Introduction: The Exodus Narrative in Synchronic and Diachronic Perspective

The IECOT commentary series has set itself the goal of combining, to the greatest possible degree, diachronic and synchronic perspectives in its exegesis of the Old Testament. The starting point and reference point for both perspectives is the traditional text that has been transmitted in the *Biblia Hebraica*. We have decided to call chapters 1–15 the subject matter of this commentary, the "biblical exodus narrative." In this commentary, separate authors have treated the two interpretive perspectives – Helmut Utzschneider the synchronic perspective and Wolfgang Oswald the diachronic.

In this commentary, the two different interpretive perspectives will initially be treated separately in the sub-sections "synchrony" and "diachrony," both part of the section called "text analysis." Their common basis will be the translation, which is provided with notes. In the section entitled "synthesis," moments of convergence and divergence between the two perspectives will be related to each other. The "dialogue" between the two interpretive perspectives aims to deepen theological understanding and clarify the degree to which the respective hermeneutical presuppositions bring about different interpretations.

The following introductions each have their own research goals and scope of analysis. The introduction from a synchronic perspective offers a broad view of the exodus narrative (Exod 1:1–15:21), in accordance with the scope of this commentary. The introduction from a diachronic perspective, on the other hand, treats the entire book of Exodus. This is because the stages that underlie the final form of the text consist of compositions that are not limited to the first part of the book of Exodus. In some cases, the decisive evidence for the presence of a layer of literary extension is found in Exod 16–40; as such, a comprehensive view of the text is required in order to successfully sketch the literary history of the book.

A. The Biblical Exodus Narrative – A Synchronic Analysis

1. "Synchronic Interpretation" as Literary-Aesthetic Interpretation

The term "synchronic" is firmly anchored yet only vaguely defined in biblical scholarship. Though we cannot repeat the debate here,[1] it is nevertheless necessary to give a brief account of the way this commentary understands the term.

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1 See Blum, *Sinn*, 16–30; Walter Dietrich, "Synchronie und Diachronie in der Exegese der Samuelbücher – eine Einführung," in *David und Saul im Widerstreit – Diachronie und*

Synchronic Interpretation in Exodus Commentaries

In addition to this, it is helpful to cast a glance next at the significance of synchronic interpretation for more recent commentaries on the book of Exodus.[2] Synchronic interpretation has now firmly established itself in the discipline; nevertheless, the understanding of this perspective is variously accentuated and often is defined in contrast to a diachronic perspective (cf. section B.1. of this introduction for the diachronically oriented commentaries).

Of these commentaries, the first to be mentioned is *Das Buch Exodus* by the Jewish scholar and Rabbi Benno Jacob. This comprehensive book was written in German between 1934 and 1944. Because its author had to flee Nazi Germany it has only been accessible in a restored German edition since 1997. The commentator orients himself towards the extant Hebrew text, which he analyzes in light of an intimate knowledge of the classical Jewish interpretive literature and with great linguistic precision. Benno Jacob's primary concern is to work out the "religious thoughts and intentions" of the Torah, "according to which the narrative has been shaped in the way it has and not in some other way."[3] This point of view is combined with a healthy scepticism towards historically analytical biblical scholarship that has its source in Christian Protestantism. In particular, Jacob vehemently rejects the theory of literary sources, which at the time of his writing was almost the only dominant theory.[4]

The four-volume commentary by Cornelis Houtman that appeared between 1993 and 2002 does in fact assume that "material from various sources"[5] has played a role in the composition of the entire work. At the same time, due to an act of "final editing,"[6] the entire work is characterized by considerable unity. This is precisely the sense in which it was intended to be a "unity," and so this is how it should be read. This does not prohibit us from noting, in individual cases, moments of unevenness or tension in the text that may indicate a literary prehistory behind the unified end product.

The Exodus volume by Carol Meyers, which appeared in 2005 as part of the series *New Cambridge Bible Commentaries*, has clearly been influenced by more recent literary studies. In line with these trends, her commentary is interested in the "existing text,"[7] which does not hinder the author from occasionally drawing attention to traces of the sources of the present text, in particular the "dominant hand of P."[8] From a literary perspective, "Exodus [is] essentially a narrative – a connected series of episodes with characters and a plot."[9] As a narrative, the entire book of Exodus (not only the exodus narrative in Exod 1–15) has a special function. With reference to Jan Assmann, Meyers claims that it is remembered history and thus represents "a kind of thinking, in which the biblical traditions are understood as phenomena of collective cultural memory."[10] This "literature of remembrance" preserves elements of historical reality, such as

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Synchronie im Wettstreit. Beiträge zur Auslegung des ersten Samuelbuches (ed. Walter Dietrich; OBO 206; Freiburg, Switzerland: Academic Press/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 9–14. See also the Editors' Preface.

2 For synchronic interpretation of the book of Exodus, see also Utzschneider, *Renaissance*, 62–67.

3 Jacob, *Exodus*, 484.

4 See the presentation by Janowski and Jürgensen in the preface to the German edition of 1998: Jacob, *Exodus*, XIV–XV.

5 Houtman, *Exodus*; citation from *Exodus 1*, 1.

6 Houtman, *Exodus 1*, 2.

7 Meyers, *Exodus*, 2.

8 Meyers, *Exodus*, 17.

9 Meyers, *Exodus*, 18.

10 Meyers, *Exodus*, 10.

events and conditions in Egypt during the 19th Dynasty, which are analogous to certain events in the exodus narrative.[11] She supposes that the figure of Moses preserves the memory of a charismatic figure from the beginnings of Israel in the village culture of the Iron Age. As in her other works, Meyers applies feminist exegesis to the Exodus narrative (cf. in particular her interpretation of the Song of Miriam in Exod 15:20).

As in Meyer's commentary, Christoph Dohmen's German language volume *Exodus 19–40*, published in 2004 as part of the series *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament*, orients itself towards the traditional Hebrew text and has as its starting point the role of the reader, specifically that of the contemporary reader. The meaning of texts is "always as manifold as their readers."[12] Nevertheless, limitations are placed upon this semantic diversity by the "*intentio operis*" – Dohmen refers here to Umberto Eco. However, nowhere does Dohmen name a method or even criteria for determining the "*intentio operis*." The interpretive perspective is twofold: it desires to do justice to both the textual perspective and to the perspective of the reader. As such the commentary is the "guarantor and watchman of the text" while simultaneously keeping open the text's "semantic plenitude and multidimensionality."[13] For Dohmen, this is part and parcel of a clear scepticism towards classical, diachronic research. Dohmen is not concerned with discovering the "original meaning" or the authorial intention of the text. Inquiry into the earlier stages of the text is not ruled out of court, but for him it does not belong to the actual task of a commentary.

Das Buch Exodus, a German commentary by Georg Fischer and Dominik Markl, which appeared in 2009 in the series *Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar – Altes Testament*, also takes a synchronic approach. The authors undertook to "remain close to the biblical word,"[14] which meant paying attention to its linguistic structure with all its intricacies. The authors strive to provide a comprehensive portrait of the narrative by paying special attention to its inner movement, its figures and motifs, as well as the text's peculiar literary characteristics. This latter phenomenon can be seen above all in the fact that the individual parts demonstrate a "coherent, often even necessary sequence."[15] The result is a very unified view of the exodus narrative and the book of Exodus, the "Exodus scroll,"[16] as a totality; this view typically has great scepticism towards all diachronic theories.[17] Fischer und Markl read "Exodus as an intentional unity full of tensions."[18]

The Text as "Literary-Aesthetic Subject"

This commentary agrees with the commentaries discussed above in that it relates its synchronic interpretation to the traditional Hebrew text. It understands this entity to be a "literary-aesthetic subject,"[19] i.e. an independent literary work that *can* be meaningfully read without reference to the intentions of its authors and

11 See Meyers, *Exodus*, 10.
12 Dohmen, *Exodus*, 29, cf. 29–33.
13 Dohmen, *Exodus*, 30f.
14 Fischer and Markl, *Exodus*, 9.
15 Fischer and Markl, *Exodus*, 20. In an earlier publication, Georg Fischer compared Exod 1–15 to a "staircase" (Fischer, *Exodus 1–15*, 150), in which each section of the text presuposed its predecessor, as in a series of steps. He concluded that the text was a compositional unity.
16 Fischer and Markl, *Exodus*, 22, cf. 19.
17 See also recently Fischer, *Exodus 3–4*, 196: "Whoever begins to read a text with assumptions about its compositional history runs the risk of importing something alient into it."
18 Fischer and Markl, *Exodus*, 245.
19 Utzschneider/Nitsche, *Arbeitsbuch*, 68–69.

without knowledge of the history of its development. Synchronic interpretation in this sense is directed towards the literary form, the poetic formation of the traditional Hebrew text, as well as its aesthetic response. Its most defining poetic form is narrative. This form is realized by means of the specific features of ancient Hebrew narrative style (e.g. syntax, textual incipits), as well as more general narrative techniques[20] that are also typical of modern narrative texts. At its heart, therefore, synchronic interpretation is a representation of the narrative profile of the exodus narrative. It is the purpose of this introduction to give an initial impression of this profile; this will later be further developed in the exegesis of its larger and smaller sub-units.

Textual Form

Literary-aesthetic interpretation also focuses its attention on the historical textual forms, i.e. genres, motifs, motif-constellations and traditions, that have formed the text and which have each undergone their own specific, individual formation within it.[21] Synchronic interpretation, therefore, as understood in this commentary, is not a-historical. Literary-aesthetic interpretation is conscious of its indebtedness to the tradition of Old Testament genre and genre-historical criticism.[22]

Synchronic and Diachronic Interpretation

This commentary also differentiates itself from the aforementioned commentaries in not wishing to define synchronic interpretation in opposition to diachronic interpretation. The relationship between the two interpretive perspectives, however, is not formed on the basis of a literary hypothesis of a final redactor, i.e. the last editor in a long series of authors and redactors. An interpretation of the traditional end-text as a "literary-aesthetic subject" in no way requires a hypothesis regarding its author.[23]

In contrast to this, diachronic interpretation reconstructs the prior stages of the traditional book of Exodus, identifies older compositions and reveals – as far as this is possible – the original intentions of its authors or its compilers. It thus understands these reconstructed compositions to be acts of communication[24] and to this end formulates an historical hypothesis about the location of each composition within the history of Israel's social discourse.

Historical interpretation operates on the temporal level of each of the reconstructed older compositions in their literary and social contexts and is thus, in a strict Saussurean sense, also "synchronic."[25] (In accordance with typical exegetical

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20 See Utzschneider/Nitsche, *Arbeitsbuch*, 140 and the literature listed there; see also Seybold, *Poetik*.

21 See Helmut Utzschneider, *Der Text als ›Doppeltes Lottchen‹? Zum Verhältnis von synchroner und diachroner Exegese in Exod 1–5* in *Diasynchron: Beiträge zur Exegese, Theologie und Rezeption der Hebräischen Bibel, Walter Dietrich zum 65. Geburtstag* (eds. Thomas Naumann and Regine Hunziker-Rodewald; Kohlhammer: Stuttgart, 2009), 389–401.

22 See Coats, *Exodus 1–18*. This commentary from the year 1999 particularly treats the Old Testament genres in the book of Exodus.

23 See Helmut Utzschneider, "Autorenintention, alttestamentlich," in Wischmeyer, *Bibelhermeneutik*, 63–64.

24 See Christof Hardmeier, *Textwelten der Bibel entdecken: Grundlagen und Verfahren einer textpragmatischen Literaturwissenschaft der Bibel* (TSHB 1/1; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003), 15.

25 See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Grundfragen der allgemeinen Sprachwissenschaft* (2nd edition; Berlin: de Gruyter 1967, 67); Blum, *Sinn*, 16–30; Christina Hoegen-Rohls/Mechtild Habermann, "Synchronie/Diachronie," in Wischmeyer, *Bibelhermeneutik*, 578–579.

usage, however, the term "synchronic" will only be applied here to literary-aesthetic interpretation.)

In our interpretations, these different research agendas will reveal both commonalities as well as tensions between the two interpretive perspectives. It is not our concern to harmonize them. Our concern is much more, under the "synthesis" heading, to bring the various approaches into a dialogue and by so doing attempt to secure their respective contributions to our total understanding of the text.

2. The Exodus Narrative in the Old Testament Narrative Traditions (Gen – 2 Kgs)

Chapters 1–15 of the book of Exodus are not an isolated unit; rather they have been integrated into the narrative arcs of the Pentateuch and the "historical books" that reach as far as the second book of Kings. The exodus narrative is not so disconnected from the narrative thread found in Genesis, the narratives of the wilderness wanderings, the Sinai event, or the conquest of Canaan that it could be considered a self-contained entity.

Forward References

Every now and then – even if not too often – the exodus narrative makes explicit reference to figures and material found in the Patriarchal Narratives (Exod 1:1–6; 2:24; 3:6, 15–16; 6:3; 13:19). For their part, the Patriarchal Narratives themselves make reference to the exodus event. Obvious forward references, however, can only be found in Gen 15:13–16 and Gen 50:24–26; their presence in other texts such as Gen 12:10–20 and Gen 46:1–5 is questionable and a matter of dispute. The network of cross-references between Exodus and the Patriarchal Narratives is not particularly dense, which gives the impression that they are editorial in nature and of a late date.

Back References

Back references to the exodus narrative from later traditions are much denser and more widespread; the scope of their presence includes, for example, the legal traditions of the Sinai pericope (Exod 20:2; 22:20; 34:18; Lev 23:43), the narrative in Exod 32, the list of Israel's stations in the wilderness in Num 33, Deuteronomy, the conquest traditions that make reference to the miracle of the sea within the context of the crossing of the Jordan, and the report of the construction of the temple in 1 Kgs 6:1.

However, it is not only – indeed not even primarily – the explicit references that embed the exodus narrative within the narrative continuum of the Old Testament historical traditions. It is far more the "thematic deep structure" of its plot (cf. 4.1) as well as the depiction of its figures that demand, or at least suggest, a narrative prequel or a narrative sequel.

Exodus and Eisodus

A narrative of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt presupposes a prior "eisodus," a narrative of how they got into the land; at the very least it raises the question. Regardless of whether one understands the designation of the collective main character as "Israelites" (בני ישׂראל) to be a mere demonym or an echo of the "*nomen eponymum*" of the patriarch Jacob (as in Exod 1:7), they are identified as non-Egyptians and *as such* this raises the question of how these characters made their way into Egypt. The story of Joseph (Gen 37:39–50) supplies the answer: the

Israelites immigrated to Egypt under the leadership of their patriarch Jacob-Israel because of a famine in the land of "Canaan" (41:57; 42:1–2; 45:11).[26]

The figure of Moses also connects the exodus narrative with the narrative world of the story of the Patriarchs. In some respects he is a "liminal" figure, located on the borderline between the Israelites and the Egyptians, the story of the Patriarchs and the story of the people (cf. especially the interpretation of Exod 2 and 3).

Exodus – Where To?

Just as the presence of a departure raises the question of a prior entry, it also raises the question of the destination of this departure. It is certainly true that the dominant key term of the departure, יצא, focuses upon the exodus from Egypt as the land of slavery and as such does not reflect upon its "thereafter" or "wither" (Exod 3:10; 6:6; 14:11). Nevertheless, the concepts of direction or destination are always associated with the departure narrative.

In the dialogues between God and Moses there is never any question that the land is the destination of the departure; Moses is also supposed to make this destination clear to the people (cf. Exod 3:8,17; 6:8; 13:15). There are indications that the Israelites will be driven out by their Egyptian hosts (גרשׁ, 6:1; 11:1; 12:39) and eventually there is the people's fear, expressed at the miracle of the sea, that the path into the wilderness in truth leads to death (14:11).

Pharaoh is told about a festival to YHWH in the wilderness (Exod 3:18; 5:3; 7:16 etc.); it is for the celebration of this festival that Moses demands the release of his people. Many interpreters have argued that Moses is calling for a "holiday," the implication being that either the Israelites will return to Egypt or that this is simply a "pretext."[27] In the meantime the cultic festival of YHWH is conceived as a comprehensive and not only "spatial" "destination" of the exodus narrative, one that finds expression in individual references (cf. Exod 3:12), in the keyword "serving"/"service" (which has cultic connotations), in the laws of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread in Exod 12–13, and in the narrative conclusion of Exod 15; this concept is also concretized on various levels (cf. 5:3).

The manifold notions of direction and destination show that the question of "whither?" is inherent to the exodus story; as such, it is not only reasonable but inevitable that this exodus story is extended into a story of wandering. This story does, after all, have its beginning within the exodus story through the first of the two itinerary formulae (Exod 12:37; 13:20); these are repeated in the itinerary formulae found between Exod 15:22 and Num 33, up until the point that the Israelites first reach the Mountain of God at Sinai (Exod 19), before finally crossing the threshold of Canaan in the book of Joshua. Above all, however, "the sea-miracle narrative" (Exod 13:17–15:21) will prove to be a "liminal text" at the transition between the two great narrative arcs, namely the exodus narrative and the narrative of the wanderings.

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26 In my opinion, this answer is certainly sufficient if we remain on the level of the plot, even if we can hardly identify any indications on the surfaces of the text of an original connection between the Exodus narrative and the Joseph Story; see Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus*, 56.

27 E.g. Baentsch, *Exodus*, 38; Jacob, *Exodus*, 113, sees in this a cryptic announcement of their return to the land of the Patriarchs.

3. The Exodus Story as a Unified Narrative

Notwithstanding the fact that the exodus narrative has been integrated into the narrative continuum of the Old Testament narrative traditions, there are good literary reasons for viewing and interpreting it as an independent entity – which does not mean that it is either thematically unified or "self-contained," as already demonstrated above. Rather, its narrative unity (not "isolation") finds expression in a series of signals and structures:

- in the clear opening and concluding signals, which are nevertheless open to those texts that are adjacent to them (to the following texts more than to the preceding);
- in the theme words, which bridge and permeate the narrative;
- through the ancient literary form that underlies the narrative;
- in the narrative's plot.

3.1. The Narrative Beginning

A clear opening signal is the "prologue" to the narrative in Exod 1:1–7. On the one hand, it connects back to the Joseph Story (vv. 1, 6) and to the stories of the Patriarchs and creation through the multiplication sayings in particular (v. 7). On the other hand, the prologue makes clear that all the figures of these previous narratives have died (v. 6): "Then Joseph died and all his brothers and that entire generation," i.e. those of the tribe of Jacob and their immediate offspring who had immigrated to Egypt. The narrative begins anew with new characters; the old ones are merely a memory.

3.2. The Narrative Conclusion

As Georg Fischer has noted,[28] the exodus narrative does not have one narrative conclusion but two.

3.2.1. Exod 15: Praise for Salvation at the Sea

The "latter," second narrative conclusion consists of two hymnic songs: a comprehensive song by Moses (Exod 15:1b–19)) and a short but evocative song by Miriam (Exod 15:21). In terms of content, they are intimately connected with the immediately preceding (sub)narrative about the salvation of the Israelites at the Sea and have been integrated into it (see 5.3 below and the exegesis of Exod 15). The festive character that the narrative confers upon this event, particularly by means of its description of the women's dance (Exod 15:20), reminds one of the entreaty that Israel go into the wilderness in order to celebrate a festival (Exod 3:18; 5:1); this turns the conclusion of the exodus narrative into a cultic service for YHWH.

28 Fischer, *Exodus 1–15*, 160.

3.2.2. Exod 12:37–42: Exit and Departure

Exodus 12:21–42 can be read as the primary and first conclusion. This conclusion, too, contains cataphoric (anticipatory) signals. Verse 37 states Israel's departure from Rameses, the place in which Exodus 1:11 locates Israel's forced labor; at the same time, this verse begins the long itinerary list of the wanderings narratives. Its primary function, however, is to conclude the plot arc of the exodus narrative. Here, God's promise received on the Mountain of God (Exod 3:8, 10) and the demand to Pharaoh to let the Israelites go (Exod 5:1) are fulfilled. Verses 40–42 understand this event to be the conclusion of an epoch, numbering the length of the Israelites' sojourn in Egypt as 430 years and then fixing their departure "on [the] very day" of the expiration of the 430-year period.

3.3. The System of Keywords and the "Spherical Integrity" of the Exodus Narrative

A further indication of the integrity of the narrative is the technique of using keywords.[29] The narrative is permeated by a network of keywords, which signal the key themes of the narrative and the plot lines that they create. They appear in two different structural patterns.

3.3.1. Keyword Bridges

There are keywords that are placed at the beginning and end of a narrative and in so doing build a bridge between the narrative beginning and end.[30] They raise a theme at the beginning and at the end indicate what has become of it. They thus also function as cataphoric and anaphoric references. Examples of this kind of keyword are לחם ni. ("fight") and נצל hi. ("liberate").

The Keyword "fight"

לחם ni. "fight" establishes a keyword bridge from Exod 1:10 on the one hand to Exod 14:14, 25 on the other. In Exod 1 Pharaoh wants to prevent the people from ever "fighting" against Egypt. According to Exod 14:14, 25 there is "fighting," but in a manner that could not have been foreseen in Exod 1: it is not the people that fights against the Egyptians but YHWH, and YHWH who finally conquers them once and for all. That which Pharaoh had feared at the beginning of the narrative becomes a reality, but in a completely different manner to what he had originally imagined. Moses' song constitutes the concluding moment of this keyword trajectory when it celebrates YHWH as a "man of war" (איש מלחמה; Exod 15:3).

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29 Although not the first to recognize it, Martin Buber was the first to describe the significance of this technique: "The term keyword refers to a word or a root that repeats itself within a text in a semantically significant manner: Whoever traces these repetitions will discover the meaning of the text." Martin Buber, "Zu einer neuen Verdeutschung der Schrift," supplement to Martin Buber/Franz Rosenzweig, *Die fünf Bücher der Weisung* (Cologne: Hegner, 1954), 15. Text-linguistically speaking, keywords are recurring figures that are easily observable on the surface of the text, on the one hand, and which, on the other hand, lead us directly to its central themes; see Utzschneider/Nitsche, *Arbeitsbuch*, 91–93.

30 See Utzschneider, *Atem*, 49–54: "Strukturbildende Leitworte."

The Keyword "liberate"

In a similar manner, the keyword נצל hi. "liberate" traces the narrative's arc of suspense. During his epiphany to Moses on the Mountain of God, YHWH festively explains that he has descended in order to "liberate [Israel] from the hand of the Egyptians" (Exod 3:8). According to Exod 5:23, after Pharaoh has refused to let Israel go, God has to hear the following from the mouth of Moses: "you have not liberated your people at all (והצל לא־הצלת את־עמך)." This keyword occurs once again just before the final "plague," the killing of the first born of the Egyptians, the event that finally moves Pharaoh to let Israel go. In the speech in which Moses prepares the Israelite elders for this, we read: "It is a sacrifice-Passover for YHWH, who distanced himself from the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when he struck Egypt but liberated our houses" (Exod 12:27).

3.3.2. Keywords as Leitmotifs

The Keyword "serve"

A further type of keyword accompanies the narrative over its entire course, like a thematic leitmotif in a piece of music. An example of such a thematic leitmotif is the semantic field of עבד or עבדה. In the biblical exodus narrative, this semantic field has two diametrically opposed meanings and references. To Pharaoh and the Egyptians, it means "slave labor" (cf. Exod 1:13–14; 2:23; 5:9,11 etc.; Exod 6:5–6, 9; 14:5, 12). In reference to YHWH ("to serve YHWH") it means "divine service" (Exod 3:12; 4:23; 7:16–10:3, 8; 12:25, 26, 31).[31] The majority of the references to service of YHWH can be found in that part of the biblical exodus narrative that reports the direct struggle between Pharaoh and God, namely the story of the plagues. In the manner of a leitmotif we find the repetition of the demand to Pharaoh that has been made a classic by the spiritual, "Let my people go": "Let my people go, that they may serve me ..." (שלח את־עמי ויעבדני, Exod 7:16; 8:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3; 12:26).

Divine Service

In Exod 12:25–26, i.e. immediately before the first conclusion to the narrative, the term עבדה, "divine service," "cultic tradition," is applied to the Passover festival, thus acquiring a meaning that points well beyond the temporal horizon of the exodus narrative. This semantic duality in the meaning and reference of the word family reflects what is arguably the main fundamental theme of the biblical exodus narrative: the conflict between the human tyrant Pharaoh and YHWH, the God of Israel.[32] Both make a claim for Israel's service. For Pharaoh this service is violent (1:13–14) and ultimately aimed towards destruction; for YHWH it is bound up with liberation and freedom.[33]

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31 *KBL* 730–731 or 733–744.; see also Utzschneider, *Atem*, 54–56 as well as Georges Auzou, *De la servitude au service: Étude du livre de l'Exode* (Paris: Éd. de l'Orante, 1961), passim.

32 The primary theme of the biblical exodus narrative is not a conflict between the Egyptian divinities and the God of Israel who demands exclusivity, as one might assume from Jan Assmann's interpretation of the exodus narrative. In the "confrontation between Israel and Egypt," the issue is not a "religious antagonism between monotheism and idolatry" (Assmann, *Moses*, 25); rather it is political antagonism between Pharaoh, whom the narrative characterizes as a very human tyrant, and Yhwh, the divine ruler of the world.

33 Utzschneider, *Atem*, 119f.

4. Structure and Plot of the Biblical Exodus Narrative

4.1. Basic Terms: Plot, Type, Scene, Episode, Narrative Phase

The term "plot" refers to the meaningful arrangement of the elements of a narrative, namely the actions and characters it contains. The plot holds the narrative together and structures it. The structure and plot of a narrative can be recognized by a series of narrative techniques that are able to express its internal "divisions." Narrative plots can also be designed according to specific types; in particular one can make a distinction between an action-oriented plot (an "action novel") and a character-oriented plot. The biblical narrative is designed according to the first type (cf. 4.5).

The basic unit of the exodus narrative, and of Hebrew narrative in general, is the *scene*,[34] i.e. a sequence of actions that are "played out" in a particular arena; it involves a small number of active characters and *short* speeches and is temporally circumscribed. At the same time, however, scenes are usually not comprehensive enough – as shall shortly be demonstrated – for them to meaningfully constitute the internal divisions of a narrative. We will use the term "episode" to designate the larger units in which a number of scenes can be grouped into a sequence of scenes (the exegesis will also be structured according to these larger units). The scenes of an episode depict actions (4.2.1) or *comprehensive* speeches or dialogues (4.2.2.). There are also episodes without scenes (4.2.3), although these are far less common. Finally, episodes themselves can be grouped into larger narrative units; following Eberhard Lämmert, we call these "narrative phases" ("*Erzählphasen*").[35] In the exodus narrative, phases consist of three to six episodes (the exception being the plague narrative, which consists of ten episodes); these episodes form a unity in terms of their actions, their character sets, as well as their spatial and temporal cohesion. We will divide the exodus narrative as well as its interpretation into six narrative phases (4.4).

4.2. Scenes and Episodes

4.2.1. Action-Defined Episodes

Scene and Episode: The Example of Exod 2:1–10

An instructive example of an episode that consists of scenes defined by action is the childhood story of Moses (Exod 2:1–10); we begin by singling out the scene in which the Egyptian daughter of the king discovers the little box containing the abandoned baby Moses (Exod 2:5–6):

> "(5) Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile; in the meantime her companions walked up and down the bank of the Nile. Then she saw the little box in the midst of the reeds and sent her servant. She grabbed it (6) and opened (it).

34 See Bar-Efrat, *Bibel*, 110–116; Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel 1. Vol. I: King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kings 1–2): A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses* (SSN 20; Assen: van Gorcum, 1981), 8; Seybold, *Poetik*, 88–90.

35 Eberhard Lämmert, *Bauformen des Erzählens* (2nd ed; Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967), 73.

> Then she saw it – the child, and behold: a boy, he cried. Then she had pity on him and said: This is one of the Hebrew children."

This short text is exemplary of an action-defined scene. An arena for the action is expressly given: the bank of the Nile. The main characters of the action are the king's daughter and the child in the little box; the princess' companions, who offer a helping hand to their mistress, play the role of supporting actors. The action itself is limited to a few elements: a stroll, the discovery of the little box, its retrieval and opening, the discovery of the child, and a spoken commentary by the princess.

There are multiple indications that this scene is richly connected with the surrounding scenes and episodes: The princess's statement that "this is one of the *Hebrew* children ..." presupposes the episode of the midwives (Exod 1:15–22). The character of the sister to some extent creates a "bridge" to the scene of the discovery of Moses. At the end of the first scene she makes her way to the site of the discovery on the Nile and remains standing there (v. 4). As such she becomes a silent witness to the discovery, thereby creating the link to the third scene of the conversation with the princess, the result of which is the return of the child to his biological mother, who is to raise it as its nurse (vv. 7–9).

The example of this episode illustrates that although the individual scenes represent a basic narrative unity, they nevertheless must (usually) be supplemented with several other scenes in order to create a meaningful subunit. The unifying element of the subunit Exod 2:1–10 is the figure of Moses and the intention to narrate his childhood as a story of threat and deliverance. The sequence of scenes is held together by its own plot, an "internal plot" within the framework of the broader plot of the exodus narrative.

4.2.2. Episodes as Speeches and Dialogues

Speeches and even more so dialogues are also fundamentally scenic. They are integrated into the nexus of the character's activity within the narrative. The most important factor that differentiates action-defined scenes from speech or dialogue scenes is the fact that in the latter there is almost no difference between narrated time and narrative time. Reading a dialogue or a speech takes almost as long as the dialogue or speech itself. In contrast to the typically rapid action-defined episodes, dialogue and speech episodes slow down the pace of the narrative; indeed they bring it to a standstill – which does not mean that "nothing happens." On the contrary.

The exodus narrative contains longer speech and dialogue sections (only these concern us here; shorter speeches can always also be found in action-defined narratives) in the following places: Exod 3:7 – 4:17; 6; 11; 12–13 as well as in chapter 15.

Dialogue and Speech Compositions Exod 3:7 – 4:17

In the two comprehensive speech and dialogue compositions in Exod 3:7 – 4:17 as well as Exod 6, God introduces himself and the decisions he has made. These compositions link back to God's history with the Patriarchs. They provide Moses with instructions for his future activity; within the narrative they point to the future (cf. the divine speech to Moses in 3:19: "But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go ..."); and they provide insights into God's thoughts and intentions, "beyond" the narrated horizon of divine-human interaction (cf. 3:7: "I have seen the plight of my people in Egypt ..."; Exod 6:2ff.). In the dialogue scenes,

Moses can object to God (Exod 3), indeed accuse him (Exod 5:22–23), so that the two negotiate with each other and come to agreements.[36] These dialogue scenes redirect the flow of the action, as when God responds to Moses' objections by equipping him with miraculous powers (Exod 4:1–9), or when God decides to take the initiative to liberate his people (Exod 6:1ff.).

Speeches in Exod 12–13

The speeches of God and Moses in Exod 12–13, i.e. the first of the two narrative conclusions, have their own special background. The divine speech in 12:1–20 and 13:1–2, as well as the Mosaic speech in Exod 13:3–16, which both frame the narrative of the departure from Egypt in Exod 12:21–42, develop "eternal ordinance(s)" (חקת עולם, Exod 12:14, 17) from motifs in this narrative that in the future will apply to the Passover-Matzot ritual as well as the dedication of the first born. In this way, the rituals actualize the narrative and receive their meaning from it.

Speeches in Exod 15

The second narrative conclusion in Exod 15:1–21 with its two songs of praise by Moses and the male Israelites, on the one hand, and Miriam and the women, on the other, is also to be considered a speech scene. They have been inscribed into the course of events, but by decelerating that process into "real time" they create a clear "concluding *fermata*."

Speeches as Caesurae

The dialogue and speech scenes in the exodus narrative constitute – as this short sketch has demonstrated – decisive stimuli for the ensuing course of events. In accordance with this, they have been placed at the "turning points" in the narrative, creating caesurae in the course of events. The scenes can thus provide us with important clues for the overall division of the narrative into "phases." In the speech scenes found in the narrative conclusions the narrative itself is bundled together with reference to its enduring meaning beyond the narrated temporal horizon. The scenes are also theologically highly significant. They not only presuppose a visual and auditory and thus aesthetic theology of the perception of God, they also expand this theology by introducing dialogical, integrating components. The relation between God and humans is conceived and communicated "dramatically."

4.2.3. Non-Scenic Episodes

The biblical exodus narrative is never untrue to its genre. It contains no textual elements that are not integrated into the narrative continuum (in contrast, for example, to the prophetic books, in which non-narrative oral texts can be directly juxtaposed with narrative texts). At the same time, however, the reader encounters pieces that differ from the narrative style of the scene.

First of all, an author can distance a narrative text from the narrative style of the scene by taking the action out of the hands of the actors, so to speak, and directly *describing* states or processes, as in Exod 1:8–14.

Another form of non-scenic narration are those textual elements which, although integrated into the narrative sequence by means of speech introductions or references to the narrative development, nevertheless contain speech acts that do not immediately relate to either the events of the exodus narrative or their

36 See Frank H. Polak, "Negotiations, Social Drama and Voices of Memory in Some Samuel Tales," in *Performing Memory in Biblical Narrative and Beyond* (eds. Athalya Brenner and Frank H. Polak; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 46–71.

continuation in the historical traditions of the Old Testament. In particular, the genealogy of Moses and Aaron in Exod 6:14–25 belongs to this group of non-scenic episodes.

4.3. Further Textual Forms

Beyond these basic scenic and episodic forms and encompassing them are what we have labeled "textual forms" ("*Textbildungsmuster*"): thought forms, motif constellations, and genres that shape the structures and plot of the exodus narrative. We provide a few examples here that will be further developed in the exegesis in the main body of the book.

The account of Moses' childhood and youth in Exod 1:15–2:22 has been determined by the *narrative pattern of the "abandoned baby,"* a pattern used in the ancient world for unusual rulers, such as the legendary Sargon of Akkad, the Persian Cyrus, or the royal founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus (cf. the introduction to the second narrative phase). Smaller units, such as the scene in which Moses, after his flight from Egypt, meets the daughters of the Midianite priest at the well (Exod 1:16–22), constitute what in Homeric studies is called a "*type scene*."[37] Elements of a *"saga of the founding of a cultic site"* and a *"prophetic vocation account"* have been woven into the narrative of the burning bush (Exod 3:1–6) and the subsequent episode containing a dialogue (Exod 3:7–4:17).[38] Decisive for our understanding of the function of these and other textual forms is the fact they have each been uniquely reconfigured and at times even disfigured for their context, as becomes particularly clear, for example, in the schema of the saved savior: The young man Moses proves to be insufficiently legitimate and qualified to deliver the people from their Egyptian oppression (Exod 2:11–15), thereby thwarting the schema.

4.4. The Phases of the Exodus Narrative

The First Narrative Phase

The *first narrative phase (Exod 1:8 – 2:22)* comprises the epoch of the first pharaoh who had oppressed the Israelites (cf. 1:8 and 2:23) and primarily plays out in Egypt: Pharaoh sets the Egyptians against the Israelites, who are growing in numbers and in strength. The Egyptians oppress them through forced labor *(Episode 1: 1:8–14)*. Pharaoh intensifies the repression by proposing to the "midwives of the Hebrews" the notion that they kill the male babies of the Israelites the moment they are born *(Episode 2: 1:15–22)*. This is the context in which the story of the birth and childhood of the "Hebrew" called Moses is developed *(Episode 3: 2:1–10)*. Moses the young man attempts to intervene for the sake of his people *(Episode 4: 2:11–15)*– albeit without success. This narrative phase ends with Moses' flight to Midian,

37 Alter, "Art," 56; see also the individual exegesis below. The scenes derive their "typicality" from conventional modes of behavior, preferably those typical of threshold moments in the cycle of life, such as pregnancy, birth, engagement, marriage, death. The typical elements of the scene constitute the basic elements of the plot which can then be shaped or re-shaped by the author in such a manner as to give expression to his or her own message.

38 See Schmidt, *Exodus 1–6*, 113–114; 123–135.

located somewhere in the steppe east of Egypt *(Episode 5: 2:15–22)*, where the hero marries into the family of a certain Reuel – and in so doing appears to be lost to the higher task of being a "savior."

The Second Narrative Phase

In the *second narrative phase (Exod 2:23 – 6:1)* a long time has passed and Moses is still in Midian (2:23). Round about him, however, new things are beginning to happen – things which are initially only visible to the reader: a new person has replaced the oppressive pharaoh; above all, however, God enters the "stage" as the main actor and ultimate protagonist of the narrative. The opening episode depicts him in heaven, to which the cry of the oppressed Israelites rises up and receives a hearing *(Episode 1: 2:23–25)*. God meets Moses out of a burning bush located on the Mountain of God, where Moses had coincidently been shepherding the sheep of his father-in-law *(Episode 2: 3,1–6)*. This is followed by the speeches and dialogues of *Episode 3: 3:7 – 4:17*, in which YHWH sends Moses to Egypt – not without Moses' resistance. Moses eventually submits to his task and returns to Egypt, while along the way God provides him with the help of his brother Aaron. It appears that the two brothers were able to convince the Israelites of God's decision *(Episode 4: 4:18–31)*. The mission of liberation, however, fails as a result of Pharaoh's hardness of heart, thus calling into question the credibility not only of Moses but also of God. *(Episode 5: 5:1 – 6:1)*. The inclusio created by means of the keyword "liberate" (cf. Introduction: The Exodus Narrative in Synchronic and Diachronic Perspective, 3.3.1. Keyword-Bridges) reveals the trajectory of the events of this narrative phase and signals an increase in the tension in the storyline of the narrative as a whole: will God's promised liberation ever materialize?

The Third Narrative Phase

With this, the chain of events enters into a crisis situation that requires a reversal, a peripeteia, for better or worse. This is the subject of the *third narrative phase (Exod 6:2 – 7:13)*, which is set in Egypt. In *Episode 1: 6:2–8* YHWH confirms his promises. Indeed, he reinforces them by making himself the subject of the liberation and by declaring the knowledge of God to be its purpose. Despite this, the crisis is further intensified in *Episode 2: 6:9–12*, in which the Israelites close themselves off to the message of liberation and Moses wishes to abandon his mission; indeed, things seem to be heading towards an unhappy end. A turn for the better introduces the following three episodes (*Episode 3: 6:13–30: Genealogy; Episode 4: 7:1–7: the Egyptians are to experience the name of YHWH; Episode 5: 7:8–13*: *Moses and Aaron prove themselves in front of the Egyptians*) in which YHWH, in various ways, obligates Moses and Aaron anew and re-equips them for their mission to the Egyptians.

The Fourth Narrative Phase

The *fourth narrative phase (Exod 7:14 – 11:10)* consists primarily of the series of episodes that are the nine plagues *(Episodes 1–9: 7:14 – 10:29)*. The two representatives of God now announce "plagues" that are intended to cause, indeed force, the Pharaoh who is "hardened" against God to "release"(שלח pi.) Israel from Egypt. The narrative thus creates a struggle between Pharaoh, the antagonist on the side of Egypt who is initially assisted by "sorcerers" and "magicians (7,11– 9,11), and YHWH, the protagonist on the side of Israel who is represented by Moses and Aaron. The outcome of this struggle appears to be unresolved until the very end. As soon as the seeds of insight and willingness begin to sprout within Pharaoh, they are nipped in the bud by the "hardening of his heart." By means of certain motifs (the most important of which is the "hardening" of Pharaoh), the narrative does signal that beneath the apparently frozen surface a "dynamic of liberation" is at work that will inevitably lead to the release of the Israelites and a catastrophe

for Pharaoh and his people. Before this happens in the final "plague," the death of the Egyptian firstborn, the narrative once more interpolates a dramatic speech by Moses to Pharaoh in which Pharaoh is told of this final fatal blow *(Episode 10: Exod 11)*.

The Fifth Narrative Phase

In the *fifth narrative phase (Exod 12:1 – 13:16)* the narrated events are framed by far-reaching speeches at the beginning and the end. This creates a two-fold temporal horizon. On the horizon of the narrated events we read about the last plague against the Egyptians and the fulfilment of the promise of liberation to the Israelites *(Episode 2: 12:21–42)*. The speeches by God and Moses *(Episode 1: 12:1–20; Episode 3: 12:43 – 13:2; Episode 4: 13:3–16)* create a second temporal horizon that goes far beyond the events themselves and points into Israel's future. In these episodes the rituals of Passover-matzot and of the sanctification of the firstborn are drawn out of the narrated events. What took place in the night of liberation, the night in which YHWH led Israel out of Egypt, will be cultically remembered and actualized for all time and throughout all generations. With that, the biblical narrative could come to an end.

The Sixth Narrative Phase

It is followed, however, by the *sixth narrative phase (Exod 13:17 – 15:21)*, the "sea-miracle narrative." This story is situated outside the exodus narrative, as the stage upon which it takes place is no longer in Egypt: at best it is located on its eastern-most border with the wilderness and the sea *(Episode 1: 13:17–21)*. On the other hand, in its three central episodes the sea-miracle narrative *(Episode 2: 14:1–14; Episode 3: 14:15–25; Episode 4: 14:26–31)* recapitulates the significant motifs of oppression and exodus in a more intense and climactic form: the Egyptian threat and the crisis of the Israelites, who cry out to YHWH (14:15; cf. 2:23). Once again, the reality of liberation is open to question, until God finally conquers Pharaoh and the Egyptian army and delivers Israel from its pursuers.[39] The two songs of Moses and the Song of Miriam in the concluding *Episode 5: 15:1–21* refer to these events and conclude the praiseworthy deeds (*t^{e}hillot*) of God towards his people with a human song of praise (*t^{e}hillah*) (cf. the exegesis and 5.3 below).

4.5. The Biblical Exodus Narrative as an "Action Novel"

The sequence of the narrative phases and their episodes clearly shows that the biblical exodus narrative is an "action novel." It has been composed according to a narrative type that is oriented toward the *solution* of a *complication*, the complication being the forced labor of the Israelites and their expectation of liberation, the solution being their liberation and departure. In so doing, the exodus narrative subjects its hearers and readers to "suspense" that depends upon an increasing discrepancy between the expectations of the reader and the unfolding of events; put more simply, the suspense depends upon deferment.[40]

During the phase of the plague narrative in particular – after the crisis of the third narrative phase – there is an intensification of the expectation that Pharaoh

39 Utzschneider, *Atem*, 74.

40 Mieke Bal defines "suspense" as follows: "... suspense can be generated by something that will occur later ..."; in Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2nd ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 160.

will finally let the Israelites go. The fact that the series of nine plagues do not evince any sign of progress or even a breakthrough toward this goal counteracts this expectation. This technique of providing fine detail along with deferment keeps the reader in suspense. It is only in the fifth narrative phase that, by means of the tenth and final plague, liberation becomes a reality and the tension is resolved. This narrative strategy is intensified in the sea-miracle narrative, which once again puts the entire solution in jeopardy.

Characters

The characters of the narrative are integrated into the plot in different ways. From the very beginning the Israelites are depicted as sceptical, fickle, and resistant. Only in three places in the narrative do they agree with God's desire to liberate them: when Moses delivers them the message of liberation that he had received on the Mountain of God (Exod 4:31), on the night of the departure (Exod 12:27), and after the victory over the Egyptian army at the Sea of Reeds (Exod 14:30–31; 15:1–21).

In the meantime, the character of Moses introduces moments that increase and complete the trajectory of suspense. Moses' resistance to the divine task to lead Israel out of bondage (cf. Exod 3 and 4) is a significant moment of deferment; the wrath of God that he thereby brings upon himself (Exod 4:14) is a countervailing force that keeps the action moving. The wrath of Moses against Pharaoh in the third narrative phase (Exod 11:8) (finally) has a similar effect, for it announces the "showdown" of the final plague. The different ways in which these characters relate to the trajectory of suspense are indications of the fact that the narrative contains different levels of action.[41]

Suspense

The narrative strategy of suspense demonstrates that the exodus narrative not only intends to engage the intellect of its readers, it also intends to awaken and speak to their emotions. It wants to hold captive, move, arouse, perhaps also entertain; above all, however, it wants to gain its readers' trust. The pragmatic-communicative sense of this narrative strategy appears to be to intensify the expectation of freedom precisely when it appears to be most desperately threatened by persecution. The intention is that, to the extent that the readers themselves are oppressed, this suspense is transferred to them, giving them renewed resilience. In the biblical exodus narrative, the expectation of and will to freedom are not without foundation; they are grounded in YHWH's will and action.

5. Themes and Intentions of the Biblical Exodus Narrative

5.1. Theonomy: The Exodus Narrative as a Political-Theological Didactic Narrative

Within the plotline of the biblical Exodus narrative – and increasingly as the story develops – YHWH, the God of Israel, is revealed as the "sole ... subject and agent of the liberation of Israel."[42] This narrative trajectory is the expression of a *political*

41 See Utzschneider, *Atem*, 108-109.
42 Utzschneider, *ibid.*, 75.

theology that understands every political event to be subject to the will of YHWH, to theonomy, above all precisely in those moments when human leaders appear to defy him, i.e. when there is a "hardening" (cf. 4.4 above). Pharaoh is hardened, or he hardens himself, until what the reader and Moses have already known from the mouth of YHWH (Exod 3:19; 4:21) becomes clear *in actu*, namely that YHWH is the one who hardens him. The political theology of the exodus narrative reckons with a "synergy" between the feelings and actions of Pharaoh, on the one hand, and the intentions of YHWH on the other, even when they appear to contradict each other. The inflexibility of the human potentate is directed against himself; his consciousness of his power does not make him strong but rigid; it catastrophically restricts his perceptive and cognitive faculties. His lack of knowledge of YHWH (Exod 5:2) and his unwillingness to get to know him leads to the two concluding catastrophes, the death of the Egyptian firstborn and the death of the Egyptian army in the sea. Generalized, this means that the course of world history is subordinate to YHWH, indeed it plays into his hands, regardless of whether humanity wants or knows this or not. The "knowledge formula" "that they may know that I am YHWH," which is used repeatedly in relation to the king and the Egyptians (Exod 6:7; 7:5,17; 10:2; 14:4 etc.),[43] not only applies to the Egyptians within the world of the narrative (after all, at the end of the story they are all lying dead in the sea) but much more to those in the future who would presume to take on their role. The formula is even more applicable, however, to the Israelites. They should be able to trust that will God intervene for his people, even when political reality appears to militate against his willingness to do so.

It is no doubt Israel's long history of experience with apparently invincible tyrants – the Assyrians of the seventh century, the Babylonians, the Persians, and finally the Greeks – that helped them see that the downfall of these empires was a result of their own rigidness and the powerful salvific intervention of God. With a political theology that had been justified in this manner, the biblical exodus narrative was able to offer hope in the apparently inevitable and endless situations of oppression that Israel first experienced at the end of the eighth century B.C.E. during the period of its existence as a state and the dominance of the aforementioned empires in the ancient orient. It is probably these experiences that lie behind the biblical exodus narrative (cf. the detailed presentation in paragraph B. 2.1 of this introduction).

5.2. Divine Service as a Sign of Freedom – the Exodus Narrative as the Cult Legend of the Passover-Matzot festival

By virtue of its first ending in Exod 12–13, the biblical exodus narrative is an aetiology of the Passover-Matzot festival and the sanctification of the firstborn. In Exodus 12–13, this is not only combined with two temporal horizons, that of the narrative plot and that of the future liturgical activity in the land (cf. 4.2.2 above). The exodus narrative subordinates both horizons to the concept of "service" (עבדה). The Israelites are explicitly commanded to keep the Passover festival, which

43 On the keyword in the exodus narrative, see Utzschneider, *Atem*, 56–62.

is concerned with the events of the night of liberation in Egypt. "When you enter into the land that YHWH will give you, then you must keep this עבדה" (Exod 12:25). Rather than sinking into oblivion it should become a tradition that is passed from parents to their children (12:26–27): "When your sons say to you: 'What is the meaning of this service?' say to them: 'It is a sacrifice-Passover for YHWH, who distanced himself from the houses of the Israelites in Egypt ...'" (for the translation, see the exegesis). Yet the definition of the Passover-Matzot festival as עבדהnot only introduces the cultic meaning of the semantic field "serve/service" into the concept of the festival. The antonymous semantic field of "forced labor" and, above, liberation from it, also remains part of the memory and is connected with every future celebration of the Passover festival.

5.3. The Exodus Narrative as "T^{e}hillah Narrative"

The biblical exodus narrative is not only "cultic" by virtue of its relation to the Passover-Matzot festival; the narrative is in itself cultic. This becomes apparent in the "second ending" of the exodus narrative, the sea-miracle narrative (Exod 13:17 –15:21), and there it becomes particularly clear in the two songs in Exod 15. The sea-miracle narrative narrates Israel's liberation as a praiseworthy deed of YHWH (*t^{e}hillah*, cf. Exod 15:11): The sea-miracle narrative is barely concluded before Exod 15:1–21 actualizes it in a hymn in praise of God (*t^{e}hillah*). The double meaning of *t^{e}hillah* as praiseworthy deed and the hymnic praise of precisely this deed is significant for the "second ending" of the exodus narrative. Both "endings" of the biblical exodus narrative point to the abiding significance of the exodus tradition; they "eternalize" themselves in their cultic and hymnic reception. In order to designate this, we suggest the term "*t^{e}hillah*-narrative," following Ps 78:3–4, which talks of the *t^{e}hillot* of YHWH that are to be recounted to the following generations.

> "What we have heard and have learned
> and what our fathers have recounted to us
> we do not hide from their sons;
> to the following generations we recount the praiseworthy deeds of YHWH (לדור אחרון מספרים תהלות יהוה)
> and his power and the miracles which he has done."

B. The Literary History of the Book of Exodus

1. Principles and Goals of the Commentary in Diachronic Perspective

Explanation of Incoherences

The interpretation of the book of Exodus in diachronic perspective is based on the observation that although the final form of the text may be read as a narrative continuum, the reception of this narrative is always inhibited by the presence of conspicuous difficulties that hinder our comprehension; these difficulties are due

to specific characteristics of the text that run counter to what a reader would typically expect.[44] A key example is Exod 6:2. Here God tells Moses that he has revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob not by the name of "YHWH," even though this assertion flatly contradicts verses such as Gen 15:7; 26:22; 28:13 as well as Exod 3:15. Another example is the account of the arrival of the Israelites at the Mountain of God. Although the people have been residing at the mountain since Exod 18, their arrival in the desert that contains the mountain is recounted two more times in Exod 19:1 and in 19:2a. Observations of this kind can easily be multiplied and are accessible to any reader in any culture. The observation of incoherencies is in no way – as some might wish to presume – merely the expression of a modern scientific-critical mode of reading; it can be proven without a doubt that the ancient readers of this text were also aware of them.[45] What is relatively new is simply the idea that such controversial phenomena require a historical explanation.[46] Since the emergence of historical-critical research in the seventeenth century, numerous models have been developed in order to attempt to explain the development of the present text as a work of various authors or as a confluence of numerous elements of tradition.

Documentary Hypothesis

The so-called "Documentary Hypothesis" became influential in the history of research. According to this theory, the Pentateuch as a whole, including the book of Exodus, consists of several independent source documents, which were gradually edited together in a multi-stage process over the course of hundreds of years. There was a source document from the early period of Israel's kingship which used the divine name "YHWH" ("Yahwist" [spelled "Jahwist" in German]/"J"), as well as a slightly younger document that can be recognized by its use of the divine appellation "Elohim" ("Elohist"/"E"). At a much later date the Deuteronomic ("dtn") law Deut 12–26 was composed and supplemented by further texts that were close to it in their theology and which can also be found in the book of Exodus ("Deuteronomistic"/"Dtr"). Finally, during the period of the exile, priestly circles wrote a further source document, which was primarily concerned with cultic issues ("Priestly Document"/"P"). According to this theory, these source documents were successively merged. In the first editorial stage the Yahwist was united with the Elohist edition, creating the "Jehowist"/"Yehovist" version ("JE"); this was followed by the incorporation of the Dtr texts and then the merging with the Priestly Document ("Pentateuchal redactor"/"R^P").

In addition to this theory the so-called "Fragmentary Hypothesis" was advocated, according to which there are no continuous sources in the beginning of the book of Exodus; instead it consists merely of individual pieces of tradition that had been brought together into its present form by various editors.[47]

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44 A primary work is Harald Schweizer, "Literarkritik," *ThQ* 168 (1988): 23–43.

45 See Benjamin D. Sommer, "Translation as Commentary: The Case of the Septuagint to Exodus 32–33," *Textus* 20 (2000): 43–60; Wolfgang Oswald, "Moderne Literarkritik und antike Rezeption biblischer Texte," in Utzschneider and Blum, *Lesarten*, 199–214.

46 Literary-critical theories are almost as old as the church (see for example Hennig Graf Reventlow, *Epochen der Bibelauslegung* [vol. 2; Munich: C.H. Beck, 1994], 15), although up until the modern era in Europe they were always marginal to the theological discussion.

47 For a detailed history of Pentateuchal criticism, see Houtman, *Pentateuch*.

Criticism of the Documentary Hypothesis

The classic literary-historical models of the Documentary and Fragmentary Hypotheses have been subject to criticism since the 1970s in works by Rolf Rendtorff, Hans Heinrich Schmid, John Van Seters, and Erhard Blum.[48] For one, the dating of the narrative works to the early monarchial period was revised, as the cultural preconditions for the creation of such a comprehensive piece of literature were only present at the very earliest at a more advanced stage of the monarchial period. In addition, the concept of continuous source documents was given up and replaced by numerous alternative models. Whereas some simply undertake to reduce the number of sources, others defend a traditio-historical model, according to which several initially independent narrative arcs have been successively combined. As an alternative or a supplement to this we have the composition-historical model, according to which several originally independent literary blocks have been successively connected with each other.

Compositional Model

The exegesis found in this volume follows the compositional model; the reason is that it requires the least historical hypotheses and is best able to explain the final form of the text. Already Martin Noth realized that the "themes" of the Pentateuch are relatively loosely juxtaposed and he interpreted this – in an age of broad unquestioned acceptance of the Documentary Hypothesis– in terms of their diverse history of oral transmission before the material came to be written down.[49] It is the case, however, that the units designated by Noth as "themes" show evidence of having been shaped as literary compositions. As such, the compositional structures of an independent Jacob Narrative, an independent Joseph Story, an independent Exodus Narrative, and other older works can still be easily recognized within the final form of the text, despite all the reworking and literary development that they have undergone. The beginning of the literary history of the Pentateuch, therefore, consists of such thematically self-contained narratives. In terms of the reconstruction of the literary development of the book of Exodus, this means that the Patriarchal Narratives and the Joseph Story, on the one hand, and the Exodus Narrative plus its literary extensions, on the other, were only placed in sequence and then interconnected with each other at a relatively late stage in history.[50]

More Recent Diachronic Models

On the basis of this basic insight, various suggestions have been made as to how to imagine the genesis of the book of Exodus. Erhard Blum, for example, reckons with a narrative that stretched from the birth of Moses to his death, which was embedded into a late Deuteronomistic composition, called "KD" ("deuteronomistische Komposition").[51] Reinhard Gregor Kratz, in contrast, extracts an exodus-conquest narrative, that stretched from the birth of Moses until the conquest in the book of Joshua.[52] Eckart Otto[53] and Rainer Albertz[54] have made other suggestions that also orient themselves to the block model.

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48 Hans Heinrich Schmid, *Der sogenannte Jahwist: Beobachtungen und Fragen zur Pentateuchforschung* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1976); Rolf Rendtorff, *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* (BZAW 147; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1977); Van Seters, *Prologue*; Blum, *Vätergeschichte*; Blum, *Studien*.

49 Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte*, 48–67.

50 See Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus*, as well as the contributions to the edited volumes Gertz, *Abschied*, and Dozeman and Schmid, *Farewell*.

51 Blum, *Studien*; Blum, *Verbindung*; Blum, *Connection*.

52 Kratz, *Komposition*, 301–304.

53 Otto, *Gesetz des Mose*; Otto, *Mose*.

54 Albertz, "Heilsmittlerschaft."

Alongside these theories, however, the classic Documentary Hypothesis continues to be used, for example, by Werner H. Schmidt[55] and Axel Graupner[56], and it has been further developed by Christoph Levin[57] and Hans-Christoph Schmitt.[58] The latter two scholars understand the Yahwist – each in their own way – to be a much later editor working with older traditions. Similar developments in America ought also be mentioned: in addition to publications that adhere to the Documentary Hypothesis, such as the commentary by William Propp,[59] the works of John Van Seters in particular are worthy of note. Van Seters has given up the distinction between J and E and identifies the writer only as a Yahwist writing during the exilic period. In his opinion, the Priestly texts are an editorial expansion of older non-Priestly material.[60]

More Recent Synchronic Interpretations

This unresolved situation, which is unlikely to find a consensus resolution in the near future, has recently led several interpreters to abandon diachronic analysis completely. The initiator was Brevard S. Childs. Though he certainly made the attempt in his Exodus commentary to interpret the text within the parameters of the Documentary Hypothesis, he nevertheless came to the conclusion that such a venture is impossible and so made a virtue out of necessity and became one of the first critical exegetes to consciously interpret the final form of the text.[61] This new interpretive direction has been further developed, on the one hand, by those who recognize that the book of Exodus developed over a long period of time, but nonetheless believe that it is impossible to reconstruct this history. Examples of such scholars are Cornelis Houtman,[62] Carol Meyers,[63] and Georg Fischer/Dominik Markl.[64] On the other hand, it has led to works that fundamentally question the literary-historical approach as a whole, such as the commentary by Christoph Dohmen,[65] which in a certain sense continues the tradition started by Benno Jacob[66] (cf. section A.1 above, which discusses commentaries that interpret Exodus from a synchronic perspective).

Thomas B. Dozeman

The Exodus commentary by Thomas B. Dozeman, published in 2009, may be identified as the first to take up the most recent Pentateuchal debates and make them fruitful for literary-historical interpretation of the book of Exodus.[67] In his opinion, the Pentateuch contains a narrative stemming from the exile, which he calls "non-P," as well as a slightly later Priestly Composition that is based upon it. This model abandons several of the assumptions made by the Documentary Hypothesis, such as the differentiation of non-Priestly material according to J and E as well as the idea of an independent Priestly document. Nevertheless, it retains the notion of a continuous non-Priestly narrative running from creation to the conquest as well as the idea that the texts of the book of Exodus are concerned with historical traditions.

The Question of Genre

This raises the question of genre. From a diachronic perspective, however, this cannot refer to the genre of the book of Exodus as a whole but rather to the works

55 Schmidt, *Exodus 1–6*.
56 Axel Graupner, *Der Elohist: Gegenwart und Wirksamkeit des transzendenten Gottes in der Geschichte* (WMANT 97; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002).
57 Levin, *Jahwist*.
58 Schmitt, *Arbeitsbuch*.
59 Propp, *Exodus 1–18*.
60 Van Seters, *Search*; Van Seters, *Prologue*; Van Seters, *Moses*; Van Seters, *Pentateuch*.
61 Childs, *Exodus*.
62 Houtman, *Exodus*.
63 Meyers, *Exodus*.
64 Fischer and Markl, *Exodus*.
65 Dohmen, *Exodus*.
66 Jacob, *Exodus*.
67 Dozeman, *Exodus*.