International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament

Helmut Utzschneider
Wolfgang Oswald

EXODUS 1–15

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International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (IECOT)

Edited by

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Cover:
Top: Panel from a four-part relief on the "Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III" (859–824 BCE) depicting the Israelite king Jehu (845–817 BCE; 2 Kings 9f) paying obeisance to the Assyrian "King of Kings." The vassal has thrown himself to the ground in front of his overlord. Royal servants are standing behind the Assyrian king whereas Assyrian officers are standing behind Jehu. The remaining picture panels portray thirteen Israelite tribute bearers carrying heavy and precious gifts.
Photo © Z.Radovan/BibleLandPictures.com

Bottom left: One of ten reliefs on the bronze doors that constitute the eastern portal (the so-called "Gates of Paradise") of the Baptistery of St. John of Florence, created 1424–1452 by Lorenzo Ghiberti (c. 1378–1455). Detail from the picture "Adam and Eve"; in the center is the creation of Eve: "And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man." (Gen 2:22)
Photograph by George Reader

Bottom right: Detail of the Menorah in front of the Knesset in Jerusalem, created by Benno Elkan (1877–1960): Ezra reads the Law of Moses to the assembled nation (Neh 8). The bronze Menorah was created in London in 1956 and in the same year was given by the British as a gift to the State of Israel. A total of 29 reliefs portray scenes from the Hebrew bible and the history of the Jewish people.

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Wolfgang Oswald

Exodus 1–15

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Content

Editors' Forward

The International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (IECOT) offers a multi-perspectival interpretation of the books of the Old Testament to a broad, international audience of scholars, laypeople and pastors. Biblical commentaries too often reflect the fragmented character of contemporary biblical scholarship, where different geographical or methodological sub-groups of scholars pursue specific methodologies and/or theories with little engagement of alternative approaches. This series, published in English and German editions, brings together editors and authors from North America, Europe, and Israel with multiple exegetical perspectives.

From the outset the goal has been to publish a series that was "international, ecumenical and contemporary." The international character is reflected in the composition of an editorial board with members from six countries and commentators representing a yet broader diversity of scholarly contexts.

The ecumenical dimension is reflected in at least two ways. First, both the editorial board and the list of authors includes scholars with a variety of religious perspectives, both Christian and Jewish. Second, the commentary series not only includes volumes on books in the Jewish Tanach/Protestant Old Testament, but also other books recognized as canonical parts of the Old Testament by diverse Christian confessions (thus including the Deuterocanonical Old Testament books).

When it comes to "contemporary," one central distinguishing feature of this series is its attempt to bring together two broad families of perspectives in analysis of biblical books, perspectives often described as "synchronic" and "diachronic" and all too often understood as incompatible with each other. Historically, diachronic studies arose in Europe, while some of the better known early synchronic studies originated in North America and Israel. Nevertheless, historical studies have continued to be pursued around the world, and focused synchronic work has been done in an ever greater variety of settings. Building on these developments, we aim in this series to bring synchronic and diachronic methods into closer alignment, allowing these approaches to work in a complementary and mutually-informative rather than antagonistic manner.

Since these terms are used in varying ways within biblical studies, it makes sense to specify how they are understood in this series. Within IECOT we understand "synchronic" to embrace a variety of types of study of a biblical text *in one given stage of its development*, particularly its final stage(s) of development in existing manuscripts. "Synchronic" studies embrace non-historical narratological, reader-response and other approaches along with historically-informed exegesis of a particular stage of a biblical text. In contrast, we understand "diachronic" to embrace the full variety of modes of study of a biblical text *over time.*

This diachronic analysis may include use of manuscript evidence (where available) to identify documented pre-stages of a biblical text, judicious use of clues within the biblical text to reconstruct its formation over time, and also an examination of the ways in which a biblical text may be in dialogue with earlier biblical (and non-biblical) motifs, traditions, themes, etc. In other words, diachronic study focuses on what might be termed a "depth dimension" of a given text – how a

text (and its parts) has journeyed over time up to its present form, making the text part of a broader history of traditions, motifs and/or prior compositions. Synchronic analysis focuses on a particular moment (or moments) of that journey, with a particular focus on the final, canonized form (or forms) of the text. Together they represent, in our view, complementary ways of building a textual interpretation.

Of course, each biblical book is different, and each author or team of authors has different ideas of how to incorporate these perspectives into the commentary. The authors will present their ideas in the introduction to each volume. In addition, each author or team of authors will highlight specific contemporary methodological and hermeneutical perspectives – e.g. gender-critical, liberation-theological, reception-historical, social-historical – appropriate to their own strengths and to the biblical book being interpreted. The result, we hope and expect, will be a series of volumes that display a range of ways that various methodologies and discourses can be integrated into the interpretation of the diverse books of the Old Testament.

Fall 2012 The Editors

Authors' Preface

The undersigned have been constantly aware of the honor of being permitted to write one of the first two "pilot volumes" of the series *Internationaler Exegetischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament/International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament*. Over the years of our collaborative work we have become increasingly aware of the challenges that such a project brings with it. The Editors' Forward informs the reader about the goals and principles of this undertaking. Our own specific interpretation of these goals and principles as they relate to the interpretation of the book of Exodus can be found in the introduction to this volume. Above all it remains for us to express our gratitude here for all the support that we have received while working on this project.

It would have been impossible to complete this commentary in the brief period of six years if we had not received such generous material support from the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*. Between 2009 and 2012, the DFG financed Wolfgang Oswald's work by providing him with a temporary position at the University of Tübingen. This support also enabled Helmut Utzschneider to take a semester's leave. This semester was then extended by a further free semester, taken in advance, to an entire year of research due to the kind cooperation of the Lutheran Church in Bavaria. In the meantime, Jutta Krispenz filled his position at the Augustana-Hochschule.

In addition to this, the material assistance provided by the DFG helped support the "Colloquium on the Theory of Exegesis" that was held in the Old Testament department of the Augustana-Hochschule during the years 2008–2012. This colloquium was exclusively dedicated to texts and themes from the exodus narrative. We were able to invite many colleagues who are also involved in interpreting the book of Exodus to this "exodus academy." We would like to express our particular gratitude for the contributions of Rainer Albertz, Christoph Berner, Erhard Blum, Georg Fischer, Shimon Gesundheit, Thomas Krüger, Dominik Markl, and Frank Polak.

We have also received much encouragement and inspiration from the editors of IECOT. In particular, we will remember with great fondness two intensive weeks in Jerusalem, 2011, where we were able to discuss large swathes of our manuscript with Shimon Gesundheit, the volume editor. The discussions took place in the Faculty Club of the Hebrew University and the library of the Church of the Redeemer during a block seminar that was part of the "Studium in Israel" program.

In the final stages of our work we received generous support from various quarters. Our colleague Stefan Seiler carefully reviewed the translation – we naturally bear responsibility for any mistakes that remain. No less our thanks go to Philip Sumpter for the sensitive translation and especially to David Carr, the American IECOT chief editor, and to Ulrike Guthrie (IECOT work site in New York) for the careful redaction, copy-editing and proofreading of the English edition. Our student colleagues from the Augustana-Hochschule Michael Rummel and Bernhard Schröder, along with the reliable Mrs Andrea Siebert, helped us with general corrections. Last but not least, Walter Dietrich, the chief editor, and his colleagues in Bern, Sara Kipfer and Heidi Stucki, accepted the manuscript. Jürgen Schneider and

Florian Specker of Kohlhammer Publishing House were our constant and understanding contact persons. To all these people, we express our warmest gratitude.

Neuendettelsau/Tubingen in the summer of 2014
Wolfgang Oswald and Helmut Utzschneider

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.

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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).

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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.