TERMINOLOGICAL PATTERNS
AND THE FIRST WORD OF THE BIBLE:
ראשית(ב) '(IN THE) BEGINNING'

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Summary

Close reading of the final text of the Pentateuch has brought to light three linguistic linkages based on the nouns ראשהת *'beginning',* עמר *'Omer', and* אחרית *'end'. According to the text's extant* Endgestalt *the two nouns 'beginning' and 'Omer' overlap in their respective seventh positions, and the two antonyms 'beginning' and 'end' in the seventh and seventh-from-last/twelfth positions. The conjecture has thus been corroborated that the text has been carefully composed by its ancient author.*

In some recent studies scrutinising selected passages of the Hebrew Bible the existence of linguistic links has been uncovered. Evidently these so-called 'terminological patterns'[1] are one of the structural devices by means of which the extant *Endgestalt*, i.e. final shape, of the Pentateuch has been crafted. As established in a previous essay these terminological patterns have been discovered by tabulating all the words used in a given self-contained literary unit, an entity which may consist of a brief passage, a chapter, or even a whole biblical book.[2] By tabulating the vocabulary of a given passage, the distinct

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[1] W. Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus* (BInS 35; Leiden: Brill, 1999).

[2] W. Warning, 'Terminological Patterns and the Divine Epithet *Shaddai*', *TynB* 52 (2001) 149–53; Warning, 'Terminologische Verknüpfungen und Genesis 12,1–3', *Bib* 81 (2000) 386–90; Warning, 'Terminologische Verknüpfungen und Genesis 15', *Henoch* (forthcoming); Warning, 'Terminological Patterns and Genesis 17', *HUCA* (forthcoming); Warning, 'Terminologische Verknüpfungen und Genesis 22', *Spes Christiana* (forthcoming); Warning, 'Terminological Patterns and Genesis 38', *AUSS* 38 (2000) 293–305; Warning, 'Terminological Patterns and Genesis 39', *JETS* (forthcoming); Warning, 'Terminologische Verknüpfungen und Lev 11', *BZ* (forthcoming); Warning, 'Terminologische Verknüpfungen und der aaronitische Segen', *JETh* (forthcoming); Warning, 'Terminological Patterns and the Verb מול "Circumcise" in the Pentateuch', *BN*

distribution, relative frequency, and structural positioning of significant terms and/or phrases comes to light.[3] In recent analyses of the book of Leviticus and several selected pericopes of the Pentateuch, it has been disclosed that in a variable length list the *seventh* and, in the case of a longer list, at times the *twelfth* position are emphasised by means of some special term or phrase.[4] In the course of these studies the conjecture has been corroborated that each of the pericopes examined thus far has been carefully composed by its ancient author, 'the term "author" being understood and used as referring to the person(s) responsible for the text before us, the person(s) who composed the literary units we call, for instance, "Genesis 17", "the Joseph Story" or "Genesis", literary entities which did not exist prior to their composition, whatever the prehistory of their individual parts may have been.'[5]

As of the beginning of 2001, more than 150 terminological patterns have been disclosed in the Pentateuch,[6] and in each of these structural outlines the stringing together of various texts turns out to be sensible and meaningful. It is exactly because of the plethora of these expressive linguistic links—most of them appear in individual narratives, several encompass one of the five books of the Pentateuch, and only a few extend from Genesis to Deuteronomy—that I have deliberately desisted from discussing the diverse arguments adduced in support of the hypothesis claiming literary disunity, arguments that

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106 (2001) 52–56; Warning, 'Terminological Patterns and the Term עצום "Strong, Powerful" in the Pentateuch', *AUSS* (forthcoming).

[3] W.G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (JSOTSS 26; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 288, points out that the seventeen occurrences of the particle כל 'all, every' in Ps. 145 are 'obviously related to the universalist theme of the poem'.

[4] W. Warning, 'Terminologische Verknüpfungen in der Urgeschichte', *ZAW* (forthcoming), points to linguistic links based on the deliberate distribution of the two roots 'good' and 'make' in the creation story. In two significant statements, 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good' (1:31) and 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him' (2:18; NIV), the two terms 'good' and 'make' coincide the seventh and twelfth times in Genesis respectively. Because of the double overlapping we might presume that the present text of the creation story in Gn. 1–2 is a carefully composed literary unit, whatever its oral and/or written prehistory may have been.

[5] Warning, 'Shaddai', 149–50.

[6] Preliminary research has brought to light over 80 terminological patterns in Esther, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Micah, Haggai, and in the NT in each of the four Gospels and the book of Revelation.

seem to be primarily based on the assumption that we can somehow 'reconstruct' previous stages of the extant text.[7]

If we analyse the eighteen occurrences of the word ראשית 'beginning; firstfruit, firstling' it turns out that the author of the Pentateuchal *Endgestalt* has made use of the very first word of the Bible, in correlation with the two nouns עמר 'Omer' and אחרית 'end' in conceiving and composing a terminological pattern that encloses, as it were, almost the entire Pentateuch.

The Noun ראשית

Because of its seventh and seventh-from-last (= twelfth) positions the substantive ראשית 'beginning' seems to be part of a profound terminological pattern. In Leviticus 23:10, which reads 'bring the first sheaf of your harvest to the priest', its seventh occurrence overlaps with the seventh occurrence of the noun עמר 'Omer (ancient dry measurement), sheaf'. In the seventh-from-last, i.e. twelfth occurrence, in Deuteronomy 11:12, the noun 'beginning' coincides with the seventh of its antonym אחרית 'end' ('The eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year').

The semantic polyvalence of the noun 'Omer' has obviously been utilised by the ancient author because this is one of those cases that 'Play on words exploits the polyvalence of meaning of one word … It is probable that many plays on words in the OT escape us; perhaps those which are more ingenious and allusive.'[8] In view of the evident 'numerological precision' we cannot close our eyes to the fact that the pericopes juxtaposed in the table below present themselves as an artistically arranged literary entity. Although according to the prevailing scholarly understanding the respective passages derive from completely different eras, the author has managed to interlink them terminologically:

Gn. 1:1		בראשית	ברא אלהים	
Gn. 10:10	ותהי	ראשית	ממלכתו בכל	
Gn. 49:3	ראובן בכרי אתה כחי	וראשית	אוני	
Ex. 23:19		ראשית	בכורי אדמתך תביא בית יי	
Ex. 34:26		ראשית	בכורי אדמתך תביא בית יי	
Lv. 2:12	קרבן	ראשית	תקריבו אתם ליי	

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7 Cf. R. Rendtorff, *Leviticus* (BKAT 3,1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1985), 4; J.C. de Moor, ed., *Synchronic or Diachronic: A Debate in Old Testament Exegesis* (OTS 34; Leiden: Brill, 1995).
8 L. Alonso-Schökel, *A Manual of Biblical Poetics* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 29.

Lv. 23:10	קצירכם אל הכהן	ראשית	והבאתם את עמר
Nu. 15:20	ערסתכם	ראשית	
Nu. 15:21	ערסיתכם	מראשית	
Nu. 18:12	אשר יתנו ליי לך נתתים	ראשיתם	
Nu. 24:20	גוים עמלק ואחריתו עדי אבד	ראשית	
Dt. 11:12	השנה ועד אחרית שנה	מרשית	
Dt. 18:4	דגנך תירשך ויצהרך	ראעית	
Dt. 18:4	גז צאנך תתן לו	וראשית	
Dt. 21:17	אנו	ראשית	כי הוא
Dt. 26:2	כל פרי האדמה	מראשית	ולקחת
Dt. 26:10	פרי האדמה	ראשית	ועתה הנה הבאתי את
Dt. 33:21	לו	ראשית	וירא

Gn. 1:1	in the	*beginning*	God created
Gn. 10:10	the	*prime*	of his kingdom was Babylon
Gn. 49:3	Reuben … the	*firstfruit*	of my virility
Ex. 23:19	bring the	*prime*	of the firstfruits ...
Ex. 34:26	bring the	*prime*	of the firstfruits ...
Lv. 2:12	as an offering of	*firstfruit*	you may present them
Lv. 23:10	**bring the**	***first***	**sheaf of your harvest ...**
Nu. 15:20	of the	*first*	of your dough
Nu. 15:21	from the	*first*	of your dough
Nu. 18:12	their	*first*	that they give to the LORD ...
Nu. 24:20	Amalek was	*first*	among the nations, but his end ...
Dt. 11:12	**from the**	***beginning***	**... to the end of the year**
Dt. 18:4	the	*firstfruit*	of your corn, new wine, and oil
Dt. 18:4	and the	*first*	from the shearing of your sheep
Dt. 21:17	for he is the	*firstfruit*	of his virility
Dt. 26:2	you shall take of the	*first*	of all the fruit of the ground
Dt. 26:10	I bring the	*first*	of the fruit of the ground
Dt. 33:21	and the	*first*	he chose for himself

Whatever the oral and/or written *Vorlagen* of the present Pentateuch may have been, the preceding table presents itself as a rather carefully composed 'numerological entity'.

The Noun עמר

As stated above, the seventh occurrence of the noun עמר 'Omer, sheaf' coincides with the seventh of the substantive 'beginning'. Whereas in Exodus 16, the story of the manna, the word עמר on six occasions has the connotation of 'Omer', i.e. an ancient Israelite dry measurement, in its seventh occurrence in Leviticus 23:10 the noun takes on the meaning 'sheaf' for the first time in the Bible. The divine injunctions regarding the offering of the firstfruits emphasise that the Israelite worshipers were strictly forbidden to 'eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God' (v. 14, NIV). Because in the literature of many ancient peoples

the number 'seven' is loaded with the notion of fulfilment, completion, and finishing, we might correctly conclude that the author of this terminological pattern has been successful in making the form and the content coincide completely. The phrase עמר ראשית 'first sheaf' which consists of two nouns both of which appear for the seventh time at this point, is found but once in the Hebrew Bible. Hence the theological significance of the 'first sheaf' in the Israelite cultus seems to be corroborated by the symbolism inherent in the number 'seven':

Ex. 16:16	עמר לגלגלת מספר נפשתיכם
Ex. 16:18	וימדו עמר
Ex. 16:22	ויהי ביום הששי לקטו לחם משנה שני העמר לאחד
Ex. 16:32	מלא העמר ממנו למשמרת לדרתיכם
Ex. 16:33	ותן שמה מלא העמר מן
Ex. 16:36	והעמר עשרית האיפה הוא
Lv. 23:10	והבאתם את עמר ראשית קצירכם אל הכהן
Lv. 23:11	והניף את העמר לפני יי
Lv. 23:12	ביום הניפכם את העמר
Lv. 23:15	מיום הביאכם את עמר התנפה
Dt. 24:19	ושכחת עמר בשדה

Ex. 16:16	an	*omer*	according to ...
Ex. 16:18	they measured it with an	*omer*	
Ex. 16:22	on the sixth day ... two	*omers*	apiece
Ex. 16:32	a full	*omer*	of it …
Ex. 16:33	put an	*omer*	of manna in it
Ex. 16:36	now an	*omer*	is the tenth part of an ephah
Lv. 23:10	**bring the first**	***sheaf***	**of your harvest to ...**
Lv. 23:11	he is to wave the	*sheaf*	before the LORD
Lv. 23:12	on the day you wave the	*sheaf*	
Lv. 23:15	from the day you brought the	*sheaf*	of the wave offering
Dt. 24:19	and you forget a	*sheaf*	in the field

Exegetical inferences: the offering of the עמר ראשית—be it a bundle of stalks of barley or as Jewish tradition has it (Nu. 15:20; *b. Menahot* 66a, 68b) a cake made out of barley meal mixed with water—'is important in itself and also it is important because it starts the counting for the next festival (cf. Ex. 23:19a; 34:26a)',[9] namely the Feast of Weeks: 'You are to count from the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, seven full weeks' (Lv. 23:15). The structural uniqueness emphasises the divine command: Israel is permitted to enjoy the bounteous blessings of the new harvest only after having completed the offering of the first sheaf

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9   J.E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 384–85.

with its accompanying sacrifices, in other words, the fullness of God's gifts to Israel is answered by them in offering first what belongs to the LORD and only after having done so may they delight in his generous gifts.

In the third and last terminological pattern to be analysed in this study, the seventh positions of the two antonyms 'beginning' and 'end' evidently focus on the LORD's providential care over the land that he is about to give to his people Israel.

The Noun אחרית

Even a quick glance at the following table makes us realise that the seventh of the total of ten occurrences of the noun אחרית 'end, posterity; remnant; last (days)' coincides with the seventh-from-last (= twelfth) of the substantive 'beginning' in Deuteronomy 11:12: 'It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.' On the other hand, in the following table the structuring function of Numbers 24:20 in its relation to Deuteronomy 11:12 seems likewise to be of importance. A close-up look at the ten occurrences of the word 'end' indicates that the antonyms 'beginning' and 'end' have syntactically been juxtaposed only twice, namely in the fourth and fourth-from-last positions. Since it cannot be contested that according to the present text the noun 'end' appears the seventh time and the noun 'beginning' the seventh-from-last time in Deuteronomy 11:20, we might presume this 'numerological precision' to be due to somebody's deliberate literary design. Furthermore, in comparison with the two preceding terminological patterns it is of interest that in the present one several poetic sections have been integrated: Jacob's blessing his sons (Gn. 49), the Balaam oracles (Nu. 24), prose sections from Deuteronomy 4, 8, and 31, and the song of Moses (Dt. 32):

Gn. 49:1	הימים	באחרית	את אשר יקרא אתכם
Nu. 23:10	כמהו	אחריתי	ותהי
Nu. 24:14	הימים	באחרית	יעשה העם הזה לעמך
Nu. 24:20	עדי אבד	ואחריתו	ראשית גוים עמלק
Dt. 4:30 באחרית הימים ושבת עד יי אלהיך			
Dt. 8:16		באחריתך	להיטבך
Dt. 11:12	שנה	אחרית	מרשית השנה ועד
Dt. 31:29	הימים	וקראת אתכם הרעה באחרית	
Dt. 32:20	אחריתם	אראה מה	
Dt. 32:29	לאחריתם	יבינו	

Gn. 49:1	what will happen to you in the		*last*	days
Nu. 23:10		and may my	*end*	be like his
Nu. 24:14	… will do to your people in the		*last*	days
Nu. 24:20	**Amalek was first … but his**		***end***	**will be unto destruction**
Dt. 4:30		in the	*last*	days you will return to ...
Dt. 8:16		so that in the	*end*	it might go well with you
Dt. 11:12	**from the beginning ... to the**		***end***	**of the year**
Dt. 31:29		in the	*last*	days ...
Dt. 32:20	and I will see what their		*end*	will be
Dt. 32:29	and understand what their		*end*	will be

Exegetical inferences: first, probably few modern readers of the Pentateuch would want to attribute the overlapping of the antonyms 'beginning' and 'end' in Deuteronomy 11:12 to chance. Second, in looking at the fourth and fourth-from-last texts we should be aware of the thematic antithesis: whereas 'Amalek was first among the nations, he will come to ruin in the end', the Promised Land will continually be under the LORD's care 'from the beginning of the year to the end of the year'. Third, in contemplating the present and the first terminological pattern jointly, their theological implications are self-evident: the Almighty God, who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth, is the very same, the God of the chosen people, who promises Israel on the plains of Moab that his eyes will forever be on the land of Canaan, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Once again 'the what and the how'[10] clearly correspond and complement each other. Hence this astounding artistic arrangement deserves scholarly attention, not least because of its being replete with theological significance.

Conclusion

Close reading of the final text of the Pentateuch has brought to light three linguistic links based on the nouns ראשית 'beginning', עמר 'Omer', and אחרית 'end'. Since according to the extant *Endgestalt* the two nouns 'beginning' and 'Omer' overlap in their respective seventh positions (Lv. 23:10), and the two antonyms 'beginning' and 'end' in the seventh ('end') and seventh-from-last/twelfth ('beginning') positions (Dt. 11:12), this *fact* should be seriously taken into consideration. Because of the congruence of literary form (numerological overlapping) and theological content (both the phrase 'first sheaf' and the statement that 'the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year'

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[10] L. Alonso-Schökel, 'Hermeneutical Problems of a Literary Study of the Bible', *Congress Volume: Edinburgh 1974* (VTS 28; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 3.

appear but once in the Hebrew Bible) the pericopes juxtaposed in the preceding tables present themselves as a sensible and theologically expressive entity. With regard to the present situation in Pentateuchal studies, R.N. Whybray has aptly remarked that

> as far as assured results are concerned we are no nearer to certainty than when critical study of the Pentateuch began. There is at the present time no consensus whatever about when, why, how, and through whom the Pentateuch reached its present form, and opinions about the dates of composition of its various parts differ by more than five hundred years.[11]

While reflecting on Whybray's assessment of the current conditions in Pentateuchal studies, the reader should consider the evidence presented in the preceding pages. It is my firm conviction that although more than 150 terminological patterns have hitherto been disclosed in the Pentateuch, many more await their being revealed. Therefore, the *Endgestalt*, 'the only *fact* available to us … in all its complexity',[12] should be more highly esteemed in Pentateuchal studies.

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[11] R.N. Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 12.
[12] Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 27 (his emphasis).