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The Relationship between Moses and Aaron and the Question of the Composition of the Pentateuch

Thomas Römer

There is no doubt that Moses is the most important human figure in the Torah, which could almost be understood, as suggested by Rolf Knierim, as a “biography of Moses.”¹ Indeed, the book of Exodus starts with Moses’s birth story in chapter 2, and the last chapter of the Pentateuch, Deut 34, reports the death of Moses, so that the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy are tied together by the life of Moses and cover, on the narrative level, the 120 years of his life. If the Pentateuch can be understood as a life of Moses, the book of Genesis would constitute a prologue of sorts to the Moses story.² There are, of course, other actors in the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy, especially Aaron, although he shows up only after Moses’s call in Exod 4 and in a quite unexpected and unprepared way. The reader of Exod 4 may indeed be puzzled because the text had not yet mentioned that Moses had a brother. In Moses’s birth story in Exod 2, there is no allusion at all to an older brother. On the contrary, Moses appears to be the firstborn. And it is also quite clear that the appearance of the sister in Exod 2 is due to a later redactor who wanted to show that Moses was not abandoned by his family when he was discovered by Pharaoh’s daughter.³ The

1. Rolf P. Knierim, “The Composition of the Pentateuch,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1985 Seminar Papers*, SBLSP 24 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 393–415.

2. In the so-called final form of the Torah, this is certainly the case. Gen 15 already introduces a summary of the events described in the following books, and several texts in Genesis allude to the descent to Egypt, especially Gen 12:10–20 and Gen 37–50. When the term *Pentateuch* is used, it refers to the collection of five books that is the first part of the Hebrew Bible. The term *Torah* refers to the foundation document of nascent Judaism, which for some would have been a Hexateuch.

3. The verses mentioning Moses’s daughter are quite commonly assumed to be

insertion of the sister into the story of Moses's adoption by the Egyptian princess creates a chronological problem because Moses receives his name only after his mother has brought him from nursing him, which normally takes several months. That means that the original story was told about a Moses without elder brothers or sisters. Interestingly, when Moses performs the miracle at the sea, so the Israelites can cross it in Exod 14, there is no mention at all of Aaron, although he is a main figure in the negotiations with Pharaoh and in the plague stories.

These observations may lead us to wonder whether there was an older and shorter narrative that told only about Moses, his birth, his flight to Midian, his call there by YHWH, and his return to Egypt, as well as his role as a miracle worker when parting the sea. If this is the case, one must ask why Aaron was introduced into this story and by whom. To complicate the issue, one must also take into account and explain the following fact: several texts in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers present Aaron as being under the authority of Moses, whereas some other texts seem to confer upon him a much more important role. How should we explain the different types of relationship between Moses and Aaron? My hypothesis will be the following: behind the figures of Moses and Aaron we may detect different scribal groups that redacted and transmitted stories that were later combined in order to constitute the Pentateuch. To examine this hypothesis some remarks about the promulgation of the Torah are in order.

1. The Question of the Promulgation of the Torah

In the 1990s, Peter Frei postulated the existence of a Persian policy of "imperial authorization" of local law codes. He suggested that the central Achaemenid administration would occasionally have bestowed local legal documents with imperial authority.⁴ The publication of the Pentateuch and its acceptance as law in Yehud should therefore be viewed as an exam-

an insertion by a later redactor; see, e.g., Werner H. Schmidt, *Exodus*, 2 vols., BKAT 2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988–1999), 1:52–54; Meik Gerhards, *Die Aussetzungsgeschichte des Mose: Literar- und traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu einem Schlüsseltext des nichtpriesterlichen Tetrateuch*, WMANT 109 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2006), 52–54; and Thomas Römer, "Moses and the Women in Exodus 1–4," *Indian Theological Studies* 52 (2015): 245–46.

4. Peter Frei, "Zentralgewalt und Lokalautonomie im Achämenidenreich," in

ple of such imperial authorization. This practice would have encouraged Judeans to codify their traditional customs into an authoritative document, which they would subsequently have ratified. The general purpose of such imperial authorization would have been to prompt some form of institutional cooperation between the Persian Empire and the provinces, granting the latter some degree of local autonomy while simultaneously enforcing the king's rule in legal matters. Such an imperial authorization would also explain why the Pentateuch contains different and sometimes contradictory texts: the Persians would only allow one official document for the province of Yehud.

Several scholars have accepted the theory that such an imperial authorization instigated the publication of the Pentateuch.⁵ However, more recently, this explanation has been strongly criticized.⁶ In fact, the Pentateuch is not comparable to the evidence that has been claimed by Frei and others to exemplify the institution of imperial authorization. There are indeed quite a few inscriptions dealing with specific legal matters, which

Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich, ed. Peter Frei and Klaus Koch, 2nd ed., OBO 55 (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 33.

5. Frank Crüsemann, *Die Tora: Theologie und Sozialgeschichte des alttestamentlichen Gesetzes* (Munich: Kaiser, 1992), 404–6; Rainer Albertz, *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit*, 2 vols., GAT 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992–1997), 2:497–504; Ernst A. Knauf, “Audiatur et altera pars: Zur Logik der Pentateuchredaktion,” *BK* 53 (1998): 118–26; Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Was the Pentateuch the Civic and Religious Constitution of the Jewish Ethnos in the Persian Period?,” in *Persia and Torah: The Theory of the Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch*, ed. James W. Watts, *SymS* 17 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 41–62; and Kyong-Jin Lee, *The Authority and Authorization of the Torah in the Persian Period*, CBET 64 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011).

6. Udo Rütterswörden, “Die persische Reichsautorisation der Thora: Fact or Fiction?,” *ZABR* 1 (1995): 47–61; Josef Wiesehöfer, “Reichsgesetz’ oder ‘Einzelfallgerechtigkeit’? Bemerkungen zu P. Freis These von der achaemenidischen ‘Reichsautorisation,’” *ZABR* 1 (1995): 36–46; Jean-Louis Ska, “‘Persian Imperial Authorization’: Some Question Marks,” in Watts, *Persia and Torah*, 161–82; and Eckart Otto, “The Pentateuch in Synchronical and Diachronical Perspectives: Protorabbinic Scribal Erudition Mediating between Deuteronomy and the Priestly Code,” in *Das Deuteronomium zwischen Pentateuch und Deuteronomistischem Geschichtswerk*, ed. Eckart Otto and Reinhard Achenbach, *FRLANT* 206 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 14–35. See also the contributions in Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson, eds., *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007); and Uwe Becker, “Die Perser im Esra- und Nehemiabuch,” *ZAW* 127 (2015): 607–27.

often are written in two or three languages. The only partial parallel would be with the so-called codification of Egyptian law under Darius I, but this latter case is quite different, and the text on which it is based makes no mention of the codification of law.⁷

One should therefore probably search for more internal explanations for its creation. In this context, the Pentateuch is often viewed as a document of compromise among different scribal schools in Jerusalem during the fourth century BCE or maybe even later.⁸ Different groups agreed to collect the different traditions they regarded as authoritative—for example, the Priestly writing—and combine them in order to create a normative account or a foundation myth of the origins of Israel. That normative account, while it preserved conflicting views, was nevertheless unified by a comprehensive narrative framework stretching from the origin of the world (Gen 1) to the death of the divine mediator, Moses (Deut 34), with this Moses being its main figure.⁹

It is often claimed that the Torah was composed in Jerusalem. However, recent archaeological investigation of the population of Yehud and Jerusalem in the Persian period reveals that Jerusalem was only very sparsely inhabited during this time.¹⁰ Of course, one cannot exclude that some priests and scribes around the temple were enough to compose the Pentateuch. But one should also take into account the political and economic strength of the Babylonian and the Egyptian diaspora. Even if the story of Ezra bringing a “law” from Mesopotamia to Jerusalem in Ezra 7 is totally invented, it reflects in one way or another the implication of the Babylonian diaspora in the compilation of the Torah.¹¹

7. Donald B. Redford, “The So-Called ‘Codification’ of Egyptian Law Under Darius I,” in Watts, *Persia and Torah*, 135–59.

8. Reinhard G. Kratz, “Temple and Torah: Reflections on the Legal Status of the Pentateuch Between Elephantine and Qumran,” in Knoppers and Levinson, *Pentateuch as Torah*, 77–103.

9. Eckart Otto, *Das Gesetz des Mose* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007), esp. 197–204.

10. Oded Lipschits, “Demographic Changes in Judah between the Seventh and the Fifth Centuries B.C.E.,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 323–76; and Israel Finkelstein, “The Territorial Extent and Demography of Yehud/Judea in the Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods,” *RB* 117 (2010): 39–54.

11. See, e.g., Sebastian Grätz, *Das Edikt des Artaxerxes: Eine Untersuchung zum religionspolitischen und historischen Umfeld von Esra 7,12–26*, BZAW 337 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004).

The decision to prefer a Pentateuch to a Hexateuch and to end the Torah with Moses's death outside of the land (Deut 34) rather than with Joshua's conquest is best explained as a concession to the diaspora.¹² Moses's death, which happens according to the will of YHWH, shows that is not necessary to live inside the promised land; the most important thing is to accept YHWH's will and law. Defining the Torah as a *Pentateuch* rather than a Hexateuch means de facto acknowledging the reality and even the legitimacy of diaspora Judaism. Similarly, the Joseph story in Gen 37–50 was apparently a creation of the Jewish diaspora in Egypt or of an author who was sympathetic to this diaspora, which was later included in the Pentateuch as a concession to that diaspora.¹³

It is clear now that there was a (Yahwistic) sanctuary on Mount Gerizim that was built probably after the resettlement of Shechem ca. 480–475 BCE.¹⁴ If so, the instruction in Deut 27:4 for building an altar on Mount Gerizim, found in the Samaritan Pentateuch and supported by one codex of the Old Latin, was most likely introduced at the time of the composition of the Pentateuch as a means of acknowledging the legitimacy of the newly built Samaritan altar.¹⁵

12. For the debate between groups favoring a Hexateuch or wanting to construct a Pentateuch, see Thomas Römer and Marc Z. Brettler, "Deuteronomy 34 and the Case for a Persian Hexateuch," *JBL* 119 (2000): 401–19; Eckart Otto, *Das Deuteronomium im Pentateuch und Hexateuch: Studien zur Literaturgeschichte von Pentateuch und Hexateuch im Lichte des Deuteronomiumrahmens*, FAT 30 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); and Rainer Albertz, *Exodus*, 2 vols., ZBK 2 (Zurich: TVZ, 2012–2015), 1:19–26.

13. On the Joseph story as written in the Egyptian diaspora, see Thomas Römer, "The Joseph Story in the Book of Genesis: Pre-P or Post-P?," in *The Post-Priestly Pentateuch: New Perspectives on Its Redactional Development and Theological Profiles*, ed. Federico Giuntoli and Konrad Schmid, FAT 101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 185–201. On the notion that it was written by a written by an author in the land, but sympathetic to the Egyptian diaspora, see Bernd U. Schipper, "Joseph, Ahikar, and Elephantine: The Joseph Story as a Diaspora Novella," *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 18 (2018): 71–84. According to Franziska Ede, *Die Josefsgeschichte: Literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Entstehung von Gen 37–50*, BZAW 485 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), the Joseph story was conceived from the beginning as a bridge between the patriarchs and the exodus.

14. Yitzhak Magen, "Mount Gerizim: Temple City," *Qad* 120 (2000): 74–118; Ephraim Stern and Yitzhak Magen, "Archaeological Evidence for the First Stage of the Samaritan Temple on Mount Gerizim," *IEJ* 52 (2002): 49–57; and Jan Dušek, "Mt. Gerizim Sanctuary, Its History and Enigma of Origin," *HBAI* 3 (2014): 111–33.

15. Cristophe Nihan, "Garizim et Ébal dans le Pentateuque: Quelques remarques

However, Jerusalem with its temple was perhaps the place in which the compilation of the first edition of the Torah was first decided, probably in contact and cooperation with groups from Samaria.¹⁶ If we try now to identify more precisely the parties involved, we should logically think of the two main institutions in Persian-period Jerusalem: the temple and the lay council presiding over the temple assembly.¹⁷

The existence of a lay council alongside a priestly college seems to be attested in the correspondence between Jerusalem and the Judean/Israelite community of Elephantine, which mentions, besides the governor, “the high priest Jehohanan and his colleagues, the priests in Jerusalem” as well as “Ostanes, the brother of Anani and the leading men among the Jews.”¹⁸ The council of elders was composed of the ראשי האבות, the “heads of the fathers’ [houses],” who are also mentioned in Ezra–Nehemiah. Ezra 3:12 (MT) makes the equation explicit with its phrase, ראשי האבות הזקנים, “the heads of the fathers’ [houses], the elders.” Significantly, in Deut 31:9–13, the Torah, after it is written by Moses, is entrusted to “the priests, the Levites, who bear the ark of the covenant of YHWH, as well as to the elders of Israel” (31:9), who have the task of reading it to the entire community every seven years (31:10–13). This looks like an attempt to bring together three major groups implicated in the promulgation of the Torah. According to Neh 8:13, three groups gather around Ezra “in order to discern [לְהִפְחִיל *hiphil*] the words of the Law”: these three groups are the ראשי האבות, the priests, and the Levites.

en marge de la publication d’un nouveau fragment du Deutéronome,” *Sem* 54 (2011): 185–210. For a somewhat different view, see Detlef Jericke, “Der Berg Garizim im Deuteronomium,” *ZAW* 124 (2012): 213–28.

16. Walter Houston, “Between Salem and Mount Gerizim: The Context of the Formation of the Torah Reconsidered,” *JAJ* 5 (2014): 311–34; Benedikt Hensel, *Juda und Samaria: Zum Verhältnis zweier nach-exilischer Jahwismen*, FAT 110 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), esp. 170–94.

17. Albertz, *Religionsgeschichte*, 502–4. For a similar idea, see Joel Weinberg, *The Citizen-Temple Community*, JSOTSup 151 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

18. A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), 30, lines 18–19; see also Bezalel Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change*, 2nd ed., DMOA 22 (Leiden: Brill, 2011). For the social groups in Jerusalem and Samaria, see further Gard Granerød, *Dimensions of Yahwism in the Persian Period: Studies in the Religion and Society of the Judean Community at Elephantine*, BZAW 488 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016).

On the other hand, however, various passages in the Pentateuch suggest an attempt by priestly groups to claim sole authority in the interpretation of the Torah. Thus, according to Deut 33:10, teaching (יריה) the Torah is the privilege of Levi, the priestly tribe among Jacob's sons.¹⁹

In Lev 10:10–11, Aaron and his sons are commanded to “separate” between “holy and profane, unclean and clean” (10:10) but also to “teach” (יריה) “all the statutes” (כל החקים) communicated to Moses by YHWH (10:11). Here the transition from the traditional duty reserved for the priests to the interpretation of the entire Torah is transparent. This passage is, along with Num 18, the only divine command in the Pentateuch that is addressed exclusively to Aaron.²⁰

The conception of the Aaronides as teachers of the Law also plays an important role in writings from the Hellenistic period (see, e.g., Sir 45:17 or 11QT 56:2–6). At the end of the Persian period, the rapid decline in the influence of the Persian administration over the area appears to have led to the development of the power and status of priestly clergy in Jerusalem and particularly to political claims made by the high priest.²¹

This overview indicates that there are at least three competing groups that can be detected in the Pentateuch and that refer to different figures: Moses, who reflects in many cases the aspirations of the lay council, Aaron, who seems to represent the priestly line, and the Levites, who are related to the figure of Korah in some pentateuchal texts and claim their right to read and to teach the Torah.

2. Moses and Aaron

As already mentioned, in some texts of Exodus, Moses appears alone without his brother. In the texts where Moses and Aaron are mentioned together, Moses comes first in around 90 percent of these passages. Although Aaron appears as Moses's older brother, he is presented as Moses's spokesman or under the authority of Moses.

19. The Samaritan Pentateuch and Syriacus have a plural here, תורות.

20. See also Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, FAT 2/25 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 591–92.

21. The first coin minted in the name of a high priest of Jerusalem, a certain Yohanan, is dated ca. 350 BCE. It indicates that coin minting, and therefore tax collection, came under the control of the high priest in Jerusalem at that time.

There are, however, some texts that claim a higher authority for Aaron, such as the genealogy in Exod 6:13–25, which is considered by most scholars a late priestly insert (P^s) into an older Priestly account (P^g) of Moses's call (6:2–8*), where Moses appears alone without any mention of Aaron.²² The fact that we have to do here with an addition is also demonstrated by the *Wiederaufnahme* of verse 12 in verse 30. Verse 12 reads, “Moses spoke before YHWH, ‘The Israelites have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me, I am uncircumcised of lips?’” and verse 30 reiterates, “Moses said before YHWH, ‘I am uncircumcised of lips, how would Pharaoh listen to me?’”

This list, which looks at first glance as though it might be a genealogy of the twelve sons of Jacob, does not go further than Levi, born third, and pays special attention to Levi's offspring. Verse 20 presents Aaron indeed as Moses's older brother (without, however, mentioning Miriam). Interestingly, nothing is said about Moses's offspring, whereas Aaron's descendants are presented in a detailed way. The author of the list also shows interest for the Korahites who, in Num 16–17 appear in conflict with Moses and Aaron.²³ In Exod 6:14–25 Aaron, Moses, and Korah are all Levites, but the emphasis is put on Aaron and his line. This is particularly clear in the concluding remark in verse 26: “This is Aaron and Moses to whom YHWH said, ‘Bring [sg.] the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, organized in armies.’” In this verse, Aaron, contrary to the majority of the texts in Exodus, appears as YHWH's privileged interlocutor, whom he commands to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, normally Moses's task. Interestingly, this has been corrected immediately in the following verse in MT, which reads: “It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, it was Moses and Aaron.”²⁴ In MT, Moses is put in the first position; later redactors apparently wanted to emphasize Moses's superiority over Aaron.²⁵

22. See recently Albertz, *Exodus*, 1:25–26 and 128, who attributes this genealogy to a very late postpriestly redactor, writing after the hexateuchal redactor.

23. On this, see Jaeyoung Jeon, “The Zadokites in the Wilderness: The Rebellion of Korach (Num 16) and the Zadokite Redaction,” *ZAW* 127 (2015): 381–411.

24. See also Albertz, *Exodus*, 1:131.

25. LXX has the same order as in Exod 6:26. This could be due to stylistic considerations, or it could reflect the original texts. If the latter, MT would be a very late correction.

A similar phenomenon occurs in Num 18:1–24, which is, with Lev 10:8, the only text in the Torah in which YHWH speaks only to Aaron without mentioning Moses. In this speech, YHWH grants to Aaron and his sons a perpetual income and taxes from the sacrifices to be offered by the Israelites. This passage presupposes the foregoing story about Aaron's staff. According to this story, Aaron's staff was the only staff among those of the twelve tribes that sprouted overnight (Num 17:16–27). Here Aaron appears as representative of the tribe of Levi, whereas Num 18:1–24 clearly postulates the superiority of Aaron and his sons over the other Levites, who are said to be “assistants,” but who cannot approach the utensils of the sanctuary or the altar (18:3).²⁶

Interestingly, at the end of the chapter a passage was added (18:25–32), in which YHWH no longer speaks to Aaron but to Moses.²⁷ In a different way, this passage also stipulates the superiority of the Aaronides over the Levites, by claiming that the Levites should also receive a tithe from the Israelites, but that they should give also a tithe from their income to Aaron and his sons. The idea of a tithe of the Levites occurs in the Hebrew Bible only in Neh 10:39 and may reflect a reality of the Second Temple in the late Persian or Early Hellenistic period.²⁸ In Num 18, this topic is introduced by a speech of YHWH to Moses, so that, at the end of chapter 18, his leading position is confirmed again.

Exodus 6 and Num 18 seem to reflect a struggle between Aaron (and the group behind him) and Moses (and the group behind him). Both texts also affirm the superiority of Aaron and his offspring over the other Levites. There are, however, some texts in the Pentateuch that reflect attempts by the Levites to challenge the superiority of Aaron and his offspring.

26. According to Reinhard Achenbach, *Die Vollendung der Tora: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Numeribuches im Kontext von Hexateuch und Pentateuch*, BZABR 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 141–72, Num 18 is part of a theocratic redaction (“theokratische Bearbeitung”) that belongs to the latest layers of the book of Numbers and was added when the Pentateuch was almost completed.

27. Ludwig Schmidt, *Das vierte Buch Mose: Numeri 10,11–36,13*, ATD 7.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 82–83.

28. Rudolf Meyer, “Levitisches Emanzipationsbestrebungen in nachexilischer Zeit,” *OLZ* 41 (1938): 722–28; Ulrich Dahmen, *Leviten und Priester im Deuteronomium: Literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien*, BBB 110 (Bodenheim: PHILO, 1996), 405–8; and Harald Samuel, *Von Priestern zum Patriarchen: Levi und die Leviten im Alten Testament*, BZAW 448 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 235–39.

3. Levites against the Aaronides

This conflict is apparent in Num 16, where the Levites associated with Korah are challenging Aaron's priestly prerogatives: Korah who is also mentioned in Exod 6 appears in Num 16 as the leader of the Levites, who claim the priesthood against Aaron, and who are harshly condemned by Moses:

Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you Levites! Is it too little for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to allow you to approach him in order to perform the duties of the Lord's tabernacle, and to stand before the congregation and serve them? He has allowed you to approach him, and all your brother Levites with you; yet you seek the priesthood as well!" (Num 16:8–10)²⁹

This chapter has recently been analyzed convincingly by Jaeyoung Jeon, who has shown that the Korah-Levites layer is the latest revision of Num 16 and that it reflects the rejection of attempts of Korahite Levites to obtain a priestly status.³⁰ This layer of Num 16 can therefore, as demonstrated by Jeon, be attributed to an Aaronide or a Zadokide redaction.³¹ In Num 16, Moses and Aaron are in solidarity against attempts to challenge their special status and prerogatives.

There is, however, in the Pentateuch a text where the Levites are presented in a better light than Aaron: the story of the golden calf in Exod 32. In this story, Aaron appears in an ambiguous role (at best) because he is presented as the creator of the golden calf and the inventor of idolatry. Because of the clear intertextual relationship of this chapter to 1 Kgs 12, Aaron is even depicted as a forerunner of Jeroboam who according to the Dtr edition of the books of Kings committed the original sin of the Northern Kingdom by introducing idolatry and sanctuaries other than Jerusalem. In Exod 32:21, Moses also criticizes Aaron for bringing a sin over the people: "Moses said to Aaron, 'What did this people do to you

29. Biblical translations follow the NRSV, except that "the LORD" has been replaced by "YHWH."

30. Jeon, "Zadokites in the Wilderness," 381–411.

31. See also Jaeyoung Jeon, "The Zadokite and Levitical Scribal Conflicts and Hegemonic Struggles," in *Scripture as Social Discourse: Social-Scientific Perspectives on Early Jewish and Christian Writings*, ed. Jessica M. Keady, Todd E. Klutz, and Casey A. Strine (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 97–110.

that you have brought so great a sin upon them?” In the parallel account of the story in Deut 9, it is even said that YHWH “was angry with Aaron and wanted to destroy him” and that he was rescued only through Moses’s intercession (9:20).

In Exod 32, the negative image of Aaron is contrasted with the appearance of the Levites, who are presented as the only group who was on the side of YHWH and Moses: “Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, ‘Who is on YHWH’s side? Come to me!’ And all the sons of Levi gathered around him” (32:6). Here the Levites, who appear belligerent and kill thousands of the idolatrous people, are opposed to the idolatrous Aaron. Moses then confirms the “ordination” of the Levites: “Moses said, ‘Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of YHWH, each one at the cost of a son or a brother, and so have brought a blessing on yourselves this day.’” (32:29). What is translated here as “ordained” is מלאו ידכם “your hands have been filled” in Hebrew, and this is exactly the same expression used in Exod 28:41 for the ordination of Aaron and his sons.³² That means that the passage in Exod 32 wants to claim for the Levites the same rights as for the Aaronides. One could therefore understand the rise of the Levites according to Exod 32 as “a replacement to the leadership of Aaron.”³³ There is no consensus about the stratification and the date of Exod 32. The text is probably older than the harsh condemnation of the Levites in Num 16.³⁴ Its integration in the Exodus version of the story (interestingly, this episode is not mentioned in Deut 9–10) nevertheless also reflects the attempt to introduce critical notes about the Aaronide priesthood into the Torah. One may therefore suspect that Exod 32 was at least revised by the same Levitical group that is criticized in Num 16.

32. On this expression, see Konrad Rupprecht, “Quisquilien zur Wendung *ml’ (t) jd plnj* (jemand die Hand füllen) und zum Terminus *ml’ jd* (Füllung),” in *Sefer Rendtorff: Festschrift zum 50. Geburtstag von Rolf Rendtorff*, ed. Konrad Rupprecht, DBAT 1 (Dielheim: printed by the authors, 1975), 73–93.

33. Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2009), 711. See also Jeon, “Zadokite and Levitical Scribal Conflicts,” 101–2.

34. Thomas B. Dozeman, “The Composition of Ex 32 within the Context of the Enneateuch,” in *Auf dem Weg zur Endgestalt von Genesis bis II Regum: Festschrift für Hans-Christoph Schmitt zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Martin Beck and Ulrike Schorn, BZAW 370 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 175–89.

4. Moses's Superiority over Aaron

The introduction of Aaron as Moses's brother takes place in Exod 4:13–17, a passage that is part of 4:1–17, a post-Priestly supplement to the call of Moses in Exod 3.³⁵ This passage deals with Moses's doubts about the success of his mission. The first sign that YHWH performs for Moses, the transformation of his staff into a serpent prepares the reader for the prologue of the plague narrative, as does YHWH's announcement to Moses that the waters of the Nile will turn into blood. At the end, Moses is still not convinced and asks YHWH to find someone else. YHWH gets angry with Moses.

Then the anger of YHWH was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall be God for him. Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs." (Exod 4:14–17)

First of all, it is interesting that Aaron is described here as a Levite and not as a priest. Is this an attempt to downgrade Aaron or an attempt to integrate the Levites into the Israelite priesthood?³⁶ In any case, Aaron's function here is described as that of a prophet, a spokesman. Moses shall put YHWH's words that he receives into Aaron's mouth. This description of Aaron's role triggers the statement that Moses will be "god" for Aaron (Exod 4:16). The description of Aaron as Moses's prophet occurs also in Exod 7:1, where Moses is equally qualified as "god," but here in regard to Pharaoh: "YHWH said to Moses, 'See, I have made you God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.'" The qualification of Aaron as a prophet is related to texts in which Moses is described

35. Jan C. Gertz, *Tradition und Redaktion in der Exoduserzählung: Untersuchungen zur Endredaktion des Pentateuch*, FRLANT 186 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 305–27; and Thomas Römer, "Exodus 3–4 und die aktuelle Pentateuchdiskussion," in *The Interpretation of Exodus: Studies in Honour of Cornelis Houtman*, ed. Riemer Roukema, CBET 44 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 65–79.

36. Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, BZAW 189 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 362, speaks of a "bridge" between Aaron and the Levites.

not as a prophet (as, e.g., in Deut 18) but as standing over the prophets. This is especially the case in Num 12, which is a text where Aaron appears together with Miriam in conflict with Moses. In Num 12:6–8, YHWH puts Moses over all other mediations: “When there are prophets among you, I YHWH make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face—clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of YHWH” (Num 12:6–8). In the following story, when Miriam is struck with leprosy, Aaron, the priest, can only take note that Miriam has become leprous; he cannot even pronounce the quarantine. He asks Moses to heal her by calling him “my Lord” (יְיָ) in 12:11, so that only Moses can pray to YHWH, who instructs him about the time of exclusion from the camp. Aaron is depicted as unable to accomplish his priestly functions and dependent totally on Moses.³⁷

One can therefore conclude that Exod 4:1–17 and Num 12 originated in the context of the lay group who considered Moses as their ancestor and as the only real mediator. In composing such texts, they apparently wanted to counter other texts such as Num 18, where Aaron receives direct divine communication and where his priestly function is presented as the most important in Israel.

Yet Num 12 transfers the priestly function to Moses, and a similar transfer can be observed in Exod 4:17, where Moses shall take a “staff” (מִטָּה). The same staff that is mentioned in regard to Moses for the first time in Exod 4:2 appears in the hand of Moses in the account of the parting of the Sea as well, in Exod 14:16, where YHWH tells Moses to lift his staff and to raise his hands to divide the waters. In the rest of the story, however, Moses only raises his hand and the staff is never mentioned again. One can therefore conclude that this mention of the staff is a later insertion. In the plague story in Exod 7–8, the staff is clearly Aaron’s staff, as also in Num 17:16–26. In late texts this priestly staff has been transferred to Moses in order to bestow him also with the symbol of priestly and magical power (see, e.g., Exod 9:23; 10:13; 17:5, 9).³⁸

37. Thomas Römer, “Israel’s Sojourn in the Wilderness and the Construction of the Book of Numbers,” in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld*, ed. Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim, and W. Brian Aucker, VTSup 113 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 439–41.

38. Gertz, *Tradition und Redaktion*, 313–14.

4. A Short Conclusion

External evidence from Elephantine and some biblical texts lead to the assumption that we should distinguish at least three main groups that were involved in the compilation of the Pentateuch, independently from Samaritan and Egyptian diaspora voices: (1) a lay group, which may be reflected in some texts which highlight the role of the elders and in others with the heads of the fathers' houses, and which considered Moses to be their founder; (2) a priestly group, which considered Aaron as its ancestor; and (3) a group of Levites, who tried to maintain their privileges.

The narrations about conflicts or tensions among Moses, Aaron, and the Levites seem to reflect tensions between these groups during the Persian period and perhaps early Hellenistic period. Most texts, especially those ascribed to P in Exodus and Leviticus, seem to reflect a compromise between the lay group and the priestly group. In those texts, Moses and Aaron act together, although Moses stands in almost every passage at first position. But there was apparently some disagreement about that compromise: in Exod 32 the Levites claim to be closer to Moses than the Aaronides. Numbers 16 strongly rejects Levitical claims and confirms Aaron's priestly prerogatives. The Aaronide group also made some attempts to put Aaron over Moses in late texts from the book of Numbers and in an addition to a P text in Exod 6. Other texts, probably written in the milieu of the lay group, responded to these texts by emphasizing Moses's superiority over Aaron, claiming that Moses was "god" to Aaron and Aaron his prophet. Numbers 12 also suggests that Aaron's priestly power needs support from Moses. The priestly power of Moses was finally emphasized by transforming Aaron's staff into Moses's staff.

The Pentateuch appears in this regard not only as a compromise but also as a record of scribal conflicts that were never totally resolved. The only solution was to maintain different claims inside the same document. Yet the epitaph about Moses as the incomparable mediator in Deut 34:10–12 makes the figure of Moses the most important human actor of the Torah, who can be overcome neither by Aaron nor by the Levites.

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