THE JACOB TRADITION IN HOSEA XII 4-5

by

STEVEN L. MCKENZIE
Memphis, Tennessee

The reference to the Jacob tradition in Hos. xii is a notorious crux interpretum. The passage presents numerous difficulties which have resisted the various attempts at explanation. Chief among these difficulties are the questions of the origin of the Jacob tradition reflected in Hos. xii and its relation to the Genesis account and the message intended by the prophet for his contemporary audience in his citation of episodes from the story of Jacob. The present investigation draws on previous interpretations as well as advances in the history of Israelite poetry and epic tradition in order to suggest a Sitz im Leben for the citation of excerpts from Jacob’s life in Hos. xii 4-5.

By way of determining the limits of the pericope, Buss (p. 41) has observed that in Hosea tricola frequently occur at the beginning or end of poetic units. xii 3 introduces the unit in vv. 3-7 of the present text. However, v. 3 mentions Jacob and his deeds in a general fashion, but unlike vv. 4-5 it contains no specific allusions to episodes of the Jacob tradition. V. 3 and vv. 4-5 are reconstructed below according to eighth-century, northern orthography.

A tricolon in v 3 introduces the Jacob material:

\[ rb \text{ lyhwh} \ 'm \ yšb\ l \]
\[ lpqd 'l yqg kb dkrw \]
\[ km 'l w yšb lh \]

Yahweh has a dispute with Israel
To punish Jacob according to his ways.
According to his deeds he will requite him.

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2 See the bibliography at the close of this article. All secondary sources referred to herein are cited in full in the bibliography.
Two aspects of the reconstruction require explanation. First, in this verse as in vv. 4-5 I provisionally omit the conjunction at the beginning of the cola. This is in accordance with the findings of Cross and Freedman for earlier Israelite poems. Secondly, as commonly agreed, I read "Israel" in place of the MT's "Judah" in v. 3 because of the parallelism with "Jacob" in the next line. "Judah" reflects later application of the passage to the southern kingdom.

The poem about Jacob in vv. 4-5 is distinct from v. 3, as argued above. It is also distinct from vv. 6-7, as argued below. Moreover, I disagree with those who insert v. 13 into v. 4. The meter of v. 4 is different from that of v. 13. More importantly, the insertion of v. 13 into v. 4 destroys the parallelism of vv. 4-5. Finally, v. 13 cannot be added to v. 4 because of the radical (and unnecessary) divergence from the Genesis account that such a shift would produce. I reconstruct vv. 4-5 as follows:

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line 1 bbn t qb 2hw
line 2 bnh s rh 2 lhm
line 3 yr l wykl
line 4 bh wytnn lh
line 5 bt 2 l ymsn
line 6 šm ydbr 2mn
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In the womb he seized his brother's heel.
In his manhood he wrestled with God.
(Israel) he wrestled God and prevailed.
He wept and entreated him.
At Bethel he found him/finds us.
There he spoke with him/speaks with us.

The poem contains several figurae etymologicae in reference to the names "Jacob" and "Israel". Line 1 recalls the word play on the name Jacob in the tradition about his holding on to his brother's heel ("aqeb) at birth (Gen. xxv 21-26). It is impossible, however, to

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3 Cf. pp. 126-7. Admittedly, the use of conjunctions at the beginning of cola may have become more frequent by the eighth century. However, with the possible exceptions of line 2 (v. 4) and line 6 (v. 5) the conjunctions at the beginning of the cola seems superfluous and secondary.

4 So Harper, p. 380. I agree with Ackroyd (p. 245) and Robinson (pp. 48-9) that the references to Jacob in vv. 4-5 are completely distinct from those in v. 13.

5 I omit the definite object marker, 'et- as a prosaic addition in accordance with the techniques of Stuart (p. 87, n. 4) for restoring earlier Hebrew poetry. Cf. Cross and Freedman, p. 112, n. 28. Its addition here may have been influenced by the preposition 'et- in the next line.