

The Compositional Hypothesis: A New Look at the Torah

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What evidence is there to support the hypothesis that the Torah is an integral composition planned and executed by a single author or school, what I call “The Compositional Hypothesis?” The following is a collection of resources based on my research, laying out in detail the case for this hypothesis. It includes most of my publications as well a few by my colleague Dr. Paul Hocking.

1. The Mishnah

- a. One of the keys to the discovery of the compositional character of the Torah was an earlier discovery of the literary format of the Mishnah. A decade-long project to identify the organizing principles of the Mishnah led to the production of a new layout of the text of the Mishnah. In 1997 the full text of this edition of the Mishnah was accepted for publication by Ben-Gurion Univ. However, since the publication would have required obtaining a very large grant, I decided instead to upload the text to the then new internet, where it has resided since.
[The Woven Mishnah in Hebrew \(circa 1990\)](#)
This is a full Hebrew text of the Mishnah. Each chapter is arranged in two dimensions, as a table or weave.
- b. The discovery of two-dimensional chapters was first reported in a peer-reviewed journal published by Bar-Ilan Univ. in Hebrew, Alei Sefer 14, 1987:
[The Literary Structure of the Mishnah \(Erubin Chapter X\) כל חלקי הבית אחוזים זה בזה](#)
- c. About the same time, I published an article in the journal of Israeli Talmud teachers, Shmaatin. It demonstrates that the third chapter of Mishnah Sheviit was constructed as a weave. The article is in Hebrew.
[Shmaatin: Sheviit \(1987\)](#)
- d. The following Hebrew articles contain introductory material for reading the Mishnah according to its literary structure:
[מבוא למשנה כדרכה \(Circa 2000\)](#)
[יש מבנה למשנה: אנשי כפר חנניה \(Circa 2000\)](#)
- e. Here is an English introduction to The Structured Mishnah. It was delivered as a lecture to the Talmud faculty of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America in 2005.
[Introduction to The Structured Mishnah \(2005\)](#)
- f. The initial impetus to study the literary format of the Mishnah’s chapters was provided by a reading of a commentary on *Mishnah Avot* by the Maharal of Prague. He observed that the sayings of the five “pairs” of communal leaders in

the first chapter of Avot should be read as a coherent two-dimensional composition. The following English article details and expands the Maharal's approach to what has become a seminal text for the discovery of the Torah's literary format:

[The Art of Writing the Oral Tradition \(1998\)](#)

2. The Torah

- a. A link between the Torah and the Mishnah is found through a unique arrangement of the Decalogue described here in an early essay:

[The Exoteric Decalogue \(2002\)](#)

I am currently writing a piece detailing the dependance of the Pairs text in Avot on an oral tradition regarding an esoteric reading of the Decalogue. I will mention the details here because it is critical to understanding the full significance of the link between the literary formats of the Torah and the Mishnah.

- b.

The arrangement of the Decalogue described in the above pieces is based on a division into ten parts that appears in the scrolls of the Torah. Like the Catholic division, it takes the two "Do not covet" verses as two independent Words (commandments). Identifying this pair of Words leads to reading the Decalogue as five consecutive pairs of Words. Each pair is split between the two stone tablets, so that one tablet contains the "odds" and one the "evens." There is no hint of this arrangement anywhere I am aware of, except for the Pairs in Avot.

The author of the Mishnah crafted the five Pairs to reflect reading the Decalogue as five consecutive pairs of Words. The aspect of consecutively organized pairs in the Torah is reflected in the presentation of the Pairs in Avot as representatives of five consecutive generations. The sayings of the Pairs in Avot can be read partly as glosses on the inverted parallel Words: the first Pair reflects the last Decalogue pair, the two "Do not covet" Words. The author of the Mishnah emphasized the fact that he read the Decalogue containing two "Do not covet" Words by beginning each of the sayings of the first Pair with the same words "Make your house." Moreover, the very first of the Pairs' sayings is a clear reflection of the parallel Word: "Make your house a meeting place for the wise" parallels "Do not covet your fellow's house." The saying is preventive: if your house is a meeting place for the wise, you have no reason to covet your neighbor's house.

Reading the articles noted above for Avot and the Decalogue will expand and clarify the correspondences between the two. Here I want to add what the author of Avot adds about the origin of what he implies is an esoteric reading of the Torah. The chapter begins "Moses received torah from Sinai." In this context "torah" means "teaching" and not the "Torah." Avot then describes the

transmission of this teaching to just a few individuals in each generation, making it an esoteric teaching. The members of the five Pairs are amongst those who received the esoteric teaching that appears in the composition that includes all ten of their sayings, the composition that can be read as an esoteric commentary on the Decalogue. The esoteric message of the Pairs is found in its structure, as discovered by the Maharal, and it parallels an esoteric reading embedded in the structure of the Decalogue.

- c. The structural reading of the Decalogue is expanded in Part Two of my book: [Before Chapter and Verse: Reading the Woven Torah \(2022\)](#)¹
The book gives an overview of how to read the Torah as a woven text. It demonstrates the value of this reading by solving the “YHWH-Elohim” problem in Genesis without recourse to multiple sources.
- d. The following article gives a top-down view of some of the conclusions from my book:
[An Alternative to the Documentary Hypothesis: Textual Weaving](#)
- e. The woven Torah is available both in Hebrew
[The Woven Torah in Hebrew](#)
And English
[The Woven Torah in English](#)
- f. An introductory paper
[The Lord Spoke to Moses in Tables](#)
was presented at a conference at the New York Theological Seminary in 2010. The presentation is also available as a slide presentation here:
[The Lord Spoke to Moses in Tables: Part 1](#)
And here:
[The Lord Spoke to Moses in Tables: Part 2](#)
- g. Two articles about Leviticus were dedicated to the memories of mentors of mine. The first was published in The Journal of Hebrew Scripture in 2008
["The Editor was Nodding" A Reading of Leviticus 19 In Memory of Mary Douglas](#)
- h. The second was published in an SBL volume in memory of Jacob Milgrom: (Gane, Roy E., and Ada Taggar-Cohen, editors. Current Issues in Priestly and Related Literature: The Legacy of Jacob Milgrom and Beyond. Society of Biblical Literature, 2015)
[Structure is Theology: the Composition of Leviticus](#)
- i. The above article served as the basis for a PhD thesis by Paul J Hocking in 2021: [A New and Living Way A Study of Leviticus as Rhetoric A Multi-Disciplinary Critique of Moshe Kline's Approach to the Reading and the Writing of the Book](#)
- j. Dr. Hocking and I jointly presented a paper on the Covenant Code at the 2022 International Meeting of the SBL, Salzburg, Austria, Stylistics and the Hebrew Bible Section. The paper is available both as a video (recommended for the

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quality of the slides)

[A New Way of Reading the Covenant Code Based on The Esoteric Woven Torah](#)

and as a paper:

[The Covenant Code: A New Way of Reading the Ancient Writing: Kline and Hocking](#)