The Priestly Account of the End of Jacob’s Life

1. Introduction

The title of this conference and the limitation of the cycle of the Jacob narratives to Genesis 25-35 may be misleading, since a sizeable portion of the traditions about Jacob are found in the next pericope, that of the Joseph story. This is especially true with regard to the Priestly traditions about Jacob. In fact, the Priestly narrative in the final chapters of Genesis is primarily devoted to Jacob. The Priestly introduction to the story of Jacob (“Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan. This, then, is the line of Jacob”) is entirely outside the “Jacob Narrative,” in Gen 37:1-2. And the survey of Jacob’s final days, his descent to Egypt together with his sons, and the long description of his deathbed testament and his death are at the center of the focus of the Priestly narrative in the final chapters of Genesis. This Priestly narrative will also stand at the center of my talk today.

One of the few areas of agreement in the study of the Torah that has survived the changes in recent decades is the distinction between the Priestly and non-Priestly layers in the Torah. There are many disagreements about the precise date and nature of the Priestly layer — that is, whether it is redactional or existed as an independent document — but there is no one today among scholars of the Bible who disputes the existence of a Priestly layer in the Torah. But even though there is widespread consensus among scholars about which verses belong to the Priestly layer, there are many texts that are still disputed or at least not yet identified as belonging to P. True, Menahem Haran announced definitively more than 30 years ago that “This source is so stylistically distinct that no one has ever disagreed even about a single verse whether it was Priestly or belonged to one of the other sources.” This, however, was overstated even then, and it certainly is today after the many changes in biblical scholarship.

This disagreement about the identification of P extends to the final chapters of Genesis as well. The following table demonstrates that there is no complete agreement among scholars about the identification of the texts that belong to the Priestly narrative sequence about the end of Jacob’s life. There are significant differences particularly with regard to chapter 47, and some disagreement with regard to 48:5 and 7.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Genesis**  | **47** | **48** | **49** | **50** |
| Wellhausen  | 5, 6a, 7-11, 27b, 28 | 3-6(7) | (28)29-33 | 12-13 |
| Noth | 27b-28 | 3-6 | 1a,29-33 | 12-13 |
| Westermann | (7-10, 11\*), 27b-28 | 3-6\* | 1a, 28-33 | 12-13 |
| Lohfink  | 27b-28 | 3-6 | 1a,28b-33 | 12-13 |
| Levin | 27-28 | – | 1a,28b\*-33\* | 12-13, 22b |
| Kratz | 27-28 | 3-4(5), 6 (,7)  | 1a,29-33 | 12-13 |
| Schmid | 27-28 | – | 1a, 29-33 | 12-13 |

1. Genesis 47 — LXX

A survey of scholarship about this chapter throughout the years demonstrates that most scholars from the middle of the 20th century onward identify just two verses at the end of the chapter, vv. 27-28, as Priestly, though several scholars from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (represented in the table by Wellhausen) would include some additional verses, particularly at the beginning of the chapter. The change in approach in the analysis of the chapter stems, in my opinion, from two sources:

(1) During the course of the 20th century, the assumption has grown more deeply rooted that P ignores and perhaps does not even know the story of Joseph. Many scholars have therefore severely reduced the scope of P in the Joseph narratives, and certainly for those verses that actually mention Joseph. This approach, to be sure, is problematic, since the identification of P needs to be based on philological and historical considerations, not on prior assumptions about the content of the hypothesized Priestly narrative.

(2) The second reason, especially relevant for Genesis 47, is connected to the limited concern of scholars with textual criticism of the Torah and the comparison of the various versions, and the generally negative evaluation of the worth of the Septuagint as a witness to the authentic text of the Torah. For Genesis 47, there is an important witness, completely different from the Masoretic version. But ever since Rudolph’s study of the Joseph story (1933), many scholars have devalued the evidence of the Septuagint with regard to this chapter. Nonetheless, the evidence of the Septuagint is tremendously important for understanding how the differences between the versions came into being, and for understanding how to separate the redactional layers in the chapter and lay bare the process by which it was created. It is worthwhile to begin from this perspective.

The differences between the MT and the LXX in Genesis 47 can be seen from the sources in #1 on the handout.

As you can see, vv. 5-7 are ordered differently, and the LXX has a complete extra sentence in v. 5. Some scholars view the additional text in the Septuagint as secondary, but as we will see, exactly the opposite is true. According to what we read at the beginning of the chapter (where the two versions are largely identical), Joseph has told Pharaoh that his brothers and their livestock have arrived in Egypt from Canaan and relocated in the land of Goshen. He brings five of his brothers before Pharaoh, who asks them about their occupation. The five brothers respond that they are shepherds and therefore are requesting permission to settle in Goshen, which was described in ch. 46 as pastureland, separated from the prime agricultural areas of Egypt. One might therefore expect Pharaoh to grant permission. But according to the Masoretic Text, the story continues in a surprising way. In v. 5, according to the MT, Pharaoh informs Joseph that his brothers have arrived in Egypt — “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Your father and your brothers have come to you’” — as if Joseph was not aware of this, and as if Pharaoh were not himself speaking at that moment with five of Joseph’s brothers! Now Pharaoh suggests, out of goodwill toward Joseph’s family, that they dwell in the best part of the land of Egypt: “The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land” (v. 6). The “best part” of the land is definitely not the land of Goshen! According to the previous chapter, Goshen is completely separate from the settled area of Egypt. Joseph had suggested that his brothers request Goshen precisely “because all shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians” (46:34). “The best part of the land,” by contrast, must be understood to refer to the major agricultural areas of Egypt, where the Egyptians themselves live. According to 47:11, “the best part of the land” is “the land of Rameses,” which can in no way be identified with Goshen. This is a place worthy of the family of the king’s second-in-command, not a pastureland far away from the Egyptians themselves. V. 5 continues with yet another surprising change: After suggesting that the Israelites settle in “the best part of the land,” Pharaoh seems to suddenly change his mind and agree that they settle down in Goshen.

The order of the verses in the Septuagint makes more sense. In v. 4, the five brothers of Joseph request the land of Goshen as pastures for their flocks, and in v. 5, Pharaoh immediately agrees: “Let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock.” The next sentence in the LXX does not appear in the MT; it introduces a new topic: “And Jacob and his sons came down to Egypt, to Joseph, and Pharaoh king of Egypt heard.” This new story also tells of the arrival of the Israelites in Egypt, but it differs from the preceding story. Here, Pharaoh hears about Israel’s arrival in Egypt before Joseph does. From a plot perspective such a possibility is quite plausible; Pharaoh could certainly have heard of this from his troops on the border, just as we find in Egyptian sources from the 2nd and 1st millenniums BCE. Actually it is hardly likely that Pharaoh would be the last to hear about a large group of foreigners — 70 people and their property — heading for Egypt and representing themselves as the family of the king’s second-in-command. Pharaoh informs Joseph of their arrival and suggests settling them in “the best part of the land.” The fact that the additional text in the LXX begins a new story duplicating the one that has just been told and actually contradicting it (for it too tells of the arrival of Joseph’s family and Pharaoh’s agreeing to let them reside in Egypt) nails down that this verse was part of the origin text. That is, it proves that this was a verse that dropped out of the MT in one of the stages of copying. A later scribe would not add a contradictory version of something that had already been told, both because he would have no reason to do so and because superfluous duplication would create additional difficulties.

It seems, therefore, that at some stage a homoioteleuton took place here. The copyist’s eye skipped from the first occurrence of the words “Pharaoh said to Joseph” to the second:

**Gen 47:5** (according to the LXX): “Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock.’ And Jacob and his sons came down to Egypt, to Joseph, and Pharaoh king of Egypt heard. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Your father and your brothers have come to you. **6** The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land.’” When the copyist realized his mistake or, more likely, a later scribe identified the error, he added part of the omitted verse in the margin, from which place it was eventually reintroduced into the text in the wrong place, as you see here.

Occurrences of this sort, where a copyist’s omission is restored in small letters or written vertically in the margins, are well known nowadays from the Dead Sea Scrolls, for example in the Great Isaiah Scroll from Cave 1 at Qumran [slide]. Notice too that the scribe (or whoever made the corrections) saw no need to add the whole verse during the correction process, which was presumably limited by considerations of space, or he assumed that the missing part of the verse in any case duplicated the contexts of 46:27-28 and 47:5a (according to the MT).

When we retrovert the addition in the LXX to Hebrew and connect it to the story that follows, what stands out (from the addition and the verses that follow it) is the unmistakable language of P. The reconstructed verse from the LXX has several significant stylistic features of P that testify to where it was made and certify that it was original. The combination “Pharaoh king of Egypt” appears throughout the Tetrateuch only in P (Gen 41:46; Exod 6:11, 13, 27, 29; 14:8); the non-P sources use either just “Pharaoh” or just “king of Egypt” but never combine the two into a single phrase. The syntax is unusual as well, putting the subject *after* the verb לבוא and a place name indicating the direction of travel: ויבואו מצרימה אל יוסף יעקב ובניו... (47:5, LXX) is reminiscent of other priestly verses nearby, such as וַיָּבֹ֖אוּ מִצְרָ֑יְמָה יַעֲקֹ֖ב וְכָל־זַרְע֥וֹ אִתּֽוֹ (46:6) and וְאֵ֨לֶּה שְׁמ֧וֹת בְּנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֛ל הַבָּאִ֥ים מִצְרַ֖יְמָה יַעֲקֹ֣ב וּבָנָ֑יו (46:8). It is clear that no later scribe could succeed in imitating Priestly language and style so precisely; there is nothing in the preceding pericope that would have influenced the scribe to make his words so perfectly match the Priestly idiom in our chapter.

The continuation of the story both in the LXX and in the MT [slide] also contains many obvious signs of P. The particular interest of the unit on counting the years of the patriarchs (Gen 47:9, 28; and cf., e.g., Gen 9:28-29; 12:2b; 17:1 and elsewhere) is one of the unique characteristics of the Priestly source. It is unmistakable. So too the description of the patriarchs as sojourners in Canaan is characteristic only of P (Abraham: Gen 17:8, 23:4; Jacob: 28:4; Isaac: 35:27, 37:1; Esau and Jacob: 37:7, and cf. also Exod 6:4).

Some of the idioms that appear in the unit are exclusive to the Priestly source:

(1) The root עמד in the Hiphil in combination with the preposition לפני (e.g. וַיַּֽעֲמִדֵ֖הוּ לִפְנֵ֣י פַרְעֹ֑ה in 47:7) appears in the Bible almost exclusively in P (Gen 41:46a; Lev 14:11, 16:7, 27:8 and 11; Num 3:6, 5:16, 18, and 30, 8:13; 27:19 and 22).

(2) The combination חיי שני ימי + pronominal suffix, which appears four times in vv. 8-9 and again in v. 28, appears elsewhere in the Torah only in Gen 25:7, a verse that is universally identified as P. Even the shorter combination חיי שני is found elsewhere in obviously Priestly texts: Gen 23:1, 25:17; Exod 6:16, 18, and 20.

(3) The word מגורים (47:9) is a distinctly Priestly term. All of its occurrences in the Torah are found in texts that are considered Priestly: Gen 17:8, 28:4, 36:7, 37:1; Exod 6:4 (and cf. Ezek 20:38).

(4) The construct form מְאַת, which appears twice in our unit (47:9, 28) is an additional sign of P, being used regularly throughout the Priestly source (Gen 5:3, 6, 18, 25, 28; 7:24; 8:3; 11:10, 25; 21:5, 25:7, 17; 35:28; Exod 6:16, 18, 20; 38:25, 27; Num 2:9, 16, 24, 31; 33:39) where the other sources use the construct form מאה (e.g., Gen 26:12, Deut 22:19, and elsewhere). The order in which the numbers are given for compound numbers is another sign of P; the smaller number comes before the larger one, as in שְׁלֹשִׁ֥ים וּמְאַ֖ת שָׁנָ֑ה of 47:9. (For some other examples see Gen 5:3, 25:7, and elsewhere.) In the other sources, the larger number precedes the smaller one (e.g., Gen 6:3, Deut 31:2, and elsewhere).

(5) The word אחֻזה, found in v. 11 of our unit, appears in the Torah only in texts that are considered Priestly (Gen 17:8; 23:4, 9, 20; 36:43; 48:4; 49:30; 50:13; Lev 14:34; 25:10, 13, 24, 25, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34, 41,45, 46; 37:16, 21, 24; 27:22, 28; Num 27:4, 7; 32:5, 22, 29, 32; 35:2, 8, 28; Deut 32:49). Outside the Torah the word appears only in texts that are influenced by the Priestly source.

The Priestly narrative in Genesis 47 concludes with the report that the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied, in vv. 27b-28: “And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly. Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred forty-seven years.” There is essentially no disagreement among scholars with regard to v. 27b. One can easily identify the specifically Priestly language in this part of the verse; the root אחז in Niphal and with the meaning “to settle on one’s holding” appears almost always in Priestly texts (Num 32:30; Josh 22:9, 19). The hendiadys “be fruitful and multiply” (as in v. 27b) is one of the most characteristic phrases of the Priestly source in the Torah: Gen 1:22, 28; 8:17; 9:1, 7; 17:6, 20; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4; Exod 1:7, Lev 26:9. The phrase “they gained possessions in it” of v. 27b refers to “the land of Rameses” from v. 11. This is the place in Egypt where the Israelites resided according to P, and that is the reason why, in the continuation of P in Exodus, the Israelites leave from there on their journey: “The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children” (Exod 12:37; cf. Num 33:3, 5).

The non-P traditions in our chapter, by contrast, describe the Israelites as settling in Goshen: “Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen” (47:27a). You can see that the two halves of v. 27 contradict each other. Israel “settles” in Goshen in the singular, but the second half of the verse switches the verbs to the plural. 27b is *not* the continuation of 27a; rather, it picks up smoothly from v. 11. The natural continuation of the conversation between Jacob and Pharaoh is of course v. 28, which enumerates the years of Jacob’s life at the time (130) until his death 17 years later at age 147. Therefore, in accordance with 37:2 (in the Priestly source), Joseph lived with Jacob for 17 years before going down to Egypt and for another 17 years once Jacob too came down to Egypt.

One can therefore say that the evidence of the LXX contributes to our understanding of the source divisions, because it simplifies the identification of the two layers that were interwoven here. The MT, by contrast, complicates the identification of sources and makes it difficult to understand how they were redacted. Perhaps that is why the majority of modern scholars have ignored the P texts at the beginning of the chapter, though almost all scholars correctly identify 27b-28, at the end of the chapter, as P. Yet not all of them saw the contradiction between 27b and 27a, and they did not make the connection between 27b and the Priestly unit at the beginning of the chapter. From the perspective of content, vv. 8-9 precede v. 28, and must be connected to it. When we add to this the LXX version of vv. 5-6, we find a complete, continuous story about the Israelites’ arrival in Egypt and Pharaoh’s meeting with Jacob, which begins in ch. 46 and continues in these verses (according to the LXX). This Priestly narrative is parallel in many points to the non-P narrative also found in chs. 46-47 (#2 on the handout).

The two stories both recount the arrival of Jacob and his sons in Egypt and their meeting with Pharaoh (along with Joseph). The two stories also describe Pharaoh’s giving permission to the Israelites to reside in some region in Egypt. But there are significant differences in many details, and the two stories in fact contradict each other when we look at them separately.

In the P story, it is Pharaoh who first hears about the arrival of Joseph’s brothers and who informs Joseph of it. In the non-P story, it is Joseph who lets Pharaoh know that his brothers have arrived, after first greeting his father and brothers and preparing them for the meeting with Pharaoh. In P, Pharaoh does not speak at all with Joseph’s brothers, only with Jacob. The purpose of the meeting is different in the two stories. In the non-P story, the Israelites request permission to reside in Egypt; in P, Jacob does not request permission to reside in Egypt — such permission is granted to Joseph even before the meeting, and with no connection to the conversation between Pharaoh and Jacob. Here, the meeting is all about Jacob’s being treated with respect as he stands facing Pharaoh. Even the location where they settle is different in the two stories: in the non-P story, the Israelites receive permission to reside in Goshen, a land of pasture that is separated from the areas of Egyptian settlement, while in P they are permitted to reside in the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses, which is unfit for pasturing livestock and is perhaps even a more urban area, where it would be appropriate for those who are close to the king to live. There are also notable differences in characterization: in non-P, Joseph’s brothers are described as requesting that Pharaoh be kind enough to alleviate the hunger of their flocks. It seems that the brothers, supported by Joseph, are cleverly manipulating Pharaoh’s answer in order to get hold of Goshen. There is no mention of such manipulation in the P version. There, it is not the brothers who meet with Pharaoh, but Jacob, the elderly, respected father of the nation. Jacob stands before Pharaoh with great dignity, and Pharaoh, marveling at Jacob’s age, asks him how long he has lived and receives his blessing. According to the P story, Jacob is an exemplary figure, matching the depiction of the other patriarchs in P.

1. Genesis 48

The continuation of the P narrative about the end of Jacob’s life is found in the next chapter, Genesis 48. Most scholars have correctly identified that what Jacob says at the beginning of the chapter, after “Jacob said to Joseph” in v. 3, is inconsistent with what he says later, after “When Israel saw Joseph’s sons, he said” of v. 8 (#3 on the handout).

In the first speech, at the beginning of the chapter (vv. 3 ff.) Jacob blesses the sons of Joseph and even says their names: Ephraim and Manasseh. In v. 8, by contrast, Jacob (here called “Israel”) sees the boys with Joseph and asks, “Who are these?” It is not merely that he does not recognize his own grandsons (whom in the canonical text he has just blessed); apparently he does not even know that sons were born to Joseph in Egypt. This is the natural conclusion from what Israel says in v. 11: “I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also.”

And there is more. Jacob’s first speech shows distinct linguistic and stylistic signs of P:

1. the name שדי אל;
2. the combination of the verbs “be fruitful” and “multiply,” here in the form “I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers [הִנְנִ֤י מַפְרְךָ֙ וְהִרְבִּיתִ֔ךָ]” (v. 4);
3. the phrase “a company of peoples [עמים קהל],” found only in P and Ezekiel;
4. the expressions אחוזה and עולם אחוזת, “a perpetual holding.”

The connection with P here is not merely stylistic; Jacob’s words relate directly to the divine revelation to Jacob at Bethel when he returned to Canaan from Paddan-aram, in Genesis 35, which belongs to the Priestly layer.

The most plausible way to explain the contradiction, accepted by almost all scholars, is the assumption that Jacob’s words in 48:3 ff. belong to P, distinguishing them from what he says in v. 8 ff. There is a dispute regarding vv. 5 and 7. Reinhard Kratz, for example, says that v. 5 belongs to the story of Ephraim and Manasseh’s being born to Joseph (41:51-52), and would therefore seem to be non-P. Nonetheless, the birth of Manasseh and Ephraim is also mentioned in the P version, in Genesis 46, in the list of Israelites who came down to Egypt. There is a characteristically brief mention of them in the extensive P list there: “To Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him” (46:20). It could be that this report has been worked over in some way, but in its original form it certainly belongs to P. Note that the Potiphera motif is used here quite differently from the way it is presented in the non-P material, where he is “Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh” (39:1, and cf. 37:36). There is therefore no reason to remove 48:5 from the Priestly layer.

With regard to v. 7, most scholars are confident that the redactor has woven together here Priestly materials that recount Jacob’s return from Paddan-aram (an obviously P narrative) with the non-P materials in Genesis 35 that recount the death and burial of Rachel. But a comparison of ch. 35 with ch. 48 demands that we assume — in contrast to most scholars — that two traditions were woven into the story of Rachel’s death and burial. See #4 on the handout; the small type marks the non-P material.

The P narrative in Genesis 35 on the death of Rachel is identical to what is recounted in Genesis 48. The whole purpose of recounting that Rachel died some distance from Ephrath is to say that she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem) and not in the family tomb in the cave of Machpelah, as recounted in the P stratum about the rest of the patriarchs. In the original P story, Rachel’s death is not connected to the birth of Benjamin; according to P, Benjamin was born in Paddan-aram, not in Canaan (Gen 35:23-26) [slide]. The non-P tradition, by contrast, tells us that Rachel died in childbirth, and explains Benjamin’s name as a reference to her death.

This analysis also has implications for the double tradition about Rachel’s place of burial. Outside the Torah, Samuel’s famous words to Saul — “When you depart from me today you will meet two men by Rachel’s tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah” (1 Sam 10:2; cf. Jer 31:15) — bear witness that Rachel was buried in the territory of Benjamin, or at least on the border between Ephraim and Benjamin. That is, according to this tradition, Rachel was buried among her descendants, who gave their name to the place. The non-P layer in Genesis 35 (according to the analysis suggested here) does not tell us where Rachel was buried. But the continuation of the story, and the fact that it focuses on Benjamin’s birth and Rachel’s death while giving birth to him, implies that she died in the territory of Benjamin, precisely matching the traditions about Rachel’s tomb that we find outside the Torah. It is therefore clear that the only source that describes Rachel being buried in the territory of Judah is the P stratum of the Torah. From its later perspective, it shifts the northern tradition to the region of Judah.

1. Genesis 49-50: The End of Jacob’s Life according to P

The short P narrative in Genesis 48 has no purpose other than to explain that the descendants of Manasseh and Ephraim will receive the inheritance of Joseph when they return to Canaan, and to record that Rachel was buried in a different location than the rest of the patriarchs and matriarchs. The reason for mentioning this is clarified in the continuation of the P story, in chs. 49-50. Here, there is great agreement among the majority of scholars as to which verses belong to P. The analysis presented here largely follows that of previous scholarship, but I want to explain the narrative logic of the Priestly story.

In ch. 48, Jacob reminds Joseph that Rachel was indeed buried near Bethlehem; but he requests that he himself be buried in the cave of Machpelah, together with Leah and the rest of his ancestors. He calls for his sons, blesses them, and requests that they bury him in the cave of Machpelah where his ancestors were buried, and where he himself buried Leah (#5 on the handout). The direct continuation is found in 50:12-13 (#6 on the handout).

As you can see, these two verses are not connected to the context in which they are currently found. These two verses speak of the sons of Jacob in general, while the verses in which they are embedded focus on Joseph as directing the events of the burial. In fact, two traditions about the burial of Jacob in Canaan are interleaved here. The broader, non-P story explains how the sons of Israel received special permission to leave Egypt and return. The P story does not expand on that; it apparently assumes that no special permission was necessary after the general permission given them by Pharaoh (in ch. 47) to live wherever they wanted to in the best part of the land of Egypt. In these two formulaic verses about the fulfillment of Jacob’s command to bury him in Canaan, the Priestly description that sets a seal on the patriarchal period is complete.

1. Conclusions

Most of the unit that has been surveyed here consists of Jacob’s long leave-taking before his death. This is perhaps the first inkling of the genre of “testaments” that developed so much more extensively in Second Temple times. Jacob’s long leave-taking in P is composed of a series of blessings: a blessing for Pharaoh, which also includes a summary of Jacob’s own years on earth (“few and hard”); a blessing for Joseph and his sons, including an assurance that they will have an inheritance in Canaan; and a blessing for the rest of his sons, including the instruction to bury him in Canaan. With the fulfillment of this command, the Priestly story of the patriarchs is complete.

The LXX, in my opinion, preserves the original shape of Genesis 47, and therefore exposes the Priestly stratum in ch. 47. Though this story also includes references to Joseph, there is no reason to say that every mention of Joseph in the P narrative belongs to a later redactional layer. There is not enough evidence to prove that, and any attempt to do so will end up being circular. The simpler explanation is that the P narrative about the end of the patriarchal period also contains a brief and characteristically formulaic mention of Joseph. But the principal focus of the P narrative is precisely on Jacob. The meeting of Jacob with Pharaoh is the climax of the story of the best period of Israel in Egypt, *not* the era of Joseph. It therefore emerges that in order to clarify the Jacob cycle, we must adopt a more flexible and more up-to-date approach in demarcating the unit and describing its development, so that we do not leave meaningful parts of the story of Jacob outside the discussion.