Jacob: Friend or Foe of the Ezekiel Tradition?

On four occasions the book of Ezekiel mentions the figure of Jacob. In each case, the tone is positive. This stands in contrast to the figure of Abraham, mentioned in Ezek 33:23-29, about whom the book of Ezekiel finds nothing positive to say. Indeed, the text goes so far as to undermine the very premises supporting the land promise to Abraham in order to contest the non-exiles' claims that the land of Judah now belongs to them. Is the simultaneously negative treatment of Abraham and positive treatment of Jacob sensible? This paper demonstrates that the four positive mentions of Jacob are all part of a later redactional layer in the book of Ezekiel. The earlier material fails to mention Jacob by name, but employs various terms associated with Esau as polemical aliases for Jacob. These constitute a portion of the book's larger challenge to the validity of the Jacob tradition because it is also utilized in the non-exiles defense for their possession of Judah. Although this alone offers a substantial insight into the book of Ezekiel's theology, perhaps the more intriguing implication is its relevance for the question of when the patriarchal tradition began to coalesce. Namely, the book of Ezekiel's effort to subvert both the Abraham and the Jacob traditions as part of the non-exiles claim to the land indicates the disparate narratives about Abraham and Jacob were already being harmonized and joined together during the first 15 years after the destruction of Jerusalem.