

LINKS BETWEEN THE THREE MAIN DIVISIONS  
OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS (2)  
CHRONOLOGY

SCATTERED throughout the book of Genesis there are twenty-four chronological data, more or less explicit. We are attempting to compare them with one another in the accompanying conspectus to reconstruct the chronology in the whole book:

*Remarks:*

(3) This datum is embedded in a context assigned to A, and hence at this stage it cannot be attributed to other sources without violating our own principles of subject matter examination.

(4) These verses 16, 3.2 are a reduplication of the report about Hagar's relation with 'Abram'. One of them is probably an interpolation. It is very likely that the second one is the later insertion, for its style is discordant with that of its context: note the lack of dialogue:

16, 2

And Sarai said unto Abram,  
Behold now, Yahweh hath restrained me from bearing; go in, I pray thee, unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her.

16, 3

... and Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to Abram her husband to be his wife.

The liveliness of 16, 2 is kept throughout the whole section up to v. 14. Hence 16, 3, i.e. the chronological datum, does not belong to A but to some other source.

(5) 16, 16. Ishmael is born when Abraham was 86, in strict harmony with v. 3; therefore v. 3 belongs to C, to which this section dealing with circumcision belongs.

(6) 17, 1. 24. 25, as an integral part of the covenant and circumcision

This is the concluding extract from the Rev. Fr. C. Sant's thesis for his doctorate in Theology: 'The Literary Structure of the Book of Genesis'. The other extracts are to be found in *Melita Theologica* Vol. XI, pp. 1-13; Vol. XII, pp. 14-27; Vol. XIV, pp. 62-74; Vol. XV, pp. 41-49.

	ABRAHAM	SARAH	ISHMAEL	ISAAC	ESAU	JACOB	JOSEPH	MANASSE	EPHRAIM	DATA	REMARKS	SOURCE
1	0									Abraham is born.		
2	10	0								Sarah is born 17,17.		
3	75	65								Thare dies 11,32; 12,4.		?
4	85	75								Abraham marries Hagar 16,3.	Duplicate // with 16,2	
5	86	76	0							Ishmael is born 16,16.		C
6	99	89	13							Covenant of Circumcision 17,1.24.25.		C
7	100	90	14	0						Birth of Isaac 21,5.	Connected with 17.	C
8	137	127	51	37						Death of Sarah 23,1.		C
9	140		54	40						Isaac marries Rebekah 25,20.		C
10	160		74	60	0	0				Esau and Jacob born 25,26.	Doubtful as to source.	
11	175		89	75	15	15				Abraham dies 25,7.		C
12			114	100	40	40				Esau marries his first wives (26,34) Judith and Basemath.	Doubtful.	
13			137	123	63	63				Ishmael dies 25,17.		C
14				138	78	78				Jacob migrates into Haran (31,38.41) Isaac is old and blind nearing death; Esau marries Makelath.		B
15				145	85	85				Jacob marries Leah and Rachel 29,18.27.		
16				152	92	92	0			Joseph is born 30,25; 31,41.		
17				158	98	98	6			Jacob returns from Haran 31,38.41.		B
18				169	109	109	17			Joseph betrayed by his brothers 37,2. – (It may be that his brethren may have plotted against Joseph later).	Doubtful.	C
19				180	120	120	28			Isaac dies 35,28 – Joseph interprets dreams to prisoners.	It seems to be an interpolation.	?
20					122	122	30			Joseph stands before Pharao 41,46. Year of Plenty begins.	Cfr. 41,45b // 46b.	
21					129	129	37	0	0	Ephraim and Manasseh born 41,50.	General reference with no definite date.	R
22					130	130	38	2	2	Second year of famine – Joseph recognises his brethren (45,6). His father comes into Egypt (47,9).	Indirect reference.	R
23					?	147	55	19	19	Jacob blesses Manasseh and Ephraim (48,20) and his own sons (49,1) – dies 47,28.	This seems to be a later addition cfr. 47,28 // 29.	
24							110	73	73	Joseph dies 50,22.25.		?

account is a C datum.

(8) 23, 1 again is an introduction to the narrative of Sarah's death and her burial and of the purchase of a family tomb at Machpelah. This section has been attributed to C.

(9) 25, 20. '... and Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Paddan-Aram'. This is a duplicate of 24, 67 and this last name unquestionably connects this verse with C. 'Laban the Syrian' and 'Bethuel the Syrian', the former occurring only once and the latter appearing also in 28, 5 in C, confirm our conclusion.

(10) 25, 26. This is a short note about Isaac's age when his sons were born. Its source is doubtful so far.

(11) 25, 7 gives us the age of Abraham when he died. It is a part of the section dealing with Abraham's death and burial, which is assigned to C. Note here the good relations between Isaac and Ishmael, cfr. 17, 1 ff.

(12) 26, 34. Esau marries Judith and Basemath, his first wives, at the age of 40 years. These wives proved to be 'a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah' v. 35; this corresponds exactly with 27, 46: 28, 1b 'Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan' and 28, 8 '... and Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father; and Esau went unto Ishmael, and took unto wives ...' The sequence is excellent. That 26, 34 is not a sequence to what precedes it, that is, to the story of Isaac's dealings with his neighbours is evident; another section is introduced. In 27, 1, however, another narrative begins leading to the fraud of Jacob against his father and his brother. This fraud was the cause of the alienation between Jacob and Esau; finally it led to their total separation through Jacob's flight into Mesopotamia. According to 27, 44.45 Jacob sought safety, not a wife, in Haran. Here we are faced with two motives for Jacob's sojourn in Syria: safety and marriage. The former belongs to one tradition, the other to another tradition, which threads were merged into one. Now 28, 1-9, with which the chronological datum in 26, 34, is ultimately connected, forms part of C. It may be remarked here that there is no contradiction: both motives may have lead Jacob to sojourn in Syria, but one tradition mentions the first and the other stresses the second without excluding the other<sup>1</sup>. In fact even according to the source, according to which Jacob fled in safety, he married Rachel and Leah.

Isaac in 27, 1 is represented as nearing his death and practically

<sup>1</sup>Cfr. *Melita Theologica*. Vol. xii, p. 14.

blind: '... when Isaac was blind, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see ...'; the whole section 33, 1 ff. dealing with the meeting of Esau and Jacob, on the latter's return from Mesopotamia creates to the impression that Isaac was already dead, so much so, that the interest is mainly shifted on to Jacob and his family. On the other hand in 28, 1 ff. the patriarch is not, at least explicitly, referred to as a decrepit man. If Esau was 40 years of age when he took Canaanites unto wives, some time must have passed before they proved to be a nuisance to their mother-in-law. Isaac, therefore, had already surpassed his hundredth year and Jacob his 40th, but it seems unlikely that he had reached his 50th. By combining other data directly or indirectly concerned with chronology we arrive at the figure of 78 years of age for Jacob and 138 for Isaac. Now we know from 35, 28 that Isaac died at the age of 180 years, i.e., he remained on his deathbed 42 years, according to the combined narrative. The figure 138 is arrived at thus: Joseph was born in the 14th year of Jacob's sojourn in Syria; he was the son of Rachel, who bore him just at the end of Jacob's 14 years' service for his wives (30, 25; 31, 38, 41) 'And in this manner have I served thee in thy house twenty years, 14 for thy daughters, and six for thy flocks ...'. But Joseph was 30 years when he stood before Pharaoh 41, 46; Jacob entered Egypt at the age of 130 years (47, 9) in the 2nd year of the famine, when Joseph was 38 (7) years of age; hence Jacob must have been 92 years of age at Joseph's birth, that is, 14 years after his arrival in Mesopotamia, where he entered at the age of 78 years, whereas his father Isaac was 138 years of age. Therefore, Jacob was comparatively old when he got married, although this contrasts sharply with the laughter of Abraham in 17 when God announced to him the birth of Isaac in his old age of 100 years, Sarah being 90 years. Hence there is some gap somewhere in the chronology; if we consider only the data in C we find that the age of Jacob at his departure cannot be surmised for lack of data. But this does not mean that the chronology in C is confused; it means that the data of the document outside C joined with those of the latter do not yield very likely solutions in the absence of other documents. All difficulties would disappear if the clear data of C be separated from the more general and indirect data of the other source.

(13) 25, 17. This is another datum in a C section, a general summing up of a patriarch's age, as a conclusion to his biography.

(14) 31, 38.41 has already been discussed.

(15) 29, 18.27. After seven years service Jacob is given Leah, instead of Rachel, in marriage; Rachel was given in marriage after a week

in return for a seven years service.

(17) 31, 38.41. Jacob returns into Canaan six years after the birth of Joseph, that is, after a 20 years service with Laban.

(18) 37, 2. It is just a note on Joseph's age 'These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph being seventeen years old ...'. This chapter is concerned with Joseph's betrayal into the hands of the merchants. This note seems to be a continuation of 37, 1, itself the sequence to chapter 36 dealing with Esau's generations. It is symmetrical with the position of Isaac's generations in 25, 19 immediately after Ishmael's generations. We incline hence to assign this datum to C.

(19) 35, 28. This information about Isaac is the usual age-summing up before the report of some one's death. This verse is part of tradition C. The pathetic note 'and Esau and Jacob his sons buried him' is remarkable for its reflection on the peaceful relations of the twins.

(20) 41, 46. Joseph stands before Pharaoh at the age of 30 years; 41, 45. 46a seems to be a duplicate of 46b:

41, 45-46a. And Joseph went over the land of Egypt. And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt.

41, 46b. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.

This short notice about Joseph's age, then, seems to be a later insertion in relation to its context, where dates otherwise do not occur. It might be due to the writer of what has been termed 'the third element'.

(21) 41, 50. 'And unto Joseph were born two sons before the year of famine came ...'. Again as with Jacob's marriages and his sons' births here we have dates in relation with some event, and not with the father's age. This notice belongs to tradition R.

(22) 45, 6. What has been said just now with respect to the preceding datum, applies with equal force to this case. It has been ascribed to tradition R.

(23) 47, 28. The ever-recurring closing formula characteristic of C, reappears to sum up the age of Jacob, now approaching his death. Its misplacement or rather its secondary character relatively to its context appears from its following verse about the blessing of Joseph: 'And when he saw that the day of his death drew nigh ...'.

(24) 50, 22. 25. Joseph dies at the age of 110 years. This is the only explicit chronological datum outside C or 'the third element'.

<sup>2</sup>Cfr. DE VAUX, *Les Patriarches hebreux et les decouvertes modernes*, RB55 (1948) 326.

This brief study of the single chronological data helps us to reconstruct more or less exactly the sequence of events in the course of 355 years from the birth of Abraham to the death of Joseph. We meet, however, some slight inconsistencies with regard to Jacob's flight into Mesopotamia through what seems to be additional material or due to the conflation of two different sources each with its own system of time reckoning. In fact a glance at the chronological conspectus would show that the data may be divided into two large groups: the one giving exact datings in relation to the age of the persons concerned; the other, starting with some outstanding important event in the life of the patriarch, takes it as a point of departure. Data no. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 18. 19. 20. 22. 23. 24. belong to the first class; the rest are included in the second. The contents of the first class form integral parts of C and the 'third element' of Joseph's history except in those cases where they are discordant with their context; the latter, however, betray strong connections both of substance and of literary style with those in the larger sections of C. This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that this chronological annotation is artificial; the sojourn in Canaan amounts to 215 years exactly half the number of the years of the sojourn in Egypt.<sup>2</sup> It is highly probable, therefore, that they belong to this thread. This is confirmed by the fact that 48, 3-4 is included in C. The other data mostly belong to B and to R. A is very sparing in time annotation. This leads to the conclusion that C in 11-36 links with the 'third element' in 37-50, and in B 11-36 is one with R in 37-50.

It remains to find a link between A in Gen. 11-36, and J in Joseph's history; the oath scene in 47, 29-31 resembles closely the scene in 24, 2 ff:

## Ch. 24

2. And Abraham said unto his servant, who was ruler over all he had: Put I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: and I will make thee swear by Yahweh, ... that thou shalt not take a wife ...

## Ch. 47

29ff. And he called his son Joseph and said unto him, If now I find grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: but when I sleep with my fathers, thou shalt carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place ...

Moreover time reckoning in J is missing no less than in A. Finally it

is highly probable that such a rich narrative as A, would have included in it Joseph's history, which meant so much for the Hebrews.

The final result of this investigation in the chronology and genealogy of Genesis is that the eight or nine threads disentangled in the previous analysis may be grouped into three main lines thus:

1 - 50	1 - 11	12 - 36	37 - 50
A	A'	A	J
B		B	R
C	C'	C	'Third Element'

### GENERAL CONCLUSION: THE COMPILATION OF GENESIS

We do not propose to discuss the date at which Genesis was most probably compiled; it is beyond our scope. But we intend here to give just a hint as to a line of approach for a likely solution of this question. We must first of all base all our discussions on the historical fact of the sojourn of the Hebrews in Egypt from the time of the settlement of Jacob and his family until the Exodus under the strong leadership of Moses.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, if Genesis was written before or immediately after the exodus from Egypt one most probably would find some vestiges of Egyptian influence with respect both to the contents of the work and to its literary features. Moreover it would also reflect the political conditions and ideals of the Hebrews on the eve of the Exodus, and hence in which the writer must have interested himself. Finally by comparing together the three main strands one would be enabled to discover their order in being committed to writing. Through such an investigation the dating of the work would be less difficult.

The last fourteen chapters of Genesis are set against an Egyptian background; the rest of Genesis most often refer to Egypt.<sup>4</sup> 'In the course of our demonstration, it will be proved by numerous examples from language and subject matter that the Egyptian environment is most strikingly reflected in the Joseph and Exodus narratives not merely in single words, expressions, and idioms, but in the use of whole sentences, formulae, standing phrases, stylistic forms and so forth'. Yahuda then gives numerous examples to support his thesis, not only with reference to these last chapters but also to the rest of Genesis. Such an

<sup>3</sup> J.M. LAGRANCE, RB (1938) p. 177.

<sup>4</sup> A.J. YAHUDA, *The Language of the Pentateuch in its relation to Egyptian*, London 1933, vol. I, p. xxxiv.

influence on Hebrew tradition was but natural, when one remembers that the Hebrew community was founded, stabilised and set on its forward march towards national maturity in an Egyptian atmosphere, and hence their language, and traditional stories must have had received an Egyptian stamp.

In Genesis we note that the references to Egypt are numerous: Abraham goes to Egypt (12, 10 ff.); Isaac would have gone there if he was not stopped by God Himself (26, 1-2); Jacob went to settle there for good after his son Joseph had been installed as viceroy (37-50). The interest in Egypt is beyond question and it increases in volume and extent in the Joseph narrative, which is studded with references to Egyptian life and institution which betray a strong familiarity with them on the part of the writer and the people to whom they were written. We contended in a former chapter that the purpose of the compiler of Genesis was the recording of the Promise, as a means to incite the people to undertake the arduous enterprise of shaking off their Egyptian bondage; now this highly practical end could not give rise to Genesis after the Exodus. The Hebrews in the desert looked forward to Canaan and turned their thoughts on the future; in Egypt, on the other hand, they looked back and yearned for the freedom which their forefathers enjoyed in Palestine (50, 24). Genesis is a retrospective work, whereby the writer attempted to enthuse his readers: 'God will visit you after my death, and will make you go up out of this land, to the land which he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... God will visit you, carry my bones with you out of this place' (50, 24-25). Such words would work like magic on an oppressed community, with no hope of help except from God, who was the helpful friend of their forefathers (Ex. 3, 15). Therefore both the actual contents and the aim of Genesis point to the time just before the Exodus; a later time is not likely.

In the foregoing discussion we analysed the book of Genesis into three main strands: A.B.C. It would be very interesting to establish between them the chronological order relative to their date of origin for it is not probable that they were originally cast into their mould at the same time or by the same author. Strand A is the most voluminous and the richest in its narratives, and interest in the personages and their doings; B is more fragmentary and not so alive in its stories as A; thus the story of the sacrifice of Isaac (22, 1-19), which could have given a chance to its writer to indulge in describing the feelings of Abraham and the others, is no match to the highly descriptive and copious language of 24, 1-67 recounting the journey of Abraham's servants into Mesopo-



tamia in search of a wife for Isaac, although it has its own beauty characteristic of oral tradition. C on its part is more 'pedantic' and interested in dates, names and covenants; no reference whatever to the domestic life of the personages concerned. This would make us believe that B is an oral tradition, written in its primitive form, which had been handed down to the Hebrew of the Exodus period from father to son; A, the richest narrative is the original story written by the compiler himself, who based himself on a given line of tradition which he worked over and radically recast according to his own views; the same writer, however, added to his own compositions excerpts from B, which he left in their original form. C seems to be the fundamental framework; but even without C the plan of Genesis would not break down, for after all C is mostly a synopsis of A and B and it betrays a strong theological interest in the facts recorded in them. It seems therefore, that C is the later document added to A and B after some time perhaps to give a more schematic order to Genesis, without breaking up the unity of the original work.

The source at the basis of Genesis betrays a strong Egyptian influence. The book is composed of three main strands one of which is an oral tradition preserved in its original cast, the second is an original composition, or at least an oral tradition which had been worked over by the writer; the third is a later addition to the other two. The question would now arise: who was the compiler? Naturally one who was most interested in the liberation of the Hebrews and in the establishment of their theocracy: Tradition has it that Moses was the writer of the book. Indeed Moses had all the means to write such work; he was an educated man in the court of the Pharaoh and was specially called by God to lead the people out of Egypt; we may surmise then that Moses jotted down the immemorial traditional lore dealing with the promises to work up the national feelings of the people unto boiling point. He wrote A, and absorbed within it B, without changing the name Elohim, into Yahweh; the latter name is generally used in A, the former in B. In Ex. 3 13 ff. Moses said to God: Lo I shall go to the children of Israel, and say to them: the God of your fathers hath sent me to you. If they should say to me: What is his name? What shall I say to them? God said to Moses: I am who am. The name Yahweh was revealed to Moses for the first time; obviously such a history then, written under the patronage of Yahweh, a name which evidently was not popular or rather current at the time immediately preceding the Exodus, could have as its author no one except Moses or one in intimate relations with him. Moses, however,

did not change Elohim of B into Yahweh, perhaps to show that both names refer to the same God, of the Patriarchs and of the living posterity.<sup>5</sup> But C, the later document, has Elohim and EL Shadday as the names of the Deity; could this be written by Moses? One could, perhaps, opine that it was added later after the Exodus, but before the entry into Canaan by a writer other than Moses; e.g. Aaron or another interested in institutional religion; this document in fact does not have history so much as A and B; its interest lies in pedigrees, and institutions and promises, which it does not set in their historical settings but brings out their theological significance. Moses in this view, would have given it his approval. Thus we may conciliate together a documentary theory, and the traditional view with respect to Mosaic authorship.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J.M. LAGRANGE, *Ibid.* p. 181.

<sup>6</sup> *Ench. Biblicum* n. 174-177.