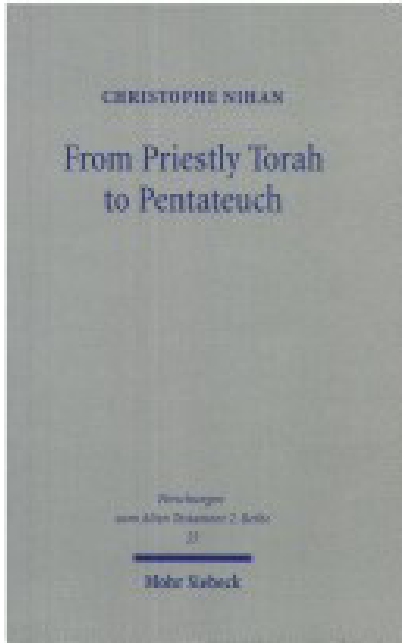


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From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus

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From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus is a revision of Christophe Nihan's dissertation, which was completed under the direction of Thomas Römer and submitted to the University of Lausanne in 2005. Though its main focus is the book of Leviticus, it also addresses the larger pentateuchal Priestly source and the division of that source between P (and its predecessors), H (which Nihan views as post-P; he also extends H beyond a single author or compositional event, positing instead a "Holiness School" whose activity continued for several decades after the composition of the Holiness Code), and later, post-Holiness School revisions. As such, this work treats the full range of compositional and redactional issues in Leviticus, explaining the book's development from its fragmentary beginnings to its inclusion within the Pentateuch. In service of such ends, Nihan engages in careful and detailed exegesis of the pentateuchal Priestly source, and the fruit of his labor is substantial and significant. I will summarize here Nihan's main arguments and offer brief evaluation before turning to a more general response to the book as a whole.

Nihan's introductory chapter entails a helpful *Forschungsbericht* regarding compositional issues in pentateuchal Priestly literature, including a brief but detailed excursus devoted

to the “Holiness Code” (Lev 17–26). This literature review, like the entirety of the volume, is particularly valuable for its engagement with the range of both past and present European, American, and Israeli/Jewish perspectives. The introduction also serves to contextualize Nihan’s study and methodological approach within the recent history of pentateuchal studies.

Chapter 1 addresses the extent and details of the Priestly source in Genesis and Exodus, focusing especially upon the suggestions of several European scholars that P originally ended in Exodus with the instructions for building the tabernacle or their fulfillment. Arguing against this view, Nihan reasserts the argument that P already anticipates the inauguration of the sacrificial cult in Lev 1–9 on several occasions in Genesis and Exodus. For instance, the P flood story—and in particular its close with the establishment of rules for slaughter—anticipates the sacrificial rules in Lev 1–7. The instructions for the priests’ investiture in Exod 28–29 likewise anticipate their fulfillment in Lev 8–9. Moreover, the narrative transition from Exod 40:34–35 to Lev 1:1 demonstrates that these verses were originally contiguous and that Lev 1:1 is not originally the beginning of a new work (51–58). In other words, the Priestly narrative, including its theological perspective and style, exhibits no compositional break between the end of Exodus and the opening chapters of Leviticus, so it is unwarranted to posit that P originally ended with material now found in Exodus. Discussion of his own view of the ending of P, however, Nihan reserves for his consideration of Lev 16 in chapter 4.

Chapter 2 takes up the question of Leviticus in its final, canonical form. In conversation with various scholarly arguments regarding the book, Nihan attempts to justify the delineation of Leviticus as a self-contained scroll and outlines an overall structure for the book in terms of narrative and theology. Notwithstanding several important points that Nihan makes here, this chapter seems the weakest and least integrated of the study, especially in light of the work’s dominant source-critical stance.

Nihan claims that the dating formulae in Exod 19:1 and 40:17, alongside those in Num 1:1 and 10:11, set Leviticus off as a distinct book that its editors meant as “the heart of a fivefold Torah” (74). It is thus not a “mechanical” division. Nihan also insists that, although all of Leviticus must rightly be read as narrative (with its “laws” viewed as divine speeches), attempts to undermine the distinction between strata in the book are not compelling. Even so, the thematic and chronological indications within the work do provide it with a certain logic and unity, and Nihan suggests a tripartite division of the book: Lev 1–10; 11–16; 17–26 (with Lev 27 as an appendix to the entire book). Leviticus 1–7 presents sacrificial laws, after which the priests are invested and the sanctuary cult inaugurated (Lev 8–10). The reference to the deaths of Nadab and Abihu in 16:1, as well as examples of intertextuality between Lev 10 and 16, serve to connect Lev 1–10 both at

the level of theme and plot with chapters 11–16, which are themselves a coherent unit. Nihan thus sees the corpse pollution of Nadab and Abihu as the original circumstance necessitating the Day of Atonement rite (100), a view that, at least within the canonical book, is difficult to maintain in light of the dating of the Day of Atonement in the seventh month (16:29). Chapters 17–26 extend the themes of the earlier chapters of Leviticus through their focus upon the holiness of the deity, sacrifices, priests, the divine space, and the people themselves. Across these divisions—as well as across the entirety of P+H—Nihan sees an overarching motif of reconciliation between deity and humanity that is finally achieved fully in Leviticus. Through the establishment of the sanctuary and sacrificial cult, which culminates in P in the Day of Atonement, the intimacy between God and humans that existed in the antediluvian world is reestablished (106; see also 233–37).

Chapter 3 is a detailed examination of the compositional history of Lev 1–10 that is fully conversant with both the biblical text and the scholarly literature that treats it. Focusing on the narrative setting of Leviticus as a whole, Nihan begins with Lev 8–9 (Lev 10 is only addressed briefly here [148–50]; it is discussed in detail in the book’s final chapter) before turning to Lev 1–7. He argues for the literary coherence of Lev 9 and its fundamental connection with Lev 8, whose ceremony is presumed by the narrative of Lev 9. Moreover, even as he acknowledges late editorial changes in both chapters, Nihan suggests that Exod 29 and Lev 8 originate from the same hand (124–47) and that they are composed with full knowledge of the sacrificial rules in Lev 1–3 (157).

The composition of Lev 1–7 is more complicated in Nihan’s assessment and can thus only be outlined here schematically. Leviticus 1–3 represents an earlier, pre-P instruction, but the original arrangement of the chapters was 1–3–2, not 1–2–3. In Nihan’s view, this reordering recommends itself by solving the problem of the obvious intrusion of Lev 2 between Lev 1 and 3 and by rationalizing the command to salt all offerings—which is Nihan’s understanding of 2:13 (a point that is questionable)—as a summary for the entire pre-P unit (213–15). For their part, chapters 4–7 represent a series of later insertions: Lev 4 is an expansion and consolidation of the Priestly system of atonement that was composed in light of both Exod 30 and Lev 16; Lev 5 depends upon and is thus later than Lev 4; and Lev 6–7 relies upon all of Lev 1–5 (197–98).

Chapter 4 considers the purity laws in Lev 11–16. Nihan begins with a consideration of P’s sources in Lev 11–15, which he views as similar to those he posits that P employed in Lev 1–3. That is, they are several preexisting *tôrôt* that likely were grouped together already prior to their expansion and incorporation into P. In their pre-P existence, these laws served as a sort of manual for the priests’ consultation (300). Then, in conversation with the various scholarly assessments of Lev 11–15, Nihan offers an abbreviated analysis

of the purity laws informed by anthropological, historical, and literary considerations. However, Nihan does offer a somewhat more detailed examination of the food laws in Lev 11 in which he highlights connections between the food laws in Lev 11 and P's created order and the part these rules play in P's overall reconciliation theme. He also argues for an exilic context for the composition of these rules (334–39).

The remainder of chapter 4 is dedicated to Lev 16. Nihan begins by examining the question of compositional development in this chapter. Against the views of much existing scholarship, he concludes that, although dependent upon earlier traditions, verses 2–28 are “a coherent complex of rites” and that “the bulk of ch. 16 should be regarded as a unified composition from the hand of the Priestly writer” (362). Nihan then turns to a consideration of Lev 16's significance within the sacrificial system of Lev 1–16 and its role as the original ending of P as a whole. Accordingly, Nihan also develops more fully here his views of the overall ideological perspective and *Sitz im Leben* for P. He argues that Lev 16 serves as the capstone for ensuring the enduring presence of the deity among Israel (whom he calls God's “priestly nation”) and thus the fitting end to P's vision of reconciliation between deity and humanity. Setting the composition of P in the early Persian period, Nihan also emphasizes the theme of ethnic separation in P as an attempt to preserve Judean cultural identity after the return from exile (383–94).

Chapter 5,¹ which shares its title with the volume as a whole (“From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch”), constitutes the heart of Nihan's arguments regarding the movement from the earlier P source (the scope and content of which were established in the previous chapter) to its incorporation in the Pentateuch itself. For Nihan, this is a process accomplished through the compositional and editorial work of H and its heir, the Holiness School (HS). He thus begins this chapter by demonstrating the dependence of Lev 17–26 (H) upon P. He then turns to a detailed discussion of H's reuse of laws from P, the Decalogue, Deuteronomy (D), and the Covenant Code (CC). Finally, he considers those passages outside of Lev 17–26 that are thematically and linguistically analogous to the Holiness Code (Numbers, in his view, is a special and separate case, for he accepts the view of Reinhard Achenbach² that the Priestly material in this book is later than HS and

1. Much of this chapter was published previously in an abbreviated form (“The Holiness Code between D and P: Some Comments on the Function and Significance of Leviticus 17–26 in the Composition of the Pentateuch,” in *Das Deuteronomium zwischen Pentateuch und Deuteronomistischem Geschichtswerk* [ed. Eckart Otto and Reinhard Achenbach; FRLANT 206; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004], 81–122), but Nihan's views have changed on some points, which he carefully and helpfully notes.

2. *Die Vollendung der Tora: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Numeribuches im Kontext von Hexateuch und Pentateuch* (BZABR 3; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003).

therefore comes from a different hand). He suggests, like Knohl, that H is actually part of a larger school whose editorial work extends to the late fifth century B.C.E. (572–75).

For Nihan, H is both a supplement to and a completion of P as well as an exegetical reception of the non-Priestly pentateuchal legislation. Moreover, it bears little evidence of subsequent editing (545–46). On the basis of such observations, he concludes with Eckart Otto and others that H is the work of the pentateuchal redactor: “Lev 17–26 was never intended as a self-contained legislation but was conceived from the beginning as part of a complementary reading of the biblical laws” (549). Clarifying the motivation for H’s engagement with its sources, Nihan states, “The redactional activity of inner-legal exegesis which can be consistently identified in Lev 17–26 corresponds to the necessity of dealing with the tensions which were automatically created by the juxtaposition within a single, unified document (although certainly already divided into several scrolls) of the Decalogue, the CC, D, and P” (548–49). H as pentateuchal redactor can abide the contradictions between the different legal corpora because its work is intended as a compromise between various traditions. Additionally, Nihan suggests that D can be conceptualized in the compiled Pentateuch as a divine concession for the second wilderness generation rather than as a commentary of second rank (554 n. 615; see, however, the potentially conflicting view on 556, where he argues that “Deuteronomy is simply an appendix” to the Sinai legislation that precedes it in the compiled Pentateuch and that he characterizes as “the heart of the divine revelation”).

In my estimation, Nihan’s view of H as an irenic and compromising supplement vis-à-vis the legislation that it revises cannot be sustained. Indeed, it is unnecessary to assume the combination of the different legal collections into a unified document in order to agree with Nihan that H is a systematic reinterpretation of earlier biblical legal collections. Instead, CC and D can serve as sources for H to exploit and then, once it is finished with them, to leave behind. Such a view relieves the tension between conflicting laws in the Pentateuch without requiring H to blunt the distinctiveness of its own legislation by immediately setting it alongside competing laws. This view is also supported by contrasting H’s use and revision of P with its interactions with CC and D. I do not see evidence of H making insertions into its non-Priestly sources, a point that Nihan actually concedes in his consideration of H interpolations in Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy (564–72). By contrast, H makes several insertions into P (a point that Nihan likewise readily accepts). To my mind, such different revisionary procedures suggest that H

intends to *supplement and complete* P but to *exploit and supplant* CC and D. It also suggests that H is not the pentateuchal redactor.³

Much of Nihan's argument seems to rest on his identification of a "few instances" (555 n. 617), such as Lev 19:20–22, where he concludes that H is supplementing D (Deut 22:23–27) (468–71). However, such cases are hardly clear instances of supplementation. For example, Lev 19:20–22 can stand wholly apart from D. Thus, I would suggest that, while Lev 19:20–22 may be *inspired by* D, it is not a clear case of supplementation.

Chapter 6 is a close examination of Lev 10, which (along with Lev 27) Nihan argues is the latest insertion into the book of Leviticus. In his view, Lev 10 is not composite, as many scholars have claimed. Rather, it is a coherent narrative comprised of five sections (10:1–5, 6–7, 8–11, 12–15, 16–20) arranged chiasmically (576–79). Moreover, the chapter is a complex example of innerbiblical exegesis that draws significantly from P, H, and even Ezekiel. Its goal is to elevate the priests, as exemplified both in this chapter's clear delineation of priestly duties and in its prioritization of Aaron over Moses in the interpretation of Torah (598–603). Nihan avers, "The *whole* narrative of ch. 10—and not only the episode of v. 16–20—may also be viewed, simultaneously, as forming the founding legend of the priestly tradition of Scripture's interpretation and commentary" (605). It is thus a fitting final addition to the priestly book of Leviticus, even as it anticipates the tradition of scribal Torah commentary in the postbiblical period. Finally, a summary and enumeration of conclusions close the volume, which also includes source, author, and subject indices.

Nihan's approach both to issues of compositional history and interpretation in general can be characterized as even-handed and judicious. To be sure, his conclusions strongly reflect the current state of European pentateuchal theory, and thus his work shares much in common with that of scholars such as Reinhard Achenbach, Jan Christian Gertz, Eckart Otto, Thomas Römer, and Konrad Schmid, among others. Yet he also interacts with and finds useful the views of scholars whose general orientation is significantly different from his own. Perhaps foremost in this group are the Israeli/Jewish scholars Jacob Milgrom and Israel Knohl. In addition, Nihan establishes an independent voice for himself through reasoned and charitable objections to the views of other scholars on points both large and small. For example, as noted already with regard to his view of the

3. For further discussion of these issues, see Jeffrey Stackert, *Rewriting the Torah: Literary Revision in Deuteronomy and the Holiness Legislation* (FAT 52; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), esp. ch. 5; idem, "The Holiness Legislation and Its Pentateuchal Sources: Revision, Supplementation, and Replacement," in *The Strata of the Priestly Writings: Contemporary Debate and Future Directions* (ed. Sarah Shectman and Joel S. Baden; AThANT; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, forthcoming).

composition of Exod 29 and Lev 8–9 and the composition of Lev 10, Nihan is on the whole more conservative in his identification of multiple strata within individual pericopae and larger literary complexes than many other recent European scholars. Similarly, although Nihan accepts Knohl's characterization of a Holiness School, he proposes an alternative dating and scope for this group's work.

In my estimation, Nihan's book is a very important contribution to the study of pentateuchal Priestly literature. Although there is much with which to disagree in the volume, such objections in no way undermine the book's considerable value. The exegesis is critical, detailed, and creative. Nihan is to be congratulated for a highly engaging and even provocative work that will no doubt play a significant role in moving current debates on pentateuchal theory forward.