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Schmid, Konrad

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## **Distinguishing the World of the Exodus Narrative from the World of its Narrators: The Question of the Priestly Exodus Account in its Historical Setting**

### I. Divergences in Current Pentateuchal Scholarship

It is a more or less obvious observation that Pentateuchal research in Israel, North America, and Europe differs widely in terms of presuppositions, methods, and results.<sup>1</sup> Actually, there are very few points on which scholars agree, and these basically pertain to four specific elements: 1. The Pentateuch is a composite text. 2. The Pentateuch is, as a literary entity, a product of the first millennium BCE.<sup>2</sup> 3. The composition of the Pentateuch cannot be sufficiently explained without the assumption of sources, and by “source” I mean a self-contained literary piece that once existed independently. And 4., among the alleged sources, there is one textual layer that is less controversial than others, which is P—the so-called “Priestly Document”.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the theory that there are earlier sources included in the Pentateuch, scholars often identify a great divide between “documentarians” and “supplementarians,”

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<sup>1</sup> See Dozeman, Schmid and Schwartz 2011; cf. Schmid 2010; Baden 2012a; idem 2012b; idem 2012c; Schwartz 2012a. For overviews of scholarship see e.g. Fischer 2003; Römer 2004a; 2004b; Otto 2009; Schmid 2008: 37–41.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding its different final shapes, see Blum 1991.

<sup>3</sup> See the standard text assignments by Elliger 1952; repr. 1966; Lohfink 1978; repr. 1988; Otto 1997. There is new debate, especially among European scholars, regarding the original end of P, especially in the wake of Perlitt 1988; idem 1994. Compare the general thematic agreement, but variability with regard to the literary end at either Exod 29 (Otto 1997), Exod 40 (Pola 1995; Kratz 2000: 102–117; Bauks 2000), Lev 9 (Zenger 1997; idem 2004: 156–175), Lev 16 (Köckert 2004: 105; Nihan 2007: 20–68) or Num 27 (Ska 2008). A staggering of endings within the priestly document between Exod 40 and Lev 26 is suggested by Gertz 2007: 236. Frevel 2000, supports the traditional conclusion in Deut 34 (cf. Schmidt 1993: 271; Weimar 2008: 17). Blenkinsopp 1976; Lohfink 1978/1988; Knauf 2000b; Guillaume 2009, see the conclusion of P<sup>g</sup> in Joshua.

referring thereby to the proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis located mainly in North America and Israel on the one hand, and the—primarily—European scholars who envision a more complex genesis of the Pentateuch on the other hand.

However, the nomenclature of this distinction is not very precise. Why? The difference between the Documentary Hypothesis and more recent European approaches arising in the wake of Rendtorff and Blum<sup>4</sup> does not lie in the question of whether or not one reckons with independent documents that have been incorporated in the Pentateuch.<sup>5</sup> The difference between the two positions is *with how many and which kinds* of documents are assumed and how the process of their compilation and redactional expansion is best reconstructed. The documentarians limit themselves often to three or, including D, four sources, and one or more generally mechanical redactors who basically compiled these texts.<sup>6</sup> The so called “non-documentarians” reckon with more sources (for instance, P, D, a Primeval History, the Abraham cycle, the Jacob cycle, the Joseph story, the exodus story).<sup>7</sup> This approach also assigns more text to redactional layers in the Pentateuch that compile and update the different source texts.

One very basic and important commonality among the so-called “non-documentarian” approaches regarding the exodus story is that this story was neither from the beginning nor from the early periods of biblical literature merely one *episode* within a much larger story spanning from the patriarchs or even creation to the death of Moses or the conquest of the land. It enjoyed a significant existence as a literary entity unto itself. Only for P do we have clear evidence that the exodus is merely the second act in Israel’s foundational history.<sup>8</sup> Whether or not this is to be evaluated in terms of the notion of Genesis and Exodus as two formerly independent traditions of origins for Israel prior to P, has remained contested up to present.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Rendtorff 1977a; idem 1975/1977b; Blum 1984; Kratz 2005; Otto 2007; Schmid 2010; idem 2012b; Berner 2010.

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed treatment of these processes, see Schmid 2010: 7–16, 334–347; idem 2011a.

<sup>6</sup> See Schwartz 2012b.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. the charts in Kratz 2000: 331, Otto 2003: 1099, and Gertz 2007: 216.

<sup>8</sup> See Schmid 2010, building *inter alia* on Römer 1990 and de Pury 1991.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Carr 2001; Dozeman 2006; Van Seters 2006; Schmitt 2009; Davies 2010.

It is, however, important to see that the divergences in global Pentateuchal scholarship are not just the result of different assessments of individual texts within an otherwise shared approach to the Pentateuch. The differences arise from disparate understandings about how to do historical exegesis. For instance, how does one assess the degree of dependence of a biblical author on his historical and cultural contexts?<sup>10</sup> How is one to evaluate literary discontinuities and continuities in ancient narrative texts? Or, how should one conceive of ancient authors' imagination and creativity? Of course, all these questions cannot be decided *more geometrico*. Nevertheless, there is still a great need for a discussion of such problems in a historically-informed way.

In order for progress to be made in Pentateuchal research in global terms, it is necessary to be both cautious and transparent in terms of methodology and basic presuppositions. And therefore, the following paper will mainly address some foundational methodological considerations and their relevance for a specific test case, the alleged P layer in Exodus.

## II. Determining the Relationship between the World of the Narrative and the World of the Narrator

When interpreting the Bible historically, and this is especially true for the Pentateuch because its stories are at least history-*like*, it is crucial to acknowledge the difference between the world of the narratives in the Bible and the world of the narrators, and to account for this difference in a methodologically controlled manner.

To illustrate this point with a non-biblical sample: In 1804, the German writer Friedrich Schiller published a play by the name “Wilhelm Tell,” who is seen as one of the founding heroes of Switzerland from in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> The world of this narrative is, accordingly, the early Middle Ages—the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The world of its author is the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of course, it is not impossible that this play about “Wilhelm Tell” reworks and includes some historically adequate memories from the 13<sup>th</sup> century—one

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<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Sommer 2011, who is albeit overstating his case.

<sup>11</sup> Schiller (1804) 1996, see the commentary on 735–850.

could perhaps argue this on the basis of a number of historical observations, but it is much more likely, and likewise much easier to demonstrate, that this play reflects foremost the time of Schiller himself, the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

To identify historical elements in such a history-like story pertaining to the world of its authors is a complicated and demanding task. It also depends considerably upon the specific nature and the genre of the narrative itself. The best results are attained when certain elements appear in the story that cannot be explained fully within its narrative plot, seeming instead to resonate with the author's own historical and cultural contexts.

If we approach the exodus story from such a perspective, then the starting point must account for this difference: The narrative of the exodus story plays out in the second half of the second millennium BCE—to be precise: in the year 2666 *anno mundi*, according to the chronology of the biblical text, which is 480 years before the dedication of the Solomonic temple (cf. 1 Kgs 6:1).<sup>12</sup> It is, however, important to keep in mind that there are also elements in the exodus story that seem to blur a specific historical location of the events—“Pharaoh” remains constantly nameless, and the 430 years of Israel's oppression in Egypt seem likely to serve as a counterpart to the 430 years of the monarchy in (Israel and) Judah rather than as a historical statement.<sup>13</sup> A possible reason for this blurred perspective might be the “mythical” quality of the events depicted.<sup>14</sup>

The world of the narrators of the exodus story is, as virtually all scholars agree, not identical with the world of the narrative. Some scholars, especially in the wake of Frank Moore Cross, view the Song of the Sea in Exod 15 as a very ancient piece of literature,<sup>15</sup> but this is probably untenable, given the textual links in Exod 15 to the preceding narrative in Exod 14 (including its Priestly portions).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For the details of the chronology, also regarding the different textual versions, see Hughes 1990.

<sup>13</sup> Schmid 2010: 19.

<sup>14</sup> See below n. 23.

<sup>15</sup> See the discussion in Russell 2007; Dozeman 2009: 336–337; Utzschneider/Oswald 2013: 339–341.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Berner 2010: 389–400, especially 395; Klein 2012, see also the discussion in Albertz 2012: 253; Utzschneider/Oswald 2013: 341.

At any rate, it is safe to say that a matter of dispute is just how distant and how different the world of the narrators is from the world of the narrative. In addition, it is probably also safe to say that there are *several* distances between the different worlds of narrators from the world of the narrative, which *vice versa* also makes the notion of the world of the narrative more complicated.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of methodology, it is very important to avoid relating the world of the narrative to the worlds of the narrators in a simplistic allegorical way, e.g. the motive of the oppression and the *corvée* labor in Egypt is *only* a projection of Neo-Assyrian practices, or the exodus from Egypt is *only* a camouflage for the exodus from Babylonia. To be sure, the assertion of these historical backgrounds is possible and to a certain extent even probable, but there are at least two additional considerations that need to be taken into account. Firstly and foremost, each literary text develops its own fictive universe, which itself includes various indispensable elements. Secondly, a foundational myth such as the exodus story is likely to have reworked a very complex set of memories and traditions.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the biblical exodus account is not just a text to be decoded through the reconstruction of experiences from another, later time. It should also be evaluated in terms of a literary text that has been shaped—I make this assertion with caution—*both* by earlier historical memories (maybe even from the world of the narrative itself) and contemporaneous influences (from the worlds of the narrators).

Given the current state of scholarship, the best initial approach to gaining an adequate historical-critical interpretation of the exodus story is to discuss and evaluate the literary layer that is the least contested, the Priestly version of the exodus story. This layer has received considerable attention in past and present scholarship. A few of the many investigations include the monograph by Peter Weimar and a more recent essay by Thomas Römer.<sup>19</sup> A new approach has recently been presented by Christoph Berner in

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<sup>17</sup> For the composite nature of the exodus account see e.g. Gertz 2000; Dozeman 2009, but also Berner 2010; Albertz 2012.

<sup>18</sup> See Schmid 2012a: 83–84, see also Hendel 2001; Bishop Moore and Kelle 2011: 77–95.

<sup>19</sup> Weimar 1973; Römer 2009, see also Utzschneider/Oswald 2013: 50–52.

his *Die Exoduserzählung: Das literarische Werden einer Ursprungserzählung Israels*.<sup>20</sup> He argues that the P texts in Exodus are not part of a source but are of a redactional nature. Jakob Wöhrle's study *Fremdlinge im eigenen Land: Zur Entstehung und Intention der priesterlichen Passagen der Vätergeschichte* seems to have a more convincing point for a comparable approach to Gen 12–50, but I will not go into that discussion here.<sup>21</sup> For my argument, the theological perspective and the alleged historical context of P in Exodus are more important than their literary nature.

### III. Narrative and Authorial Aspects of the Priestly Exodus Story

The Priestly version of the Exodus story is usually, with minor variations in detail, considered to be made up of 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\*, 18–20; 12:40–41; 14:1–4\*, 8a, 10\*, 15, 16–18a\*, 21–23\*, 26–29\*.<sup>22</sup> It includes the basic elements 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.

While this narrative is about the early history of Israel, as Norbert Lohfink and Ernst Axel Knauf in particular have pointed out,<sup>23</sup> it is less helpful to approach the Priestly Document, including its exodus story, as a historiographical work. Rather, 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

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<sup>20</sup> Berner 2010 (cf. my review in Schmid 2011c), see also Van Seters 1995: 574; Albertz 2012: 10–26.

<sup>21</sup> Wöhrle 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Following basically the delineations proposed by Gertz 2000: 394–396, cf. also Lohfink 1978/1988: 222–223 n. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Lohfink 1978/1988: 227–242 (227: “Die Rückverwandlung der Geschichte in Mythos”); Knauf 2000a.

does not write *Geschichte*, but *Urgeschichte*. The importance of this differentiation will become clear in the next section.

The following discussion will address four textual elements of P's narrative world that might open up a window into the specific historical world of its narrators.

1. The first one is the decidedly anti-Egyptian stance of the narrative and its emphasis on divine violence against the Egyptians. It appears most poignantly in Exod 14:28a, one of the final statements of the description of the crossing of the sea:<sup>24</sup>

וַיָּשׁוּבוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת-הַלְּכָב וְאֶת-הַפָּרָשִׁים לְכָל-חֵיל פְּרָעֹה הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיָּם	The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea.
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The Egyptians are buried in the sea after the Israelites have safely reached the opposite shore. The specific description of this act reveals its significance for P: The wording of Exod 14 shows clearly 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*.

This may be demonstrated first by Exod 14:22:

וַיֵּבְאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיַּבֵּשָׁה וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חֹמָה מִיְמִינָם וּמִשְׂמָאלָם	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.
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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, in the Priestly account of the creation:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים	And God said,
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<sup>24</sup> On P in Ex 14 see Levin 2013: 104–111.



יָקֻוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל-מְקוֹם אֶחָד וְתִרְאֶה הַיַּבֵּשָׁה וַיְהִי-כֵן	“Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let <i>the dry ground</i> appear.” And it was so.
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In the miracle at the Sea of Reeds something similar to the third day of creation happens: the *dry ground* can be seen. The Priestly Document apparently intends to shape the presentation of this miracle in the same mold as the creational activity of God during the very first days of creation.<sup>25</sup>

The wording of Exod 14:28a also shows a similar affiliation with God’s creational activity reported at the very beginning of world history:

וַיָּשׁוּבוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת-הַרְכָּב וְאֶת-הַפָּרָשִׁים לְכָל חֵיִל פְּרָעֹה הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיָּם	<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.
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Within the Priestly Narrative, this statement is quite similar in literary terms to the covering of the earth by the waters of the flood in Gen 7:19–20:

וְהַמַּיִם גָּבְרוּ מְאֹד מְאֹד עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּכְסּוּ כָל-הַהָרִים הַגְּבוּהִים אֲשֶׁר-תַּחַת כָּל-הַשָּׁמַיִם: חֲמִשָּׁ עֶשְׂרֵה אַמָּה מִלְּמַעְלָה גָּבְרוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ הַהָרִים:	<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

<sup>25</sup> See Schmid 2011b: 280.

to the eradication of the sinful creatures during the flood. Erasing the Egyptian army is thus another element of the establishment God's creational world order. These observations shows why P is more *Urgeschichte* than *Geschichte*.

Why is the destruction of Egypt's military power noteworthy? Outside of this episode, P projects a very peaceful view of the world. The flood story of Gen 6–9 seems to be an obvious exception, but even here, P actually criticizes the notion of divine violence. In Gen 6, P takes up the judgment prophecies of Amos 8 and Ezek 7 and in fact argues that while there was once a divine proclamation concerning a divine destruction of the world, this event took place in the primordial age of the world history and was been settled once and for all in Gen 9.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, within this overall peaceful worldview of P, the case of Egypt, especially the destruction of *Egypt's military power* at the crossing of the sea, is quite a striking exception.<sup>27</sup>

It even seems that P makes a distinction between Egypt's military and Egypt's "civilian population," as for instance also P's reinterpretation of the plagues against Egypt as a contest of magicians suggests.<sup>28</sup> It seems to have been influenced to some extent by P's notion of a peaceful world. P's "plague" account includes five miracles (I 7:8–13\*: staff to snake, II 7:19, 20a\*, 21b, 22\*: Nile water to blood, III 8:1–3, 11\*: frogs, IV 8:12–15\*: lice, V 9:8–12: boils) that are arranged in a climax: the Egyptian magicians are able to repeat the first three miracles, they are unsuccessful regarding the fourth and have to acknowledge the power of the God, and finally, they are afflicted by the fifth miracle, the boils, and have to give in.<sup>29</sup> The damaging impact of the plagues of Egypt is very limited in P. A look at the blood episode in Exod 7:19.20a\*, 21b, 22\* (P)<sup>30</sup> is instructive in this respect:

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Schmid 2012a: 166–167.

<sup>27</sup> Berner 2010: 375–382 assumes a complicated literary process for the depiction of the Egyptian army in Exod 14.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Van Seters 1995; Römer 2003. For the delimitation of P in the plague cycle see Gertz 2000: 79–97.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Gertz 2000: 82.

<sup>30</sup> See n. 22.

<p> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה  אָמַר אֶל-אַהֲרֹן  קַח מִטֵּבַת וּנְטֵה-יָדְךָ  עַל-מֵי־מִצְרַיִם עַל-נְהַרְתָּם  עַל-יְאֹרֵיהֶם  וְעַל-אֲגַמֵּיהֶם  וְעַל כָּל-מִקְוֵה מִימֵיהֶם  וַיְהִי-וַדָּם  וְהָיָה דָם בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ  מִצְרַיִם  וּבַעֲצִים וּבְאֲבָנִים:  וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-כֵן מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן  כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה  וַיְהִי הַדָּם  בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:  וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-כֵן  חֲרֹטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם בְּלִטְיָהֶם  וַיִּחַזַּק לֵב-פַּרְעֹה  וְלֹא-שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם  כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: </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 “plague,” unlike its non-Priestly counterpart, no one suffers.<sup>31</sup> All water in Egypt is turned into blood by Moses and Aaron, and there is an implicit assumption that after they had performed this miracle, the blood immediately turned back into water. Otherwise the Egyptian magicians would not have been able to repeat the miracle. Thus

<sup>31</sup> Such an interpretation implies, of course, the original independence of the P source, *contra* e.g. Van Seters 1995: 574. Blum 1990: 250–252 acknowledges the self-contained character of the Priestly plagues within the framework his contextual interpretation of the Priestly plague cycle and he assumes that P has reworked a pre-existing tradition.

the event apparently lasted only for a very short time – and it was a miracle, not a plague.<sup>32</sup>

Be this as it may: P envisions wide-reaching political, cultural, and religious peace for the whole known ancient world, for everyone except for Egypt. Why?

It is difficult to see a sufficient basis for this motivation solely within the narrative world of P's exodus account. P is ultimately interested in the establishment of the sanctuary. The destruction of Egypt at the crossing of the sea is not really necessary for such a narrative development. Of course, it may have been a given for P's authors from the exodus traditions they knew, but the specific interest in divine violence against Egypt remains noteworthy.

Albert de Pury suggested that the violence towards Egypt might have arisen in response to the specific constellation of the world of P's authors in the early Persian period.<sup>33</sup> Of course, there is considerable debate over the possible date of P. Scholars often argue for a Neo-Babylonian or, as de Pury, an early Persian origin, but especially in Israel it is common to view P as a pre-exilic text, a conclusion also shared by American scholars like Richard Friedman.<sup>34</sup> Others, like William Propp, seem to allow for some fluidity and interpret P as the result of a process which began in the pre-exilic period and extended into the Persian period.<sup>35</sup>

In my opinion, the basic arguments regarding the date of P by Julius Wellhausen seem still valid today: P presupposes the cult centralization of Deuteronomy, which can be dated to the Josianic period, and the classical prophets do not presuppose the legislation of P.<sup>36</sup> There is, however, also some need to point out a specific shortcoming in

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<sup>32</sup> Even the subsequent slaying of the firstborn is presented in a very reduced manner (as an announcement in two verses in Exod 12:12–13, embedded in an elaborated Pessach account); the execution is not reported within P (Gertz 2000: 394–396).

<sup>33</sup> de Pury 2007/2010.

<sup>34</sup> Friedman 1987: 161–216, see also Hurvitz 1988: 88–100; idem 2000.

<sup>35</sup> Propp 1999: 730–732.

<sup>36</sup> Wellhausen 1886: 385–445.

Wellhausen's understanding. His arguments were overly focused on the internal intellectual developments in ancient Israel and Judah. Especially in the last several decades studies have shown that ancient Israel and Judah's intellectual history is heavily influenced by the imperial ideologies of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and sometimes even the Greeks. P, for example, seems to respond to basic conceptions from the Persian worldview and political theology, chief among them being the peaceful, well-ordered organization of the world according to different nations, all of which dwell in their lands with their own language and culture. This is, for instance, reflected in P's share in the Table of Nations in Gen 10:<sup>37</sup>

בְּנֵי יַפֶּת [...] בְּאַרְצֵיהֶם אִישׁ לְלִשְׁוֹנוֹ לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם בְּגוֹיֵיהֶם:

Gen 10:2,5: The sons of Japheth [...] in their lands, with their own language, by their families, by their nations.

אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי-חָם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְלִשְׁוֹנָם בְּאַרְצֵיהֶם בְּגוֹיֵיהֶם:

Gen 10:20: These are the sons of Ham, by their families, by their languages, in their lands, and by their nations.

אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי-שֵׁם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְלִשְׁוֹנָם בְּאַרְצֵיהֶם לְגוֹיֵיהֶם:

Gen 10:31: 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 the basic idea of Genesis 10 is found in Persian imperial ideology, as attested, e.g., in the Behistun inscription, which was disseminated widely throughout the Persian Empire.<sup>38</sup>

According to its political ideology, the Persian Empire was structured according to the different nations. The imperial inscriptions declare that every nation belongs to their specific region and has their specific cultural identities. This structure is the result of the will of the creator deity, as Klaus Koch has pointed out in his "Reichsidee und

<sup>37</sup> See Vink 1969: 61; Knauf 2000b: 104–105; Nihan 2007: 383, see also Vermeylen 1992. Levin 1993: 124 takes a different stance.

<sup>38</sup> Schmitt 1991; idem 2009; Greenfield and Porten 1982.

Reichsorganisation im Perserreich,” where he identifies this structure as “Nationalitätenstaat als Schöpfungsgegebenheit.”<sup>39</sup>

The picture of Egypt in P, as a nation needing to be tamed in an otherwise well-organized and disciplined world, might suggest that P predates 525 BCE, the date of the Persian conquest of Egypt by Cambyses.<sup>40</sup> P seems to reflect the peaceful world order of the Persian Empire at a point in time that it includes the whole ancient world—except for Egypt. This constellation in the world of P’s authors might also explain why the divine violence against Egypt seems to be directed more towards its army than towards its population. This differentiation seems to play a role in Exod 14:4: “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory (כבוד ni.) for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am YHWH.” The “Egyptians” in this verse probably do not refer to “Pharaoh and all his army” because they are facing their imminent destruction. It is not them who need to know “that I am YHWH.” Rather, the remaining Egyptians shall learn from the death of their king and the destruction their army “that I am YHWH.”<sup>41</sup>

2. There is, secondly, another striking element in P that pertains to the depiction of Egyptian religion in P. In Exod 12:12b, God tells Moses:

<p>וּבְכָל-אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרָיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׁפָטִים אֲנִי יְהוָה:</p>	<p>On all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am YHWH.</p>
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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,<sup>42</sup> propagating a sophisticated version of inclusive monotheism that reflects the empirical

<sup>39</sup> Frei and Koch 1996: 201.

<sup>40</sup> Von Beckerath 2002; Briant 2002: 50–55; Cruz-Urbe 2003.

<sup>41</sup> The redactional verse 14:25 (see Krüger 1996: 532, see also n. 43 below) then interprets the Egyptians as the Egyptian soldiers who recognize, just before their death, that it is YHWH himself who fights against them.

<sup>42</sup> See Schmid 2011b: 278–289.

diversity of different religions in the world that are, however, all transparent guideposts pointing to the one creator deity that is ultimately presented in the narrative flow of P as YHWH.

William Propp has drawn attention to the fact that Exod 12:12 is formulated as *yiqtol*: “I will punish.”<sup>43</sup> This precludes the possibility that Exod 12:12 is referring to the earlier humiliation of the Egyptian gods in the plague cycle that has already taken place.

Exodus 12:12 is apparently a narrative element that is not fully integrated into the world of the narrative, but again provides a window into the world of the narrator.<sup>44</sup>

3. The introduction of the theme of the **כבוד יהוה** in P, thirdly, is remarkable. From Exod 16 on, the **כבוד יהוה** is the most prominent mode of God’s revelation. The concept, however, does not seem to be properly introduced within the narrative. But Exod 14:17–18 uses **כבוד** ni. in order to describe the details of the destruction of the Egyptian army in the sea. Specifically highlighted are the chariots and the horsemen. God’s victory over the Egyptians apparently establishes his **כבוד** in P’s eyes.<sup>45</sup> This results in Exod 16 being able to expect that the **כבוד יהוה** is a concept that the audience understands.<sup>46</sup>

4. Finally, P’s introduction to the figure of Moses in its Exodus account also seems to have been influenced by the world of the author, especially when compared with the earlier tradition in Exod 2.

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<sup>43</sup> Propp 1999: 400.

<sup>44</sup> It might be possible to relate these “judgements” 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 Davies 1990, especially 162–164. It is noteworthy that, according to P, the Israelites are commanded to head back (*šwb*) to “Ba’al Zaphon” in order that the miracle can take place, see Krüger 1996: 521f. The miracle in P is mainly a demonstration of God’s power, not necessary for the deliverance of the Israelites.

<sup>45</sup> See Wagner 2012: 68–72. Utzschneider/Oswald 2013: 320 also highlight the use of **כבודת** in Exod 14:25.

<sup>46</sup> See also Struppe 1988: 139–143.

Within the P narrative, Moses’s appearance shows up somewhat surprisingly in the report of his commissioning in Egypt, in Exod 6:2–8. He is more properly introduced by the presentation of his ancestry in Exod 6:16–20, especially in Exod 6:20:

<p>וַיִּקַּח עַמְרָם אֶת־יֹכְבֵד דֹּדְתּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד לּוֹ אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־מֹשֶׁה וּשְׁנֵי חַיֵּי עַמְרָם שָׁבַע וּשְׁלֹשִׁים וּמָאתַיִם וְשִׁבְעִים וְשָׁנָה:</p>	<p>And Amram took Jochebed, his aunt, for him as a wife and she bore him Aaron and Moses, and the years of Amram's life were one hundred thirty-seven years.</p>
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Three elements are striking in this introduction. Firstly, we are told that Moses’ father married his aunt. Secondly, Moses has an older brother, Aaron. Thirdly, we do not hear a word about Moses’ miraculous deliverance while a baby, which appears in the non-Priestly account in Exod 2.

The third point is especially noteworthy because we can assume quite safely that Exod 6:20 is acquainted with and reworks Exod 2,<sup>47</sup> given the somewhat difficult relationship between Moses’ parents in terms of their kinship (which according to Lev 18:12; 20:19 is illegitimate). This can be explained best by taking into account the introduction of Moses’ birth story in Exod 2:1. There Moses’ origins are depicted as follows:

<p>וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת־בַּת־לֵוִי:</p>	<p>And a man from the house of Levi went and took the daughter of Levi.</p>
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This verse poses many problems that I cannot deal with here, but it seems clear that Exod 6:20 interpretes the description of Moses’ father in Exod 2 (“a man from the house of Levi”) as someone who is at least a grandson of Levi, whereas Moses’ mother (“the daughter of Levi”) seems to be a direct daughter of Levi, therefore making Moses’ parents thus nephew and aunt.

<sup>47</sup> For Exod 2 as the original beginning of the exodus story, see Otto 2000; Carr 2001; Schmid 2010.



If we can reasonably assume that Exod 6:20 is acquainted with and reworks Exod 2:1, then it is possible to go a step further in comparing the texts. They are quite similar to each other, but Exod 6:20 introduces several changes. The most important are the following: 1. Moses' parents bear names (Amram and Jochebed). 2. Their kinship is explicitly defined as nephew and aunt, 3. They are explicitly married (In Exod 2 Moses' nameless father "took" the daughter of Levi, but Amram "took" Jochebed "for himself as a wife"). 4. Moses has an elder brother, Aaron. And 5., most importantly, Exod 6 is completely silent about Moses' miraculous deliverance.

Regarding a possible window into the world of the author, especially points 4. and 5. are remarkable.

The introduction of Aaron as *elder* brother in Exod 6, a fact that deprives Moses of the claim to being the firstborn son as suggested in Exod 2, is probably to be interpreted in line with P's general tendency to eliminate any connotations of Moses as an exceptional hero with extraordinary powers. P has a decidedly theocentric view of history, and Moses' task in the exodus is simply *to announce* what *God* will do to Israel, as Exod 6:6 clearly states:

לָכֵן אָמַר לְבְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי יְהוָה וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלַת מִצְרַיִם וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעֲבָדָתָם וְגָאֵלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים:	Therefore say to the Israelites: I am YHWH, and I will lead you out from the labor of the Egyptians and I will deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.
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It is not Moses, but God who leads Israel out of Egypt. Furthermore, the goal of the exodus is not the conquest of the land, but the dwelling of God amidst his people, cf. Exod 29:46.

וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם	And they shall know that I am YHWH their God,
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אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְשֹׁכְנֵי בְתוֹכָם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם:	who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am YHWH their God.
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P depicts Moses as merely an agent of God whose prime task is to establish the sanctuary. This is possibly also the way the Priestly authors perceived the Persian kings of their time: They too are commissioned by God, and their task is to rebuild the temple. The ideal king, according to P, is only portrayed in terms of what he is not: He is the *opposite* of the Pharaoh of the exodus, who does not listen to Israel's God and hardens his heart.

It is quite apparent that P's Pharaoh is shaped as something of an "Anti-Cyrus," in Isa 45:3:<sup>48</sup>

Isa 45:3:

וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ אוֹצְרוֹת חֹשֶׁךְ וּמְטֹמְנֵי מְסֻתָּיִם לְמַעַן תֵּדַע כִּי-אֲנִי יְהוָה הַקּוֹרֵא בְשִׁמְךָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:	And I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that <i>you may know</i> that it is I, YHWH, who call you by your name, the God of Israel.
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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Kratz 1991: 104 n. 388; see for Isa 45 also Leuenberger 2010. The most fitting counterpart for Isa 45:3 is Exod 5:2:

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה מִי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר אֶשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלוֹ לְשַׁלַּח אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֶת-יְהוָה וְגַם אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אֶשְׁלַח:	But Pharaoh said, Who is YHWH, that I should listen to his voice and let Israel go? I do not know YHWH, and I will not let Israel go.
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However, the literary-history location and affiliation of this verse are unclear (see e.g. Gertz 2000: 335–339). At any rate, it does not seem to be part of P.

This apolitical function for Moses in P is further accentuated by the omission of his birth account.<sup>49</sup> It has often been noted that Exod 2 is an adaptation of the Sargon legend which, as has especially been pointed out in more recent scholarship, is subversively reworked by Exod 2. Not the Assyrian king, but Moses is the one chosen by God to be a mighty leader of his people. The Neo-Assyrian background and the anti-imperial stance is elided from P's account of the Moses story. Moses, according to P, is the voice of God, and his task is to inform Israel about God's actions and to establish the sanctuary. He even has an elder brother, Aaron, who is to be the ancestor of the sanctuary's priests.

Dating P in the early Persian period, however, is often contested by way of the argument about its linguistic dating. Especially in Israel and North America, but less so in Europe, the fact that P is written in Classical Biblical Hebrew is viewed as support for a pre-exilic date: Classical Biblical Hebrew belongs, according to the epigraphical evidence of the basic referential corpus, to the 8<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. Therefore, P is to be dated to this period as well.<sup>50</sup> From my perspective, the debate about the conclusiveness of this historical linguistic argument is only about to begin. There is no room to deal with this issue here, but I would like to mention my main reservations. Firstly, the fact that a text is written in Classical Biblical Hebrew (CBH) and not in Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) informs us primarily about its theological perspective within the biblical tradition, and not, at least not directly, about its historical date. Secondly, there is a significant gap in the external, non-biblical control corpora for Hebrew from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BCE: There are many inscriptions from that period, but they are in Aramaic rather than Hebrew. Whether that in itself is a telling fact is contested. At any rate, we are not able to define a clear *terminus ante quem* for CBH from the external evidence. Thirdly, there is a basic asymmetry between the methods used by linguists to date CBH and LBH texts. Biblical texts written in CBH belong to 8<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century because the external evidence dates to that period. The external evidence for LBH is mainly found in the texts from the Dead Sea from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, but the biblical texts and books written in LBH, like Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel and

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<sup>49</sup> Rendsburg 2006.

<sup>50</sup> See above n. 34. A good overview on the overall debate is provided by the contributions in Young 2003; Miller-Naudé and Zevit 2012.

Esther, are dated much earlier because they are, at least in parts, obviously older than the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> century. The arguments regarding LBH show at minimum that a multitude of arguments need to be taken in account when dating biblical texts, and the external evidence is but one of them. Neither is it a deal breaker.

#### IV. Conclusions

Whether P's exodus account is a Persian period text or not, is and will probably remain a topic of debate. To be sure, I do not preclude the possibility that P has reworked earlier material, especially in its legal section – rather, this is a quite probable assumption.<sup>51</sup> But, any rate, there is no other method than carefully distinguishing between the world of the narrative and the world of the author for evaluating biblical texts in historical terms. Only in this way can we take steps forward in global Pentateuchal research and link it with other historical disciplines.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. e.g. Nihan 2007: 608–619.

<sup>52</sup> See also Bishop Moore and Kelle: 2011.

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