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Matthew C. Genung

The Composition of Genesis 37

Incoherence and Meaning in the Exposition of the Joseph Story

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To

Cristina Giulia, Sophia, Andrew, Elizabeth, Anna Charles and Nancy Xavier[†] and Aurora

with love and gratitude.

Foreword

"It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts" (Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*: "A Scandal in Bohemia"). This simple rule of judicial investigation can easily apply to the case presented at the beginning of the Joseph Story which, as a matter of fact, offers any curious reader much to think about.

Actually, many questions come across the readers' mind when they discover the empty pit with Reuben (Gen 37,29). Where is Joseph? Did somebody kidnap him? Or, was Joseph not sold to the Ishmaelites, as it had been planned by Judah (37,26–27; cf. 37,28)? Where was Reuben during this bargaining and why does he go back to the pit? Does he not know that Joseph had been sold by the brothers? And why do Midianites appear on the stage, all of a sudden, at this crucial moment (37,28)?

The main question, however, is not so much about the identity of those responsible for abducting Joseph to Egypt, either the Midianites (37,36) or the Ishmaelites (39,1), or whether Joseph was sold or kidnapped, but about who wrote such a confusing report of the facts. And what was the writer's intention? Whom does he want to deceive? Whom does he want to cover up? Is this narrator reliable or is he as unreliable as the narrator of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* by Agatha Christie? Who will profit by such a strange account in which a crime is planned (37,18), a father is convinced later by his sons that there is a casualty (37,31–35), but nobody seems to be the culprit, since they accuse a wild animal (37,33) and the *corpus delicti* is nowhere to be found? On the other hand, why is the reader informed of what Reuben, the firstborn, seems to ignore, namely that Joseph is alive and is brought to Egypt (37,36)?

We have in this chapter of the Book of Genesis all the ingredients to write a thrilling detective story. Matthew Genung's thesis endeavors to untangle all the knots of this chapter that attracted attention as soon as the critical study of biblical texts started. It has also been the object of several, and contradictory, studies in recent years. Some among them, however, suffer from the defect identified earlier by Sherlock Holmes: a theory precedes and guides the inVIII Foreword

vestigation. That was already the case with Julius Wellhausen, in a famous paragraph where he stated that the validity of his theory, the documentary hypothesis, depended entirely on his capacity to demonstrate its soundness in the Joseph Story¹. Wellhausen succeeded, of course, but his success was a kind of Pyrrhic victory that proved unconvincing for many.

Matthew Genung preferred to start the investigation afresh and to follow Sherlock Holmes' advice: "Data! Data! Data! [...] I can't make bricks without clay" (Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*: "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches"). In his monograph, he presents the conclusions of his inquiry and pleads for a revision of several sentences delivered in the past. The reading of the acts of a trial may sometimes be demanding, but this effort is also rewarding. A lawyer should convince the court, he or she has to provide the board with all the available evidence, he or she has to listen to all the witnesses and to answer the objections raised by his or her opponents. This is what Matthew Genung undertakes in his study.

The reader is therefore invited to read with attention his plea for a new perspective and some new conclusions about this well-known case. After a long journey through all the data of the investigation, everyone will be able, I think, to form a personal and well-informed judgment on chapter 37 of the Book of Genesis. This is one, and not the least, merit of this painstaking and rigorous study.

Jean Louis Ska March 2017

¹ JULIUS WELLHAUSEN, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1876–78; 1885; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963) 52: "Es ist zu vermuten, dass dies Werk [Genesis 37–50] hier wie sonst aus J und E zusammengesetzt sei; unsere früheren Ergebnisse drängen auf diese Annahme und würden erschüttert werden, wäre sie nicht erweisbar."

Preface

With the sale of his beloved son into slavery, the foundation for Israel's descent into Egypt is laid, the ramifications of which reach well beyond the confines of the Joseph Story and in fact reverberate throughout the entire Bible. Yet Genesis 37 recounts even more than this pivotal moment in the life of Israel. On the one hand this chapter of the Bible presents one of the more difficult texts to interpret, which explains why it has proved to be somewhat of a battleground in biblical exegesis. Consequently, a thorough study of Genesis 37 also reveals many moments in the rich history of the interpretation of the Pentateuch. On the other hand, this chapter offers a spectacular opportunity to peer beyond the letter and to perceive the fire animating the crucible of its compositional history. Such a gaze offers not least an explanation for the difficulties and contradictions narrated in the immediate text, which is to apprehend meaning in what may seem to be the incoherent byproduct of the faithful scribe, but also an impetus and methodology which can aid in understanding other biblical texts.

The nature of the text itself, its interpretative difficulties, ensuing questions, and the principal theories proposed throughout the history of its interpretation are the vectors of the heuristic used in this study which aims to provide a fresh and, hopefully, compelling exegesis of Genesis 37 that accounts for its inherent tensions and at the same time remains internally coherent. The first task, undertaken in chapter one, is to present a study of the history of interpretation of Genesis 37, which at once demonstrates the interpretative problems, surveys the most important solutions and exegetical methods brought to bear upon them, and culminates in the status quaestionis. This leads to the second task, a literary analysis of the biblical chapter, passage by passage, guided by its multiple interpretative problems, in conjunction with an analysis of the principal solutions proposed in its exegetical history. This task is carried out in chapters two through five, each of which treats a particular passage in detail, and concludes with a provisional proposal based upon the cumulative results of the analysis. The final task, presented in chapter six, is to offer a synthesis of these results, which explains Genesis 37 as a compoX Preface

sition based on an elaborate narrative strategically expanded, and thereby reactualized for a new period in the life of Israel.

This monograph is a revised dissertation defended at the Pontifical Biblical Institute on December 11, 2015 for the Doctorate in Sacred Scripture. There are more people to whom I owe thanks for the outcome of this study than I can name here. First of all, however, and with great affection and esteem, my deep gratitude is owed to Rev. Jean Louis Ska, S.J., who moderated my doctoral research with great care and skill, and who patiently taught me the craft of biblical exegesis. Of course, he bears no responsibility for the shortcomings contained herein, but deserves much credit for its merits. Special thanks are also due to Rev. Federico Giuntoli, S.J., who helped me throughout the entire process of my research with immense generosity and solicitude, whom I thank for the many ways my work has improved because of his insight. Rev. Dominik Markl, S.J. and Rev. Helmut Engel, S.J., who served on the defense committee, graciously read my work with care and provided valuable feedback for its improvement. This is not to overlook many other great teachers at the Biblicum, and at the Pontifical Gregorian University, whom I want to thank for the formation received at their hands.

A debt a gratitude the likes of which words cannot adequately express is owed to Rev. William Leahy, S.J., who so generously welcomed me to Boston College, as also to the members of the Theology Department and library staff and students at Boston College, where as Visiting Scholar I was able to begin to teach and where the research for this work was undertaken. The gift of my time at Boston College is invaluable.

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Finally, I want to acknowledge that many friends and my family, to whom this book is dedicated, shared no small part in carrying the burden during seven years of study in Rome, and five more in Boston, so that they might have some understanding of how grateful I am.

Matthew C. Genung May 25, 2017 Ascension of the Lord

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XV

Chapter 1

History of Research

Genesis 37 begins the final section of the book of Genesis, the so-called Joseph Story (JS), and serves as the exposition to this most elaborate and longrunning biblical narrative. Widely considered to be a literary masterpiece for its religious content, artistic beauty, and literary singularity, the JS excels almost as equally in its nuanced exegetical history. Behind its impressive story line, character development and artistry, just as with other biblical narratives, lie literary tensions and contradictions in events recounted that make this narrative difficult to interpret. Perhaps the most well-known and stumping of these difficulties is found in the contradicting claims found between Gen 37,28b, which recounts that the Ishmaelites brought Joseph to Egypt where they sold him (according to Gen 39,1), and Gen 37,36, which reports the Midianites' sale of Joseph into Egypt. The details of Joseph's fate are further complicated by the report in Gen 37,28a, whereby the syntax of the Hebrew text seems to indicate that the Midianites sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites, a claim considered by many to conflict with Judah's plan to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites (Gen 37,27), and perhaps with Joseph's statement to his brothers that it was they who had sold him, found much later in the JS (Gen 45,4). These are the most stubborn of the difficulties in Genesis 37 that have given rise to a spectrum of interpretations of the narrative, and upon which this study of Genesis 37 attempts to shed light.

Recognition of and solutions proposed for this, as well as further literary tensions in Genesis 37, did not begin with the advent of critical biblical research in the 17th century, but one may safely assert that the flurry of such proposals now in circulation is due to the type of inquiry into the biblical text that arose at that time. In this chapter, the most significant milestones in the history of the research into Genesis 37, from the early stages of critical research to the present, will be surveyed in order to paint a clearer picture of the tensions in the text, and the bases for the various solutions. The presentation will be according to the exegetical method employed, rather than chronology. Upon this foundation, a new set of solutions is constructed. The result is a fresh and, hopefully, compelling exegesis of Genesis 37 that accounts for its inherent tensions and at the same time remains internally coherent.

Although many important contributions are not included in the survey, the scholars and works that are cited are those which led or at least contributed to a major shift in favor of a specific exegetical paradigm, and whose ideas were seminal in the development of a particular type of solution to the problems in the narrative. For the sake of clarity, important authors whose work represents more of a variant proposal within a category of a particular solution, rather than the impetus for a new solution, are mostly excluded.

The purpose of this endeavor is to understand the basic categories to which solutions belong, their underlying methodologies, and the insights that resulted in shifts in exegetical method leading up to the present. The proposals can be put into two basic categories: synchronic and diachronic. The latter is roughly organized into sections according to the Documentary Hypothesis, form criticism, and the theory of a unified text with redactional updating, or *Fortschreibung*. Subsequently, the problems in Genesis 37, whether perceived or real, are briefly summarized. Their main proposed solutions are then categorized and briefly evaluated. Finally the *status quaestionis* is presented.

The history of research pertinent to the study of Genesis 37 began with questions posed to a much broader context, and have only in recent times been applied to more and more limited extents of text. Questions about Genesis 37 still usually have at least the entire JS in view, often the book of Genesis, and sometimes the entire Pentateuch. This study focuses specifically on the problems of Genesis 37. Seeking an understanding of Genesis 37, as opposed to the greater JS, is an endeavor justified by the supposition that it presents exegetical problems whose results have become confused due in part to too broad a purview. An understanding of Genesis 37 on its own merits can become a starting point for untangling problems in the greater JS, as well as the composition of Genesis and the Pentateuch. For these reasons, I have limited this study to theories pertinent to this particular text¹.

¹ For other recent approaches to the history of research, see C. PAAP, *Die Josephsgeschichte: Genesis 37–50*. Bestimmungen ihrer literarischen Gattung in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts (EHS.T 534; Frankfurt am Main 1995); F. W. GOLKA, "Genesis 37–50: Joseph Story or Israel-Joseph Story?", *CBR* 2 (2004) 153–177.

1. Documentary Hypothesis

1.1 Karl-David Ilgen

The period of critical biblical exegesis arose with the insight that some of the most thoroughgoing tensions in the book of Genesis are explained by the theory that it was composed from once independent documents. To understand the nature of the tensions, early exegetes relied upon the task of separating its material into its original source documents. For the first critics, the main tension involved the various divine names used and their apparent systematic distribution. For this reason Genesis 37, which does not contain any divine name, was seen by the pioneering Jean Astruc as unified, and belonging entirely to his Memoir A². Several decades later, an appreciably more nuanced approach to biblical criticism by K.-D. Ilgen yielded the division of Genesis 37 into two once separate, parallel and complete narratives³. In that half century span, Astruc's idea that the documents employed by Moses in the composition of the book of Genesis could be discovered by source criticism had given way to the understanding that the Pentateuch was compiled by a collector or storyteller from ancient sources, at a date closer to the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, than to the theophany at Sinai⁴. Seeking to understand Israel's true history, religion and cult, Ilgen undertook a much more detailed analysis of the biblical text in order to base its division into source documents. Beyond the discrepancy of the divine name, he also analyzed stylistic elements of the language employed and contradictions in the events depicted.

Regarding the beginning of the JS, his treatment of Genesis 37 is not only thorough, but his method proved foundational for biblical exegetes, even beyond subsequent proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis (DH). Contradictions that proved important for his delineation of sources were first the details regarding Joseph's age given throughout the JS. For example, Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold into Egypt (37,2), and 30 when he was grand vizier before Pharaoh (41,46). According to 46,6 he was 39 when he was seen by his brothers, because it was the second year of famine. He then lists the major family events occurring in that 23-year time span, which seem

² J. ASTRUC, *Conjectures sur la Genèse*. Introductions et notes par Pierre Gibert (Bruxelles 1753, Paris 1999) 504–505.

³ K.-D. ILGEN, Die Urkunden des Jerusalemischen Tempelarchivs in ihrer Urgestalt, als Beytrag zur Berichtigung der Geschichte der Religion und Politik aus dem Hebräischen mit kritischen und erklärenden Anmerkungen, auch mancherley dazu gehörenden Abhandlungen. I. Die Urkunden der ersten Buchs von Moses (Halle 1798) 417ff., 447–479.

⁴ ILGEN, Urkunden, 7–15.

incredible. Among these are the marriages and births of Judah's children and grandchildren, which also conflict with the time span and the report of the number of people brought down to Egypt (46,8-27). This was already noted by Abraham Ibn Ezra in his 12C commentary on the Torah, and later by Baruch Spinoza. It was not until Ilgen, however, that they were used in the search of underlying documents as an explanation of their nature. Second, the presence of multiple reasons for his brothers' hatred of him, i.e. the father's predilection of Joseph, his gift of the special tunic, and Joseph's evil report (Gen 37,3-4), or Joseph's dreams, (37,5-11). Third, the type of coat that Joseph wore: Joseph's garment, always a form of החנח, is mentioned eight times, but in three instances it is nomen regens to פַּסִים or הַפַּסִים. For Ilgen and many after him this became a determinant factor for source criticism. Fourth, is the contradiction in whether or not Joseph was a shepherd; fifth, the problem of whether Reuben or Judah was the one responsible for dissuading the other brothers from their murder conspiracy; sixth, whether it was the brothers or the Midianites who sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites; seventh, whether it was the Ishmaelites or Midianites who brought Joseph to Egypt; eighth, the variant use of Jacob or Israel as the father's name; and ninth, the problem of the identity and occupation of the one to whom Joseph was sold in Egypt and his relation to the prison where Joseph was later held. The issue of the identity of the Egyptian who bought Joseph arises from the conflict of Gen 37,36 and the continuation of the story from Genesis 39, and is an important cipher for some attempts to unravel not only the JS as a whole but also Genesis 37. This issue is treated in more detail below, where the contribution of M. Noth is discussed.

These tensions in Genesis 37 were viewed by him in relation to the unfolding of the remainder of the JS, and used for its delineation into sources. Based upon these factors, Ilgen divided the material, just as he had in the previous parts of Genesis, between two *Elohist* documents, identified as the *First Elohist* and *Second Elohist* documents, from which he proposed that a later redactor composed Genesis 37 and much of the rest of the JS. For Ilgen, only Genesis 39 belongs to his so-called *Jehovist* source, since only that chapter contains the divine name YHWH. As an important argument about the relationship of the material of the JS to other Genesis and Pentateuchal material, it is noteworthy that Ilgen is already troubled by the discontinuity of some events narrated in the First Elohist of Genesis 37 with his previously ascribed First Elohist material throughout Genesis⁵. He nonetheless persists in his

⁵ See ILGEN, Urkunden, 447.

view of the continuity of the source documents in the JS with those throughout Genesis.

For Ilgen, the contradictions that run throughout the JS cannot be harmonized, but must be used to separate the current form of the narrative into its original source documents. Only then is one able to understand the story. The great endeavor to clearly identify the source distinctions, and to assign the biblical material to its proper source document, was now well underway.

1.2 Hermann Hupfeld

In large measure, H. Hupfeld found himself in agreement with Ilgen regarding the tensions in the JS and the solution in the Documentary Hypothesis. However, Hupfeld's important insight that the peculiar narrative style found in the JS, in which many details are narrated in a long-running fashion, coupled with its lack of legal and theocratic motifs, meant for him that Ilgen had mistaken the identification of its sources. According to Hupfeld, material from the older Elohist, the Urschrift, which corresponds to Ilgen's First Elohist⁶, is not represented in the Joseph Story. It is marked by legal and theocratic language and a curt writing style, traces of which cannot be found in the JS. This motivated him to ascribe most of Genesis 37 to his Younger Elohist. The deciding factor for Hupfeld is based on the tension in Genesis 37 regarding whether the brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites at the suggestion of Judah, or was put into the cistern at the suggestion of Reuben and taken out by the Midianites. Hupfeld provides three key issues for its source distinction: first, the brother who tried to save Joseph's life; second, the way he was brought to Egypt; and third, the person to whom he was sold in Egypt. Based upon affinities with other tensions in subsequent chapters of the JS, and delineated by the use of the divine name YHWH in Genesis 39, for Hupfeld, the Judah/Ishmael material originated in his so-called *Jhwhist* document, and the remaining material in his Younger Elohist, which forms the base material for Genesis 377.

1.3 Julius Wellhausen

Discernment of sources based upon style and content was continued by J. Wellhausen, who was in agreement with Hupfeld about the difficulty in

⁶ This is the later-designated Priestly Document (P).

⁷ Cf. H. HUPFELD, *Die Quellen der Genesis und die Art ihrer Zusammensetzung* (Berlin 1853) 47–48, 65–69. Unlike Ilgen, he found Genesis 37 to be mostly unified. He ascribes only 37,1 to the *older Elohist*, 37,2–25a.28a.29–36 to the *younger Elohist*, and 37,25b–27.28b to the *Jhwhist*.

discerning between J and E, especially in the JS. One should note the gingerliness with which he expounds his source allocation of the Genesis 37 material, which is brought into relief by his admission about the necessity, for the veracity of his overall source-critical work, of showing that the JS in Genesis 37–50 is composed from the same sources as he had proposed based upon his analysis of Genesis 1-368. Perhaps motivated by this exigency, Wellhausen proposes that the JE Redactor (RJE) based his redactional composition of Genesis 37 on five blocks of material, alternatively from E (vv. 2–11*), J (12–16*), E (17–23*), J (24–28*) and E (29–36*), with smatterings from the alternate source regularly intruding into the base source material of each subsection⁹. This compositional model is in stark contrast to Hupfeld's, who saw a mostly unified chapter 37, with only one doublet requiring source distinction. Although Wellhausen recognized the same literary tensions as Ilgen and Hupfeld, he used different characteristics of Genesis 37 to arrive at a finer delineation of its sources. Of great importance in his method was the theory that doublets were indications of parallel sources. This is because for Wellhausen, too, Genesis 37 exhibits no need for source distinction until one confronts the Ishmaelite/Midianite contradiction in vv. 25-36. Given this contradiction, the leap is made that, in consideration of the doublets in the other sections, multiple sources are indeed discernable. From there, stylistic characteristics are used to allocate material to the supposed sources. According to Wellhausen, because the original sources of Genesis 37 were interwoven, upon their disentanglement the originally independent stories would emerge into view. His research from an analysis of Genesis 1-36 concluded that each source had a particular style of Hebrew expression, which, he held, allowed a finer distinction of material into sources. This was, without a doubt, motivated by his primary interest, which was to date texts and inquire into their significance for Israel's ancient history. To accomplish this, coherent complexes of stories were required. Through a comparison of the legal codes and of the ideologies contained in the narrative texts of the Pentateuch, he distinguished between its sources, and identified three epochs in which they were written. Since for him the Yahwist (J) and Elohist (E) came from

⁸ J. WELLHAUSEN, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Berlin 1866, ³1889, 1963) 52, "Es ist zu vermuten, dass dies Werk [Genesis 37–50] hier wie sonst aus J und E zusammengesetzt sei; unsere früheren Ergebnisse drängen auf diese Annahme und würden erschüttert werden, wäre sie nicht erweisbar."

⁹ This is not how he presents it, but is the layout of Genesis 37 once his source division is presented. His presentation considers first vv. 25–36, then 12–24, and finally 2b–11, which is according to his method of determining which material belongs to the J and E (and P) sources.

the beginning period of the United Monarchy, he did not focus on differentiating them beyond style. For the classification of Genesis 37 material, he relied upon typical phrases and preferred lexicology from outside the JS¹⁰. Because he held that the *Yahwist* document (J) employed object suffixes, Israel as the father's name, and portrayed Hebron as his dwelling, while the *Elohist* (E) utilized the *nota accusativi*, exhibited a rambling style, and a fondness for the theme of dreams, individual verses of Genesis 37 were ascribed accordingly to J and E. For Wellhausen, Genesis 37 was composed from two complete, parallel versions of the same story, each source having its own stylistic idiosyncrasies, which were interwoven by R^{JE 11}.

1.4 Joel Baden

Not long after Wellhausen, theories for Genesis 37 began to seriously take into consideration the unity of the JS based on its literary peculiarities and distinctiveness from the other Genesis narratives. These theories are evaluated below. However, it is first worth noting that at present there is a renewed effort to counter the more recent methodologies applied to the Pentateuchal texts, on the basis of their failure to provide widely accepted solutions. Here I am referring to the effort of proponents of the *Neo-Documentary Hypothesis*¹². On this basis, J. Baden and others have re-proposed the Documentary Hypothesis on the grounds that it remains the best explanation for the ten-

¹⁰ WELLHAUSEN, Composition, 53.

¹¹ WELLHAUSEN, *Composition*, 60–61. It is worth considering that Wellhausen's view of the composition of the Pentateuch presented here represents a drastic change from his opinions expressed earlier in his career, when he argued against the existence of multiple, independent, parallel sources. Earlier he favored a theory of supplementation, according to which a more organic development of the biblical text is discernible. In his former view, smaller blocks of material were joined or assimilated into earlier material, all of which had been reworked to the extent that the original text is no longer discernible. See ID., *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen 1871) x–xi.

¹² J. S. BADEN, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*. Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis (New Haven, CT 2012) 1–44; B. J. SCHWARTZ, "Joseph's Descent into Egypt: The Composition of Genesis 37", *The Joseph Story in the Bible and Throughout the Ages* (ed. L. MAZOR) (Beth Mikra 55; 2010) 1–30; ID., "How the Compiler of the Pentateuch Worked: The Composition of Genesis 37", *The Book of Genesis*. Composition, Reception, and Interpretation (ed. C. A. EVANS, *et al.*) (VT.S 152; Leiden – Boston, MA 2012) 263–278. Belonging to the same school but with a very different opinion about the composition of Genesis 37 is found in the doctoral thesis of T. L. YOREH, *The First Book of God* (BZAW 402; Berlin – New York, NY 2010), especially pp. 28–38, 119–161. Yoreh defends the existence of the E source, and finds Genesis 37 to consist mainly in an E narrative with a J supplementation.

sions in the Pentateuch, including the JS, and Genesis 37. Baden argues that methodologically, source criticism went awry when it used language and style as criteria for distinguishing between sources. Instead, he proposes that the narrative plot and its coherence should be the only standard by which sources are distinguished, and that this method is successful in sorting out the problems. In particular, he is critical of supplementary hypotheses proposed for Genesis 37, arguing that they have not achieved satisfactory solutions to the problems. For Baden, proposals to explain the major problem in the text that cannot be harmonized, i.e. the Ishmaelite/Midianite question, are inadequate. Either the proposed base layer is left with tensions rendering it incoherent, or the redactional layers are not grounded with sufficient motivation for their classification as redactions. To him they look like the very sources which he and the documentarians have themselves proposed. Yet his own proposal for Genesis 37* leaves the impression that at least one of the source documents is not represented as a complete story, and that intra-documental inconsistencies remain.

2. Form Criticism

2.1 Hermann Gunkel

As is now obvious, by the time of H. Gunkel the various schemes of source division of Genesis 37 between J and E were already kaleidoscopic, and while Gunkel proposed another complex division of material into J and E in Genesis 37, a new approach was ushered in by this great scholar. His major contribution is seen in his approach to the Pentateuchal texts as literature. For him, the book of Genesis consisted in a collection of stories (Sagen) that must first be understood from the perspective of their literary genre and original function in the life of Israel, their Sitz im Leben. Gunkel considered the material behind the JS similar not only to that of other ANE cultures, but also to modern popular literature, and so it can be understood based upon its popular folktale (Märchen) motifs. Similar to the other material in Genesis, the JS was formed from a collection of legend traditions that grew together in a series of oral and literary stages, of which he sees the kernel to be pure folktale, completely void of historical references, even of the name Joseph¹³. At the root of the actual Joseph narrative, to which Genesis 37 belongs, is the story of Joseph's sale to a foreign land because of his brothers' hatred, where he

¹³ H. GUNKEL, "Die Komposition der Joseph-Geschichten", ZDMG 76 (1922) 68.

later receives them under his power and eventually pardons them¹⁴. Secondary narratives were later added to this main Joseph narrative. The motifs present in the JS stem from the oral stages before the legends were applied to Joseph and fused with Israel's tribal history, a complex process that involved both oral and multiple literary stages. The expansive style of the JS, so distinct from the other parts of Genesis, is an indication of its more recent dating relative to the other legends of Genesis¹⁵. He places it around the early monarchy, when, he holds, Israel's narrative style would have been more developed. According to his theory, it was around the 10–9 C. B.C. when both the Yahwist and the Elohist schools collected these traditions into documents. The form in which we receive them is due to the R^{JE} who skillfully redacted them together from the sources.

The significance of Gunkel's insight into the common folktale motifs underlying the JS narratives is manifested in how he used them to understand the background of the text and original motive of its composition. The doublets and repetitions in the present form of the text, however, are still explained by source criticism, since for Gunkel the J and E schools had recourse to the same tradition font of legends that were based upon these popular motifs. This is expressed with regard to Genesis 37 in that he finds two coherent and distinct variants of the same story, each with its own dominant motif. His appeal to popular motifs allowed him to explain the origin of some of the variances between the two versions. Although both sources are based on the leading motif of the contrast between the younger, good brother and the older, disloyal brothers¹⁶, the J variant includes the garment motif whereas the E variant the dream motif. He also resorts to *Religionsgeschichte* in order to explain elements of the narrative as coming from ancient traditions.

This reference to folktale motifs, however, only goes so far in his explanation of the tensions of the text. It is no longer of value once the issue moves beyond the pure folktale motif and entails elements pertaining to history. For example, he explains E's use of Midianites and J's use of Ishmaelites as due to the historical circumstances at the time of the sources' composition. By induction, Gunkel conjectured that at the time of the composition of E, the Midianites were in some way part of the Ishmaelites¹⁷. Similarly, that E used

¹⁴ GUNKEL, "Komposition", 66–67, also ID., *Genesis* (Macon, GA 1997) [Original: *Genesis* (HK 1/1; Göttingen 1901, ³1910, 1977)] 442.

¹⁵ GUNKEL, Genesis, lxxiv-lxxvii, 387.

¹⁶ H. GUNKEL, *The Folktale in the Old Testament* (HTIBS; Sheffield 1987) [Original: *Das Märchen im Alten Testament* (RV 2; Tübingen 1921)] 137.

¹⁷ GUNKEL, *Genesis*, 393. This theory will become important for some who understand the text as unified, as will be seen below.

Reuben while J used Judah was a reflection of differing historical tribal circumstances. Thus he deduced J's greater literary age¹⁸. While his interest was in the folkloric pre-history of the text, he resorted to the Documentary Hypothesis to explain most tensions in Genesis 37. His division of Genesis 37 into sources, although not his primary exegetical aim, was adopted by many exegetes after him, and became the basis of discussion.

2.2 Hugo Greßmann

Similar to Gunkel, H. Greßmann held that the key to understanding the nature of the JS lies in understanding its traditions. Rather than attention to its literary qualities, however, his methodology sought to individuate the history of the development of the traditions underlying the text, with close attention paid to Israel's tribal history combined with common folkloric motifs. In his method too, it is easy to see the influence of the general intellectual trends of nineteenth century Germany, when popular literature as well as the ideas of the religionsgeschichtliche Schule came into focus. Greßmann conceived of the history of the JS as the development of an individual popular legend into the Novelle, primarily for the accommodation of Israel's tribal history. Genesis 37 provides the key for his understanding of the entire JS. He holds that Joseph's second dream, the star dream (37,9–11), is the kernel of the original JS¹⁹. Although this dream has a proleptic function within the narrative, it does not fit the present story because its conclusion is not entirely borne out. The star dream prefigures Joseph's rise to the monarchy, supposes that the mother is living, and expects his father also to pay him homage. These three key elements of Joseph's second dream are not fulfilled in the present version of the JS, but, according to Greßmann, would have been in a previous version of the narrative, if the dream was ever to have made sense.

Beyond this literary problem, he also sees a tension in the portrayal of Joseph and his brothers both as shepherds and farmers, which he explains by Israel's historical socio-economic development from a nomadic to agricultural lifestyle. According to Greßmann, this is reflected in the development of the JS traditions. The sheaf dream (Gen 37,5–8) reflects this later stage, and amounts to an updating of the star dream, accommodating later traditions²⁰.

¹⁸ GUNKEL, Genesis, lxxiv.

¹⁹ H. GRESSMANN, "Ursprung und Entwicklung der Joseph-Sage", *EYXAPIΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ*. Studien zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments. Festschrift H. Gunkel. I: Zur Religion und Literatur des Alten Testaments (ed. H. SCHMIDT) (FRLANT 36 [n.F. 19]; Göttingen 1923) 17–22, 52.

²⁰ GRESSMANN, "Ursprung", 53.

In the same way, Judah replaced Reuben as the brothers' spokesman, since the tribe of Judah displaced the tribe of Reuben as the most powerful tribe²¹.

The Judah/Reuben tension allows him to date the older tradition, that of Reuben, to the time of the Judges, and the Judah tradition to the time of the Davidic monarchy, and explains the tension of the Midianites and Ishmaelites. The former also belongs to the period of the Judges, the latter to the time of David. A third redactional layer is seen in Genesis 37 with the references to Shechem and Dothan, which correspond to the tribal-historical period that gave rise to the preference of Ephraim over Manasseh²².

2.3 Gerhard von Rad

While still approaching the text from the viewpoint of sources, G. von Rad contributes to a movement toward understanding the unity of the JS. Methodologically, he sought the most authentic moments of a tradition in what he called Israel's kerygma, which he connected with the origins of Israel. Thus he started with the final form of the text, not with the individual, small units closest to the oral traditions. For von Rad, the "small historical creed" is the primitive core of the Pentateuch in its present state, and the Yahwist was the writer and theologian of the Solomonic period who composed his great work around this kernel by making theological connections between the earlier elements at hand²³.

From this viewpoint he conceived of the JS as the link between the patriarchal stories and the exodus. He sees a stark contrast between the literature of the JS and the other patriarchal narratives, countering Gunkel that it is a collection of stories, and disagreeing that it contains historical or political indications of the tribes²⁴. Its unusual length and novelistic literary quality indi-

 $^{^{21}}$ GRESSMANN, "Ursprung", 10–11. According to Greßmann, the Song of Deborah (Judg 5) provides the historical anchor for the period of tribal Reuben's power.

²² GRESSMANN, "Ursprung", 17.

²³ J. L. SKA, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake, IN 2006) [Original: *Introduzione alla lettura del Pentateuco*. Chiavi per l'interpretazione dei primi cinque libri della Bibbia (Collana biblica; Roma 1998, Bologna 2000). Translated from: *Introduction à la lecture du Pentateuque*. Clés pour l'interprétation des cinq premiers livres de la Bible (Brussels 2000)] 120.

²⁴ G. VON RAD, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom", *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (1953) [Original: "Josephgeschichte und ältere Chochma", Congress *Volume: Copenhagen 1953* (ed. ANDERSON, G.W. – BENTZEN, A. – DE BOER, P.A.H. – BURROWS, M. – CAZELLES, H. – NOTH, M.) (VT.S 1; Leiden 1953) 120–127 = in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (TBü 8; München 1961) 272–280] 292, 298–

cated for von Rad that the JS cannot be broken into individual segments that would have had independent existence before having been redacted together. Rather, he conceived of the JS as an organically written narrative unity, a *Novelle* with scenes and a developed plot. Genesis 37 is the exposition to this literary unity, from which the rest of the narrative builds and finds its conclusion.

This narrative was composed during the Davidic-Solomonic monarchy. In fact the Joseph Story was the basis of his theory of the Solomonic Enlightenment, and Joseph represents the enlightened period of Solomon's court, since he was able to discover the divine will not by special revelation, but by wisdom. It has literary affinities with the Davidic court history and a didactic motive that classifies it squarely among early wisdom writing²⁵.

What then with the tensions? These are still explained by source criticism. Here one detects a certain contradiction between his conception of the JS as an organically constructed narrative from beginning to end and an artistically redacted composition. This is because he conceives of the final form as an artistic composition by R^{JE} from the J and E sources, each of which contained a complete JS²⁶. For von Rad, the existence of the Ishmaelites and Midianites in Genesis 37 is evidence of a double thread in the narrative arising from two sources²⁷. He does not explain why such a literary unity would have been manifested with such tensions in the two sources.

^{300;} ID., Genesis. A Commentary (London 1972) [Original: Das erste Buch Mose. Genesis (ATD 2–4; Göttingen 1949, 91972).] 347, 433.

²⁵ See also G. VON RAD, "Biblische Josephserzählung und Josephsroman", *Gottes Wirken in Israel*. Vorträge zum Alten Testament (ed. O. H. STECK) (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1974); ID., *Die Josephsgeschichte*. Ein Vortrag (BSt 5; Neukirchen-Vluyn ³1959). For a criticism of his position of its wisdom background, see J. L. CRENSHAW, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon Historical Literature", *JBL* 88 (1969) 129–142; M. V. FOX, "Joseph and Wisdom", *The Book of Genesis*. Composition, Reception, and Interpretation (ed. C. A. EVANS, *et al.*) (VT.S 152; Leiden – Boston, MA 2012) 231–262.

²⁶ VON RAD, *Genesis*, 347. For a criticism of von Rad's position of its artistic unity and his recourse to the Documentary Hypothesis, see R. N. WHYBRAY, "The Joseph Story and Pentateuchal Criticism", *VT* 18 (1968) 522–528.

²⁷ VON RAD, Genesis, 352.

3. Tradition Criticism

Martin Noth

Perhaps the most controversial theory with regards to the JS is owed to M. Noth, whose interest was primarily historical, and whose exegetical methodology sought to understand the history of the traditions lying behind the literary sources. He held that tradition-critically, the JS represents a very late narrative. Noth noted that the ancient tradition, which, as proposed by von Rad, is presented succinctly in the small historical creed at Josh 24,4, does not mention the events of the JS, because the JS is later and is an outgrowth from this kernel of tradition. It was composed for the purpose of elaborating on the tradition of Jacob and his sons coming down to Egypt and must have already had the present sequence of Pentateuchal themes in view. For Noth, this explains why the JS now provides the link, albeit loosely, between the themes of the patriarchs and of the exodus²⁸.

Noth is much less critical of its literary inconsistencies as were scholars like Ilgen, Wellhausen and Gunkel. For him, the story developed out of a series of motifs already in circulation at a late date, but prior to the literary sources. For this reason not all tensions belong to the later literary history of the narrative. The various examples of tensions used by the other proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis do not compel Noth to such extensive delineation between the sources. This is because of his basic thesis that some literary inconsistencies within the sources come from the *Grundlage* (G), which was common to both J and E. This means that some tensions in style, language, and content have been carried through from G to the sources and cannot alone support literary source distinctions²⁹. This proposition, coupled with his assertion that R^{JE} did not attempt to preserve his source documents in their entirety within his composition, results in the acceptance of more inconsistencies within the source documents³⁰. His rule is to consider the immediate

²⁸ M. Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1972) [Original: Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch (Stuttgart 1948, Darmstadt 1960)] 208–213. For an opposing view, see K. SCHMID, "Die Josephsgeschichte im Pentateuch", *Abschied vom Jahwisten*. Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion (ed. J. C. GERTZ, et al.) (BZAW 315; Berlin – New York, NY 2002) 83–118; ID., *Genesis and the Moses Story*. Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible (Siphrut 3; Winona Lake, IN 2010) [Original: *Erzväter und Exodus*. Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments (WMANT 81; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1999)] 50–60.

²⁹ NOTH, *Traditions*, 228–229.

³⁰ NOTH, Traditions, 27.

literary unit in itself when distinguishing between sources used in its composition, and to disregard how a composition of material from J and E was effected elsewhere. Thus, for example, he does not insist that Genesis 37 contains multiple motives for the brothers' hatred or two stories of Jacob being informed of Joseph's death.

In Noth's view, there are two main tensions in Genesis 37 that must be solved by source distinction. One is the question, already important for Ilgen, of the identity of the Egyptian to whom Joseph was sold and the related conflict around his imprisonment and accession to authority within the prison that leads to his ultimate success in Egypt. His proposal for Genesis 37, then, stems from the tension between two disparate portrayals of the first period of Joseph's stay in Egypt. According to Gen 39,1*–40,1 it was an Egyptian man (איש מצרי) who purchased Joseph, and the place of Joseph's confinement is the איש הסהר בית הסהר 1,32 that it was Potiphar who purchased Joseph, and Joseph is located in the משמר.

As the introduction to the JS, Genesis 37 is also a composition of E and J, which when read in conjunction with these imprisonment stories, shows that the Elohist source narrated the Midianites' sale of Joseph to Potiphar (37,36), who later put Joseph in charge of the Twar $(40,2-41,32)^{31}$, while the Yahwist source narrates the Ishmaelites' sale of Joseph to an anonymous Egyptian man, who later imprisoned him (Gen 37,28b; 39,1a α b)³².

The second major issue resolved by source criticism regards the tension of which brother intervened to save Joseph's life, and is conceived of as pertaining to the custom of the spokesman role filled by the older brother. Similar to Greßmann, Noth proposed that the text reflects a change in historical circumstances recorded by two different traditions. The J source preserved a tradition where Judah was the eldest, while E preserved a tradition that accorded that role to Reuben. Although on the one hand he attributes the tradition historically older form to E, on the other hand he also insists that this cannot be used to provide a fixed milieu to the literary form ³³. In my view, this is a weakness in his theory of distinction between literary and tradition critical issues, for here he admits a tradition variant that is expressed also in variant sources. How this is possible if both sources are based on the same tradition (G) presents a difficulty. Other than the theme of the coat, which he ascribes

³¹ NOTH, Traditions, 34.

³² Noth holds that Gen 39,1 is reductionally edited with the insertion of Potiphar based on Gen 37,36 in order to harmonize the two sources. See NOTH, *Traditions*, 26, n. 77.

³³ See NOTH, Traditions, 230, n. 605.

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to the E material, no other inconsistencies in Genesis 37 cause conflict for Noth necessitating source division.

His tradition critical view – that the JS arose in the tribe of Joseph and in central Palestine at a relatively late date – changes the exegesis of some details in Genesis 37. For example, the geographical notices of Dothan and Shechem are due to the simple fact that the story originated in the house of Joseph, which occupied that area. Hebron is explained as an editorial gloss to harmonize this story with the other patriarchal traditions that held Hebron as a place of importance³⁴. In essence, Noth was willing to propose unity despite the existence of literary tensions used by adherents of the DH to insist on source distinction.

4. Unity

4.1 Wilhelm Rudolph

W. Rudolph marks the emergence of a new branch of JS research. Countering proponents of the DH as well as those seeking explanations for tensions in the traditions underlying the sources, Rudolph emphatically denounced what he considered to be the absurdity of source distinction in the JS. He was critical of Gunkel who, in his commentary on Genesis, followed the DH model, although he later spoke of its inutility for understanding the artistic composition of this narrative³⁵.

His basic argument is for the stylistic and literary unity of the JS, which he confronted with arguments in favor of the DH. For Rudolph, these latter are weaker precisely because they do not appreciate its literary character. He held that the main viewpoint of the JS – that man works for evil but God works for the good – is equally inherent in the purported J and E versions³⁶. The style of the JS, already described as peculiar by Gunkel, Greßmann, and von Rad, is destroyed by its division into sources.

Rudolph contends that the contradictions used to divide the story into two sources are not really existent. His analysis of the divine name as well as the Israel/Jacob name alternation throughout the JS – traditional elements used for source distinction – shows that they do not indicate continuous sources in

³⁴ NOTH, Traditions, 211.

³⁵ See his Leipzig lecture, in GUNKEL, "Komposition", 55–71.

³⁶ W. RUDOLPH, "Die Josephsgeschichte", *Der Elohist als Erzähler: Ein Irrweg der Pentateuchkritik?* An der Genesis erläutert (ed. P. VOLZ – W. RUDOLPH) (BZAW 63; Giessen 1933) 147.

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