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Narrative, Lists, Rhetoric, Ritual and the Pentateuch as a Scripture

James W. Watts
Syracuse University

The Formation of the Pentateuch

Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America

Edited by

Jan C. Gertz, Bernard M. Levinson,
Dalit Rom-Shiloni, and Konrad Schmid

Mohr Siebeck

Jan C. Gertz is Professor of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament at the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg.

Bernard M. Levinson is Professor of Jewish Studies and Hebrew Bible and of Law at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

Dalit Rom-Shiloni is Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible at the Department of Biblical Studies, Tel Aviv University.

Konrad Schmid is Professor of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament at the University of Zurich.

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Narratives, Lists, Rhetoric, Ritual, and the Pentateuch as a Scripture

James W. Watts

The Pentateuch's juxtaposition of different genres within a narrative framework provides some of the evidence for building source- and redaction-critical theories of the Pentateuch's literary history. Rhetorical analysis suggests, however, that such genre juxtapositions are characteristic of an ancient Near Eastern strategy of persuasion. The Pentateuch's inset genres, especially its lists of instructions and laws, generated most of its normative force that, together with its ritualization, led to its scripturalization as Torah.

Narrative Genre Expectations

The narrative framing of pentateuchal lists has dumbfounded modern biblical critics for a very long time, because the five books of the Torah together make for a very bad story. For two hundred years, the Pentateuch's poor narrative form has provided the fodder for reconstructing the history of the text.

The Pentateuch suffers from at least three kinds of narrative difficulties. First, the story contains many repetitions and contradictions. The repetitions include famous examples, such as the two creation stories (Gen 1–2), the three wife-sister stories (Gen 12, 20, 26), the two calls of Moses (Exod 3, 6), and many more. Contradictions in the plot include different sequences for the creation of animals and humans (Gen 1:20–27; 2:4–25) and different counts for the numbers of each species of animal in the ark and for the length of time they stayed in the ark (Gen 6:19–20; 7:2–4, 8, 12, 15, 17, 24; 8:3, 6, 10, 12). Contradictions also appear at the level of motivation: YHWH decides to destroy the human race but then saves Noah and his family (Gen 6) and commissions Moses to free the Israelites from Egypt and then tries to kill him (Exod 3–4). The problems of repetition and contradiction also appear in the Pentateuch's lists of instructions. The legal collections duplicate and contradict each other on some issues (e.g., the altar laws of Exod 20:24; Lev 17:3–7; and Deut 12:13–14; the different calculations of reparations for theft in Exod 21:37–22:3 and Num 5:7; the three versions of the Ten Commandments in Exod 20:2–17; 34:11–26; and Deut 5:6–21) and omit topics that one might reasonably expect to be included (e.g., how to kill animal

offerings, rules for contract law). Nineteenth-century biblical scholars developed classical source criticism to explain the repetitions and contradictions. Yet the most convincing accounts did not succeed in eliminating all the repetitions and contradictions from their reconstructed sources.[1]

Though the problem of repetition and contradiction has drawn the most attention, the Pentateuch deviates from narrative conventions in two other ways as well. A second problem is that many lists interrupt the story, especially after Exod 19. The Ten Commandments (Exod 20) are followed by successively larger collections of laws and instructions: the Covenant Code (Exod 21–23); the instructions for building the tabernacle (Exod 25–31), which are followed by a detailed narrative of their fulfillment (Exod 35–40); the instructions for offerings in the tabernacle (Lev 1–7) and for cleansing impurities (Lev 11–16), which are followed by the Holiness Code (Lev 17–27); genealogies (Num 1–3) and lists of offerings (Num 7), including and followed by miscellaneous ritual and legal instructions interposed within a narrative of wilderness wandering in the rest of Numbers; all of which is concluded finally by a recapitulation of the whole exodus and wilderness story, including the laws and instructions, this time in the voice of Moses (Deuteronomy). As a result, more than half of the Pentateuch's contents consist of nonnarrative lists of one kind or another. Generations of biblical scholars have therefore attempted to "improve" the narrative by labeling the laws as secondary additions to one or more pristine stories (e.g., P^g supplemented by P^s).[2]

A third major deviation from narrative norms lies in the fact that the Pentateuch's story does not have a proper narrative ending. Moses completes his speech and then dies (Deut 34), which also ends the Pentateuch. The end of Deuteronomy leaves most of the Pentateuch's plot expectations unresolved, most obviously its repeated anticipation that Israel will occupy the land of Canaan. Scholars have therefore tried to provide it with a better ending by recreating older tetrateuchs (the narrative of Genesis through Numbers) and hexateuchs (Genesis through Joshua) or by simply accepting the addendum of the Deuteronomistic History to create an Enneateuch (Genesis through Kings).[3]

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[1] E.g., J. WELLHAUSEN (*Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* [3rd ed.; Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1899], 207, 315) recognized supplementary layers in each of the reconstructed sources, which set the stage for most of the developments in twentieth-century pentateuchal criticism (so R.G. KRATZ, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* [trans. J. Bowden; London: T&T Clark, 2005; orig. German ed., 2000], 227–229).

[2] E.g., Kratz still maintains that "there is largely agreement over excluding the law" from analysis of the separate, and only narrative, sources (KRATZ, *Composition of the Narrative Books* [see n. 1], 226).

[3] The prepentateuchal existence of some form of a Hexateuch ending with the conquest of the land somewhere in Joshua has been the most popular hypothesis from the time of Wellhausen up to today (a recent proponent is D.M. CARR, *The Formation of the Hebrew*

These well-known issues show that modern expectations about what narrative genres require have driven a great many historical reconstructions of the Pentateuch's composition. These expectations about narrative genres are, for the most part, not anachronistic. The writers of biblical literature did know how to tell good stories with strong narrative climaxes. Modern readers usually regard the book of Samuel's Succession Narrative (2 Sam 11–20) as the best prose narrative writing in the Bible, but the pentateuchal writers also knew how to write well-plotted stories on a fairly large scale. The Joseph story is certainly one (Gen 37; 39–50). The exodus story, despite all its multiple layers and intrusions, manages to maintain narrative suspense over fourteen chapters (Exod 1–14), including a double climax in the death of the firstborn and the crossing of the Reed Sea, followed by the cathartic celebration of the Song of the Sea (Exod 15).

Exodus 1–15 shows that pentateuchal redactors as well as authors could conform their materials to narrative plot conventions even while incorporating multiple sources, doublets, contradictions, and lists of instructions. The fame of Exod 1–15 as "the exodus story" throughout Jewish and Christian cultures shows that these problems need not prove fatal for narrative success. The exodus story, however, provides one thing that the Pentateuch as a whole does not: a satisfying narrative climax and conclusion. We should therefore consider carefully the failure of the Pentateuch overall to abide by this narrative convention that is attested in its own pages.

The skills that biblical writers can deploy in plotting narratives should warn us that their failure to meet narrative expectations in combining stories with instructions in the composite Pentateuch, as well as probably in P and Deuteronomy, was the product not of authorial or editorial incompetence but of deliberate choices. These choices were clearly literary and rhetorical choices, but they were not narrative choices. They made no attempt to conform to the standards of how to conclude a story, then or now.

Nevertheless, the choices they made were successful. The fact is that it is this form of the text, this genre-breaking amalgam of stories with lists of all sorts, this Pentateuch, that has survived. Indeed, it has more than survived: it succeeded to an unprecedented degree compared to all other Jewish literature – or, frankly, all other ancient literature until the development of the Christian canon that imitated

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Bible [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 290–291, 296). That the current Pentateuch was preceded by a Tetrateuch ending in Numbers was maintained most famously by M. Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. B.W. Anderson; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972 [orig. German ed., 1948]). That it was preceded by a continuous narrative to the end of the Judean kingdom has been suggested by, among others, J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 41–42, and by H.-C. Schmitt, "Die Suche nach der Identität des Jahweglaubens im nachexilischen Israel: Bemerkungen zur theologischen Intention der Endredaktion des Pentateuch," in *Pluralismus und Identität* (ed. Joachim Mehlhausen; Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1995), 262.

and incorporated the Pentateuch while trying to supersede it. And it seems to me that it is this success – the fact that it was this Pentateuch that was scripturalized as Torah and became the first scripture of Western religious history – that we biblical scholars most need to explain about it. Our primary attention should not be directed at its earlier versions and stages and traditions. Even if we reconstruct them accurately, we only succeed in reproducing more conventional forms of ancient literature than are exhibited by the extant Pentateuch. We already have such conventional forms in abundance from other ancient cultures, but these forms of literature did not experience the religious and cultural success of the Torah as we have it.

The pressing question, then, for me at least, is: Why this text and in this form rather than any other? Compositional history can play a role in answering this question, but not if we insist on working with narrative genre expectations that the Pentateuch itself refuses to respect. We need to rethink what the Pentateuch does as religious literature and how it does it.[4]

Though narrative coherence plays a role in most reconstructions of the Pentateuch's composition, some scholars think it governed only the writing of the individual sources. The editing of the sources together may have been governed by other considerations.[5] Some point to the ancient rabbis as recognizing the incoherence of the Pentateuch's narrative and the incompatibility of its laws.[6]

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[4] Similarly D.J.A. Clines, "Does the Pentateuch Exist? Seven Questions We Should Be Asking if It Does," in *A Pillar of Cloud to Guide: Text-Critical, Redactional, and Linguistic Perspectives on the Old Testament in Honour of Marc Vervenne* (ed. H. Ausloos and B. Lemmelijn; BETL 269; Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 45–54; idem, "Putting Source Criticism in Its Place: The Flood Story as a Test Case," in *Biblical Interpretation and Method: Essays in Honour of John Barton* (ed. K.J. Dell and P.M. Joyce; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3–14.

[5] So B.J. Schwartz, "The Pentateuchal Sources and the Former Prophets: A Neo-Documentarian's Perspective," in this volume, pp. 783–793, and also those who think the finished Pentateuch was the product of a political compromise between rival groups in the Persian period, e.g., P. Frei, "Zentralgewalt und Lokalautonomie im Achämenidenreich," in P. Frei and K. Koch, *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich* (2nd ed.; OBO 55; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1996 [1st ed., 1984]), 8–131; idem, "Persian Imperial Authorization: A Summary," in *Persia and Torah* (ed. and trans. J.W. Watts; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 5–40; F. Crüsemann, *Die Tora: Theologie und Sozialgeschichte des alttestamentlichen Gesetzes* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1992), 260–261; K. Schmid, "The Persian Imperial Authorization as a Historical Problem and as a Biblical Construct: A Plea for Distinctions in the Current Debate," in *The Pentateuch as Torah* (ed. G.N. Knoppers and B.M. Levinson; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 23–38; K.-J. Lee, *The Authority and Authorization of Torah in the Persian Period* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011); and my own conclusions in J.W. Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 137–143.

[6] B.J. Schwartz, in his summation of the conference Convergence and Divergence in Pentateuchal Theory, distinguished the approaches of Neo-Documentarian theories of pentateuchal composition from nondocumentarian theories based on their treatment of the presence

But it is not clear that rabbinic recognition of the need to harmonize disparate laws is the same thing as recognizing narrative incoherence. It may instead reflect the rabbis' different expectations of the genres of both pentateuchal narratives and laws.[7] The assumptions about narrative coherence that govern critical models of pentateuchal composition consider a range of possible genres and their conventions that is too limited. They almost never take into account that juxtaposed genres each influence how the other gets read or heard.

Inset Genres

The Torah's storyline encompasses collections of laws, lists of ritual instructions, collections of tabernacle building instructions, and genealogies that amount to considerably more than half of the Pentateuch's total word count.

Biblical reception history shows that narratively inset genres tend to influence how the narratives around them get read, rather than vice versa. The frame genre – in the Bible usually narrative prose – does not lend its reading conventions to the inset genres,[8] but rather the inset genres lead readers to read the frame narrative by the inset genre's conventions. For example, the history of chanting and singing scriptural texts of all genres takes the reading conventions of song genres and extends them to the prose genres contained in scriptures. We do not know when the practice of chanting the Torah's text began, but it is clear that editors of biblical books were already inserting psalms so that psalmic themes and conventions of performance would influence the interpretation of the surrounding narratives. Their use of hymns to provide thematic emphasis as conclusions or brackets to narrative blocks (Exod 15; Deut 32; Judg 5; 1 Sam 2; 2 Sam 22) shows that this tendency is not just a postbiblical development but

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or absence of narrative coherence. He argued that Neo-Documentarians like himself find narrative coherence, or any other kind of literary coherence, only in the Pentateuch's sources, not in its final shape, whereas supplementary theories of redactional growth try to find at least theological coherence in the narrative whole; see SCHWARTZ, "Pentateuchal Sources" (see n. 5).

[7] So B.M. Levinson: "The fact that the three law collections are set in a narrative frame is descriptively accurate. I believe that it goes beyond the evidence, however, to claim that redactional strategy mandates the exclusive validity of one particular form of reading. Indeed, classical rabbinic exegesis, which is certainly synchronic, does not privilege narrative over law, and is certainly not beholden to reading from beginning to end in a unilinear way" (B.M. LEVINSON, "The Bible's Break with Ancient Political Thought to Promote Equality – 'It Ain't Necessarily So,'" *JTS* 61 [2010], 685–694, here 693).

[8] W.J. Houston, among others, has recently defended reading the whole Pentateuch as narrative: "In that its overall structure is narrative, it must be possible to make overall sense of it as narrative"; W.J. HOUSTON, *The Pentateuch* (SCM Core Texts; London: SCM Press, 2013), 15, and see 17.

that it drove the actions of the editors who placed the psalms here to have that thematic effect.[9] Contrary to long-standing modern assumptions about "learned psalmography" diverting and degrading the piety of oral psalmody, biblical editors placed psalms within narratives in order to bring the pious enthusiasm of victory hymns to the reading of historiographic stories.[10]

That is also the case for laws and regulations transmitted by divine oracle to a prophet: their presence within pentateuchal narrative led to the entire five-book collection being read as law (even when differentiating *haggadah* from *halakah*)[11] and as oracle. One place where this traditional effect still prevails over modern criticism is in Deuteronomy. Despite its narrative framework, that book's hortatory cast dominates its interpretation in contemporary criticism, as it should.

The history of the Pentateuch's interpretation in Jewish and Christian traditions shows clearly that the legal and instructional conventions of these

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[9] See J. W. Watts, *Psalm and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative* (JSOTSup 139; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), and K. Finsterbusch, "Integrating the Song of Moses into Deuteronomy and Reshaping the Narrative: Different Solutions in MT Deut 31:1–32:47 and (the Hebrew *Vorlage* of) LXX Deut 31:1–32:47," in this volume, pp. 631–650.

[10] There is an old idea in Psalms research, going back at least to S. Mowinckel but still repeated in recent surveys of biblical psalmody, that the vivid traditions of oral psalmody were constricted and repressed when scribes reduced them to writing. As so-called learned psalmography wrote psalms for narratives and acrostic alphabetical exercises in the Second Temple period, it lost a vital connection to the worshiping community. On the contrary, all the evidence we have for how psalms were actually used by writers and worshiping communities indicates the opposite development. Including psalms in narratives did not lead to psalms being read like stories; it rather led to stories being sung like psalms. Both Jewish and Christian traditions developed traditions of chanting the narrative texts that frequently led to full-scale melodic and even choral treatments. We do not know how far back in time such traditions of musical performance go, but it is plausible that most inset hymns have been strategically placed in biblical narratives to stimulate a sung response praising God for the stories that precede them. See J. W. Watts, "Biblical Psalms outside the Psalter," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (ed. P. W. Flint and P. D. Miller; VTSup 99; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 288–309, here 304–308.

[11] For example, J. Neusner described *halakic* use of the narrative of creation in Gen 1: "The Halakhic starting point then is self-evident. [. . .] If we begin at the end and reconstruct that process, we find ourselves in the very heart of the narrative that yielded the principles realized in the Halakhic rules. For the premise of the Halakhic enterprise – narratives bear within themselves laws that define correct conduct in the Israelite social order – leaves no alternative. From the Pentateuchal narratives, exhortations, and ad hoc rules, the Rabbinic sages undertook to define a system and design a structure. That would define how the behavior of an entire society would realize in everyday conduct the implications of the Torah's story. So from the outcome, the shape and structure of the Halakhah itself, we find our way back to the starting point: the point in the story that precipitated thought of one sort, rather than of another, on this topic, not on that"; J. Neusner, *Judaism's Story of Creation: Scripture, Halakhah, Aggadah* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 53.

inset genres spread to the surrounding narratives, not vice versa. The stories of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers have been excavated as precedents for religious doctrines and legal rulings throughout Jewish and Christian history. By contrast, narrative concerns for plot, theme, and characterization emerge hardly at all in the history of interpretation until modern times.[12] It is, of course, the case that the two religious traditions differ dramatically on the value they place on pentateuchal law. Whereas *halakah* based on Torah became fundamental to rabbinic and subsequent Judaisms and was already dominant in various groups of the late Second Temple period, Christians' displacement of Torah with Gospel led them to emphasize the stories of the Pentateuch more than its instructions and laws. The Christian canon subsumes the Pentateuch into a longer Dodecateuch (or Pentadecateuch, by splitting Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles into two books each), a sweeping narrative history that runs all the way through the book of Nehemiah. But Christians' preferred forms of interpretation for most of their religion's history did not focus on contextualized narrative plot and context but rather applied typology and allegory to both narrative and legal texts.

The choice made in the Second Temple period to define Torah as five books ending with Deuteronomy cannot be explained by either *halakah* or typology. The literary shape of the Pentateuch requires another explanation. I believe this explanation can be found through rhetoric, by focusing on how the Pentateuch addresses its listeners and readers to persuade them of its claims and of its own authority.

Rhetoric

The rhetorical strategy of juxtaposing genres in a sequence of (1) stories followed by (2) lists concluded by (3) positive and negative sanctions shapes the overall structure of the Pentateuch as well as its most important component parts, P and Deuteronomy.[13] This basic claim about pentateuchal rhetoric does not rest on the description, much less the definition, of any particular genres

[12] Even the traditional distinction between *halakah* and *haggadah* did not lead the latter to emphasize conventions of narrative genre, as Neusner observed: "But in the Rabbinic recapitulation in the cause of reconstruction, the Halakhah generalizes the Pentateuchal Halakhah upward. By contrast, the Rabbinic Aggadah particularizes the Pentateuchal Aggadah downward. The one takes specific laws and makes of them governing principles. That is what I mean by generalizing 'upward.' The other reads the narratives verse by verse, dismantling the flow of narrative and taking up each constituent piece in turn, thus particularizing 'downward.' Consequently, they are not commonly understood to tell a single continuous story. They are rarely viewed as writing, each its own chapters in its own modes of discourse, while collaborating in a common, continuous story"; Neusner, *Judaism's Story of Creation* (see n. 11), 6. See also Levinson, "Bible's Break" (see n. 7).

[13] For detailed discussion, see Watts, *Reading Law* (see n. 5).

within it. It is rather a claim about the persuasive effect of the combination as it stands in the five-book collection. It is true that the rhetoric of story followed by lists concluded by sanctions is composed of different genre building blocks. But its force depends on an underlying rhetoric of past, present, and future: the rhetoric of how we got here, what we have to do now, and what will happen if we do and if we don't. Modern political rhetoric uses this form of persuasion a great deal. Documents from across the ancient Near East show that ancient peoples heard a lot of this kind of rhetoric too.[14] It is this rhetorical pattern – story, list, sanction – that explains the persuasive force of Torah and that contributed to its success in making the Pentateuch the first scripture of Western religious history.

The history of scripturalization in the Second Temple period shows clearly that the Torah was scripturalized before the Prophets, despite the oracular nature of many of the prophetic books. It also shows that written Torah functioned as a norm first as the ritual law of the Jerusalem temple and was only gradually extended to social and criminal matters in and after the second century BCE.[15] It was the Pentateuch's lists of ritual instructions that generated its growing authority as scripture.

Of the three components of the story-list-sanctions rhetorical convention, it is especially the rhetoric of lists that requires more extensive analysis from Pentateuch scholars than it has received to date.

The Rhetoric of Lists

Writing seems to have been invented in Mesopotamia for recording lists. Though other genres of ancient literature draw greater attention from modern readers, the writing and interpretation of lists remained the most basic and also the most prestigious scribal activity in Mesopotamian cultures for more than two thousand years. Historians of the ancient Near East have frequently noted that its development and interpretation constituted a "science of lists" (*Listenwissenschaft*).[16] The various omen series, such as the Old Babylonian collection of extispicy omens, *Bārutû*, and the Neo-Assyrian collection of celestial omens, *Enūma*

[14] J. W. Watts, "Story, List, Sanction: A Cross-Cultural Strategy of Ancient Persuasion," in *Rhetoric before and beyond the Greeks* (ed. C. Lipson and R. Binkley, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 197–212.

[15] See J. W. Watts, "Ritual Legitimacy and Scriptural Authority," *JBL* 124 (2005), 401–417; also M. LeFebvre, *Collections, Codes, and Torah: The Re-Characterization of Israel's Written Law* (LHBOTS 451; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 18–23, 146–182.

[16] See W. von Soden, "Leistung und Grenze sumerischer und babylonischer Wissenschaft," in *Die Welt als Geschichte* 2 (1936), 411–464, 509–557; A. Alt, "Die Weisheit Salomos," *TLZ* 76 (1951), 139–44, reprinted in idem, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (2 vols.; Munich: Beck, 1953), 2:90–99; P. W. Coxon, "The 'List' Genre and Narrative Style in the Court Tales of Daniel," *JSOT* 35 (1986), 95–121.

Anu Enlil, represented the pinnacle of scribal expertise. Mastery of omens still grounded the reputation of Babylonian sages in the Roman period.

The power of lists has not waned since antiquity. Lists continue to govern modern bureaucracies in the forms of instructions for routinized procedures and filing systems.[17] Though lists have not received as much scholarly attention as have narrative and lyric poetry, they play a determinative role in human behavior. As the theorist of rhetoric J.D. O'Banion has remarked,

> Rendered as tallies, recordings of the movements of the stars, word lists, dictionaries, or codified laws, the list is a powerful tool for arranging and disseminating isolated pieces of information. It also comes to arrange and, to a considerable degree, dictate the nature of the lives of those who are affected by lists.[18]

As tools for economic and legal control, lists dictate modes of exchange and social standing. The historian of law Cornelia Vismann observes that "[l]ists do not communicate; they control transfer operations."[19] The original and continuing dominance of lists in literate cultures fully justifies J.Z. Smith's description of them as "the most archaic and pervasive of genres."[20]

Because of the social impact of lists, readers use lists in distinctively different ways than they do stories or poems. Lists, by their nature, invite readers and listeners to choose items relevant to themselves and ignore the rest. Whether the list contains omens, ritual instructions, or recipes, readers choose or feel obliged to act on only those elements they regard as appropriate to their situation. Collections of laws, instructions, and genealogies all invite listeners and readers to find those details relevant to their circumstances, their problems, and their identities. When a list appears in a scripture, people frequently presume that all of it must be relevant somehow, but they still pick and choose as their own wishes, time, and circumstances require or allow, leaving the rest for another occasion.

I said above that readers tend to spread the conventions of inset genres to the larger narrative contexts that contain them. Nowhere is this more obvious than with the pick-and-choose characteristics of lists. Jewish and Christian interpreters have extended that practice to every verse of Torah and Bible. James Kugel identifies the criteria of relevance to the reader and of equal significance of any

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[17] J. Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 42–121.

[18] J.D. O'Banion, *Reorienting Rhetoric: The Dialectic of List and Story* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 12.

[19] C. Vismann, *Files: Law and Media Technology* (trans. G. Winthrop-Young; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008; orig. German ed., 2000), 6; also Goody, *Logic* (see n. 17), 54–86.

[20] J.Z. Smith, "Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon," in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 36–52, here 44.

verse of Scripture for interpreting any other as two of four key characteristics of scriptural interpretation that developed in antiquity.[21] On the criteria of relevance and equal significance, let me add that the belief that somewhere in the Torah or the Bible some verse of Scripture must be relevant to me, now, extends and develops an inherent feature of lists of laws and instructions, whether they be ritual instructions, omen lists, or cookbooks, and applies them to other aspects of life. Lists invite readers to find the parts relevant to themselves and ignore the rest, at least for now. This characteristic practice of reading lists has become a distinguishing feature of how religious individuals and communities read scriptures.

Ritualizing Texts

Even when rhetorical interpretation includes a robust analysis of lists, rhetoric alone cannot fully explain the scripturalization of the Pentateuch, at least if we limit it to the book's words and their meanings. Comparative studies of scriptures show that they get ritualized in three different dimensions. Communities that venerate a scripture ritualize its rhetoric, that is, the meaning of its words, through sermon, study, and commentary. But such communities also ritualize the reading process itself through recitation, memorization, and song or chant, as well as performing its contents through various artistic and theatrical media. In addition, communities that venerate a scripture ritualize the physical book by its iconic display, manipulation, decoration, and storage in elaborate book boxes and libraries that serve as reliquaries for the sacred texts.[22]

In Exodus and Deuteronomy, the Pentateuch commands its own ritualization in iconic (tablets, ark, scroll) and performative (read aloud) dimensions, and its exhortations presuppose semantic study of at least its laws. The vocabulary of these commands characterizes the Pentateuch in covenantal, legal, and instructional terms as *tôrâ, ʿēdût,* and *bərît*.[23] These terms indicate that its writers intended the legal and, especially, ritual material to generate the Pentateuch's dominant, what we might call "scriptural," effect.

Thus rhetorical analysis, the history of interpretation, and the Pentateuch's own instructions for its ritualization all point to the lists of laws and instructions as the main engine for its scripturalization. If that is the case, the narrative

[21] J.L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 14–19.

[22] J.W. Watts, "The Three Dimensions of Scriptures," *Postscripts* 2/2–3 (2006–2008), 135–159, reprinted in *Iconic Books and Texts* (ed. J.W. Watts; London: Equinox, 2013), 9–32.

[23] See J.W. Watts, "From Ark of the Covenant to Torah Scroll: Ritualizing Israel's Iconic Texts," in *Ritual Innovation in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism* (ed. N. MacDonald; BZAW 468; Berlin: de Gruyter, forthcoming).

framework may have been utilized simply as a capacious container for the instructional contents. Discussions of literary genres routinely comment on narrative's capacious ability to incorporate other genres, whether narrative takes the form of classical epic or modern novel.[24]

Therefore, we must reckon with the possibility that neither the writers nor the editors of the Pentateuch felt bound to respect conventions of narrative genre composition. If that possibility be admitted, than biblical criticism should abandon compositional theories that presuppose conformity to narrative conventions as evidence for reconstructing one stage or another.

[24] E.g., "A commonplace of Renaissance literary theory and practice held that epic was a sufficiently capacious genre to include elements of other forms of literature" (C. Bond, *Spenser, Milton, and the Redemption of the Epic Hero* [Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011], 80), and "The novel is by all accounts a remarkably capacious genre, and it seems able to embrace just about every other literary form within its bounds. Among contemporary genres, only film has a similar capacity" (A.J. Cascardi, "The Novel," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature* [ed. R.T. Eldridge; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 162–179, here 162); similarly A. Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 180–181.