

THE DATING OF THE SO-CALLED "P-SECTIONS" IN GENESIS

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I. "ON THE DATING OF THE 'GENESIS P SECTIONS,' SPECIFICALLY OF GENESIS CHAPTER XVII"

An unpublished work on the subject of circumcision in the Old and New Testaments showed me that the fundamental chapter on this, Genesis 17, which treats of the origin and meaning of circumcision, was usually being considered by adherents of literary criticism to be a subsequent of the exilic or post-exilic period. For those critics the chapter consequently has no historic value with reference to the question of the introduction and significance of circumcision.

Since the date of a particular passage is today seen mostly in connection with the date of the "source," "document," or "tradition" to which it is assigned, I do not consider Genesis 17 by itself but in connection with the dating problem of the so-called "P sections of Genesis" to which Genesis 17 is customarily said to belong.

As to which chapters, sections and verses in Genesis 1-50 belong to "P" there is widespread agreement. (According to Eissfeldt [Einleitung, 3rd edition, 1964, page 250] there are the following passages:

Genesis 1:1, 2, 4a; 5; 6:5-9, 19, 28, 29; 10; 11:10-26, 27, 31, 32; 12:4b, 5; 13:6, 11b, 12ab; 16:1a, 3, 15, 16; 17; 19:29; 21:2b-5; 23; 25:1-10, 12-17, 19, 20, 26b; 26:34, 35; 27:46; 28:1-9; 29:24, 28b, 29; 30:4a, 9b; 31:18ab; 33:18a; 35:6a, 9-13, 15, 22b-29; 36:1, 2a, 4-9, 40-43; 37:1, 2; 41:46a; 46:6-27; 47:5-11, 27, 28; 48:3-7; 49:1, 28-33; 50:12, 13).

These portions of the book of Genesis are held to be the latest in all of the Pentateuch.

The object of Part I of my book is to ascertain the time these passages were first given an unduly late date (sections 1 and 2, pp. 1-42) and for what reasons (sec. 3, pp. 43-130).

In Part II the tenability of the arguments used from that time on to the present to support the late dating of the "P sections" in Genesis is investigated (pp. 131-227). Section 2 of Part II is concerned with the

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arguments used in general in dating passages and which also affect other portions of the OT (pp. 132-189), section 3 with the particular dating arguments which apply above all to the "Genesis P" sections (pp. 190-227).

Part III investigates, along a different route independently of traditional dating arguments, the question of the date of Genesis 17 in particular, substantiates its early date, and briefly states the conclusions that must be drawn.

For many present-day critics such an investigation is pointless, since to them analysis as well as date of "P" are more or less a settled matter (see "Responses") or because they are forced to admit—as a result of archaeology and comparative environmental material—that much of the material even of so-called "P" is very old. And so they see little point in preoccupation with the question of date. The latter maintain they agree that material and content are old; only form, composition, interpretation or redaction are late. In this vein von Rad writes: "The well-known criteria for the late date of 'P', which stem from the classical period of Pentateuch criticism, are still valid today; except that we apply this date not to its composition, but—in comparison to the age of the handed down record—to a relatively late literary-theological redaction process" (von Rad, *Theologie I*. 1962, p. 92).

In Part III of the book I attempt to illustrate by means of a form-critical investigation of Genesis 17, how untenable the traditional various dating of form and content is, and that not only the dating of material but also that of redaction must be revised. Accordingly, form, style and content of Genesis 17 belong to the 2nd millennium BC and have nothing to do with post-exilic writers. As Mendenhall (*Law and Covenant*, 1955), Baltzer (*Das Bundesformular*, 1960), M. G. Kline (*Treaty of the Great King*, 1963), have done, and previous to this Wiener (*Studies in Biblical Law*, 1904), among others, I draw a parallel to the Vassal Treaties and show how Genesis 17, as to construction and style, is similar to these treaties of the middle of the 2nd millennium B.C., which no longer exist in this form after the year 1200 B.C. There is, moreover, no motive for reproducing the chapter in this form later in view of the fact that the structure of the treaties of later periods is different.

Even if someone should not accept this environmental material which in Part III is advanced and used, among other things, in a comparative way to support the early date, he ought nevertheless to revise the traditional "P date," at least of the Genesis portions, for two main reasons:

- 1) in view of the history of late dating (Part I)
- 2) in view of the untenableness of hitherto advanced dating arguments (Part II).

WHAT DOES THE INVESTIGATION OF PART I SHOW?

Part I shows that 1869 is the decisive year for the exilic-postexilic dating of the "Genesis P sections." What Eissfeldt writes in his *Einleitung* 3, 1964, p. 219 is indefinite. In 1866 the decision to post-date had not yet been made.

In his book, "Die geschichtlichen Bücher" ("The Historical Books"), 1865 (published in 1866, cf. p. 7, footnote 14 and p. 11, footnote 34) Graf was still defending an early date for the "P sections of Genesis" (see dissertation S. K. pp. 10 and 11). Up to this point these passages belonged to the so-called fundamental document which even the critic Bishop Colenso, known for his practice of dating late and whom one might call the de Wette of Anglo-Saxon countries, considered to be among the oldest in all of the Pentateuch.

a) *Reuss leads in the late dating of the Laws*

As early as the summer semester of 1834 we find Eduard Reuss of Strasbourg assigning a late date to the Laws, the first one to do so, and that more as "a product of intuition." (His thesis: "The Prophets are older than the Laws, and the Psalms are later than both.")

b) *Continuation by his disciple, Graf*

Reuss's disciple and friend, K. H. Graf, took over the practice of late-dating from his teacher when, even before his "Die Geschichtlichen Bücher," he wrote, "...I must add that with your article, 'Judenthem in Ersch und Gruber,' 1850,—which I wholly endorse—you have secured a place of priority for yourself. That the whole middle section of the Pentateuch must be post-exilic, of this I am fully persuaded..." (see dissertation S. K. p. 7, footnote 15; cf. Graf's letter, p. 501). As early as 1844 Reuss in his article "Josua" (in Ersch and Gruber) had for the first time expressed in writing (hypothetically) that if Deuteronomy stemmed from the time of Josiah, then Joshua originated in the time of the exile, and the other books at a still later period (meaning Exodus and Leviticus; according to page 198, col. 1, Genesis does not come into consideration here), because Joshua did not refer to them (dissertation S. K. p. 8, footnote 19).

c) *Hupfeld's Literary Analysis (1853)—an indirect reason for the late dating of the "Genesis P Sections" by Graf (1869)*

Hupfeld's new documentary hypothesis, "The Sources of Genesis," 1853, from the indirect basis for the exilic-postexilic dating of the "P Sections" in Genesis by Graf (1869), even though Hupfeld dated his *three* documents, which he found for the first time in Genesis, in the order "G" (later "P"), "E", "J", considering the "fundamental document" (later "P") to be the oldest. Then followed Riehm's book, "The Giving of the Law by Moses in the Land of Moab," 1854, which underscored de Wette's Josiah date of Deuteronomy.

As soon as the *three* documents of Hupfeld found recognition and

were continued in the other books of the Pentateuch, and as soon as the earlier supplementary theory had been discarded (according to which J supplemented the Elohist stratum, the foundation document, later known as P), the "Genesis P Sections," as part of *one* document which was given an exilic-postexilic date, automatically had to be assigned into the same exilic-postexilic period.

d) *The incentive given by Kuenen*

In Leyden in the Netherlands, Kuenen, in a letter to Graf, in which he shares Graf's and Reuss's conviction that the composition to the priestly laws was subsequent to that of Deuteronomy, drew attention to the relationship between these laws and the Elohist passages (Graf's letter of October 8, 1866; cf. Diss S. K. p. 11, footnote 34). Because Kuenen, as Reuss, was still an adherent of the supplementary theory, only E was dated later than J by him (with Hupfeld the order had still been G (=P), E, J) the foundation document remaining undisputed. There was therefore no breakthrough as yet.

e) *Graf's position changes radically as Riehm (1868) and Noldeke (1869) attempt to prove the converse: the ancient date of the foundation document*

In 1865 Graf, continuing the tradition of his teacher, Reuss, wrote the above mentioned "Die geschichtlichen Bücher" (Dissertation S. K. pp. 10 and 11). This was reviewed by Riehm, a student of Hupfeld, in "Theologische Studien und Kritiken," 1868, pp. 350-379. In doing so he sought to prove that the "Grundschrift" was one cohesive document of an ancient period previous to that of Deuteronomy (p. 354, appealing to Hupfeld's "Sources," 1853), to which not only the historical work of the Elohist (including Genesis 17) but also the legislation of Leviticus belonged (Dissertation S. K. p. 11, footnotes 36 and 37).

Noldeke (Untersuchungen, 1869) was a supporter of a pre-Deuteronomy date for the foundation document which, according to him, was already known to Ezekiel (o.c. 1869, p. 68) (Dissertation S. K. p. 1 and footnotes 38, 40).

f) *In acknowledging one cohesive document Graf is faced with a decision*

Graf, in contrast to his teacher, accepted Hupfeld's document hypotheses in a modified form (Dissertation S. K. p. 12) and was placed by Riehm and Noldeke before the alternative of giving the *whole* so-called "foundation document" a date previous to that of Deuteronomy as these had done, or to place the *whole*, together with the Laws of Leviticus (and the "Genesis P Sections" which now belonged to the foundation document) into the exilic-postexilic period. Graf chose the latter course without, however, possessing the physical energies to entertain and meet the arguments which Riehm and Noldeke had adduced against so late a date for the foundation document and especially for the Leviticus legislation (Dissertation S. K. p. 11).

g) *Graf's decision 1869*

Graf, unable to go against his teacher Reuss, by deciding for an early date of the Laws, in the year of his death 1869 assigned also the "Genesis P Sections" to the exilic-postexilic period (the so-called "foundation document" in AWE, 1869, pp. 466-467, cf. Dissertation S. K. p. 17; footnote 41).

h) *The reasons for a late dating of the "Genesis P Sections" 1869 purely analytical*

The "P Sections of Genesis" (including the example chapters 1; 5; 10; 17) had therefore been given an exilic-postexilic category, without they themselves having been examined to their date. Previous to 1869 we hear of no arguments drawn from the "sections" themselves. Only after 1869, when they had already become exilic-postexilic, were arguments advanced for this position. However adduced subsequently, they no longer carry the same force, since they were not the actual cause for assigning a late date but were merely designed to substantiate an already determined date. They ought, therefore, to be examined all the more carefully. This is precisely what was not done, as I show in Part I, para. 3 (pp. 47-130), where these arguments are listed. Each succeeding generation accepted them uncritically.

WHAT DOES THE INVESTIGATION OF PART II SHOW?

The investigation of Part II examines first of all those arguments which are also applied *generally* in dating processes:

1. The argument from silence (pp. 132-137).
2. The comparing and general, relative dating of sources which in themselves are non-uniform, incompletely transmitted or in part considered unhistorical (pp. 138-147).
3. The argument of logical development with its outdated pre-suppositions from philosophy, cultural history and religious history (pp. 148-165).
4. The problems of the manifold linguistic dating arguments (pp. 166-189).

Following this, those dating arguments are examined which are applied *specialy* to support the "P Sections" of Genesis, subsequent to their having been given a late date. These are:

1. Unrelated arguments (pp. 190-199) such as
name of month and date of year,
chronology and genealogies,
detailed presentation,
higher spirituality
and proper names.

2. Arguments from features of the exilic-postexilic period (pp. 200-208) such as importance and meaning of circumcision, exclusiveness, promises of kings, Babylonian influences.
3. Arguments favoring the acceptance of a priestly tendency writing for the exiles (pp. 209-227).

The examination has shown that none of the general or special arguments advanced, are any longer tenable today.

An examination of the context in which Genesis 17 stands (III, paragraph 3, 3, pp. 267, 277) shows that this chapter was rent out of context quite arbitrarily; it is rather its climax. Among other things this fact has consequences for the literary-analytical and tradition-historical hypotheses which elsewhere, also, as to analysis and date, rend apart that which belongs together, and substantiates the fact of a shaky foundation of customary analysis, of which also Part II Section 3A speaks (pp. 150-153; footnote 13 for further literature).

It is therefore necessary to seek for a method that will again view the Old Testament texts more in the light of its context (cf. Kenneth Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, London, 1966; *The OT in its Context*, 1, 2, 1971; *TSF Bulletin* 59/60).

II. RESPONSES AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SUBJECT EXAMINED

The response to the dissertation may be characterized thus: joy and gratitude on the part of the conservatives, acknowledgment of the thorough and "titanic" labors on the part of nearly all competent critics who at the same time reject the results. In his paper on "The date and origin of the Priestly Code in the OT" in "Oudtestamentische Studien," *Deel XV*, pp. 1-144, Leyden, 1969, J. G. Vink consigns "PC" to a still later date, into the Persian period. This Dominican father on the academic staff of the University of Utrecht has, in the above mentioned article, completely ignored my objections adduced against the late-date arguments. The only reference to my work is footnote 2 on page 8 in which he refers the reader to his review in "Tijdschrift voor Theologie" V (1965), pp. 452-453, in which he reveals that he has not inspected my objections or has done so superficially.

In the beginning of his review he says, "(Imagine) in 1964 an attack, with academic pretensions, on the literary criticism of the Pentateuch in the form of source—and tradition—analysis!" He further claims that in Part II I treat "all the arguments of literary Pentateuchel criticism," whereas I am not primarily concerned, in my book, with Pentateuch-analysis, but with dating (even though dating is connected with analysis and my conclusions on dating also affect Pentateuch-analysis." Small wonder that he uses dating arguments, which I have already disproved in my book, without finding it at all necessary to consider and come to grips with them. And because he takes no note of the history of the late dating of the "P Sections of Genesis" in my book, he accepts and quotes

(p. 8) Eissfeldt's inaccuracy in the latter's "Einleitung 3" (p. 219) that until 1866-1869 PC was believed to be the foundation document of the Pentateuch, whereas I make clear that 1869 is the decisive year, and that not for the whole PC, but only for the "P Sections of Genesis," while the other parts, those of a more legislative nature, had already been given a late date in 1834 (Eissfeldt, *Einleitung*, 1833, p. 219). Neither was the "PC" considered to be the oldest stratum because of chronology and the apparently proper way of describing the history of Israel (p. 8), but rather because they recognized in it a framework for the structure of Genesis. It would have done no harm to take note of Eissfeldt's statement: "Kulling has examined with exemplary thoroughness the history of Pentateuch-criticism, above all its efforts at analysis and determination of the "Genesis P Section" So convincingly has he proved that K. H. Graf's paper of 1869 indicates the decisive year, that all future presentations of the development of Pentateuchal criticism will make use of his conclusions with gratitude." (*Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Leyden, No. 1/2, Jan.-Mar. 1965)

It is an inaccuracy if Vink writes on p. 9 of his paper that Reuss, Graf, Kuenen and Wellhausen first reversed the relative order of the Pentateuch sources—Graf's dating of the "P Sections of Genesis" was the sole cause for declaring the whole "PC" exilic-postexilic after 1869. Vink speaks of "inner cohesion" as evidence for one author instead of accepting a "school," in opposition to E. A. Speiser (*Genesis*, 1964) and he seeks to determine the time of this author by means of certain historical circumstances. However, the whole has an inner cohesiveness, not only an imaginary "P," as I have shown (pp. 267-274). Conversely, there are many reasons for rejecting the idea of a constructed priestly tendency writing (for the exiles), as I have also shown (pp. 209-227). Vink points to the fact that the defenders of a pre-exilic "PC" are few in number today (p. 9). Such statistical arguments are never evidence for the truth of a matter, and for no more reason are they an academic abili for passing these few over, as he has done. In a similar fashion did Baron Frederic de Hugel, at the Catholic Congress of OT theologians in Fribourg in 1898, consider the documents of the Pentateuch to be devisive ("en matieres chronologiques, geographiques, historique, morales, theologiques") using statistical support (4 against 125) (cf. "La methode historique et son application a l'etude des documents de l'Hexateuque, in: *Compte rendu du quatrieme congres scientifique international des catholiques* . . . 1897, Fribourg (Suisse). But even if a unity were present this would carry no weight, since the OT "critics" adopt many arguments from one another quite "uncritically" (see *Dissertation S. K. I par. 3*, pp. 43-130). The more recent document hypothesis seems to present no problem at all to Vink. When someone has spent "a good many years on the theology of P," as he says (p. 16) it is clear, that it is bitter, should it turn out that there is no "P." Neither does he investigate carefully von Rad's division of "P" into P^A and P^B (*Die Priesterschrift im Hexateuch*, 1934). He terms my "titanic work" "hopelessly

old-fashioned" and considers it a "disturbing" waste of "Christian energy" (Review).

It would have done his labors no harm if he had profited a little from these "Christian energies" and would first have studied the history and proof of late dating and the confrontation with prevailing dating arguments before dating "PC" in the late persian period (398 B.C.) and tying it to Esra's Mission (p. 17). Instead, he has taken the same course as Kuenen in 1870 in his "Godsdienst II," by attempting a subsequent undergirding of a date already determined; for he first of all accepts a late date and also attempts to prove "PC" to be in Joshua (as against Noth, Elliger, Kilian and others, siding with Cazelles, Fohrer and others, pp. 12/3 and 63 ff); following this he treats "PC" in Genesis (pp. 80-95) and seeks for arguments for a late Persian period, repeatedly quoting old Holzinger, Hempel, and others, and bypassing more recent works which do not support the theory. Does the remark he casts in the teeth of others apply to himself when he speaks of being "hopelessly old-fashioned" and of the waste of "Christian energy?" Also passed over is an investigation of Genesis 10 by D. J. Wiseman (also quoted in my book p. 194, footnote 26), who concludes that the evidence for a date of circa 1500 B.C. or earlier for the compilation of the "List of Nations" is mounting. There is no need to come to such artificial conclusions as that the Babylonians and Persians are missing, possibly because they form the center; perhaps they were the cartographers(1) (p. 86).

In spite of the objections I raise against the general practice of relative dating (Dissertation S. K. pp. 138-147) he speaks of the "pillar" of Wellhausen's argument of the relative chronology of "P," that is, of its "relation to the other Pentateuchal strata" (p. 12). He does limit the argument, nevertheless, he retains it in a measure. Auerbach also retains validity as terminus a quo (p. 15) without my arguments (pp. 190-192) being considered.

In contrast to H. Schmidt, with whom he otherwise agrees in the study of the creation amount (p. 80, A2), Vink takes no knowledge of a Canaanite tradition of the Babylonian creation myth Enuma elis (p. 81), because this naturally does not fit into his late date concept. That is why he speaks of direct transmission, namely subsequent to the exile (pp. 81, 82).

Even if this had been received from Babylon uncritically—assuming that there ever was such a "P," which first needs to be proved—nothing would as yet be gained in favor of a late date, since (with Carpenter-Harford) one would have to keep in mind five such possibilities of contact, also that there was a Babylonian influence in Canaan as early as the second millenium B.C. (Dissertation S. K. p. 208). And the fact that the biblical account of creation lacks any reference to a temple is supposed to point in the direction of a late date: "the theological concepts of the PC have outgrown these narrow nationalistic views" he says

(p. 83). If the creation account is really historic (and not a poem by a post-exilic writer, for whom temple and tabernacle are important) then we miss no temple here.

The same is true of the supposed contrast to Isaiah 45:5 and 7, because in Genesis God is to have created only light, not darkness. Vink feels it necessary to account for such a "slightly *dualistic* remark" (p. 83) by a Persian influence. As for us, we miss no such reflections in a real creation account in the beginning of creation.

The *covenant* in Genesis 9 (pp. 84, 85) is said to be important for dating, but instead of accepting it as an indication of an early date (cf. Dissertation S. K. pp. 214, 215; 263-265), according to him it speaks of "the abolition of messianism in its old nationalistic setting." This is said to be explained etiologically by Israel's experience in the late Persian empire especially in the dispersion ("the period of the Persian empire is thought of as a time of covenant, with all peoples, a concept, which has a parallel in the PC [Genesis 9]") (p. 61). Also the command forbidding the eating and spilling of blood in Genesis 9 is said to speak of a rejection of the holy war and of pacifism in the Persian period.

The reasons I have given, rejecting a priestly tendency writing for the exilic-postexilic period, also applies to a Persian period: "Just why an exilic-postexilic priest should select from the food laws one that allows the eating of meat without blood is quite unexplainable, especially because no particular reason is given by the writer. For the exilic-postexilic period it appears superfluous to grant a general permission to eat meat (Genesis 9:3). In this period a law differentiating between prohibited and non-prohibited meats would be more understandable. It is just verse 3 which indicates that there is no exilic-postexilic priestly interest involved and that the levitical legislation is not yet in existence.

A priestly tendency cannot be recognized. If there had been any special danger of an undue consumption of blood in the exilic-postexilic period it would then not have been necessary to first permit meat to be eaten and after this to forbid the eating of blood. However, the so-called exilic-postexilic sources indicate no such danger and 1 Samuel 14:32-34 presumes such a prohibition" (pp. 214, 215).

In Genesis 11:31 Vink attempts to deny the departure from Ur (p. 88), since the text is said to be an etiological reflection referring to the Mesopotamian Jews. P is said to have tightened the ties with the Israelite forefathers.

In connection with Genesis 17 few dating arguments are advanced (pp. 89-91). Genesis 17:6 is said to reflect the spiritual climate of the Persian period (p. 90). No notice is taken here of what I have written on this (pp. 207, 208) and it is quite wrong to reject Hempel who opposes a postexilic date for this passage (p. 90). He asserts, "It shares the spirit of the covenant with Noah, unlimited in space and time and in its turn linked with the universal scope of the creation story" (p. 90). This characterization of "P" as being universal stands in contradiction to the exclusivistic lineaments ascribed to it (cf. Dissertation S. K. pp. 205, 206).

If we should weigh these periods as to their exclusiveness—the patriarchal, the postexilic, the Persian—we would have to conclude that in the “P” of Genesis we do not recognize the exclusivistic lineaments of the postexilic period. This holds true for the problem of mixed marriages as well as for other relationships with non-Israelites (p. 206).

If Vink seeks to scale down the universalism of the patriarchal period or to deny it he fails to recognize the broad horizon of Babylon’s world culture (cf. Dissertation S. K. pp. 757, 758).

With respect to circumcision and covenant enough has been said on this point, to the effect that they are not a reason for a late date but for an early one (pp. 214, 215; and 263-267).

And the constant practice of presupposing a late interpolation disregards the arguments against the later construction which ought then to be of a different nature (cf. Dissertation S. K. pp. 209-227).

Genesis 23 is again said to reflect “the wealthy Jews of the dispersion” (p. 91) (in contrast cf. Dissertation S. K. pp. 194, 195 and Lehmann p. 195, footnote 35). It is unnecessary to go into each detailed question. Everywhere the Persian period must explain things, even if a point needs to be stretched, or an element denied, as in Genesis 28:3 where the eschatological character of this prophecy is negated in order to make it fit into the Persian period (p. 92).

Even the birth of Jacob’s children in Paddan-Aram (Vink, by the way, arbitrarily places 35:26 before 31:18) and his return from Mesopotamia can easily be made to agree with the image wealthy Jews in the dispersion would like to have of their patriarch (p. 93). Genesis 35:11 and 12 is said to have been written from a standpoint of “PC” preparing a new occupation of the land for Israel. Accordingly he allows the words, *’etten ’et ha’ares*, in verse 12, to stand, in contrast to Holzinger, the man he quotes for support who deleted them. As regards the final section of Genesis (37-50) Rupert is adduced for the statement that in P the story of Joseph became the story of Jacob (p. 94). Again “etiology” points to a wealthy people and a later return. Vink does not, however, explain why in this case the text mentions only a temporary return to Canaan for the funeral of Jacob (Gen. 50:13) and an immediate return to Egypt, if it supposed to be only etiological and not historical.

In a summary (pp. 127, 128 cf. 143, 144) the various arguments are once more listed. On the one hand this paper if one should evaluate it positively, can serve as evidence that the so-called “P” under no circumstances fits into the exilic-postexilic period, to which we gladly give assent. On the other hand, it can be considered neither as evidence, much less as proof, our assigning a date as late as the Persian period.

Concluding observations: In Vink’s negation of my dissertation, particularly of the history of late dating, as well as of the arguments advanced against late dating, we have another reason for adhering to the early dates. No reason whatsoever can be found in the so-called “Genesis P Sections” themselves for assigning a later date to these than to other parts of the Pentateuch.