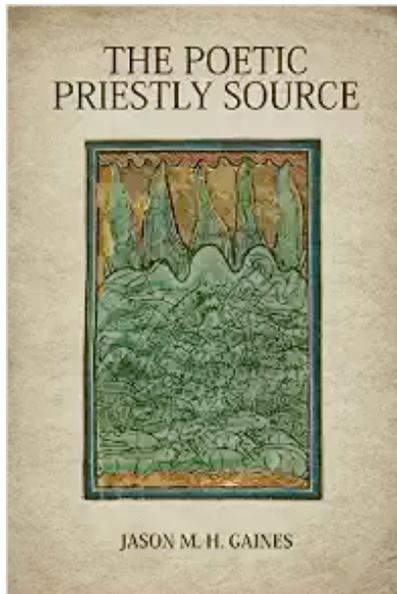**Jason M. H. Gaines**

The Poetic Priestly Source

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This study, reflecting a thorough revision of Gaines's PhD dissertation,[1] argues that the P narrative contains an extensive poetic stratum, which forms the primary stage of P, and was composed by different authors working closely in concert (Poetic-P, middle-exilic, with roots in the Neo-Assyrian period). In the second stage this poetic work was supplemented and modified by prosaic narration and, for example, dates, numbers, and genealogies (Prosaic-P, end-exilic). At stage 3, the addition of the Holiness Code led to the constitution of the P document as a separate text, which at stage 4 was combined with other materials to form the Pentateuch, using P as basis for the framework (final redactor $R^{Non-P/D/P+H}$, different from R^{P+H}). A last stage is mainly scribal. Legal sections were already embedded in the poetic stratum[2] and were further included in the prosaic strata.[3]

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1. Jason M. H. Gaines, "Poetic Features in Priestly Narrative Texts," PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2013.
2. It may be helpful to add that the ostensibly counterintuitive use of poetry in legal texts is attested for Old Frisian law by Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), 127. In Hindu literature one notes the metrical form of large sections of the Law of Manu; see Jan Gonda, *The Ritual Sutras*, A History of Indian Literature, 10 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 1974–1984), 1:480, 607; G. Bühler, *The Laws of Manu Translated with Extracts from Seven Commentaries*, Sacred Books of the East 25 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1886), lxxiv–lxxx, xc; M. Winternitz, *Geschichte der Indischen Literatur*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Amelangs, 1909–1920), 1:364, 3:480.

This is not to say that Gaines maintains an absolute divide between prose and poetry. He envisions a broad poetry–prose continuum in which the poetic pole is characterized by the presence of a number of features out of a multifarious set of characteristics, such as parallelism (in the grammatical, lexical, and phonological articulation of Adèle Berlin, with an added "literary" element, along the lines of James Kugel and Robert Alter), structural devices (chiasm, *inclusio*, and marked word order), rhythm, and other stylistic features such as metaphor. In this continuum a text may be characterized as poetic, but Gaines refrains from strict generic categorization as prose or poetry. Analysis of a small number of samples indicates that texts classified as poetry contain, in the mean, a large number of poetic features, whereas texts classified as prose contain a significantly smaller number of these characteristics.

These characterizations enable Gaines to distinguish between those parts of Gen 6–9; 17 that are rich in poetic features and thus represent the P-poetic stratum and the add-ons in which such features are rare. The analytic method is laudable: a left column presents the text of P-poetic, and a right column gives the full text of P-prosaic, including the text of the first stratum and the prosaic add-ons. Whereas in the left column the cola are ordered as in poetry, in the right column they appear in the linear order of prosaic texts. Thus the entire analysis is in full view. In the creation narrative (Gen 1:1–2:3) Gaines finds P-poetic in 1:6–6, 8–10 (apart from a few vocables), 11aα, 13–14aα,17b–18a, 19–20, 22–24a (apart from למינה), 26a; 27–28, 29aα1 (until לכם), 30–31; 2:1–2a (apart from ביום יהשביע), 3; the prosaic add-ons are in 1:7, in some vocables in 1:9, 10, 24a, in 1:11aβb–12, 14aβ–17a, 18b, 21, 24b–25, 26b, 29aα2b (from את כל עשב); 2:2b (including ביום השביעי). On the other hand 2:4a is taken together with 5:1[4]–2 in parallel, in continuation with 5:24, assuming that the P-proasic add-ons (5:3–23) have replaced the original P-poetic version.

In this way Gaines seeks to reconstruct the entire P-poetic text of patriarchal narrative. Of special interest is his thesis that this stratum did not include Ishmael (introduced from non-P by P-prosaic) and the acquisition of the Machpelah cave (P-poetic includes only 23:2, 19aβ-b, apart from הוא חברון, a P-prosaic gloss in the wake of v. 2). The limited extent of the P-poetic version of the Joseph tale is explained by the assumption that the actual concern with the promise to return to the land diminished the value of the tale of how the ancestors left it. Thanks to the prosodic characteristics, Gaines is able to reconstruct an interesting P-poetic version of the account of the instructions for the building of the tabernacle, in spite of the difficulties caused by the technical nature of this

3. For convenience the following sections are not included in Gaines's analysis: Lev 1–7; 11–27 (including all H); Num 5; 15; 18–19; 28–30; 35:9–34. However, here, too, he recognizes the intermingling of prosaic and poetic features.

4. Gaines (317, n. 68) notes with Eißfeldt that ספר (5:1) is not a regular term in the P work.

section. Thus the opening segment of Exod 25:1–6, 8 is in its entirety parsed as poetry, and so are significant parts of verses 10–15, 18, 20, 22, 23–26, 28–30. In this section, as in, for instance, Exod 29, P-prosaic add-ons are rare, but in other segments they include large parts of the text (25:32b–35, 38–40; 26:2–6, 8–13, 16–30, 33–35; 27:7–19). On the other hand, the narrative of the actual building of the tabernacle is entirely attributed to P-prosaic. This section is closed by the segment on the descent of the divine cloud on the sanctuary (40:34, 36–38).

Gaines argues that the separation of P-poetic texts from prosaic add-ons reveals a continuous, consistent, and thus viable pentateuchal source. An additional boon is that an analysis on the basis of poetic prosody may provide a solution to many critical issues, such as the promise to Abraham (Gen 17:7–8), where verse 8aα is attributed to P-poetic, with verses 7, 8aβb are as prosaic add-ons. Thus in Gaines's view the poetic/prosaic distinction should precede the separation of H from P. An outlook to future research points to poetic prosody in the ritual texts, such as Lev 1:3; for H, similar patterns can be discerned, for instance, in Lev 18:7.

I find much to praise in this new outlook on the P work. In the consistent presentation of prosodic patterning it goes beyond the ground work done by Meir Paran.[5] However, Paran's contribution would have merited extensive representation, since it would have indicated that the extent of the prosodic patterns analyzed in the present study definitely includes ritual passages and, indeed, many of the texts included in H. In addition, there is much to be learned from Klaus Koch's distinction between a "formulaic style" in Exod 25:6–10 and a "periodic command-style" in many other P sections (such as Exod 26), of which the former is attributed to a preceding *Vorlage* originating in an oral context, whereas the latter represents a later transformation into a more scribal style.[6]

Gaines repeatedly shows awareness of the problems inherent to the use of prosody in order to distinguish between prose and poetry. First, many of the features used in the present study for specific differentiation are common to prose and poetry, such as chiasm, *inclusio*, repetition, rhetorical use of word order, rhythm, and sound play (attributed to phonological parallelism). If these features do not stand out in the samples used in order to test the power of prosody, the reason is the choice (five passages in different corpuses) and the extent of the passages (including eight to ten verses in each

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5. Meir Paran, *Forms of the Priestly Style in the Pentateuch: Patterns, Linguistic Usages, Syntactic Structures* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989) (Hebrew with English summary). The contributions of Mary Douglas and James Watts to our understanding of the rhetoric of the P legislation likewise merits more attention.

6. Klaus Koch, *Die Priesterschrift von Exodus 25 bis Leviticus 16: Eine überlieferungsgeschichtliche und literarkritische Untersuchung*, FRLANT 71 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), 7–9, 96–99. Koch's terms are *Formularstil* and *Gefügter (Befehls-)Stil.*

sample, 96–99). If more literary prose had been taken into account, apart from 1 Sam 24:1–8, these features would probably have yielded far more "poetic" features, including parallelism. A second problem is that the execution of the prosaic/poetic differentiation often seems doubtful. For instance, why would the sound play in the two rhythmic clauses in Gen 17:4, anticipating the promise in 17:5, not count as poetic (and therefore repetitive)? Similar questions could be raised for verse 7 (P-prosaic) in comparison with verse 8 (P-poetic). The author (137) views the formulation verse 7 as propelling forward rather than seconding, as in poetic parallelism. However, in such texts as Exod 15 and Deut 32 parallel cola definitely push the reader forward, as such cola often do in the poetry of the Ugaritic epic texts. These questions could be raised again and again and would suggest significant expansion of the extension of P-poetic or, alternatively, recognition of an overall poetic coloring in the P work in general. Since Gaines is most cautious in the construction of his argument and in drawing conclusions, these reflections will hardly surprise him. In the end, the question is whether this innovative and in a sense revolutionary approach was worthwhile. My answer is an emphatic yes.[7] Gaines's work is an important step forward toward a more adequate understanding of a most central text in the Mosaic narrative/legislation and in pentateuchal theory.

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7. I may be forgiven for adding, in a personal note, that the findings of the present study dovetail to a large extent with the results of a syntactic-stylistic analysis of texts attributed to the P work: see Frank H. Polak, "Discourse Profile and 'Priestly' Documents," in *Le-Ma'an Zion: Studies in Honor of Ziony Zevit*, ed. F. Greenspahn and G. A. Rendsburg; (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, forthcoming).