

The Pentateuch as a Two-Dimensional Composition

Where Egyptian tomb structure meets YHWH's revelation

Moshe Kline — companion note to "*The Torah and the Book of Gates*" (academia.edu/168833450)

Structural analysis of the Torah — synchronic, text-based, with no historical agenda — has produced a result with diachronic implications. The Torah turns out to be a two-dimensional composition. And the compositional form it follows appears to be Egyptian. If this holds, it offers an alternative to the Documentary Hypothesis: not a text compiled from sources, but a text composed in two dimensions by a scribe using an attested technology. The two-dimensional architecture is invisible to linear reading. Once serialized, the grid disappears. Later scribes copying the linear text did what scribes do: they updated its language, introduced Aramaisms and Persian loanwords, glossed place-names — "Ur of the Chaldeans" — all without seeing the architecture beneath the surface they were retouching. Composition and copying are different acts. The linguistic features that scholars date to late periods are the marks of the last hands on the surface. They do not date the design.

The Torah is not a line. It is a field — eighty-six literary units, each built as a table of rows and columns, meaning carried by position as well as by content. This is not an interpretive overlay. The units are marked by the text's own boundary signals, and the reading has been through peer review: the Covenant Code as a two-dimensional composition in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (2025, with Paul Hocking), the structure of Leviticus in an SBL Press volume (2015), Leviticus 19 in the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* (2008). An independent doctoral study at the University of Chester applied the method to the entire book of Leviticus and found it valid and reliable (Hocking 2019, available at chesterrep.openrepository.com).

That is the starting point: a text in which position is rhetorical. Where a passage sits — which row, which column — is part of what it means.

What the analysis found

Set three of the Torah's five books side by side — Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy — and their unit-rows align into a continuous band running through three registers (Figure 1). An upper register oriented toward the deity. A lower register oriented toward the human domain. An interface between them. At the center of Leviticus the two outer registers exchange position: what was above moves below, and what was below moves above. This horizontal band carries time — a narrative journey from creation through covenant to a future dispersion and return.

The remaining two books extend the pattern vertically. Exodus and Numbers flank Leviticus — Exodus above, Numbers below. This vertical axis carries space, not time. Exodus faces upward:

theophany, the mountain in fire, elders standing before the divine presence. Numbers faces downward: rebellions, earthly tests, the ground opening beneath Korach. Three registers in two dimensions — time along the horizontal, space along the vertical. At the center of both stands Leviticus — the Ohel Moed, the tent of appointed time and appointed place, where the two axes converge.

What emerges is a single compositional field integrating time and space. Three registers — deity-oriented above, human-oriented below — run through both dimensions, and at the center the orientation reverses.

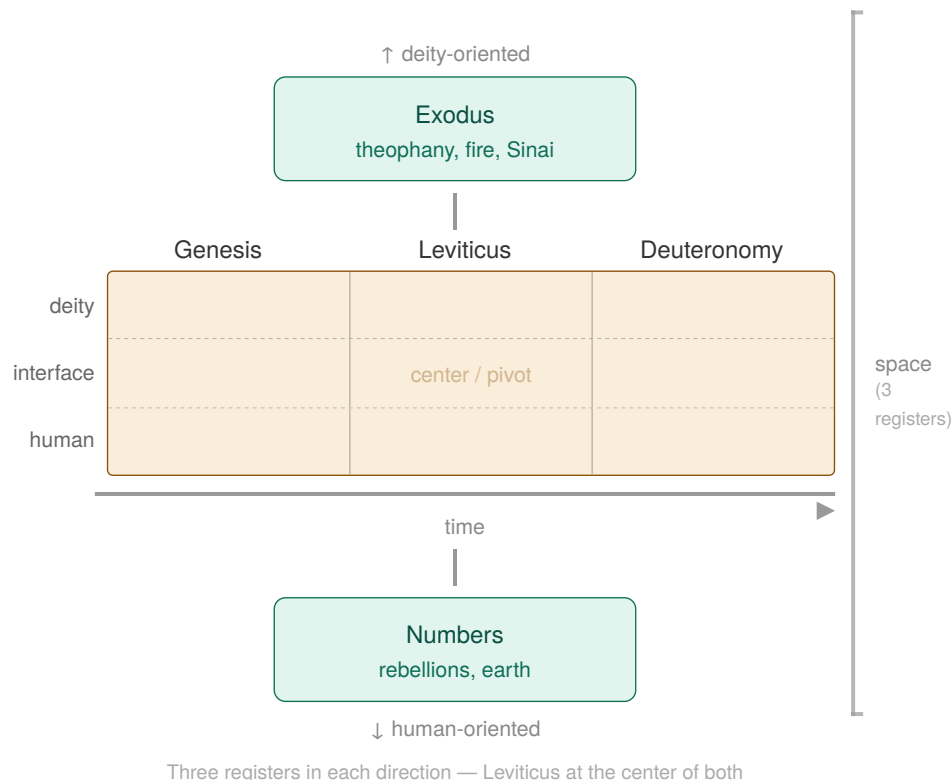


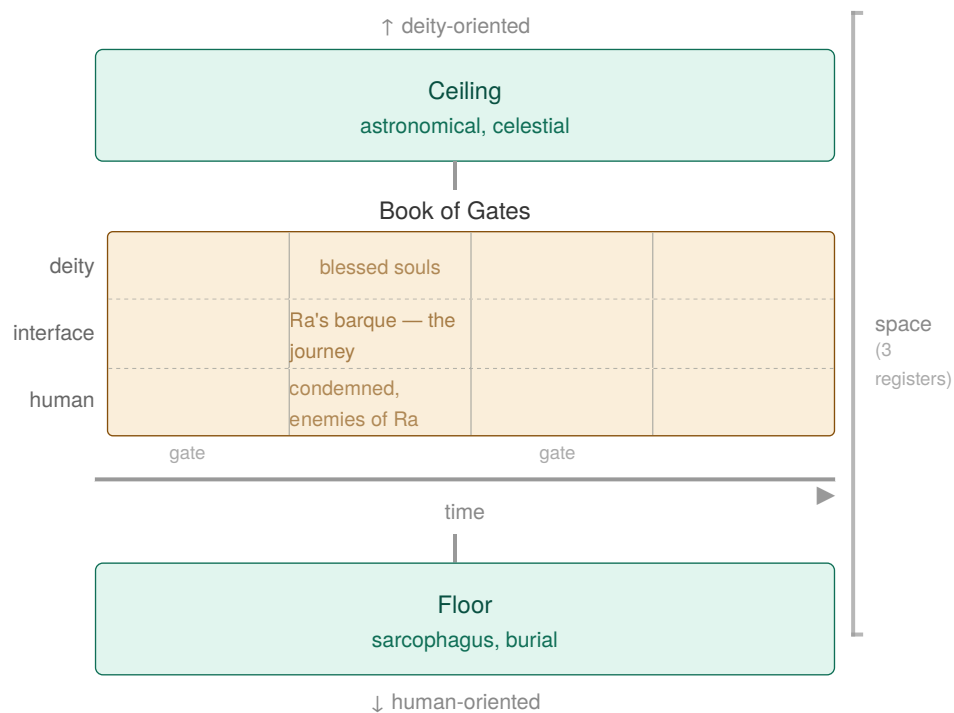
Figure 1: The Torah — two-dimensional layout

An Egyptologist will recognize what I am describing.

The parallel

In the Egyptian royal tomb, three surfaces carry fixed orientations: an astronomical ceiling above, the walls bearing a three-register composition, and the floor holding the sarcophagus below. The arrangement is physically literal. In many New Kingdom burial chambers the sarcophagus sits in a sunken pit below the level of the wall decorations — "the lower area of the room," symbolizing primordial earth. The three-register wall composition begins above this earthly level. The ceiling carries the stars. Heaven above, the journey in between, earth below. In the Torah, the corresponding lower position is Numbers — where the earth opens beneath Korach and swallows

him alive. On the walls, each division occupies its own vertical panel, stacked into three horizontal registers — with guarded serpent gates separating one division from the next.



Three surfaces of the royal tomb — each division gated by a guardian serpent

Figure 2: The Egyptian royal tomb — ceiling, wall, floor

The closest structural match to the Torah is the Book of Gates, for a specific reason. The Torah has one unpaired structural element — a triad dealing with impurity, material that must be disposed of to enter the holiest precinct. It occupies the position where the Book of Gates places the judgment of the impure, between hours five and six, before the journey continues inward.

This is not a thematic resemblance. It is a compositional one — the same organizing logic applied to different content. The form is Egyptian. The content is Israelite — Semitic narrative and law, not solar cosmology. The author took the technology and filled it with his own material.

Why not coincidence

Structural parallels between distant texts can always be dismissed. What makes this case different is evidence from inside the Torah that the two-dimensional grid came first and the linear text we read is its serialization.

In eighty-five of the eighty-six units, the text reads across the rows — because the rows carry the linear, rhetorical sense. Serialized this way, each unit reads as coherent narrative or law. One unit does something different. A fifty-law stretch of Deuteronomy has been read as disordered since antiquity — laws on war, family, property, and civic life jumbled without visible logic. It turns out

to be a table of ten rows and three columns, serialized down the columns rather than across the rows, in contrast to the other eighty-five units. The "disorder" is the trace of a grid original that someone chose to unroll along the vertical axis. That compositional choice is available only to a scribe holding the complete two-dimensional field.

What follows

For biblical studies, the Torah's two-dimensional architecture identifies a compositional model — not a redactional history, but a scribal technology. The Documentary Hypothesis explained the Torah's complexity by positing multiple sources. The Woven Torah identifies a single compositional model that accounts for the same complexity: Egyptian two-dimensional scribal practice, applied to a cosmic narrative by a scribe trained in that tradition. The form of the Torah does not require J, E, P, and D. It requires a scribe who knew how to compose on a canonical grid — the way a scribe formed in the royal scribal tradition was trained to compose.

The grid was laid down once. The surface was retouched many times. No copyist ever disturbed the two-dimensional structure — because no copyist ever saw it.

That a two-dimensional composition can survive centuries of faithful copying without anyone recognizing its structure is not a hypothesis — it is demonstrated. The Mishnah's 524 chapters follow the same compositional technology, a structure that survived nearly two millennia of transmission without detection.

For Egyptologists, there is a new challenge: finding replicas of Egyptian compositional formats in other ancient literatures.

Two independent routes — one structural, one thematic — appear to be converging on the same Egyptian material. If so, the convergence is worth examining.

The full argument is in "The Torah and the Book of Gates" (academia.edu/168833450).