JBL 144, no. 2 (2025): 217–239
https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.144.2.2025.2

The Covenant Code: A New Way of Reading the Writing

PAUL HOCKING
phocking@icloud.com
Abergavenny, Wales

MOSHE KLINE
moshekline@gmail.com
Jerusalem, Israel

In this article, we propose a new way of reading the Covenant Code in the book of Exodus. We argue for a different way of understanding the ancient writing of the code. Using synchronic, literary criticism of the second half of the Covenant Code (Exod 22:17–23:19 [Eng. 22:18–23:19]), we read the laws as five pericope-triads, rather than independently, on the basis of their repeated literary devices. The resulting parallel pericopes appear as a literary "weave." The flow of meaning down the weave appears to visualize YHWH's approach to building a holy nation. The identification of woven composition presents new possibilities for an integrated understanding of the literary context of specific laws. The meaning of any given law is a function of its place in the weave. Therefore, much of this article is directed at developing a more complex understanding of "context" than is usual. We hypothesize that *literary weaving* was an ancient scribal paradigm in this context, and that applying it to such texts may suggest rhetorical purpose for repetitions and apparent disjunctures.

In this article, we suggest a new way of *reading* the Torah, because we argue for a different way of understanding the *writing* of the Torah. We offer here a literary-critical, synchronic case study of what we take to be a single literary unit, the second half of the so-called Covenant Code (Exod 22:17–23:19 [Eng. 22:18–23:19]). We do not address the literary composition of the extant text or its historical composition, and we do not engage with diachronic questions addressed elsewhere or with the text's relationship with ancient Near Eastern legal collections.[1]

[1] Diachronic studies include David P. Wright, *Inventing God's Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi* (Oxford University Press, 2009); John Van Seters, *Law Book for the Diaspora: Revision in the Study of the Covenant Code* (Oxford University

The reader of this legal unit may be left with the impression that it is a random collection of laws, but we set out evidence that the extant form of the unit was constructed in parallel in two dimensions, and with a suasive intent that is more covenantal than legal. The initiated hearer or reader is guided by repeated literary devices to hear/read the laws in sets of three (here called *triads*), and so to discern a meaningful flow in the rhetoric from set to set, from the beginning to the end of the unit. Alexander Samely et al. captured this insight neatly in their typology of ancient Jewish literature, calling such use of repeating literary devices "repetitions as markers of architecture," and defining it as "a repetition of words, marking out as coordinated certain passages that deal with contrastive sub-topics of the same superordinate theme, usually unnamed."[2] These repeating markers or correspondents are taken as primary in this reading, ahead of paragraph content. Our argument is that the ancient writers used repetitions to indicate the cognitive units for rhetorical purposes and for the reader's benefit.

I. The Literary Context

We consider the Covenant Code (Exod 21:1–23:19) as made up of two literary units. The first unit (Exod 21:1–22:16) presents itself as case law, marked by the repeated casuistic formula, "if a person does X …" (usually כִּי, with an imperfect verb, impersonal, in the third person); this unit is focused on the subject of torts or personal damages.[3] In contrast, the second unit, our unit of interest (Exod 22:17–23:19), does not use the casuistic "if" formula (except subordinately in 22:22, 24, 25), but uses simple commands in the imperfect (so "apodictic"), most often in the negative, "you shall not …," and often with personal, second-person address.[4] The closing boundary of this second unit is taken as 23:19, as the following unit in Exodus changes genre to prospective narrative, starting with the words, "Behold, I will send my angel before you …" (23:20).[5]

Press, 2003); Bernard M. Levinson, "Is the Covenant Code an Exilic Composition? A Response to John Van Seters," in *In Search of Pre-exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, JSOTSup 406 (T&T Clark, 2004), 272–325; B. Kilchör, "The Direction of Dependence between the Laws of the Pentateuch: The Priority of a Literary Approach," *ETL* 89 (2013): 1–14. For the ancient Near Eastern context, see T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, ApOTC (InterVarsity Press, 2017), 447–49.

[2] Alexander Samely et al., *Profiling Jewish Literature in Antiquity: An Inventory, from Second Temple Texts to the Talmuds* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 313.

[3] Bernard S. Jackson, *Wisdom-Laws: A Study of the Mishpatim of Exodus 21:1–22:16* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 45–54; Albrecht Alt, "The Origins of Israelite Law," in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (Blackwell, 1966), 88–132.

[4] Jackson, *Wisdom-Laws*, 54–59; Alexander, *Exodus*, 509–10.

[5] Joe M. Sprinkle, *"The Book of the Covenant": A Literary Approach*, JSOTSup 174 (JSOT Press, 1994), 33–34.

The subject or logic of the regulations in our unit is not so easy to categorize as the first (torts). The key, we argue, is to read the laws in sets of three, or in *triads*, rather than to see them as separate laws; then the resulting construct can be conceived of as a two-dimensional table. Such a solution is not to be excluded as implausible, as similar two-dimensional structures have been proposed by scholars for the literary units of creation, the "plagues," and the offerings.[6] Didier Luciani's proposal on the offerings (Lev 1–3) is particularly relevant, as it comes from legal genre in Leviticus, as does our Exodus unit. We argue, however, that the more culturally appropriate metaphor would be to conceive of the structure as a *weave*, containing warp and weft threads.[7]

II. Text as Weave: Methodological Assumptions

The ancient use of *weaving* as a metaphor for *writing* may have come from Quintilian and the Latin *textus*, referring literally to "something woven," from the past participle of *textere*, "to weave, join, braid, fabricate."[8] We hypothesize that literary weaving was an ancient scribal paradigm in this context, and that applying it to these texts may suggest a rhetorical purpose for repetitions and apparent disjunctures. As contemporary readers, we live with a reading paradigm that is replete with embedded assumptions. Mary Hocks explains that these assumptions have been constructed historically through writing and printing processes, and Walter Ong states cogently, "More than any other single invention, writing

[6] On creation, see Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Free Press, 2003), 31; C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (P&R Publishing, 2006), 73. On the plagues, see Umberto Cassuto, *Perush ʿal Sefer Shemot* (Magnes, 1959), 61; Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus* שמות: *The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPSTC (Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 38; Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of our Pilgrimage*, Bible Speaks Today (InterVarsity Press, 2005), 111; Moshe Greenberg and Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Understanding Exodus: A Holistic Commentary on Exodus 1–11*, 2nd ed. (Cascade, 2013), 120–54. On offerings, see Didier Luciani, "Structure et Theologie en Lv 1,1–3,17," in *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers*, ed. Thomas Römer, BETL 215 (Peeters, 2008), 319–28, here 324

[7] Moshe Kline, "The Editor Was Nodding: A Reading of Leviticus 19 in Memory of Mary Douglas," *JHebS* 8 (2008): art. 17, 1–59, here 41, https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2008.v8.a17; Paul J. Hocking, "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" (PhD thesis, University of Chester, 2021), 262–63, https://chesterrep.openrepository.com/handle/10034/626200; Moshe Kline, *Before Chapter and Verse: Reading the Woven Torah* (Kindle Direct Publishing, 2022), esp. 25, 31, and 43, https://www.amazon.com/Before-Chapter-Verse-Reading-Woven/dp/9655982718.

[8] Toivo Viljamaa, "Text as *Hyphos* in Quintilian: Institutio oratoria 9.4.3–23," in *Ad itum liberum: Essays in Honour of Anne Helttula*, ed. Outi Merisalo and Raija Vainio (University of Jyväskylä, 2007), 131–38, here 132 and n. 3, and 135.

has transformed human consciousness."[9] Therefore, we may be oblivious to ancient forms of rhetoric that were built on different embedded assumptions, for example, those from oral, mnemonic, or other traditions.[10] Repetitions and parallel pericopes could be viewed as a form of visual rhetoric where "the structure itself becomes semiotic" (applying the words of Hanno Ehses).[11] Put simply, the careful rhetoric in this literary unit seems to unite laws in triads, and then links the triad rows to make up a meaningful picture or "weave," when seen as a whole. The identification of "woven" composition in such texts presents new possibilities for understanding the literary context of specific laws. The meaning of any given law is a function of its place in the weave, as defined by its warp and weft. Therefore, much of this article is directed at developing a more complex understanding of "context" than is usual.

III. The Literary Unit

The Unit Weave

We argue that this unit (Exod 22:17–23:19) contains five literary triads that are best conceptualized as a two-dimensional weave, containing warp and weft threads. Now, whether the structure was to be *conceived* in the mind like this, led along by aural echoes in the hearing-reading, or actually *composed* like this as a written text in a table-weave, is not critical to the argument at this point. We consider that the received linear form indicates its architecture to the hearer/reader through repeating literary devices, and not primarily through distinctive content.[12] As contemporary readers, fixed in the assumptions of linear texts, we may judge these repetitions to be repetitious and redundant. However, we ask that such assumptions be bracketed out, at least at this stage, in order to consider the possibility of a text-weave being indicated by repeating literary devices—a proof-is-in-the-pudding argument.

[9] Mary E. Hocks, "Understanding Visual Rhetoric in Digital Writing Environments," *College Composition and Communication* 54.4 (2003): 629–56, here 634; Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, New Accents (1982; repr., Routledge, 1997), 77.

[10] Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*, LAI (Westminster John Knox, 1996); David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2005); H. Van Dyke Parunak, "Oral Typesetting: Some Uses of Biblical Structure," *Bib* 62 (1981): 153–68; Marianna E. Vogelzang and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, *Mesopotamian Epic Literature: Oral or Aural?* (Mellen, 1992); John Miles Foley, *Oral Tradition and the Internet: Pathways of the Mind* (University of Illinois Press, 2012).

[11] Hanno H. J. Ehses, "Representing MacBeth: A Case Study in Visual Rhetoric," in *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Victor Margolin (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 53–63, here 59.

[12] See further on rhetorical symmetry in the Hebrew Bible and the Mishnah in Hocking, "New and Living Way," 13–36, 157–73, 185–210.

For ease of reference, the five textual triads are numbered 1–5, and each member of a triad we will call a "segment," lettered consecutively: L (left), M (middle) and R (right), assuming English format. The literary unit or weave (Exod 22:17–23:19 Heb) is represented below.

	L	M	R
1	22:17	22:18	22:19
2	22:20	22:21–23	22:24–26
3	22:27	22:28–29	22:30
4	23:1–3	23:4–6	23:7–9
5	23:10–11	23:12–13	23:14–19

The segments are read in exactly the same order as in the "linear" text, but each triad of laws is read or heard as if it was in a thread (horizontal row), with the segments side by side, in parallel with each other. One reads the three segments in the first row (L–M–R), and then the three segments in the second row, and so on, but one is prompted by the literary devices to conceive of the *segments* as in parallel with each other, side by side, and the *rows* as parallel, one under each other.

One of the most important observations for deriving meaning from this composition is that the flow of ideas is from triad to triad, rather than from law to law. So, for example, if one reads the first six laws in a linear manner, they are about a sorceress, then someone who commits bestiality, and then one who sacrifices to idols, then relationships with a sojourner, widows and orphans, and finally, the poor. This does not seem coherent, until one realizes that each triad is bound together by a repeating formal device and explores a specific theme or concept—the first three cases are people to be socially excluded, and the next three are those who are socially oppressed or disenfranchised in some way. The relationship between these concepts determines the *color* of the thread, or the *picture* woven into the fabric of the text. Given this, in this article we will use the term *thread* for the segment-triads, rather than *row*.

To start, it will help to see the big picture or "map" up front, so it is easier to follow the details as we progress. From triad to triad (that is, from thread to thread), the text becomes more complex in structure and concept. It moves in stages from addressing social outsiders (thread 1), through increasingly complex levels of social organization (threads 2 to 4), to the ultimate form of society, the nation, with its own calendar and relationship with the deity (thread 5). This composition forms the picture in the horizontal *weft* threads (its suasive intent), as below.

Warp Threads Weft Threads Relationship to:	L Earthly-Oriented Mundane Immanent	M Conceptual Middle between the Mundane and Divine	R YHWH- Oriented Divine Transcendent
1. Outsiders	1L	1M	1R
2. Disenfranchised	2L	2M	2R
3. Societal Authority	3L	3M	3R
4. Justice System	4L	4M	4R
5. YHWH's Nation	5L	5M	5R

In contrast, the vertical *warp* threads, appear arranged around concepts such as "the Mundane and the Divine," or "the Immanent and the Transcendent." Warp thread L addresses mundane or worldly matters (and, initially, underworldly matters), while every segment in thread R refers to the deity, YHWH, by personal name or in first-person address. Thread M acts as *a conceptual middle*, a constant interplay between the dyads defined by L and R. This suggests a kind of *textual loom*, employed by the weaver of texts in designing and creating the weave.

To start, we will consider the first and fifth threads, using close contextual reading based on the Hebrew text, as these threads form a framework for the middle of the weave (threads 2–4). Our English translation is generally word for word, following the Hebrew lexemes and syntax closely. We recognize that this is poor translation for normal purposes, but (for widest readership), we want to retain in English the lexical repetitions and syntactical relationships in the Hebrew. We have also spaced the text in each segment, to try to line up matching text in parallel segments. We hold that the resonances in the text are important for the initiated reader, as they indicate the formal/rhetorical architecture. To repeat, the repetitions/parallelisms in the text are read as the primary indicator of structure, and the content as secondary. It is advisable to read each text-thread closely a few times, to gain a personal grasp of the thread, and its three segments, before then reading our exposition. Our aim is to illuminate the literary repetitions or parallelisms in the text so that readers can validate them, evaluating the evidence being used in the argument. The English and Hebrew text for the full unit (the five threads) is available online for printing purposes.[13]

[13] Paul Hocking and Moshe Kline, "Handout: A New Reading of the Ancient Writing," https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.24338.94409.

Thread 1

Relationship to:	1L Mundane Immanent	1M Conceptual Middle	1R Divine Transcendent
1. Outsiders	22:17 *The-one-sorcery-ing* [f, i.e., the sorceress] shall not be allowed to live.[14]	22:18 *Anyone-lying* with a beast surely shall be put to death.[15]	22:19 *The-one-sacrific-ing* to the gods shall be destroyed,[16] unless to YHWH, to him alone.

This first-thread triad is made up of three laws,[17] which, at first reading, seem very dissimilar in *content*; but, on careful reading, one notices the similar *form* in each: (1) they all commence in Hebrew with a participial noun (e.g., v. 17: "the-one-practicing-sorcery [f]"); (2) all declare a penalty for the prohibited behavior; (3) the penalty verbs are all passive, and so impersonal (see n. 17), and also written in the third person, which is, in fact, unique in this whole unit; and (4) the three regulations are terse, almost poetic, with a stress pattern in threes.[18]

Semantically, the thread contains three forbidden actions, sorcery/witchcraft, bestiality, and idolatry, and all three receive a divine sentence with increasing severity: (L) "shall not (be allowed to) live," (M) "shall surely be put to death," and (R)

[14] The consonantal form here (תחיה) could be pointed as *piel*, *pual*, *hiphil* or *hophal* and as second-person masculine singular or third-person feminine singular! As the verbs in the parallel segments are (uniquely, in this literary unit) third-person singular and also passive (*hophal*), we translate as *pual*/*hophal* third-person feminine singular, "she shall not be allowed to live" (Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* [John Knox, 1985], 84; Sprinkle, *Book of the Covenant*, 162 n. 1).

[15] The compound verb here מוֹת יוּמָת is an emphatic use of the infinitive absolute ("to die") with the third-person masculine singular *hophal* of the same verb (passive, lit., "he shall be put to death"). Everett Fox translates this as "is to be put to death, yes, death" (*The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary, and Notes*, Schocken Bible 1 [Schocken, 2000], 382).

[16] This *hophal* verb יָחֳרָם means to be devoted or to banned. "The idea is that it would be God's to do with as he liked. What was put under the ban was for God alone, either for his service or for his judgment. But it was out of human control. Here the verb is saying that the person will be utterly destroyed" (NET, Exod 22:20, n. 46).

[17] These three laws "differ markedly in both form and content from what precedes them." (Alexander, *Exodus*, 500). Some scholars consider them to be the closure of the first half of the Covenant Code. With others, however, we see this triad as the opening of the second half of the code, for syntactic and semantic reasons, as well as its *inclusio* with thread 5 (see the main text). As above, up to 22:16 is clearly marked by casuistic formulae ("if … then …"), but this unit follows an apodictic format—simple commands in the imperfect.

[18] Sprinkle, *Book of the Covenant*, 161 n. 1, 162.

"shall be destroyed."[19] The thread makes no reference to who is to implement the sentence, but it is clear that such individuals are personae non gratae, outcast, not to be part of YHWH's community.

The lexemes and syntax guide the reading and so the interpretation. The core structure of each law is identical: "the one doing this action (X) shall be outcast/negated." With the first case (L, feminine), it is the very action or substance of sorcery *intrinsically* that is unworthy of life. In just three Hebrew words (מכשפה לא תחיה), the verse states that the one practicing witchcraft is not to enjoy life itself. However, with the opposite case (R, masculine), it is the object or direction of the action *extrinsically* that is key—sacrificing *to* other gods instead of *to* YHWH, *to* YHWH alone (Heb.: ל, 3x). The deity is the ultimate *Other*, or extrinsic being. And, finally, between these two extremes (M, "anyone"), the focus is on the combination of the action *with* the object. Anyone lying *with* (Heb.: כל־שכב עם) a beast—any human being, whether female or male—mixing *with* an animal, combines intrinsic and extrinsic natures inappropriately.

Next, in contrast, we will consider the last thread in the unit, the fifth one, which is much fuller in content, but the rhetorical rules are the same: the literary indicators guide the reading and thus the meaning of the triad thread.

Thread 5

5L Mundane Immanent	5M Conceptual Middle	5R Divine Transcendent
A. 23:10 And *six years* you shall sow your land and gather its produce. 23:11 *And the seventh* you shall let it drop and relinquish it (leave fallow),	**A.** 23:12 *Six days* you shall do your works/deeds. *And* on *the seventh* day you shall cease,[20]	**A.** 23:14 *Three times*[21] you-shall-festival[22] to-me *in-the-year*. **I.** 23:15 The festival of *maṣṣôt*/unleavened-bread you shall keep[23] *seven days*; you shall eat *maṣṣôt* as I charged you, at the appointed time of the month of Abib, for in it you went out from Egypt (and they shall not appear before my presence empty-handed.)

[19] Sprinkle, *Book of the Covenant*, 162–63.

[20] The verb שבת means to cease or stop, and by extension, "to sabbath."

[21] The rare term opening "A" (v. 14) strictly means "three feet" or three foot-beats, maybe indicating the pilgrim festivals, three times a year, journeying to the sanctuary.

[22] The verb חגג, meaning "to celebrate," or "to festival."

[23] This is the same verb as in 23:13 שמר, but in the *qal* stem, second-person masculine singular, "you shall keep."

5L Mundane Immanent (*cont.*)	5M Conceptual Middle (*cont.*)	5R Divine Transcendent (*cont.*)
and the poor of your people shall eat, and their leftover, the living-thing (animal) of the field shall eat.	In order that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your handmaid and the sojourner may be refreshed.[24]	**II.** 23:16 And the festival of the harvest, the firstfruits of your works that you sow in the field, **III.** and the festival of in-gathering, when goes out the year, when you in-gather your works (= produce) from the field.
Also shall you do for your vineyard and for your olive grove.	**B.** 23:13 And in all that I said to you, <u>you (pl.) shall keep yourselves</u>,[25] And the name of other gods you [pl.] shall not bring to memory, it shall not be heard on your mouth.	B. 23:17 *Three times*[26] *in the year* shall appear each of your male(s) to the presence of the Lord YHWH. **I.** 23:18 You shall not sacrifice with leaven my blood sacrifice.[27] **II.** And it shall not remain overnight, the fat of my festival, till the morning. **III.** 23:19 The beginning of the first–fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of YHWH your God. **C. (VII).** You shall not boil a kid in the milk of its mother.

Linguistically, all three segments of this thread open by enumerating periods of time (in italics): six years, six days and three times a year (twice: 23:14, 17). The first two segments, L and M, not only open with six, but go on to mention *the*

[24] The verb נפש in the *niphal* means here "to be refreshed" or "to be (re)souled."

[25] The *niphal* verb, so probably reflexive in this context, "you [pl.] shall keep yourselves," but it could be passive, "you shall be kept" (in all that I said to you). The active reflexive sense would match the parallel *hiphil* active verb in B: "you [pl.] shall not cause to remember." These are the only two second-person masculine plural verbs in this thread.

[26] The word opening B (v. 17) is the usual word for "times," פעמים, not as in v. 14, maybe emphasizing the occasion rather than the pilgrimage. So, A has three festival laws, and B has three laws (two sacrifice laws and one firstfruit law; so A–B has 3 + 2 + 1, mirroring the 1 + 2 + 3 laws in threads 2–4).

[27] Literally, "the blood of my sacrifice," as genitive of specification: "my blood-sacrifice" (Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* [Magnes, 1967], 304). This expression occurs elsewhere only in Exod 34:25 of the Passover, so B.–I and B.–II here are about Passover regulations, assumed parallel to A.–I, the Maṣṣôt Festival. So, with Rashi, Norman Snaith ("Exodus 23:18 and 34:25," *JTS* 20 [1969]: 323–48), and Menahem Haran (*Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* [Eisenbrauns, 1985]).

seventh, and the R segment refers to keeping the festival for *seven* days. These temporal indicators would be sufficient to read the segments as a single triad-thread, but there is more.

There is also a less formal similarity between L and M—both segments set out laws for the people that benefit animals: "the animal (living thing) of the field will eat the leftovers" (23:11), and "so that your ox and your donkey may rest" (23:12). This similarity is especially interesting because Sabbath observance is invoked for the benefit of animals.

Turning to the R segment, the laws about animals here are different—they refer to sacrificing and cooking them. A closer look at the three segments reveals three distinct *types* of animals. Segment L mentions "the living-thing" (חיה) of the field, meaning animals in the wild generally; M refers to the ox and donkey, a merism for domesticated working beasts; and R mentions animals for sacrifice and eating. These distinctions suggest that there is more to this triad than just the similar anaphora at the start of each segment, or the connection with time.

A closer look at 5M reveals that the command to sabbath is not based on the divine example from creation (as in Gen 2:2–3 and Exod 20:11), or on freedom from slavery in Egypt (as in Deut 5:15). The initial reason given (in 5M.A) for ceasing from work on the seventh day is *so that* (למען) animals, servants, and sojourners (as hired hands here?) can rest and be refreshed (23:12; cf. Deut 5:14), but then the text is immediately connected with the deity (5M.B), "and in all that I have said to you, you [pl.] shall watch yourselves" (תשמרו). These two laws (5M.A and 5M.B) seem so different from each other, so why conclude that, in this final form, they are parts of a single textual segment, rather than two independent segments? The A part speaks of mundane obligations of individuals (singular verbs) toward animals and the disenfranchised, and the B part speaks of obligations by the whole nation toward YHWH. It is this combination that indicates the authored purpose, making segment M a conceptual middle, between the left and the right segments. M.A is like L because it refers to acts that benefit animals and the downtrodden, but M.B is like R in a number of ways: (1) YHWH speaks in the first person in both, to give instructions concerning how to relate to YHWH (23:13, 15); (2) YHWH's instruction in M.B is to "keep yourselves" (תשמרו) and in R, to "keep the festival" (תשמר); (3) M.B is the only pericope in the thread with plural verbs (second-person masculine plural), which matches the more corporate/national emphasis of R (23:15, 17); and (4) the contrast between "the name of other gods" in M.B and "the presence of the Lord YHWH" in R (23:17, 19) is significant. So, it seems clear that there is a mundane focus in 5L, a divine focus in 5R, and the combination of mundane and divine matters in 5M.

However, one part of 5R seems out of place—the final half-verse in thread 5R.C, about a kid.[28] According to our explanation of the divine focus in R, the command not to boil a kid in its mother's milk seems totally out of place. If R

[28] The word גדי probably means a young male goat (Menahem Haran, "Seething a Kid in Its

represents the relationship with the transcendent (as we argue), the kid does not seem to belong there. Maimonides was the first to suggest, in 1195, that the law forbids some idolatrous Canaanite rite.[29] This could make sense here, given the daily sacrifice of a goat for a sin offering (חטאת) during the eight-day festival of Sukkot (Num 29:16 etc.).[30] To date, however, there has been no external evidence in support of this rite.[31] Other explanations given for this strange law include (1) ethical reasons (boiling a kid in its own mother's milk is not humane, as per Philo, Ibn Ezra, and Rashbam);[32] (2) taking the translation to mean "You shall not boil a young goat which is at its mother's milk," meaning the kid should be fully weaned before it can be slaughtered;[33] (3) illicit or unseemly mixing (this act mixes milk and blood in the ancient view of substances, so forbidden);[34] or (4) a figure of speech (about not bringing a new firstfruit offering to YHWH mixed with the previous generation of grain).[35]

For our purpose, however, we will just point out the *literary* significance of this prohibition. The law presented in this half-verse appears three times in the Torah (Exod 23:19, 34:26, Deut 14:21). Each time it is the second half of a verse with no obvious connection to the first half, and in each case it closes a series of laws. This suggests that the author is using it as a literary device, a colophon to denote the end of a block of laws.[36]

Further, it is relevant to observe the literary patterns woven into all three segments in this fifth thread. First, segment L contains one subject (A), segment M contains two (A and B), and segment R contains three (A, B, and C). Second,

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Mother's Milk," *JJS* 30 [1979]: 31–33 and n. 25), in contrast to Rashi (Exod 23:19), who assumed the young of any domestic animal.

[29] Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedländer, 2nd rev. ed. (Dover, 1956), 37; P. C. Craigie, "Deuteronomy and Ugaritic Studies," *TynBul* 28 (1977): 155–69, here 156.

[30] In the regulations for Sukkot (Num 29), the term used for the sin-offering goat is שעיר־עזים, probably indicating a hairy male type of goat (rather than of cattle) (*DCH* 8, s.v. "שעיר"; *HALOT,* s.v. "שעיר"), and certainly this resonates here in Exod 23:19 with "a young male goat" and "its mother" (גדי, אמו) (Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*; Motyer, *Message of Exodus*, 242).

[31] Craigie, "Deuteronomy and Ugaritic Studies," 156–59; Jacob Milgrom, "You Shall Not Boil a Kid in Its Mother's Milk: An Archaeological Myth Destroyed," *BRev* 1.3 (1985): 47–55.

[32] Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 305; Haran, "Seething a Kid," 29–30.

[33] Stefan Schorch, "'A Young Goat in Its Mother's Milk'? Understanding an Ancient Prohibition," *VT* 60 (2010): 123–29.

[34] Ernst Axel Knauf, "Zur Herkunft und Sozialgeschichte Israels: 'Das Böckchen in der Milch seiner Mutter,'" *Bib* 69 (1988): 153–69, here 153–54; Alan Cooper, "Once again Seething a Kid in Its Mother's Milk," *Jewish Studies Internet Journal* 10 (2012): 133–42; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3 (Doubleday, 1991), 741.

[35] J. Webb Mealey, "You Shall Not Boil a Kid in Its Mother's Milk (Exod. 23:19b; Exod. 34:26b; Deut. 14:21b): A Figure of Speech?," *BibInt* 20 (2012): 35–72, here esp. 63.

[36] Michael Fishbane, "Biblical Colophons, Textual Criticism and Legal Analogies," *CBQ* 42 (1980): 438–49.

segments L and M have a strong literary repetition of "six" (years and days) and "the seventh" (year and day), set apart from the six (23:10–12). This 6 + 1 pattern is not repeated lexically in segment R, but it is clear that A and B both contain three laws: in A, about the three annual festivals, and in B, about three aspects of offerings that relate to the festivals.[37] So, here in R we have two sets of three laws in A and B, a literary "six," which are similar (laws relating to the deity), and then in C, about the kid, a literary "seventh" (labeled VII, to indicate this). C is set apart from the rest, with a dissimilar law (whatever interpretation one takes). This means that segments L and M have a *lexical* 6 + 1 pattern, and R has a *literary* 6 + 1 pattern (six laws, 2 × 3, and then a separate seventh law).

These observations suggest that the three segments of the fifth thread have been carefully woven. Ostensibly, they are a collection drawn together by the similar numerical openings. On closer inspection, one sees that they contain a conceptual middle (M) that links the realm of the natural or mundane (L) to the realm of the supernatural or divine (R). Looking closer still, the segments reveal an almost hidden "six plus a seventh" pattern.

The discovery of such formal patterns and conceptual ordering begs for an explanation, so let us expand the field of the inquiry.

Threads 1 and 5 as an Inclusio

First, let us consider the relationship of the fifth thread to the first thread (that is, the relationship of the two outer threads). Notice some literary resonances in the parallel segments.

	5L **Mundane** **Immanent**	**5M** **Conceptual Middle**	**5R** **Divine** **Transcendent**
1	*Live* (תחיה)	Whoever lies with *an animal* (בהמה)	*sacrificing* to a god, unless to *YHWH*
5	the *living-thing* (חיה) of the field	on the seventh day you shall cease, so that *your ox and your donkey* may rest	You shall not *sacrifice my blood-sacrifice* with leaven … you shall bring your firstfruits to the house of *YHWH your God*

The root חיה ("to live") is found in both L segments, sacrifices are mentioned in both R segments, and both M segments address matters having to do with animals.

[37] Some see verse 17 as an *inclusio* (closure) with verse 14 (e.g., S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus: In the Revised Version with Introduction and Notes*, CBSC [Cambridge University Press, 1911; repr., Forgotten Books, 2018], 249); others, as a parallel alternation (continuity) (Sprinkle, *Book of the Covenant*, 188–89; Cooper, "Once Again Seething a Kid," 111). Either way, there are three festival commands in verses 14–16 and three offering commands in verses 18–19a.

Similarly, both L segments deal with worldly (initially, other-worldly) matters and make no mention of the deity, whereas both R segments speak very overtly about YHWH, and in the first person. The M segments are especially interesting—while 1M forbids sleeping with animals, 5M demands that people rest at the same time as the animals! So, not only do the threads suggest careful planning individually, but they also appear to have been constructed to form a framework or *inclusio* around the laws in threads 2 to 4.

This hypothesis can be tested by comparing the first law of thread 2 and the last law of thread 4 within the framework (that is, 22:20 [Eng. 22:21] and 23:9).

> 22:20 A sojourner you [sg.] shall not cheat and you [sg.] shall not oppress him, for sojourners you [pl.] were in the land of Egypt.
>
> 23:9 And a sojourner you [sg.] shall not oppress, for you know the soul of a sojourner, for sojourners you [pl.] were in the land of Egypt.

The first law in thread 2 and the last law in thread 4, sandwiched between the two outer threads (1 and 5), are nearly identical, both in the subject matter (sojourners) and in the motivation clause (for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt).[38] They form another clear *inclusio*, indicating to the reader that this block (threads 2 to 4) is a *bounded* construct, suggestively composed as a framework *within* threads 1 and 5.[39]

As we have seen, thread 1 deals with individual outsiders (those practicing sorcery, bestiality, and idolatry), while thread 5 deals with YHWH's nation. We will see that threads 2 to 4 set out a process of socialization, or nation building, emerging out of the exodus from Egypt. In addition to the contribution of each thread to the development of this process, the writer has integrated a formal sign of increasing complexity. Threads 2 to 4 have increasingly complex structures. Each segment of thread 2 contains *one* law, thread 3 has *two* laws, and thread 4 *three* laws, further evidence of intentional weaving by this weaver of text.

The following outline summarizes what is tentatively proposed at this stage regarding the pattern of the unit.

1		**Outsiders**
2	One law per segment	Three Stages of Socialization
3	Two laws per segment	
4	Three laws per segment	
5		YHWH's Nation

[38] Frank Crüsemann, *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law*, trans. Allan W. Mahnke (Fortress, 1996), 182.

[39] Alexander, *Exodus*, 441, 443; Sprinkle, *Book of the Covenant*, 182, 184.

We can now study the middle three threads, starting with thread 2.

Thread 2

2L Mundane Immanent	2M Conceptual Middle	2R Divine Transcendent
22:20 **A sojourner** you [sg.] shall not cheat and you shall not oppress him, for sojourners you [pl.] were in the land of Egypt.	22:21 **Any widow or orphan** you [sg.] shall not oppress. 22:22 *If* you [sg.] indeed oppress him, when he indeed cries out to me, I will indeed hear his cry. 22:23 And My wrath shall burn and I will kill you [pl.] with the sword, and **your wives shall be widows and your children orphans.**	22:24 *If* money you lend my people, **the oppressed/poor among you**,[40] you shall not be to him like a creditor, you shall not set on him interest. 22:25 *If* you indeed take in pledge your fellow's cloak till the going down of the sun, (then) you shall return it to him. 22:26 For it is his covering, for him alone, it is his cloak for his skin—in what can he lie? And it will be when he cries out to Me, I will hear, for compassionate I (am)

The rhetorical color intensifies in thread 2, in two significant ways: all three segments describe social interactions, and also give reasons for observing the commandments. In thread 1, there are no interactions mentioned with the outcast individuals, but in thread 2, all three segments address a person's interactions (underlined) with the weak and disenfranchised (**bold**): the sojourner, widows/orphans, and paupers. These three categories of relationship appear to range from the first segment, 2L, "the sojourner" (גר, the potential outcast, close to those in thread 1), to the third segment, 2R, regarding the poor, but described as: "my people, the poor among you" (את־עמי את־העני עמך). And, if the literary parallels (like colors) in the segments are read carefully, the general pattern in the repetitions

[40] The noun here (עני) has the same root as the verb "oppress" (ענה II) in the other two segments, meaning those who are oppressed or afflicted, and so, the poor generally (*DCH* 6, s.v. "ענה II").

can be seen—the repeated rhetoric in all three segments is: "the disenfranchised, you shall not oppress."

Thread 2, then, addresses a second principle—correct behavior toward the weak in YHWH's society, "my people." The two poles give significant reasons for this principle (boxed). In 2L, the reason given is because of *the people's experience in history*, "*for* [כי] you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." They know from their experience what it means to be oppressed as sojourners in a foreign land, so now they should know they should not oppress *other* foreigners, who reside in *their* land. In 2R, in contrast, the reason given for right behavior is because of YHWH's nature, what the deity declares about the divine character, "*for* [כי] I am compassionate," and so YHWH's ear is ever open to the cries of the oppressed. What high ethical reasons these are, epistemological and ontological. God's people should not oppress the disenfranchised, because of what they have come to know from their own experience and about YHWH's own nature!

So, how does 2M fit in, as a conceptual middle? Observing the additional "colors" in this segment, one can see that it combines all the elements, including the significance of the cries of the oppressed, and the hearing of YHWH, but uniquely adds YHWH's measure-for-measure punishment on the person who does not show care for the weak of society. Such a combination of segments confirms Bernard S. Jackson's argument that these laws are best understood as "narrative law," not "semantic law." Meanings are embedded in particular social contexts, and so the language can be less explicit, since values and understanding of context are shared.[41] One can easily see the "narrative" in 2M that is assumed in both 2L and 2R. First, in 2R, the only element that is missing is the last element of 2M, the judgment of God on the oppressor in due measure. The people should never oppress the disenfranchised (the poor debtor in this case), knowing that YHWH is compassionate and so hears the cries of the oppressed. But what does YHWH's compassion do when he hears those cries? The reader knows already from segment 2M what YHWH does—divine wrath moves against the oppressor on behalf of the oppressed with measure-for-measure punishment, and the people should know this. YHWH's compassion for the oppressed among the people leads to divine judgment on the oppressor. Second, in 2L there are two elements absent that are found in M, YHWH's hearing and YHWH's judgment, but the historical and literary allusion to Exod 2:23–25 and 3:7–9 is well known at this point to the reader/hearer.[42] According to the Exodus narrative, YHWH's people experienced affliction and oppression in Egypt, which resulted in their crying out to YHWH, and in YHWH's hearing them; and then, of course, his wrath moved against the oppressor, the pharaoh. So, the

[41] Jackson, *Wisdom-Laws*, vii, 23–25; exemplified in Assnat Bartor, "Reading Biblical Law as Narrative," *Proof* 32 (2012): 292–311; and Jonathan Burnside, "At Wisdom's Table: How Narrative Shapes the Biblical Food Laws and Their Social Function," *JBL* 135 (2016): 223–45, https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1352.2016.3042.

[42] Though it is "elliptical" here, see Wright, *Inventing God's Law*, 335.

law in 2L assumes that the reader knows this founding story and remembers the words of Exod 2 and 3, and so intuitively fills in the ellipsis. "Don't afflict or oppress sojourners, because you know when *you* were sojourners, *you cried out* and *I heard you* because of *my compassion* for the oppressed, and so *my wrath poured out on Pharaoh*." How powerful in the here and now should this experience of YHWH from their founding narrative be?

Therefore, it seems clear that the whole triad has been carefully authored as an integrated thread. In 2L, the reason given for not oppressing the disenfranchised is *immanent*, intrinsic to their history. In 2R, it is extrinsic, in the nature of the *Transcendent*—divine compassion. And in the middle, in 2M, the reason not to oppress the disenfranchised (widows and orphans) combines both of these, it is inherent in the Transcendent's *compassion for* the oppressed, and in divine *passion against* oppressors, and this works out in the deity's immanent engagement with the oppressor's personal history, measure for measure, "My wrath will burn and I will kill you with the sword, and *your* wives will become widows and *your* children orphans."

All three threads that we have examined so far have common rhetorical characteristics and show signs of being carefully woven designs, not a simple collection of laws. We are now ready to examine thread 3.

Thread 3

Before we examine the theme of the weft thread, we can see immediately that the categories we have begun to associate with the columns (the warp threads) continue here. At one pole (3L), the *immanent* theme is represented by the focus on civil leaders, and at the other pole, 3R, the *transcendent* theme is shown in YHWH's command: "Holy people [אנשי־קדש] shall you be to me."

Turning to the character of thread 3 as a weft thread provides an opportunity to appreciate the writer's dedication to aligning the formal structure with the content—in this thread there are *pairs* of laws in all three segments.[43] Our first observation (taking another step up from thread 2, which dealt with the socially weak) is that each pair of laws defines a category of authority: L: civil/mundane, R: divine/holy, and M: intermediary, the cult (here, priests are implied, as the recipients of the people's gifts).

The pairs of laws (A and B) in each segment seem to relate to cases where the person's behavior is associated with society or objects at large—indeed, the objects are *fronted* in each law for emphasis. Law A has *plural* objects (judges; people of holiness), so general/communal, while law B has singular objects (a leader; flesh in the field … to the dog), specific/individual. First, segment 3L addresses *speech* toward society's civil leaders, the judges and the prince or leader. There are many judges, אלהים (3L.A; taking these as representatives of אלהים; see n. 44), and the

[43] Alexander, *Exodus*, 514–15; Driver, *Book of Exodus*, 235–36.

3L Mundane Immanent	3M Conceptual Middle	3R Divine Transcendent
A 22:27 Judges[44] *you [sg.] shall not belittle* **B** and a leader among your people *you [sg.] shall not curse*.	**A** 22:28 Your fullness (of harvest) and your juice (of vintage) you [sg.] shall not hold-back. **B** The firstborn of your sons shall you [sg.] give to me. 22:29 Thus you [sg.] shall do for your ox, your lamb: seven days it shall be with its mother: on the eighth day, shall you give it to me.	**A** 22:30 And people of holiness shall you [pl.] be to me, **B** and flesh in the field torn you [pl.] shall not eat: to the dog shall you [pl.] fling it.

Hebrew is a generic plural, indicating a class of people, but the prince (נשיא, 3L.B) is a single individual. Second, 3M addresses the *sacred duties/levies* to be given to YHWH ("to me"), but in practice, given to the Levitical priests, who collected these donations to sustain the cult. 3M.A speaks generally of giving the firstfruit offerings with no mention of time, though obviously around harvest time, but 3M.B speaks specifically—firstborn sons and animals, and seven and eight days. Third, 3R addresses *consecration* to the Transcendent. 3R.A calls for consecration to YHWH by all, while 3R.B is a very specific act demanded of such consecrated people—"scrupulous obedience."[45] The central position (row 3 in the unit) of this call to be a people of holiness is "very fitting."[46]

The consistent distinction in thread 3 between subthread A and B effectively creates a "weave within the weave," contributing to the weaver's continuing integration of form and content. Subthread A points to general classes and subthread B to specific cases. As we have already seen above, threads 1 and 2 discuss specific individuals, and, in preview, threads 4 and 5 are about national frameworks, the legal system (4), and the calendar (5). Therefore, subthread 3A, dealing with generalities, is like threads 4 and 5 below, while subthread 3B, containing specific cases, is like threads 1 and 2 above. Thus, our weaver has designed thread 3 as a woven interface between the individual and the communal, both within itself and within the five-thread weave.

[44] The word אלהים is translated here as "judges," rather than as "God," as in Exod 21:6 and 22:8 (BDB, s.v. "אֱלֹהִים 1"). See below for explanation (but contra Cyrus H. Gordon, "אלהים in Its Reputed Meaning of *Rulers, Judges*," *JBL* 54 [1935]: 135–44, https://doi.org/10.2307/3259316).

[45] Motyer, *Message of Exodus*, 241.

[46] Alexander, *Exodus*, 515.

Thread 4

Our observation above that thread 3 is composed of two subthreads, each with its own theme, prepares us to see a similar phenomenon in thread 4. Each segment of thread 4 contains a similarly structured triad of laws, consisting of a pair of matching elements (A and B) followed by a third element (C) that seems to address a different subject from the first two.

	4L **Mundane** **Immanent**	**4M** **Conceptual** **Middle**	**4R** **Divine** **Transcendent**
A	23:1 You shall not convey an empty/vain hearing (rumor). You shall not place your hand[47] with **the wicked one** to be a false witness	23:4 If you encounter the ox of **your enemy** or his donkey straying, you must surely return it to him.	23:7 From a lying word (false matter) stay far away, and/so the innocent and *the righteous one* you shall not kill, for I will not *pronounce-righteous*[48] **the wicked one.**
B	23:2 You shall not be following the many[49] to evils, and you shall not respond *in a dispute* to bias (it), following the many to cause bias.	23:5 If you see the donkey of **the one hating you** lying down under its load, then you shall refrain from leaving him. You shall surely restore him.[50]	23:8 A gift/bribe you shall not take, for a bribe blinds the open-eyed (ones) and perverts the words of *the righteous (ones).*
C	23:3 And a poor-man you shall not honor (= favor) *in his dispute*.	23:6 You shall not bias the judgment (= tilt the balance) of your needy one *in his dispute*.	23:9 And a sojourner you shall not oppress, for you (pl.) know the soul of a sojourner, for sojourners you were in the land of Egypt.

[47] Literally, but could mean "make common cause" (NET) or "lend support" or "shaking hands in agreement" (Alexander, *Exodus*, 507).

[48] Heb. אַצְדִּיק *hiphil*, "cause to be righteous," or "declare righteous," so, "justify."

[49] "The many" or "the great," so not swayed by public opinion or those with power (Sprinkle, *Book of the Covenant*, 184).

[50] Probably a wordplay here on the root **עזב**, with two homonyms, probably meaning "leaving" in the middle clause (refrain from leaving him), but meaning "restore" or "lift to its feet" in the last clause (*DCH* 6, s.v., "עזב I, II"; NET here n. 14; Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus,* 297–98).

First, let us consider the image woven into thread 4, which has two separate but interrelated components. One is based on the three C elements, and the other is based on the three pairs of A and B elements. Together they form an image of "social justice." The C elements define the balance of justice. On one side (4L.C) is a warning against favoring the disenfranchised, which seems strange if read alone. However, on the other side (4R.C) is a warning against oppressing the disenfranchised. In the middle is an instruction not to incline, turn or skew the judgment (לא תטה משפת) in either direction, in regard to the needy (אביון), like tilting the balance in one direction.

The image created in the 4C subthread is this:

L	M	R
And a poor person you shall not **favor**	You shall not **tilt the balance** of your needy one in his dispute	And a sojourner you shall not **oppress**

Throughout history, the metaphor of the balance has represented the *foundation* of social justice, upon which stands the whole of the legal system. However, the *system* itself is represented through the imagery of the A–B pairs—judgment is dependent on witnesses (L.A, L.B) and judges (R.A, R.B).[51] As motivation for judges to act justly, YHWH states in R.A in the first person, "for I will not justify the wicked." As Desmond Alexander says, "Those who pervert the course of justice must reckon with a divine judge, who exercises his authority with absolute impartiality."[52]

However, the function of the donkey "lying down under its load" in M is not obvious. A clue comes from parallel laws in Deut 22:1–4, which presents a similar scenario but in reference to "your brother."[53] In this context in Exodus, the laws are in reference to "the one hating you" and "your enemy," insisting that "an enemy must be treated as a friend."[54] Clearly, in this literary context about the legal system,

[51] Helmuth Frey, "Das Ineinander von Kirche und Welt im Licht der Komposition des Bundesbuchs," *WD* 1 (1948): 13–35, here 22–29; contra John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (Word, 1987), 331; Sprinkle, *Book of the Covenant*, 183.

[52] Alexander, *Exodus*, 517.

[53] Moshe Kline, "Reading Deuteronomy 21:10–25:4 as a Table: An Examination of the Literary Structure of Biblical Legal Codes" (paper presented at the SBL Annual Meeting in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in 2005).

[54] Alexander, *Exodus*, 516.

such individuals are potential litigants. They present the adversarial issue at the heart of the legal system. The entire framework of law exists for them.

The following table summarizes the double visualization in thread 4.

	4L	4M	4R
A + B	Witnesses	Adversaries	Judges
C	← The Balance of Social Justice →		

At the center of the system are adversaries, 4M, those who may have recourse to the courts. The system exists because of them and for them. They are flanked by the other persons needed for the court to function, witnesses and judges. The three sets of persons in the paired laws of 4A and 4B are supported and underscored by 4C, the balance of social justice. It seems that the author needed to introduce the lost and suffering beasts of the adversaries in 4M in order to create the picture of the legal system embedded in the weave. All the laws are "conceptual colors" employed to create a woven image.

Now, if the three C elements are considered in more detail, it seems that they form a subthread focused on the disenfranchised, and, surprisingly, similar to those that occurred in thread 2. The pattern in the threads is shown below.

Thread 2 and 4C Compared

	L **Mundane** **Immanent**	**M** **Conceptual Middle**	**R** **Divine** **Transcendent**
2	22:20 A *sojourner* you shall not cheat and you shall not oppress him, for *sojourners* you were in the land of Egypt.	22:21 Any *widow or orphan* you shall not oppress … 22:23 And my wrath shall burn and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall be *widows* and your children *orphans*.	22:24 If money you lend my people, *the oppressed/ poor* [עני] with you …
4C	23:3 And *a poor-man* [דל] you shall not favor in his dispute.	23:6 You shall not bias the judgment (= tilt the balance) of *your needy one* in his dispute.	23:9 And a *sojourner* you shall not oppress, for you know the soul of a *sojourner*, for sojourners you were in the land of Egypt.

A close look at threads 2 and 4.C suggests a chiastic arrangement. Thread 2 begins with the sojourner (2L) and ends with the poor (2R), and this order is reversed in 4.C. The close connection between 2 and 4.C effectively creates a frame enclosing threads 2 to 4, beginning and ending with the near-identical reference to sojourners (2L and 4R.C). It seems that our weaver-writer went to great lengths to create this inverted parallel in threads 2 and 4.C. And the threads between also form a structural parallel—thread 3 and subthreads 4.A–4.B, each composed of a pair of laws.

Standing back, one observes that rows 2 and 3, taken together, have the same structure as the three-part thread 4. Since thread 2 is a single law, and thread 3 is based on doublets, thread 4 forms a mirror image of them, as it is made up of a doublet (A and B), followed by a single law (C). It appears that we are being directed to see threads 2–4 as containing two complementary blocks of threads: 2, 3.A, 3.B; and 4.A, 4.B, 4.C (three "rings" with the chiastic form: A–B–C–C–B–A), so six laws in each column (warp). Since we have already noted the significance of the 6 + 1 figure in the definition of thread 5, we are naturally drawn to consider whether there is another rule connected to each column. Sure enough, we now have yet another level of significance for the "otherness" of thread 1—its single law in each segment creates a 1 + 6 pattern in the columns of threads 1–4, mirroring the 6 + 1 pattern in the segments of thread 5.

IV. Conclusion

The writer(s) of this extant literary unit seem to have invested significantly in coordinating matters of form and content. In this article, we offer the ancient skill of "weaving" as a helpful metaphor for the construct, with the text-cloth woven on a 5 × 3 "loom" of warp and weft "threads." The laws in the weft threads appear to have been structured in triad-groups, with each triad having a related function, like colored weft-threads on a loom, as summarized below.

Weft Thread	**Text**	**Structure of Triad Segments**	**Function of Each Law Triad (Weft Color) Relationship of YHWH's People with …**
1	22:17–19	One short law, no reason	Outsiders
2	22:20–26	One law, but with reason	The Disenfranchised
3	22:27–30	Two laws (pairs)	The Authorities, including YHWH himself
4	23:1–9	Three laws (pair + single)	Societal Order, the Legal System
5	23:10–19	6 + 1 structure	National Order and YHWH's Calendar

Taken as a whole (even if one is skeptical about a few details!), both structure and function progress similarly from thread to thread according to a principle of increasing complexity. The text-threads flow from the simple to the complex, becoming more complex as they portray successively more complex social relationships (see the "map" above under "The Unit Weave"). Thread 1 contains single, terse laws about outsiders—excluded individuals, to have no interaction with YHWH's people. Thread 2 describes how YHWH's people should interact with the weak or disenfranchised in society, each segment including a single law and its reason. Thread 3 introduces the interface between people and authorities including YHWH, using two laws in each segment. Then the complex visualization created by thread 4 increases the number of laws in each segment to three, dramatically portraying how to become a civil society, operating according to the principles and practices of a just legal system. So, the pattern of laws is: one about outsiders (thread 1), and then 6 to do with insiders (threads 2 to 4), so 1 + 6. And, finally, thread 5, with its 6 + 1 structure, shows how to be YHWH's nation, with a national order and calendar. The weft (horizontal) threads create the pattern-design in the weave. In this case, the flow of meaning (color) down the threads of text suggests a process of "socialization," or "nation-building."

Turning to the warp, the vertical threads (which provide a supporting structure on a loom, again the "map" above under "The Unit Weave"), we conclude that the laws on the left thread relate to the earthly/mundane, the laws on the right thread relate to the divine, and laws combining mundane and divine matters appear on the middle thread.

So, it seems clear from this synchronic analysis that the extant form of this literary unit of the Covenant Code presents itself not as a random collection of laws but, as evidentially composed, as a two-dimensional construct. As Alexander concludes about the whole Book of the Covenant, "Undoubtedly, the different sections of the Book of the Covenant complement each other, creating a unified text that highlights the obligations placed upon the Israelites in order for them to be a holy nation, living under the authority of God."[55] The reading proposed in this article supports the recent scholarly view that such texts are not narrow legal codes but more literary and national-covenantal (hence, "the document of the covenant" in Exod 24:7).[56] As Joe Sprinkle says, "These regulations as a whole … are part of YHWH's address to Israel and related to the narrative rather than simply being a collection of laws," and later, "features more appropriate to literary art than law."[57] Jacob Milgrom's terse conclusion in another context is apposite: "Structure is theology."[58] Consideration of this particular structured example has suggested a

[55] Alexander, *Exodus*, 450.

[56] Sprinkle, *Book of the Covenant*, esp. 27–29.

[57] Sprinkle, *Book of the Covenant*, 197, 206.

[58] Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3B (Doubleday, 2001), 2129–30.

rich rhetorical purpose regarding the covenantal relationship of YHWH with the people.

If this woven reading is accepted here, it raises a number of questions for future study: First, regarding hermeneutics—if this and other literary units in the Torah are written with pericopes in parallel, how do we learn to interpret them as cognitive units? In this unit, for example, the suggested development of a holy nation in relationship with YHWH is more holistic than is normally perceived in legal texts.

Second, regarding history of composition—when and how could Israel's authors, editors, or scribes have been writing like this? Was this text initially composed like this in two-dimensional form, or just conceived like this in the mind and written in the linear form, as we have it? Such questions are relevant to the dating of such a composition.

Third, regarding source criticism—recognition of our modern reading assumptions, and insights from the ancient art of weaving have suggested a rhetorical and hermeneutical purpose for the "repetitions as markers of architecture," and may open our eyes to read the "visual rhetoric" in this and other Torah texts in context-appropriate ways. This rhetorical-critical approach is not primarily about *stylistics* but about *architecture* and so hermeneutics. The approach may not only be important in the understanding of this unit but may also have applications in other literary units in the Torah where there are obvious repetitions and disjunctures.[59]

Fourth, regarding *comparanda*—are there any other texts with a two-dimensional composition in other biblical or ancient Near Eastern contexts? As mentioned above, there are at least three other two-dimensional Torah texts referenced by previous scholars, and elsewhere we have published examples of such compositions in the Torah and Mishnah.[60] Certainly, this is a paradigm worthy of wider consideration.

[59] The literary unit structure for the whole of Exodus and the Torah is published in Kline, *Before Chapter and Verse*, 111–275.

[60] See Kline, *Before Chapter and Verse*, 32, 45–75; and Kline, "The Literary Structure of the Mishnah: Erubin Chapter X" [Hebrew], *Alei Sefer* 14 (1987): 1–30; Kline, "The Structured Mishnah: An Address to the Talmud Faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, March 21, 2005," Academia.edu (2005), https://www.academia.edu/42783319/Introduction_to_The_Structured_Mishnah; Hocking, "New and Living Way," 185–210.