A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus

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Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1. The Royal Priesthood in Exodus 19.6 and the Scope of this Study

The designation of the people of Israel as a ממלכת בדנייה in Exod. 19.6 has been and continues to be a crux interpretatum. While the phrase is capable of a diversity of translations and paraphrases (‘kingdom of priests’, ‘priestly kingdom’, ‘royalty [and] priests’, ‘administrative body of priests’), I offer at this stage (in anticipation of the discussion in Chapter 4) as a working translation, ‘a royalty, or royal body of priests’, or, more paraphrastically, ‘a royal priesthood’.

These words form the climax of a brief divine declaration given to Moses, sometimes known as the ‘eagle speech’ (Exod. 19.4-6a), which he is to relay to the people of Israel upon his descent from Mt Sinai. Thus, according to the writer of Exodus, these words constitute a designation of Israel in the mind of God, his characterization of the elect people consequent upon the new or heightened relationship inaugurated at Sinai.

Both because of its position at the head of the extended Sinai pericope (Exod. 19.1–Num. 10.10) and because of its striking content, this declaration has come to be regarded by some within both the Jewish and the Christian traditions as a significant locus for the theology of the Hebrew Scriptures, enjoying paradigmatic status as the quintessential Erwählungs-tradition, the story behind Israel’s awareness of being the elect people of God. Phillips considers that ‘Ex 19.3-8 acts as a summary of the whole account of the covenant in Ex 19–24’.1 Merrill writes, ‘Without doubt Exodus 19.4-6 is the most theologically significant text in the book of Exodus’.2 Muilenburg would extend even further the significance of this unit of text, venturing that ‘it is scarcely too much to say that [Exod. 19.3-6] is in nuce the fons et origo of the many covenantal pericopes which

appear throughout the Old Testament'. 3 Similarly Elliott sees this passage as containing ‘one of the most dominant and central expressions of Israel’s theology and faith in the entire Old Testament’. 4

Not all interpreters are as convinced of the prominence of this declaration, however. The monumental Old Testament theology of Gerhard von Rad contains not a single reference to Exod. 19.6 or the eagle speech. 5 There is as yet no consensus on the import and function of this declaration, and the situation is not helped by the fact that only once in the Hebrew Bible are the words מָלָלָה וַחֲדוֹשׁ found in this combination. As one recent Old Testament theologian puts it, ‘The phrasing is only a tease that is left unexplored’. 6 Whether it is as unexplored in the biblical tradition as Brueggemann imagines remains to be seen.

What meaning is to be attributed to the words translated ‘royalty’ (or ‘kingdom’) and ‘priests’? How do they relate to each other? What light is shed on the meaning of the expression by the cotext, 7 both the immediate cotext in ch. 19, and the wider cotext of the Sinai narrative proper (Exod. 19–24), or the book of Exodus, or even the Pentateuch as a whole? Conversely, does the designation of Israel as a ‘royal priesthood’ contribute to a better understanding of the nature of the Sinai covenant? How might the covenant, understood in terms of such a declaration, relate to the significant corpus of laws embedded in the narrative matrix of the Pentateuch, particularly the so-called ‘priestly’ material? What place might the Sinai covenant, when seen in the light of this general royal-priestly declaration, occupy within the discussion on biblical covenants generally?

7. The term ‘cotext’ is used in some discussions of linguistic theory to mean the literary context of the discourse in which a particular item of text is set. In this sense it is distinguished from the more familiar term ‘context’, by which is meant the totality of the attendant circumstances to the discourse (including paralinguistic ones) which may be inferred either from the text itself, or drawn from other sources of knowledge; see, e.g., Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation (London: SPCK, 1989), p. 16.
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One motivation for this study is the observation that in the Christian tradition, the doctrine of the ‘royal priesthood of the faithful’ (in its Catholic form), or the ‘priesthood of all believers’ (as Protestants generally know it) has had a long pedigree and is a live issue in the Church. ‘[I]t has the unanimous consent of the Early Fathers, and is expounded by theologians up to the eighth century and after the twelfth century in both Eastern and Western Christendom. So prominent is it that it is rare for a church writer of importance to be silent about it.’ It is my observation that discussions of this issue have not always proceeded from the best exegetical foundations. It is beyond the scope of this book, however, to interact with these discussions as such, or to consider any outcomes in terms of ecclesiastical structure or practice. So far as these discussions are exegetically based, they deal predominantly with the New Testament citations of or allusions to Exod. 19.6 found in 1 Pet. 2.5, 9; Rev. 1.6; 5.10; and 20.6, passages which will not be considered here in any depth.

The focus of this work will be to consider the meaning and use of the expression מְלָכַת הָדוֹנֵי as found in Exod. 19.6, within its literary context, both its immediate and its wider context, then to consider some thematic and ideological implications of this study for Israel’s self-perception, and finally to explore some possible literary reflections upon Exod. 19.6 within the Hebrew Bible.

2. A Survey of Relevant Literature

On the questions posed above, much has been written from a wide diversity of perspectives. The literature survey below will concentrate on works from roughly the last one hundred years, with increasing attention to the


more recent contributions. This is not meant to diminish the substantial
and abiding contribution of earlier generations of interpreters. Quite the
contrary, in fact, as the conclusions reached in this study will at times be
seen to have affinities with earlier interpretations, such as those adopted by
the versions, the targums and early Jewish and Christian commentators,
but largely abandoned by modern interpreters, and to depart from aspects
of the prevailing views of recent scholarship. From the moment the words
of Exod. 19.6 were promulgated, the interpretative task began. This book
aims to make a small contribution to the ongoing task, and to the extent that
it has value, builds upon the foundation of those who have gone before.

a. Commentaries

Among the numerous commentaries on Exodus, we may note a few of the
most significant ones from the past century or so as being those by Keil,10
Holzinger,11 Chadwick,12 McNeile,13 Driver,14 Beer,15 Noth,16 Cassuto,17
Hyatt,18 Childs,19 Schmidt,20 Gispen,21 Durham,22 Fretheim,23 Sarna,24

& Stoughton, 1903).
Commentaries; London: Methuen, 1908).
Notes* (CBSC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911).
15. Georg Beer, *Exodus, mit einem Beitrag von K. Galling* (HAT, 3; Tübingen:
J.C.B. Mohr, 1939).
17. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (trans. I. Abrahams; Jeru-
Press, 1974).
20. Werner H. Schmidt, *Exodus* (BKAT, 2; 2 vols.; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirch-
en Verlag, 1974).
Translation* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of
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The nature of commentaries is such that rarely will there be more than a brief discussion under a verse such as Exod. 19.6. The chief value of the commentaries lies in the fact that in general they deal with the whole book, and the structure of the commentary is usually (though not always) dictated by the received form of the textual tradition.

Most of the commentaries named fall broadly within the tradition of critical scholarship, which for much of the past century has meant working within the canons of the historicist framework and its principal artefact of Hebrew Bible studies, the documentary hypothesis made popular by Wellhausen in his Prolegomena to the History of Israel. This work represented both a culmination of nineteenth-century scholarship on the Pentateuch and a new point of departure for much of its subsequent study, indeed much of the study of the Hebrew Bible generally. A consequence is that few commentators have felt their job has been done unless each unit of text has been assigned to one or other of the continuous sources or one of the many redactions through which the Pentateuch passed on its journey to the form in which we know it. A notable gap in the list above is an Exodus commentary in the International Critical Commentary series, as the projected volume by A.R.S. Kennedy never appeared. This series has generally represented for the English-speaking world the classical outworking of the Wellhausen approach to Pentateuchal studies. One major exception to the observation above regarding the dominance of the documentary hypothesis is the work of Cassuto, who sought to give a unified reading of the book of Exodus. Perhaps the most groundbreaking of the commentaries is the one by Childs, who is more candid than has been customary among serious commentators about the pre-commitments of

the exegete and the way these do and must affect the interpretative task. Childs gives ample space to historical-critical issues, but, unlike some commentators, does not feel that the exegete’s task ends when he has fragmented the text into myriad constituent parts. His approach will be considered further below.

b. Monographs on the Sinai Pericope
More scope for treatment of literary and thematic issues is afforded by the monographs on the section of Exodus which deals with the encounter between Israel and the God Yhwh on Mt Sinai, or with various portions of the narrative of this encounter, particularly chs. 19–24. With their interweaving of narrative and law, these chapters present the interpreter with a formidable task to analyze their literary structure in any satisfying way. Principal among these monographs are the works of Beyerlin,31 Eissfeldt,32 Zenger,33 Nicholson,34 Schmidt,35 Renaud36 and Niehaus.37 These approach the Sinai material from some different perspectives. The Sinai pericope has been the most notoriously difficult portion of the Pentateuch with which to grapple from a source-critical perspective. Eissfeldt’s Die Komposition der Sinai-Erzählung and Zenger’s Die Sinaitheophanie in particular represent a developed stage of this approach as applied to the

Sinai pericope. Zenger’s work is particularly useful in giving a digest of the major contributions to the discussion to the 1960s. Beyerlin is more concerned to consider the form-critical background to the component units of the Sinai material, considered against the background of the ancient Near Eastern treaties and their possible origin in festival contexts. Schmidt’s contribution is to evaluate the traditions linking Moses with both the Exodus and the Sinai traditions. The work by Niehaus, while containing substantial material on the Sinai encounter, uses the genre of the theophany account to investigate other biblical passages and ancient Near Eastern parallels.

c. Essays on the Sinai Pericope

There have been countless essays and articles on the Sinai pericope or aspects of it. Mention can only be made here of a few. Among the most influential has been von Rad’s essay, ‘The Form Critical Problem of the Hexateuch’;\textsuperscript{38} the German original of which appeared in 1938. Other contributions include those by Van Seters,\textsuperscript{39} Blum,\textsuperscript{40} Sonnet,\textsuperscript{41} Rendtorff,\textsuperscript{42} Otto\textsuperscript{43} and Alexander.\textsuperscript{44} In addition, one finds substantial sections on the Sinai pericope in monographs on the Pentateuch (or Hexateuch) as a


whole, such as those by Carpenter and Harford,\textsuperscript{45} Noth,\textsuperscript{46} Whybray,\textsuperscript{47} Blum\textsuperscript{48} and Rendtorff.\textsuperscript{49} Again, some of this material shows a preoccupation with the pre-history of the text, in terms of source-analysis, form-criticism or tradition-criticism rather than with interpreting the text as a literary unity, though the contributions of Whybray, Blum, Rendtorff and Alexander represent different stages of a move away from the earlier consensus.

d. Literature on Exodus 19.4-6
On the specific passage which concerns us, Exod. 19.6 and its immediate context in Exodus 19, there has been a steady stream of articles in the years since the turn of the twentieth century, the main contributions of which will be considered under Chapter 4. Principal among these are those by Klopfer,\textsuperscript{50} Caspari,\textsuperscript{51} Scott,\textsuperscript{52} Bauer,\textsuperscript{53} Moran,\textsuperscript{54} Fohrer,\textsuperscript{55} Mosis,\textsuperscript{56} Rivard,\textsuperscript{57}

53. J.B. Bauer, 'Könige und Priester, ein heiliges Volk (Ex 19,6)', BZ 2 (1958), pp. 283-86.
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Le Roux, Cazelles, Kleinig, Barbiero, Ska, Dozemann and Schenker.

Since questions of source are generally dealt with more substantially in studies of larger units of text (see above), these more specific studies, while usually containing some material relating to source-analysis, deal with syntactic and lexical issues (Caspari, Scott, Bauer, Moran, Fohrer, Mosis, Cazelles and Barbiero), with issues of social or theological provenance (Ska, Barbiero), with literary form, function and redaction (Rivard, Kleinig, Dozemann, Le Roux), and with aspects of the history of translation and interpretation (Cerfaux, Schenker). The chief issue addressed in not a few of these studies is the identity of the referent of the expression מְלֶאךְ הָגִויִים. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the two substantive issues to be determined are whether the words מְלֶאךְ הָגִויִים refer to Israel collectively, or only to a priestly elite, and the more commonly overlooked question of to whom an attribution of royalty is being made.

Finally, attention must be drawn to the monograph of Jo Bailey Wells which is based on Exod. 19.5-6. Wells is primarily interested in the


65. Jo Bailey Wells, God’s Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology (JSOTSup,
theme of holiness as an attribute and aspiration of the people of God for which she sees this passage as foundational. After a literary analysis of Exod. 19.5-6 and its setting in the book of Exodus, Wells considers the relationship of priesthood and holiness, and addresses the development of these interrelated themes in the Hebrew canon and the New Testament, particularly 1 Peter. There is thus some overlap of interest with the present work. The focus differs, however, in that Wells does not treat in any depth the privileged status of Israel described in terms of royalty which is a major theme of the present work, and the intertextual studies are consequently different.

e. Old Testament Theologies
A further genre of literature relevant to this study for the treatment generally given to the themes of covenant, election, people of God, worship and related loci which are raised by the Sinai encounter is that of Old Testament theology, or history of Hebrew religion. Among these, the comprehensive work of Eichrodt and the more focussed studies of Dumbrell and McComiskey in particular devote considerable attention to the notion of covenant, seeing it as a significant structuring device for their consideration of thematic development within the Hebrew Bible. No study of Old Testament theology, with the exception, to a degree, of the work of

305; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000). The present work in its phase as a doctoral thesis was completed without the benefit of Wells’s helpful study.

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Dumbrell who devotes more than passing attention to Exod. 19.3b-6, has made use of the *locus* of Israel’s royal priesthood as a central element in its treatment of Israel’s religious thought.

f. Literature on Israel’s Priesthood and Cult, Election and Covenant

As will be argued in Chapter 6, any understanding of the ‘royal priesthood’ declaration must take account of the ideology behind Israel’s cult. Among the more specific studies which deal with the theme of priesthood and the cult generally, we may note at this stage the works of de Vaux, Kraus, Rowley, Cody, Haran, Jenson, Nelson and Longman, and from a more comparative stance, those of James, Clifford and Henshaw. These works set Israel’s cult in the context of the cultic ideology and practice of the ancient world, outline the details of Israelite practice as


recorded in the literary texts or as reconstructed from archaeological studies and to some extent endeavour to develop a rationale for Israel’s cult and priesthood.

Israel’s understanding of its relationship with Yhwh, particularly as expressed in the concepts of election and covenant, has generated a vast literature, some of which will be considered in Chapter 7. While from the perspective adopted in this work, election and covenant are closely interrelated themes, they have for the most part been treated separately. By some, the ‘kingdom of priests’ passage is treated as a key passage in expounding Israel’s belief in its special status or calling as Yhwh’s chosen people, notably by Wildberger and Fuhs. It is surprisingly omitted by Sohn from his otherwise comprehensive catalogue of images of election, perhaps because the rich extended metaphor lying behind the notion of Israel as a royal priesthood has not been fully appreciated. There have been a number of significant monographs as well as some influential essays on the nature of Israel’s covenant(s) with Yhwh over the past half century commencing with Mendenhall’s *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. The steady stream of monographs and articles has


canvassed such issues as the degree to which Israel's understanding of its relationship with Yhwh is paralleled within ancient Near Eastern religious or royal conventions, the degree of continuity/discontinuity within the Israelite covenants and the tension between conditionality and unconditionality in the covenants, with the result that no clear consensus has emerged.

**g. Literature on New Testament Citations of Exodus 19.6**

One final category of literature must be mentioned at this point. Because the New Testament books of 1 Peter (2.5, 9) and Revelation (1.6; 5.10; 20.6) quote or make clear allusion to Exod. 19.6, treating the theme of the corporate royal priesthood of Christians as a significant aspect of Christian reflection on this unit of text and tradition, a major monograph has been written on each of these. Both the work of Elliott on the 1 Peter *locus*, and


that of Schüssler Fiorenza on the Revelation passages discuss in some
depth the Hebrew text of Exod. 19.6, the versional evidence, and some of
the ancient quotations and allusions.\(^{85}\)

3. Method and Format of this Study

Our task, then, will be to focus on the interpretation of Exod. 19.6. The
next chapter will consider the main contours of the source-critical approach
to the Sinai pericope which has been dominant for over a century. Noting
the failure of this approach to produce satisfying results, we will consider
the newer literary criticism with its emphasis on the integrity of the discus-
sion and outline the approach to be taken in this book. In keeping with
the (nuanced) ‘final form’ approach to be adopted (as outlined in Chapter
2), we will not deal with form-critical or tradition-historical matters except
to the extent that these are related to the discussion on the meaning of
‘covenant’ (Chapter 7). Chapter 3 will present an exegesis of the passage
Exod. 19.1-8 with particular attention to vv. 4-6a in an endeavour to under-
stand the functioning of the phrase מַלְאָךְ הָהָיִם in relation to that context.
The interpretation of the phrase itself will occupy our attention in Chapter
4. The discussion will then be extended to take in some considerations
from the structure of the book of Exodus as a whole and the bearing these
may have on the interpretation of Exod. 19.6. These matters will be dealt
with Chapter 5 which will focus in particular on the unit Exod. 24.1-11.
This passage, it is argued, presents the ‘ordination’ rite for the priesthood
of the community of Israel, and the culmination of the preparations of
ch. 19 in the consummation of the divine vision and the meal as honoured
guests in God’s heavenly palace.

Chapter 6 will outline something of the rationale of the priestly legis-
lation, principally as this is found in Exodus 25–31, though drawing on
other relevant passages of the Hebrew Bible and beyond. What was the
nature and function of the tabernacle and the Levitical or Aaronic priest-
hood which functioned within it?\(^{86}\) How do such priests relate to the

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85. Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, pp. 50-128; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza,
Priester für Gott: Studien zum Herrschafts- und Priestermotiv in der Apokalypse
(NTAbh, 7; Münster: Aschendorff, 1972), pp. 78-166.

86. The epithets ‘Levitical’ and ‘Aaronic’ are used here interchangeably to denote
the specially designated class of cultic officials within Israel and to distinguish them
from the general priesthood to which Israel as a whole is called. The discussion as
to whether other Levite families legitimately filled the priestly office, or whether the
‘priests’ of Exod. 19.6? It will be suggested that the Aaronic priests are intended by the writer of Exodus to present a concretization of the image of Israel’s royal priesthood, a visual lesson on the ideal prospect set before the nation as a whole. This chapter will include more comparative material on priesthood and cult in the ancient Near East. There is no intention to assume a ‘history of religions’ approach and imply that Israel’s understanding must conform to a general cultural pattern. Such parallels as we observe are intended to act as catalysts and prompts for our closer investigation of the sources which are specific to Israel’s cultic theory and practice.

Although it is beyond the scope of this work to present a comprehensive interpretation of the Sinai covenant, Chapter 7 will suggest ways in which an understanding of the ‘royal priesthood’ declaration may elucidate the Sinai covenant as one in which the notion of a grant to Israel of a privileged position predominates. This grant is understood to entail, in some metaphorical sense, something of the status and prerogatives of royalty as well as priesthood. These metaphors are seen as drawing their content from the cosmic cultic ideology as this is presented within Israel’s religious tradition, and as pointing to the restoration of access to God’s presence as he is conceived of as enthroned in his heavenly temple.

The phrase מִלְעָבָדֵים הָדוֹרִים or echoes of it occurs in a number of later Jewish and Christian writings. Besides the New Testament references cited above, we may note some of the principal references to be found in 2 Macc. 2.17; Jub. 16.18; 33.20; Philo, Abr. 56; Sobr. 66; 4Q504 7.4 and some possible allusions in texts relating to the Testament of Levi (both a Greek fragment and the Aramaic Levi texts from Qumran). However, as these have mostly been treated (albeit sometimes briefly) in discussions on the background to the New Testament passages, and as any substantial treatment of these would significantly alter the focus of the present work, there will not be a detailed study of these here, though reference will be made to them, particularly in Chapter 4, primarily for the light they cast on the state of the text of Exod. 19.6 in Second Temple times.

restriction of priesthood to the Aaronides was a late development will be taken up again briefly below, but will not be a major issue for this study. For the writer of Exodus, only the sons of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi, were eligible to serve as priests.

There are, however, a number of possible echoes of the ‘royal priesthood’ image of Exod. 19.6 within the Hebrew Bible, and with the exception of Isa. 61.6, which is frequently considered in relation to Exod. 19.6, most of these have received scant attention from the perspective of their intertextual or thematic relationship with the Exodus passage. As used in this book, ‘intertextuality’ refers to the way texts draw on one another’s language, images and conceptual worlds. It is not laden with a particular philosophical content, but is used in much the same way as the phrase ‘inner-biblical exegesis’ is used by Fishbane. Among the passages to be considered for their links with Exod. 19.6 are Numbers 16; Hos. 4.4-9; Isa. 61.6; Mic. 4.6-14; Ps. 114.2 and Zechariah 3. These generally short studies are not intended to be exhaustive, but indicative of possible fruitful lines of inquiry. Other possible connections will be mentioned more in passing. In looking at these passages, it is the aim of this study to demonstrate that the notion of Israel as a corporate royal-priestly entity is not a passing metaphor, but represents a richer and more sustained ideology which has left its mark at a number of places within the Hebrew Bible and beyond. We will also be interested to note the light that one text may shed upon the interpretation of another.


Chapter 2

OLD AND NEW IN LITERARY CRITICISM: METHODOLOGIES IN THE INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS 19.6

1. Literary Criticism in its Older Guise: 
Source and Redaction Criticism

As has been noted in Chapter 1, much of what has been written on the Sinai pericope has addressed source-critical, form-critical and tradition-historical concerns, though with no sign of any significant consensus. The following section will briefly survey the main contours of the discussion on the source criticism of Exod. 19.4-6a (or, including the quotative frame and response, vv. 3b-8).

Exodus 19–24 presents the reader with an array of puzzling difficulties. These include the apparent misplacement of the Decalogue in 20.1-17, the confusing number of ascents and descents of the mountain on the part of Moses, the tensions regarding the nature and degree of proximity of the encounter between God and Israel, the character of the theophany event (Is it storm?, volcanic activity?) and the role and identity of the various representative or mediatorial figures in the encounter. Most typically, scholars have had recourse to source-critical solutions to these tensions, identifying the apparent disjunctions in the flow of the text as the seams marking the transitions to a different underlying source. The results of such studies have been less than satisfying, as evidenced by the lack of consensus as to an overall analysis after well over a century of such scrutiny of the text. McCarthy’s comment would meet with substantial acceptance: ‘The Sinai narrative is a locus classicus for the difficulties of traditional source criticism’.

There is widespread agreement that 19.4-6a, at least, is from a single source, with possibly a degree of redactional reworking, or alternatively that it is in its entirety the contribution of a single redactor. Muilenburg,

for example, believed that ‘the composition of Exod. xix 3-6 is so closely woven and the structure so apparent that the excision of any line of verse actually mars its unity and destroys its literary character’. While some forty years later it may seem strange to observe a scholar almost apologizing for maintaining the literary integrity of such a small unit of text, such of course was the climate in which Muilenburg wrote. Yet, for this particular unit, his comment is not unrepresentative of the views of scholars working in the area of Pentateuchal criticism.

All semblance of agreement ends at that point, however, for the attribution of 19.4-6a to one or other of the commonly identified Pentateuchal sources (continuous parallel narrative strands) or redactional (editorial) additions to the Pentateuch in the form in which we have it has proved one of the most elusive of all source-critical quests. Even scholars normally confident in their attribution of passages to sources are sometimes hesitant, and sometimes confusing when it comes to this portion of the Pentateuch.

Those who have seen in the expression מִמְּלֵאכָּתָם בְּרֵאשִׁית at least an echo of an ancient liturgical formula have tended to attribute it either to the Yahwist (J) or, more commonly, to the Elohist (E) source. The J source has traditionally been regarded as the earliest of the Pentateuchal sources (as early as the tenth century). Its distinguishing feature for the Sinai complex is considered to be its depiction of Yhwh as one who descends to Mt Sinai in theophany, as distinct from having his permanent abode there. The J source is associated with the warnings about crossing over to see God. Among those who support the attribution of Exod. 19.4-6 to J, we may include Carpenter and Harford, S.R. Driver, Gressmann, Oesterley

5. Carpenter and Harford, Composition, pp. 515-17.
7. Gressmann regards Exod. 19.3-6 as originally an introduction to the Book of the Covenant: Hugo Gressmann, Die Anfänge Israels, von 2 Mose bis Richter und
and Robinson and von Rad. While the J authorship of the unit 19.4-6a has not been popular, it has recently been revived by Van Seters, although in a rather different cast. Van Seters’s Yahwist is a post-exilic writer, hence one who *ex hypothesi* is amenable to Deuteronomic influences.

The majority of interpreters over the past century have favoured an Elohist (E) source for 19.4-6a (or 3b-8), conventionally dated about a century after J. The Elohist is identified with the view that Mt Sinai is God’s permanent abode, and gives prominence to the figure of Moses as a mediator. Those who adopt this position include Gallling, Muilenburg, Weiser, Eichrodt, Newman, Eissfeldt, Beyerlin, Kuntz, Childs and Hanson.

With the growing loss of confidence regarding the existence of an E source in recent decades, there has been a heightened interest in one or other of the alternative traditional sources or redactions, and new sources proposed.

Some see these verses as old (pre-Deuteronomic) yet as not belonging to either the J or E epic sources. For Wildberger, the discourse constitutes an

independent election source.\textsuperscript{21} McCarthy links 24.1-2, 9-11; 24.3-8; and 19.3b-8, and sees them as stemming from a source independent of J or E.\textsuperscript{22} Likewise Patrick sees 19.3b-8, taken together with 20.22–23.19 and 24.3-8, as constituting a connected account of the Sinai event, distinct from J and E, and probably of northern provenance, composed prior to 721 in order to provide a narrative setting for the Covenant Code.\textsuperscript{23}

There is no Deuteronomistic (D) source as such postulated for this section of the Pentateuch, though the Deuteronomistic school is widely regarded as having a significant redactional role in relation to the shaping of the J and E traditions.

In the complex process of weaving together the separate strands, one or more interim redactional stages are posited before the final redaction. Typically, there was a JE redaction, followed by one or more Deuteronomistic redactions, with the resulting material undergoing a final redaction at the hands of the Priestly school. Exodus 19.4-6a has been regarded as a product of redactional activity on the part of each of the major editorial hands. Thus Bennett has it as the work of a pre-Deuteronomic redactor of the JE material.\textsuperscript{24} More commonly, there has been a sustained acceptance of the view, first propounded by Wellhausen, that vv. 4-6a are in some way Deuteronomic.\textsuperscript{25} The use of 'Deuteronomic' in this context has conventionally referred to a redaction of the (already combined) JE material which has theological and stylistic affinities with the bulk of the book of Deuteronomy. Such activity is usually associated with the Josianic reforms which date from 621, though some proto-Deuteronomic activity has been attributed to the period of Hezekiah a century earlier, and later dates are also proposed.

Principal among the reasons advanced for detecting a Deuteronomic redaction at Exod. 19.4-6a are its affinities in vocabulary and style with passages in Deuteronomy, such as the reference to Israel 'seeing' a past event (cf. Deut. 4.3, 9; 10.21; 11.7), the carrying of Israel on eagles' wings (cf. 32.11), the use of אֲנִי הָאָרֶץ (cf. 7.6; 14.2; 26.18), the conditional covenantal

\textsuperscript{21} Wildberger, \textit{Jahwes Eigentumsvolk}, pp. 9-16.
\textsuperscript{22} McCarthy, \textit{Treaty and Covenant}, pp. 264-73.
\textsuperscript{23} Patrick, 'The Covenant Code Source'.
\textsuperscript{25} Wellhausen's views underwent some modification between the editions of his \textit{Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments}; see Childs, \textit{Exodus}, p. 345.
idea of v. 5, considered by many a Deuteronomic innovation (cf. 11.13; 15.5; 28.1), and the characterization of Israel as a ‘holy’ nation, though the use of מֵי rather than מַי is sometimes seen as a difficulty (cf. 7.6; 14.2, 21; 26.19; 28.9).

Wellhausen has been followed in his perception of Deuteronomic influence by such interpreters as Klopfer, McNeile, Steuernagel, Beer, Simpson, Noth, Haelvoet, Jacob, Auzou, Perlitt, Zenger, Hyatt and Nicholson. For Blum, who has made a significant contribution to the study of Pentateuchal composition, Exod. 19.3b-8 marks a stage in the compositional history between the D and P redactions.

Least prominent among candidates for the source of 19.4-6a has been the Priestly source (P). Such a source has (following Wellhausen) generally been regarded as containing little of the Sinai narrative material (often no more of chs. 19–24 than 19.1-2a, and 24.15b-18a), though much of the legal and cultic material of the Pentateuch is attributed to P. It has generally been considered to be post-exilic, and theologically sterile. The post-exilic dating of P has, however, been challenged by a number of scholars on linguistic and other grounds.

30. Simpson, Early Traditions, p. 199.
33. E. Jacob, Theology, p. 204.
34. Auzou, De la servitude, p. 245.
35. Perlitt, Bundestheologie, pp. 171-74. Perlitt’s work significantly raised the profile of the D redactor.
The traditional view of P as originally constituting an independent narrative strand has also over recent decades to some extent given way to the view that the Priestly contribution to the process of Pentateuchal formation was one of redactional activity, particularly the final shaping of the Pentateuch in much the form in which we have it, though an independent P source has still had its recent defenders.

Any understanding of which involves the notion of the collective priesthood of the whole community is not felt to sit well with the more exclusive priestly agenda. However, for those who understand in Exod. 19.6 in a more restricted sense, the P source, or a post-exilic priestly reshaping of earlier material is an attractive possibility, and such viewpoints have been espoused by such scholars as Winnett, Fohrer, Cazelles, Dozemann and Ska.

In recent decades there has been a growing level of dissatisfaction with the method and results of traditional source criticism as applied to the Pentateuch and alternative approaches have been considered. In particular the contributions of Schmitt, Knierim, Whybray, Rendtorff and


Frederick Victor Winnett, The Mosaic Tradition (Near and Middle East Series, 1; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1949), pp. 163-64.


Ska, 'Exode 19.3b-6'.


Rolf P. Knierim, 'The Composition of the Pentateuch', in Kent Harold
Blum\textsuperscript{52} represent various degrees of movement in the direction of a focus on the redactional or final form of the text. The hypothesis involving the redaction of several documents along the lines popularized by Graf and Wellhausen has undergone some significant modifications—some adjustment of dates, some new sources, the virtual disappearance of the E source, and a greater emphasis on the role of the redactor(s). Yet it remains in its essentials as the dominant position in Pentateuchal studies. For how long remains to be seen.

Whatever advantages historical criticism as traditionally practised may have for other portions of the Pentateuch, it has been singularly disappointing as a means of elucidating the origins (and hence perhaps the significance) of the Sinai complex in general and Exod. 19.4-6a in particular. The comment of Gunn expresses a growing realization on the part of Old Testament scholarship: 'It is no exaggeration to say that the truly assured results of historical critical scholarship concerning authorship, date and provenance would fill but a pamphlet'.\textsuperscript{53} Certainly there is little by way of positive result to report after more than a century of source-critical endeavour so far as the Sinai complex is concerned. The lack of methodological controls evident in much of the literature would suggest that little progress is to be expected from further efforts along the lines of traditional source criticism. Thus Rendtorff concludes that 'the criteria for source criticism have proved unsuitable to explain the literary problems of the Sinai pericope'.\textsuperscript{54}

The approach in its earlier stage of development depended on an assumption of the minimally creative role of the redactors, who (apparently without noticing) left glaring inconsistencies of plot, character and theology in their redaction, to be discovered by scholars from a time and culture far removed from theirs. Yet when a greater role is given to the redactors, the very criteria which were used to distinguish their sources begin to evaporate. The comment of Gowan is worth repeating: 'Redaction certainly took


50. Whybray, \textit{The Making of the Pentateuch}.


52. Blum, \textit{Komposition des Pentateuch}.


place in the creation of the Old Testament books, but there are too few objective criteria for determining what is redactional, and the failure to find agreement on the composition of Exodus 19–24 is proof that most of the decisions being made are subjective'.\textsuperscript{55} Moreover, even if we could get behind the text to its sources, it would do little for our understanding of the text as a literary document. It would simply push the questions back to an earlier stage, and would still call for something much more than an identification of a unit of text as 'E' or 'redactional' or 'priestly', or as 'misplaced'. Knierim is only marginally overstating the case when he writes: 'Traditional historical exegesis has for good reasons been preoccupied with the layers and developments before the latest composition. At the same time, however, it has behaved as if the final composition was not worth discussing.'\textsuperscript{56} The text as we have it is reduced to the status of a witness to something else, and at times a very indirect witness at that, rather than being treated as literature with its own integrity and worthy of study in its own right.

2. \textit{A Paradigm Shift: The Newer Literary Criticism and the 'Final Form'}

This leads us to a consideration of the approach to the text to be adopted in this study. Recent decades have begun to witness something of a sea-change in approaches to the literature of the Hebrew Bible. There has been an increasing emphasis on more holistic literary approaches to the text as we have it, where the integrity of the discourse is axiomatic to a serious reading. Even as early as 1938, von Rad observed:

\begin{quote}
A process of analysis, doubtless almost always interesting, but nevertheless highly stylised, has run its course, and a more or less clear perception of its inevitability handicaps many scholars today... On almost all sides the final form [\textit{Lettgestalt}] of the Hexateuch has come to be regarded as a starting-point barely worthy of discussion, from which the debate should move away as rapidly as possible in order to reach the real problems underlying it.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

Developments in biblical interpretation over recent decades, particularly with regard to biblical narrative, have their roots in general literary theory,

\textsuperscript{55} Gowan, \textit{Theology in Exodus}, p. 282 n. 13.
\textsuperscript{56} Knierim, 'Composition', p. 393.
\textsuperscript{57} Von Rad, 'The Form Critical Problem', p. 1. In practice, von Rad himself continued to treat the final form more as a window through which one looked for evidence of how it came to be there.
drawing on the work of literary critics such as Frye, who states one of the central tenets of his approach:

The primary understanding of any work of literature has to be based on an assumption of its unity. However mistaken such an assumption may eventually prove to be, nothing can be done unless we start with it as a heuristic principle. Further, every effort should be directed toward understanding the whole of what we read, as though it were all on the same level of achievement.\(^{58}\)

The Presidential address of James Muilenburg delivered to the Society of Biblical Literature in 1968 signalled something of a turning point in Old Testament scholarship in this regard.\(^{59}\) While wishing to remain very much in continuity with form criticism, Muilenburg issued ‘an appeal to venture beyond the confines of form criticism into an inquiry into other literary features which are all too frequently ignored today’.\(^{60}\) Adopting the phrase ‘rhetorical criticism’ for the approach he advocated, Muilenburg wished to place greater emphasis on the distinctive contribution of each particular text, rather than generalize about its literary affinities, and to observe its structural and aesthetic features. It was this address which introduced such literary terms as *chiasmus* and *inclusio* into the general vocabulary of scholars of the Hebrew Bible.

Another proposal for a more integrated reading of the texts of the Hebrew Bible, one less reliant on a speculative reconstruction of sources, was put forward in 1978 by McCarthy: ‘The object of exegesis, then, is primarily the text as it stands, not possible origins or historical referent’.\(^{61}\) This approach has been expounded and applied (in different ways) within the context of Hebrew Bible studies generally by such writers as Polzin,\(^{62}\) Licht,\(^{63}\) Clines,\(^{64}\) Childs,\(^{65}\) Alter,\(^{66}\) Berlin,\(^{67}\) Sternberg\(^{68}\) and Rendtorff,\(^{69}\) to


\(^{60}\) Muilenburg, ‘Form Criticism and Beyond’, p. 4.


\(^{64}\) David J.A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOTSUp, 10; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978).
name but a few. It provides the editorial rationale for some relatively recent literary introductions to the books of the Bible. Such study is concerned not so much with the pre-history of the text, or with uncovering the *Sitz im Leben* of its component forms, or with the pre-literary traditions which may underlie the text, all of which are ultimately of limited value in explaining the function of a unit of discourse within the matrix of its surrounding context. Rather, it accepts the text as a given, and endeavours to discern its inner coherence and meaning, to appreciate the artistry which has shaped it, and to consider it in relation to texts which appear to have some inter-relationship with it (intertextuality).

Rendtorff traces the course of traditional historical-critical inquiry, noting the continuum between redaction criticism (with its emphasis on process) and what has become known as a 'final form' approach, with its emphasis on product, and makes the following observation:

> What will continue, I hope, is the attitude of taking the text seriously in its given form, in its final shape... [T]aking a synchronic approach to the text in its given shape is a task Old Testament scholarship has neglected too long and too intentionally. Scholars still seem to be proud of knowing things better than the final redactors or compilers. This is a kind of nineteenth-century hubris we should have left behind us. The last writers, whatever we want to call them, were, in any case, much closer to the original meaning of the text than we can ever be.


Berlin articulates some principles relevant to her proposal for ‘a new biblical hermeneutics’ which are worth itemizing in their summary form:

1. Respect the integrity of the text...
2. Assume the text makes sense in its present form...
3. Take the wording of the text seriously...
4. Take the literary context seriously...
5. Take the historical and social context seriously...
6. Is the text to be read literally or metaphorically?...
7. Decide which features of the text are hermeneutically significant and how they are to be used in the interpretive process.⁷²

The present study proceeds from a position which is in general accord with these principles with one reservation. The reservation relates to what is meant by the integrity of the text as this affects textual criticism (taken up below). On a ‘final form’ approach, the notion of what we are calling cotext becomes much more important than it has traditionally been. Words, expressions, whole speeches derive their meaning not merely from the lexicon, or the sum of their constituent parts. They take on meaning in relation to the text around them. Thus, for example, when we come to consider the meaning of the oracle in Zech. 3.8-10, we will not be looking for its meaning in isolation, or in relation to a hypothetical ‘oracles source’, ᵇ³ but in relation to the preceding vision account (Zech. 3.1-7) and ultimately the book of Zechariah as a whole.

Utzschneider⁷⁴ and Vervenne⁷⁵ both note the paradigm shift as this applies to the study of Exodus. The Exodus commentaries by Childs,⁷⁶ Durham,⁷⁷ Fretheim,⁷⁸ Houtman⁷⁹ and Propp⁸⁰ represent, to varying degrees, more integrated literary approaches to the text. The Sinai complex

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⁷⁶. Childs, Exodus.
⁷⁷. Durham, Exodus.
⁷⁸. Fretheim, Exodus.
⁷⁹. Houtman, Exodus.
⁸⁰. Propp, Exodus 1–18.
has not received the same attention from the perspective of a holistic literary approach as other portions of the Hebrew Bible, perhaps because of the special problems associated with the interweaving of story with law. The following treatments of the Sinai material exemplify some, at least, of the characteristics outlined above: Licht, Rivard, Greenberg, Moberly, Chrichigno, Blum, Dozeman, Rendtorff, Sailhamer and Wells. We will be considering some of these contributions at relevant points.

a. Textual Criticism and the ‘Final Form’

Though the approach adopted here has sometimes been called a ‘final form’ or Endgestalt approach, this may not prove to be a particularly helpful description. Given the diversity of textual traditions of a document such as the book of Exodus, ‘final form’ becomes a matter of choice—the choice of the individual interpreter or the tradition of one’s faith community—as to which particular text-form or even version will be adopted as the basis for one’s literary analysis. Pushed to its ultimate limit, this may even mean settling on one manuscript or printed edition as being normative. Insofar as the expressions ‘final form’ or ‘the text as we have it’ may be used in this book, they are used somewhat more loosely, more in the manner of their use by Childs and Rendtorff to refer to the broad contours

85. R.W.L. Moberly, _At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34_ (JSOTSsup, 22; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983).
91. Wells, _God’s Holy People.
92. Childs, _Introduction to the Old Testament_, p. 75; Rendtorff, ‘Der Text in seiner Endgestalt’. 
of the text accepted as ‘canonical’ within the Jewish and Christian traditions, without restricting that to one precise text-form. The approach adopted here will be open to textual criticism, as traditionally practised in connection with the Hebrew Bible. That is (pace Berlin), there will be at least a readiness to consider the evidence not only of the Masoretic Text (MT) but also the witness of other manuscript traditions, the versions, and the targums for such evidence as they may suggest for readings, possibly earlier, besides those of MT. In particular, the Masoretic vocalization will be regarded as a helpful interpretative overlay on the consonantal text (the proto-Masoretic text), but will not be treated as definitive. Thus to some extent, this study seeks to work from a reconstructed text, though only insofar as there is reasonable evidence to support a particular reading.

The attempt to reconstruct hypothetical earlier forms of the text (the continuous narrative sources, or earlier redactions) involves a greater degree of subjectivity. It is not to be denied that the enterprise of combining sources and editing earlier works was a feature of Hebrew historiography, nor that there is to some extent a continuum between text-critical and source-critical analyses. Both seek to establish earlier forms of the text as part of the quest for historical authenticity. The question might be posed, however, whether ‘earlier’ inevitably means ‘better’, that is, whether particular forms of a text are amenable to this sort of value judgment. In part, the distinction between source- and text-criticism involves a distinction between the activity of an editor and that of a scribe. To the extent that textual variations are deliberate (editorial), they have significance. Insofar as they are thoughtless scribal accidents, they are of limited value for the reading of texts, though they may shed light on scribal techniques, or the development of the Hebrew language.

It is an axiom of the method adopted here that the final form (barring scribal lapses) is a literary work worthy of our attention. There will be a predisposition to accept the coherence of any text; that is, whatever its background in terms of sources, its author or editor consciously shaped the work to suit authorial or editorial purposes. If the observance of features of coherence and aesthetic qualities in the text may be queried as springing from a desire to find unity, so equally may the discovery by others of discrepancies and doublets (the stock-in-trade of the older source-critical

approaches) be seen as arising from an overly historicist need to get beyond the text. Within the Sinai pericope, one may take the example of the paradox of seeing God or being face-to-face with God, and not seeing God, particularly his face (Exod. 19.21; 24.11; 33.11, 20, 23). These references will either be regarded as constituting a discrepancy and hence suggestive of different sources brought together in such a manner that the editor was unaware of, or unable to control the result, or alternatively, they may be seen as a conscious reflection of the inherent tension in a divine–human encounter, and the inadequacy of language to convey both the transcendence and the immanence of such an experience.

b. Historicity and the ‘Final Form’

Is the method adopted here then to be excluded from an engagement with history? This is a serious issue on which not a great deal has yet been written. The more one simply opts for a synchronic as opposed to a diachronic reading of a given text, with minimal attention to the process of formation and transmission of the text and its underlying traditions, the less safe might appear to be one’s conclusions as to the way that text connects with real events or with other texts. Applied to the Bible, this means, for example, that an approach which assumes the integrity of the text may of necessity be more tentative about issues of dating and the priority of one text over another than has often been the case. But it is not thereby ahistorical in character. Childs, who prefers to call his approach a ‘canonical’ approach, identifies the failures of the historical critical method, while at the same time endeavouring to take Israel’s history seriously.

In some ways, the contribution to historiography of the newer literary approaches will be less assertive and confident than has been true of much of the literary criticism of the previous century, but the widely divergent conclusions reached about so many issues over this period suggest that it is time for a more modest and realistic assessment of our abilities to reconstruct both texts and events. At least an approach which deals with the texts we possess has some claim to historicity and is inherently less prone to fragile hypothetical reconstructions. The evidence of the texts themselves is more tangible than the reconstructions which attempt to reach back beyond them. In the end there will hopefully be a better balance


resulting from the newer literary emphases, without an abandonment of historical enquiry in the process.

This work is primarily literary and thematic in its concerns. However, it proceeds from an assumption that literature and history cannot be divorced. If historical comments are at times confined to footnotes, this is not an indication of their intrinsic insignificance, but is because their injection into the body of the text would interrupt the flow of the discussion.