

Abhandlungen zur Theologie
des Alten und Neuen Testaments

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Erhard Blum, Christine Gerber, Shimon Gesundheit,
Matthias Konradt, Konrad Schmid, Jens Schröter,
Samuel Vollenweider

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The Strata of the Priestly Writings

Contemporary Debate and Future Directions

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The Exodus Narrative According to the Priestly Document

Thomas Römer

University of Lausanne, Switzerland
Collège de France

1. The current debate about the Priestly texts of the Pentateuch

Teachers convinced of the importance of introducing their students to the question of the formation of the Torah in a historical-critical perspective today find themselves confronted with a very uncomfortable situation. The current debate makes it almost impossible to present a consensus on the question without coming across as somewhat demagogic. And it is quite understandable that some beginners in biblical studies get the impression that “anything goes,” that all theories can be defended, and that any quest for a new consensus about the formation of the Pentateuch ultimately becomes a losing proposition. In my view, this state of affairs is dangerous. While this may have become an acceptable option in a post-modern context, it poses a real threat to ongoing historical research on the Hebrew Bible, which is nowadays more necessary than ever. There are, to be sure, some points that approach a consensus in critical scholarship. We find general agreement that the Persian period constituted the decisive period of the formation of the Pentateuch, notwithstanding the likelihood that older traditions came to be integrated at that moment. It could also be said that substantial agreement exists regarding the fact that the Pentateuch should be understood as a compromise document, negotiated in the main between the two major ideological trends¹ that would come to give Judaism its profile beginning in the Persian period, namely, the priestly (“P”) and lay-scribal, deuteronomist (“D”) or Yahwistic (“J”) trends. For all that, agreement on the question decreases if all the non-priestly and pre-priestly texts come to be reduced to one “author” or group, or if one envisages a variety of non-priestly texts. This discussion will not be taken up in this paper, however.² It indicates nonetheless that the existence of

¹ The word “trend” should not be understood as meaning a vast, popular movement. The Pentateuch was edited by a very few elites, who knew each other and met in Jerusalem (and Babylon?).

² For an overview of the current discussion see RÖMER, Hauptprobleme, 289–307.

“Priestly texts” in the Pentateuch is probably with very few exceptions³ the most stable theory of pentateuchal research since Graf and Wellhausen. It therefore seems a good idea to focus our attention on the agreement between scholars who support very different theories about the formation of the Torah. It should be mentioned, however, that the apparent consensus on P includes quite different views on the date, nature, and scope of the Priestly document.

Most scholars would agree to locate P either at the end of the so-called exilic (better: Babylonian) period, though some scholars from Jewish backgrounds prefer a pre-exilic date for the P texts. It seems to me that this view is difficult to maintain for the narrative P texts (as we will see). This does not, however, exclude the possibility that some material in the first part of Leviticus could reflect the rituals from the era of the First Temple.

Another question presently being debated is whether P was originally written as an independent document, a view held by the majority of scholars, or whether P was a work of redaction from the very start that was intended to supplement the older J material (Cross, Rendtorff, Van Seters⁴). It must be admitted, though, that we have yet to reconstruct an entirely coherent P document. Problems arise, for instance, in the Jacob story, where the P material capable of reconstruction lacks the story of Jacob’s sojourn in Laban’s territory, as well as his marriages with Laban’s daughters. It has often been observed that the P texts of the exodus story contain no introduction of Moses; he appears in Exod 6,2 without any presentation. On the other hand, the P text in Exod 6,2ff appears to be a fitting continuation of Exod 2,23aβ–25, whereas the link between this text and Exod 3,1ff is odd.⁵ Moreover, the revelation of God’s authentic name in Exod 6,2ff for the first time in Israel’s history makes absolutely no sense in the event that this text was conceived as a supplement to the non-priestly texts in Genesis 1–Exodus 5, where Yhwh’s name had already been revealed.⁶ It is also quite easy to reconstruct an independent P text for the so-called plague narratives, as well as for the parting of the sea. E. Blum has suggested that the alternative between an independent document and a redaction may not apply since some P texts could have been composed as independent narratives (or collections), whereas other P texts could have been conceived from the very beginning as revisions of older, non-priestly

³ FISCHER, Lage, 608–16; IDEM, Wege, 93–106.

⁴ CROSS, Myth; VAN SETERS, Abraham; RENDTORFF, Problem.

⁵ One should probably understand the *wyd*’ in 2,25 as a niph. (following LXX): “God revealed himself, and God spoke to Moses ...”; see for further details RÖMER, Exodus, 68–69.

texts.⁷ Since the beginnings of the documentary hypothesis, it had been difficult to reconstruct a coherent P document in the narrative texts following the exodus story. This brings us to our next point, namely, the question of the endpoint of the first priestly document, the so-called “Grundschrift,” Pg.

A majority of scholars still follow M. Noth’s view that Pg ended with the death of Moses in Deut 34,1*7–9.⁸ Since Noth considered P as comprising all the major themes of the Pentateuch, it appeared quite logical that Pg would end with the death of Moses.⁹ But in 1988 Lothar Perlitt demonstrated that the vocabulary of these verses is not typical of P, but rather betrays a late style that mixes deuteronomistic and priestly elements.¹⁰ On another front, one may also ask whether the installation of Joshua as Moses’ successor in 34,8–9 constitutes an appropriate conclusion of a work; rather than concluding a story, these verses serve to introduce the Joshua and conquest narratives. An obvious question presents itself: if Deuteronomy 34 does not contain the ending of Pg, where might it be discovered? Some scholars have opted to return to Wellhausen in hopes of including parts of the book of Joshua in the original P account. According to this view, the end of Pg is to be found in Josh 18,1 or Josh 19,51.¹¹ The statement in Josh 18,1: “The whole congregation of the Israelites assembled at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting there. The land (*’eretz*) lay subdued before them” looks at first sight to be a fitting inclusion together with God’s blessings and order in Gen 1,28: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth (*’eretz*) and subdue it.” But Gen 1,28 is addressed to humanity in general, whereas Josh 18,1 applies specifically to Israel. Even in P’s conception, Gen 1,28 applies to the “perfect creation” in which man is originally a vegetarian; it is significant that the “new deal” between God and mankind after the Flood no longer contains the command to subdue the earth.¹² If neither the end of Deuteronomy nor the end of Joshua offers an appropriate conclusion to Pg, and since the book of Numbers does not commend itself as a serious candidate for the conclusion of Pg,¹³ the only

⁷ BLUM, Studien, 229–85.

⁸ NOTH, Überlieferungsgeschichte.

⁹ See SCHMIDT, Studien, and recently FREVEL, Blick.

¹⁰ PERLITT, Priesterschrift.

¹¹ BLENKINSOPP, Pentateuch, 237; KNAUF, Priesterschrift.

¹² Interestingly Gen 9,1 repeats: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” But there is no more mention of the idea of subduing the earth.

¹³ Recent works have argued that the so-called P texts in Numbers certainly do not belong to Pg; see for instance ACHENBACH, Vollendung; OTTO, Deuteronomium; NIHAN, Ecrit, 196–212. Some scholars consider Num 27,12–14 as a possible ending for Pg (SKA, Introduction; GARCÍA LÓPEZ, Pentateuque), but again, these

remaining possibility is that the original ending of P be found instead within the priestly account of Israel's sojourn at Mt Sinai. In fact the Sinai pericope has often been recognized as the very center and purpose of the priestly narrative.¹⁴ This suggestion¹⁵ has been adopted in recent years by a growing number of scholars, even if there is no agreement on the identification of the precise conclusion of Pg. Thomas Pola and others hold that Exod 40,33b or 40,34 constitute(s) the conclusion of Pg: "So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tent of the meeting and the glory of Yhwh filled the Tabernacle."¹⁶ As often observed, the conclusion of the building account of the Tabernacle in Exodus 39–40 contains several parallels with the priestly creation account in Gen 1,1–2,3,¹⁷ and could be considered as an *inclusio* around the whole priestly narrative. An ending of P in Exodus 40 also finds possible support in a motif from Near Eastern mythology (especially Enuma Elish), where the creator god is enthroned in his sanctuary as king over his creation after his victory over a sea monster, who represents chaos.¹⁸ Genesis 1, Exodus 14, and Exodus 35–40* could therefore be understood as a triptych: creation, victory over the sea, and establishment of the creator god's sanctuary. But since according to P the sanctuary is built in order to provide a place for the sacrificial cult, it seems quite logical that its institution in the first chapters of Leviticus should be considered as an integral part of the original P document. One could argue that Pg ended either in Leviticus 9 with the consecration of the priests and the first sacrifices, followed by the appearance of Yhwh's glory to the whole people (Zenger¹⁹), or in Leviticus 16, where Aaron is allowed to enter the *adytum* and where Yhwh's encounter with Israel has become a permanent feature in the cultic acts of purification and sacrifices (Köckert, Nihan²⁰). For our purposes, a decision as to whether Leviticus 9 or 16 should be considered as Pg's original conclusion is of relatively minor im-

layer" with a hexateuchal perspective, do not conclude but prepare (at least) the story of Moses' death.

¹⁴ See for instance NOTH, *History*, 8.

¹⁵ See AURELIUS, *Fürbitter*, 187.

¹⁶ POLA, *Priesterschrift*: 40,33b; BAUKS, *Complexité*; IDEM, *Signification*; KRATZ, *Komposition*, 105: 40,34; see also AULD, *Leviticus*. A more radical solution is advocated by E. Otto, who argues that P's original conclusion was Exodus 29*; see OTTO, *Forschungen*.

¹⁷ BLENKINSOPP, *Structure*; BLUM, *Studien*, 306–7; BAUMGART, *Umkehr*, 503–6.

¹⁸ WEINFELD, *Sabbath*. As pointed out by Christophe Nihan, in Enuma Elish the sanctuary for Marduk is completed one year after his victory over Tiamat; in Exod 40,17 Yhwh's sanctuary is completed one year after Yhwh's victory over Pharaoh and the Sea in Exodus 14; see NIHAN, *Torah*, 74.

¹⁹ ZENGER, *Priesterschrift*.

²⁰ KÖCKERT, *Leben*; NIHAN, *Torah*.

portance. What matters instead is the fact that, according to the current debate, Pg did not span the entire scope of pentateuchal themes; it ended indeed at Sinai with the establishment of Israel's sacrificial cult. If one adopts this view, the priestly account of the exodus functions in the original P document as a kind of "mortar" that holds together the creation story, the ancestors, and the establishment of Israel's cult. In the following I would like to comment on three major aspects of the priestly exodus story: the call of Moses in Exodus 6 and P's "inclusive" monotheism; the priestly account of the "plagues" and P's presentation of Moses and Aaron as "magicians"; and, finally, the priestly narrative about the miracle at the sea and P's "mythologization" of Israel's origins.

2. The call of Moses, the revelation of the divine name and P's "inclusive" monotheism

The Priestly account of "Moses' call" in Exod 6,2–8 offers an alternative view of the exodus and related issues compared to Exodus 3. The scene has the following structure:²¹

v. 2	אני יהוה	
v. 3		Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
v. 4		לתת להם את ארץ כנען
v. 5		נאקת בני ישראל אשר מצרים מעבדים אתם
v. 6	אני יהוה	והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלת מצרים וגאלתי אתכם
v. 7		ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם והייתי לכם לאלהים
	אני יהוה	המוציא אתכם מתחת סבלת מצרים
v. 8		והבאתי אתכם אל הארץ Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
	אני יהוה	

The declaration "I am Yhwh," appearing four times and functioning as the dominant formula in the divine speech to Moses, clearly serves as the main theme of the scene; the promise of the exodus is framed by two references to the ancestors and the gift of the land to them and the present generation. Finally, Yhwh's intervention for Israel is described by three verbs:

²¹ For a partially different proposal see MAGONET, *Rhetoric*.

ga'al, laqach, hayah. The priestly “call of Moses,”²² who, in contrast to Exodus 3, is not at all depicted as a prophet, but as the addressee of God’s self-presentation and mediator between God and Israel, focuses on three major items: the divine name, the reference to the ancestors, and the exodus and gift of the land.

2.1. The revelation of the divine name

Intriguingly, God’s revelation to Moses in Exodus 6 is situated in Egypt, as opposed to Exodus 3, where the divine name is revealed to Moses at the “mountain of God.” This aspect of the divine revelation in Egypt in Exodus 6 parallels Ezekiel 20 (v. 5: “I made myself known to them [*yd'*, *niphal*] in the land of Egypt”; cf. Exod 2,25 and 6,3 where the same root occurs). According to the priestly tradition, God disclosed his true name in Egypt, something ostensibly unacceptable to the deuteronomistic tradition. For the authors of Pg and of Ezekiel 20, the story of the exodus also and above all remains the story of the revelation of the divine name. The divine speech to Moses is, according to Pg, the last step in the history of God’s revelation to mankind and then specifically to Moses and to Israel: “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shadday but by my name Yhwh I did not make myself known to them” (Exod 6,3). By this reference to Gen 17,1 (“... Yhwh²³ appeared to Abraham and said to him: I am El Shadday ...”), the author of Pg constructs three phases of divine disclosure: in the primeval history, God is known to all humans as “Elohim,” for Abraham and his descendants he is “El Shadday,”²⁴ and only to Moses and Israel in Egypt is vouchsafed God’s personal name, Yhwh. This means that Israel’s singular privilege is the knowledge of the divine name and through this privilege Israel becomes the only nation capable of worshiping God by means of an adequate sacrificial cult. On the other hand, however, Pg advocates – contrary to the Deuteronomists – an inclusive monotheism: all people of the earth venerate the same god, irrespective of whether they address him as Elohim, El, or El Shadday. For P, there is no need to struggle against the worship of other gods, since these gods represent only partial manifestations of Yhwh. This kind of theology, moreover, seems

²² According to SKA, Place, this pericope is not a call story but stands alongside the so-called “Disputationsworte” of the book of Ezekiel.

²³ Some commentators have thought that the name Yhwh in Gen 17,1 does not fit with P’s theory of the divine revelation. But this is not true: The tetragram is used by the narrator in order to inform the reader about the identity of El Shadday. In the narrative, Abraham does not get any information about this.

²⁴ KNAUF, Shadday.

quite compatible with the Persian worldview of a sole, supreme God presiding over all the nations of the Empire. The “inclusive monotheism” expressed in Exodus 6 favors a date for Pg during the beginning of the Persian era.

2.2. The reference to the ancestors

Exodus 6 provides a literary link to the ancestral narratives. In so doing, Pg may be the first author to bring together, in one document, the ancestral traditions and the exodus narrative, thought by several scholars (Schmid, Otto, Blum²⁵) to have been originally independent and competing traditions. According to this view, Pg created a new story of Israel’s origins in which the ancestors appear as a “prologue” to the exodus story. But in fact they are more. If one looks at Exodus 6, it appears that God’s covenant with the ancestors constitutes the real reason for Yhwh’s deciding to bring Israel out of Egypt (vv. 5–6: “I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the Israelites, ‘I am Yhwh and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians’”; see 2,24: “God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”). In contrast to the original story of Exodus 3, where God announces the exodus and the entry into the land without any mention of the ancestors (all the references to the ancestors in Exodus 3 belong to one of the last redactions of the Pentateuch²⁶), the ancestors appear in Exodus 6 to serve as the motivation for the whole exodus event. This does not necessarily mean a “devaluation” of the Moses tradition,²⁷ but rather brings to the fore the priestly commitment to securing the ancestors an important place in the construction of Israel’s origins. The link with the patriarchs also appears in Exod 6,7, where the covenant formula “I will be your God” takes up God’s promise to Abraham in Gen 17,7: “I will establish my covenant ... to be God to you and to your offspring after you.” In the priestly narrative, Gen 17,7 and Exod 6,7 serve a preparatory function for Exod 29,45–46: “I will be their God. And they shall know that I am Yhwh their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I may dwell among them.”²⁸ The deliverance of Israel is due to

²⁵ SCHMID, *Erzväter*; OTTO, *Deuteronomium*; GERTZ, *Stellung*; BLUM, *Verbindung*; see also, more hesitatingly, CARR, *Genesis*; IDEM, *Connections*.

²⁶ Exod 4,1–17 is clearly a post-priestly supplement to Exodus 3*. In Exodus 3*, none of the references to the patriarchs belong to the original narrative. For more details see GERTZ, *Tradition*; RÖMER, *Exodus*.

²⁷ As argued by LOHFINK, *Abwertung*.

²⁸ For the relation between the three passages see SCHMIDT, *Exodus*, 276–78; NIHAN, *Torah*, 83.

Yhwh's covenant with Abraham (which for P applies to the three patriarchs), but the purpose of the exodus is not simply to free Israel from its *corvée*; it sets up God's very advent and intention to dwell among the nation he has chosen for himself. This observation fosters the idea that the original priestly account finds its resolution in Yhwh's dwelling on Mt Sinai. What remains, we now ask, of the significance of the land for P?

2.3. Exodus and the land

J.-L. Ska has observed that the exodus in 6,2–8 is described with terms that evoke the semantic field of the family:²⁹ God appears as Israel's *go'el*, his parent, who "takes" (*laqach*) it to become part of his family. This family-like description of the exodus event is also more related to the ancestral tradition than to the deuteronomistic theology for which the exodus is the beginning of the military conquest of the land. For the priestly view of the exodus, the possession of the land carries another significance. In Exodus 6, the theme of the land is mentioned twice. In v. 4, the land that Yahweh gave to the ancestors is called *'eretz m'gurehem*, the land in which they resided as aliens, a priestly expression that occurs also in Gen 17,8 and 28,4. This does not mean that later generations would have a relationship to the land different from that of the ancestors; according to P, all Israelites are "resident aliens" on the land that is given to them as *'achuzah*, which means that although Yhwh gives the Israelites the usufruct of the land, it remains God's exclusive possession.³⁰ P's conception of the land comes close to the idea expressed in the Holiness Code: "the land is mine; with me you are but aliens (*gerim*) and tenants" (Lev 25,33). One may therefore conclude that the gift of the land after the exodus is basically the same as the gift of the land to the ancestors.³¹ One may even go further and argue that for P it makes little difference whether Israel is living in the land or in "exile," since it effects no change in its *ger* [Israel is a singular noun] status. This view seems nevertheless to be contradicted by Exod 6,8, which states that Yhwh will give the land as *morasha*, a possession. This is the only case in which P employs this expression, and several scholars consider the verse to be a late interpolation,³² since it is considered to be at odds with P's ideology. But there are no literary-critical reasons that would support this hypothesis. The use of *morasha* as well as the expression *nasa'*

²⁹ SKA, Place.

³⁰ On this, see KÖCKERT, Land; BAUKS, Begriffe.

³¹ NIHAN, Torah, 85.

³² KOHATA, Jahwist, 31–34; GOSSE, Exode; OTTO, Forschungen, 10 n. 45. who

yad is probably taken over from the book of Ezekiel.³³ In Ezek 33,24 the expression *morasha* is used with reference to Abraham by the non-deported population in order to claim their right to the land; the Golah-oriented author of Ezek 33,23–29 rejects this view. Since P integrates Abraham and the ancestors into the narrative about Israel's origins, he probably reinterpreted this claim in a positive sense to show that, through Abraham and the ancestors, all Israelites, both those who are in exile and those who are in the land, come to be entitled to the land. For P, however, this possession does not alter the *b'nei yisrael's* status as *gerim*, as is shown through the parallel that exists between vv. 4 and 8 of Exodus 6.

As demonstrated above, the overwhelming topic of Exod 6,2–8 remains the revelation of the (personal) identity of Israel's God. In the so-called priestly plague stories this revelation comes to be applied to an Egyptian context.

3. The Priestly view of Egypt in the so-called "plague stories"

With respect to the plague stories in Exodus 7–12, there exists a certain consensus among exegetes when distinguishing priestly (P) and non-priestly texts that show affinity with the Dtr school (D) within Exodus 7–12. The Dtr school seems to have written a version where the plagues total seven,³⁴ as is confirmed by Pss 78,44–51 and 105,28–38, which both allude to a cycle of seven plagues. As J. Van Seters has notably demonstrated, this is a literary creation and not an "ancient tradition."³⁵ Following the Dtr view, the manifestations of Yhwh in Exodus 7ff are to be understood as divine punishments caused by Pharaoh's obstinance. Opposite this ideology of judgement and punishment, P proposes a more irenic, indeed ironic, recounting of the yahwistic manifestations before the Egyptians. Priestly texts in Exodus 7ff never mention plagues, but rather signs and portents (7,3; 11,9). They are *Demonstrationswunder*, that is miracles and wonders that seek to demonstrate Yhwh's power.³⁶ Contrary to Dtr ideology, P is obviously not concerned with the judgement of Israel and the nations; the priestly author, as we have seen already, would rather concern himself with Israel's place and status among the nations.

The Priestly version of the miracles in Egypt contains five episodes, of which 7,1–13 is the first; it is often understood as a prologue in a syn-

³³ RÖMER, Väter, 504–5, 515–16; GOSSE, Exode.

³⁴ See for instance KOHATA, Jahwist.

³⁵ VAN SETERS, Plagues.

chronic approach.³⁷ In each of these five scenes, Moses and Aaron compete with the magicians of Egypt. After Aaron's stick has been transformed into a "dragon" (interestingly, in 7,9–10.12 P uses the term *tannin*, which is also found in Gen 1,21), Pharaoh sends for wise men (*chakamim*) and the sorcerers (*m'kashpim*, cf. Deut 18,10). These two categories of specialists also go by the name *chartummim* (Exod 7,11). This word, which is repeated in the five episodes (7,22; 8,3.14f; 9,11), probably constitutes an Egyptian loan designating a priest of high rank who is in charge of reading ritual instructions (Redford: "chief lector priest"³⁸). Aaron and the *chartummim* thus have a double identity as both priests and "magicians." Where they differ is in the source of their knowledge: Egyptian magicians base their performance on occult sciences (cf. 7,11.22; 8,3.14³⁹), whereas Aaron may do Yhwh's bidding by way of Mosaic instruction (7,9.15; 8,1.12). But just like Moses and Aaron, they succeed in transforming water into blood (7,22) and in making frogs materialize (8,2). This means that the author takes the magical capacities of the Egyptians seriously and that for him, magic as such poses no real problem.⁴⁰ What he seeks to prove is that Yhwh's word is in fact more efficacious than Egyptian magic.

Accordingly, in the fourth plague the Egyptian magicians fail to imitate Aaron's magic gesture, transformation of dust into mosquitoes (Exod 8,13–14). As a result, they acknowledge Moses and Aaron's (and their God's) superiority, declaring to Pharaoh: "This is the finger of God (*elohim*)" (8,15). This expression, attested in Egyptian magic formulas, probably points to Aaron's stick,⁴¹ the superiority of which they acknowledge. They do not use the tetragrammaton, but rather the more universal name *elohim* used by P for pre-mosaic times and for other peoples. For P, *elohim* is the word which allows Hebrews and Egyptians a theological arena of commonality. In sharp contrast to Pharaoh (whom Yhwh has hardened), the magicians begin to understand their adversaries' superiority. The Egyptian magicians' defeat is finally confirmed in the fifth episode, where they are themselves affected by the ashes of the furnace that Moses and Aaron transform into a carrier of skin disease (9,10–11). In this episode one may observe an interesting change. Contrary to the four previous episodes, the narrative does not open with "Yhwh told Moses: tell Aaron ..." (cf. 7,8.19; 8,1.12), but with "Yhwh told Moses and Aaron" (9,8). Here Moses does not transmit the divine order to his brother to be carried out later; the two take a direct

³⁷ Belonging to P then, *grosso modo*, 7,19–22*; 8,1–3.11*; 8,12–15; 9,8–12. There is an astonishing unanimity on this matter among exegetes.

³⁸ REDFORD, Study, 203.

³⁹ These are the only biblical plural occurrences of the word.

⁴⁰ Cf. SCHMIDT, *Magie*, 178.

⁴¹ COUROYER, *Doigt*.

part in the magical operation, Moses even playing the lead role in the affair. It would seem that the author wished to show that it is through the direct implication of Moses that the Egyptian magicians are finally defeated. Moses, who had more or less kept withdrawn from the first four episodes, is finally characterised as the one who puts an absolute end to Egyptian magic.

According to Reindl, P would have taken up a narrative originating in the Egyptian Diaspora,⁴² which seems an attractive idea. It is certainly not pure coincidence that the other occurrences of the word *chartummim* are all in the story of Joseph (Gen 41,8.24) and in the narrative part of Daniel (Dan 1,20; 2,2), that is to say in two Diaspora novels. Be that as it may, Exodus 7ff may be understood as a dialogue with Egyptian culture. P accepts and perhaps admires the magic knowledge of the Egyptian priests, but he wants to convince his readers that belief in Yhwh, the only God, may integrate and exceed such knowledge in might. This affirmation is also expressed in the Priestly narrative of the Parting of the Sea, which can be understood as P's final episode of Yhwh's miracles in Egypt.

4. The Parting of the Sea and P's "mythologization" of the exodus

Exod 13,17–14,31 is one of the classical cases where two independent documents can easily be isolated: an older account where Yhwh pushes the sea back, like an ebb tide, and the Priestly account, where the sea is divided and the Israelites cross the sea, the waters forming a wall on their right and on their left. Interestingly, the fact that there were two different biblical accounts about the miracle is still remembered in the work of Artapanus, who wrote in the second century BCE and who reports that there existed two competing traditions about the crossing of the sea among the Jewish communities in Egypt,⁴³ which correspond roughly to the two accounts mingled in Exodus 14. The priestly account (which can be found in vv. 1–4.8.9b.10*.15*.16*.18.21*.22–23.26.27α.28–29⁴⁴) is structured by a refrain, which states that Yhwh will glorify himself and that the Egyptians shall know that he is Yhwh. What was revealed to Moses in Exodus 6 must now be recognized by Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The priestly account in Exodus 14 also underlines the correspondence between the divine word and its realization; the same feature appears in Genesis 1, in the priestly

⁴² REINDL, *Finger*.

⁴³ See on this also LOEWENSTAMM, *Evolution*, 273–74.

⁴⁴ Disregarding questions of detail, a consensus exists as to this reconstruction; cf. for instance the synopsis in JENSON, *Holiness*, 222. See further KRÜGER, *Erwägungen*.

plague story, and in the account of the construction of the Tabernacle in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40. As has often been observed, the priestly story of Israel's deliverance at the Sea is closely related to the creation account in Gen 1,1–2,3.⁴⁵ These texts share several important terms with Exodus 14 "P," some of which also occur in the priestly account of the Flood. Both stories describe God's action with the idea of separation, expressed in Genesis 1 by the root *b-d-l* in the hiphil (five times): creation takes place by separation: separation of light from darkness, and separation of the primordial waters (1,6–7).⁴⁶ The same idea is expressed in Exod 14,16,21 with the root *b-q-'*: Moses stretches his hand over the waters, which are then divided by God.⁴⁷ The term *yabbasha* ("the dry ground"), which is seldom used in the Hebrew Bible, occurs in Gen 1,9–10 as well as in Exod 14,16,22,29; in both cases the "dry ground" stands as the space where life is possible,⁴⁸ contrary to the water, whose omnipresence makes life impossible. The expression *b'tok hayyam*, "in the middle of the sea," which appears in Exod 14,16,22,23,27 and 29 and in Gen 1,6 denotes the same idea: life emerges by repelling the water. The priestly author of Exodus 14 deliberately uses the vocabulary of creation in order to describe Yhwh's intervention for Israel. In doing so he describes Israel's salvation at the sea in mythological terms. The splitting of the sea in Exodus 14 is an act of creation, as is the separation of the waters in Genesis 1. In this text, God creates the world, while in Exodus 14 Yhwh creates Israel as his people by making them cross the waters. The slashing of the waters in Exodus 14 also recalls the mythological theme of the defeat of the Sea god or the primeval waters by the creator god; this victory entitles him to dwell in his temple. As in Mesopotamian mythology, the victory over the sea in Exodus 14 is preparation for the building of the sanctuary in Exodus 25ff. Allusions to the future worship of Yhwh by Israel can also be detected in the way in which the priestly author of Exodus 14 describes Israel's crossing of the sea. According to 14,22, "the Israelites went into the middle of the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left." The "left" (*s'mo'el*) is also used for the North (Gen 14,15; Josh 19,27), and the "right" can designate the South (Josh 17,7). These designations presuppose an orientation towards the East, which in the Ancient Near East is the place of life, whereas the West (which can be designated by the word *yam*) designates death and hell. Israel's passage through the water corresponds then to a procession from the West to the East, from death to

⁴⁵ See especially SKA, *Passage*; GIBERT, *Bible*.

⁴⁶ The root *b-d-l* occurs quite often in the book of Leviticus.

⁴⁷ The same verb is used in Gen 7,11 to describe the splitting of the heavenly water reservoirs.

⁴⁸ See also the use of the verb *y-b-sh* in Gen 8,7 and 14.

life, and this procession also reflects the Eastern orientation of the Syrian Temple type to which the Jerusalem sanctuary belongs.⁴⁹

Summing up, the priestly account of the parting of the Sea combines different themes: Yhwh manifests his glory to the Israelites and Egyptians and "creates" Israel as his people. Israel's response to that is to honor their God by the appropriate cult in his sanctuary. This worship in the temple is foreshadowed in Exodus 14 by the passage from West to East, suggesting a procession as well as the architectural orientation of the sanctuary, which needs now to be built.

5. Some concluding remarks

Our investigation of the three major P texts in the exodus story (Exodus 1–15*) – the revelation of the divine name (Exod 6,2–8), the miracles by which Moses and Aaron compete with the Egyptian magicians (Exodus 7–9*), and the passage through the sea (Exodus 14) – confirms some major issues of the current debate about the Priestly texts in the Pentateuch. First of all, it seems quite clear that Pg was not interested in relating Israel's entry into the land after the exodus, since for P Israel's relation to the land after the exodus will be basically the same as was the relation of the ancestors to their land: the Israelites remain *gerim*, the only owner of the land being Yhwh. It seems plausible, therefore, that the original P account, which combined (for the first time?) the ancestral narratives with the exodus story, ended with the installation of the sanctuary and the sacrificial cult on Mt Sinai (Leviticus 9 or 16). According to Pg, Israel's specificity lies in its knowledge of God's "real" name. That means that Israel has to respond to this knowledge with the appropriate worship of Yhwh. The focus on the sanctuary reflects P's understanding of Israel as a temple-centered community. P's "theory" of God's revelation in three stages (Elohim, El Shadday, Yhwh) reflects an "inclusive monotheism" which takes into account the fact that the Persian kings were apparently willing to authorize different cults inside their empire. The openness to other people is also expressed in the story of Moses and Aaron competing with Egyptian culture. This reflects Pg's political agenda: in the first decades of the Persian period, Israel had to live together inside and outside the land with different ethnic groups. The link between the exodus and the ancestors in Exodus 6, where the land given to Israel is labelled a *morasha* (v. 8) should be understood as an attempt to state that the land has to be shared between the former exiles and those who had not been deported. If these

⁴⁹ KEEL, *Welt*, 143.

conclusions are right, the original priestly account of the exodus should be understood as a contribution to political and religious ecumenism at the beginning of the Persian period.

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