The literary problems posed by the narratives in Exodus are rather different from those of Genesis. There we dealt with three distinct literary units, each woven together out of discrete documentary sources. The primeval history of man on earth (Gen. 1-11) reflected a mythological tradition shared with Mesopotamia and other parts of the ancient Near East. The patriarchal tales (Gen. 12-36) represented a legendary block of non-historical genre-pieces, intended to convey the essence of a variety of local traditions associated with the shrines and other "sites and sights" of Syria and Palestine. The story of Joseph (Gen. 37-50) was an essential link between Patriarchs and Exodus enlarged into an elaborate novella with an ostensible Egyptian setting and background. None of the three units could be said to qualify as authentic historical record-keeping, though together they did enshrine the manner in which a later, united Israel chose to render account to itself of its own alleged past.

The work which we know today as the Book of Exodus, on the other hand, must have laid some claims to being a chronicle of historical events, of history "as it really happened." The events recorded in Exodus were much closer in time to the time of the artist who gave us the finished book than were those of Genesis. Moreover they bear a much more crucial relation to the history of his own time, whatever precise date is assigned to that. A united Israel is hardly conceivable without the shared memory of the Exodus (or an exodus) preceding the conquest of Canaan. And the Exodus in turn presupposes the prior sojourn in Egypt and subsequent wanderings in Sinai. Genesis moved in the realm of myth, legend and novella – the formulation of what may have been, the almost random choice of one or more explanations for the present state of affairs in terms of their possible origins and of selected intervening stages, told by preference in the form of biographical
details associated with paradigmatic individuals. We now leave that realm behind and move instead to what must have been: the necessary organization of group traditions into a meaningful sequence of events that can account for the group's present awareness of its collective destiny.¹ This awareness can be said to be epitomized in the unique expression "the people of the Children of Israel" in 1:9. Although put in the mouth of the Pharaoh, it completes "the subtle transformation of the personal biographies of the patriarchs into the ethnic histories of the several tribes, a process in which the twelve eponymous sons of Jacob become the one collective entity known to the Bible as the Children of Israel."²

That being so, are we entitled, more than in Genesis, to look to the literature of the Ancient Near East for confirmation of the claims to historical validity of Exodus? Hardly, for these claims are made strictly in the context of Israel's own formulations. Their neighbors had different preoccupations, and what was crucial to the Israelite historian was more likely than not outside or beneath the notice of any other people's chronicler. Surely the Egyptian contemporaries of the dramatic events at the Sea and in Sinai are not apt to have recorded for posterity what at the time appeared as just one or two more episodes among countless others. Surely they would have had to be prophets to foresee their ultimate impact.

We can, however, look to the external sources for a general evaluation of the historical context in which the Bible places the events, and of the literary forms in which it transmitted them. That is to say, we can invoke the contextual approach, combining comparison and contrast to illuminate the conceptions that Israel shared with its general ancient Near Eastern setting, and to silhouette the memories that were uniquely hers.³ To achieve this purpose, it helps to analyze the biblical book, not into the original documents which (by the documentary hypothesis or other critical estimates) went into its making, but into its major generic components. Reading the text in its "canonical" shape, that is as a single, finished work of literature,⁴ one tends to detect three such components – biography, history and legislation. They predominate respectively in what may be called the

¹For the view that Israelite history begins with the oppression in Egypt, see Hallo 1980 (esp. pp. 16f.) with a critique of Soggin 1978. My view is defended by Sasson 1981 and modified by Malamat 1983. Soggin 1984:26f. (and 387 n. 13) attacks all three.
³Hallo 1980.
⁴Cf. above, ch. II p. 19.
prologue or "mise-en-scène" of the book (chs.1-6), its body or narrative core (chs. 7-17), and its denouement or conclusion (chs. 21-40). All of them converge in its climactic centerpiece, the revelation at Sinai (chs. 18-20). They may serve as a thread in distinguishing the kinds of ancient Near Eastern literature – inevitably very diverse – respectively relevant for their elucidation.

The Biography of Moses, and of His Kin

To turn from Genesis to Exodus is, then, to pass from legend to history. The gap is considerable, but the transition is facilitated by recourse in both books to biography: the biographies of the Patriarchs, the twelve sons of Jacob, and particularly Joseph at the end of Genesis, the biographies of Moses and his kin at the beginning of Exodus. The entire story of the Egyptian oppression, from the midwives who frustrated the Pharaoh's intent to the enforced labor of the Israelites, is told in terms of its relationship to Miriam, Aaron and Moses. The historicity of these three figures was an article of faith long before the close of the biblical period (and an admulatory "Life of Moses" was written by Philo Judaeus of Alexandria shortly thereafter). References to them in pre-exilic prophecy (Mic. 6:4; Jer. 15:1), in the Deuteronomistic history (Josh. 24:5; 1 Sam 12:6, 8), and in the Psalms (105:26, 106:16) show how deeply embedded was the belief in their crucial role in transforming the twelve tribes into one people. But precisely because of their part in the emergence of Israel's nationhood, later memory tended to invest them with legendary accretions which have the cumulative effect of discrediting their historicity in modern critical judgement. Thus it is important to identify the purely literary elements in their biographies, especially any so-called topos, that is a motif or theme cast in a recurrent literary form.

One such topos is the tale of Moses' birth. On the surface it resembles a familiar folkloristic motif: the exposure of the infant son by royal decree and his rescue and ultimate arrival at or return to the palace. Many secondary motifs are likewise shared by the tale of Moses with particular versions of the theme as developed in other cultures. Among the most famous of these is the "Birth Legend of Sargon of Akkad" preserved in an Assyrian text cast in the form of a fictionalized autobiography. But while Sargon ruled in hoary antiquity, and legends began to accumulate about him at an early date, the motifs of exposure in a reed basket and rescue by a person attached

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6Cf. Silver 1982 ch. III.
to the palace appear nowhere outside the "Birth Legend." And there is no indication that this legend goes further back than the late eighth century B.C.E., when it may have been composed to celebrate the triumphs of his namesake, Sargon II of Assyria (722-705 B.C.E.).

Scores of comparable legends have been identified in other literatures, some of which can (unlike the Sargon legend) be shown to have originated before the first millennium B.C.E. Such are, for example, the Hittite tales of "the Sun-God and the Cow" and "the City of Zalpa." Others, while late, have at least a specifically Egyptian setting in common with the Moses legend, notably a version of the "Contending of Horus and Seth." But none of them includes all the elements of the Moses birth legend, which evidently evolved in response to the felt need to explain both his name and his origins, or better: to explain them away, for there were surely more convincing etymologies available both in Egyptian and in Hebrew.

Another topos crucial to the figure of Moses is his speech difficulty. It is remarked at least two and possibly three different times. Once Moses calls himself, literally "heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue" (4:10; New Jewish Version [NJV]: "slow of speech and slow of tongue") and twice "uncircumcised of lips" (6:12, 30; NJV: "of impeded speech"). Isaiah similarly protested that he was "unclean of lips" before he accepted his prophetic mission (Isa. 6:5; cf. also Jer. 1:4-10). The "heavy" speech organs are, perhaps, an artful counterpart to Pharaoh's "heart" (i.e. mind) which is repeatedly described as "heavy" (NJV "stubborn" or "hard") in the same (i.e. so-called "Yahwistic") version of the recital of the negotiations between the two, but the idiom itself is rooted in Near Eastern literature. In one of the earliest Sumerian epics, a central role is played by the messenger whose "mouth was too heavy" to repeat a message verbatim, leading by necessity to

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7See below, Selection 14.
9See below, Selection 15. The Hittite tale of Appu ("Brother Good and Brother Bad") which has sometimes been compared as well has closer parallels to the Biblical story of Job (Hoffner 1969:52-55) or to the patriarchal narratives of Genesis (Irvin 1978:58-62) if it is not in fact the prologue to "The Sun-God and the Cow" (ibid.).
10See below, Selection 16.
12I.e., "he who pulled his people out (of the water)." So interpreted, e.g. by Buber 1946:36. Cf. Isa. 63:11f.
the invention of (letter-)writing.\textsuperscript{15} An essay describes a poor student as one who is "(too) heavy for Sumerian, he cannot move his tongue correctly."\textsuperscript{16} In later Akkadian literature, the "heavy mouth" became a recognized medical phenomenon and the beginning (hence: title) of an entire treatise on pathology.\textsuperscript{17}

The marriage of Moses again involves familiar literary topoi, combined in unique or novel ways. The initial encounter with Zipporah at the well, the insistent hospitality on the part of her family, and even her father's name here (Reuel; 2:15-22) are reminiscent of the wooing of Rebekah (Gen. 24) and to some extent of the first meeting of Jacob and Rachel (Gen. 29). But this idyllic beginning is combined with the less edifying events surrounding the return of the couple to Egypt (4:18-26), when Moses became "a bridegroom of (i.e., cleansed by) blood because of the circumcision." Circumcision serves as a puberty rite in Islam as well as in numerous pre-literate societies. That it was once a prerequisite for marital relations (like a first-fruit offering) is suggested by the biblical analogy of David's wooing Michal with the foreskins of two hundred slain Philistines (I Sam. 18:27), and by the Arabic cognate of the Hebrew term for "bridegroom" which derives from the verbal root meaning "to circumcise."\textsuperscript{18} And behind all these associations stands the Egyptian tale of the "Deliverance of Mankind from Destruction." Although it is not entirely certain that circumcision was widely practiced in Egypt,\textsuperscript{19} we have in that tale a similar motif to Zipporah's touching Moses with the freshly-cut foreskin after God "sought to kill him": the assuaging of divine wrath by the application of human blood or its equivalent.\textsuperscript{20}

Moses' persistent desire to encounter God is among the few biographical details in the later portions of the book. After the strange episode in which he is vouchsafed a view of God's "back" (33:23), Moses himself undergoes a physical transformation that terrifies the people. The skin of his face begins to become "radiant" (34:29f.) or even to "grow horns" in the Latin translation of the passage and in Michelangelo's famous statue of Moses. Though the latter sense would normally call for a secondary verbal form derived from the simple noun for horn, there is in fact a conceptual link between "radiant" and "horned." This is well illustrated in Sumerian and Akkadian prayers.
to the moon, conceived of as crescent-shaped like the horns of an ox and shining at the same time. The Sumerian epithet which literally means "growing horns" is sometimes translated into Akkadian by a word meaning "horned" and at other times by one meaning "radiant." The "veil" with which Moses covers his face when he is not reporting the divine command may also have a precedent in the idiom of Mesopotamian hymnography which uses a single term to describe the turban which surrounds the head of the High Priest, the "halo" around the divine statue, and the "corona" of cultivated land enveloping and sustaining the temple.

The Emergence of Israel

When Moses assumes the divinely assigned leadership role, the focus of the narrative shifts from the development of an individual to the birth of a nation or, in literary terms, from the level of biography to that of history. Correspondingly, the significant literary unit grows from the isolated topos to the complex of motifs which together constitute an entire type of narrative within a given larger genre, and fruitful comparison must move from the level of what may be called "topology" to that of typology. The narrative portions of Exodus include the common experience of the Egyptian oppression, the dramatic escape from Goshen and from the pursuing Egyptians, the first wanderings in Sinai, and the collective assent there to a code of laws – in short, all the constitutive elements of Israel's emergence except for the conquest of the Promised Land. These events run like colored threads through all the rest of biblical literature, becoming paradigms and archetypes for the biblical conception of all of Israelite history.

At the same time, they recur in no other Near Eastern historiography. True, the general phenomenon of large-scale ethnic movements characterizes the late thirteenth century B.C.E. throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, and there are heroic echoes of these migrations in the epics of various peoples. And Egyptian literature – in the form of model letters – attests, for the same period, to the concern for workmen and for straw to maintain the daily quota of brick production (cf. Exod. 5) and to the tight control exercised by Egypt over her eastern frontier, regulating the entry by tribes coming westward

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22Haran 1984b.
24See below, chapter VII.
across the Sinai desert in the face of drought in Palestine (Edom), or sending military search parties eastward into Sinai in pursuit of individual runaway slaves. 25 On a royal Egyptian stele, there is even a mention of Israel among the victims of Pharaoh Merneptah, toward the end of the thirteenth century 26 in what is certainly the earliest extra-biblical reference to Israel, and "the only instance known from an Egyptian text"; 27 in turn, the name of Merneptah is thought to survive in the toponym "the spring of Me-nephtoah" (Josh. 15:9; 18:15). But the specific events recorded by Exodus for Israel's history are not validated by independent testimony from any extra-biblical source. And no comparable events are claimed (or conceded) for any other people's history -- unless it be by the Bible itself (cf. Amos 9:7). No other people preserved a record of its own enslavement, or of "despoiling" its oppressors by stealth, or of its grudging farewell to the "fleshpots of Egypt" (16:3; cf. Num. 16:13 where Egypt is even referred to as a "land flowing with milk and honey"), or finally of its collective entry into a social compact. The very uniqueness of these narratives in the literary sense argues in favor of their authenticity; at least they are not imitations of foreign models. By contrast, the interpretations put on them were conceptualized and formulated in terms shared with the surrounding world, as we shall see.

First a word about the oppression. In Exodus itself, it is dealt with in an extremely cursory manner. The "storage cities" of Pithom and Raamses (i.e. Ramses) are mentioned as the ostensible objects of the Israelites' forced labor (1:11); they provide a precious clue -- possibly the sole clue -- to the historical context of the oppression, since the cities with which they can best be identified were built in the Eastern Delta under the first kings of the Nineteenth (First Ramesside) Dynasty in the thirteenth century B.C.E. 28 But the further details of the oppression, including Pharaoh's attempts to slay the male offspring and the increasing exactions of the foremen, are told in the context of Moses' biography (see above) and add little to the historical picture. It is in the legislative context, both inside and outside Exodus, that the oppression is most emphasized. The Decalogue insists "remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 5:15), and "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" is a refrain in all the other

25See below, Selection 19.
27Faulkner 1975:234.
law codes (22:20, 23:9; cf. Lev. 19:34, Deut. 10:19). The Bible elevates the theme of oppression to a typological level, justifying thereby the legal protection to be accorded to the stranger living in Israel’s midst or to the slave be he originally Israelite or stranger. Characteristically, the biblical legislation adds the stranger to the widow and orphan (e.g., 22:20f.), the two categories of unprotected classes traditionally the object of (royal) solicitude in the ancient Near East. Thus the memory of the oppression remains a living stimulus for a distinctive Israelite modification of an ancient Near Eastern concept of social justice.

If Exodus deals summarily with the oppression, it dwells elaborately on the negotiations to bring about the release. Moses and Aaron, assuming their first historical role, confront Pharaoh seven times and scourge Egypt with what were originally seven plagues (see Pss. 78 and 105); they became ten plagues when two discrete sources were combined into the final artful redaction, the form familiar from the liturgy of the Passover Haggadah. Whatever their precise number, nature or order, however, the plagues are less a historical than a literary phenomenon (cf. already I Sam 4:8). They are probably indebted to catalogues of calamities known from native Egyptian compositions, notably the "Admonitions of Ipuwer." These are usually assigned to the First Intermediate Period (ca. 2100 B.C.E.), less often to the Second Intermediate Period (ca. 1600 B.C.E.), but in any event draw a classic picture of a chain of ecological disasters overtaking the usually stable Egyptian society: the sand dunes advance over the arable land, the peasant abandons his plot in despair, the birth rate declines and the death rate increases, corpses are abandoned to the Nile yet its waters, thus polluted, are drunk for want of better; law and order break down. Such traditional evocations of Egyptian collapse can hardly be dissociated entirely from the stylized narrative of the ten plagues. It is somewhat less likely that it also owes something to the Akkadian omen literature, but that too is full of cliches descriptive of natural disasters.

The Exodus narrative climaxes in the slaying of the first-born, the dramatic crossing of the Reed Sea, and the rout of the pursuing Egyptians. A minor detail of the event may be preserved in a later allusion to the "mare in Pharaoh’s chariotry" (Song of Songs 1:9),

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30Havice 1978.
31Greenberg 1971.
32See below, Selection 20.
33Bell 1971; van Seters 1966:103-120.
presumably let loose against him in order to stampede his stallions—a military strategem which is already attested in an Egyptian inscription of the fifteenth century B.C.E.\textsuperscript{34} But for the rest, the narrative itself is not demonstrably indebted to any extra-biblical model. On the contrary, it served as the model for subsequent deliverances down to our own day.\textsuperscript{35} In line with repeated injunctions to instruct the next generation (12:27, 13:8, 13:14; cf. Deut. 6:21) it was made a prominent part of every narrative of the national experience, whether in prose (e.g. Num. 33; Deut. 26:1-11; Josh. 24) or in poetry (e.g. Psalms 78, 105f., 135f; Jer. 32:16-25). The memory of it was so effectively impressed on all posterity that it colored every subsequent crisis in the national experience. Every oppression was somehow regarded as another "Egypt," every liberation as a triumph over Pharaoh (cf., e.g., I Sam 6:6).\textsuperscript{36} And the mold was secondarily imposed also on prior events, notably Creation which the account of Genesis turned into a divine triumph over the waters of chaos.

But if the narrative of the Exodus was uniquely Israelite, the interpretation put on it by the Bible was, on the contrary, couched in traditional Near Eastern terms. The Song at the Sea, in its short form as attributed to Miriam (15:21) as well as in the longer form attributed to Moses (15:1-18), is ancient testimony to this interpretation. Regarded by some scholars as one of the earliest surviving monuments of Hebrew literature, it proclaims, in effect, that Israel saw in its dramatic deliverance the hand (intervention) of its God, who thereby was exalted to a status equal or superior to the gods of other nations (15:11), entitled to His own sanctuary (15:13, 17), and acknowledged by His people as king for ever after (15:18). The connection between the historical triumph of the people and the enthronement or exaltation of its deity is explicit here, in later biblical passages, and in post-biblical liturgy (the Kedushah).

The same connection is present in the Ugaritic epic of Baal, which dates back to the fourteenth century B.C.E. at least and recounts how, after defeating Mot and Yam, the embodiments of death and sea, Baal is elevated to the head of the pantheon and installed in a palace built

\textsuperscript{34}See below, Selection 22.

\textsuperscript{35}Cf. "Exodus 1948" for the name of a ship that brought remnants of European Jewry to Israel after World War II.

\textsuperscript{36}Especially the Babylonian exile and restoration; cf. e.g. Isaiah 51:9-11; Jeremiah 16:14f., 23:7f.; Ezekiel 20:32-44. On these prophetic passages see Ackroyd 1975:110f., 128-131, 238f. and literature cited there; on the last see also Greenberg 1983:360-388.
by the other gods.\textsuperscript{37} The connection is even more explicit in the Babylonian "Epic of Creation." Here Marduk achieves the status of first among the gods by successfully defeating an older generation of deities led by Tiamat, symbol of the watery deep, a feat no other god dared to undertake. From the carcass of the slain monster he creates an orderly cosmos, but the text lays far more stress on the resulting acclamation of Marduk by all the other gods, and their undertaking to erect a temple for him.\textsuperscript{38} This "exaltation of Marduk" almost certainly has a historical background, not, as used to be thought, the rise of Babylon (Marduk's city) to prominence under Hammurabi in the eighteenth century B.C.E., nor yet the reunification of Babylonia under the Kassites in the fifteenth, but most probably the recovery of the cult statue of Marduk from Elamite captivity at the end of the twelfth.\textsuperscript{39}

But the concept of divine exaltation was far older than this in Mesopotamia. As early as the twenty-third century B.C.E., the great Sargonic kings of Akkad forged the first Mesopotamian empire under the patronage of the goddess Inanna, and there is reason to believe that her elevation to the pinnacle of the Sumerian pantheon was celebrated in direct consequence of these political developments,\textsuperscript{40} and that other deities subsequently followed her example.\textsuperscript{41} The theological interpretation put on the Exodus was thus of a piece with the entire "typology of exaltation" which had evolved over the centuries in the Near East: the deity of a dynasty, a city or a people assumed his exalted place among all the gods as a consequence of the triumphs of his earthly proteges when these triumphs were attributed to him, i.e., when the proteges acknowledged their debt to him.\textsuperscript{42}

Concomitant with this general typology of divine exaltation was the belief in divine presence, symbolized at the Reed Sea and in the desert by the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night; after the departure from Mount Sinai, the divine presence was believed to reside in or sit (as if on a footstool) on the ark, which led the people in the battles of the conquest and eventually came to rest in the Temple of Solomon. Ancient Near Eastern armies similarly went into battle behind the symbols of their deities. This is abundantly clear from

\textsuperscript{37}Pritchard 1955:133f.; cf. Plaut 1981:494 = 1983:163. For "the view of the (Baal) cycle as the exaltation of Baal as king" see Mark Smith 1986:322 and 330f. with n.95.
\textsuperscript{38}See below, Selection 24.
\textsuperscript{39}Lambert 1964.
\textsuperscript{40}See below, Selection 23.
\textsuperscript{41}Hallo and van Dijk 1968. For the exaltation of Ninurta see van Dijk 1983.
\textsuperscript{42}Mann 1977.
pictorial representations, notably the winged sun-disc with the portrait of the god Assur repeatedly depicted in Assyrian reliefs, and corresponding standards carried in front of Assyrian armies or left by them in conquered cities as symbols of submission to the Assyrian god. At the same time, there may be a hint at a defiant distancing from the Near Eastern convention in the name Adonai-nissi, "the Lord is my banner" (17:15) by which the victory over Amalek was remembered.\(^{43}\)

**The Covenant at Sinai**

The consummate artist who was author or redactor of Exodus began with the genealogy of the sons of Jacob (1:1-7; cf. 6:14-26) and the biography of the children of Amram; he chronicled the climactic succession of events which led from oppression to freedom; and he will yet provide a legislative code to ensure that the new freedom be shared and respected for all future time. But now, in the middle of the book, he weaves together all these strands - biographical, historical, legislative - to create a true crescendo in the events at Mount Sinai. Whether he created the events as well is another question, though it must at least be noted that the narrative reformulations of the national experience elsewhere in the Bible omit them as regularly as they include the deliverance from Egypt (above).\(^{44}\)

The biographical element provides the prologue: Moses is reunited with his wife and children and with his Midianite father-in-law, here under the name of Jethro, whose timely counsel is willingly followed. The drama of the revelation ensues, first in oral form in the context of the theophany (ch. 19), then twice more in the form of the graven tablets (24:12-18 and 31:18). It fits into the typological pattern so far reconstructed, on the basis of Near Eastern parallels, on what may be called the "constitutional" level, in the sense both of a "constitutive" event in the continuing historical process of nation-building, and of a fundamental legislative enactment undergirding all more specific legislation. In both senses, the Decalogue seals the bargain struck at the Exodus: in return for God’s military intervention on their behalf, the Israelites obligate themselves to become His people (3:12, 6:7, etc.). Freed from enslavement to Pharaoh, Israel transfers its allegiance to its divine liberator, entering into a relationship with potential analogies to several Near Eastern models.

\(^{43}\)Ibid., esp. ch. 3 and pp. 265ff., figs. 1-3.

On one interpretation, the relationship created at Sinai was that between master and slave, and indeed "worship" (of God) and "enslavement" (to man) are expressed by the same root ("BD") in biblical Hebrew. The same ambiguity can be noted in other Semitic languages where, for example, Akkadian and Aramaic "fear, reverence" and Arabic "peasant" derive from a common root ("PLH"). Another theory holds that the relationship created at Sinai was that between a king and his people, as documented at the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E. especially under the Amorite dynasts of Mesopotamia. These kings regularly proclaimed a release from debt slavery shortly after their coronation and sometimes coupled this proclamation with the promulgation of a code of laws "so that the strong might not oppress the weak," to quote the Laws of Hammurapi. Since God was elevated to kingship over His people at the Reed Sea (above), the proclamation of the Decalogue and more especially the Covenant Code (21-24) could be the logical next step in line with Near Eastern precedent, albeit of an earlier age.

The most widely held view of the matter today is that the covenant at Sinai casts God and Israel in the role of sovereign (suzerain) and vassal. This is a relationship attested by the so-called suzerainty treaties which, like the Exodus, are dated precisely to the end of the Late Bronze Age. Such treaties are best known from examples preserved in the royal archives of the Hittite capital at Hattusha in Anatolia (modern Turkey), but were common throughout the Near East in the late fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C.E. Some points of comparison between the Decalogue and the suzerainty treaties may be noted, especially where they contrast with the contemporaneous parity treaties (i.e., treaties between kingdoms of equal rank) and with the vassal treaties of the first millennium B.C.E.

The actual provisions of the suzerainty treaty are regularly preceded by a preamble including a historical prologue designed to justify the suzerainty relationship and to outlaw any future breach of it by the vassal. The body of the treaty provides for its public reading and for depositing it in the temple, and the conclusion invokes the gods of the vassal as witnesses and guarantors of his future obedience, on

46Cf. the double sense of cultus as "work" (e.g. in "agriculture") and "worship."
pain of dreadful curses subscribed to in formal oaths to the accompaniment of special sacrifices. Most of these elements recur in connection with the Decalogue. God's sovereignty is justified by His role in Israel's history in general (as this is detailed by "credal" synopses like Josh. 24:2-15) and in the Exodus in particular. So in the first commandment, which is less commandment than prologue and, grammatically speaking, probably not even a separate sentence from the second commandment (Christian exegesis, in fact, counts first and second commandment as one, and arrives at ten commandments by dividing the last commandment or, in some traditions, the second, in two). The Decalogue is engraved in stone and deposited in the ark (and ultimately in the Temple), heaven and earth are called upon as witnesses (cf. Deut. 4:26, 30:19, 31:28), and after suitable sacrifices the twelve tribes swear to "do and obey" all of the covenant (24:4-7). By contrast, the vassal treaties of the first millennium largely dispense with the legitimizing prologue, are far more apodictic (unconditional) in their provisions, and rely for their enforcement on more elaborate curses catalogued in lurid detail. As for the contemporaneous parity treaties, they refer to the contracting parties as "brothers," in contrast to the "father-son" relationship which the vassal accords to his sovereign (cf. 4:22f.).

What then of the Book of the Covenant (NJV: "record of the covenant"; see 24:7) itself? It is a collection of "precedents" (NJV: "rules"; see 21:1, 24:3) of which a few are phrased apodictically (i.e., in the form of peremptory commands or prohibitions like the Decalogue), and a few more in participial form (notably 21:12, 15-17; 22:17-19). But the bulk is formulated as conditional sentences in the manner of the conditional or casuistic legislation known from the Near East in half a dozen major collections dating from the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age to the end of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 2100-1200 B.C.E.). It might thus be thought that the Book of the Covenant has adopted a form current in the time of the Exodus just as the Decalogue did. But the matter is not so simple, for in this case the comparison extends beyond form to content. Numerous specific provisions have precise counterparts in the cuneiform legislation. Where the

50 Sometimes regarded as a "renewal of the treaty" at Sinai; cf. also I Sam. 12:6-12; Neh. 9; Pss. 78, 105f., 135f.
51 Cf. Moran 1967. For the notion of a whole genre of decalogues (i.e. commandments grouped in sets of ten), see especially Morgenstern 1955.
52 See below, ch. VIII.
comparison is with the famous Laws of Hammurabi,\textsuperscript{53} one could perhaps appeal to the demonstrable and lasting fame of that corpus within Mesopotamia to account for the possibility that it was known also beyond Mesopotamia; where the comparison is with Hittite\textsuperscript{54} or Middle Assyrian laws,\textsuperscript{55} one might be tempted to argue from their relatively late date to the feasibility of their being borrowed in Israel. But what are we to make of provisions shared with "codes" neither so famous nor so recent as these, like those of King Ur-Nammu of Ur, King Lipit-Ishtar of Isin, or of an as yet unidentified Old Babylonian king of Eshunna beyond the Tigris (ca. 1800 B.C.E.)? The last, in particular, has revealed the existence of a provision for the case of an ox goring another ox which is not only absent from the corresponding legislation about the goring ox by Hammurabi, but so close in letter and spirit to Exodus 21:35f. as to virtually rule out the chance that both traditions independently arrived at this truly Solomonic judgement.\textsuperscript{56}

We are thus forced to conclude that the Book of the Covenant included wise legal precedents from a period when knowledge of them could still have passed freely to both ends of the Fertile Crescent. The period of the Amorite migrations at the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E. comes to mind in this connection. This granted, the appearance of similarly formulated legislation in Deuteronomy (19-25) may be seen as an attempt to preserve more of the common Amorite heritage, with the portion in Exodus concentrating more on topics suggested by the context into which it was inserted. The period of the desert wanderings would, for example, justify the emphasis on family law, while property law, only that relating to livestock would be called for in detail; regulations such as those for the seventh year (23:10f.) here merely anticipate the elaborate prescriptions of Lev. 25 and Deut. 15.\textsuperscript{57} The recent experience of bondage would suggest the laws regulating slavery, and others of a general humanitarian cast. The connection of the legislation to the oppression is indeed drawn


\textsuperscript{55}Pritchard 1955:180-188. Cf. e.g. Walters 1970 note 5 and below, Selection 63.


\textsuperscript{57}A parallel of sorts is suggested for the period of Amorite rule in Babylonia, when fields were normally rented for six years; cf. Butz 1979:301-304.
explicitly and repeatedly (see above) and differentiates the biblical case law from its Near Eastern cognates. A law such as that limiting the distraint of garments taken in pledge for loans (22:25f.; cf. Deut. 24:10-13) is known nowhere else in the Near East but has an analogue in a Hebrew letter excavated south of Jaffa in 1960.\textsuperscript{58} The real legislative concern is with the Tabernacle, and this forms a fitting conclusion to the book.

The Tabernacle

The balance of the Book of Exodus is largely devoted to the Tabernacle and its personnel, first as divinely commanded (25-30) and then as executed (35-40).\textsuperscript{59} The structure is explained as a portable sanctuary to serve during the period of wandering, or until a permanent house (cf. 1 Kings 8:12f.) could be erected for the deity. So much attention to a temporary disposition seems hard to justify on simple considerations of narrative structure. And indeed critics have been quick to regard the material as a late, priestly interpolation intended to endow the later temple at Jerusalem with the antiquity and hence the authority implied by attaching it directly to the revelation at Sinai. But comparative literary considerations counsel a different assessment.

We have already seen that the covenant at Sinai sealed the bargain struck at the Exodus: God became, in a legal sense, the new master of the slaves He had freed or, in a political sense, the sovereign of the vassal nation which He had forged. But in a literary and theological sense, one further debt remained to be paid: the time-honored Near Eastern typology of exaltation required that the newly enthroned king have a house of his own, erected for him by his subjects. The other gods carry out the work in the Ugaritic epic of Baal (see above) and in the Babylonian "Epic of Creation," where they build for Marduk the great temple Esagila, with the ziggurat (stepped tower) that may have become the model for the "Tower of Babel" (Gen. 11). In both of these compositions, and several others, the building of the victorious deity's house (i.e., his temple) is the climax of the epic. So far from being a subsidiary motif, it is the denouement toward which all the action moves, the visible symbol of the exalted status that the divine protagonist sought and achieved.

\textsuperscript{58}See below, Selection 28.
\textsuperscript{59}For biblical and extra-biblical parallels to such "prescriptive" and "descriptive rituals" respectively, see below, ch. VII and Plaut 1981:679 = 1983:424 ("Repetition as a literary device").
Thus the Tabernacle fills a traditional place in the literary structure of Exodus. Nevertheless, it again displays very distinctive elements that set it apart from its Near Eastern models, above all its connection with the Sabbath. In the sense of a consecrated day recurring with uninterrupted regularity and free from ties to lunar phases or any other natural phenomena, the Sabbath is a uniquely Israelite innovation. No convincing parallels have been found for it in the surrounding Near East, while on the other hand its influence is manifest in many biblical contexts.\[^{60}\] It is woven into the warp and woof of the Exodus, first as a memorial to the Egyptian oppression (cf. Deut. 5:15) and to the deliverance from it (cf. the liturgy); then as a feature of the desert wanderings in connection with the manna (16:22-31); finally in the fourth commandment where the six days of creation are invoked retroactively as a model for the solemn injunction to labor for six days (and cease on the seventh). And via creation, the Tabernacle too is tied to the sabbatical idea. The prescriptions for building the Tabernacle are revealed to Moses on the seventh day after he has spent six days on the mountain (24:16), and the description of the construction is concluded by Moses completing his work (40:33), beholding and blessing it (39:43), and hallowing it (40:9) in terms echoing almost verbatim God's consummation of creation (Gen. 1:31-3:3).\[^{61}\] The laws of the Sabbath are, not surprisingly, the first ones that intrude into the long narrative of the Tabernacle (31:12-17).

In light of the comparable literary patterns, then, the Book of Exodus forms a coherent unit, moving ever upward, from slavery to freedom, from biography to history, from legal and political levels of meaning to esthetic and ethical planes, from the intercession of the man Moses to the abiding involvement of God.

\[^{60}\text{Hallo 1977.}\]