

Quantitative Methods in the Humanities
and Social Sciences

Thomas E. Levy
Thomas Schneider
William H.C. Propp *Editors*

Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective

Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience

 Springer

Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective

Quantitative Methods in the Humanities and Social Sciences

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Managing Editor: Brad C. Sparks

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Preface

The grand narrative about Israel's Exodus from Egypt, mainly preserved in the Book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible, holds momentous significance for ancient Israel, Jewish identity, Christianity, Islam and Western thought, and deeply impacted the formation of academic disciplines studying the ancient Near East. In its role as a pervasive theme, it has inspired artistic and popular imagination. Finally, the Exodus lies at the heart of a controversy about the reliability and origins of the Biblical narrative, not the least in the context of research on the emergence of Israel after the end of the Late Bronze Age.

This volume is the most innovative gathering of thought assembled on the topic of Israel's Exodus from Egypt. In 9 sections, the volume presents papers first presented at *Out of Egypt: Israel's Exodus Between Text and Memory, History and Imagination*, a conference at the University of California, San Diego, May 31 to June 3, 2013. The transdisciplinary perspective this book takes combines an assessment of past research with current knowledge on the topic and new perspectives for future study. Research from Egyptologists, archaeologists, Biblical scholars, computer scientists, and geoscientists appears in active conversation throughout the various chapters of this book. The 44 contributions by leading scholars from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Israel, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, unite a diverse group of hermeneutic approaches. They pertain to the text and later reception of the Exodus narrative, including its Egyptian and Near Eastern parallels, function as cultural memory in the history of Israel, the interface of the Exodus question with the emergence of Israel and archaeological fieldwork, and exploration of the text's historicity. The historical geography and the environmental events described in the Exodus narrative and related texts receive thorough scientific analysis, reinforcing this volume's transdisciplinary character. An important section is devoted to cyberarchaeology, visualization techniques, and museological presentation of the Exodus.

Exodus research is evocative of "World Building," to use a phrase from Alex McDowell, production designer at the University of Southern California. World building is based on three pillars: "Storytelling is the most powerful system for the advancement of human capability due to its ability to allow the human imagination to precede the realization of thought; that all stories emerge logically and intuitively from the worlds that create them; and that new technologies powerfully enable us to sculpt the imagina-

tion into existence.”¹ Through the practice of ancient world building described here, we hope to promote a new approach to transdisciplinary research.

Setting the Stage: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Exodus Narrative

This volume commences with the conference’s keynote lectures. *Jan Assmann* perceives Exodus as a myth about the origin of a people and a religion. This myth simultaneously symbolizes the revolutionary turn in human history from cosmotheism to monotheism, the transition from the idea of a god immanent in or equivalent to nature, to the concept of one transcendent god beyond nature. He also traces the incomplete realization of this concept in Western history, where the recurrence of cosmotheistic trends and the reactions to counter cosmotheism kept the myth and symbol of Exodus alive until modern times. *Ronald Hendel* situates the cultural memory of the Exodus in a dialectic between historical memory and ethnic self-fashioning. He locates the roots of the mnemohistory of the Exodus in the transition from the Late Bronze to the Iron Age. At that time, memories of the collapse of the Egyptian Empire in Canaan were transformed into a memory of liberation from Egyptian bondage that was narrativized as a myth of ethnic origins—expressed in its oldest form, the Song of the Sea, as Yahweh’s victory over the chaos represented by pharaoh. The dishonorable storyline of the Exodus, with a people fleeing from slavery, is for *Manfred Bietak* an indication of elements that are historically credible. From this, he reviews the available evidence from Egypt on the settlement of “Proto-Israelites” during the later Ramesside period. He infers that such groups would have settled in Egypt simultaneously with the Proto-Israelites in Canaan. In his conception, the collective memory of the Proto-Israelites suffering in Canaan under Egyptian oppression and those suffering in Egypt merged in the genesis of Israel’s myth of origin. The later belief in a stay of the Israelites at Tanis/Zoan was then spurred by the transfer of archaeological remains from Pi-Ramesse to Tanis and Bubastis. *Israel Finkelstein* reconstructs different historical stages of the narratives about Israel’s wanderings in the southern desert. He focuses on the eighth century with Israelite activity along the Arabian trade route; the transformation of the desert narratives in Judah under Assyrian rule in the seventh century; their elaboration under the Egyptian 26th dynasty; and the loss of knowledge about the southern desert after 560 BCE. These narratives would have enriched a tradition of salvation from Egyptian rule that developed between the sixteenth and tenth centuries BCE. This tradition was transferred from the lowlands to the northern part of the central highlands, where it became a charter myth of the kingdom of

¹ You can read more about world building and the 5D Institute that Alex McDowell directs here: <http://5dstitute.org/about>.

Israel. In contrast with these assessments that are skeptical of our ability to define a single Exodus event in the second millennium BCE and concentrate instead on the purpose and development of the narrative in the first millennium, *Lawrence Geraty* gives an overview of conservative and mainstream readings of the Exodus account. He attempts to situate an Exodus event in various historical contexts of the Egyptian Bronze Age, with a special focus on dates in the 18th and 19th dynasties, while also touching on other proposed Exodus dates between 2100 BCE and 650 BCE.

Science-Based Approaches to the Exodus

This section presents a scientific study of the eastern Nile delta and Sinai peninsula's ancient environment. This includes a thorough assessment of scenarios that could either underlie events detailed in the Exodus narrative (for instance, plagues and the parting of the sea) from a conservative point of view, or scenarios that could have inspired the imagery behind the Exodus plagues and miracles, imagery that also appears in apocalyptic and ritual texts from the ancient Near East. *Stephen O. Moshier and James K. Hoffmeier* reconstruct the changing ancient physical geography of the region due to dynamic interactions between the Nile river system, Mediterranean Sea, and the tectonics of the Red Sea rift system. By combining field geology, archaeology, digital topography, and satellite imagery with geographic information technology, they produce a new map that reveals different positions of the Mediterranean coastline, lagoons, and the existence of Pelusiac Nile distributaries, lakes, and wetlands. By creating an accurate geophysical map for Exodus research, this recreated geography helps to delineate the path of the ancient coastal road between Egypt and Palestine. *Mark Harris* gives a critical assessment of the interpretative strategies of the burgeoning number of popular, naturalistic readings of the Exodus text. In defiance of Biblical scholarship that emphasizes the complex genesis and character of the Exodus traditions, and without considering the ideological uses of a text, these strategies take the narrative at face value as reflecting apocalyptic natural catastrophes, particularly the eruption of Thera (Santorini) in the seventeenth century BCE. The remaining contributions of this section provide scientific data on a variety of natural disasters to determine whether they could have generated the phenomena described in the Exodus narrative. *Amos Salamon* and coauthors examine the main tsunamigenic sources in the Eastern Mediterranean that may explain the parting of the sea—how to make the sea dry and then inundate the land. Their simulations recreate the tsunami that followed the Thera eruption around 1600 BCE; the strong magnitude 8–8.5 earthquake of 365 CE in the Hellenic arc and the resulting tsunami that devastated Alexandria; and a voluminous Late Pleistocene submarine slump at the Nile cone that started with a significant drawback of the sea and was followed by a remarkable inundation. The Thera eruption is also crucial to the remaining papers. *Michael Dee* and coauthors discuss the relevance of radiocarbon dating to Exodus-related problems and present dates from three

pertinent case studies; the dating of the Egyptian New Kingdom, the conquest of Canaanite cities as reported in the Book of Joshua, and the dating of the Thera eruption. *Malcolm Wiener's* article presents a reply to Dee's study, advocating for a much later eruption date (after 1530 BCE).

Cyber-Archaeology and Exodus

The four contributions to Section III explore the potential of visualizing the past, with the Exodus and recent archaeological research on Iron Age Jordan as a means to present original research for both scholarly and public dissemination in the format of the "museum of the future." The four contributions provide the background to an exhibition that accompanied the Exodus conference, prepared by a team of archaeologists, geoscientists, computer scientists, engineers, and digital media technologists under the direction of Thomas Levy. It was mounted in the Qualcomm Institute Theater at UC San Diego, a performance space reconfigured into a museum space that uses new visual and audio technologies. A large-format 8' × 32' (2.3 m × 9.75 m) 64 million pixel screen and several other tiled display systems were used for the computer visualizations, and a new 50-megapixel 3D large-scale immersive display system called the WAVE had its premiere. New audio systems and content were developed by the Sonic Arts researchers to project archaeological and geological audio data. These cyber-archaeology papers, along with those in the science-based approaches to Exodus, provide the grist for ancient world building applied to the Exodus narrative.

The Exodus Narrative in Its Egyptian and Near Eastern Context

Bernard F. Batto proposes that the Exodus narrative was rewritten through redaction by priests in order to elevate the Exodus "event" to mythical status, in the exile or post-exilic times. In this conception, employing motifs of the Combat Myth prevalent throughout Mesopotamia and the Levant, Yahweh and pharaoh were profiled as the two antagonists in the battle between the creator and the chaos monster in the form of the primeval Sea. Pharaoh is identified with and defeated in the "Sea of End" (*yam sūp*), the Red Sea not Reed Sea, from which Yahweh emerges as the creator of Israel. *James Hoffmeier* reviews the long history of scholarly engagement with the Old Testament by Egyptologists since the nineteenth century, in particular their vivid and positive interest in the topic of the Exodus and the historicity of Israel's sojourn in Egypt. He calls for Egyptologists "to return to the debate to bring data from Egypt to bear on historical and geographical matters." *Susan Tower Hollis* studies the relationship between Egyptian stories and Biblical stories about Israel's sojourn in Egypt, most notably the comparison between the 19th dynasty "Tale of Two Brothers" from the Papyrus

d'Orbiney (BM 10183) and the narrative of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39. *Scott B. Noegel* suggests the Egyptian sacred bark as the best non-Israelite parallel to the Ark of the Covenant that the late priestly tradition of Exodus 25 depicts as being manufactured at Mount Sinai. The Israelite conception of the Ark probably originated under Egyptian influence in the Late Bronze Age. *Gary Rendsburg* presents an assessment of Egyptian parallels to motifs occurring throughout Exodus 1–15, such as the hidden divine name, turning an inanimate object into a serpent or crocodile, the conversion of water to blood, the casting of darkness, the death of firstborn, the parting of waters, and death by drowning. Almost all these motifs are known only from Egypt without an echo in other ancient Near Eastern societies. Rendsburg imagines an educated Israelite writer and his well-informed Israelite audience were able to understand and enjoy the Egyptian cultural context of a composition that “both subverts Egyptian religious notions and simultaneously expresses Israel’s national heritage in exquisite literary fashion.” *Brad C. Sparks* concludes this section with a comprehensive compilation and discussion of scholarship since the nineteenth century that takes note of Exodus parallels in some 90 ancient Egyptian texts of different genres and time periods. Sparks argues that the historicity of the Exodus needs to be reevaluated in light of this Egyptian narrative material and intriguing associated iconography.

The Exodus Narrative as Text

This Section gives in-depth views of the starting point for Exodus discussions: the Exodus narrative as preserved in the book of Exodus. Eminent specialists on the exegesis of Exodus are represented in this section. *Christoph Berner* suggests that the complexity of the account of Exodus 1–15, a narrative that is not coherent in nature and whose details often stand in tension with each other (if not in flat contradiction), can best be understood as resulting from a process of continuous literary expansions (*Fortschreibungen*). He demonstrates through the references to the Israelites’ forced labor, which he uses as a test case, that substantial parts of the narrative belong to an extensive post-priestly stage of textual redaction. Thus, the Exodus narrative reveals little about the historical circumstances of the Exodus, but all the more about how post-exilic scribes imagined it and participated in the literary development of the Biblical account. *Baruch Halpern* speaks about the Exodus as a fable that was inspired by possible events of Israel’s past, although he contends that its historical genesis will be as irretrievable to us as its narrator. Halpern also emphasizes that the text’s modern discussants must wield the tools necessary to confront the epistemological challenges that we face. The true question is: “What do we need to know in order to know what we want to know?” Faced with storytellers and their audiences who contributed historical detritus while adding artistic value to the story, the subject’s sole value is to recover the story’s magic: to understand Israel’s modes of social thought over time and the culture that immortalized the Exodus. *Thomas Römer* addresses traditions

about the origins of Yahweh. While the Exodus narrative was recorded in writing for the first time in Judah and seems to reflect the contemporaneous Assyrian oppression, the literary contours of the older Exodus tradition that came to Judah from Israel after 722 escape us. Hosea 12 shows Yahweh (the god of the Exodus) in opposition to the Jacob tradition, perhaps proof of the attempt to make the Exodus the foundation myth of Israel. The two accounts of Yahweh's revelation to Moses, as well as external evidence (Kunttillel Ajrud, evidence about the *Shasu Yahu*) preserve the memory that Yhwh was not an autochthonous deity but was introduced from the South. *Stephen C. Russell* proposes a new historical contextualization of Moses' appointment of officials to judge legal cases in Exod 18:13–26. Traditionally believed to reflect the social world of the monarchic period and to provide an etiology for the system of royal judges established by Jehoshaphat (2 Chron 19:5–10), this appointment more closely parallels the postexilic system of Ezra 7:12–26, where the Persian king Artaxerxes instructs Ezra to appoint judges who know the Mosaic law. Exod 18:13–26 is best understood as a postexilic expansion of Exodus 18; it constitutes a major bridge in the book of Exodus by summarizing the deliverance from Egypt and anticipating the revelation at Sinai. *Konrad Schmid* issues a call to acknowledge in our assessments the difference between the world of the narratives and the world of the narrators and to account for this difference in a methodologically controlled manner. His particular example is Exodus 1–15, a text debated in Hebrew Bible studies in terms of both its compositional and its historical evaluation. Despite all controversies, there is broad consensus about the Priestly texts in Exodus 1–15 (Exod 1:7, 13–14; 2:23*–25; 6:2–12; 7–11*; 14–15*). The article discusses several narrative peculiarities in the Priestly Exodus account that might be explained by seeing it as a Judean foundational myth of the early Persian period. The image of Egypt as unruly and needing to be tamed suggests a date prior to 525 BCE, when Cambyses conquered Egypt. Whereas Cyrus was a supporter of Jewish independence, the Pharaoh of Exodus is an “Anti-Cyrus.”

The Exodus in Later Reception and Perception

This section deals with later Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions and interpretations of the Exodus. *Joel Allen* examines the “despoliation of Egypt” (Gen 15:14; Exod 3:21–22; 11:2–3 and 12:35–36), a motif that has evoked embarrassment for Jewish and Christian expositors. This essay examines key allegorical “text therapies” (e.g., the interpretation of the Egyptian plunder as *spiritual* treasures by which Jews and Christians sought to heal the text of its improprieties and warrant appropriation of the pagan classical heritage into the realm of the spirit). Philo, Origen and Augustine all sought to provide justification for those who wished to have the best of both the Biblical and classical worlds and to balance the faith of scripture with the reason of Greek philosophy. *René Bloch* examines the challenge that the Exodus story presented to Jewish-Hellenistic authors whose homeland was Egypt. How did they come to terms with the Biblical story of liberation from

Egyptian slavery and the longing for the promised land? His study looks at narrative differences in Philo's discussion of the Exodus. In particular, Philo read the story allegorically as a journey from the land of the body to the realms of the mind. This permitted him to control the meaning of the Exodus and stay in Egypt. *Caterina Moro* focuses on the extra-Biblical Exodus story of the Jewish-Hellenistic historian Artapanus. This story, unlike the Biblical Exodus account, provides an identity for Moses' Egyptian opponent, assigning him the name Chenephres. Moro examines the evidence on his possible historical equivalent, Khaneferra Sobekhotep IV of the 13th dynasty, and the fictional history that elevated him to the position of the pharaoh of the Exodus. *Babak Rahimi* proposes to understand the Quranic accounts of the Exodus as a salvational drama, in contrast to Classical Quran exegesis that has perceived the expulsion of the Israelites from Egypt as divine punishment imposed on them for their transgressions against God. Not only does the Quranic Exodus narrative contain many instances of God's blessing to the Israelites, the Exodus constitutes a metanarrative of spiritual liberation and represents a chronicle of God's presence. The Israelites' experience of a trial through adversity ultimately reveals divine grace and a promise for salvation. The article by *Pieter van der Horst* examines the pivotal role that the Exodus from Egypt played in Jewish-pagan polemics from the beginning of the Hellenistic period into the Imperial period. Pagan polemicists reversed the Biblical story of the Israelites' liberation from Egyptian bondage, portraying a negative image of Israelite origins and picturing them as misanthropes and atheists. Jewish-Hellenistic authors reacted to these attacks in writing through novels, dramas, and philosophical treatises.

The Exodus as Cultural Memory

It is in the first millennium BCE that the purported Exodus event became a written and cultural artifact, a canvas of continued ideological imagination. This section's contributions engage with the concept of cultural memory, whereby the Exodus story may be seen as a response to a society's religious and cultural needs during the monarchies of Israel and Judah and the exilic and post-exilic period. It may also be considered a vehicle of national identity. *Aren Maeir* discusses the variability of memories and their susceptibility to being shaped and changed. He discusses the Exodus tradition as a matrix of cultural memories, woven together and altered over a long period, thus defying any attempt to determine a single historical event that would correlate to the Exodus. It is not an ahistorical myth but rather reflects the many periods and contexts, in which the Exodus *mnemo-narratives* were formed—a multi-faceted “narrative complex” and space of memory shaped by the needs of Israel's identity. In a similar vein, *Victor Matthews'* contribution draws a distinction from efforts to determine the possible historicity of the Exodus event. Instead it concentrates on how and why collective memories are created, perpetuated, used and reused. While he inquires

when and where the Exodus tradition originated, he concludes that current data make it impossible to provide a definitive answer and that what can be said has more to do with why the Exodus tradition was important to the Israelite community at various times. *William H.C. Propp* supports the view that the Exodus cannot be called “historical” and that the evidence is too diffuse to be adequately tested by the historical method; in consequence, we must resign ourselves to ignorance. By way of comparison, Propp adduces and contrasts another mythic tale of improbable, miraculous salvation to the Exodus story: the “Angel(s) of Mons” from World War I, where abundant information enables us to sift truth from fiction precisely and set both in historical context. *Donald B. Redford* puts the Biblical account of Israel’s stay in and expulsion from Egypt in line with several other traditions regarding a “coming-out” from Egypt: Manetho’s *Aegyptiaca*, the Bocchoris “leper”-tradition, Phoenician reminiscences, and asides in the Hebrew prophets. These traditions, extraneous to the book of Exodus, are the *Asiatic* folk-memory, “adjusted, distorted, inverted, with motivation reversed or imputed,” of the Hyksos occupation and their expulsion after a reign of 108 years. Redford examines the contribution of these traditions to elucidating the original event and its perception through time. Finally, *William G. Dever* offers an archaeological critique of the “cultural memory” model of the Exodus-Conquest narrative. After reviewing what the Biblical writers actually knew about their origins, what they created as their memories, and what they may have forgotten about their past, he concludes that the narrative is a foundation myth whose basic elements—an immigration of “all Israel” from Egypt and conquest of the land—are invented. Instead of asking how these texts functioned socially, religiously, and culturally, he examines “what really happened” and points to Israel’s emergence as an indigenous phenomenon within Canaan, with the Israelites being essentially Canaanites, displaced both geographically and ideologically.

The Exodus and the Emergence of Israel: New Perspectives from Biblical Studies and Archaeology

This section provides a link to questions about the historicity of the Exodus memory by moving the discussion from the Exodus text and its historical purposes in the first millennium BCE to the emergence of Israel in the later second millennium. *Emmanuel Anati* presents an overview of the archaeological survey of Mount Karkom (which he identifies as Mount Sinai) and surrounding valleys that resulted in the discovery of 1,300 new archaeological sites. The presence of altars, small sanctuaries and numerous other places of worship characterize Mount Karkom as a holy mountain of the Bronze Age at the foot of which large numbers of people seem to have lived temporarily. Drawing on several theoretical insights regarding the nature of social power and makeup of ancient states in his analysis of the Amarna letters, *Brendon Benz* presents an alternative hypothesis to recent scholarship which has hypothesized that Israel consisted of geographical, economic, and/

or political outsiders. Politics and populations of the Late Bronze Age Levant were more diverse than is generally recognized, with social power more widely distributed and often negotiated among a range of political players in an “egalitarian” manner. The various forms of political organization included those that consisted of populations defined by settled centers and those that were not. After highlighting points of continuity between the Late Bronze Age and the constituents of early Israel as they are depicted in some of the core passages of the Bible, Benz suggests that early Israel included a contingent of geographical, economic, and political insiders. *Avraham Faust* discusses the ethnogenesis of Israel with particular attention to the earliest Israel group, the one mentioned in the Merneptah stele, which according to Faust was composed mainly of Shasu pastoralists. Many different groups (including many Canaanites, and possibly a small “Exodus” group that had left Egypt) were amalgamated into what was to become Israel. The Exodus story was one of the traditions and practices that was useful in demarcating Israel from other groups and came thus to be adopted by “all Israel.” *Daniel Fleming* looks at the phenomenon of herding over distance as a survival of earlier social strategies from Israel’s background. In the Exodus story, Israel appears as settled in Egypt, with no indication of free movement with its livestock into and out of Egypt. For the Exodus writer, all pastoralism was local. However, elements of the deeper narrative structure follow the logic of long-range pastoralism (Moses and Israel’s way into the wilderness; the move to herding bases in Canaan), with the Exodus from Egypt amounting to a change of operating base when an existing base was no longer available. Thus, the Exodus story may have been attached to and served social circles in which such migration could be celebrated. *Garrett Galvin* reviews certain aspects of the scholarship on the historicity of the Exodus event and the archaeological evidence from Egypt and Palestine, pointing to the powerful analogy of the establishment of the Philistines as a new nation in Palestine. He emphasizes that, despite a more cautionary approach to texts since the twentieth century Linguistic Turn in the philosophy of history, the Biblical Exodus narrative remains our main textual access to the question of a historical core. However, it is a myth of origin that has parallels in Greek, Roman and Germanic stories of ethnogenesis, a theological document operating within the conventions of historical narratives. *Christopher Hays* recognizes the numerous contacts that existed between ancient Israel and Egypt—memories of Egypt, which later became literary traditions in the Hebrew Bible, were handed down by some portion of the Iron Age proto-Israelite state, and textual and material data related to the earliest Israelite monarchy indicate an ongoing cultural relationship with Egypt. He adds an apparent similarity between the way the two nations conceptualized the extent of their kingdoms to the examples of Egyptian influence on early Israel. *Robert Mullins* reviews the three models that have been put forth to explain the appearance of Israel in the western highlands of the southern Levant: conquest, pastoral sedenterization, and social revolt. According to him, a fourth model, which takes into account the dissolution of the Egyptian empire at the end of the Late Bronze Age, provides a more satisfying explanation for what must have been a widespread, complex, and lengthy

process. What we find in the Biblical text is a constructed history whereby later Israel enshrined and reshaped its past to create official memories of a culture and formulate a new vision for the future. *Nadav Na'aman* examines reasons for the contrast between the central place of the Exodus in Israelite memory and its questionable historical status. He suggests that the bondage, the suffering, and miraculous delivery from slavery actually took place in Canaan during Egypt's imperial reign over Palestine in the New Kingdom and the empire's demise in the twelfth century, and that the locus of these memories was later transferred from Canaan to Egypt. The bondage and liberation were experienced by the pastoral groups that later settled in the highlands of the Northern Kingdom, hence the central place of the Exodus tradition in the cultural memory of Israel's inhabitants. Since the process of settlement in the Judean highlands took place later and on a limited scale, the memory of the Exodus played only a minor role among Judah's inhabitants.

Conclusion

The concluding chapter of the volume by *Thomas Schneider* presents a glimpse of the complexity of Exodus research. Any attempt to trace and contextualize motifs of the narrative is obstructed by the complexity of the text's history. Exegetical certainties of the twentieth century have vanished in the crisis of pentateuchal research and given way to multiple scenarios of text composition and redaction, the interrelationship of major themes, and the provenance and historical context of phenomena mentioned in it. This general situation is exemplified by a study of Exodus 12 that at the same time aims to be a genuine contribution to Exodus research and a perspective at the end of the volume. The received text of Exodus 12 describes the last plague brought onto Egypt by Yahweh—the killing of Pharaoh's firstborn son and the firstlings of the country's livestock—by Yahweh or alternatively, his “destroyer” who strikes the Egyptians but spares the homes of the Israelites. Several aspects of the Passover protection ritual have not yet been explained in a satisfactory way. After giving an overview of the intricate exegetical situation, the study proposes a new approach to the text by drawing on parallels from Egyptian rituals which would have been appropriated by the text's authors for the Israelite cause. Pap. Cairo 58027, a ritual for the protection of Pharaoh at night, and rituals aimed at the “Plague of the Year” receive particular attention.

In addition to the exegetical approaches to Biblical studies presented here, the transdisciplinary methods illustrated in this volume demonstrate the great potential that scientific and quantitative methods have in answering long-standing questions in both the humanities and social sciences. Questions that have mystified generations of people who have been fascinated with the enigmatic Exodus of the Bible may now be examined using these approaches that are sure to bear fruit in the coming years. Indeed, transdisciplinary, or team science approaches will be in the

forefront of cutting edge concepts that, with the integration of technology, will be brought together by researchers from the social sciences, humanities, natural sciences and engineering. The editors hope that the 43 contributions included in the volume will provide an inspiring point of departure for all future research on the question of Israel's Exodus.

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Out of Egypt or Out of Canaan? The Exodus Story Between Memory and Historical Reality

42

Nadav Na'aman

Abstract

The factual background of the Exodus story is the most perplexing issue in biblical historical studies. On the one hand, the Exodus tradition is very old, and its status as the central Israelite foundation story finds remarkable expression in every genre of biblical literature. On the other hand, most scholars doubt the historicity of the story, and generally consider it to be the vague memory of a small group, which was gradually adopted by all other Israelite tribal groups. The contrast between the central place of the Exodus in Israelite memory and its questionable historical status requires explanation. The chapter suggests that the bondage, the suffering, and the miraculous delivery from slavery actually took place in Canaan and that the locus of these memories was later transferred from Canaan to Egypt. The bondage and liberation were experienced by the pastoral groups that later settled in the highlands of the Northern Kingdom. Hence, its central place in the cultural memory of Israel's inhabitants. Since the process of settlement in the Judean highlands took place later and on a limited scale, the memory of the Exodus played only a minor role among Judah's inhabitants.

Scholars dispute the historicity of the Exodus narrative. The range of opinions stretches from those who suggest that the nucleus of the story is basically authentic and the episode reflects an important event in the early history of Israel to those who entirely dismiss the historicity of the story, emphasizing that it was written at a later time and suggesting that it mainly reflects the time of its composition. According to the latter

view, the Exodus story is essentially a myth that was formulated at a later time and does not reflect the reality of the Israelites' early history (for recent discussion see: Redford 2011). Between the two extremes lie scholars who accept the historicity of a few details in the story and posit that the story includes a small nucleus of historical events that took place on Egyptian soil and on the way from Egypt to Canaan (for the history of research see recently: Davies 2004; Propp 2006: 735–762; Russell 2009: 1–23, with earlier literature; Schmid 2010: 117–139 and n. 556).

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Scholars do agree that the Exodus tradition was mainly accepted in the Northern Kingdom and finds clear expression in the prophecies of Amos and Hosea and in some early psalms of possible northern origin (Ps 77; 80; 81) (Hoffman 1989: 169–182; Blum 2012: 42–49, with earlier literature). Although the tradition is not mentioned in the original prophecies of Isaiah and Micah, it is dominant in various Judahite texts written in the late First Temple period (Davies 2004: 26–27). These references include the celebration of the Passover in Josiah's 18th year (2 Kings 23:21–23), the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1–17), the Book of the Covenant (Exod 22:20; 23:9), the early layer of the Book of Deuteronomy (5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22; 26:5–8), and some psalms of possible Judahite origin (Ps 78; 114). It is thus inconceivable that the tradition was unknown in the Kingdom of Judah before the seventh century BCE and suddenly played such an important role in the consciousness of the late First Temple period's ruler and elite. We should better assume that the Exodus tradition was known in both kingdoms but occupied a more important role in the historical memory of the Northern Kingdom.

The prophecies of Amos and Hosea are the earliest available sources reflecting the memory of the Exodus in Israel. The coming out of Egypt is explicitly mentioned three times in the Book of Amos (2:10–11; 3:1; 9:7), five times in the Book of Hosea (2:15 [Heb. 17]; 11:1; 12:9 [Heb. 10], 13 [Heb. 14]; 13:4), and, though indirectly, in three additional Hoseanic references (8:13; 9:3; 11:5). The prophecies unambiguously indicate that the Exodus was considered to be a foundational event in the Northern Kingdom and had the status of a constitutive tradition.

The few eighth century texts available to us are separated by four centuries from the historical event they relate. Analyzing them indicates how the vague historical event was memorialized by the Israelites at the time of writing. The texts reflect the manner in which the eighth century Israelite society conceived of its past in a quest to make it relevant for the present (rather than to maintain historical accuracy of the "event").

What might have been the original event behind the memory of the Exodus? Since I

already discussed the question in detail, I will present only the main contours of the solution I suggested (Na'aman 2011).

Analysis of the Exodus story *vis-à-vis* the historical data led scholars to conclude that the story contains a number of characteristics that reflect the late exilic or post-exilic date in which it was written, whereas it is difficult to find distinct characteristics that reflect the period to which the story is attributed. No evidence that might be connected to the Exodus story either directly or indirectly was ever detected in the Egyptian texts. Examination of the archaeological data from Iron Age I sites did not produce any evidence that sheds light on the Exodus story. Were this story not mentioned in the Bible, no scholar would have guessed that even a small group from among those who settled in the highlands on both sides of the Jordan arrived from Egypt (Dever 1997: 67–86; Weinstein 1997: 87–103).

In light of the absence of evidence, some scholars hypothesized that a small group of people of West Semitic origin was initially in Egypt and, upon migrating to Canaan, joined the pastoral groups that settled in the highlands and the adjacent peripheral areas. This group transferred the tradition of bondage to Egypt and the miraculous escape by divine help to the other groups that later settled in the highlands (e.g., Noth 1958: 110–138; Halpern 1992: 87–113, 1993: 89*–96*; Malamat 1997: 15–26; Davies 2004; Blum 2012: 49–63). According to this hypothesis, a certain elite group whose identity cannot be established migrated from Egypt, and in light of its political, social, or religious-cultural influence, was able to transform its exclusive historical memory into an all-encompassing Israelite historical consciousness.

However, the central place of the Exodus tradition in early biblical historiography, prophecy and psalms does not suit this assumption, which fails to explain how an event that was originally connected to a small group became the basis for the central claim of origin and establishment of the people of Israel. In my opinion, the supposition that such an early and deeply entrenched common Israelite tradition could have grown from the experience of a small group does not make sense. Another explanation for this central

perception must be sought; and the place to look for it lies in the concept of “mnemohistory,” namely, the past as memorialized by the people (Assmann 1998: 8–17). Differently stated, the discussion of the biblical story should not be directed at the past as it really happened, but rather at the manner in which Israelite society shaped its identity by creating a certain image of its own past (Hendel 2001: 601–604, 2005: 57–59). We must concentrate on the way in which the historical memory of the Exodus has emerged and developed. In this context we may inquire regarding the background of the perception that Israel emerged as the people of YHWH at a time when the Israelite peoples were subjugated to Egypt. How did the tradition of liberation from Egyptian bondage become a foundational story of the People of Israel?

In my opinion, the major event underlying the Exodus tradition is the dramatic Egyptian withdrawal from Canaan after the Egyptian bondage reached its peak during the Twentieth Dynasty (Na’aman 2011: 60–69). Over the course of the thirteenth to twelfth centuries, the Egyptians greatly expanded their grasp of Canaan, annexed large territories, and increased their pressure on the city-state rulers. They conducted campaigns, destroyed settlements and deported many local inhabitants to Egypt. They operated against the pastoral nomadic groups—among them the group called “Israel,” which lived in the peripheral areas of Canaan. Elements of the Exodus story, such as bondage, suffering and arbitrariness of the government, well reflect the experience of all the inhabitants of Canaan in their contacts with the Egyptian government. Evidently, the Egyptian withdrawal brought relief to all those who lived in Canaan. This event would explain the strong feeling of freedom from the bondage of foreign power that engrained into the memory of the Exodus.

Moreover, the sense of a miracle that happened to the Israelites, so prominent in the Exodus tradition, well reflects the reality of mid-twelfth century Canaan. For hundreds of years, Egypt occupied Canaan and none of its inhabitants could have remembered a different reality than that of Egyptian governance of the land. Suddenly,

Egypt retreated from Canaan and its inhabitants became free of foreign rule. No wonder that the withdrawal was conceived as a kind of miracle that the local inhabitants attributed to their God. My suggestion that the historical memory of the release from the bondage of Egypt was originally connected to Canaan fully explains the all-encompassing dimension of the memory involving the entire Israelite people.

It is well known that Egypt ruled Canaan uninterruptedly for about 350 years, and during that long period its involvement was gradually intensified and reached its zenith shortly before the Egyptian withdrawal from Canaan. Notwithstanding, Egypt is absent from all biblical texts that describe Canaan before the conquest and destruction of its major cities. How can we explain the black hole that was opened wide in the biblical memory, in a place where we would expect the preservation of memory? In my opinion, the riddle is resolved by the assumption that the vivid memory of the Egyptian presence in Canaan was absorbed within the Exodus tradition and thus disappeared from the collective Israelite memory. Memorization and forgetfulness complement and nourish each other so that the effect of one dictates in many ways the other. I suggest, with due caution, that the transfer of the memory of bondage and liberation from Canaan to Egypt, and with it the forgetfulness of the memory of the long Egyptian occupation of Canaan, is the result of the shaping of a new identity of the young Israelite society when it settled in the highlands of Canaan. Thus, a segment of the new settlers’ past was removed from its local context in Canaan and transferred to the land of the subjugator.

An important element that might be connected to the shifting of memory from Canaan to Egypt is tradition of the YHWH’s origin from the southern periphery of Canaan. This tradition is evident in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:4–5), the Blessing of Moses (Deut 33:2), and the prophecy of Habakkuk (3:3a). Within the Exodus story as well, YHWH reveals himself to Moses in Midian, somewhere in the desert area south of Canaan. Several inscriptions dated to the mid-eighth century discovered at Kuntillet ’Ajrud mention “YHWH of Teman,” namely, the God of Israel who is directly

connected to the desert areas south of Palestine. According to all these sources, YHWH—the divine leader of the Exodus story—originated from the southern periphery of the settled country (Seir, Sinai, Paran, Teman, Midian). The God and his followers moved from south northward, to the Land of Canaan, and the south-northward movement might have influenced the memory of the Exodus as a movement that proceeded from Egypt to Canaan (Hutton 2010; Leuenberger 2010, with earlier literature; Na'aman 2011: 66–67; Blum 2012: 52–63).

No source illuminates the way in which the Exodus was remembered before the eighth century. Hence, the mechanism by which the memory was shifted from Canaan to Egypt and the identity of the agents of this change are unknown. We can only hypothesize that through a long process, the painful memory of the bondage to Egypt and the miraculous withdrawal of the Egyptians was severed from Canaan and attached to Egypt. The two rival sides of the historical memory—the Israelites and the Egyptians—remained at the center of the plot, but the arena was reversed, so that the retreat from Canaan to Egypt was replaced by a migration from Egypt to Canaan. According to this scenario, all elements of memory that originally were linked to Canaan were gradually absorbed within the memory that connected the Exodus with Egypt, and in this form reached the eighth century BCE writers and prophets.

How should we explain the prominent role of the Exodus memory in the Northern Kingdom and its lesser role in the Kingdom of Judah? Some scholars suggested that the Exodus story was a “charter myth” of the Northern Kingdom, written after the Kingdom’s liberation from the Judahite yoke in the time of Jeroboam I and since then holding central place in the ideology of the kingdom (Crüsemann 1978: 111–127; van der Toorn 1996: 287–302, 2001; Albertz 1994: 140–145, 2001; Carr 2011: 477–479). According to this hypothesis, some elements of the biblical narrative of Solomon’s oppression and Jeroboam’s rebellion reflect the historical reality of the late tenth century BCE. The Exodus story was modeled after the main contours of the story of Israel’s subjugation to Solomon and its liberation under the leadership

of Jeroboam and served as an early paradigm of the establishment of the Israelite kingdom by divine support (for discussions of the relations of the Exodus and the rise of Jeroboam stories see: Dietrich 1986; Zakovitch 1991: 87–97; Särkio 1998: 165–173, 2000; Oblath 2000; Frisch 2000; Blanco Wissmann 2001; Russell 2009: 27–47). As a model of the establishment of the kingdom, the Exodus story held a prominent place in the Kingdom’s ideology. However, the history of Solomon and the story of the foundation of the Northern Kingdom were written long after the period they refer to and were guided by literary and ideological considerations of the author’s time. The historical chain of events that led to the foundation of the Northern Kingdom must have been entirely different from the one related in the Book of Kings. Moreover, we know next to nothing about the ideology of the early Israelite monarchy and about the outlines of the Exodus story as related in the early monarchical period. The Exodus as a “charter myth” of the Northern Kingdom was probably shaped only in the eighth century BCE, in the time of Jeroboam II, and the story of Jeroboam’s rebellion and his rise to power was probably composed at about the same time.¹ Hence, the “charter myth” hypothesis does not really explain the original place of the Exodus tradition in the Northern Kingdom.

To account for the prominence of the Exodus memory in the Kingdom of Israel, we must emphasize that Israel and Judah were two distinct territorial, sociopolitical, and cultural phenomena. Israel was much larger, richer and more densely populated compared to its southern neighbor. The surveys revealed that the main concentration of Iron Age I–IIA sites was found in the northern part of the highlands, between the Jezreel Valley and Jerusalem and that most of the highland

¹ Some scholars dismissed the suggestion that the Exodus story reflects an authentic memory of the early history of Israel. See recently Berner (2011). Other scholars dismissed the idea that the story of Jeroboam’s rise to power is based on a pre-Deuteronomistic text and suggest that it is a fictive description without any basis in a chronistic or novelistic source. See Hoffmann (1980: 59–73), Berlejung (2009: 16–24).

population in the eleventh to ninth centuries was located in Israel's territory. In contrast, the highlands of Judah were sparsely inhabited until the Iron Age IIB (Finkelstein 1988; Zertal 1994; Ofer 1994; Lehmann 2003). Moreover, Israel emerged as a full-blown state already in the early ninth century BCE, whereas Judah emerged as a full-blown state about a century later (Finkelstein 1995). It is evident that the tradition of the subjugation, suffering and liberation from Egypt was part of the experience of the pastoral groups that wandered in the peripheral areas of Canaan in the thirteenth to twelfth centuries BCE, among them the group called "Israel." When these tribal groups settled the highlands areas on both sides of the Jordan in Iron Age I, they carried with them the living memory of the release from the Egyptian bond as well as the belief in YHWH as their divine savior. About two centuries later, when the institution of monarchy was established in the Northern Kingdom, the experience of the early settlers became an integral part of the inhabitants of the kingdom's cultural tradition. Memory of the Exodus was transferred verbally for centuries until it was finally put in writing, either in the eighth or in the seventh century BCE.

In contrast to the early, large-scale settlement in the highland regions of the Northern Kingdom, the process of settlement and consolidation in the Judean highlands took place later and on a more limited scale, so the experience of subjugation and liberation from a foreign yoke might not have formed part of the early settlers' living memory. Moreover, the city of Jerusalem rose to power in rivalry with its northern neighbor. As the Exodus tradition played such prominent role in the Northern Kingdom, Jerusalem's rulers and elite must have shaped a different memory of the kingdom's past—one that emphasized its separate origin and distinct identity *vis-à-vis* its strong northern neighbor. The Exodus gained prominence in Judah only after the Assyrian conquest and annexation of the Northern Kingdom, and since then gradually integrated into Judah's historical memory and ideology. King Josiah, in his efforts to take over the ancient Israelite identity, was probably the first king who officially

celebrated the Passover in the temple of Jerusalem and thereby sealed the Exodus official place in the historical memory of the Kingdom of Judah.

I suggest that both the centrality of the Exodus tradition in the Northern Kingdom and its marginality in the Kingdom of Judah demonstrate the tradition's great antiquity. Its acceptance in the north is the result of the early settlement in the highlands of many population groups that experienced the suffering, subjugation and liberation from the Egyptian yoke. In contrast, those who settled in the Judean highlands did not directly experience the Egyptian oppression. Hence, the memory of the Egyptian withdrawal from Canaan and the sudden release from the Egyptian bondage did not play significant role in their cultural memory.

In sum, the understanding that the story of the Exodus reflects the historical memory of the early Israelite society in Canaan opens a small window for recognition of the consciousness of the early settlers in the highlands. Assuming that this is indeed the case, the Exodus story might be considered the earliest source available for research into the cultural-religious worldview of early Israelite society in the twelfth to eleventh centuries BCE.

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