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Taming Egypt: The Impact of Persian Imperial Ideology and Politics on the Biblical Exodus Account

Konrad Schmid (Zürich)

1. The Bible and the Ancient Near East

For current historical research on ancient Jewish literature, it is a matter of course that texts are influenced by the cultural and historical settings from which they emerge. In biblical studies, such an approach was not always fully accepted. A case in point is the so-called *Babel-Bibel-Streit* that emerged after the Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch, on January 13th, 1902 and in the presence of the emperor Wilhelm II, delivered a lecture on the topic “*Babel und Bibel*.”¹ Delitzsch suggested that the Bible is not a text *sui generis*, but rather is deeply influenced by its Mesopotamian literary precursors that need to be credited for their intellectual shaping of basic biblical concepts like creation and the flood.

There is no doubt that Delitzsch exaggerated his point, especially in his subsequent work and publications, and he was rightly the focus of criticism for advocating a kind of “pan-Babylonism.” His approach even provoked public mockery, with his enthusiasm for Babylonia making its way into one of the most prominent satirical magazines of the time, the “*Simplicissimus*.”²

But one should also acknowledge that the *particula veri* of his approach was the acknowledgment that the Hebrew Bible is first and foremost a literary and cultural artefact belonging to and in dialogue with ancient Near Eastern literature, quite like the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* argued,³ and not an entity that emerged and existed in splendid isolation from its cultural environment. In what follows, I will address some specific features of the biblical exodus account that reflect ideological influences from the period of its authors.

¹ Cf. Reinhard G. Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch und der Babel-Bibel-Streit* (OBO 133; Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 1989.

² Cf. Thomas Theodor Heine (1867-1948), *Simplicissimus* 7/52 (March 1903): 409.

³ Cf. Gerd Lüdemann and Alf Özen, “Religionsgeschichtliche Schule,” *TRE* 28:618–624.

Despite the divergences in current Pentateuchal theory,⁴ it is safe to say that the biblical book of Exodus developed over centuries. We can clearly identify a literary version of the exodus story from the Neo-Assyrian period⁵ and a parallel version (now combined with the older one) that probably originated in the early Persian period. Some scholars speak of them as “J” and “P,” respectively. Whereas I agree with the latter designation,⁶ I will refrain

⁴ Cf. Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, Baruch J. Schwartz (eds.), *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research* (FAT 78; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); cf. Konrad Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (Siphut 3; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 7–16, 334–47; Joel S. Baden, “The Continuity of the Non-Priestly Narrative from Genesis to Exodus,” *Biblica* 93 (2012): 161–186; idem, “From Joseph to Moses: The Narratives of Exodus 1–2,” *VT* 62 (2012): 133–158; idem, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). For overviews of the related scholarship, see e.g. Georg Fischer, “Zur Lage der Pentateuchforschung,” *ZAW* 115 (2003): 608–616; Thomas Römer, “Hauptprobleme der gegenwärtigen Pentateuchforschung,” *TZ* 60 (2004): 289–307; idem, “La formation du Pentateuque: histoire de la recherche,” in *Introduction à l'Ancien Testament* (MdB 49; ed. T. Römer, J.-D. Macchi, and C. Nihan; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2004), 67–84; Eckart Otto, “Kritik der Pentateuchkomposition: Eine Diskussion neuerer Entwürfe,” in *Die Tora: Studien zum Pentateuch: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (ed. E. Otto; Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte 9; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 143–167; Konrad Schmid, *Literaturgeschichte des Alten Testaments* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008), 37–41; Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Pentateuch as Scripture and the Challenge of Biblical Criticism: Responses among Modern Jewish Thinkers and Scholars,” in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction* (ed. Benjamin D. Sommer; New York: New York University Press, 2012), 203–228.

⁵ Cf. e.g. Eckart Otto, “Mose und das Gesetz: Die Mose-Figur als Gegenentwurf Politischer Theologie zur neuassyrischen Königsideologie im 7. Jh. v. Chr.,” in *Mose: Ägypten und das Alte Testament* (Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 189; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000), 43–83; Jan Christian Gertz, “Mose und die Anfänge der jüdischen Religion,” *ZTK* 99 (2002): 3–20.

⁶ See the standard text assignments by Karl Elliger, “Sinn und Ursprung der priesterlichen Geschichtserzählung,” *ZTK* 49 (1952): 121–143; reprinted in *Kleine Schriften zum Alten Testament* (ed. H. Gese and O. Kaiser; TB 32; Munich: Kaiser, 1966), 174–198; Norbert Lohfink, “Die Priesterschrift und die Geschichte,” in *Congress Volume Göttingen 1977* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 29; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 183–225; reprinted in *Studien zum Pentateuch* (SBAB 4; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 213–253; Eckart Otto, “Forschungen zur Priesterschrift,” *TRu* 62 (1997): 1–50. There is debate regarding the original end of P, especially in the wake of Lothar Peritt, “Priesterschrift im Deuteronomium?,” *ZAW* 100 (1988): 65–88 = idem, *Deuteronomium-Studien* (FAT 8; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 123–143. Proposals include seeing the literary end at either Exodus 29 (Eckart Otto, “Forschungen zur Priesterschrift,” *TRu* 62 [1997]: 1–50), Exodus 40 (Thomas Pola, *Die ursprüngliche Priesterschrift. Beobachtungen zur Literarkritik und Traditionsgeschichte von P^g* [WMANT 70; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-Verlag, 1995]; Reinhard Gregor Kratz, *Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments* [UTB 2157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000], 102–117; Michaela Bauks, “La signification de l'espace et du temps dans l'historiographie sacerdotale,” in *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* [BETL 147; ed. Thomas Römer; Leuven: Peeters, 2000], 29–45), Leviticus 9 (Erich

from speaking of “J” for reasons that I as well as others have developed elsewhere.⁷ There may also be earlier precursors to the exodus story, especially when accounting for probable oral versions of it, but I will not address these earlier stages in this paper.⁸

Zenger, “Priesterschrift,” *TRE* 27:435–446; idem., *Einleitung in das Alte Testament, Studienbücher Theologie I,1*, [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, ⁵2004], 156–175), Leviticus 16 (Matthias Köckert, *Leben in Gottes Gegenwart: Studien zum Verständnis des Gesetzes im Alten Testament* [FAT 43; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 105; Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus* [FAT II/25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], 20–68) or Numbers 27 (Jean-Louis Ska, “Le récit sacerdotal. Une ‘histoire sans fin’?,” in *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers* [BETHL 215; ed. Thomas Römer; Leuven: Peeters, 2008], 631–653). Between Exodus 40 and Leviticus 26, a staggering of endings within P is suggested by Jan Christian Gertz (ed.), *Grundinformation Altes Testament* (UTB 2745; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, ²2007), 236. Christian Frevel, *Mit Blick auf das Land die Schöpfung erinnern* (HBS 23; Freiburg: Herder, 2000), supports the traditional conclusion in Deuteronomy 34 (cf. Ludwig Schmidt, *Studien zur Priesterschrift* [BZAW 214; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993], 271; Peter Weimar, *Studien zur Priesterschrift* [FAT 56; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 17). Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Structure of P,” *CBQ* 38 (1976): 275–292; Norbert Lohfink, “Die Priesterschrift und die Geschichte,” in *Congress Volume Göttingen 1977* (VT.S 29; ed. John Adney Emerton; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 183–225 = idem., *Studien zum Pentateuch* (SBAB 4; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 213–253; Ernst Axel Knauf, “Die Priesterschrift und die Geschichten der Deuteronomisten,” in *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (ed. T. Römer; BETL 147; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 101–118; Philippe Guillaume, *Land and Calendar: The Priestly Document from Genesis 1 to Joshua 18* (Habilitationsschrift, Bern 2008), see the conclusion of P^s in Joshua. For an argument against P as a source in Exodus, see Christoph Berner, *Die Exoduserzählung. Das literarische Werden einer Ursprungslegende Israels* (FAT 73; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). However, see my review in *ZAW* 123 (2010): 292–294. Rainer Albertz, *Exodus 1–18* (Zürcher Bibelkommentare 2.1; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2012), 10–26; as well as Jakob Wöhrle, *Fremdlinge im eigenen Land: Zur Entstehung und Intention der priesterlichen Passagen der Vätergeschichte* (FRLANT 246; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), holds a similar position for Genesis 12–50.

⁷ Cf. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid (eds.), *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (SBL Symposium Series 34; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006); for the decisive literary break between Genesis and Exodus, see Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, which builds *inter alia* on Thomas Römer, *Israels Väter: Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990); and Albert de Pury, “Le cycle de Jacob comme légende autonome des origines d’Israël,” in *Congress Volume Leuven 1989* (VT.S 43; ed. John Adney Emerton; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 78–96. On this issue, cf. the exchange between Joel S. Baden, “The Continuity of the Non-Priestly Narrative from Genesis to Exodus,” *Bib* 93 (2012): 161–186, and Konrad Schmid, “Genesis and Exodus as Two Formerly Independent Traditions of Origins for Ancient Israel,” *Bib* 93 (2012): 187–208

⁸ Cf., e.g., Uwe Becker, “Das Exodus-Credo: Historischer Haftpunkt und Geschichte einer alttestamentlichen Glaubensformel,” in *Das Alte Testament – ein Geschichtsbuch?! Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsüberlieferung im antiken Israel* (eds. U. Becker and J. van Oorschot; Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 17; Leipzig: EVA, 2005), 81–100.

If one admits that biblical authors were influenced by their historical experiences and that the world of these narrators impacted the narratives themselves, then it is to be *expected* that the various periods in which the book of Exodus was produced would be reflected in its texts. Of course, the *world of the narrative* has its own logic, but biblical texts, especially in the Pentateuch, often give us glimpses into the world of the narrator as well.

This paper will discuss several conspicuous features in the Priestly exodus account that relate to the story's stance towards Egypt.⁹ These narrative perspectives point to a specific political situation at the beginning of the Persian period that seems to have played a role in the author's experience. I think the Priestly exodus account provides a good example of early Jewish cultural encounter in the ancient Near Eastern world.

The Priestly texts in the book of Exodus belong to the theocratic strand of early Second Temple period literature in the Bible. In general, the Priestly document ("P") takes up the Persian imperial ideology of a comprehensive *pax Persica* encompassing the entire ancient world.¹⁰ Yet at the same time, the Priestly texts in Exodus develop the notion that Egypt stands outside of God's world order. They suggest that only by taming Egypt may God's creative activity come to a meaningful end in the ultimate establishment of God's glory (כבוד יהוה) in the world. Taming Egypt is an essential element of the Priestly document's portrayal of world history that starts with the beginning of time and culminates in the establishment of Israel's sanctuary. In what follows, I will explain how and why the Priestly document develops this specific stance towards Egypt, arguing in a way that includes observations about the world of the narrative and the world of its narrators alike.

II. The Priestly Exodus Account and Its Theological Shape

Allowing for minor variations in detail, the Priestly version of the Exodus story is usually considered to comprise the following verses in Exodus: 1:7, 13–14; 2:23*–25; 6:2–12; 7:1–2, 4–7, 8–10a, 11–13, 19–20*, 21b, 22; 8:1–3, 11*, 12–14a, 15; 9:8–12; 11:10; 12:1, 3–8*, 18–

⁹ On P's exodus account, cf. Peter Weimar, *Untersuchungen zur priesterschriftlichen Exodusgeschichte* (FB 9; Würzburg: Echter, 1973); Thomas Römer, "The Exodus Narrative according to the Priestly Document," in *The Strata of the Priestly Writings: Contemporary Debate and Future Directions* (ed. Sarah Shectman and Joel S. Baden; ATANT 95; Zurich: TVZ, 2009), 157–174; Albertz, *Exodus 1–18*, 50–52.

¹⁰ Cf. Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 175–203.

20; 12:40–41; 14:1–4*, 8a, 10*, 15, 16–18a*, 21–23*, 26–29*.¹¹ Its basic elements include of the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt, the commissioning of Moses, the contest with the Egyptian magicians, the setting up of the *Pessach*, Israel’s departure from Egypt, and the death of Pharaoh and his army in the sea, after which the Israelites reach the wilderness of Sinai.¹²

While this narrative is about the early history of Israel, Norbert Lohfink and Ernst Axel Knauf in particular have pointed out¹³ that it is not particularly helpful to approach the Priestly document and its exodus story as a *historiographical* work, as has often been done. Instead, the Priestly document intends to present Israel’s beginnings not in terms of history, but in terms of foundational myth. It is easier to describe this difference in German terms: P as a whole writes not *Geschichte*, but *Urgeschichte*. The importance of this differentiation will become clear in the following sections.

1. Creation Theology in P’s Account of the Crossing of the Sea (Exodus 14)

The first feature to be discussed in the Priestly exodus story is the theologically loaded wording in the account of the sea crossing in Exodus 14. This wording shows that the salvation of Israel and the destruction of Egypt in P are not based on an arbitrary act of God: both elements are divine *creational activities*.¹⁴

¹¹ Following basically the delineations proposed by Jan Christian Gertz, *Tradition und Redaktion in der Exoduserzählung: Untersuchungen zur Endredaktion des Pentateuch* (FRLANT 186; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 394–396.

¹² For the notion of Sinai in P, see Konrad Schmid, “Der Sinai und die Priesterschrift,” in “*Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben*” (*Gen 18,19*): *Studien zur altorientalischen und biblischen Rechtsgeschichte, zur Religionsgeschichte Israels und zur Religionssoziologie* (eds. Reinhard Achenbach and Martin Arneht; BZAR 13; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 114–127; reprinted in *Schriftgelehrte Traditionsliteratur: Fallstudien zur innerbiblischen Schriftauslegung im Alten Testament* (FAT 77; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 143–158.

¹³ Cf. Norbert Lohfink, “Die Priesterschrift und die Geschichte,” in *Congress Volume Göttingen 1977* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VT.S 29; Leiden: Brill, 1977), 213–253 = *Studien zum Pentateuch* (Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände 4. Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 183–225; Ernst Axel Knauf, “Der Exodus zwischen Mythos und Geschichte: Zur priesterschriftlichen Rezeption der Schilfmeer-Geschichte in Ex 14,” in *Schriftauslegung in der Schrift: Festschrift für Odil Hannes Steck zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (eds. R. G. Kratz et al.; BZAW 300; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 73–84; idem, “Die Priesterschrift,” 101–118.

¹⁴ Cf. on this in more detail Konrad Schmid, “The Quest for ‘God:’ Monotheistic Arguments in the Priestly Texts of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism* (ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 271–289.

This may be demonstrated first by Exod 14:22, a verse that is unanimously attributed to P:

<p>ויבאו בני־ישראל בתוך הים ביבשה והמים להם חמה מימינם ומשמאלם</p>	<p>The Israelites went into the sea <i>on dry ground</i>, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.</p>
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In the crossing of the sea, the Israelites went on *dry ground*, in Hebrew: *ביבשה*. The term *יבשה* only appears once in the Priestly document before Exod 14:22. This is the statement in Gen 1:9, part of the Priestly account of creation:

<p>ויאמר אלהים יקוו המים מתחת השמים אל־מקום אחד ותראה היבשה ויהי־כן</p>	<p>And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let <i>the dry ground</i> appear.” And it was so.</p>
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In the miracle at the Sea of Reeds, something similar to the third day of creation takes place: the *dry ground* can be seen. The Priestly document apparently intends to present this miracle in the same mold as the creational activity of God during the very first days of creation.¹⁵

The wording of Exod 14:28a exhibits a similar affiliation with God’s creational activity at the very beginning of world history as well:

<p>וישוב המים וכסו את־הרכב ואת־הפרשים לכל חיל פרעה הבאים אחריהם בים</p>	<p><i>The waters</i> returned and <i>covered</i> the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea.</p>
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Within the Priestly narrative, this statement is quite similar in literary terms to the flood waters’ covering of the earth in Gen 7:19–20:

¹⁵ See Schmid, “Quest,” 280.

והמים גברו מאד מאד על־הארץ ויכסו כל־ההרים הגבהים אשר־תחת כל־השמים חמש עשרה אמה מלמעלה גברו המים ויכסו ההרים	<i>The waters</i> swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were <i>covered</i> ; fifteen cubits deep <i>the waters</i> swelled, and the mountains were <i>covered</i> .
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The implicit theological argument underlying this thematic and terminological link can be described as follows: The destruction of the Egyptian army in the sea is tantamount to the eradication of the corrupted creatures during the flood. Erasing the Egyptian army is thus another part of establishing God’s creational world order. These links back to Genesis 1 and 6 show that P’s exodus account is more *Urgeschichte* than *Geschichte*. Leading the people out of Israel and destroying the Egyptian military is part of God’s *creational* activity.

2. P’s Peaceful World View

Why is the destruction of Egypt’s power noteworthy? Outside of this single episode, P displays a very peaceful view of the world. That is to say, P shows no hostile attitude toward the nations; Israel’s God is not only Israel’s God, but also the God for the whole world; and accordingly, God makes promises to Israel, to the Abrahamic nations more broadly (Genesis 17), and even to the whole world (Genesis 9).¹⁶

The flood story of Genesis 6–9 seems to pose an obvious exception to such peacefulness, but even here, P in fact *criticizes* the notion of divine violence. As Rudolf

¹⁶ For P, there is a specific relation between the “world cycle” (Genesis 1–9) and the “Abrahamic cycle” (Genesis 11–Exodus 1) in Genesis and the “Israel cycle” (Exodus 1–40) in Exodus. It represents a concentric theological organization of the world in which the creator God is *Elohim* for the world (Gen 9:1), *El Shadday* for the Abrahamic people (Gen 17:1), and YHWH for Israel (Exod 6:2). See on this in further detail Konrad Schmid, “Judean Identity and Ecumenicity: The Political Theology of the Priestly Document,” in *Judah and Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (eds. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 3–26. This conception might be inspired by the Persians’ own view of center and periphery within their empire; cf. Herodotus (I, 134): “After their own nation they hold their nearest neighbors most in honour, then the nearest but one—and so on, their respect decreasing as the distance grows, and the most remote being the most despised. Themselves, they consider in every way superior to everyone else in the world, and allow other nations a share of good qualities decreasing according to distance, the furthest off being in their view the worst.” Cf. Briant, *History*, 181.

Smend noted some 30 years ago, P's presentation of the great flood amounts to a critical interaction with the prophecy of doom.¹⁷

Especially in P's theological argumentation in Genesis 6, several allusions to the prophetic tradition are detectable:

Gen 6:13: And God said to Noah: *The end* (עֵת) *of all flesh has come* (אֵל) *before me*, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.

As Smend and others have noted, the beginning of this passage quotes the book of Amos:

Am 8:2: And [Yhwh] said to Amos: What do you see? I said: A basket with ripe fruit (עֵת). And Yhwh said: *The end* (עֵת) *has come* (אֵל) *for my people Israel*; I will no longer forgive.

This passage from Amos is already taken up in Ezekiel 7,¹⁸ which is probably also reflected in Genesis 6:

Ezek 7:2–3: You, son of man, shall say: Thus says Yhwh the Lord to the land of Israel: *The end* (עֵת) *has come* (אֵל)! *The end* (עֵת) *has come* (אֵל) *to the borders of that land*! *The end* (עֵת) *has come* (אֵל) *to you*.

How should one interpret P's allusion in Genesis 6 to these harsh statements from the Prophetic books?¹⁹ P seems to proclaim that there was indeed a divine judgment entailing the "end," but that this event happened very long ago—at the time of the flood—and that this divine will to make an "end" has been overcome by God's unconditional covenant with humankind, as stated in Genesis 9. Thus, P rejects the basic elements of the prophecy of doom: God will never again go to war with his creation, as his bow in the clouds symbolizes.²⁰ In light of P's political theology one could add that, for P, the present situation

¹⁷ Rudolf Smend, "Das Ende ist gekommen": Ein Amoswort in der Priesterschrift," in *Die Botschaft und die Boten: Festschrift für Hans Walter Wolff zum 70. Geburtstag* (eds. J. Jeremias and L. Peritt; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-Verlag, 1981), 67–74 = *Die Mitte des Alten Testaments: Exegetische Aufsätze* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 238–243.

¹⁸ For the textual variations in Ezekiel 7 cf. Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Der Prophet Hesekiel: Kapitel 1–19* (ATD 22,1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 100 n. 441, for the motif of the "end" 116–117.

¹⁹ For other links from P to the Prophetic tradition, see also Bernard Gosse, "Le livre d'Ezéchiel et Ex 6,2-8 dans le cadre du Pentateuque," *BN* 104 (2000): 20–25; Jan Christian Gertz, "Noah und die Propheten: Rezeption und Reformulierung eines altorientalischen Mythos," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 81 (2007): 503–522.

²⁰ Cf. Udo Rütterswörden, "Der Bogen in Genesis 9: militärhistorische und traditionsgeschichtliche Erwägungen zu einem biblischen Symbol," *UF* 20 (1988): 247–263; see also Erich Zenger, *Gottes Bogen in den Wolken: Untersuchungen zu Komposition und Theologie der priesterschriftlichen Urgeschichte* (SBS 112; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1987); Udo Rütterswörden, *Dominium terrae: Studien zur Genese einer alttestamentlichen Vorstellung* (BZAW 215; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); Othmar Keel, "Der Bogen als

of a theocracy mediated by the Persian Empire is tantamount to the end of history. P takes up the judgment prophecies of Amos 8 and Ezekiel 7 (“the end has come”), arguing that even though there was a divine proclamation concerning the world’s divinely wrought destruction, this event occurred in primordial times and was settled once and for all in the covenant of Genesis 9.²¹

Hence, within P’s peaceful worldview, the case of Egypt and the destruction of Egyptian power in the sea make for a striking exception—even if it is applicable only to the narrative world.²² Also worth noting is how P seems to distinguish between Egypt’s military and Egypt’s “civilian population.”

Only the military is the target of divine destruction, whereas the people of Egypt appear spared of God’s violence. This point is especially evident in P’s account of the plagues against Egypt in Exodus 7–11. It has often been noted that the Priestly plague cycle is conceived not so much as a series of strikes against Egypt to force Israel’s release from Pharaoh, but rather as a contest of magicians.²³

Against the magicians of Egypt, Moses and Aaron demonstrate before Pharaoh that the God of the Israelites is the sovereign ruler of the world. In a sequence of five elements—rods to snakes (7:1–7*), Nile water to blood (7:8–22*), frogs (8:1–3), lice (8:12–15*) and boils (9:8–12)²⁴—Moses and Aaron establish the supremacy of their God’s power over Egypt’s power. The first three miracles can be imitated by the magicians of Pharaoh, but by the fourth, they have to acknowledge that “this is the finger of God” (Exod 8:14), and by the fifth, they are afflicted by the boils and are no longer able to participate in the contest: “The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils” (Exod 9:11a).

Yet more than these characteristics of the Priestly plague cycle differentiate it from the non-Priestly plagues. Additionally, in the non-Priestly plague cycle, *all of* Egypt has to suffer

Herrschaftssymbol: Einige unveröffentlichte Skarabäen aus Israel und Ägypten zum Thema ‘Jagd und Krieg,’” ZDPV 93 (1977): 141–177.

²¹ Cf. Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 166–167.

²² Berner, *Exoduserzählung*, 375–382 proposes a complicated literary genesis for the depiction of the Egyptian army in Exodus 14.

²³ Cf. John Van Seters, “A Contest of Magicians? The Plague Stories in P,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells. Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (eds. D. P. Wright *et al.*; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 569–580; Thomas C. Römer, “Competing Magicians in Exodus 7–9: Interpreting Magic in the Priestly Theology,” in *Magic in the Biblical World: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon* (ed. Todd E. Klutz; JSNT.S 245; London: T & T Clark), 2003, 12–22.

²⁴ Gertz, *Tradition*, 79–97, 395.

from the strikes, whereas in the Priestly account such is not the case. Instructive in this respect is the very first plague in Exod 7:19–22*:

<p>ויאמר יהוה אל־משה אמר אל־אהרן קח מטך ונטה־ידיך על־מימי מצרים על־נהרתם על־יאריהם ועל־אגמיהם ועל כל־מקוה מימיהם ויהי־דם והיה דם בכל־ארץ מצרים ובעצים ובאבנים ויעשו־כן משה ואהרן כאשר צוה יהוה ויהי הדם בכל־ארץ מצרים ויעשו־כן חרטמי מצרים בלטיהם ויחזק לב־פרעה ולא־שמע אלהם כאשר דבר יהוה</p>	<p>And YHWH said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over its rivers, its canals, and its ponds, and all its pools of water, so that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout the whole land of Egypt, even in wood and stones.’” Moses and Aaron did just as YHWH commanded and there was blood in all the land of Egypt. But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh’s heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them; as YHWH had said.</p>
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In this Priestly “plague,” unlike its non-Priestly counterpart, no one suffers. All water in Egypt is turned into blood by Moses and Aaron, and there is an implicit assumption that after they had performed the miracle, the blood *immediately turned back into water*. Otherwise the Egyptian magicians would not have been able to repeat the miracle. Thus the event apparently lasted only for a very short time—the event being a miracle, not a plague.

If one looks for a moment at the parallel non-P version, it becomes obvious that, firstly, the plague lasts longer, and secondly, it affects the population of Egypt considerably: they have to search laboriously for water by digging in the banks of the Nile.

The frog “plague” is similar. In P’s presentation, the coming of the frogs is a brief event that disappears as quickly as it appears. The frogs are not a means to torture Egypt, but are simply one element in the contest between Moses and Aaron, on the one hand, and the magicians, on the other. In the non-P account of the frog plague, the frogs go everywhere, invading all the houses and plaguing every Egyptian.

Even the Priestly presentation of the death of the firstborn unfolds in a highly reduced manner (a two verse announcement in Exod 12:12–13, which is embedded in a *Pessach* account). The execution itself is not reported in P.²⁵

Therefore, P's shaping of Exodus 14 is conceptually exceptional and demands an explanation. P envisions wide-reaching political, cultural, and religious peace for the whole known ancient world, but its stance towards Egypt's military is different. Why?

III. P's Historical Situation and its Stance toward Egypt

One could imagine P already to have been acquainted with the deadly fate of Pharaoh and his army from having had access to the *pre-existing traditions of Israel's exodus from Egypt*. This point is certainly an important one and might be an explanation. Nevertheless, one must account for the fact that P was in all probability written as an independent literary source. The reason that P was not simply added to the pre-existing tradition as a further redactional layer has to do precisely with its conceptual break from this tradition, as especially Christoph Levin has pointed out.²⁶ Especially in Genesis 12–50, P's theology of a single legitimate cult introduced by Moses could not be reconciled with the stories of the ancestors, who built several altars and worshipped in several places.²⁷ It is therefore to be suspected that if P had been willing to exclude the element of violence against Egypt's army in Exodus 14, then P probably could have done so. Furthermore, the destruction of Egypt's army is highlighted particularly within P's *own* text portions.

It is difficult to see a sufficient basis for this motivation *solely within the narrative world of P's exodus account*. Indeed, P is ultimately interested in the establishment of the sanctuary, a narrative development for which the destruction of Egypt at the sea is not really necessary. As mentioned before, for P's authors, it may have been a given based on the exodus traditions they already knew, but the inclusion of and specific interest in divine violence against Egypt still remains noteworthy.

Therefore, one should consider other explanations. I find most promising the approach of Albert de Pury, who suggested that P's reference to violence against Egypt may have arisen

²⁵ If one follows Gertz, *Tradition*, 394–396.

²⁶ Christoph Levin, *Der Jahwist* (FRLANT 157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 437.

²⁷ Levin, *Jahwist*, 437 n. 6.

in response to the political situation in which P's authors operated in the early Persian period.²⁸

The date of P is of course a matter of considerable debate. Scholars often argue for a Neo-Babylonian or an early Persian origin, but even a pre-exilic date is sometimes suggested.²⁹ Others allow for stages of growth and interpret P as the result of a process that began in the pre-exilic period and extended into the Persian period.³⁰

Especially for P's cultic laws, such a long term perspective is probably correct. But for P's overall narrative and its specific theological shape, the basic arguments by Julius Wellhausen are, in my opinion, still valid: P presupposes the cult centralization of Deuteronomy, which can be dated to the late neo-Assyrian period, and the classical prophets do not presuppose the legislation of P. For this reason, P seems to be later than both D and the classical prophets. But P's specific introduction of the sanctuary as a mobile tent seems to predate the dedication of the second temple in 515 B.C.E., so that if P is a Persian period text, then it belongs to the early Persian period.

Indeed, the basic conception of political theology in P—the peaceful, well-ordered organization of the world according to which different nations all dwell in their own lands with their own language and culture—points to a general dating of P's composition in the Persian period. As argued above, this worldview of P may well find expression in the Priestly flood story and plague cycle. Moreover, it is probably most clearly evinced through the Priestly table of nations in Genesis 10:³¹

²⁸ Cf. Albert de Pury, "P^s as the Absolute Beginning," in *Les dernières rédactions du Pentateuque, de l'Hexateuque et de l'Ennéateuque* (ed. Thomas Römer and Konrad Schmid; BETL 203, Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 99–128 = idem, *Die Patriarchen und die Priesterschrift: Les Patriarches et le document sacerdotal. Gesammelte Studien zu seinem 70. Geburtstag: Recueil d'articles, à l'occasion de son 70e anniversaire* (AThANT 99; Zürich: TVZ, 2010), 13–42.

²⁹ Cf. Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco: Harper), 161–216; see also Avi Hurvitz, "Dating the Priestly Source in Light of the Historical Study of Biblical Hebrew: A Century after Wellhausen," in *Lebendige Forschung im Alten Testament* (ed. Otto Kaiser; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 88–100; idem, "Once again: The Linguistic Profile of the Priestly Material in the Pentateuch and its Historical Age: A Response to J. Blenkinsopp," in *ZAW* 112 (2000): 180–191.

³⁰ William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 2A; New York: Doubleday, 2006), 730–732.

³¹ See J. G. Vink, "The Date and the Origin of the Priestly Code in the Old Testament," in *The Priestly Code and Seven Other Studies* (ed. J. G. Vink et al.; OTS 52; Leiden: Brill, 1969), 1–144, 61; Ernst Axel Knauf, "Die Priesterschrift und die Geschichten der Deuteronomisten," in *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (ed. Thomas Römer; BETL 147; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 101–118, 104–105; Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 383; see

Gen 10:2, 5	בני יפת [...] בארצתם איש ללשנו למשפחתם בגויהם
	The sons of Japheth [...] in their lands, with their own language, by their families, by their nations.
Gen 10:20	אלה בני-חם למשפחתם ללשנתם בארצתם בגויהם
	These are the sons of Ham, by their families, by their languages, in their lands, and by their nations.
Gen 10:31	אלה בני-שם למשפחתם ללשנתם בארצתם לגויהם
	These are the sons of Shem, by their families, by their languages, in their lands, and by their nations.

It has long been recognized that one of the closest parallels to Genesis 10—that is, to a structuring of the world as a differentiated unity consisting of various nations and languages—is found in Persian imperial ideology and is attested, e.g., in the Behistun inscription, which was disseminated widely throughout the Persian Empire.³²

The Persian imperial inscriptions declare that every nation belongs to their specific region and has their specific cultural identities (cf. DNa 30–38; XPh 28–35; DB I 61–71). This structure results from the will of the creator deity, as Klaus Koch pointed out in his “*Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich*,” where he identifies this structure as “*Nationalitätenstaat als Schöpfungsgegebenheit*.”³³ This fact may be illustrated by the tomb iconography of three Persian kings in *Naqš-i Rostam* (cf. ANEP 769): The reliefs above the tombs’ entrances include a cosmic representation of peaceful order among the nations in the Persian Empire.

also Jacques Vermeulen, “La ‘table des nations’ (Gn 10): Yaphet figure-t-il l’Empire perse?,” *Transeu* 5 (1992): 113–132.

³² Rüdiger Schmitt, *The Bisitun Inscriptions of Darius the Great: Old Persian Texts* (vol. 1 of *The Old Persian Inscriptions*; Corpus inscriptionum Iranicarum; London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991); idem, *Die altpersischen Inschriften der Achämeniden: Editio minor mit deutscher Übersetzung* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2009).

³³ Klaus Koch, “Weltordnung und Reichsidee im alten Iran und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Provinz Jehud,” in *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich* (2nd ed.; OBO 55; Fribourg: Academic Press, 1996), 197–201; cf. p. 150f: “Das Zurückführen von Göttern und Menschen an ihren, mit Städte- und Tempelnamen gekennzeichneten Ort (*ašru*) rühmen auch akkadische Königsinschriften, vom Prolog des Codex Hammurabi (Ia 65: ‘restore’ ANET 164; TUAT I 41) bis hin zum Kyros-Zylinder (Z. 32; ANET 316; TUAT I, 409). Doch gibt es dabei, soweit ich sehe, nirgends einen Hinweis auf Völker und Länder. Mit Dareios I. setzt also ein neuer, an der Nationenvielfalt ausgerichteter Schöpfungs- und Herrschaftsgedanke durch.”

What is the place of Egypt within that structure? P’s surprising picture of Egypt as a nation needing to be tamed in an otherwise well-organized and disciplined world might imply that P does not yet presuppose Egypt’s inclusion in the Persian Empire. If that is the case, then P would predate the Persian conquest of Egypt, which happened in 525 B.C.E. under Cambyses.³⁴ In sum, P seems to reflect the peaceful world order of the Persian Empire at a point when it included the whole ancient world except for Egypt. This political situation in the world of P’s authors might also explain why the divine violence against Egypt seems directed more towards its army than towards its population.

IV. The Establishment of God’s “Glory” in the Victory over Egypt’s Army at the Sea

The defeat of Egypt’s army appears associated with yet another, important theological Priestly theme in Exodus 14: the establishment of God’s “glory” after the destruction of Egypt’s army.

It is well known that God’s “glory” (כבוד יהוה) is a central concept in P, especially in its Sinai pericope.³⁵

From Exodus 16 on, the כבוד יהוה is the most prominent mode of God’s revelation, though the concept does not seem properly introduced within P’s narrative. However, if one looks beyond the substantive and takes into account the usage of the root *kbwd* in P, then Exodus 14 arguably serves as the basic etiology of God’s “glory” within P’s narrative.

This idea is observable in Exod 14:4a, which reads as follows:

<p>וּחִזַּקְתִּי אֶת־לִב־פַּרְעֹה וְרָדַף אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאֶכְבַּדָּהּ בַּפַּרְעֹה וּבְכָל־חֵילוֹ וַיֵּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה</p>	<p>I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory (Nif. כבוד) for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am YHWH.</p>
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The “Egyptians” in this verse probably do not refer to “Pharaoh and all his army,” since they are here facing imminent destruction. It is not they who need to know “that I am YHWH.” Rather, the *remaining* Egyptians, the people of Egypt, shall learn from the death of their king

³⁴ Cf. Eugene Cruz-Uribe, “The Invasion of Egypt by Cambyses,” *Transeuphatène* 25 (2003): 9–60.

³⁵ Cf. Ursula Struppe, *Die Herrlichkeit Jahwes in der Priesterschrift* (Österreichische Biblische Studien 9; Klosterneuburg: Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988); Thomas Wagner, *Gottes Herrlichkeit: Bedeutung und Verwendung des Begriffs kâbôd im Alten Testament* (VT.S 151; Leiden: Brill, 2012).

and the destruction of their army “that I am YHWH.”³⁶ The driving force behind this knowledge is the establishment of God’s “glory” in the victory over the Egyptian army at the sea.

Exodus 14:17–18 also uses Nif. כבוד in order to describe the theological significance of the destruction of Egypt’s army in the sea. This text highlights the chariots and horsemen.

ואני הנני מחזק את־לב מצרים ויבאו אחריהם ואכבדה בפרעה ובכל־חילו ברכבו ובפרשיו וידעו מצרים כי־אני יהוה בהכבדי בפרעה ברכבו ובפרשיו	Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. And the Egyptians shall know that I am YHWH, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.
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Apparently, God’s victory over the Egyptians establishes his כבוד in P’s eyes. With this reading of Exodus 14, it is possible to understand the concept of כבוד יהוה, which receives this exact designation for the first time in Exodus 16, the story of the manna (cf. Exod 16:7, 10).³⁷

V. God and the Gods of Egypt in P

Another striking element in P pertains to its depiction of Egyptian religion. In the uncontested P-verse of Exod 12:12b, God tells Moses:

ובכל־אלהי מצרים אעשה שפטים אני יהוה	On all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am YHWH.
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This is the only instance in P where אלהים denotes a *plurality* of deities, and where deities other than YHWH himself are envisioned. P is a decidedly monotheistic text,³⁸ propagating a sophisticated version of inclusive monotheism. This inclusive monotheism acknowledges the empirical diversity of different religions in the world, portraying all of them as guideposts that point to the one creator deity that the narrative flow of P ultimately presents as YHWH.

³⁶ The redactional verse of 14:25 (see Thomas Krüger, “Erwägungen zur Redaktion der Meerwundererzählung [Exodus 13,17-14,31],” in *ZAW* 108 [1996]: 519–533, 532) then interprets the Egyptians as the Egyptian soldiers who recognize, just before their death, that it is YHWH himself who fights against them.

³⁷ See also Struppe, *Herrlichkeit*, 139–143.

³⁸ See Schmid, “Quest,” 278–289.

William Propp has drawn attention to the fact that Exod 12:12 is formulated as *yiqtol*: “I will punish.”³⁹ This grammatical observation precludes the possibility that Exod 12:12 refers to the earlier humiliation of the Egyptian gods in the plague cycle. Exodus 12:12 is ostensibly a narrative element not fully integrated into the world of the narrative and provides a window into the world of the narrator, who seems to expect a judgment on Egypt.⁴⁰

To sum up: P’s exodus account is a historical text from a specific historical period. As such, it not only creates a fictitious narrative world, but also (as one would expect) provides glimpses of the author’s own world.⁴¹

³⁹ William H. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 2; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 400.

⁴⁰ It might be possible to relate these “judgments” on the gods of Egypt to P’s specific location of the miracle at the sea “in front of Ba’al Zaphon” (Exod 14:2). The place is probably the antecedent to the sanctuary of Zeus Casios mentioned by Herodotus (II, 6, 158; III, 5) and is to be identified with *Ras Qasrun* on the sandbar of the *Sabakhet (Sabkhat) el Bardawil*. Excavations show no evidence reaching back prior to the Persian conquest of Egypt (see G.I. Davies, “The Wilderness Itineraries and Recent Archaeological Research,” in *Studies in the Pentateuch* (ed. J.A. Emerton; VTSup 41; Leiden: Brill 1990), 161–175, especially 162–64). It is noteworthy that, according to P, the Israelites are commanded to head back (שוב) to “Ba’al Zaphon” in order that the miracle can take place. See Krüger, “Erwägungen,” 521f. The miracle in P is mainly a demonstration of God’s power rather than something necessary for the deliverance of the Israelites.

⁴¹ In this respect, the argument of Benjamin D. Sommer is overstated in “Dating Pentateuchal Texts and the Perils of Pseudo-Historicism,” in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research* (ed. Thomas Dozeman *et al.*; FAT 78; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 85–108, 85. Consider, for example, the following statement against dating texts by profile: “In this article I make a very simple point concerning the dating of texts. It is odd that one needs to make this point; yet it does need to be made, because it pertains to a practice that is as common within biblical studies as it is specious. Scholars in our field frequently support a speculative dating of a text by asserting that, since the text’s ideas match a particular time period especially well, the text was most likely composed then. [...] According to this approach, a scholar ascertains the themes of a passage, then thinks about when that theme would be relevant, crucial, or meaningful to ancient Israelites, then dates the text to that time-period. It should be immediately clear that this method of dating holds no validity whatsoever.”