variance with the primary motive of the division (v. 9); and its spirit is different from that of the narrative in which it is embedded.”

42 According to Noth, Überlieferungsgeschichte, 30–31, 38, the E-source is restricted to the Bethel episode (in Gen 28), the birth of Jacob’s children (in 29–30), the departure from Laban (31) and to the finale in chs. 32–33. In all of these passages two parallel threads of E and J are allegedly intertwined.
resultant “stepped structure” not only mirrors—so to speak—the imagined ramp/stairway, but also the conceptual climax leading from the heavenly ramp to the divine messengers and, finally, to the Deity himself. At the same time, the sentences in the first line rhyme with the antonyms “earth” and “heaven” suffixed with a *heh locale*, and the second and third lines both end with a preposition with a suffix in the third person (sing. masc.). Last, but not least, the first and the last sentence are bracketed by participles of the same root *nšb: muššab*—*niššab*, a word-play which is taken up later with *maššeba*. It would be difficult to find in biblical prose a passage surpassing the density of our scene description.

Moreover, after the divine speech and his awakening, Jacob relates the divine world seen in his dream with the place (*hnqwm*) he came upon by chance in two speeches which take up the three main components of our dream scene—as is common in biblical style, in reversed order: firstly YHWH himself: ‘*aken yeš yhwh bammaqom hazze*; secondly the *mal’ake* *’elohim* as part of the divine ‘household’: ‘*en ze ki im bet ’lohim*; and finally the heavenly rampart: *weze ša’ar haššamayim*.\(^{43}\) Formally reversing the climax in vv. 12–13a*, Jacob starts his own conclusions, appropriately, with God himself. In contrast, his two speeches show a climax in terms of his involvement: the first speech (v. 16) gives expression to his insight and surprise (“and I did not know it!”); the second (v. 17), explicitly marked by *wyr*, gives expression to his fear in the face of the place’s holiness.

Thus shaping Jacob’s verbal reaction in two speeches proves meaningful in several respects: it highlights not only the cognitive and the affective consequences of Jacob’s experience (again, in the appropriate sequence), but, even more significantly, it also enables the narration to give the suitable space to both, YHWH, the most important actor in any terms, and the holy place, the most important matter in terms of pragmatics with respect to the world of the addressees.\(^{44}\)

The factual consequences of Jacob’s insights and affects are sharply presented in the report of Jacob’s actions before and after his nighttime experience. By means of verbal reiteration another frame is built (v. 11 paralleling

\(^{43}\) These references are, of course, not only based on the recurrence of the terms לִּבְשָׁנָה and בַּמַּקְוָם, but also on the conceptual relationship between ‘God’s household’ and “God’s house,” and between the ‘ramp leading to heaven’ and “the gate of heaven” respectively. Sean McEvenue, “A Return to Sources in Genesis 28,10–22?,” *ZAW* 106 (1994): 381, calls in question these relations, though even the alleged Elohistic layer would not work without them. For a more differentiated exposition see Blum, *Komposition*, 9–16.

now enclosing the dream and the verbal response. It shows the fundamental transformation of the place and the stone in Jacob’s perception, which is summed up in his naming the anonymous place as bet ’el in v. 19a.

According to a lasting source-critical consensus, our episode emerged from the combination of two previously independent narrative threads: J in vv. 10, 13–16, 19a(b) and E in vv. 11–12, 17–18, 20, 21a(b), 22. Thus, source critics suggest cutting the vision at the third line and Jacob’s verbal response between vv. 16 and 17. However, one has to ask if explaining the highly styled structure, especially of vv. 12–13a*, as the accidental result of the combination of two sources would not go far beyond a sound diachronic reasoning. At best, the option of a redactional expansion would be conceivable, assuming that an author has fitted his additions meticulously to his ‘Vorlage’ to create an artful whole. Still, the arguments for such a diachronic explanation would have to be weighty.

Two main arguments have been made since the classical critics. The first is the alleged tension caused by the juxtaposition of the so-called “names of God” ywhw and ’elohim. The second is the claim that vv. 16 and 17 form a doublet, both stating the “holiness of the place.” This second argument, however, misses the individuality of the two speeches outlined above; they simply do not have the same propositional meaning, and v. 16 does not constitute an expression of fear nor v. 17 an expression of surprise.

45 Blum, Komposition, 9. Pointing to such correspondences does not imply the claim of an overall “chiasmus” covering the whole pericope; pace McEvenue, “Sources,” 378–380.
46 There is in this case some dissent as well, with regard to ‘minor’ questions (the unity of v. 11, the source-critical identifications of vv. 19, 21b, 22b), which must not deter us in this context, however.
47 Unfortunately, McEvenue, “Sources,” has not grasped this point in his discussion.
48 This option has been suggested by David M. Carr, Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 206–207, esp. n. 57, who sees vv. 13–16 as an expansion by the author of his Proto-Genesis-Composition. See also John Van Seters, Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 292–295 (earlier tradition in vv. 11–12, 16a, 17–19a); and Kratz, Komposition, 270–274, 280.
49 Additionally, Wellhausen, Composition, 30–31, argues that (a) the suffix in ’yw cannot refer to slm, stating that nisṣab ’al means only “stand before,” and that (b) YHWH speaking “from heaven upon the ramp” (?) would require qr as verbum dicendi. But not only are the statements (a) and (b) inaccurate (cf. Amos 7:7 and the language in 28:13 [just ’yw] and in Isa 6), but also the given context does not exclude the understanding that YHWH stood before/over Jacob (the matter depends on the conception the readers had concerning YHWH’s presence at Bethel).
51 The reader would probably agree that both propositions include the idea of the holiness of the place, but that is not what the utterances are stating.
The predominant argument, however, involves the name of God in vv. 13 and 16, applying the *Hauptkriterium* of Pentateuchal criticism since at least the nineteenth century. It presupposes that any juxtaposition of the divine name YHWH and the Hebrew common noun for “God”—‘*elohim*—suffices to suspect different authors. Despite its lasting reputation, this criterion is philologically unfounded, however. In fact, we are dealing here with an astonishing *idée fixe* in OT research. Interestingly enough, this holds true only for Pentateuchal criticism; there are plenty of interchanges of *elohim* and the Tetragrammaton in the former Prophets and beyond without anyone claiming different sources or redactions in those cases. And indeed, the linguistic data are fundamentally clear. There are no “two names of God” in Hebrew: The Israelite God has but one name (the Tetragrammaton), whereas ‘*elohim*, ‘el, and so on constitute appellatives, sometimes used like titles. Therefore, YHWH and ‘*elohim* stand in the same linguistic relationship to each other as David and hmlk or as Necho and par‘oh. There is nothing strange about these nouns being used interchangeably in the same text. They can be combined as well: pr‘h nkh is “Pharaoh Necho” (Jer 46:2), so yhwh ’*lhym* (Gen 2–3 *passim*; Exod 9:30; 2Sam 7:25, 26 etc.) just means “God Yahwe.” There might be, of course, authors who prefer either the proper name “David” or the title “the king,” but stylistic criteria should never function as an *a-priori* argument! That is, however, the way in which the so-called argument of the “names of God” has often been used in Pentateuchal source criticism. The reasons for that peculiar approach to the Pentateuch seem to be deeply rooted in the history of the discipline: the beginnings of the historical approach to the Bible were primarily connected

52 Wellhausen, *Composition*, 32.
53 For a detailed linguistic discussion of the issue see Erhard Blum, “Der vermeintliche Gottesname ‘*Elohim*’,” in *Gott Nennen: Gottes Namen und Gott als Name* (ed. Ingolf U. Dalfert and Philipp Stoellger; RPT 35; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 97–119.
54 A few random examples include: 1Sam 3:3 (*wmr ‘*lhym tm rkmh wsmwrl* škb bhkl yhwh šr šm ’*rwn ’*lhym*); 11:6–7 (*rwh ‘*lhym/phd yhwh*); 2Sam 3:39 (*‘*lhym/yhw*); 2Sam 6:7–9 (*yhwh/ h’*lhym/ ’*rwn h’*lhjm/ yhwh/ ’*rwn yhwh*); 2Sam 14:36–17 (*nhlt ‘*lhym/mlh’*lhym/yhwh*); 15:31–32 (*yhw/ ’*lhym*); 1 Chr 21:30–22:1 (*’*lhym/yhwh/ byt yhwh h’*lhym*); 2Chr 18:31 (*... w*yhwh ‘*zrw wwsytm ‘*lhym mnw nnw*).
55 Though determined in general, *הרנה* is used without the article. This is analogous to the use of לְאֹדָה (as “God”). Another interesting analogy includes the use of ἡ τιμιότατης without the article referring to the Great King of Persia (in Herodotus). Common to these titles is that their reference is definite in the speaker’s world. In such cases, one may speak of an “absolute title.” With regard to לְאֹדָה this condition is given in a henotheistic or monotheistic context. Additionally, the Hebrew writer/speaker has the choice between לְאֹדָה and לְאֹדָה רַבָּה, seemingly without any semantic difference (cf. for instance Gen 6:9–12; 22:1, 8, 9 and the examples in n. 54 above).
with the Primeval History (Gen 1–11), in which the preference for the divine name or for the common noun/absolute title in different layers is indeed apparent. Given, furthermore, the theological system in P concerning the revelation of God’s name (Exod 6), it was tempting to generalize this criterion at least in the realm of the Pentateuch and almost to lend it an a priori authority.

An unbiased reading, in fact, reveals that we have, in the Pentateuch as in other parts of the canon, texts using either the divine name or other Hebrew divine designations (common nouns/titles) as well as texts which show both side by side. In the latter, the interchange of designations seems to occur only rarely for the sake of some ‘deeper’ meaning. In most cases it appears arbitrarily or induced by slight nuances or seemingly superficial reasons or conditioned by idiomatic language. The phenomenon cannot be restricted to early or late literature either; one only needs to compare the designations of God in the speech of the wise woman from Tekoa (2 Sam 14) with the Chronicler’s version of David’s census in 1 Chr 21. Here and there the designations change randomly.

Consequently, varying divine designations in the Jacob story do not require an explanation per se. Nevertheless, some remarks (limited to the main story) may be added here in order to illustrate the options just mentioned above: the first three verses of the opening episode (25:21–23) use the name yhwh. This way the narrative identifies the god of Isaac’s/Jacob’s family who will play the decisive role. Genesis 27 has the name three times, apart from v. 20 twice directly connected with the blessing (vv. 7, 27). In phrases with brk the divine name seems to be idiomatic: in the Hebrew epigraphic sources the evidence is clear-cut. The same can be observed in the biblical traditions, where God, when introduced as the giver of a blessing, is referred to almost exclusively by the Tetragrammaton; major exceptions are, to my knowledge, only the introductions to Priestly blessings in Genesis (according to the theological scheme of P) and the so-called “Elohistic Psalter.” The corpus of Isaac’s blessing has ha’elohim in 27:28; I do not see a special reason for this.

57 As is probably the case in Gen 22; cf. Blum, Komposition, 323.
58 For an isolated example, see the blessing of the non-Israelite Melchizedek in Gen 14:19–20 using l’lyn.
In Gen 28:10–19 God himself is called by his name; the etiological derivation of the place name “Bethel” is introduced by *bet elohim* in Jacob’s speech, which is prepared itself by *mal’ake elohim* in the dream (see above). In the apodosis of Jacob’s vow (vv. 20, 21*, 22), the functional term *bet elohim* constitutes another pun with *bet el*, and it has no better correspondence in the protasis than *’elohim*.\(^{59}\)

The next cluster of divine designations starts with the divine name in 29:31–35.\(^{60}\) The switch to *’elohim* occurs with Jacob’s argument against a desperate Rachel that he (as a human) is not in God’s place (30:2). Thereafter we have the common noun eight times until Joseph, whose name is—with deliberate redundancy\(^{61}\)—interpreted twice using *’elohim* as well as *yhwh* for a double alliteration.

The Tetragrammaton in 30:27, 30 continues the thread of v. 24, being simply idiomatic here (as subject of *wybrk*). The next switch to *’elohim* occurs in Jacob’s speech to his wives, when he speaks about the ‘god of his father’ (31:5). Moreover, the whole passage narrating the process of separation between Laban’s and Jacob’s families (ch. 31) is about children, fathers, and their gods like a *tema con variazioni*. Therefore it should not be surprising that the common noun prevails in 31:5–53. There are only two exceptions: The reference in 31:13 to the revelation at Bethel uses neither *yhwh* nor *elohim* but *hael bet-el* alluding simultaneously to another cultic name at the sanctuary, i.e. *’l bet-el* (35:7), with which the addressees were most probably familiar. An occasional occurrence of *yhwh* can be found in the etiological derivation of “Mizpah” in 31:49, probably induced by a slight alliteration.

The even more consistent use of *’elohim* in Gen 32–33 (seven times) does not come as a surprise either. The encounter with the messengers at Mahanaim forms a deliberate reminder of the Bethel-encounter, picking up the *mal’ake ’elohim* and substituting *bet elohim* with *mahane ’elohim*. In the Penuel-episode there is actually no alternative because of the puns (a) with “Israel,” (b) with “Penuel,” and (c) because of the meaningful vagueness of the opponent’s identity. The report on the brothers’ encounter continues using the same language (three times), once (33:10) in a clear reference to 32:31.

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\(^{59}\) Verse 21b probably did not belong to the older story, unless one prefers to read the sentence as part of the *protasis* (“if YHWH will behave towards me as [my] god[?]?); *yhwh* would then be a suitable anaphora to *’elohim* in v. 20. If, however, the sentence represents a variant of the ‘covenant-formula’ and should be read as the beginning of the apodosis (“then YHWH shall be my God”) then we have a logical as well as conceptual incoherence between the *protasis* and the *apodosis*. At any rate, the formulation with the indirect object in the first person is unique to 28:21b and implies a conception peculiar to Josh 24 (see v. 22). This might suggest connecting 28:21b with the redaction of Gen 35:1–5 and Josh 24 outlined previously; cf. Blum, *Komposition*, 89–91.

\(^{60}\) This provides an alliteration with “Yehuda” in v. 35.

\(^{61}\) Rachel’s first statement (in 30:23) closes the theme of her dramatic conflict with her sister/fellow-wife, the second one (v. 24) points to the future and functions as a narrative ‘place marker’ for the last son still to be born. This ‘redundancy’ fits perfectly with the narration underscoring the birth of Rachel’s firstborn as the apex of the whole passage.
At any rate, the overall conclusion with regard to the Bethel episode in Gen 28 seems quite clear: there is actually no compelling evidence one way or the other, be it for the common source-critical analysis or for recent redaction-critical variations severing vv. 12 and 13a.

(b) A detailed analysis of the complex ch. 31 would go beyond the scope of this contribution. Instead, we shall focus on the more or less unanimously agreed upon separated versions of how Jacob received his wealth according to Gen 30:25–43 on the one hand and according to *31:1–16 on the other hand. Under the premises of the documentary hypothesis the first piece is assigned to J, the other to E. Some major contradictions between the pieces have been pointed out already. Although one might consider the possibility of two complementary versions, one as the narrator’s report focusing on Jacob as a trickster, the other as Jacob’s narration focusing on divine causality, the differences stand out here in the extreme. Moreover, at least one contradiction remains unsettled: whereas Jacob obviously makes his wealth at Laban’s expense in 30:41–43, this aspect remains completely hidden from the hearer/reader in ch. 31. There are thus good reasons to look for a diachronic explanation of the tensions just mentioned.

The popular presumption of parallel sources, however, raises questions. First, it seems evident that Jacob’s speech in 31:4–12 presupposes a previously narrated report on Jacob’s success with the flock that caused the anger of Laban. Consequently, one has to assume the loss of a substantial narration of the alleged E-strand. But what could have been the plot line of that lost part? Certainly Jacob’s success would be based on an agreement with Laban concerning sheep and goats with a peculiar pattern, quite similar to the narrative in ch. 30, though more complicated (31:7!). Assuming such a possibility, the next question arises with regard to the divine revelation reported extensively in Jacob’s speech to his wives: on the one hand, a straight record by the narrator forming a bold doublet to 31:10–13 can be ruled out. On the other hand, however, is it conceivable that the scene with the divine messenger providing the decisive clue to Jacob’s situation would be given in a flashback from the outset?

This brings us back to the crucial issue concerning the given story in Gen 30–31: it is the peculiar way in which the plot-elements of 31:7–13

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62 See above p. 184.
63 See Gen 31:2, 4. A source-critical approach tends to see 31:1, 2 as a doublet. Nothing, however, prevents us from reading the verses as complementary information building a slight climax (“to hear—to see,” “Laban’s sons—Laban himself”).
(including the divine message) are integrated into the greater narrative that requires an explanation. In other words, what is the *raison d’être* for such a narration using a flashback? The most reasonable answer seems to be that it was designed in order to re-tell an existing story by expanding it with an additional perspective. This way, Jacob’s speech can function as a theological corrective to the story of his successful ‘skill,’ providing a *doppelte Kausalität* (Seeligmann).

This conclusion has interesting implications. Based on ‘old’ literary-critical observations, we have strong indications of a redactional/compositional (pre-)history of the Story of Jacob. Obviously, the layer of 31:4–16 has also left its marks on other parts of Gen 31 (see below). At the same time it is strongly connected with the Bethel episode in Gen 28 as evidenced by 31:13. Given the cross-relationship of the Bethel story with Gen 32–33 (Mahanaim, Penuel), this points to the probability that the layer under discussion in Gen 31 played a constitutive role in the shaping of our ‘Story of Jacob.’ For that reason I have suggested that it be called a “compositional layer (*Kompositionsschicht*)”. Under such circumstances the ability to reconstruct the tradition used cannot necessarily be expected. Nevertheless, such an attempt does not seem futile from the outset, at least in the portion beginning with 31:19, since we find significant literary techniques here like resumptive repetitions (*Wiederaufnahmen*) or anticipating repetitions (*Vorwegnahmen*) that can be used as devices for a diachronic *Fortschreibung*.

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64 Blum, *Komposition*, 168–171.

65 It seems impossible to reconstruct a coherent narrative line without the Teraphim-episode. This is why the diverse proposals to separate extensive J/E-threads fail. Thus in Noth’s J (31:1, 3, 17, 18a, 19a, 20, 21azb, 22–23, 25b, [25b]), 26a, 27, 30a, 31 ... 36a, 38–40, 46a, [47], 48, 49, 51–52a, 53a; see Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte*, 30–31) Laban’s speech breaks off with v. 30a and Jacob’s anger in v. 36 is thus unfounded, both because the Teraphim incident is taken out. In contrast, Graupner, *Elohist*, 262, leaves the Teraphim in J, but now has Laban’s speech breaking off with 31:30a (continuing with Jacob’s answer in vv. 31, 41–42) in E. Consequently, assuming that the note about Rachel’s theft of the Teraphim (31:19b) belongs to the pre-compositional stratum, the conclusion is inevitable that the scene in 31:5–16 has replaced some earlier version of Jacob’s conversation with his wives.

66 As is known, such techniques may serve as redactional as well as authorial devices. In this case it seems that they coincide with diachronically significant cross-references (see already Blum, *Komposition*, 124–126). So we have a clear *Wiederaufnahme* in 31:23b/25a framing a divine nocturnal revelation to Laban, which is referred to by him in v. 29 (see Blum, *Komposition*, 126) and by Jacob in v. 42b. Verses 41–44 as a whole show parallels to 31:5–16 in several aspects; their opening line marks a new part in Jacob’s answer to Laban by resuming the preceding opening in v. 28. As a result, it seems reasonable to consider 31:24–25a, 29, 41–44 as part of our compositional layer founded on the earlier narrative in 31:9–23, 25b, 26–28, 30–40 (except for some glosses).
Especially in the concluding pact-scene, however, any such attempt will be nothing but tentative.⁶⁷

(c) Source-critical analysis of Gen 32–33 generally ascribes 32:4–9, (10–13), 14a to J, 32:1–3, 14b–22 to E, 33:1–17 to J and E (in divergent attributions), and 32:23–33 either to J,⁶⁸ E,⁶⁹ or both.⁷⁰ Such divisions in Gen 32–33 are due to a systemic compulsion to find parallel accounts rather than cogent textual evidence; to see 32:4–9, 14a and 32:14b–22 as doublets is to ignore that only vv. 4–9 provide information necessary for vv. 14b–22, i.e. Esau is coming to meet his brother!⁷¹ This implies that 32:14b–22 does not constitute a narrative strand standing on its own feet but the continuation of vv. 4–9, the alleged doublet 32:14a//22b forming an integrating element.⁷²

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⁶⁷ Under the assumptions that (a) the etiological line of Mizpa: חָגְלִית — מִזְפָּה — חָדְלִית connected with the care of Laban’s daughters (vv. 49–50), and the line of Gilead: גִּילָד — בַּרְקִיָּה — גִּילָד connected primarily with the border pact (vv. 51–52) should be distinguished diachronically, and that (b) v. 48a forms an ‘anticipatory repetition’ of vv. 51*-52a* allowing the insertion of the explicit name derivations and of the familial issue in vv. 48b–50, the following literary stratigraphy might be considered: (I) 31:46, 51–54 continuing 31:40 as basic narrative; (II) 31:45, 48–50 and the references to the Masseba in vv. 51b, 52 as a compositional layer; (III) later scribal alterations in vv. 45–46 (“Jacob” instead of “Laban”) and the ‘learned’ insertion of v. 47.

⁶⁸ This is the majority position; see for instance Wellhausen, Composition, 44; Noth, Überlieferungsgeschichte, 31; and recently Jochen Nentel, Die Jakobserzählungen: Ein literar- und redaktionskritischer Vergleich der Theorien zu Entstehung des Pentateuch (München: AVM, 2009), 286–293 and n. 813 (with literature).


⁷⁰ For instance Gunkel, Genesis, 359–363.

⁷¹ This expectation in 32:14b–22 is evidenced by Jacob’s instructions to his servant in v. 18 (“When Esau my brother meets you …”) and by the narrative logic; otherwise Jacob would have no reason to start sending herds at the Jabbok (!) in the direction of Edom.

⁷² The understanding of the parallel time-markers depends on the readers’ presuppositions. If they think it natural that five herds will be sent ahead in the night, they will see the two verses as references to the same night. Pace the argument of Wellhausen, Composition, 43, often echoed: in this case “the narrative does not come [viz. with 32:22a] to the point it had reached already” [translation mine] in 32:14a. Instead we have a deliberate contrast: While a part of his flock moved ahead, Jacob himself did not move from the “camp,” a note which, of course, forms a preparation to v. 23. If the readers, however, do not reckon with such an action at night, they will naturally understand the events of 32:14b–22 as taking place on the next day.
Recently introduced arguments regarding the “Transjordan geography” do not support a source-critical analysis either. Jeremy Hutton presumes for Jacob’s route in J “a north-south movement, in which ... Seir is the destination (32.4; 33.14.16),” and for E “an east-west movement beginning in the land of the ‘children of the east’ (Gen 29.1) ...”73 In addition, presuming that “E”—now—“presents the etiology of Mahanaim (32.2b–3) before that of Penuel (32.31) and both occur before Jacob crosses the river” he concludes that according to J “Penuel is located on the southern bank of the Jabbok, and Mahanaim on the north,” whereas E implies the location of Mahanaim on the south as well. He then suggests transferring the Mahanaim etiology in 32:2b–3 at the end of the Penuel episode after *32:25–32a (!) in the original E-strand. It was, then, the JE-redactor who transposed 32:2b–3 to its present context. The alleged problem, however, is built on questionable suppositions: neither do 32:3; 33:14, 16 imply an intention of Jacob to go from Aram to Edom,74 nor do 32:24–25 per se indicate clearly on which side of the river Jacob “was left alone.”75 Further, there is no need to break up the extended exposition in 32:23–25a literally,76 because v. 23 gives the main information with regard to the (other) protagonists, while v. 24 unfolds the process of transferring in order to prepare v. 25a.

At the same time, the source divisions here tear apart the dense network of allusions and word-plays outlined above. Thus the partially redundant fivefold panim in 32:21–22a just before the Penuel-scene might be enough to call into question the attribution of 32:14b–22 and 32:23–33 to different sources. The same holds true with regard to the parallelism between 33:10 and 32:31 cited above (p. 186) which is ignored or denied among proponents of source analysis;77 it is not only Jacob’s hint of the encounter with the divine being that builds the bridge but the semantic and syntactic correspondence as well.78

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74 Jacob’s own destination is revealed neither by his sending messengers nor by his keeping Esau in suspense.
75 Note that ‘br hifil does not mean “send across” in the strict sense.
76 Pace Blum, Komposition, 144. Rightly Graupner, Elohist, 278.
77 The only exception I could find so far is Otto Procksch, Die Genesis übersetzt und erklärt (3rd ed.; KAT 1; Leipzig: Deichert 1924), 198, who assigns both texts to J—at a price: the splitting of 32:23–33 into two literary threads.
78 See again Procksch, Genesis. Benno Jacob, Das Buch Genesis (Berlin: Schocken, 1934; repr., Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 2000), 646–647, points rightly to the cultic language used here by Jacob including the idea that one should not come “with empty hands” to the Deity (Exod 23:15, 17, etc.) and the hope for divine acceptance (raṣon); he also highlights the Penuel-encounter (32:31) as the context enabling this language. Graupner’s attempt to escape this nexus includes the proposal to read the last word in 33:10 as an imperfectum copulativum of the 2nd person with modal meaning (Elohist, 281 with n. 563); such a form, however, does not exist in the Old Hebrew verbal system (see Erhard Blum, “Das althebräische Verbsystem—eine synchronre Analyse,” in Sprachliche Tiefen—Theologische Weite [ed. Oliver Dyma and Andreas Michel; BThSt 91; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2008], 91–142).
In sum, the great finale of our Story of Jacob shows in its narrative substance both: an impressive complexity and literary unity. In contrast to ch. 31 there are no traces of the integration of an earlier literary tradition. The earlier material included in ch. 31 by the ‘compositional layer’ comprised apparently some story of Jacob and Laban, presumably as part of a bipartite Jacob-Esau-Laban-narrative (in Gen 25B; 27B; * 29–31). Our tripartite composition, however, was shaped by an author who created—possibly relying on oral traditions—especially the finale and the corresponding Bethel story as well as the compositional elements in Gen 31. Presumably, he also rewrote the episode about the birth of Jacob’s children. Moreover, since we received the story as a whole from this narrator’s hand, any attempt at reconstructing the presumed earlier tradition word-for-word would remain conjectural. For this reason, the following discussion of the probable historical setting of our tradition will focus upon the Story of Jacob described so far.

IV. The Historical Setting of the Story of Jacob

Knowing the historical context of a biblical narrative is essential for a full understanding of its purpose—and vice versa, peculiar pragmatic textual features often deliver the most reliable criteria for defining the intended addressees and the historical conditions. In this respect etiological traditions have a significant advantage in that they are anchored in a more or less specific historical constellation, i.e. the conditions under which the question, answered by the etiology, makes sense.

The Story of Jacob as a narrative of origins (Ursprungsgeschichte) implies a fundamental etiology of Israel (and some of its neighbors), which prima facie might fit constellations lasting for a long time. It includes, however, more specific etiological components too, first and foremost the hieros logos of the sanctuary at Bethel (Gen 28). Admittedly, there have been several proposals in recent decades to reckon with a flourishing sanctuary at Bethel even in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, but such claims

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79 The main indicators are the exact correspondences with the structuring of Jacob’s family in ch. 33 and the eminent role of Joseph (30:22–25; 33:7). The obviously secondary introduction of the maids in 29:24, 29; 31:33* is not so clear as evidence; pace Blum, Komposition, 170.

80 See for instance Timo Veijola, Verheissung in der Krise: Studien zur Literatur und Theologie der Exilszeit anhand des 89. Psalms (AASF B/22; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia,
have lacked any evidence from the outset. Gen 28:11–22 and the references to cultic installations in Bethel in 31:13; 35:7 therefore point strongly to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians (722–720) as *terminus ante quem* for our narrative. Further considerations actually limit its possible original context to the relatively short period of the northern state.

This northern setting is confirmed and highlighted in the story by all other places embedded into the story and introduced by name in an etiological manner: Mizpa/Gilead, Mahanaim, Penuel, Sukkot, Shechem. Remarkably, Penuel, which appears, narratively speaking, as the counterpart of Bethel, had some importance in the early years of the northern kingdom, functioning as one of the residences of Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 12:25). The extraordinary introduction of Joseph in the birth story of Jacob’s sons (29:31–30:24) and in the dramatic climax in ch. 33 (v. 7) also points to the north. As is well known, Joseph represented by far the greatest and strongest tribal group in the northern kingdom. Last, but not least, the story introduces the one ancestor’s name that served—*inter alia*—as the ‘constitutional’ name of the Northern Kingdom: “Israel.”

At first glance two elements of the Jacob story are seemingly not fully compatible with such a setting: southern Esau/Edom as a twin-brother of Jacob/Israel and their father Isaac at Beersheba (28:10). In the first case geography seems to stand in the way of connecting Edom with a northern Israelite tradition. However, mere geography is not always enough to explain social reality (of which ancestor traditions are a part). The chance finding of epigraphic texts at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (probably early eighth century BCE) throws some light on a complicated historical reality: although lying in the northern Sinai-peninsula on the route to Elath/Edom, all Hebrew personal names (comprising the Israelite divine name) are of northern origin. Moreover, the inscriptions repeatedly communicate blessings “by YHWH


81 From an archaeological point of view, not even one wall of Bethel’s sanctuary has been found so far. Moreover, a recent examination of the excavated pottery has shown the lack of evidence for any significant settlement activity in Iron Age IIC and in the Babylonian/Persian period at the site of Bethel; see Israel Finkelstein and Lily Singer-Avitz, “Reevaluating Bethel,” *ZDPV* 125 (2009): 33–48. The adduced exegetical evidence (Jer 41:5–6; Zech 7:2) does not stand up to closer examination.

82 According to OT records some cultic activities continued at Bethel under Assyrian rule until King Josiah. There is, however, no hint of such a peculiar situation in the Jacob material.

83 Pre-royal times can be excluded because of the pan-Israelite orientation of the story as well as the Davidic-Solomonic era because of the narrative’s negligence of Jerusalem.
of Samaria" as well as "by YHWH of Teman / YHWH of the south." These northern traders apparently acknowledged a special connection of their 'state' god with the region of Teman which is associated with Edom (cf. Amos 1:11–12), a connection that recalls the opening of the Song of Deborah in Judg 5:4–5: "YHWH, when you went out from Seir, / when you marched from the field of Edom ... The mountains quaked before YHWH, / the One of Sinai, / before YHWH, the God of Israel." Whichever way the tradition of a close relationship with Edom/Seir was received in northern Israel, apparently they could feel a kinship with those distant, 'wild' relatives in several respects. Whatever the case, the remarkably sympathetic introduction of the deceived Esau in Gen 27 as well as in Gen 33 is more conceivable in the North than in Judah with its bloody neighbor strife.

The role of the Isaac tradition including Beersheba in the Story of Jacob is part of its inclusive conception of Israel which is reflected, of course, in the integration of Judah as Jacob's fourth son, but no less in his ancestors Abraham and Isaac (cf. 31:42, 53: 28:13a). Apparently, however, the figure of Isaac was of peculiar significance for the northerners, at least in the later eighth century BCE. This is evidenced by the Book of Amos in which Israel is not only called *yis˙haq* (Amos 7:9) or *bet yis˙haq* (7:16), but is warned not to go on pilgrimage to Beersheba (5:5; cf. also 8:14a).

Finally, Israelite interests in Beersheba (Isaac) and in Teman (Edom) could reinforce each other insofar as Isaac was the ancestor of both Jacob/Israel and Edom and insofar as Israelite travelers to Sinai/Teman went through Beersheba (cf. 1 Kgs 19:3, 8).

All things considered, it appears to be beyond reasonable doubt that the primary home of our Story of Jacob was the kingdom of Israel. Further, so-to-speak 'external' evidence is given by the reception of the Jacob tradition in Hos 12. The way in which the prophet alludes to almost all parts of the story we have in Genesis proves that he can presuppose quite naturally his addressees' familiarity with a story like this. Can its composition be dated even more exactly? In 1984 I suggested the very beginning of the Northern Kingdom as the most appropriate date, mainly on the basis of the correspondence between political actions of the founding king Jeroboam I in Bethel and Penuel (as reported in 1 Kgs 12:25–33) and several major plot lines in the Story of Jacob. Undoubtedly, the story has an enormous legitimating force with regard to fundamental aspects of Israelite identity and religion. This holds true, however, not only for the era of Jeroboam.

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86 See Blum, *Komposition*, 175–186.
Moreover, assuming such an early date for our main composition would make it hard to find a conceivable context for the presumed earlier bipartite narrative (in Gen 25B*; 27*; * 29–31). Although it probably did not include traditions like Gen 28 and 32, its northern outlook seems clear as well. Thus the time of the kingdom of Israel up to the last third of the eighth century BCE might be considered for the formation of the Story of Jacob and its Vorstufe—but probably excluding the era of the fierce Aramean wars (second half of the ninth century BCE) because in the narration on the relations between the Aramean Laban and Jacob/Israel there is no reflection at all of the horror and hatred experienced in that time. Tentatively, one might conjecture a literary formation of the earlier Jacob-Esau-Laban-story before those wars (i.e. in the Omride era) and the composition of the tripartite Story of Jacob in the eighth century, perhaps under the second Jeroboam, probably in the realm of the sanctuary at Bethel. If we were to imagine what could have belonged to the curriculum for the education of Israelite scribes, our Story of Jacob would certainly be a first-rank candidate. After the end of the northern state, it became the core of a broader story of Israel’s ancestors.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY


Assuming such a differentiation, another tension will perhaps find an explanation: whereas 31:22–23 and the frontier-treaty in 31:51–53* (i.e. the earlier tradition) presuppose Laban living in the realm of Damascus (see also 29:1), his location at Haran (27:43; 28:10; 29:5) seems to imply a shift of the supposed origin of the Arameans to northern Syria. This ‘knowledge’ might have been taken up by the author of the full Jacob story. For somewhat divergent conjectures see Blum, *Komposition*, 164–167, 343–344 n. 11.

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