

# Introduction

יְבָרְכֶהָ יְהוָה וַיְשַׁמְרֶהָ  
יֵאָר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנְּךָ  
יֵשֶׁא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ  
וַיִּשֶׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם  
וַיִּשְׂמוּ אֶת־שְׁמִי עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
וְאֲנִי אֲבָרְכֶם

*“May the LORD bless you and keep you!  
May the LORD shine his face upon you and be gracious to you!  
May the LORD lift up his face toward you,  
And grant you peace!”  
Thus they shall put my name upon the children of Israel,  
And I will bless them.*<sup>1</sup>

Num. 6:24-27

The Pentateuchal Priestly source contains poetic texts such as the Priestly Blessing printed above. Scholars universally recognize the quotation as poetry, and widely used scholarly editions of the Hebrew Bible (JPS, NRSV, and *BHS*) format the lines as such. The concluding narrative sentence, however, is usually considered prose; the same major editions give the verse no special consideration. I disagree with this *opinio communis*: all four sentences contain poetic features; the last line might not be poetry, but it is not best described simply as prose either.

I begin this investigation with a question: How and why does the Priestly source (P) intermix poetic and prosaic material?<sup>2</sup> Past scholarly treatments have identified approximately thirty small poems in the Torah’s Priestly writings.<sup>3</sup> However, I propose that P contains a great deal more poetic material than commentators have previously recognized. Further, I make a far bolder

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1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

2. By “prosaic,” I mean characteristic of prose as opposed to poetry and not the derivative meanings of unimaginative, dull, or unromantic.

3. See the introduction to chapter 3, which provides a comprehensive list.

claim: the totality of the evidence suggests that connecting all of the poetic lines together forms a nearly complete, independent, and previously unrecognized source document. I submit that P contains two distinct strata: one written in language that contains many poetic features, and the other in a prosaic style that largely lacks poetic elements. I label these works Poetic-P and Prosaic-P, and this monograph proposes what I call the “Poetic-P + Prosaic-P” hypothesis.

Studying poetic features in P can shed light on its very nature and history, and the arguments I make herein have the potential to reshape current theories of Pentateuchal composition. My thesis contradicts several centuries of scholarship in many instances, and I readily admit that important puzzles of P’s compositional history remain unsolved in this study. I therefore build my case slowly and methodically, trying to stand on the shoulders of the giants of scholarship who have devoted their careers to the studies of poetry and of Pentateuchal source criticism.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

My work begins by exploring past scholarship on Biblical Hebrew poetry to determine the features that characterize the style; I ultimately propose nine primary elements that are common to poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible: literary, grammatical, lexical, and phonological parallelism; structural devices of chiasmus, inclusio, and marked word order; and stylistic concerns of marked diction and pronounced rhythm (chapter 1). This study pursues a polythetic mode of classification, where no single characteristic defines either poetry or prose; rather, a constellation of these nine features is present in poetic writing but absent or less pronounced in prosaic texts. Some lines contain more poetic features than others do, and consequently I recognize that poetry exists to a matter of degrees; no all-or-nothing dichotomy separates it from prose. I adopt a continuum theory that shows a gradual transition between prosaic sentences on one side and poetic lines on the other.

Next, I test if my method can correctly identify biblical poetry and prose in texts that scholars universally label one or the other (chapter 2). Colleagues of mine selected exemplary texts from both styles across a range of biblical genres, and I examine them for the presence of these nine poetic features. Using this criterion alone, my system accurately predicted the writing style for 95 percent of the prose verses and 91 percent of the lines of poetry. I show that noting the presence of these features coupled with weighing their strength, context, and dominance enables the critic to make a reasonable determination whether a text is prosaic or poetic.

After demonstrating the usefulness of this method in differentiating most known poetry and prose texts, I turn my attention to the Priestly source (chapter 3). I select as a sample text God's circumcision covenant with Abraham in Gen. 17:1-14 and examine if it contains any poetic material. This text serves as an effective case study because it is self-contained, its Priestly provenance is generally undisputed, MT is relatively uncorrupted, and past scholars have frequently seen textual layers in it. The results are perhaps surprising: the polythetic classification system identifies many verses in Genesis 17 as poetic that have not been previously labeled as such. The pericope contains a mix of lines with many and varied poetic features and verses with no poetic attributes whatsoever.

To understand the relationship between poetic and prosaic verses in P further, I perform a second, much larger case study of the Noah pericope in Genesis 6–9 (chapter 4). Critics consistently note two poems inset in P's writing (Gen. 7:11b and 9:6), as well as other scattered quasi-poetic verses. As with Genesis 17, though, my examination of P material in Genesis 6–9 reveals significantly more lines with poetic qualities than commentators have previously noted.

While the lines contain many known poetic features, very little of the Priestly source's poetic material resembles classic poetic corpora such as Psalms or the Latter Prophets, and I do not argue that P contains "poetry"; this label may be accurate for some P verses such as Gen. 7:11b and 9:6, but deciding when prose becomes poetry is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, these two case studies show that many verses in P share the features that signify poetry in accepted poetic texts; these lines therefore fall on the poetic side of a prosaic-poetic continuum. In short, they are *poetic* but not necessarily *poetry*. Other Priestly verses, in contrast, contain few or none of the common features of poetry and therefore are prosaic. "Poetic" lines can also contain hallmarks of prose, such as narrative sequence verbal forms, verbosity, and exact repetition; "prosaic" verses can also be parallelistic, terse, and marked in terms of word order and diction. Therefore, the presence, strength, context, and dominance of the poetic features in each individual example help determine whether a text is more prosaic or poetic.

Patterns emerge between the poetic and prosaic verses in Genesis 6–9. First, though doublets predictably happen between P and non-P, internal narrative doublets also occur in P itself—the majority between poetic and prosaic material.<sup>4</sup> Some P verses even repeat the exact same vocabulary, and these redundancies also fall between poetic and prosaic texts.<sup>5</sup> Second, the

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4. For example, compare Gen. 6:11-12 to 6:13 or 9:12 to 9:13, 16.

5. See Gen. 9:11, 16 against 9:14-15.

poetic lines use a relative scheme of dating, while the prosaic verses employ an absolute system. Third, events sometimes occur out of narrative sequence in P, such as when the flood begins (Gen. 7:11) before Noah and his coterie enter the ark (7:13-16a), or when the flood ends (8:1-2a) but the waters continue to swell (8:5). Reading the poetic and prosaic verses separately resolves these inconsistencies; the effect is similar to reading P and J as two different stories. Fourth, specific words have different meanings in poetic lines versus prosaic verses, such as  $\text{הַבְּהֵמָה}$  referring specifically to large animals in 6:20 (prosaic) but to all animals in 7:8a (poetic). Finally, I submit that the poetic lines form a complete narrative when separated and read by themselves; the prosaic verses, however, do not.

Of various possible explanations, the combined force of the evidence presented in chapters 3–4 suggests most strongly that P contains a poetic stratum and a prosaic stratum, with the prosaic material supplementing and thereby transforming the antecedent poetic material. The poetic stratum is therefore a source document, and the prosaic material is a supplementary redactional layer. The strata both originate from a priestly setting and reflect that milieu, but material in Prosaic-P reframes Poetic-P with a slightly different ideology and appears to have different compositional priorities.

Following these case studies, I review past scholarship on theories of Pentateuchal composition in general and the Priestly source in particular, situating my proposal in the literature and addressing questions raised by Continental, North American, and Israeli scholars concerning P's nature, completeness, internal stratum, and ending (chapter 5). I describe my understanding of P's compositional history and my method of delineating sources, which prioritizes compositional style over lexical or thematic considerations.

Having explained the method and proposed the hypothesis, I provide a preliminary division between the strata in all Pentateuchal Priestly narrative texts (and any laws included in a narrative context), formatting every poetic line and separating out the prosaic material (chapter 6). Footnotes and comments throughout defend controversial poetic/prosaic divisions and summarize the potential significance of differences between the two strata. This presentation contains new arguments about which verses belong to P, and I hope that it proves helpful as a complete—though preliminary—annotated edition of P.

Though I refer the reader to chapter 6, which summarizes my findings, the following paragraphs describe briefly the trends I observe concerning the two strata. Poetic-P appears to have existed as a separate document from Prosaic-P, but Prosaic-P does not seem to have been independent; scanning through the two strata (which appear in separate columns in chapter 6)

confirms that the poetic material is largely readable, logical, and complete in itself without the prosaic writings. The prosaic material, in contrast, is fragmentary and unreadable apart from the poetic layer; it is a supplementary redaction and does not stand alone.<sup>6</sup>

Some prosaic additions bear similarities with the terminology and theology of the Holiness Legislation in Leviticus 17–26, and perhaps Holiness authors provided a number of the prose supplementations. In other cases, prosaic genealogies interrupt sections that are themselves already prosaic. I argue that as opposed to the source document Poetic-P, Prosaic-P contains multiple layers of redaction; I use “Prosaic-P” to refer to prose additions to the poetic base layer and not as a label for a unified composition. A majority of these additions reflect similar ideology and priorities, though, so I hypothesize that most of the prosaic additions originate with the same individual or school. Some small insertions might also be the work of later scribes correcting ambiguity in texts, and my analysis sweeps them into the category of Prosaic-P even though they might have entered the textual tradition later than the majority of the prosaic additions.

The evidence suggests most strongly that Prosaic-P contains four main layers. If Poetic-P is stage I of P’s development, then the original supplementation of the poetic base document is stage II. Stage III includes additions by authors of or sympathetic to the Holiness Legislation in Leviticus 17–26, stage IV includes glosses and harmonizations necessitated by P’s combination with non-P, and stage V contains post-redactional scribal additions. My purpose in this study, though, is to separate between prosaic and poetic material in P and not to stratify that material *ad infinitum*. With these caveats in place, I will therefore speak of Poetic-P and Prosaic-P without meaning to infer that either is monolithic.

Poetic-P also contains textual layers and variations in writing style that suggest it represents multiple authorial voices. The story of Joseph in Pharaoh’s court in Egypt, for example, contains almost as many chiasmic quatrains as all previous chapters in Genesis combined, which might signal that a different author with distinct poetic tastes wrote that pericope. The evidence shows, however, that the multiple voices in Poetic-P and the prosaic supplementations all function in the same respective frameworks.

Separate strata of poetic and prosaic verses continue throughout the Priestly source, and Poetic-P and Prosaic-P have significant storyline differences with each other. For example, the poetic stratum contains no mention of Isaac and Jacob having siblings; all P references to their brothers Ishmael

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6. On the term “supplementary redaction,” see Jaeyoung Jeon, *The Call of Moses and the Exodus Story: A Redaction-Critical Study in Exodus 3–4 and 5–13*, FAT II/60 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 11.

and Esau occur in the prosaic supplementation. Poetic-P contains a streamlined version of early Israelite history without any of the complications—or colorful episodes—that envelop the characters in non-P material. J’s trickster Jacob and deceitful Rebekah become simply Jacob and his mother Rebekah; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their seldom-mentioned wives lack distinction as characters in the poetic verses, and their main narrative purpose is seemingly to accept God’s covenant and follow his command to procreate.

In the exodus story, the Poetic-P stratum only contains three anti-Egyptian plagues (water turned into blood, dirt into gnats, and ashes into boils); I note tentatively that these punishments might show YHWH’s power over the natural elements of water, earth, and fire. Prosaic-P supplements the poetic material with a narrative of Aaron changing his staff into a serpent and the plague of frogs. Pharaoh is silent until the end in Poetic-P, and God neither seeks nor receives Pharaoh’s permission to remove the Israelites from bondage. Based on these trends, the plagues in the poetic stratum have the effect of showing Pharaoh that YHWH is God and not of convincing the Egyptian to let God’s people go.

During their sojourn in the wilderness, the Israelites rebel many times in the Priestly writings. For both the Korah rebellion (Numbers 16–17) and when the Reubenites and Gadites ask to remain in Transjordan (Numbers 32), the poetic source shows God as conciliatory and accepting. He convinces the insurrectionists of their error by making a staff miraculously sprout flowers in Poetic-P, but God incinerates the rebels and sends a devastating disease to attack the Israelites in the prosaic supplementations. These differences have the occasional effect of Prosaic-P changing Poetic-P’s ideology, as, for example, the prosaic verses contain more explicitly anti-foreigner, pro-Aaron, and pro-Shabbat sentiments than the poetic lines. (Additions that confirm the importance of Shabbat might very well originate with Holiness editors.)<sup>7</sup>

Concerning the relationship between P’s strata and other ancient works, material in Poetic-P appears to be later than and familiar with at least parts of non-P; it often recasts negative events in non-P material, usually attributed to the Yahwist, as positive. I examine this topic only briefly, though, and save a fuller comparison for future research. Parts of Poetic-P also show probable knowledge of Mesopotamian traditions, and its author likely appropriated earlier Israelite poetic works as well. Prosaic-P shows no irrefutable evidence of knowing non-P, and no evidence suggests that the authors of the later prosaic supplementations combined P with non-P; they are also therefore not likely responsible for the final redaction of the Pentateuch.

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7. See the section “P’s Strata” in chapter 5.

### Select Examples

As have so many other studies produced in the last generation, my research takes inspiration from Michael Fishbane’s examination of inner-biblical exegesis.<sup>8</sup> My proposal that later authors glossed and explicated an earlier biblical text draws upon his observations of such phenomena. He discusses how scribes add geographic information, patronymics and other names, clarifications for ambiguous subject matter, pleonastic comments, lexical substitutions, and textual contemporizations to already written texts.<sup>9</sup> Most of the prosaic supplementations to the base poetic text that I identify fit into these categories.

The relationship I propose between material in the poetic and prosaic strata based on this preliminary study is perhaps best likened to an author and his or her editors. The authors of Poetic-P provide the base text, and the Prosaic-P editors (who now become authors) suggest additions, check facts, offer corrections, and clarify the work. The Priestly source as preserved in the Masoretic Text is like a manuscript with its review marks still showing. As such, most of Prosaic-P’s contributions fall into a few broad categories (besides those already noted), partially demonstrated in the following short examples.<sup>10</sup> The poetic material appears in black, the prosaic text highlighted in light grey.

Prosaic-P adds “mundane” details to the poetic material such as names, ages, dates, numbers, and physical descriptions:

Names: Genesis 10:1-4
<p>וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת בְּנֵי־נֹחַ שֵׁם הֵם וְיֹפֶת  וַיִּוְלְדוּ לָהֶם בְּנִים אַחֵר הַמַּבּוּל</p>
<p>בְּנֵי יֶפֶת גֹּמֶר וּמַגּוּג וּמְדַי וְנוּחַ וְתוּבַל וּמִשְׁכֵּחַ וְתִירָס וּבְנֵי גֹמֶר אֲשֶׁכְנַז וְרִיפַת וְתַגְרֵמָה  וּבְנֵי נוּחַ אֵלִישָׁה וְתַרְשִׁישׁ כֶּתִים וְדָדָנִים</p>
<p>These are the generations of Noah’s sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth;  Sons were born to them after the flood.</p>
<p>The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. The sons of Javan: Elishah and Tarshish, the Kittim and the Dodanim.</p>

8. Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

9. *Ibid.*, 44–65.

10. See the preliminary division between Poetic-P and Prosaic-P in chapter 6 for a full discussion of these examples.

<b>Ages: Genesis 25:7-8</b>	
<p>These are the days and the years of Abraham's life, which he lived: one hundred seventy-five years. Abraham died at a good ripe age, Old and content, he was gathered to his people.</p>	<p>וְאֵלֶּה יְמֵי שְׁנֵי-חַיֵּי אַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר-חָי מֵאֵת שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וְחֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וַיָּגוּעַ וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה זָקֵן וְשֹׁבֵעַ וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל-עַמּוּיוֹ</p>

<b>Quantitative details: Exodus 27:1</b>	
<p>You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits its length and five cubits its height. Square shall the altar be; and three cubits its height.</p>	<p>וַעֲשֵׂתָ אֶת-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים חֲמֵשׁ אַמּוֹת אָרְצוֹ וְחֲמֵשׁ אַמּוֹת רֹחַב רְבֹועַ יְהִיָּה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְשָׁלֹשׁ אַמּוֹת קוֹמָתוֹ</p>

<b>Physical descriptions: Genesis 6:16</b>	
<p>Make a roof for the ark, and finish it up to a cubit above. Set the opening of the ark in its side. Make it with bottom, second, and third decks.</p>	<p>צִהָר תַּעֲשֶׂה לַתֶּבֶה וְאֶל-אַמֶּה תְּכַלְכֶּנָה מִלְמַעְלָה וּפְתַח הַתֶּבֶה בְּצַדָּהּ תִּשִּׂים תַּחְתִּים שְׁנַיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים תַּעֲשֶׂהָ</p>

Prosaic-P narrates the performance of actions that are ordained but unconfirmed in Poetic-P, making their execution explicit:

<b>God creates the firmament: Genesis 1:6-7</b>	
<p>וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַרְקִיעַ וַיְבַדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לַרְקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לַרְקִיעַ וַיְהִי-כֵן</p>	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לְמַיִם וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַרְקִיעַ וַיְבַדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לַרְקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לַרְקִיעַ וַיְהִי-כֵן</p>



God said,

“Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters,

And let it separate waters from the waters.”

God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome, and it was so.

Prosaic-P clarifies plot elements that readers might find confusing in the poetic stratum. In the following example, the prosaic material explains why Moses cannot enter the Tabernacle:

#### God inhabits the Tabernacle: Exodus 40:34-35

וַיִּכַס הָעֶנָן אֶת-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד  
 וַיִּכְבוֹד יְהוָה מְלֵא אֶת-הַמִּשְׁכָּן  
 וְלֹא-יָכֹל מֹשֶׁה לָּבוֹא אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד כִּי-שָׁכַן עָלָיו הָעֶנָן וַיִּכְבוֹד יְהוָה מְלֵא אֶת-  
 הַמִּשְׁכָּן

The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting,

And YHWH's presence filled the Tabernacle.

Now, Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled on it. And the Glory of YHWH filled the Tabernacle.<sup>11</sup>

Prosaic-P summarizes the poetic material:

#### The Rainbow Sign: Genesis 9:16-17

וְהָיְתָה הַקְּשֵׁת בְּעָנָן  
 וַרְאִיתֶיהָ לְזִכָּר בְּרִית עוֹלָם  
 בֵּין אֱלֹהִים וּבֵין כָּל-נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה  
 בְּכָל-בְּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאָרֶץ  
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-נֹחַ זֹאת אוֹת-הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר הִקְמַתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵין כָּל-בְּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל-  
 הָאָרֶץ

11. This last sentence is a *Wiederaufnahme*, which can suggest a secondary intrusion and is a common feature that Prosaic-P uses when interrupting Poetic-P (see excursus 2 in chapter 3).

“When the bow is in a cloud,  
 I will see it and remember an everlasting covenant,  
 Between God and every living creature,  
 With all flesh that is on the earth.”  
 And God said to Noah, “This is the covenant sign that I have established  
 between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

The prosaic stratum appears to conform the poetic stratum to a slightly different ideology (as already mentioned), here introducing a command against marrying Canaanite women into Poetic-P’s narrative of Jacob seeking a wife from a trusted relative:

**Canaanite Women: Genesis 28:1-2**

וַיִּקְרָא יִצְחָק אֶל-יַעֲקֹב  
 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ וַיִּצְוֵהוּ  
 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֹא-תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן  
 קוּם לֵךְ פְּדֵנָה אֲרָם  
 בֵּיתָה בְּתוֹאֵל אָבִי אִמְךָ  
 וְקַח-לָךְ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה  
 מִבְּנוֹת לָבָן אָחִי אִמְךָ

Isaac called for Jacob,  
 And he blessed him and commanded him,  
 and he said to him, “You shall not take a wife from the women of Canaan.  
 Up, go to Paddan-Aram,  
 To the house of Bethuel, your mother’s father,  
 And take for yourself from there a wife,  
 From the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother.”

Prosaic-P harmonizes different texts. For example, when God commands the Israelites to bring gifts for the building of the Tabernacle in Poetic-P, the stratum mentions only construction material (Exod. 25:1-9). However, God also commands Moses to make sacred vestments for Aaron and the priests (Exodus 28) that require precious stones not part of the initial catalogue of supplies. A prosaic harmonization (Exod. 25:7) specifically says that the stones were present from the beginning.

Prosaic-P contains the rhetorical device of prolepsis, telling the reader key information before the story begins instead of allowing it to develop narratively:

**Moses's Shining Face: Exodus 34:29-30, 35a**

וַיְהִי בְרִדְתֹּ מֹשֶׁה מִהַר סִינַי  
 וַיֵּשְׁנֵי לַחַת הַעֲדוּת בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה<sup>12</sup>  
 בְּרִדְתּוֹ מִן־הַהָר  
 וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא־יָדַע כִּי קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו בְּדַבְּרוֹ אִתּוֹ  
 וַיֵּרְא אַהֲרֹן וְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְהִנֵּה קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו  
 וַיִּירָאוּ מִגְּשֵׁת אֱלֹוֹ  
 וַרְאוּ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־פְּנֵי מֹשֶׁה  
 כִּי קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָי מֹשֶׁה

When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai,

The two Tablets of the Pact were in Moses's hand,

In his coming down from the mountain.

Moses did not know that the skin of his face was shining because he had spoken with him.

Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face was shining;

They were afraid to come near him.

The Israelites saw Moses's face,

That the skin of Moses's face was shining.

### THE SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

This study has three important self-imposed restrictions. First, I examine only Priestly narrative material, though I use a broad definition of this genre that includes genealogies, itineraries, rituals, laws incorporated into stories as dialogue, and divine instructions that occur in the course of a narrative. Specifically, I exclude the following P law collections from consideration: Leviticus 1–7, 11–27; Numbers 5; 15:1-31, 37-41; 18–19; 28–30; and 35:9-34. I make this decision in order to limit my source material to an approachable level, though P's legal sections also contain a mix of poetic and prosaic material (see the conclusion). In no way should this choice imply that I separate compositional strata in P by the genres of law and narrative (see an analysis of such systems in chapter 5).

Secondly, I do not attribute any verses in my text base definitively to the author(s) of the Holiness material in Leviticus 17–26. Footnotes and comments indicate possibilities, but I reserve judgment on this topic for future research. I do not wish to allow issues of whether or where H occurs outside

12. I argue in chapter 6 that *וַיֵּשְׁנֵי לַחַת הַעֲדוּת* is a redactional addition, but I include the words here for simplicity.

the Holiness Legislation (it certainly does) to prejudice my discussion of poetic and prosaic features in Priestly texts, and instead I choose to present my poetic findings now and incorporate these data into research on H later. Once again, this decision should not imply that my research allies with either side of the P versus H debate. As already mentioned, however, certain prosaic supplementations share a lexicon and theology with H (for example, see Genesis 17 or Exodus 12); at this time, though, I do not strongly defend how or why these similarities occur.

Finally, I only speculate in the conclusion concerning immediately obvious questions about who composed Poetic-P and Prosaic-P, and when and where they worked. I propose that the available evidence suggests that Poetic-P dates to the middle of the Babylonian exile and Prosaic-P to its end, but I do not insist on this as fact. I offer only relative dating with confidence based on the preliminary evidence: at least some of Poetic-P postdates parts of non-P (specifically texts traditionally attributed to J), and the material in Prosaic-P is later than Poetic-P. Neither do I engage in linguistic dating, though this avenue of research could prove fruitful. Instead, I choose to propose a poetic Priestly corpus first before delving into these other critical questions.

### PLAUSIBILITY

I suggest that four widely observed and largely accepted phenomena lend credence to the arguments I make in this volume. First, the Israelites did indeed compose poetic accounts of their history. The hypothetical composition of a poetic Priestly historical narrative is therefore in line with known Israelite practices. Second, many biblical books contain a layer of poetry augmented with prosaic additions. A series of supplementary redactions (Prosaic-P) to an already extant poetic text (Poetic-P) is therefore believable. Third, a majority of scholars, even ones with vastly divergent views on the composition of the Pentateuch, sees strata or layers in P. My particular stratifications are different from past attempts in many cases, but the claim that strata exist is not peculiar. Finally, P shows concern for the language and style of its composition, sometimes prioritizing these over plot. Suggesting that P's authors were artists with an elevated literary sensitivity is therefore possible.

#### *The Israelites Composed Poetic Historical Narratives*

In Num. 21:13, a non-Priestly author describes the route that the Israelites marched through the wilderness to the Arnon, a river that is “the boundary of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites.” The text then quotes a short poem, which it says originates from יהוה? מלחמת, “The Book of the Wars of YHWH.” The poem confirms the geography already given in the prose:

At Waheb in Suphah and at the wadis;  
 [At] Arnon and the slopes of the wadis.  
 Where it stretches to the settlement of Ar,  
 And leans on the boundary of Moab.<sup>13</sup>

אֶת־וְהֵב בְּסוּפָה וְאֶת־הַנְּחָלִים  
 אַרְנוֹן וְאֶשְׁד הַנְּחָלִים  
 אֲשֶׁר נֹטָה לְשִׁבְת עַר  
 וְנִשְׁעוֹ לְגְבוּל מוֹאָב  
 Num. 21:14b-15

In this same chapter, the authors cite and reproduce two additional short songs (Num. 21:17b-18a, 27b-31). Similarly, Josh. 10:13 and 2 Sam. 1:18 mention סֵפֶר הַיָּשָׁר, “The Book of the Upright” (also called “The Book of Jasher”), which appears to have contained poetic descriptions of battle. The Song of Deborah in Judges 5 is a narrative poem of exceptional beauty.

These texts demonstrate that some elements of Israelite narrative history existed in poetic form.<sup>14</sup> It follows, then, that if a narrative, historical, poetic “Book of the Wars of YHWH” or “Book of the Upright” truly circulated in ancient times, it seems reasonable that Poetic-P’s text might have existed as well. The Priestly authors were therefore doing nothing unprecedented when composing Poetic-P, the chief difference being that their lengthy poetic composition survived while the other hypothetical poetic anthologies did not.

I do not suggest in this monograph that Poetic-P is an “epic.”<sup>15</sup> I will not even assert that the Israelites wrote national epics starring YHWH as the central character, similar to Ugaritic materials,<sup>16</sup> nor that Israelite history originated in an oral, poetic *Grundlage*.<sup>17</sup> (On the other hand, contentions

13. For different translations of this difficult text, including possible emendations, see Duane L. Christensen, “Numbers 21:14-15 and the Book of the Wars of Yahweh,” *CBQ* 36 (1974): 359–60, and discussion in Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, AB 4A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 90–95.

14. So esp. Umberto (Moshe David) Cassuto, “The Epic Poetry of Israel” (Hebrew), *Keneseth* 8 (1943): 76–80. On “heroic poetry” in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts, see Mark S. Smith, *Poetic Heroes: Literary Commemorations of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) and Charles L. Echols, “Tell Me, O Muse”: *The Song of Deborah (Judges 5) in the Light of Heroic Poetry*, LHBOTS 487 (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

15. See the introduction to chapter 3.

16. So Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 1–75; also Sigmund Mowinckel, “Hat es ein israelitisches Nationalepos gegeben?,” *ZAW* 53 (1935): 130–53; Arvid Bruno, *Das hebräische Epos: Eine rhythmische und textkritische Untersuchung der Bücher Samuelis und Könige* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1935); Cassuto, “Epic Poetry,” 121–42; and Charles Conroy, “Hebrew Epic: Historical Notes and Critical Reflections,” *Bib* 61 (1980): 1–30.

17. Martin Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1948), English edition: *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. Bernhard W. Anderson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

that biblical authors specifically avoided the epic genre<sup>18</sup> might be overstated.<sup>19</sup>) Accepting that the Israelites composed national epics is not necessary for weighing the evidence concerning a poetic Priestly composition.

While Poetic-P survived in an altered state, supplemented with layers of prosaic additions (as opposed to *Urtxts* of the poetic excerpts quoted in Numbers, Joshua, and 2 Samuel, which are lost entirely), no scroll containing Poetic-P—or any of the hypothetical Pentateuchal source documents—has ever emerged. However, one exception has significance for our study. While excavating near Jerusalem’s Old City in 1979, Gabriel Barkay and his team of workers discovered two small cylinders, which he found to be rolled-up silver amulets dating to approximately 600 BCE.<sup>20</sup> Written in paleo-Hebrew were words that resemble the Priestly Blessing in Num. 6:24-26.<sup>21</sup> Based on a transcription by Ada Yardeni,<sup>22</sup> and converting the paleo-Hebrew to block script, the texts read:<sup>23</sup>

Plaque 1 (lines 14–18)	Plaque 2 (lines 5–12)	MT (Num. 6:24-26)
יבר[כ] <sup>24</sup>	[ ] יבר[כ]	יברכך
ך יהוה ו	ך יהוה ו <sup>25</sup>	יהוה
[י] שמרך [י]	[י] שמרך	וישמרך
[א] ר יהוה	יאר יה	יאר יהוה
[פ] נ[י]	[ו] ה פניו	פניו
[lines missing]	[אל] יך ו [י]	אליך ויחנך ישא יהוה פניו
	שם לך ש	אליך וישם לך
	לם	שלום

18. Shemaryahu Talmon, “Did There Exist a Biblical National Epic?” in *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: Perry Foundation for Biblical Research, World Union of Jewish Studies, 1981), 41–61. See a counterargument in Yair Zakovitch, “Yes, There Was an Israelite Epic in the Biblical Period,” *International Folklore Review* 8 (1991): 18–25.

19. See Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 173–78.

20. See the archaeologist’s description of these events in Gabriel Barkay, “The Riches of Ketef Hinnom: Jerusalem Tomb Yields Biblical Text Four Centuries Older than the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *BAR* 35.4 (2009): 23–35, 122, 124, 126.

21. Gabriel Barkay, “The Priestly Benediction on Silver Plaques from Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem,” *Tel Aviv* 9 (1992): 139–92.

22. Ada Yardeni, “Remarks on the Priestly Blessing on Two Ancient Amulets from Jerusalem,” *VT* 41 (1991): 176–85, esp. 178.

23. The highlighted text in MT is missing from Plaque 2; the evidence is inconclusive whether it was present in Plaque 1.

24. A more recent edition rejects reconstructing the כ in this line and the first two lines of Plaque 2 (Gabriel Barkay, Marilyn J. Lundberg, Andrew G. Vaughn, and Bruce Zuckerman, “The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation,” *BASOR* 334 [2004]: 61).

25. Some read the ו as a ׀, not restoring the letter on the following line (*ibid.*).

In brief, the discovery of these amulets shows that a version of the poetic Priestly Blessing was known in Jerusalem before the fall of the First Temple. Exilic or postexilic writers later incorporated these words into the Priestly source. This evidence at least demonstrates that P's authors drew upon already extant poetic works while composing the Priestly document. In my understanding, the authors of P's poetic stratum incorporated previously composed poetic works such as this into their own poetic document. Perhaps Poetic-P is first to add the expansion that is present in MT but absent in the ancient silver inscriptions.

### *Prose Supplements Often Intrude on Biblical Poetry*

The book of Amos is poetic, yet it contains scattered verses of prose. One category of prose includes superscriptions (1:1, 3:1, 5:1),<sup>26</sup> which may be original to the oracles or may have been added by later editors or compilers. Amos also contains prose biographical information about the prophet (7:1—8:3), which is likely ancient if not necessarily original. However, I would like to draw attention to another type of prose that occurs in the prophetic book.

In Amos 3, the prophet asks a series of rhetorical questions: “Will a lion roar in the forest / When it has no prey? / Will a lion cub send forth its voice from its den / When it has no capture?” (3:4). On first thought, the obvious answer is no. However, upon further reflection, humans will never understand exactly what motivates lions to roar. Does a lion boom after a kill? Yes. Might it howl in fear, hunger, or ecstasy? Also, perhaps, yes. The interpretation of and answer to these questions is not perfectly clear, rendering them other than rhetorical. The prophet increases the seriousness of his queries, eventually asking, “Can evil come to a town / If YHWH has not caused it?” (3:6). The consequences for answering the questions about the lions incorrectly are insignificant. However, being misinformed about God's part in human suffering would have dire consequences. The next verse in Amos reads, “Surely, my Lord YHWH does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets” (3:7). Verse 7 breaks the poetic flow, and the statement is jarring. “It is a prose, didactic, declarative, dogmatic assertion (not a rhetorical question)” with Deuteronomic or Deuteronomistic affinities.<sup>27</sup> The verse is a prosaic addition into a preexisting poetic text. An

26. Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman also consider Amos 4:1 to be prose, but I find its structure highly poetic (*Amos*, AB 24A [New York: Doubleday, 1989], 147).

27. Shalom Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 112.

editor-turned-author perhaps found Amos's message insufficiently clear and supplemented the oracle with a firm declaration. Can something bad happen except by God's will? No. And further, God makes his displeasure known through his chosen prophets.

In Isa. 29:9-14, God decries the people's stubbornness and thick-headedness. The prophet declares, "For YHWH has poured over you / A spirit of deep sleep, / And has shut your eyes—*that is, the prophets,* / And your heads—*that is, the seers*—he has covered."<sup>28</sup> "The prophets" and "the seers" change the subject of the prophecy, and they have a different syntax (appositional) from the rest of the stanza. The italicized words are an addition; as Fishbane says, "an oracle condemning the people is transformed into a rebuke of false prophets."<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, Joel 4 (Joel 3 in English translations) announces God's poetic judgment against the nations, but prose interrupts the poetry and supplements it in 4:4-8.<sup>30</sup> Micah 2:5 is a "verbose prose style" addition to the poetic text that might have helped an exilic population to understand the prophet's original message.<sup>31</sup> In the poetic utterances of Job 3, the author presents a long list of metaphorical cola where the afflicted man curses the day he was born and the night of his conception. Only one errant colon (in italics) fails to conform to the pattern: "May its twilight stars be dark, / *that it hopes for light, but there is none,* / May it not see the eyelids of the morning" (3:9). Many commentators consider the middle colon a prosaic expansion of the poetic text.<sup>32</sup> In all of these cases, a prosaic editor has clarified, annotated, or otherwise supplemented a poetic prophecy or oracle.

In short, the phenomenon of later authors making prosaic insertions into preexisting poetic works is common in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>33</sup> A great deal of

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28. This example is from Michael Fishbane, "Inner Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel," in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 22–23.

29. Fishbane, "Inner Biblical Exegesis," 23.

30. The verses are an "intrusion" where "[p]arallelism rarely occurs." See James L. Crenshaw, *Joel*, AB 24C (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 184–85.

31. See summary in Hans Walter Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary*, trans. Gary Stansell, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990 [German original 1982]), 70, 80.

32. See note in David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, WBC 17 (Nashville: Nelson, 1989), 71. Many consider the prose introduction and epilogue to the book of Job to be a secondary addition to the poetic oracles, though the evidence is not entirely convincing; see discussion in Wolf-Dieter Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt. Die Prosatext des Hiobbuches und ihre Rolle in seiner Redaktions- und Rezeptionsgeschichte*, BZAW 336 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 25–49.

33. Simon J. De Vries lists dozens of examples in *From Old Revelation to New: A Tradition-Historical and Redaction-Critical Study of Temporal Transitions in Prophetic Prediction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).



precedence therefore makes my proposal of a base poetic Priestly text supplemented by later Priestly editors plausible.

### *Composition Layers Exist in the Priestly Source*

In my study of P, I am far from original in finding layers of textual composition.<sup>34</sup> To take one carefully argued recent example, Shimon Gesundheit sees two textual layers in Exod. 12:1-11. As he describes the layers, “one . . . may be seen as the basic literary layer, and the other as a layer that always functions to explain or expand the base layer further in the manner of legal midrash.”<sup>35</sup> This description matches my own understanding of a base text (Poetic-P) expanded by a more detail-oriented supplementary layer (Prosaic-P). Referring to Numbers 17, Joel Baden says, “The stratification of the priestly writings, then, is a clear and, to my mind, incontrovertible piece of evidence of an independent P document. Moreover, it is evidence that this independent document was transmitted over some period of time, supplemented and expanded and altered in various degrees at various stages.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, my proposals are not revolutionary and are instead part of current, mainstream understandings of the Priestly source, sharing a basic understanding of the material with most North American, Continental, and Israeli scholars.

### *P’s Language and Style Are Carefully Crafted*

Throughout Genesis and Exodus, the Priestly and non-Priestly narratives discuss much of the same material, from the creation, genealogies, and flood of the primeval history to the Egyptian plagues and Sinai wanderings. As I will argue in this volume (in agreement with many others), P seems to depend on some amount of non-P material. However, as David M. Carr points out, “there are virtually no verbal parallels between the strands,” in contrast to synoptic works such as Samuel–Kings versus Chronicles. He continues, “[T]hese Priestly authors show no evidence of having internalized the wording of [the post-D Hexateuch] and do not reflect it.”<sup>37</sup> Why would an author

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34. See the section “P’s Strata” in chapter 5 for a full discussion of this subject.

35. Shimon Gesundheit, *Three Times a Year: Studies on Festival Legislation in the Pentateuch*, FAT 82 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 49.

36. Joel Baden, “Source Stratification, Secondary Additions, and the Documentary Hypothesis in the Book of Numbers: The Case of Numbers 17,” in *Torah and the Book of Numbers*, ed. Christian Frevel, Thomas Pola, and Aaron Scharf, FAT II/62 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 244.

37. David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches*

or a group of authors hew closely to the plot of another work, changing details while maintaining the larger narrative, but decline to reproduce hardly any of its wording? Carr suggests that this choice indicates that non-P was not yet authoritative, and that P's authors meant P as a counter-narrative. Likely, this is so. However, I propose that P did not reproduce the wording of non-P because the *language* and *style* of P's composition were of considerable importance to P. The Priestly authors do not copy wording from non-P because non-P is largely prosaic while P's origins are poetic.

## BEGINNING A DISCUSSION

As Carr writes, "All too often, biblical studies have attempted to trace in detail every step in the growth of a biblical text to its present form. Some have found evidence of eight to fifteen (or more) layers of sources and redactional expansions in a single chapter or set of verses." I agree: some past efforts at stratification of Pentateuchal sources have reached almost absurd levels of complexity. He continues, "Yet I suggest that these more complicated reconstructions of textual prehistory have not stood and will not stand the test of time."<sup>38</sup> I heed Carr's note of caution.

In this study, I attempt to stratify and reconstruct the prehistory of the Priestly source. While my central claim might be audacious, I seek to make it modestly and to keep it from becoming unnecessarily labored. I do not attempt the impossible task of explaining *exactly* how the Priestly source came to its current state. Instead, I propose an outline of two—and only two—Priestly strata that can be identified by the presence or absence of poetic features, even though each stratum certainly has a complicated prehistory itself. To a greater or lesser extent, I aim to show that the poetic material is continuous.

At many points throughout this work, the conclusions are provisional or preliminary. I often speak of what is "most likely" instead of what is definitively true, which is the best a study of this kind can hope to do. I anticipate that readers might disagree with many of my analyses of various verses. I submit, however, that even if relatively large parts of my argument fall, the basic thesis will remain: P contains a mix of poetic and prosaic writings that contradict, repeat, and complement each other—and this fact requires explanation.

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(Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 293–94; see also his full comparison of P and non-P.

38. David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

I hope this study opens a new dialogue about the essential nature of the Priestly source, and I welcome the counter-arguments I will likely receive. My thesis has the potential to challenge centuries of research, and nothing less than a robust critique is appropriate. Future revisions to this work might expand, shrink, or change P's poetic corpus; my own understanding of Poetic-P, the base document, and Prosaic-P, the supplemental redactions, continues to grow and evolve.