From Temple to Tent:
The Cultic World of Diaspora Israelites
(Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28)

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ABSTRACT

The tent of meeting text (Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28) is lengthy and sophisticated by literary standards, thereby suggesting that intensive creativity has gone into its production. A review of literature from the early 1800s in Germany through to today observes that no extensive work focuses on the tent of meeting (אהל מועד) AND cult (Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28) and that this is a lacuna.

The methodology follows that of three exegetical chapters; the tent of meeting text is described and then discussed in dialogue with other scholars. Israelite cult is addressed as cultic place in Exodus 25–40, instructions for cultic practice in Leviticus 1–27 and defining of the cultic people in Numbers 1:1–10:28. The major outcome is that mimesis (representation taking the place of reality) is the key concept to understanding the text.

Informed by Paul Ricoeur’s theory on mimesis, the hypothesis is developed, “Exilic Israelite communities in the Diaspora in Babylonia want a cultic place and cannot have a temple, so they create and author the idea of ‘the tent of meeting’ which substitutes as a cultic centre.” The hypothesis is broken down into an investigation of three areas: life in the Israelite settlements in the Babylonian Diaspora, literary competency, and mimetic text as a substitution for reality.

On the basis of these investigations, production of the tent of meeting text by an Israelite writing circle in the Babylonian Diaspora and in the exilic or early Persian period is feasible. The tent of meeting text is creatively authored to substitute for an actual physical temple outside of the land of Israel. The implications of the findings of the thesis are that the tent, furnished like a temple, resembles a temple-tent. An Israelite cultic world is written into textual form.
Declaration / Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of diploma in any university or other institution and affirm that to the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed:

Date:
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I left New Zealand in the 1970s there was no Department of Theology at the University of Auckland. By the mid 1990s when I returned to Auckland, theology was available thanks to the Auckland Consortium of Theological Education, a group of theological colleges which had combined resources. I recognise the influence of the many lecturers who formed my biblical and theological thought through the courses that I took. Librarians at the libraries of the colleges, of what is now a former consortium, continue to facilitate the loan, even the ordering of new books and the photocopying of relevant articles.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

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<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Anchor Bible</td>
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<td>ABD</td>
<td>Anchor Bible Dictionary</td>
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<td>AnBib</td>
<td>Analecta biblica</td>
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<td>ANET</td>
<td>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</td>
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<td>AOAT</td>
<td>Alter Orient und Altes Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Biblical Archaeologist</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBB</td>
<td>Bonner biblische Beiträge</td>
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<tr>
<td>BETL</td>
<td>Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologarum lovaniensium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BN</td>
<td>Biblische Notizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BWANT</td>
<td>Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZA W</td>
<td>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
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<tr>
<td>CaE</td>
<td>Cahiers évangile</td>
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<tr>
<td>CahRB</td>
<td>Cahiers de la Revue biblique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td>COS</td>
<td>The Context of Scripture</td>
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<tr>
<td>EncJud</td>
<td>Encyclopaedia Judaica</td>
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<tr>
<td>ER</td>
<td>The Encyclopedia of Religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAT</td>
<td>Forschungen zum Alten Testament</td>
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<td>FAT</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOTL</td>
<td>Forms of the Old Testament Literature</td>
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<td>FRLANT</td>
<td>Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUCA</td>
<td>Hebrew Union College Annual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBC</td>
<td>Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISBE</td>
<td>International Standard Bible Dictionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAOS</td>
<td>Journal of the American Oriental Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
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<td>JPS 1917</td>
<td>Jewish Publication Society, The Holy Scriptures (Old Testament), 1917</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSOTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEAEHL</td>
<td>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</td>
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</table>
NIDB  The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible
NJPS  New Jewish Publication Society 1985
OBO   Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OIP   Oriental Institute Publications
OTL   Old Testament Library
OUP   Oxford University Press
SBL   Society of Biblical Literature
SBLSymS Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBT   Studies in Biblical Theology
ScrHier Scripta hierosolymitana
TDNT  Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TDOT  Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TLOT  Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament
TRu   Theologische Rundschau
TZ    Theologische Zeitschrift
URJ   Union for Reform Judaism
VT    Vetus Testamentum
VTSup Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WMANT Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZAW   Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZTK   Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche
Introduction

Approaching the kami (gods) at a shrine entails danger—warns a guide to Japan in its introduction to Shinto.

Whether one could safely be in the kami’s presence depends on one’s state of purity—the overriding concern in Shinto. Priests and others who participate in rites undergo days of purification, avoiding contact with sex, birth, menstruation, and death. (Blood and death are especially polluting.) White robes, water, saké and salt symbolise ritual purity. The sacred ground of a shrine precinct is delimited by rope, gates, fences and expanses of white gravel. Most Japanese who are in mourning or otherwise ritually polluted will not cross these boundaries.¹

In many ways the short introduction to Shinto resembles what could be a short introduction to the world centred round YHWH and the tent complex in Exodus 25 through Leviticus into Numbers 10. People, rites and holy place are inexplicably linked in both cases. The tent complex of the Hebrew Bible, with the tabernacle at its centre, is sacred ground. Passing through entrance hangings in the tent complex is to pass from one delimited zone into the next. Much of Leviticus gives insight into the Israelite concern with purity and defilement both on an individual and communal level. Concepts of purity and defilement belong to daily Hebrew life. They are related to holiness, as prescribed in the text of the tent of meeting. In Hebrew rites offerings are brought to the altar. In certain rites blood is sprinkled. Blood from the sacrificial animals purifies and makes holy. Holiness is associated with proximity to YHWH. The centre of holiness draws the attention of the seeker into the interior world of the tent and at the same time the power of YHWH is conveyed as dangerous.

To examine the identity of a people, their rites and the sacred place of their God, is to investigate cult. Cult is defined as, “a system of religious worship, especially as expressed in ceremonies and ritual” in *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, and derives from the Latin verb, *colere*, to inhabit, cultivate, protect, or honour with worship. The idea of systems, implying the ability to define or systematise theology, is more typical for Western than Semitic thought. Cult is understood in this work as a way of life, not systematised beliefs; the word theology is therefore rarely used. The Hebrew text conveys an Israelite cultic world centred round YHWH. The Israelites are the cultic people of YHWH (the people who adhere to YHWH). The tent complex is the cultic (worship) centre of YHWH’s people. The performance of cultic (ritual worship) rites is an expression of the relationship between YHWH and YHWH’s people. To enter the Hebrew texts on the tent of meeting is to enter an Israelite cultic world.

My understanding of the Hebrew text, Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28, is informed by textual research and what other people have written about the tent of meeting. The process of reading and reviewing scholarly works is to indirectly touch the society and philosophic trends which influence each scholar’s thought, and even their personality preferences. For example, Wilhelm de Wette has a sense for the artistic nature of the Hebrew text, yet Julius Wellhausen seems to have an abhorrence of legislation though he reads the Hebrew text closely.

My insights into the biblical text on the tent complex grow too out of the formation that many people have given me and experiences that I have had in different cultures. At bed-time as a child, my father read poetry to me. Over many years at odd moments, the rhythmic and meaningless but somehow meaningful verses come to me:

They went to sea in a sieve, they did,
    In a sieve they went to sea:
    In spite of all their friends could say,
    On a winter’s morn, on a stormy day,

In a sieve, they went to sea.⁴

Against this childhood background of verse I realise that repetitions, word inversions and linguistic changes in biblical passages, fascinate rather than irritate me:

The Israelites had done all of the work
Just as the Lord had commanded Moses.
When Moses saw that they had done all the work
Just as the Lord had commanded,
He blessed them. (Exodus 39:42-43)

Or,

These are the appointed festivals of the Lord
That you shall proclaim as holy convocation,
My appointed festivals. (Leviticus 23:2b)

Such biblical passages are poetic—elevated language—having rhythm even in translation.

It would have been difficult to make some of the discoveries in the biblical text without an experience of the Ignatian exercises. The *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, developed in the early 1500s, call for what is known as the “Application of the Senses” to certain stages of prayer.⁵ The senses of inner hearing and seeing through the imagination are recommended in the exercises in the first week, then later in the second week are added the senses of taste, smell and touch. Without an Ignatian formation I doubt whether I would have been sensitive to the invitation to explore the senses in the world of the tent complex.

An important socio-cultural experience for me was living in Japan for several years, the only time I have lived outside Western culture. It gave me a bird’s eye view of the West, allowing

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me to peer at the Western world from the outside. I recognised the defining nature of western European societies with their roots in Greek thought: “what is this, and what is that?” In Japan, my essays were returned with red lines and arrows demonstrating that Western logic did not work within the structures of Japanese language. Some years later on a return to Japan, I visited with a Japanese friend one of my favourite shrines, Utskushimi Jinja at Miyajima, close to Hiroshima. I sensed how much my friend’s spirit was deep at home in the grounds of the shinto. Actions such as rinsing the mouth with pure water from a bamboo ladle from the well at the entrance gate, clapping the hands before the central shrine, putting money into the gift box, giving a nod as a gesture of deference and backing away, were all part of standard rituals at the shrine. The Way of the Gods, Shinto, is not a defined faith or religion. It is a way of being, a way of life, a way of being Japanese. The Japan experiences give me a respect for the Hebrew Bible, not in the first instance as a religion defined or as the book of a faith, but as a way of life.

The text of the tent of meeting is lengthy, complex, and sophisticated. Extensive creative energy has gone into its production. On an intuitive level I have thought the text must therefore have an extraordinary importance. This is the underlying thought that has driven and carried me in study of the tent of meeting text. With this background, my entry into the text, Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28, is with the tent of meeting as the key focus.

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is the English Bible translation used in this work. Occasionally another English translation is used in which case the change in English translation is noted.

The Literature Review of chapter one starts with Wilhelm de Wette’s research on the tent of meeting in the early 1800s in Germany and moves to contemporary research in Europe and North America. Chapter two, Boundaries, gives reasons for the external textual boundaries of the tent of meeting text as Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 and for the internal coherence of the text.
Chapters three to five are an exegesis and description of the biblical text: Exodus 24:15–40:38 in chapter three, primarily Leviticus 1–16 of Leviticus 1–27 in chapter four, and Numbers 1:1–10:28 in chapter five. The methodology is to describe the text as one would an artifact such as a Greek vase. Major aspects of the textual evidence are used for the purposes of this work. Chapters three to five follow the format of a brief structural overview of the biblical book concerned and proceed in two sections; in section A, major features of the textual evidence are presented and in section B the major features are discussed in dialogue with other scholars.

Mimesis is the key word used to describe the textual evidence of chapter three to five. In chapter six the theory of mimesis is developed. It is a bridging chapter and functions to move discussion from the level of textual evidence to the world and context of the communities which participated in production of the text and were the first generations of addressees. The following hypothesis is formulated after a discussion of theories of mimesis and the evidence of chapters three to five:

**Exilic Israelite communities in the Diaspora in Babylonia want a cultic place and cannot have a temple, so they create and author the idea of “the tent of meeting” which substitutes as a cultic centre.**

The hypothesis is broken down into three parts for investigation. Chapter seven, “An Israelite Writing Circle: In the Babylonian Diaspora,” investigates facets of life for Diaspora Israelites in Babylonia on a socio-historical level. Chapter eight, “Creative Authoring: The Temple-Tent Text,” looks at the authoring or writing process and the textual creation of the tent of meeting. Chapter nine, “Cultic World of the Book: From a Real to an Imaginary Temple,” demonstrates how a mimetic text on the tent of meeting has deep roots in reality and becomes an Israelite cultic world written into textual form.

The tent of meeting text, Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28, is understood through two lenses, through the ears as an oral text and through the eyes as a physical text. One reading is through the lens of a reader, that is, someone who has access to a physical form of the text, words on a page. The other form of reception is through listening and within the Israelite community. Oral
reception alone of the text was common in times when the majority of people did not have a physical form of the text. They learnt of the concept of the tent of meeting and its cultic world through the Israelite communities amidst which they lived. This lens is used particularly in chapter six, where the socio-historical context of the Israelites in the Babylonian Diaspora is investigated. The text is both a physical text, and an oral text. Before ready access to physical texts, the cultic world of the tent of meeting was transmitted and known almost solely as an oral text. In both cases, the text is primarily one of Israelite communities.

The period of the oral text of the tent of meeting starts in the Babylonian Diaspora. Initially, Israelite cultic text is the living memories of Jerusalem and temple cult among the Israelites. These memories are collected, grow into an oral text and are written down. They gradually become not only an oral text but also a physical text. There are many years of overlap between the different stages of the process, from living memories of the Jerusalem temple, to the oral and physical text of the tent of meeting. Receivers of and participators in the oral text are the Israelites living in Israelite communities. For the purposes of this work, the word listener is associated more with oral text, and reader associated more with physical or written text. Both readers and listeners are receivers of the text of the tent of meeting, and invited to participate in the world represented by the text.
Chapter 1

Literature Review

Silencing the Tent of Meeting

Biblical texts relating to the tent of meeting and its associated ritual and social world (Exodus 25 through Leviticus to the book of Numbers 10) are marked with a mere biblical reference, dash and section title and thereby silenced through omission in Otto Eissfeldt’s *Hexateuch-Synopse*, first published in 1922.¹ Fifty two biblical chapters are notated in the synopsis as ten sections of text with no more recognition than a heading such as “Exodus 25:1–31:17, Das Stiftshütten-Gesetz,” or “Numbers 1:1–10:10, Letzte Ereignisse und Verordnungen am Sinai,” and left out. In this manner fifty two biblical chapters are omitted from his synopsis of the Hexateuch. The reasons, as follow, are questionable.

The aim of Eissfeldt’s synopsis is to demonstrate that the hypothetical four sources within the Hexateuch are separate, independent narrative units.² The hypothesis works with narrative units. Firstly, text in the Hexateuch that is not regarded as narrative, such as law collections, is not treated as valid material for the synopsis.³ Secondly, narratives that have no parallels in other sources are omitted.⁴ On this basis, Eissfeldt eliminates extensive narrative sections from the priestly source from his synopsis such as Tabernacle Laws (Exodus 25:1–31:17), Assemblage of the Tabernacle (Exodus 35–40), or Last Events and Instructions at Sinai

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¹ Otto Eissfeldt, *Hexateuch-Synopse: Die Erzählung der 5 Bücher Mose und des Buches Josua mit dem Anfange des Richterbuches. In Ihre 4 Quellen Zerlegt* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), 153*, 159*-60*. (Eissfeldt’s *Hexateuch-Synopse* is in two parts. The synoptic section is the second of the two parts; its pages are marked with a page number and an asterisk to differentiate it from the first part of the work. Asterisks and page numbers are therefore used here to denote the pages of the synopsis section of the book.)
² Eissfeldt, *Hexateuch-Synopse*, xii.
⁴ Eissfeldt, *Hexateuch-Synopse*, xi, these sections can, “zumal sie größtenteils in den anderen Quellen keine Parallelen haben, vernachlässigt werden.”
(Numbers 10:1–10:10). According to Eissfeldt, most narratives between Exodus 25 and Numbers 10 do not have parallels in other sources. They are therefore disregarded and not deemed pertinent to his synopsis. However, when reading Eissfeldt’s synopsis it is readily apparent that frequently narratives found in the J source or the E source have no parallels in other sources yet they appear in the synopsis. Eissfeldt does not abide by his criteria for the inclusion of material into his synopsis, the occurrence of parallel narratives between sources. P narratives with no parallels in other sources are omitted from the synopsis but J or E narratives with no parallels in other sources are included in the synopsis. Eissfeldt juggles the biblical evidence to support his hypothesis.

Eissfeldt’s interest behind the synopsis is in establishing two strands in the Yahwist source, an older lay strand and a Yahwist strand. The priestly writings, especially those on the tabernacle, do not fit with Eissfeldt’s interests. A. de Pury and T. Römer speak of source criticism methodologically a dead-end and give Eissfeldt’s *Hexateuch-Synopse* as one of the worst examples.5

The “omission of” the extensive tabernacle texts is apparent again more recently in a collection of 23 essays edited by John Day and published as *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*.6 Ezekiel’s temple, notions of temple in prophetic literature, Solomon’s temple and David’s temple in 2 Chronicles are addressed in Day’s collection but not the portable tent with temple characteristics of the wilderness. One might argue that the theme of temple treats real temples not fictive temples, but if Ezekiel’s vision of a temple features then no essay on the

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tent complex with temple characteristics of Exodus through to the book of Numbers is a gap in Day’s collection.

On a different but related note, two articles deal with the ark in Day’s collection but it is the ark of Solomon’s temple and Noth’s notion of the Deuteronomistic history; the ark of the tent of meeting in the so-called priestly writings gets no more than a footnote despite an abundance of biblical text that pertains to it. Furthermore, one would think that, in a cultic or worship sense, an altar is more important to a temple than an ark. If the Old Testament is read without the cultic texts of Leviticus 1–10 or descriptions of liturgical furnishings as in Exodus 35–40, little information is available in the rest of the Hebrew Bible to elucidate cultic activity at Israelite temples or sanctuaries. No article on the tabernacle and cultic texts is a lacuna in Day’s collection and provokes the question whether they are still an anathema in some areas of scholarship.

Scholarly work on the tabernacle and cult before 1990 that is frequently quoted and cited is reviewed in the following section. Literature on the tent of meeting is presented in three periods:

A. From the 1800s to Post-World War I (1919)
B. From Post-World War I (1919) to 1990
C. 1990 to the present day.

Most biblical research from the 1800s to 1990 is diachronic and more recent research is synchronic. The terminology of diachronic and synchronic, process and product, permits a twofold division of approaches to the Pentateuch. Diachronic is understood as pertaining to the historical development of text through time, the process a text undergoes in its production. Synchronic pertains to the state of a text at one particular time, and focuses on the text as

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product, as a literary unit. Saussure used the analogy of a tree trunk in relation to the terms synchronic and diachronic; a vertical cut is diachronic and a horizontal cut is synchronic.\textsuperscript{8}

The question posed of the scholarly literature reviewed is, “What does a scholar add to or confirm regarding research on the wilderness tent and cult?” The literature review does not claim to be exhaustive and review everything that has been written on the wilderness tent. It seeks to review literature considered influential or representative of approaches to the subject. Rudolf Smend,\textsuperscript{9} Lothar Perlitt\textsuperscript{10} and John Rogerson\textsuperscript{11} are some scholars who have extensively assessed and written on what they regard as influential former biblical scholars. Their assessments are taken as a guideline for what can be considered major biblical literature prior to World War I.

Three of the major biblical scholars of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century are Wilhelm de Wette, Wilhelm Vatke and Julius Wellhausen. They studied and wrote, influenced by the intellectual environment of their time: the romanticism and nationalism of Herder (1744-1803), the historical philosophical theories of Hegel (1770-1831), or the philosophic systems of Kant (1724-1804) in Germany. Smend characterises the different research approaches of the three scholars as follows—de Wette is described as pursuing the meaning of the text to an almost destructive degree and free of a systematic philosophical frame-work, Vatke as influenced by the historical philosophical ideas of Hegel, and Wellhausen as making a historical synthesis of biblical material without being confined by a specific philosophic system.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Lothar Perlitt, \textit{Vatke und Wellhausen} (BZA 94; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1965).
\textsuperscript{12} My paraphrasing of Smend, “De Wette,” 115, “1. die ohne systematische philosophische Voraussetzungen durch die Intention der Texte bestimmte destruierende Analyse (de Wette); 2. die historische Synthese unter Benutzung der Geschichtsphilosophie Hegels (Vatke); 3. die vom philosophischen System befreite historische Synthese (Wellhausen).”
A. From the 1800s to Post-World War I (1919)

Wilhelm de Wette (1780-1849)

De Wette’s early research in his two volume work *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (1806-07) looks at the inner biblical relationship between three blocks of text: Chronicles, Samuel–Kings and the Pentateuch. He observes considerable differences between the three groups of texts. In Samuel–Kings, there is little mention of levitical ceremonies, scant adherence to levitical laws, and David demonstrates a non-priestly freedom towards cult when the ark is brought up to Jerusalem. In contrast Chronicles abounds with mention of Levites and the cult is presented as levitical and Mosaic. Samuel–Kings has little Mosaic awareness and levitical reference in contrast to Chronicles. Based on these observations, de Wette views Chronicles as a more recent text and as an expansion of Samuel–Kings using literary forms of embellishment.

Against the background of Chronicles and Samuel–Kings, the quantity of material dedicated to law, Levites, a cultic edifice and cult is striking in the third block of material, the Pentateuch. De Wette observes the quantity of detail for the making of liturgical utensils and extensive cultic legislation relating to the tabernacle tent in Exodus–Leviticus. He notes differences between Samuel–Kings and Exodus–Leviticus, such as no description of the inside of the Davidic tent or information about its construction in Samuel–Kings yet much on the internal decoration of the tent of meeting in Exodus–Leviticus. Or, the tent of meeting reflects an unusual level of artistic skill and costly materials compared to Solomon’s temple or David’s tent. Valuable metals, textiles and dyes are available within the Israelite camp in the wilderness for construction and realization of the tent of meeting, yet in contrast wood has to be imported from Tyre in Phoenicia for Solomon’s temple. Gifted artists are available within

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14 De Wette, *Beiträge*, 1:5-9, 245.
the Israelite camp to realise construction of the tent and all the necessary liturgical furniture and utensils, but Solomon has to bring in artists from outside the Israelite community. The construction of Solomon’s temple takes several years but the realization of the tent of meeting only a few months despite the difference in artistic sophistication. Exodus and Leviticus have much material on the cult, be it building, sacrifices, or the cult itself but Samuel and Kings are sparse in their description of the cult in comparison.

For de Wette, two biblical passages indicate the possible existence of an old or historical tent of meeting, prior to the tent of meeting of Exodus–Leviticus. One is an account, with what he calls legend-like characteristics, of a tent pitched by David in preparation for the arrival of the ark, reflecting the possibility of some Mosaic tabernacle in the past. Another is the story of a tent erected outside the camp (Exodus 32–34) that de Wette calls “its own fragment,” and quite different to the highly ornate tent of Exodus 25–30 and 35–40. De Wette concludes that of the ornate tent of Moses only the title, tent of meeting, is Mosaic and historical and that the tent of Exodus 25–31, 35–40 may perhaps have been modelled on the tent of David.

The highly ornate tent of meeting of Exodus suggests a high degree of artistic skill and the use of rare and expensive materials, yet there is no historical evidence of any kind for the cultic tent.16 Although biblical accounts of structures similar to the tent of meeting exist, de Wette describes them as literary embellishments of earlier material. He finds it odd that the wilderness tent of early times is more sumptuous than the more recent tent of David.

According to de Wette, the biblical authors turn older material into mythic form. Even if there were historical elements in the original stories, de Wette claims the historical parts can no longer be sieved out of the mythic texture. The Pentateuch stands as a whole, old history in poetic form, with mythic meaning and mythic roots. He describes it as the “religious poetry of the Israelites.”17

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16 De Wette, Beiträge, 1:258-61.
17 De Wette, Beiträge, 2:398.
To summarise, as a result of comparing three blocks of different biblical material de Wette concludes that the wilderness tent text is late biblical material, probably exilic, and more recent than Samuel–Kings and Chronicles. He talks of the wilderness tent as a fantasy building and mythic writing, which he understands as a form of Israelite religious poetry. For de Wette, Israelite authors create myths out of their stories and traditions. It is religious not historical writing.

**Wilhelm Vatke (1806-82)**

In contrast to de Wette’s inner-biblical method, Vatke’s *Die Biblische Theologie Wissenschaftlich Dargestellt* is an historical philosophical approach. The dominating historical interest is apparent in its three sections: a lengthy first and third section discussing biblical theology, influenced by the philosophy of Hegel, and the actual biblical section in the middle. The biblical section works through eight periods in Israeliite history starting with the Mosaic and ending with the Macedonian/Maccabean period. He deals with the wilderness tabernacle indirectly when focusing on the ark, cherubim and curtain of the sanctuary of the temple of Solomon. Vatke’s interest is dating and cultural such as indications of Egyptian or Phoenician influence on Hebrew culture. He concludes that the account of the Mosaic tabernacle and the ark of the covenant are literary creations, inspired by the temple of Solomon and that the shape of the tabernacle and its tent coverings show Phoenician, not Egyptian influence.

**Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918)**

Wellhausen treats the Pentateuch and Joshua as one large narrative unit (called the Hexateuch) in his influential book, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*. As the title of the book

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20 Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Charleston SC: Bibliobazaar, 2007), 28; repr. of *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies, with preface by
suggests, Wellhausen’s interest is historical. He differentiates between what he understands as the actual history of Israelite cult and the manner and order in which history is presented in the Bible.\textsuperscript{21} He develops the theory that the Hexateuch is made up of literary strata with different themes and that the Deuteronomist, Priestly, Jehovist and Elohist sources correlate to different periods of actual Israelite history.

Passages on the tabernacle are found within the Priestly Code, typified for Wellhausen by legislation with material such as Exodus 25–40 (chapters 32–34 excluded), Leviticus and Numbers 1–10, 15, 19, 25, 36.\textsuperscript{22} He describes the literature of the Priestly Code stylistically as having a propensity for numbers, measurement, formulae, recurring phrases and turns of expression and a pedantic style. The Priestly Code for him is different to the other literary strata in that it has a contained feeling. The wandering Israelites are kept within the confines of the wilderness and the contents are set in the time of Moses. Noteworthy for Wellhausen is the quantity of priestly in relation to non-priestly legislation. Details of the portable tabernacle and wandering camp for him are archaic. This leads him to see the priestly material text as a mix of the old and the new despite the impression of one single sanctuary.

Wellhausen dates the Priestly Code as post-exilic, more recent therefore than the Yahwist and Deuteronomy documents. Unity of the cult is assumed and thereby one place only of valid cultic practice is suggested.\textsuperscript{23} In the Priestly Code the cult is centralised and in contrast to the stories of the patriarchs of the Yahwist-Elohist Document where no organised priesthood or ritual is related. Wellhausen describes the patriarchal material as “spontaneous religion” and assigns it as the first stage of Israelite history.\textsuperscript{24} The next stage, Deuteronomy and the deuteronomistic history, concerns monarchy and the centralization of the cult with Josiah’s reform and is dated as late 7th century BCE. Wellhausen treats the Priestly Code with its strong focus on centralised ritual and priesthood as the most recent document.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{21} Rogerson, “Modern World,” 110.
\textsuperscript{22} Wellhausen, \textit{Prolegomena}, 29-31.
\textsuperscript{23} Wellhausen, \textit{Prolegomena}, 57.
\textsuperscript{24} Rogerson, “Modern World,” 110.
\end{flushright}
Wellhausen notes a time-warp in the Priestly Code which he expresses in a variety of ways. He talks of a “carrying back of the new into the olden time” within the priestly writings of which the tabernacle is one such example.\textsuperscript{25} The tabernacle is described as a copy of the first Jerusalem temple, not the prototype of Solomon’s temple as the portable tabernacle is not mentioned in Judges or Kings. According to Wellhausen a sense of antiquity is created in the Priestly Code by relegating more recent laws to the past. Wellhausen moves from talking of the tabernacle as a copy of Solomon’s temple to describing it as “historical fiction.”\textsuperscript{26}

Wellhausen notes at least two images of the tabernacle suggested by the text. One image is the splendid appearance of the tabernacle, made out of expensive and rare materials in advanced Oriental style. He may well have been influenced by Vatke’s work in the field of comparative religion on cherubim and the tabernacle as Vatke writes of the tabernacle as being in Oriental style.\textsuperscript{27} The other image is of the cultic world round the tabernacle which Wellhausen describes in the following quote. Vocabulary typical of the Hebrew text and used in Wellhausen’s German and in the NRSV English translation is underlined in the following:

The \textit{sanctuary} with its \textit{priests} and \textit{Levites} occupy the central position; and the \textit{people of Israel} as a \textit{congregation} are \textit{encamped} around it; the \textit{cultus}, with its \textit{burnt offerings} and \textit{sin-offerings}, its \textit{purifications} and its \textit{abstinences}, its \textit{feasts} and \textit{Sabbaths}, are strictly observed as prescribed by the Law.\textsuperscript{28}

Wellhausen uses the German translation, \textit{Heiligtum}, for the \textit{sanctuary} (משכן) in keeping with the Hebrew text and not the then more standard German Lutheran translation, \textit{Stiftshütte}. Israel is a congregation, a cultic community (עדה). For Wellhausen the people encamped around the sanctuary are in religious not military formation.

\textsuperscript{25} Wellhausen, \textit{Prolegomena}, 61.
\textsuperscript{26} Wellhausen, \textit{Prolegomena}, 62.
\textsuperscript{27} Wellhausen, \textit{Prolegomena}, 62.
\textsuperscript{28} Wellhausen, \textit{Prolegomena}, 5, “da haben wir das Heiligtum, die Priester und Leviten im Mittelpunkt und das Volk als Gemeinde darum gelagert, da haben wir den Cultus, die Brand- und Sündopfer, die Reinigungen und Enthaltungen, die Feste und Sabbate genau nach der Vorschrift des Gesetzes, als die Hauptsache des Daseins.”
It is appropriate to comment on Wellhausen’s processing of the images of the tabernacle and their significance. Wellhausen links Ezra’s return to Judah with restoration of the Jerusalem community and temple practice. Ezra introduces the model of cult as found in the Priestly Code and developed in Babylonia to the Jerusalem community. According to Wellhausen, the new Jerusalem community builds on this Mosaic theocracy. Legitimate cult is centred round the tabernacle with a personnel structure of high priest supported by priests and Levites. Wellhausen’s assumption—that the Second Temple is based on the Priestly Code—overlooks issues such as how Israelite temple awareness moved from a courtly temple under the jurisdiction of the king to a temple under the jurisdiction of the priests within the space of sixty years or more (the length of the exilic period). The Israelites who remain in the Diaspora cannot celebrate a valid sacrifice because they have no temple. How does Wellhausen think Diaspora Israelites celebrated cult? Why does Wellhausen assume that the sacrificial laws of the Priestly Code are put into practice at the Second Temple but not the laws on the architectural and artistic realization of the cultic building?

One last note is an odd comment Wellhausen makes about Israelites as the “People of the Book,” by which he means that post-exilic Israelites in Jerusalem adhere to the law with legalistic detail. The suggestion can be made that in the post-exilic period Diaspora Israelites did become the “People of the Book” (or better said the “People of some Hebrew texts”), and that the Priestly Code is not necessarily the basis of regulations for ritual practice at the restored temple of Jerusalem.

**Carl Christian Wilhelm Felix Bähr (1801-1874)**

Bähr’s work, *Symbolik des Mosaischen Cultus I-II*, is in a completely different vein to that of de Wette, Vatke and Wellhausen, and is informed by Friedrich Creuzer’s work on symbolism and mythology. Exodus–Leviticus–Numbers, narrative and law, are treated as a textual whole in the synchronic sense. For Bähr the text is religious rather than political, allowing him

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to bypass some of the debates of the mid 1800s on theories of Mosaic law and theocracy. Bähr observes the quantity of biblical detail on Hebrew cult, often understood in the 1840s as an outer shell without a centre or a body without a soul. Many facets of symbolism in the tabernacle text are presented: the building materials of the cultic structure, metals, colours and numbers, and the cultic furnishings of each of the three areas from sanctuary and tabernacle to forecourt. The exterior form of the cultic objects signals to symbolic meaning. According to Bähr, as poets do not explain their poetry neither does the Old Testament explain its symbols. The significance of tabernacle symbolism is not developed by Bähr and therefore he offers little insight into the Mosaic cult other than a presentation of the detail.

B. From Post-World War I (1919) to 1990

Gerhard von Rad (1901-1971)

Two of Gerhard von Rad’s works on the Priestly Document and historical traditions which relate to “The Tent and the Ark” were published between two world wars. Traditions on “The Tent, the Ark, and the Glory of God” are addressed a second time in Theology of the Old Testament Vol.1. The Theology of Israel’s Traditions, and published Post-World War II. Von Rad applies methods of literary criticism such as searching for doublets and inconsistencies in his early work on the priestly writings which leads him to a synopsis of two strands (P\(\text{A}\) and P\(\text{B}\)). Several scholars regard this work as a cul-de-sac. The sub-title of von Rad’s Post-World

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32 Bähr, Symbolik des Mosaischen Cultus, 4.
War II work, *The Theology of Israel’s Traditions*, reflects the methods he brings to his research, a search for historical traditions behind the final text and for the theological meaning of the traditions.

Von Rad treats the Priestly Document as an historical work where the traditions in the main belong to Judah and Jerusalem. For him it relates to specifically priestly material which has never left the sacral sphere. The tent of meeting (חקל מועד) of the priestly writings is a reworking by priestly writers of at least two older traditions, tent and ark. The older tent tradition is that of a non-cultic tent outside the camp where YHWH appears in cloud and where counsel from God is sought (Exodus 33:7-11). Traces of the ark, a different tradition, are found in Numbers 10:35, the ark with a sacral focus in Shiloh (1 Samuel 1–6) and then in the Temple of Solomon where the ark becomes associated with a throne, a place where God dwells (permanently). The problem with associating the ark with a throne in the context of the tent of meeting of Exodus 25–31, 35–40 is that no literal or metaphorical references to monarchy are made within the text; in fact the entire text appears to be apolitical. For von Rad each tradition reflects a different theology, the tent being associated with God’s manifestation or appearance and the ark with God’s presence. A new addition of the priestly writers to the combination of tent and ark traditions is to introduce God as glory, a sign for von Rad that YHWH is Israel’s God and the fulfilment of promises made to the patriarchs. 36

Particularly pertinent is von Rad’s idea of the tent of meeting text being constructed out of older tent and ark traditions and the clarity with which he argues for these traditions and their theologies. It has set a precedent for generations thereafter as it is rare to find work on the tent of meeting without recognition of von Rad. Several scholars whose work is treated in the next section of this chapter were directly influenced by von Rad. Klaus Koch was one of his doctoral students. H-J. Hermisson was inspired by him to the doctoral theme, *Sprache und Ritus im Altsisraelischen Kult: Zur “Spiritualisierung” der Kultbegriffe im Alten Testament*, which then influenced some of Volkmar Fritz’s thought relating to the tent of meeting and more recently that of Hanna Liss. Rolf Knierim too was a student of von Rad, reflected in

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Knierim’s form critical interests and involvement with the *Forms of Old Testament Literature* series and a volume on the book of Numbers together with George Coats in that same series.  

**Martin Noth (1902-68)**

What von Rad is to biblical studies and theology, Martin Noth is to biblical studies and history. Noth wrote several influential books. *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (first published 1948 in German) is the most pertinent to research on the tent of meeting for two reasons: the setting of textual boundaries based on source analysis methods, and the idea of concept transferral. Noth analyses priestly writings as made up of three major elements: a base narrative (often indicated with the siglum Pg), what Noth calls the “Toledoth book” (collections of genealogies) and supplementary material (often indicated with the siglum Ps). A user-friendly version of Noth’s analyses is found in Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O’Brien’s *Sources of the Pentateuch*. With the metaphor of a necklace they explain the Priestly Document as made up of a thread of genealogies, itineraries and story line which hold the pearls, the major stories, together. One of these pearls is the text on the tent of meeting set at Sinai. The base narrative of the tent of meeting text starts at Exodus 24:15b and concludes at the book of Numbers 10:12, or with supplementary material at Numbers 10:28, according to Noth’s source analyses.

Noth sees the tent of meeting text as made up of elements borrowed from the Jerusalem temple and older material such as the tent of Exodus 33:7-11. The newer tent of meeting text is understandable by way of concept transferral, that is, concepts and associations made with

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the older tent stories are transferred to the new literary creation. One way to explain concept transferral is in terms of language development. For example, a small child learns that a four-legged animal is a “dog.” The child transfers the concept, “dog” to all four-legged animals. All four-legged animals are a “dog” until a cat is understood as different from a dog. The concept of “dog” informs the concept of “cat,” and then vice-versa. Associations made with the old tent are transferred to the new tent that resembles a temple. Noth proposes that the priestly material, of which the tent of meeting text is a large part, are a programme for the future, what should be, not what may have been historically.

A counter-voice to the diachronic orientated studies of the Hebrew Bible by Europeans is that of Benno Jacob (1862-1945). He trained in classical philology and Oriental languages at the University of Breslau, was a defender of Judaism, a rabbi, and experienced the disintegration of German Jewry in the 1900s. In his Pre-World War I work, Der Pentateuch: Exegetisch-Kritische Forschungen, he argues for the Pentateuch as a literary unity, not divided into documentary sources. He understood the tabernacle text as fiction and as expressing theological ideas through symbols at a time when historical-critical approaches to the biblical text dominated. A milder form of Jacob’s thought, probably in response to anti-Semitism, is expressed in his Exodus commentary, completed in 1940.

Several books and essays appear in most comprehensive bibliographies of research on the tent of meeting and thereby have become classics and obligatory reading in the field. A survey of standard tent of meeting literature follows. Reviews of literature on the tent of meeting such as those of Rainer Schmitt in Tent and Ark (1972), or in commentaries on Exodus by Brevard Childs (1974) and C. Houtman (2000) informed an understanding of the following scholarly literature.

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41 Noth, History of Pentateuchal Traditions, 243.
42 Jacob’s work is recognised by e.g., Childs, Exodus, 523, 547, and C. Houtman, Exodus: Chapters 20–40, Vol. 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 313.
44 Jacob, Pentateuch, 342-46.
Classic Books and Essays

The title of Karl Elliger’s (1901-1977) article, “Meaning and Origin of the Priestly Historical Writing” (1952), suggests that the priestly writing is historical but Elliger finds in fact that the priestly writer is more interested in theology than history.\(^{47}\) Affinities between the work of the priestly writer, Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah, where much of Elliger’s earlier research focused, lead Elliger to posit the priestly writer in exilic Babylonia. He talks of the Diaspora Israelite, far from the destroyed Jerusalem temple, arriving at the idea of a new tent inspired by ancient tent traditions.\(^{48}\) The escape from Egypt and wandering in the wilderness has a parallel with the plight of exilic Israelites in Babylonia. For Elliger, the lack of reference to cult in the writings of Isaiah indicates that Israelite cult could not be practised in exile; however, the practice of circumcision and celebration of Passover customs were possible.\(^{49}\)

The new tent of the priestly writer is not presented as a prophetic vision like Ezekiel’s temple but as law built into an historical-like style, a new literary style without precedent according to Elliger. It is unclear what Elliger means with the new concept of a tent, whether the new tent is literally a tent as in an actual physical construction or meant metaphorically, or something different again. He describes the tent as a temporary provisional thing, not a permanent structure, alluding to the idea that an actual physical tent is built in exile and that it is to function as a cultic centre for a limited length of time, to fill a gap, until some undefined time in the future. The end of Elliger’s article is unclear as he does not sufficiently explain what he means by the new tent and concludes with an allusion, that is, undefined meaning.

In a different vein to Elliger, Klaus Koch (born 1926) focuses on law rather than narrative texts in two publications between 1958 and 1959, a paper and a book. In the paper he explores what is particular to the Sinai priestly laws (Exodus 25—Leviticus 16, Numbers 1–10).\(^{50}\) He describes the priestly laws as the new cult of a new people, a program or utopia for the future.

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\(^{47}\) My translation of the title of Elliger’s article, “Sinn und Ursprung der Priesterlichen Geschichtserzählung.”

\(^{48}\) Elliger, “Sinn und Ursprung,” 143.

\(^{49}\) Elliger, “Sinn und Ursprung,” 142.

\(^{50}\) Koch, “Eigenart der Priesterschriftlichen Sinaigesetzgebung,” 36-51.
Former cultic laws practised under the monarchic system continue in a new form whereby control of cult moves from monarchy to priests.

For Koch the major theme of the laws is the relationship between cult and holiness and particular to the priestly writings. Holiness was not possible before Sinai and is not possible outside the Sinai cult according to Koch. Holiness is expressed spatially through areas designated as the most holy and holy and served by high priest or priests. A further concept is that of purity, instructions relating to personal and community well-being, the consequences of which extend into the camp. Through purification (atonement) the unclean may become clean. Cult functions as an intermediary between people and God, making holiness possible.

Koch notes that YHWH is never called holy in the priestly writings. It is priestly functions and cultic furnishings that are associated with the holy. Terms for holy place such as tent of meeting and tabernacle encourage the idea of meeting with God and God’s dwelling among the people. Koch concludes that the cult as presented in the priestly text is a utopia. The tent of meeting was never established and cult never practised as it was not possible. Koch’s conclusion is unsatisfactory as it leads to the question why so many holiness laws and concepts of holiness are collated if never to be practised.

In his book Koch applies Rendtorff’s idea of the priestly laws having a pre-history rather than a post-history to Exodus 25—Leviticus 16. He attempts to discern the origins and stages through which laws before their form in the Masoretic Text—from an oral to written form. He responds to what he considers stylistic differences in the tabernacle chapters and interprets the P source as made up of a collection of ritual material, orally transmitted. Koch arrives at the reconstruction that many of the laws are pre-Jerusalem temple yet they are appropriated by the Jerusalem cult, and then developed into a program for the future; therefore the tabernacle account indirectly has a non-Jerusalem origin. Koch’s conclusion builds on double research opportunities.

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speculation, an unravelling of historical layers previous to the final text, and a reconstruction of the oldest layer as a cult-legend of a non-Jerusalem sanctuary with its own ark.\textsuperscript{53}

One of the most prolific scholars on the tabernacle and its cultic world is Menahem Haran, a student of Yehezkel Kaufmann.\textsuperscript{54} Throughout his writings Haran regards the tabernacle as a priestly work, coming out of Jerusalem, and a revisionist version of what he calls the Shiloh legend of a shrine, vestiges of which are found in Joshua 18:1 and 19:51.\textsuperscript{55}

In a 1961 article Haran focuses on the high priest and related responsibilities inside the tabernacle such as the daily morning and evening rituals ( תמיד).\textsuperscript{56} He observes many gaps in the text into which he reads informed presumptions: that the sons of Aaron are prohibited from entering the tabernacle, that the showbread is changed on the Sabbath, and that the high priest’s vestments are worn only for rituals inside the tabernacle and not outside at the altar.

Harmony in the colours and cloth of the materials of the tabernacle are echoed in those of the vestments of the high priest. All the senses are evoked with the different ritual acts such as lighting of the lamp and sight, tending to the incense and smell, the bread standing for food and taste, the bells in the hem of the vestments relating to hearing, the twelve stones in the breastpiece awakening memory. The relationship between the tabernacle world, material gradations of metal, colour and zones, and the senses is continued and extended with the concept of gradated taboo in a further article.\textsuperscript{57} Haran presents the tabernacle furnishings and their symbolism in a manner that Bähr’s 1837 work never achieved.\textsuperscript{58} The idea of gradated taboo is associated with Koch’s idea of purity in relation to the tabernacle. Both Haran and

\textsuperscript{53} Childs, Exodus, 532.
\textsuperscript{58} Bähr explores symbolism in the text of the wilderness sanctuary as previously noted. Symbolic readings and midrashic methods tend to produce fanciful readings and go beyond a reasonable interpretation of the text, according to Childs, Exodus, 535, 586. Childs and Houtman, Exodus: Chapters 20–40, 322-23, mention U. Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus (Magnes Press: Jerusalem, 1967), 321, as an example of an Exodus commentary influenced by midrashic methods, where Cassuto writes of the tabernacle tent as an earthly sanctuary, a copy of the heavenly one as seen in a vision by Moses. There is only one reference to heaven in the tent of meeting text (Exodus 31:17); it is not related to Moses receiving the plan for the tent of meeting at Sinai.
Koch have the advantage that they read narrative and law texts relating to the tabernacle world intertextually. Reading the priestly narratives without the laws deprives the narratives of a sense of a functioning cult.

Many of Haran’s articles recur in revised form in 1978 as the book, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*. Haran describes priestly rites as “esoteric,” and that they are inspired by the First Temple. He writes that the tabernacle of P “is largely imaginary and never existed in Israel.” He suggests that the fiction was created to transmit priestly cultic concepts. However, he offers little suggestion more as to the purpose of such an extensive imaginary text other than that the priestly writers are recording their traditions which then become the canonical tradition and are sacrosanct.

In a 1965 paper Baruch Levine looks at three narrative priestly texts, Exodus 35–39, Leviticus 8–9 and Numbers 7, from a form-critical perspective in relation to ancient Near Eastern archival material. He observes affinities between Exodus 35–39 and 1 Kings 6–7 and an ancient Near Eastern genre, “archival records,” such as a palace record that describes architectural and artistic projects. For example, Numbers 7 is considered to echo Mesopotamian tabular numeration systems. According to Levine, Leviticus 8 is not a ritual witnessed or a description of ritual practice; it is an account of what was performed on one occasion in the past. He concludes that Leviticus 8–9 demonstrates a historicising tendency and the “narrativization of documentary and archival material.”

Manfred Görg’s book (1967) is a study of sacred tents in the priestly, monarchic, and Elohist traditions. He uses different language to Levine when addressing the rites in the priestly texts and talks not of narrativization but “quasi-ritual.” Görg then goes a step further in his

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conclusions and talks of the groups of priestly laws as fictive creations and suggests that the reason lies in an attempt to legitimise as authoritative an existing but endangered sanctuary as a YHWH institution.\textsuperscript{67} Noth sees much of the priestly writings as an extensive etiology, meaning the priestly writings retroject legitimization of the Jerusalem cult into the distant past.\textsuperscript{68} Görg offers a variant on the etiological purpose of the priestly writings.

Terence Fretheim in his paper, “The Priestly Document: Anti-Temple?” (1968), views the origins of the priestly tent of meeting as Shiloh as does Haran.\textsuperscript{69} He focuses on tent not temple aspects of the tabernacle. On one hand, the tent is a portable and an impermanent sanctuary, a dwelling place for YHWH for the post-exilic community, but on the other hand, then becomes a program of restoration for Israelites after return to the land from exile. Fretheim argues that as there was a counter voice to construction of Solomon’s temple so there is a counter voice to restoration of the Second Temple which comes from priestly circles with origins in Shiloh. The priestly tabernacle texts are viewed as an anti-temple voice. Rainer Schmitt finds Fretheim’s idea implausible and besides it seems unlikely that a minority anti-temple faction would write such an extensive text as that of the tent of meeting.\textsuperscript{70}

Rainer Schmitt in \textit{Zelt und Lade} (1972) comprehensively reviews predominantly German literature on the tent and ark from de Wette and Wellhausen through to Fretheim. Varying scholarly theories on oral traditions prior to the text and the historicity of the priestly tabernacle are brought together in one work. For example, there is Haran who builds on the idea that the tent of meeting has its origins in a Shiloh legend, later modified by Fretheim and even more recently by Helmut Utzschneider,\textsuperscript{71} or Frank Moore Cross\textsuperscript{72} who sees David’s tent as a model

\textsuperscript{67} Görg, \textit{Zelt der Begegnung}, 171.
\textsuperscript{68} Noth, \textit{History of Pentateuchal Traditions}, 243.
\textsuperscript{70} Schmitt, \textit{Zelt und Lade}, 238.
\textsuperscript{71} Helmut Utzschneider, \textit{Das Heiligtum und das Gesetz: Studien zur Bedeutung der Sinaitischen Heiligtums texte (Ex 25–40; Lev 8–9)} (OBO 77; Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1988). For Utzschneider the tabernacle text is the result of a combining of Shiloh ark traditions and Jerusalem temple traditions. The priestly writer moves the sanctuary from the royal sphere to link it with traditions of divine law thereby creating a new concept out of the old.
\textsuperscript{72} F. M. Cross, “The Priestly Tabernacle: A Study from an Archaeological and Historical Approach,” \textit{BA} 10, no. 3 (1947): 63.
for the tabernacle, or yet again Wellhausen for whom the tabernacle tent is a copy of the Jerusalem temple.

Volkmar Fritz (1938-2007) surveys the possible influence of Israelite temples on the priestly text of the tent sanctuary. The first part of his work is an analysis in archaeological and architectural terms of two pre-exilic Israelite temples, based on details in the biblical account of Solomon’s temple and excavations of the temple of Arad. Because of paucity of evidence he then includes four post-exilic temples. The second part of the research discusses the priestly tent sanctuary. Though Fritz concludes that the priestly tent is based on Solomon’s temple in the long house temple form, he finds that little of Solomon’s temple as a building and few interior features are reproduced in the priestly account. The priestly writer adapts Solomon’s temple and reworks former temple concepts and cult for new purposes. Fritz appropriates the concept of “spiritualization” from H-J. Hermisson’s work, Sprache und Ritus, and proposes at the end of his book that cult and temple are moved from mortar and stone into word format. Cultic place and the presence of God become reality in the word.

P. J. Kearney’s 1977 article, “Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40,” addresses the redactional relationship between the priestly creation account of Genesis one and Exodus 25–40. He parallels what he analyses as seven speech sections within Exodus 25–31 with the seven days of creation, the two texts having the theme creation in common, creation of the world and establishment of a temple. Exodus 25–40 is treated as archetypal of the sequence, creation (Exodus 25–31), fall (Exodus 32–34) and restoration (Exodus 35–40). Kearney works with Exodus 25–31 and 35–40 as priestly redactions and possibly expansions of the older JE text (Exodus 32–34). The motif of divine temple-building succeeding the divine act of creation, found in ancient Near Eastern literature, is adapted by the priestly writers. Kearney treats Exodus 25–40 as a text about a temple but in fact the Hebrew terms for temple (יהוה or

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74 Fritz finds that the long house form is typical of the Palestinian-Syrian region and draws on examples such as the temple of Hazor and strata X and IX at Meggido, Tempel und Zelt, 29-35, 166.
are not used in the Hebrew text. The building structure of Exodus 25–40 is designated as a tent of meeting or tabernacle in Hebrew.

Like Kearney, Viktor Hurowitz (1985) also sees affinities between the Hebrew Bible tabernacle account and ancient Near Eastern temple building stories. Hurowitz takes the biblical account of account and Solomon’s Temple, extrapolates eight stages of what can be called a literary temple typology and looks at the typology in relation to three ancient Near Eastern sources, the building story of Gudea of Lagash, an Assyrian account of two temples in Ashur (1115-1077 BCE), and the Sippar cylinder of Nabonidus relating to the rebuilding of Sin’s temple in Harran. He arrives at the conclusion that there is a standard literary pattern for ancient Near Eastern temples and that the tabernacle account meets to a general degree the temple literary pattern. Hurowitz speaks of Solomon’s temple as a temple and of the tabernacle of Exodus 25–40 as a tabernacle, true to the vocabulary used in the Hebrew text however his interest is primarily the idea of a temple literary template not linguistic and semantic issues relating to the tabernacle.

Vocabulary unique to the tent of meeting text (Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28) is a complex issue as it is generally treated as part of a larger block of material known as the priestly writings. In linguistic studies of the priestly writings differentiation is often made between the vocabulary of P (Exodus 25–31, 35–40, Leviticus 1–16, Numbers 1–10) and the Holiness Code (H, Leviticus 17–27), demonstrated in the work of Israel Knohl and Jacob Milgrom and which extends into A. Cholewinski’s research on H and Deuteronomy. In further comparative linguistic studies Avi Hurvitz studies the relationship between P and Ezekiel. Comprehensive research on similarities and differences between the vocabulary of the tent of meeting text and other sections of biblical text has yet to be made. Much linguistic evidence produced on P to date is disputed as seen in a response from Hurvitz to an article by

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78 Avi Hurvitz, A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel: A New Approach to an Old Problem (CahRB 20; Paris: Gabalda, 1982).
Blenkinsopp or Rendtorff in response to the first volume of Milgrom’s Leviticus commentary in the Anchor Bible series.\(^8^0\)

**Introductions to the Pentateuch**

General understandings of the tent of meeting are often found in introductory books to the Pentateuch. Broadly speaking two different approaches are used to explain the meaning of the text of the Pentateuch, synchronic and diachronic. Representative of the synchronic approach is R. N. Whybray’s *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (1995) where the tabernacle is treated thematically and given etiological significance.\(^8^1\) Examples of the diachronic approach are discussions on the tabernacle and its significance in relation to other pentateuchal texts, addressed in terms of source criticism by Ernest Nicholson and van Seters.\(^8^2\) Noth’s source analyses are printed in full in Campbell and O’Brien’s *Sources of the Pentateuch*. Two introductions that are frequently quoted are those of Joseph Blenkinsopp and Jean-Louis Ska who integrate diachronic studies and ancient Near Eastern sources with synchronic readings.\(^8^3\) Blenkinsopp speaks of the style of the priestly texts as reflecting the ancient Sumero-Akkadian scribal tradition.\(^8^4\) Tabernacle and cult are presented in introductions to the Pentateuch as a major theme of the priestly writings and as an exilic or post-exilic text, influenced in style and content by ancient Near Eastern traditions.

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Commentaries

The Jewish Publication Society commentaries on Exodus, Leviticus and the book of Numbers, first appearing between 1989 and 1991, pursue the more typical Jewish tradition of treating the biblical text synchronically yet integrate 20th century forms of research such as archaeology, biblical history, research in the field of Semitic languages and ancient Near Eastern literary comparisons.\(^85\) *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary* addresses some diachronic issues and applies modern biblical criticism rather than Jewish tradition to the Hebrew text.\(^86\) Source Hypotheses and redaction theories are not applied in the Jewish Publication Society commentary series.

On the other hand, authors for the Anchor Bible series apply a variety of different methods. William Propp, *Exodus 19–40* (2006), uses the Documentary Hypothesis as a framework for his commentary. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (1991), uses a combination of redaction criticism and the text as literary units, treating the text as a whole and not breaking it down into small sections which become dislocated one from another.\(^87\) Notes to the biblical text in both commentaries are elucidated with historically informed references ranging from philology and archaeology to comparisons with ancient Near Eastern texts. Gerstenberger’s *Leviticus* commentary in the Old Testament Library series offers a close textual reading with sociological and theological insights.\(^88\)

Living Traditions of the Tent Text

Research in the thesis is also informed by contemporary living traditions of the tent text, such as found in recent Jewish *Chumash* (= pentateuchal studies). In the Jewish lectionary system the Torah is divided into fifty-four *parashot* or portions and the entire Torah is read annually.

The tent of meeting and its cultic world make up fifteen of the fifty-four portions. Some of the Jewish lectionary texts read in conjunction with the tent of meeting texts in *haftarot* are, the Construction of Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 5:26–6:13), Production of the Furnishings for Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 7:40-50), Solomon’s Dedication of Temple and Blessing of the People (1 Kings 7:51–8:21), or Altar of Burnt Offerings (Ezekiel 43:10-27).

In contrast, texts relating to the tent of meeting are not read at all in the Common or Catholic lectionaries of the Christian traditions. The Catholic tradition, while not reading the Hebrew cultic texts, *performs* an appropriated version of them. Designated zones of holiness, a central altar, a lamp burning daily, priestly personnel and daily offerings are just some examples of contemporary Catholic practice. Catholic tradition is the practice of cult rather than the reading of cult.

The crux of this section is that the Jewish tradition reads the tent of meeting texts every year and in conjunction with other Hebrew Bible texts that relate to temples and sacrifice. The Torah and other Hebrew Bible texts are read in Hebrew throughout synagogues all over the world and are therefore a living tradition, directly accessing Hebrew. For this reason some *Chumashim* together with The Jewish Publication Society are consulted to elucidate the Hebrew text, meanings and concepts of words as well as commentaries in the Anchor Bible series.

The first five books of the Bible with section headings according to the Jewish lectionary system are printed in various editions of *Chumash* and annotated. Annotations range from traditional rabbinic references to contemporary explanations of the biblical text. The *Soncino Chumash*, regarded as conservative, is annotated with major traditional rabbinic references, and the *Stone Chumash*, regarded as orthodox, offers doctrinal explanations and homiletic discussions. The *Chumashim* have in some cases informed understandings of the Hebrew text.

C. 1990 to the present day

Much recent work on the tent of meeting and cultic texts addresses their literary nature; literary here pertains to fiction as opposed to non-fiction. This is particularly apparent in studies on the book of Leviticus of which there are several recent collections of essays such as, *Levitikus als Buch* edited by Hans-Winfried Jüngling and Heinz-Josef Fabry (1999), or *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception* edited by Rolf Rendtorff and Robert A. Kugler (2003). The recent synchronic studies of Bryan Bibb and James Watts make claims for the text of Leviticus as literature, as the cultic actions presented in the text are distanced from actual practice.

Bryan Bibb (2009)

Bryan Bibb in his doctoral thesis, *Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Book of Leviticus*, describes the text of Leviticus as “narrativized ritual.” For him, the texts are at least a step removed from actual ritual performance. They are formalised text, a blend of story and ceremony of what was probably once ritual practice. Characters stand for type rather than actual people. For Bibb, the Leviticus texts have ritual thematic material but they are not ritual. He arrives at the conclusion that there is a strong ritualizing tendency whereby ritual performance is turned into words to be read.

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94 For example Aaron stands for the typus of priest. The Israelites, denoted as “congregation” (עדה) and used more frequently than “assembly” (קהל) in the tent of meeting material, function as a chorus does in a Greek play. They are unanimous in action: watching the scene depicted (Exodus 40:38), laying their hands on the Levites (Numbers 8:10), bowing in response to a theophany (Leviticus 9:24). Moses is the vehicle for divine speech and legislation.
Bibb does not appear to read German as there are no German references in his bibliography. This means discussions in German literature on the process by which Israelite traditions of ritual become text are missing from his work. Two obvious gaps are Rendtorff’s *Die Gesetze in der Priesterschrift* with an interest in form-critical approaches to law in priestly writings[^96] and Koch on the priestly Sinai laws who articulates the transmission of law from oral into written form[^97]. Despite Rendtorff and Koch moderating their ideas in their later work towards a less formal definition of ritual genre, form-critical interest continues with work by Rolf Knierim on specific texts from Leviticus and involvement in the Forms of Old Testament Literature series but Bibb makes no mention of these.[^98]

**James Watts (2007)**

Like Bibb’s work James Watts’ book *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus*, with the subtitle, *From Sacrifice to Scripture*, is concerned with the literary process that occurs as ritual performance is transformed into text on ritual that then becomes scripture.[^99] In contrast to Bibb, Watts does, however, review German literature, noting two weaknesses with the form-critical approach, the difficulty of ascertaining the original setting and the paucity of literary material of a similar genre to make the necessary comparisons.[^100] Watts focuses on rite rather than setting. Ritual is about doing and is the performance of rite. Offerer and priest participate in the ritual process but texts deal with words. The reading of words becomes the rite and takes the place of ritual performance.

Watts’ hypothesis is that the Aaronide priests produce the book of Leviticus and the rhetoric therein has the function to legitimise their position of influence and financial advantage into the future.[^101] The historical period after production of the text is treated more fully than that

before. Historical issues regarding priests before production of the text are insufficiently addressed. Watts continues the common understanding that Leviticus is priestly writing, that is, written by priests and therefore primarily with priestly interests, and analyses the texts from the perspective of priests rather than lay persons. The difficult issue of two apparently separate priestly traditions in the Hebrew Bible, Zadokites and Aaronides, is not addressed. One of Watts’ interests is rhetoric—he searches for it and so he finds it, an observation also made by Wesley Bergen in a review of Watts’ book.

Bibb and Watts demonstrate that the text of Leviticus is literature. Bibb does not offer any reasons as to the purpose of a literary text while Watts pursues the idea that the texts are written with priestly self-interest; he thereby echoes in a different variant Wellhausen’s comment that the priestly writings are the fossilization of the Israelite religion.

Mary Douglas (1999)

Mary Douglas in *Leviticus as Literature* comes up with a better reason for the literary nature of the cultic texts than Watts to my mind. She makes analogies between Mount Sinai, the tabernacle of Exodus and the sacrificial animals of Leviticus; each analogy then further made up of three parts. Douglas comes at the rituals of Leviticus which involve animal offerings from an anthropological perspective; she does not balk at interior animal parts such as bowels and intestine and the surrounding fatty areas. Although her dividing up of the sacrificial animal into three sacrificial parts in support of her analogies is fanciful, she at least looks at

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107 Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 79. The tabernacle is seen as a tripartite structure suggested by three screens: one at the gate of the court, one into the tabernacle, and another within the tabernacle to enter the sanctuary. Sinai is divided into three different zones of access: the summit for Moses, the middle area for Aaron and elders, and the lower slopes for the people. The sacrificial animal is also treated as made up of three: a) the head and meat, portions that function as food for priest and people, b) the midriff area consisting of dense fat covering the kidneys and liver and to be burnt on the altar, c) the lower abdomen with entrails and loins which correspond to the inner sanctuary and are on top of the sacrificial pile.
the practicalities of animal sacrifice. Douglas sees a continuation of the three sections and
analogies in what she perceives to be the ring structure of the 27 chapters of Leviticus, the
biblical text resembling the proportions of a temple. Though Douglas’ analogies are
stretched and the biblical details are not necessarily supported, her vision links what she calls
the temple (of Exodus), and the cultic rites in Leviticus.

How Douglas processes her structure of the book of Leviticus into a pilgrimage text is of
particular interest. Douglas talks of the tabernacle standing as “virtual space” and existing
permanently in “virtual time.” She puts herself in the place of an exilic Israelite who has no
temple but who can, by walking through the book of Leviticus and learning the “spiritual
geography,” internalise the tabernacle. She has the pilgrim walk from the gate entrance
towards the tabernacle, enter it, approach the sanctuary from the northern side then exit along
the southern side. By implication Douglas suggests that the ritual prescriptions and tabernacle
are the internalised temple world of exilic Israelites in textual form. The purpose of the
tabernacle and cultic texts is that they are the cultic world of exilic Israelites.

Hanna Liss (2004)

Hanna Liss, Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Heidelberg, takes a different
approach to Douglas. She does not divide the book of Leviticus and its contents into
threefold sections but establishes the fictive nature of the sanctuary text. In three essays

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108 Leviticus is divided into three narrative sections which correspond with the previously mentioned three
screens in Douglas, Leviticus as Literature, 223. Chapters 1 and 17 correspond with the gate screen, chapters 8–10
with the screen to the tabernacle and 24:10-22, the story of the Egyptian blasphemer, corresponds with the
screen to the inner sanctuary. Therefore, chapters 1–17 correspond with the forecourt and altar, chapters 18–24:9
with the tabernacle and 25–27 with the sanctuary.
109 Douglas in Leviticus as Literature, 96, builds on Suzanne K. Langer’s thought, Philosophy in a New Key: A
Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art (3rd ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957);
Feeling and Form (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1953).
“The Imaginary Sanctuary: The Priestly Code as an Example of Fictional Literature in the Hebrew Bible,” in
Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period (ed. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns,
2006), 663-89; “Ritual Purity and the Construction of Identity: The Literary Function of the Laws of Purity in the
112 Liss, “The Imaginary Sanctuary,” 669-75.
since 2004 she argues for the fictive nature of narrative and legal priestly texts. Liss adds to research on the cultic texts and the tabernacle in several ways. She:

- Establishes criteria that indicate the fictive nature of texts,
- Gives examples of fictive narrative and fictive law from the cultic texts,
- Offers a reason for the purpose of fictive texts, namely, the transference of cult from practice to text.

Liss’ understanding of fiction builds on the literary theories of the German, Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007).113 Some of the signs indicative of fiction that she develops are:

- Spatial dimensions that symbolise non-spatial relations expressed through prepositions, the use of numbers and gradated groups of materials,114
- Emblematic names,115
- Relevant inconsistencies (i.e., where the meaning suggested by the text is impracticable in reality).116

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114 Prepositions such as “before,” “among,” “in the midst of,” or “from,” often separate categories such as that of animal and divine as demonstrated in the following sentence, “you shall slaughter the bull before the Lord” (Exodus 29:11). Numbers are used symbolically to create spatial dimensions, e.g., the multiples of thousands and hundreds that are used to express the count of men capable of military service in Numbers 1–4. Graduated materials suggest zones of increasing holiness within the tabernacle complex, bronze for the bases of the frames in the court, silver for the bases of the frames in the tabernacle, and gold for the overlay of the frames of the tabernacle.

115 Aaron stands for the priestly type. Moses is associated with law and is a vehicle of divine speech. The name of Oholiab, one of the tent artisans, means “the father is my tent.” Liss, Bibb and Watts, along with previous scholars such as M. Noth in his doctoral thesis on Semitic names (1928) and Görg, Zelt der Begegnung, 39–40, argue for the emblematic nature of many names in the priestly writings. I add to this that the manner in which the people, the congregation, respond in the text is formalistic. Actions such as the giving of materials and falling to the ground in unison, is along the lines of a Greek chorus and thereby emblematic.

116 Ever since de Wette’s Beiträge I-II in 1806 scholars have observed many relevant inconsistencies in the tabernacle texts. The setting is the Sinai desert yet a large cultic centre is to be constructed to consist of a screened court yard approximately 50 by 25 metres surrounding a 15 by 5 metres central tent. The materials are the finest conceivable, metals ranging from bronze to gold and cloth ranging from the finest linen interwoven with exquisite blue yarn to rare leather skin coverings. The tent with a cultic purpose is equipped and resembles a temple world yet all the furnishings are fantastically embellished with rings and poles for transport. The large size of the wilderness complex, its sumptuous fittings and provision for cultic administration centuries before urbanization betray the imaginary nature of the text. Such artistic and architectural splendour in the desert is impossible in reality.
The gap between reality and fantasy is a clue to the fictive nature of the tabernacle text, what Liss calls “impossible possibility.” Liss demonstrates the process of fictionalization, that is, the turning into fiction, with two narrative examples, that of the ark unit with its cover and the bronze altar. Particularly interesting is her example of fictive law (Leviticus 17:2–4).

Customary law allows the profane slaughter of animals for food outside the camp. The priestly writer takes the customary law and puts it into the new and fictive context of the cultic camp of the wilderness. In its re-contextualization animal slaughter outside the camp is prohibited, all slaughter is ritual and must occur at the tabernacle altar. According to Liss, adherence to the new variant of the law becomes impossible as a consequence of fictionalization and therefore the Israelite has no legal obligation as regards the law.

For Liss one of the purposes of the fictionalization of older traditions or laws, that is, their de-contextualization, is their new contextualization as “Kultus im Text,” cult within the text. The possibility for encounter with God is moved from historical place to textual space, and allows encounter with God into the future, without a temple.

Mark George (2009)

Mark George appropriates theories on architecture and space from the French neo-Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*, which he then applies to the tabernacle. Like Douglas and Liss, George views the tabernacle as an imaginary construct. For him the tabernacle is about space not place as it is not situated in a geographical and physical location. One chapter deals with physical things that are put into the tabernacle and another with spatial zones such as where the liturgical furnishings are placed within the tabernacle. A further chapter concerns the symbolism that evolves from the physical things and their relational positions in the tabernacle.

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117 Liss, “Kanon und Fiktion,” 32.
119 George, *Israel’s Tabernacle*, 16.
120 George, *Israel’s Tabernacle*, 7.
George’s thesis is that the tabernacle narrative presents “an idealized social organization in tabernacle space.”\textsuperscript{121} He works with the premise that the writers are priestly writers and posits them in the exilic Babylonian world. He applies the idea of “social energy,” which he understands as influences that circulate between different social contexts, to the tabernacle texts.\textsuperscript{122} Two examples of the transferral of social energy from the Babylonian cultural world into the Hebrew text are the transformation of Israelite concepts of kingship and the linking of ancient Near Eastern building inscriptions with the ark as a depository box.

George falls short of the social objectives of his thesis if social is understood as referring to forms of human relationships, as many of his examples focus on objects and not people. For example, he focuses more on priestly garments and their symbolic meaning than the priest and the priest’s social function. His biblical starting point is the tabernacle of Exodus, the structure, or bare architecture, understandable for a method influenced by architectural theory. However, it is regrettable that George does not use the biblical text more to develop the social aspects of the tabernacle as space. A fully functioning cultic world within the tabernacle complex is suggested by the ritual instructions and narratives of Leviticus 1–16. Then again, although Numbers 1–10 is an interpretative challenge at the best of times, it would be interesting to see the results of spatial methods applied to symbolic constructs of the people of Israel as men capable of military service or, of Israel as made up of congregation, Levites and priests grouped around the tabernacle. A gap in George’s work is that he does not draw more from the Bible itself to demonstrate the social world of the tabernacle.

Any architectural building has furnishings and spatial zones specific to it. For example, altars or niches are characteristic of temples. The ark can be said to take the place of the most central niche and George addresses the ark. Although the altar is mentioned in George’s work, there are no pleasing odours for God to smell from the sacrifices, or to abhor. In effect, in George’s work, the altar is a non-functioning object, hygienised, devoid of cultic or social action.

\textsuperscript{121} George, \textit{Israel’s Tabernacle}, 8.
The last concern with George’s work is one of terminology. He often talks of a covenant relationship with YHWH and that the Israelite congregation (עדה) is open to women and non-Israelites.\textsuperscript{123} The term covenant (ברית) is not common in Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28.\textsuperscript{124} Any references to the ark in Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 are to an ark of testimony or an ark of the pact (ארון העדות). Although some scholars argue that covenant (ברית) and testimony (עדות) are interchangeable and that the two Hebrew words can both mean covenant, more commonly the translation and meaning of testimony (עדות) is debated. George does not explain why the concept of covenant is appropriated from non-priestly texts and applied to the tent of meeting texts.

Terms such as “social energy,” “divine economy” and “covenantal relationship” are daunting until one extrapolates from George’s work what he might mean by the terms. George innovatively applies Lefebvre’s spatial ideas to the tabernacle in conjunction with a wide range of ancient Near Eastern texts available in different sources and thereby provokes fresh thinking of some issues.\textsuperscript{125} The richness of spatial studies applied to the tabernacle is the focus on space rather than place, the realm of the conceptual rather than physical.\textsuperscript{126} Tabernacle space can be carried into the future and anywhere in the world as it is portable. Recipients of the text and those who participate in its world can recreate the space wherever they are by bringing their contemporary world, that is, “social energy” to the tabernacle and therefore interact with it.

\section*{Summary}

Table 1.1 gives an overview of works reviewed or affiliated with reviews in this chapter. The first column, headed “History and Philosophy,” notes some major historical events and forms of social change as well as some philosophers whose work is recognised to have had an influence on biblical scholars. Scholars like any human being are influenced by the society

\textsuperscript{123} George, \textit{Israel’s Tabernacle}, 115-16, 192.
\textsuperscript{124} Occurrences of covenant (ברית) in the tent of meeting text: Exodus 31:16, Leviticus 2:13; 24:8; 26:9, 15, 25, 42, 44f.
\textsuperscript{125} Ancient Near Eastern sources used by George listed in \textit{Israel’s Tabernacle}, 216-18.
\textsuperscript{126} George, \textit{Israel’s Tabernacle}, 191.
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Table 1.1 Literature review summary
and world in which they live and the styles of thought which are prevalent. The second column lists German biblical scholars and incorporates European scholars from 1988 onwards. The third column lists non-European scholars. The designation European or non-European applies to the continent in which the works of a scholar were first published; scholarly influence is of course not confined to a continent and crosses geographic boundaries. The date assigned to a scholar is the date of the first publication of a work referenced in the review. The italics following a scholar’s name are an abbreviated form of the title or major content of their literature reviewed and are for quick recall purposes only.

Noteworthy in the table is the quantity of German biblical scholarly work generally indirectly on the tent of meeting and the dominance of diachronic approaches until approximately 1970. The methods of diachronic research grew out of rational and historical trends of thought under the influence of the Enlightenment. Diachronic research provides some generally accepted understandings of the tent of meeting and its history. Most cultic material in the Hebrew Bible is associated with the tabernacle and attributed to a Priestly Document, known by the siglum P and one of two to four narrative documents as proposed by different versions of the source hypothesis. The cultic laws and tabernacle are particular to the priestly writings and not present in other documents. The cultic texts are generally regarded as written/redacted/compiled over several generations, probably by priests. The cultic texts were probably written/redacted/collated in the exilic or post-exilic period. The tabernacle texts are often viewed as probably developed out of older oral traditions such as a tent of meeting outside the camp (de Wette), incorporating ark traditions (von Rad) and cultic traditions going as far back as Solomon’s temple (Milgrom). These general understandings of priestly writings are typically found in introductory books to the Pentateuch (Blenkinsopp, Ska).

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127 The link between philosophy and biblical studies is well attested in Rogerson’s *Old Testament Criticism*.  
128 Erhard Blum proposes two sources, KD and KP, in *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), whereas previous scholars work with four sources e.g., Wellhausen, *Prolegomena* and Eissfeldt, *Hexateuch-Synopse*.  
129 Blenkinsopp writes of “P as a multi-generic, multi-generational document,” in “Assessment of the Alleged Pre-Exilic Date,” 511.  
Table 1.1 also shows that since 1960 more research on P and the tent of meeting comes out of North America, both Jewish and Christian voices, than out of Europe. In a nutshell there are more German names at the top of the second column and more North American names at the bottom of the third column. In the last twenty years biblical research moves more towards synchronic research with an interest in the biblical text as fictional literature rather than as historical literature and away from diachronic research. Having said that there is a move towards synchronic research, most scholars continue to work with the idea that something like priestly schools are the producers of the tabernacle text. The biblical text regarded as priestly has moved into the realm of literature for some biblical scholars but the writers/collaters of the literary text are still generally thought of as priests and formed in priestly schools. It is time to ask the question whether producers of the tent of meeting and associated ritual texts really are priestly groups or a different group again. This lacuna is addressed in the second half of this work.

No scholars address or even start to speculate on how Israelite communities learn of the tabernacle and its cultic world in the text at the time of production of the text or the early decades thereafter. This query is not aimed necessarily at literacy issues but how Israelites might have met in exilic or post-exilic times to hear, learn, and express their Israelite-ness and adherence to YHWH in a context where temple-tabernacle and cult are textual. This area is also addressed in the second part of this thesis.

There are now several arguments in support for the literary nature of the tabernacle texts such as Bibb’s idea of “narrativized ritual,” Watts’ emphasis on “rhetoric and ritual,” or Liss on the “fictionalization of cult.” It is one thing to establish that the texts are literary and/or fictive and another to agree on the purpose of the literary nature of cultic subject matter. With the application of spatial theories George develops the idea of the imaginary tabernacle as Israelite space, and something that can be carried into the future. His work has more support from the spatial theory that informs it than from the biblical evidence. Bibb, Watts and Liss demonstrate the transferral of cult from tradition and practice (history) into the text. For Douglas and Liss, the Israelite cultic world in the text allows exilic Israelites to participate in
temple and cultic life. There is still a struggle to find a purpose for writing a fictive and literary text, another area addressed in the second part of the thesis.

More importantly than previously noted lacunae, a work with the primary focus on the tent of meeting AND its cultic world (Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28) does not appear to have been written. Corners of the tent of meeting text are addressed in commentaries, but the text covers three biblical books, therefore each biblical commentary can only deal with a part of the tent of meeting and its world. Prior to 1970, Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 was broken into two types of text, narrative or law, and addressed in diachronic studies. However, scholars tended to focus on either narrative or law and therefore not look at the relationship between narrative AND law. Synchronic work on the tent of meeting or on the instructions of Leviticus is available in recent years but nothing comprehensive yet on both the tent of meeting and instructions. This thesis addresses the gap.
Chapter 2

Boundaries

In chapter two, Boundaries, reasons for the external perimeters of the text, Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28, and reasons for internal coherence within the text are given. The external boundaries of the text are established through three different approaches, synchronic, diachronic and the idea of different voices, and make up section A of the chapter. The internal coherence of the text is considered on thematic, literary and stylistic levels in section B of the chapter.

Before proceeding to section A the frequent use in Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 of two terms, tent of meeting and tabernacle, is addressed in order to establish a title for the thesis text. Frequency of the two terms in the Hebrew Bible is shown in table 2.1. The term tent of meeting occurs 107 times in Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 and is used throughout the three books. The term tabernacle occurs 85 times and is more common in Exodus than in Leviticus and Numbers. The setting for the tent of meeting in Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 is Sinai. All references to the tent of meeting at Sinai relate to a large cultic tent complex at the centre of an Israelite camp, except for one reference (Exodus 33:7, underlined in table 2.1) which is discussed subsequently. In minimalist terms, the tent of meeting of Exodus 25–40 relates to a mere tent structure but the tent of meeting of Exodus 25–40, Leviticus and Numbers 1–10:28 relates to a tent structure at the centre of a fully functioning cultic world where ritual instructions are in place and the cultic people are defined. For this reason, the text, Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28, is designated as “the tent complex” text, to communicate the sense of a tent and Israelite cultic world.

All occurrences of tent of meeting (אהל מועד) and tabernacle (משכן) in the Hebrew Bible are listed in table 2.1. Use of the terms tent of meeting and tabernacle is frequent in
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AT SINAI</th>
<th>Tent of Meeting (אהל מועד)</th>
<th>Tabernacle (משכן)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28</td>
<td>Exodus 27:21; 28:43; 29:4, 10f, 30, 32, 42, 44; 30:16, 18, 20, 26, 36; 31:7; 33:7; 35:2; 38:8, 30; 39:32, 40; 12, 22, 24, 26, 29f, 32, 34f;</td>
<td>Exodus 25:9; 26:1, 6f, 12f, 15, 17f, 20, 22f, 26f, 30, 35; 27:9, 19; 35:10, 15, 18; 36:8, 13f, 20, 22f, 25, 27f, 31f, 38:20f, 31, 39:32f, 40; 40:2, 5f, 9, 17ff, 21f, 24, 28f, 33ff, 38;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32 occurrences</td>
<td>55 occurrences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41 occurrences</td>
<td>3 occurrences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers 1:1; 2:2, 17; 3:7f, 25, 38; 4:3f, 15, 23, 25, 28, 30f, 33, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 47; 6:10, 13, 18; 7:5, 89; 8:9, 15, 19, 22, 24, 26; 10:3;</td>
<td>Numbers 1:50f, 53; 3:7f, 23, 25f, 29, 35f, 38; 4:16, 25f, 31; 5:17; 7:1, 3; 9:15, 18ff, 22; 10:11, 17, 21;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT AT SINAI</td>
<td>34 occurrences</td>
<td>27 occurrences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers 10:29—</td>
<td>(107 total occurrences)</td>
<td>(85 total occurrences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Books</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 31:14;</td>
<td>Joshua 22:19, 29;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua 18:1; 19:51;</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 Samuel 7:6;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Samuel 2:22;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kings 8:4;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chronicles 6:32; 9:21; 23:32;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Chronicles 1:3, 6, 13; 5:5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lamentations 2:6;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 References to Tent of Meeting and Tabernacle in the Hebrew Bible
Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 and sparse in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Outside of biblical studies the term tabernacle is more common than the term tent of meeting and even used in popular circles. The term tent of meeting is rarely used in literature outside of biblical circles. Bible dictionaries generally address the tent of meeting under the entry for tabernacle rather than the other way round. Having noted that there is probably a greater familiarity with the term tabernacle than tent of meeting, the key entry to the proposed biblical text is the tent of meeting and further reason to use “the tent complex” as a designation for Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28.

A. Three Approaches

1. Synchronic

The most common way to explore the tent of meeting in the Hebrew Bible is synchronic, following occurrences of the term in the sequence of the biblical books and reading according to the plain (meaning literal) sense. This means starting with the first occurrence of the term, tent of meeting, in Exodus 27:21 and more or less accepting that all further occurrences of the same phrase refer to the same tent of meeting through to 2 Chronicles 5:5 (according to the order of the Hebrew Bible). Bible dictionary entries on the “Tabernacle,” are often typical of sequential and synchronic readings.

An example of a synchronic and sequential reading of the tent of meeting and its journey based on the Bible dictionary entries follows. The sequence is a compilation of what Schwartz, Friedman and Houtman write about various stages of the journey of the tent of meeting. The following sequence illustrates what can occur with synchronic readings. Stages in the journey

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1 The tabernacle is e.g., an important concept in Campbell Clark’s novel, Raiders of the Lost Ark, which inspired the first of several films in the Indiana Jones series.
of the tent of meeting as described by one or more of the three scholars and the pertinent
biblical passage, are both noted in round brackets:

- God reveals the plan for the tent of meeting (Friedman; Exodus 14:15-18).
- It is made, constructed and assembled at Sinai (Friedman and Houtman; Exodus 25–40).
- The tent of meeting is consecrated (Schwartz; Leviticus 8–10).
- The tent is disassembled, transported and reassembled whenever the people travel
  (Friedman and Schwartz; Numbers 12; 14:10-35; 16:6-25; 20:6-8; 25:6-8; Deuteronomy 31:14-26).
- The people enter the land of Canaan, settle, and the tent of meeting is erected at Shiloh
  (Friedman; Joshua 18:1; 19:51).
- The tent of meeting remains at Shiloh and eventually becomes a fixed (Schwartz; 1
  Samuel 2:22) and central, legitimate sanctuary (Houtman).
- The tabernacle and altar/tent of meeting are mentioned later at Gibeon (Friedman and
  Houtman; 1 Chronicles 16:39; 21:29; 2 Chronicles 1:3. 6, 13).
- In the course of time the ark and tent of meeting become separated (Friedman and
  Houtman; 1 Samuel 7:1; 2 Samuel 6:3, 17; 1 Chronicles 15:1; 16:1, 37, 39).
- Despite a difficult history the tent sanctuary and ark are brought into the temple of
  Solomon (Friedman and Houtman; 1 Kings 8:4).

The major reason for misgivings with a sequential reading of references to the tent of meeting
within the Hebrew Bible is that closer perusal of each text relating to a tent of meeting
reference outside of Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 shows that those tents (plural) of meeting
are different to the one described in Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28. Therefore, it cannot be
argued that the same tent of meeting journeys from Sinai into Canaan, an observation that
needs to be taken into account in synchronic treatment of the biblical material. Some examples

3 Haran argues that the tent of meeting text of Exodus 25–40 derives from a Shiloh tent legend, in “Shiloh and
Jerusalem,” 24 and in Temples and Temple Service, 198-201. For discussion on the tent of meeting at Shiloh,
4 For scholars who write on the plausibility of the tent of meeting at Gibeon refer to Schmitt, Zelt und Lade, 239-40.
of many possible examples follow which demonstrate that references to tents of meeting vary so much that it cannot be claimed that they are the same tent.

Friedman and Schwartz write that on the journey from Mount Sinai to Canaan the tabernacle is disassembled on each departure and reassembled at each new location but in fact outside the boundaries of the tent complex text there is no mention of assembling (hip’îl קָם) or disassembling (hip’îl רָדַע) a cultic tent, only mention of the people setting out (qal נָסַע) and encamping or pitching (qal חָנָה) tents for human dwelling. (David pitches a tent for the ark in 2 Samuel 6:17, but the Hebrew verb used is נָטָה not קָם or חָנָה.) Friedman notes Numbers 12 (the scene where Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses about a Cushite wife) as an event occurring at the tabernacle on its travels through the wilderness. However, much vocabulary of Numbers 12 is different to that of the tent text. Cloud at the tent of Numbers 12 is in the form of a pillar (עמוד) and stands (qal עָמד) at the entrance of the tent, whereas cloud in the tent text fills (qal מלא) or covers (pi’el כָּסָה) the tent of meeting. Miriam, Aaron and Moses go out (qal יצא) to the tent of meeting in Numbers 12 suggesting that the tent of meeting is outside the camp. The tent of meeting in the tent complex text is at the centre of the camp and approached by people who bring (hip’îl כָּרַב) offerings.

Friedman and Schwartz speak of the tent of meeting being erected at Shiloh. There are three explicit references to a tent of meeting at Shiloh, two in the book of Joshua and one in 1 Samuel. In Joshua 18:1 and 19:51 where reference is made to the tent of meeting the scene involves the division of land amongst various groups of Israelites at the entrance to the tent. No cultic purpose can obviously be associated with the tent of meeting in Joshua 18:1–19:51 as neither altar nor priests are mentioned. In Joshua, the area before the tent functions more like an official place such as a village square, where the dividing up of land is publicly witnessed, than as a cultic area with an altar.

Friedman and Schwartz speak of the tent of meeting remaining at Shiloh and becoming a fixed sanctuary (1 Samuel 2:22). One sentence alone refers to a possible fixed tent of meeting at Shiloh and it is not clear how it fits into the context of 1 Samuel. There is clearly a cultic building at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1–4) to which Samuel’s family go up annually with offerings and
sacrifices. The cultic building is called a “temple of the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:9; 3:3) or “the house of the Lord” (1 Samuel 3:15; 1:7, 24). The vocabulary, temple and house, is not used in the tent complex text. Women serve at the entrance to the tent of meeting at Shiloh. The Shiloh temple contains an ark but it is described as an ark of God (ארון אלהים 1 Samuel 3:3), not as an ark of the testimony (ארון העדות) as in the tent complex text. The temple does not have curtains like the tent of meeting but doors. Samuel lies down in the temple, but in the tent of meeting text only the duly rostered priests and those who have appropriately fulfilled the purification rites may enter the tabernacle, certainly not sleep in it. Samuel’s behaviour at Shiloh is clearly not in accordance with the ritual rites described in Leviticus 16:3-4.

There is not obvious continuity in the passage of the tent of meeting from Sinai via Shiloh to Jerusalem but rather incongruity. The sentence referring to the tent of meeting in 1 Samuel 2:22 stands on its own, not easily harmonised with the context.

A synchronic reading of the travels of the tent of meeting from Sinai to Jerusalem gets the tabernacle and ark in two different formats into Jerusalem, a) separated and b) together. In version a, where ark and tent are separated, the sons of Abinadab bring the ark of God (not an ark of testimony as in Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28) on a “new cart” (2 Samuel 6:1-5) according to David’s instructions to his city. The ark is moved via a cart, a wagon with wheels, yet in Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 the ark is designed with rings on each of the four corners through which poles are inserted to be carried by humans (Exodus 25:10-15; 37:1-5). The sons of Abinadab transport the ark in 2 Samuel yet in Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 a specific group of Levites, the Kohathites (Numbers 4:5-15) is assigned the task of carrying the ark. Transport of the ark with poles on foot by specifically designated humans is different to an ark transported on a cart. It is doubtful that the ark of Exodus is the ark of 2 Samuel and there is no mention of a tent of meeting in conjunction with the ark.

In version b, where ark and tent are together, they are mentioned as entities in a list. Solomon has priests and Levites bring “the ark of the Lord, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent” (1 Kings 8:4) from the city of David, Zion (1 Kings 8:1), to his newly
constructed royal temple in Jerusalem. In this version Levites and priests transport the entities in accordance with Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 but it is not clear where the tent of meeting has suddenly come from as there was no account of a tent of meeting being brought to the new tent that David pitched (2 Samuel 6:17) to contain the ark.

Drawing the examples together, a sequential reading of the journey of the tent of meeting from Sinai via Shiloh to Jerusalem is dubious. The tent in Numbers 12 is outside not inside the camp. In Joshua the tent of meeting functions as public rather than cultic place. The one mention of a tent of meeting in 1 Samuel is incomprehensible in the Shiloh setting where Samuel sleeps in the temple. There are different versions of how the ark and tabernacle get to Jerusalem, separately or together, in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings. A sequential reading cannot be constructed from the inconsistent, sparse and contradictory textual evidence. The tent of meeting of the tent complex is different to these other tents of meeting.

2. Diachronic, Source Analysis

This section looks at the contributions of four scholars, J. Wellhausen, G. von Rad, M. Noth and A. F. Campbell, who address Sinai traditions in the Pentateuch with a diachronic lens. One interest of diachronic research in biblical studies is the process which a text undergoes to become a final product. For some biblical scholars in the 19th century, different designations for God in the Hebrew text and literary features such as the doubling of stories indicated a process prior to the final text and led to the idea of different literary sources. Wellhausen’s presentation of a four sources hypothesis proposes that the first six books of the Hebrew Bible (the Hexateuch) are made up of four different documents, Yahwist (J) and Elohist (E), Deuteronomic (D) and Quattuor (Q), later better known as the Priestly source (P). J and E are treated as the earliest source, D as more typical of northern Israelite traditions, and P is associated with Judah, Jerusalem, priests and the temple. Wellhausen proposes a history of Israel divided into three periods: the beginnings of Monarchy, Deuteronomic reform and the

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5 Wellhausen, Prolegomena, 28-32; Ska, Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch, 108-12.
period of the Second Temple. The tent of meeting material is part of the P source which is dated as late, the period of the Second Temple and post-exilic.

For Wellhausen, as expounded in his *Prolegomena* (1883), the Sinai material (Exodus 19—Numbers 10) is a block of legislation which interrupts the historical flow of the J source.\(^6\) Stories set at Kadesh and assigned to the J source occur before and after the Sinai legislation, repeated in different variants. Meribah (of Exodus 17:7 and Numbers 20:13) and Massah (Exodus 17:7) are associated with Kadesh which is therefore understood as the setting for the following variant yet repeated narratives: Institution of Judges and Elders (Exodus 18 and Numbers 11), Manna and Quails (Exodus 16 and Numbers 11), The Spring and Massah (Exodus 17 and Numbers 20). Wellhausen observes that after crossing the Red Sea according to the four sources he has analysed, the J source has the Israelites proceed on to Kadesh, without making the detour to Sinai. (Wellhausen’s idea builds on the premise that Mount Sinai is sited geographically at the southern end of the Sinai Peninsula and Kadesh at the north east of the peninsula.) A literal reading of the biblical text follows the order of journey of the Israelites as: Egypt, Kadesh, Sinai, Kadesh, whereas Wellhausen’s J source has the sequence from Egypt to Kadesh, without a stop at Sinai. Wellhausen concludes that the block of Sinai material is late and inserted between the repeated Kadesh material as follows.

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{KADESH (J narratives)} \\
\text{SINAI (legislation)} \\
\text{KADESH (J narratives)}
\end{array}\]

Inserted between repeated versions of Kadesh narratives

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\(^6\) Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 376-77. Date given is that of the first German edition.
Von Rad in *Problem of the Hexateuch* (1931) and *Old Testament Theology* (1957) views the four literary sources as made up of smaller identifiable units. For example, Kadesh narratives (Exodus 17–18, Numbers 10–14) and Sinai narratives (Exodus 19–24, 32–34) are units within the J source. The Kadesh narratives are part of what von Rad calls “The Exodus tradition,” which for him is characterised by the wandering of the Israelites and themes such as the deliverance from Egypt or settlement in Canaan. “The Sinai Tradition” (Exodus 19—Numbers 10), which for von Rad interrupts the Exodus tradition, is made up of two parts—a combination of J and E sources (Exodus 19–24, 32–34) and P (Exodus 25–31, 35—Numbers 10). Characteristics of what von Rad calls “The Sinai tradition” are theophanies (the coming of God) and revelation which thematically he understands as quite different to “The Exodus tradition.” For von Rad “The Sinai tradition” remained independent of other traditional elements until late (meaning recent in its composition in comparison with for example the J source and probably post-exilic in accordance with Wellhausen’s dating ideas on the sources). To summarise, for von Rad the Sinai material is late, and an independent entity inserted into the Exodus material.

Noth, an historian, is interested in the history and pre-history of texts, their pre-literary stages and the process from oral units to oral compilations into writing. In *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (1948), Noth breaks down what he regards as the history of Israel in the Pentateuch into five major themes. One of the themes he calls, “Revelation at Sinai,” similar to von Rad’s

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“The Sinai Tradition.” Noth describes the “Revelation at Sinai” text as “an entity having its own origin and history, which was incorporated into the great corpus of the Pentateuchal tradition and late” (late meaning post-exilic). The theme, “Revelation at Sinai,” is the “latest to be added to the series of other themes, in spite of the fact that its roots apparently reach back into an especially remote past.” Both von Rad and Noth see the Sinai material as late. For von Rad, tent and ark narratives are examples of traditions preceding the P Sinai material. For Noth, the P source consists of a narrative literary base (marked with the sign Pg and called Grundlage), supplemented with additions and reworkings of material (marked with the sign Ps); the P Sinai material of Pg is regarded as late.

The strength of Noth’s work is also its weakness; it is structured on the idea of a narrative framework. Narrative that is not considered to be part of the basic narrative framework and all legislation, as legislation is not narrative, are moved to supplementary material (Ps). This results in the separation of narrative and law texts.

The effect of Noth’s division of Pg and Ps on the P Sinai material is that a cultic structure is built and dedicated in the framework narrative (Pg) as can be seen in table 2.2 but detached from cultic regulations (Ps). Cultic regulations are relegated to supplementary material (supplementary material also consists of miscellaneous narrative material). It does not make sense to have a cultic place without cultic regulations. A cultic place without ritual performance is dead. Similarly the text on the cultic people (Numbers 1–4) is identified as base narrative framework yet the social regulations by which they are to live (Leviticus 11–15, 17–27) are again relegated to supplementary material, leaving the Israelites as a cultic people without cultic codes by which to live.

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9 Noth, History of Pentateuchal Traditions, 59-60.
10 Noth, History of Pentateuchal Traditions, 62.
### Table 2.2 Diachronic analysis of Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28

In *Making Sense of the Bible* (2010), Antony Campbell notes many of Wellhausen, von Rad and Noth’s arguments relating to research on the Sinai traditions which need not be repeated here.\(^{13}\) Two traditions, non-priestly (Exodus 19–24, 32–34) and priestly (Exodus 25—Numbers 10), make up the Sinai texts. Working with Noth’s textual analyses Campbell proposes that the non-priestly itinerary leads to Sinai yet there is no itinerary at all leading on from Sinai.\(^{14}\) Campbell also points out that composition of the Sinai text reflects “immense energy” yet the “Israel-of-the-sanctuary” as presented at Sinai is not found again in the Hebrew Bible.\(^{15}\) He talks of the “intense conceptual energy” that has gone into the text.\(^{16}\) This is apparent with the sheer length of the P Sinai text, what is now much of three biblical books and encompassing fifty two chapters. It is rare in biblical writings for a theme to be sustained with such length and detail. The last three chapters of this thesis suggest reasons for the

\(^{12}\) Table 2.2 from Exodus 24:15b—Numbers 9:23 is based on Bernhard Anderson’s Supplement in Noth, *History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 262-76; Numbers 10:1-28 in table 2.2 follows the more differentiated presentation of Noth’s analysis in Campbell and O’Brien, *Sources of the Pentateuch*, 43-80.


\(^{15}\) Campbell, *Making Sense of the Bible*, 290.

“intense conceptual energy” of the tent of meeting text by way of a hypothesis. Campbell pursuits the idea that the sumptuous tabernacle is born at Sinai, gets assembled at Sinai and departs from Sinai but is never mentioned again in the form in which it is described in Exodus 25—Numbers 10.17

For over a hundred years four scholars speak of Exodus 19—Numbers 10 as Sinai material and see it as an independent text incorporated later into the Pentateuch. The inserted Sinai material is described in different ways. Wellhausen describes the Sinai material as a stifling block of legislation.18 Von Rad speaks of the Sinai Tradition as theophanies and revelation (the coming of God). For him, the concept of the tabernacle tent is constructed out of tent and ark traditions. For Noth, the historical theme “Revelation at Sinai” is partially the reworking of very old material and used from the standpoint of Jerusalem priestly circles.19 Campbell talks of the text as having “immense conceptual energy.”

Von Rad works with the end of Sinai material as Numbers 10:28 and the resumption of Kadesh material at Numbers 10:29ff.20 For Noth, Numbers 10:1-28 is a combination of Ps and Pg. Noth’s analyses of the material have the Sinai P narrative framework jump from the end of Numbers 9:23 to Numbers 10:11-12, the arrival of the Israelites at Paran; Numbers 10:1-10, a section with references to trumpets, and Numbers 10:13-28, the setting out of the tabernacle camp, are supplementary material.21 Noth’s focus is the pre-history of the final text not its thematic orientation.

There are several good reasons to include all of Numbers 10:1-28 in the text of the tent complex and have it conclude at Numbers 10:28. Firstly, Numbers 10:1-10 refers to trumpets for military and liturgical purposes. Thematically, the military use of trumpets in Numbers 10:1-10 is chiastic framing with the count of military capable men in Numbers 1 and the liturgical use of trumpets alludes to the use of trumpets in Leviticus 23:24 and 25:9. Secondly,

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21 Campbell and O’Brien, *Sources of the Pentateuch*, 79.
Numbers 10:13-28 relates the taking down and transport of the tent of meeting by the appropriate group of Levites according to instructions given in Numbers 4 and the order of march for the twelve tribes of Israel as articulated in Numbers 2. God gives the sign for the camp to move, as explained and anticipated in Exodus 40:34-38, with the lifting of the cloud in Numbers 10:11. With Numbers 10:28 the cultic people depart Sinai transporting the cultic tent. There is no further explicit reference in the Hebrew Bible to this combination of cultic people and portable cultic tent.

To summarise, in diachronic biblical research some major scholars treat Exodus 19—Numbers 10 as Sinai material and different to the J/E Kadesh material that precedes and succeeds it. The Sinai material consists of non-priestly writing (Exodus 19–24) and priestly writing (Exodus 25—Numbers 10) in terms of source analysis. Collections of law and Sinai as the setting are typical of both the non-priestly and priestly Sinai material. However, the non-priestly and the priestly writings are different in both literary style and thematic focus. Differences within the textual evidence of the Sinai material (Exodus 19—Numbers 10) according to diachronic studies are avowed herewith but cannot be pursued without deviating from the major research focus, the tent of meeting.

Bernhard Anderson’s summary of Noth’s source analysis of the priestly Sinai material starts at Exodus 24:15b and concludes at Numbers 10:28 (minus the J/E material of Exodus 32–34). I work with a textual unit which starts at the beginning of the Hebrew sentence Exodus 24:15 and concludes at Numbers 10:28. I call Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28, “the tent complex text,” not “Revelation at Sinai” or “Sinai Tradition” as the focus of this thesis is on the tent of meeting and its world rather than Sinai. In the tent complex text, law and narrative sections mutually enhance one another. Law regulates the daily actions of people, the living of life in relation to the tent of meeting at the centre of the community. Without law and ritual regulations the tent of meeting is no more than a museum piece.
3. Different Voices within the Text

Much recent research on the final form of the Pentateuch speaks of it as a “document of compromise”\(^\text{22}\) or a “document of consensus.”\(^\text{23}\) Consensus suggests finding the majority view/s of different parties, and compromise suggests agreement between different parties. Both terms imply a background of different voices prior to compromise or consensus. Blum writes of voices such as the farming community and priests, and Römer of Jerusalem clergy and laity in power. Rainer Albertz speaks of voices in the early post-exilic period that “stand side by side and against one another and often cross,” some of which are a priestly group, or Deuteronomists.\(^\text{24}\) For Albertz the varying voices create a “multiplicity of theological currents.”

Campbell observes tensions in some Hebrew Bible texts in the course of debating diachronic issues related to various themes in *Making Sense of the Bible*. He finds that biblical texts often provide for contradiction rather than harmonization.\(^\text{25}\) Frequently contrasting views are retained in the Bible.\(^\text{26}\) Certainly, different voices, traditions or theologies sit beside one another within a larger literary unit such as the Pentateuch, for example, the D and the P documents. Within a shorter literary unit such as the Sinai block of material (Exodus 19—Numbers 10) there is, for example, non-priestly and priestly material, or two codes known as the Covenant Code and Holiness Code. Different voices and tensions exist not only between different texts but within a text such as the tent complex text, demonstrated in the following three examples.

Example one looks at two different understandings of a tent of meeting (אֲהלָ מָעָ ד) in Exodus 25–40: Exodus 25–31, 35–40 relates to a tent inside a camp, and frames Exodus 32–34 which

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contains a story about a tent of meeting outside a camp (Exodus 33:7-11). Exodus 32–34 (treated as J/E source in source analysis) is different to the block of text before and after it (P source) for reasons such as different characterization of the people and of Moses, and no command-fulfilment pattern. However, one difference of interest here relates to the tent. The tent of Exodus 25–31, 35–40 is situated at the heart of the Israelite camp with an altar before the tent. It is a tent with a cultic purpose. Provisions are made for priestly personnel. Moses may not enter the tent (Exodus 40:35). On the other hand, the tent of meeting in Exodus 33:7-11 of Exodus 32–34 is outside the camp; no mention is made of an altar or priests. People go out (qal נְאֹת) to it. It is where God is sought (pi’el נְאֹת) and hence derives the idea that it is a consultation tent. Moses has an assistant, Joshua, who is never mentioned in the text on the tent within the camp. Moses may enter the tent outside the camp. The two tents are different; one tent has a cultic function and the other is associated with consultation.

One text is short (five sentences in the NRSV translation) and the other text covers thirteen chapters (NRSV translation). The short text is a story, memory or tradition of a consultation tent. The long text is complex and demonstrates a variety of sophisticated literary techniques. It is a narrative; there is the voice of the narrator, a narrative framework, and contents which are embedded between the narrative frames. It is structured with five repetitive panels. Opening and closing sections not only frame the panels but also contain theophanies (appearances of God, described in dramatic terms). Different genres (that is, particular forms or styles) are used—divine speech (the convention of God speaking via Moses), emblematic or stereotypical characters, legal passages, formulaic language. A mythic element, rarely used but significant, is reference to Sinai, standing for mythic place and time. The technique of retrogression (where a reader or listener of the text learns in hindsight what happened earlier) is also used. Two different tents portrayed in two very different literary styles sit beside one another in the final text. Both tents are set at Sinai, and both tents facilitate communication

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27 In Meir Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 552, the term “genre” is used with a wide range of meanings; the following are some examples of what are given as genres in the index: ambiguity, epic, fantastic, folk tale, gap-filling, law code, letter to gods, oral vs. written, stereotype. A wide range of genres is listed and described in Rolf Knierim and George Coats, Numbers (FOTL IV; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 337-67, some of which are: case law, command, dialogue, genealogy, instruction, narrative, ritual law, saga, theophanic march.
between people and God, but in different ways. Neither text evaluates the other. They sit side by side. In any case, the two tents are different.

Example two involves the ark unit (made up of chest, cover and cherubim) and the different signals given as to what it stands for. On one hand, the space above the ark unit is a privileged place for encounter with God (Exodus 25:22; 30:6). The ark unit is positioned in the innermost section of the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the tent complex. The high priest may enter the sanctuary once a year at Yom Kippur when the ark unit or the sanctuary space is purified through the sprinkling of blood from the sacrificial bull.

On the other hand, the ark is a chest, hollow on the inside and, as expected, having the function to contain that which is put into it. On Mount Sinai within a very long speech (Exodus 25–31) God says he will give Moses a testimony (כָּרְכָּה לָהֶם Exodus 25:16, 21 not the more commonly known word for covenant בְּרִית) to put into the ark. God gives Moses the testimony in the form of two tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18). The tablets are described as being engraved, or “written with the finger of God.” An incense altar, which is attended to through daily priestly responsibilities, is positioned before the “testimony in the tent of meeting” and is where God will meet with Moses (Exodus 30:36). Moses does as instructed and puts the testimony in the ark (Exodus 40:3, 20). The ark is called “the ark of testimony” even before Moses puts the tablets into it. The meaning of testimony קָרְכָּה is unclear despite often being considered synonymous with covenant.28 A testimony or covenant, contract people God and people, is not made in the tent complex text. No indication is given of what is written on the tablets and in a perfunctory manner, with no specified ritual, only as instructed, Moses puts the tablets in the ark. The ark is adorned with a gold cover and two cherubim beaten out of the same piece of metal. If there is any connection between cover and cherubim with the ark, then no signs are given as to the relationship.

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The idea of God as voice and spoken word is much stronger than the idea of the word of God as author in Exodus 25–31, 35–40. The spoken word dominates. What is written on the tablets is unknown. The purpose of the ark unit is unclear. The ark unit functions as the repository for the testimony but without any obvious importance given to the testimony tablets. The holiness of the sanctuary space is more apparent than the role of the ark. The ark and what is associated with it, positioned at the heart of the tent complex, eludes definition: testimony, tablets, and favoured place for meeting with God.

Example three shows how portrayal of the people of Israel in the tent complex text varies. In Exodus 35:20–29 “all the congregation of the people of Israel” (כל עדת בני ישראל) is made up of men (バン) and women (נשים). They are generous, bring offerings of materials and use their skills in the crafts towards construction of a cultic structure, the tent of meeting—the situation is a cultic context. The phrase, “all the congregation of the people of Israel” recurs in Numbers 1:2 but in contrast in a context of a count of men capable of military service and over twenty years old. A literal reading means all Israelites who are not over twenty and capable of going to war are excluded from the congregation of the people of Israel. The idea of the Israelites as a military people continues in Numbers 2 where they are described as camped in regiments under ensigns in twelve groups according to tribe and on every side of the tent of meeting.

One voice has the congregation of Israelites, women and men, as willing participants in construction of a cultic structure and another voice has the congregation of Israel as those suitable for military conscription. The military character seems out of keeping with the wider cultic context. There is no mention of any other people in the tent text at Sinai, only Israelites are mentioned. No other people are in sight, let alone that they be enemies and that there is any need for preparation for warfare.

Different voices, sitting beside one another within larger and smaller blocks of material, appear to be the norm rather than the exception in the Hebrew Bible. Jacob Neusner, rabbi and American scholar of Judaism, expresses the idea of varying voices or traditions as

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29 Further examples of different voices are: the two sets of incest laws (Leviticus 18:6-18 and 20:10-21), and the theophanies on Mount Sinai, one where Moses may enter the cloud to encounter God (Exodus 24:15-18) and one where Moses may not enter the tent of meeting to encounter God (Exodus 40:35; Leviticus 9:23).
“Judaisms.”30 A Judaism is explained as, “a system made up of a world-view, a way of life, and a social group that defines its life through that world view and lives in accord with the descriptions of that way of life.” He writes further:

These Judaisms do not unfold in a linear pattern, one begetting the next, nor do they stand in a continuous and incremental relationship to one another, one on the ruins of the last. Each takes shape on its own, identifying a self-evidently valid answer to that question. All then for justification refer back to a remote and continuous past.31

The underlining is my underlining not Neusner’s. The first underlined phrase can be applied to sequential biblical readings and the second to the results of traditional-historical research methods. If a “Judaism” is accepted to be a block of what can be considered coherent material, then a text about an ark or a tent of meeting or a group of prescriptions such as those on incest (Leviticus 18:4-24) is a Judaism in Neusner’s terms. The quote from Neusner when applied to the tent text has several ramifications.

A synchronic reading of the journey of the tent complex, from the Sinai desert via Shiloh to Jerusalem, is linear in the sense of sequential (events ordered before and after one another) and does not fit with Neusner’s idea of Judaisms, that is, that texts do not “unfold in a linear pattern.” The literary critical and traditional-historical methods which seek the pre-history to the final text stand in Neusner’s terms in a “continuous and incremental relationship to one another, one on the ruins of the last” and do not fit with his idea of Judaisms either.

“Judaisms” can be understood to mean that many biblical texts are situational; they are the writers’ response to situations contemporary to the time in which they are living. Authors rewrite or rework concepts within the Hebrew culture in which they are living at the time of writing. For Neusner, most of the Pentateuch has grown out of the exilic or post-exilic situation and is about self-definition at the time of writing or compilation. Drawing Neusner’s idea to a logical conclusion then, the Pentateuch is made up of blocks of text produced in response to life in exilic and post-exilic times. The concepts and language of biblical Hebrew

31 Neusner, “Exile and Return,” 221.
are drawn from the traditional language and stories or customary laws of the past but all reinterpreted to address a contemporary state of affairs. Neusner concludes, no Judaism “may as a matter of fact trace itself in a unitary and linear path to “Sinai,” that is, the moment of God’s revelation.” The tent of Exodus 25—Numbers 10 cannot therefore be traced back to Sinai in Neusner’s terms.

A third major approach to the biblical text, aside from synchronic and diachronic readings, is that of different voices sitting beside one another in the same text. Incongruities between recurring words and concepts may be harmonised in synchronic readings. This was demonstrated when the term “tent of meeting” was taken and followed as though the term always refers to the same thing. Diachronic methods create a Western understanding of the biblical text by separating out repeated or divergent material and putting it into a different system of groups. The third approach allows different voices to sit within the text. Where different voices exist in a text, generally neither voice evaluates the other. The different voices each have validity. Completeness is suggested through diversity rather than unity or definition. The biblical text is a non-Western style of thought; it is Semitic. Western thought tends to seek a single answer, a single way and to define it. Biblical writing may leave different voices beside one another.

To sum up the first section of the chapter, a linear reading of the tent of meeting from Sinai via Shiloh to Jerusalem is nonsense. There is good reason to accept Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 as part of an independent block of text known as Sinai material in diachronic research and added late to other material to make up what is now called the Pentateuch. Characteristic of the tent complex text as of many biblical texts is that different voices may sit beside one another, for example, a cultic tent inside the camp and a consultation tent outside the camp. This thesis works with the idea of Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 as an independent block of text within which different voices are contained. The different voices are to be understood as adding to completeness in diversity rather than contradictory in unity.
B. Internal Coherence of Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28

The next section of the chapter argues for the internal coherence of the tent text, which on the whole is consistent in thematic and stylistic material, with some contrasting voices as noted previously with examples such as those of the tent, the ark and the congregation of Israel. Evidence for internal coherence within the tent complex text in three major areas, thematic, literary and stylistic, follows and is addressed in that order.

1. Thematic Coherence: Israelite Cult

Israelite cult is the major theme of the tent complex text. The focus in Exodus 25–40 is on a cultic structure, God communicates the pattern for the tent of meeting and the people construct it. The 27 chapters of Leviticus are instructions relating to the practice of Israelite cultic, personal and communal life. The chapters of Leviticus 1–7 are ritual instructions regarding offerings to bring to the altar of the tent of meeting and Leviticus 8–10 is an account of the initiation of cult and priests. Leviticus 11–16 relates to purity instructions and their ritual ramifications for individual and community. Concepts of purity and defilement are inextricably linked in both the private and public domain and only make sense in relation to the tent which stands for the presence of YHWH in the community.\(^\text{32}\) Leviticus 17–26 is often known as the Holiness Code.\(^\text{33}\) Since the text Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 is approached through the lens of the tent of meeting, inevitably more emphasis is given to cult related to the tent of meeting than cult related to the individual and community. The relationship between the instructions of the Holiness Code and the tent of meeting is a thesis in itself again and cannot be duly addressed here. Numbers 1–10 defines the cultic people in military terms and as twelve tribes centred round a cultic tent. An overview of the dense information given in this paragraph is in table 2.3.

\(^{32}\) Liss, “Ritual Purity,” 353.

A cultic centre without ritual regulations is comparable to a museum or an artifact. The practice of ritual instructions is the dynamic life of cultic place. Narrative and instructions are integrally linked in the tent text. The tent complex text falls into three natural cultic areas, cultic place in Exodus, cultic instructions in Leviticus 1–16 and defining of the cultic people in Numbers 1–10.

The three cultic areas are interrelated. Therefore, information on one cultic area may not be confined to one biblical book but cross over into another. Some information on the tent of meeting is introduced in Exodus and then later developed in Leviticus or Numbers, a good reason for internal and thematic coherence within the tent complex text. Instructions on construction of the lampstand (Exodus 25:31-40) are fulfilled in Exodus 37:17-24 and Numbers 8:1-4. Instructions on the consecration of priests (Exodus 29) are fulfilled in the narrative Leviticus 8–10, or the people designated as Israelites at the start of the text (Exodus 25:2) are identified by tribe at registration time in the lists of Numbers 1 and 2. In general,
information introduced in Exodus is developed and expanded over the course of the text and gradually the sense of an Israelite cultic world grows.

Thematic unity also occurs on a linguistic level in Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 with three key verbs and related nouns. Nouns which refer to the cultic structure are: tent of meeting (אהל מועד), tabernacle (משכן), and sanctuary (מקדש). The lexical forms related to the nouns referring to the cultic structure are to dwell (שכן), to be set apart or consecrate (קדש) and to appoint (יעד). The verbs all occur in the following speech which God speaks via Moses:

At the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet (nip‘al תנ‘) with you, to speak to you there. I will meet (nip‘al תנ‘) with the Israelites there, and it shall be sanctified (nip‘al קדש) by my glory; I will consecrate (pi‘el קדש) the tent of meeting and the altar; Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate (pi‘el קדש), to serve me as priests. I will dwell (qalطنש) among the Israelites, and I will be their God. (Exodus 29:42-45)

In the speech God speaks using the verb in the first person singular six times. To say “I will dwell” is to express a desire. Terms for the Israelite cultic structure and the anthropomorphic wishes of God are intrinsically linked; the tabernacle (literally dwelling place) is linked with God’s desire to dwell among the people, and the tent of meeting linked with God’s desire to meet with the people. Linguistic unity permeates the text.

The first of the three key verbs to be addressed is “to appoint” (יעד). The word “meeting” (מועד) of “tent of meeting,” (אהל מועד) is related to the Hebrew verb to “appoint” (יעד) and as shown in table 2.1 occurs over thirty times in each of the three biblical books of the tent complex text.34 Two further words related to יעד and used in the tent complex text are congregation (עדה) and appointed festival (מועד).35 Congregation refers to the cultic people or linking the noun “congregation” (עדה) with its lexical base (עבד), it may be understood as “the

35 Occurrences of “congregation” in the tent text: Exodus 35:1, 4, 20; 38:25; Leviticus 4:13, 15; 8:3ff; 9:5; 10:6, 17; 16:5; 19:2; 24:14, 16; Numbers 1:2, 16, 18, 53; 3:7; 4:34; 8:9, 20; 10:2f, and of “appointed festivals”:
Leuiticus 23:2, 4, 6, 34, 37, 39, 41, 44; Numbers 9:2, 3, 7, 13; 10:10. Notes on congregation (עדה) in Milgrom, Numbers, 335, and Levine, Leuiticus, 22.
appointed people.” Hence, at least three nouns are related to the lexical form יעד (tent of meeting, אהל מועד), congregation (עדה), and appointed festival (מועד) and thereby suggest linguistic unity of appointed place, people and time. Propp in his Exodus commentary even goes so far as to suggest that the Hebrew עדות, from the term “ark of testimony” (ארון עדות), rhymes with congregation (עדה) and Görg that there is a paronomastic (punning) relationship between the verb “to appoint” (עד) and the noun “testimony” (עדות).  

Parts of the tent text are clearly elevated language and suggest linguistic interplay.

The second of the key verbs is “to dwell” (שכן) to which the word tabernacle (משכן) is related; frequency of occurrence of the word “tabernacle” was presented at the beginning of the chapter. Something further to add here is that whenever the verb שכן occurs in the tent complex text, it implicitly or explicitly refers to YHWH. The verb שכן is in explicit reference to YHWH in the following:

- That I (YHWH) may dwell (qal שכן) among them (i.e., the people of Israel, Exodus 25:8; 29:45-46; Numbers 5:3),
- The glory of God settles (qal שכן) on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:16).

In the following, the verb שכן is used in implicit connection with YHWH and explained with the text in italics within the round brackets:

- Cloud (a sign of God) settles (qal שכן) on the tabernacle (Exodus 40:35; Numbers 9:17–18, 22) and at Paran (Numbers 10:12)
- The tent of meeting (the tent standing for the presence of God) remains (qal שכן) with the people of Israel “in the midst of their uncleannesses” (Leviticus 16:16).

Where the Hebrew verb שכן is used in the tent complex text, it indicates that God is present.

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36 Propp, Exodus 19–40, 385; Görg, TDOT 6:143.
The third key verb is “to set apart or consecrate” (קדש). Sanctuary (קדש or מקדש), literally meaning holy place, occurs fifty five times.\(^{38}\) A derivative of the rootקדש is used in five percent of all the sentences of the tent complex text in Exodus and Numbers and over 10 percent of all the sentences in Leviticus indicating the importance of the concept of holiness.

A sense of different aspects of holiness develops as the tent text unfolds, from an awareness of spatial areas of holiness within the tent complex and the relation between purity laws and holiness on a personal and community level, to laws that regulate who may touch consecrated objects in the tent complex. Holiness is also equated with the power of God which is dangerous as seen in the scene when two of Aaron’s sons die because they use unholy fire (Leviticus 10).

In Exodus 29:42-45, all three key verbs appear; God is portrayed as desiring to meet, to dwell, and to make holy. Linguistically the terms for the different cultic structures and God’s desire to be among Israelites are from the same three roots. Variants of three major linguistic roots used throughout the text create a semantic unity.

2. Literary Coherence: Cloud Motif and Picture Framing

Two literary techniques which facilitate a sense of unity within the tent complex text are motif and picture framing. A motif is a recurring sign within an artistic or literary work, often identified with a character. In the tent complex text the motif of cloud appears at important moments and signals an event associated with God. Cloud appears at the beginning (Exodus 24:15-18), middle (Exodus 40:34-38) and end (Numbers 9:15-23; 10:11-12) of the tent complex text and also in Leviticus 16:2-13. All instances are textual highlights as God is explicitly present at these moments.

It is pertinent to look at the first occurrence of cloud in some detail as it gives insight into the motif. The tent text begins with a scene on Mount Sinai and cloud covers the mountain, but the nature of the cloud is ambiguous. It is dense as it settles and Moses is described as entering

the cloud, yet at the same time the cloud is also transparent as the people are able to see and thereby witness “the glory of the Lord, like devouring fire on top of the mountain.” Cloud often blurs or veils so things cannot be seen clearly. The not seeing clearly allows a non-differentiated realm between the earthly and divine. In the cloud on the mountain supernatural things happen. God calls (קרא) Moses (Exodus 24:16) and delivers a very long speech (Exodus 25–31) in which God speaks of desiring a dwelling place amongst the people. A pattern (תבנית, Exodus 25:8, 40; Numbers 8:4) or plan (משׁפט Exodus 26:30) for a dwelling structure is conveyed to Moses.39

The motif of cloud recurs after the dwelling structure is constructed and assembled (Exodus 40:34-38). The cloud moves from mountain to the tent of meeting. Several verbs recur with the cloud motif. As cloud covered the mountain so it covers (כסה) the tent of meeting (Exodus 24:15; 40:34; Numbers 9:15-16), settles upon it (שׁכן Exodus 40:35; Numbers 9:17) or is taken up (עלה Exodus 40:36-37; Numbers 9:17; 10:11). The cloud of the mountain moves to the tent of meeting and henceforth becomes a sign associated with the presence of God at a cultic place and with transport of the tent (Numbers 9:15-23). In Exodus 40:36-37 the narrator explains that by day when the cloud is over the tent of meeting the people stay put and if the cloud is taken up the people pack camp and move to the next stage of their journey.40

Numbers 9:15-23 is a lengthy passage relating to the motif of cloud. Two functions of cloud are suggested here, movement and remaining. The dynamic nature of the cloud tends to dominate on initial readings. If the cloud lifts (nip‘al עלה), the Israelites are to break camp or set out (qal נסע) and journey on. נסע is used nine times in this passage and mention of the cloud lifting is four times. However, two new Hebrew verbs are used to express the non-movement of the cloud (qal to be long, meaning to linger in the nip‘al) and היה (the verb to be) in addition to שׁכן which is translated variously as to dwell, settle, or remain (echoing its use in Exodus 40:35). There are seven references to the cloud dwelling, settling, remaining, being

39 משׁפט derives from שׁפט and is more common in a legal sense. The use of plan (משׁפט Exodus 26:30) is a hapax legomenon in the tent complex text but also used in the sense of a legal plan or specifications for a building plan in 1 Kings 6:38.
40 Cloud in Leviticus, as either a cloud of incense (Leviticus 16:13) or a medium through which God appears above the cover of the ark (Leviticus 16:2), functions similarly to cloud on the mountain. It is dense and allows an ambiguous or crossover zone between the earthly and divine.
(meaning staying) and lingering over the tabernacle. After leaving Sinai there is no further explicit reference to the cultic tent of meeting. However, the cloud, a sign of the presence of God indicates that God continues to dwell, settle, remain, stay and linger over the tent of meeting in the camp even if departure is to no particular place.

At the end of the tent complex text, abruptly, the date as year, month and day is given, the cloud lifts, the tent is taken down and the Israelites set out from the wilderness of Sinai (Numbers 10:11-17). The tent complex moves to no particular place but the presence of God remains with the people. The motif of cloud frames the beginning and end of the cultic tent section of the text and the very end of the entire tent text.

The second unifying literary technique of the tent text is that of the picture frame. The framework narrative in the tent complex text functions like a picture frame. The framework narrative is the prose text surrounding narrative or speech contents and where a narrator functions as a master of ceremonies introducing characters, establishing the setting, opening and closing sequences. There is very little framework narrative in the tent of meeting text. Short introductory and concluding sentences, often formulaic (e.g., “The Lord spoke to Moses” or “as the Lord commanded Moses”), make up most of the framework narrative. However, the very sparse text in the framework narrative of the tent complex text is important because it is where the setting and characters of the contents are stated.

The opening and closing sentences of Leviticus indicate the brevity of the framework narrative. In the following opening and closing sentences of the book of Leviticus, the underlined words are the setting and the italicised words are God and the people of the picture frame. Leviticus begins:

*The Lord* summoned *Moses* and spoke to him from the *tent of meeting*, saying:

Speak to the *people of Israel.* (Leviticus 1:1-2a)

Leviticus concludes:
These are the commandments that the Lord gave to Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai. (Leviticus 27:34)

The opening of Numbers expands the end of Leviticus with the addition of dates:

The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt. (Numbers 1:1)

The picture frame for the entire text, Exodus 25 through to Numbers 10, is the wilderness of Sinai with the tent assembled close to Mount Sinai and the people of Israel camped round the tent complex as the contents of Numbers 1-10 relate.41 The characters are the people of Israel and Moses. God can be portrayed with a speech bubble in the picture frame. Some of the speeches and scenes in the text are so long and detailed that it is easy to lose sight of the frame. Though Sinai is rarely mentioned in the text, all the events of the tent of meeting text are centred round the tent complex in the wilderness of Sinai.

3. Stylistic Coherence: Command-Fulfilment Pattern

Stylistically, much of the tent complex text follows a command-fulfilment pattern of divine speech followed by narrative. The command-fulfilment pattern is almost universally recognised by scholars though different terminology may be used such as prescriptive and descriptive, or command and execution.42 One of the characteristics of the command-fulfilment pattern is repetition as the narrative of the fulfilment section repeats the contents,

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41 References to Sinai in the tent text: Exodus 24:16; 31:18; 34:2, 4, 29, 32; Leviticus 7:38; 25:1; 26:46; 27:34; Numbers 1:1, 19; 3:1, 4, 14; 9:1, 5; 10:12. The underlined references relate to the text concerning the consultation tent of meeting outside the camp not the cultic tent inside the camp. There is one single reference in Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 to Mount Horeb (Exodus 33:6). As there are different voices in Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 such as a cultic tent and a consultation tent so there are different designations for place; the designation Sinai is predominantly used in the tent of meeting text but also the designation, Mount Horeb. Further discussion on the terminology Sinai and Horeb in: John McKenzie, “Sinai,” in Dictionary of the Bible (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), 821-22; Jacob, Exodus, 1060-71.

sometimes verbatim, of the divine speech of the command section. Major examples of the command-fulfilment pattern are listed in table 2.4.

The command part of the command-fulfilment pattern is communicated as speech and more specifically in a style called here divine speech as God is understood as the source of the speech. The speeches consist predominantly of instructions which Moses as the designated human person communicates to the people. A divine speech opens with the formula “The Lord spoke (or said) to Moses,” followed by the Hebrew indicator for direct speech, מראת. The same formula, “the Lord spoke to Moses,” also functions as a paragraph marker. Frequent occurrence of the formula in the course of a speech reinforces the impression that the text is speech, and the speech of God.

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<td>Numbers 4:34-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command to Dedicate Levites</td>
<td>Levites Dedicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers 8:5-19</td>
<td>Numbers 8:20-22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.4 Command-Fulfilment pattern


The fulfilment part of the command-fulfilment pattern repeats, in a varied form, the vocabulary of the instructions, and confirms that the instructions have been carried out. The formula, “as the Lord had commanded,” often concludes fulfilment sections. Concluding phrases such as “So Moses finished the work” (Exodus 40:33) or “the tent of meeting was finished” (Exodus 39:32) semantically close sections.

Two examples follow which demonstrate the command-fulfilment pattern. Phrases used in the command that recur in the fulfilment section are underlined to graphically demonstrate repetition and the quantity of repetition.

Example 1a. Command in divine speech, communicated by Moses:

Moses said to all the congregation of the Israelites: This is the thing that the Lord has commanded: … Take from among you an offering to the Lord; let whoever is of a generous heart bring the Lord’s offering: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine linen; goats’ hair,… (Exodus 35:1, 5-6)

Example 1b. Fulfilment of the command:

Then all the congregation of the Israelites withdrew from the presence of Moses. And they came, everyone whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and brought the Lord’s offering to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the sacred vestments. So they came, both men and women; all who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and pendants, all sorts of gold objects, everyone bringing an offering of gold to the Lord. And everyone who possessed blue or purple or crimson yarn or fine linen or goats’ hair … (Exodus 35:20-23)

Example 2a. Command part of the command-fulfilment pattern:

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The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: The Israelites shall camp each in their respective regiments, under ensigns by their ancestral houses; they shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side … (Numbers 2:1-2)

Example 2b. Instruction fulfilled with the following words:

The Israelites did just as the Lord had commanded Moses: They camped by regiments, and they set out the same way, everyone by clans, according to ancestral houses. (Numbers 2:34–3:1)

As demonstrated with the underlining above, recurring vocabulary pervades the command-fulfilment pattern. Repetition occurs in other subtle ways. For example, “whoever is of a generous heart” (דבוב לבו where דבוב functions as an adjective) in the command part of the Exodus example becomes “everyone whose heart was stirred” (נשׂאו לבו where נשׂא functions as a verb). The idea of a generous heart is expanded with a willing spirit in the fulfilment section. Grammatically, the imperative, “bring,” of the command becomes “brought” in the fulfilment section. Repetition is found in much of the tent of meeting text: use of exactly the same words, grammatical change, or semantic repetition with different words.

The repetition that results from the command-fulfilment pattern reflects a complex relationship between divine will and human action on a literary level. This is a completely different understanding of repetition to that of diachronic research where repetition is often understood as redundancy and indicating different editorial layers.46

Summary

A synchronic and sequential reading of occurrences of the term, tent of meeting, in the Hebrew Bible demonstrates on closer analysis that though the term tent of meeting is used in

46 Julius Popper’s work is representative of early diachronic research into Exodus 25–40. He treats the repetitions as redundancy and an A + B pattern. This is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, “Cultic Place.” Propp discusses the effects of redundancy and diachronic research on Exodus 25–40 in, Exodus, 365-8.
different contexts it by no means refers to the same tent of meeting as that described in the tent complex text. A tent of meeting can be inside or outside the camp, a consultation or cultic tent or even a vestige of a tent and hence one must speak of different tents (plural) of meeting. The tent of meeting of the tent complex text (Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28) is different to the image and function suggested by other occurrences of the term in the Hebrew Bible.

In diachronic research several major scholars support the idea that Exodus 19—Numbers 10, a block of text set at Sinai, is an independent literary unit and incorporated late, meaning post-exilic, into the Pentateuch. The Sinai block of text is made up of non-priestly (Exodus 19–24) and priestly (Exodus 25—Numbers 10) material. The tent complex text is the priestly material of the Sinai text. Noth’s source analysis of the Pentateuch separates the priestly material into base narrative and supplementary material, effectively the separation of narrative and law, but I argue that thematically narrative and law belong together under the subject, cult. The textual perimeters chosen for the tent of meeting text are Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28.

Internal coherence within the tent complex text is achieved with stylistic and thematic unity and the literary technique of motif. The sparse framework narrative sets the scene as a cultic tent at the centre of the camp of the people of Israel at Sinai, with God speaking via Moses, and functions as a picture frame. Different voices sitting beside one another in the biblical text are one of the characteristics of the Hebrew Bible. Exodus 32–34, with the Golden Calf scene and the tent of meeting outside the camp and framed by Exodus 25–31 and 35–40 is certainly one prime example of a different voice within the tent complex text. Completeness is expressed through diversity. The tent complex text falls into three natural parts, cultic place in Exodus 25–40, the practice of cult through the ritual instructions in Leviticus 1–16 and defining of the cultic people in Numbers 1–10.
Chapter 3

Cultic Place

Exodus 24:15–40:38

The central subject matter of the textual evidence in Exodus 24:15–40:38 is the tent of meeting. The methodology followed in this chapter is to describe the textual evidence in section A and present the most pertinent evidence relating to the tent of meeting. The evidence is discussed and developed in section B as six different thematic issues.

Two issues are dealt with before proceeding to a presentation of the textual evidence in section A. Images suggested by different biblical terms for the cultic complex are addressed and an analysis of Exodus 24:15–40:38 as a five panel structure, which is innovative and therefore unfamiliar, is introduced.

The biblical evidence suggests different images with the various terms used for the tent structure at the centre of the Israelite camp at Sinai: sanctuary (יִרְדָּן, Exodus 25:8), tabernacle (מְשֻׁן, Exodus 25:9), and tent of meeting (אֲרֵיחַ מַצּוֹד, Exodus 27:21).¹ The image suggested by all three terms is that of a tent, which can be visualised from the interior and exterior. Going from large to small, the biggest entity is the tent of meeting and the smallest the sanctuary. In general, “sanctuary” refers to the innermost part of the tabernacle, understood as the most holy place, a place of dangerous attraction. The image of the sanctuary is primarily an interior view. The sanctuary can be entered and what the inside looks like is communicated by the text.

Linguistically the sanctuary is associated with that which is holy. The word, sanctuary, can be used synonymously with the term tabernacle (for example, Exodus 36:4; 38:24; Numbers 3:38; 4:15; 8:19).

Visually and from the exterior the tabernacle is a tent. Inside, it is made up of two zones, the foreroom and the sanctuary. From the exterior and visually the tent of meeting is the central tent plus courtyard, marked with a fence-like delimiter. It is an extensive precinct. A non-biblical term, “tent complex,” is used to refer to the entire tent of meeting area, for the purposes of this study. From an exterior view the tent complex is the central tent, a large courtyard and a fence surrounding the whole, and portrayed as such in the biblical text. The space at the altar, the foreroom of the tabernacle or the sanctuary space are just some of the many possible interior views of the tent complex as suggested by the text.

Generally, understandings of sanctuary (קדש, קדש), tabernacle (משכן) and tent of meeting (אהל מועד) are explained linguistically, according to derivation, as often seen in Bible dictionary entries. The visual approach to the tent of meeting as suggested by the biblical text is less frequently used but equally as viable as the more traditional linguistic explanations.

Combinations of the terms such as “tabernacle of the tent of meeting” (Exodus 39:32; 40:2, 6, 29) sometimes occur and the terms may be combined with another concept such as testimony (עדות) to become the grouping, “tabernacle of the testimony” (Numbers 10:11). Although the Hebrew words for covenant (ברית) and testimony (עדות) are considered synonymous by scholars such as Meyers, Sarna and Rothkoff the distinction is made between the two words herein as does the King James Bible translation of the Masoretic Text. Testimony (עדות) is used extensively in the tent complex text and covenant (ברית) rarely. The ark is often termed “the ark of testimony” in the tent of meeting text never, “the ark of the covenant.”

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**Five Panel Structure of Exodus 24:15–40:38**

A structure of five panels framed with an opening and closing narrative, as shown in table 3.1, is proposed for Exodus 24:15–31, 35–40. Exodus 25–40 is often treated as a two part structure made up an A and B section in diachronic research, A as Exodus 25–31 and B as Exodus 35–39 or 40. (Julius Popper was one of the first scholars to propose this structure.) The two sections contain the same material but in a different sequence and style. Section A moves from the interior of the tent to its construction then to the exterior zone of the tent. Section B moves from construction of the tent to its interior then to the exterior zone. The style of section A is predominantly divine speech and that of section B predominantly narrative.

Julius Popper (1862) applied source critical methods with a focus on repetitions, doublets, and changes in literary style to Exodus 25–31, 35–40. He proposed a bipartite structure and two different authors, A being an early composition and B being later with expansions, to explain the repetitions. Benno Jacob (1902) refutes Popper’s proposal and sees a unity between the A and B sections. For Jacob the A and B sections treat the same objects from different points of view, A being command and B being execution of the commands of section A. The terminology “command and fulfilment (or execution)” or “prescriptive and descriptive” is applied to the two sections by some scholars and demonstrates an awareness of a bipartite structure in Exodus 25–31, 35–40.

The idea of the tent complex text as a bipartite structure, understood as command and fulfilment, does not adequately account for section B, Exodus 35–40. As can be seen in table 3.1, section B of the bipartite structure is not a mere repetition of section A with a few variations but is in fact made up of four parts, panels 2–5.

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4 Houtman, *Exodus: Chapters 20–40*, 308-18, addresses similarities and differences between the A and B parts. Differences between sections A and B range from the materials, the sequence in which materials are listed, change in addressee from either a singular or plural “you” to “he,” and change from direct speech to narrative.


6 Jacob, *Pentateuch*, 139-145.

7 Jacob, *Exodus*, 1008-09.

In table 3.1 round brackets follow the title given to four of the panels, (C) standing for command and (F) for fulfilment. Panel two is the fulfilment of panel 1, addressed to the people of Israel and confirmed in panel three. Panel four is a new set of commands, directed specifically at Moses not at the people of Israel and fulfilled by him in panel five. Five panels is a better structural analysis than the bipartite structure for several reasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening</th>
<th>Moses receives plan for tent on Mt Sinai</th>
<th>Exodus 24:15-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panel 1</td>
<td>Plan for tent communicated to people (C)</td>
<td>Exodus 25:1–31:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 2</td>
<td>Israelites make tent parts (F)</td>
<td>Exodus 35:1–39:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 3</td>
<td>Completed parts of tent brought to Moses</td>
<td>Exodus 39:33-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 4</td>
<td>God tells Moses to assemble tent (C)</td>
<td>Exodus 40:1-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 5</td>
<td>Moses assembles tent (F)</td>
<td>Exodus 40:17-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>Cloud covers the tent in the camp</td>
<td>Exodus 40:34-38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Five-Panel structure of Exodus 24:15–40

One reason is repetition, a startling feature of the tent complex text and often observed as various people write of the text as verbatim or pedantic repetition.\(^9\) Repetition is a key into the text. References to cultic furnishings and parts of the tent are repeated fivefold, not twofold. Table 3.2 demonstrates the fivefold repetition of a series of items. Where no biblical reference is given in table 3.2 then there is no occurrence of that term in that panel of the text.

A characteristic of the repeated items is that they generally appear in the same order in the panels such as the ark then the table of showbread followed by the lampstand. These three items relate to objects inside the tent. The sequence of the burnt offering altar and basin followed by mention of the court relate to the cultic space before the tent. An implicit logic in

the sequence of items makes it possible for a receiver of the text, listener or reader, to recall all
the objects and their positioning within the complex. Implicit logic is allied with the engagement of the minds and senses of the audience of the text and facilitates memorization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Panel 1</th>
<th>Panel 2</th>
<th>Panel 3</th>
<th>Panel 4</th>
<th>Panel 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tabernacle</td>
<td>Ex 25:9</td>
<td>Ex 36:8</td>
<td>Ex 39:33</td>
<td>Ex 40:2</td>
<td>Ex 40:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ark</td>
<td>Ex 25:10-22</td>
<td>Ex 37:1-9</td>
<td>Ex 39:35</td>
<td>Ex 40:3</td>
<td>Ex 40:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table (and Bread)</td>
<td>Ex 25:23-30</td>
<td>Ex 37:10-16</td>
<td>Ex 39:4</td>
<td>Ex 40:4</td>
<td>Ex 40:22-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lampstand</td>
<td>Ex 25:31-38</td>
<td>Ex 37:17-24</td>
<td>Ex 39:4b</td>
<td>Ex 40:4</td>
<td>Ex 40:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening curtain for sanctuary</td>
<td>Ex 26:31-33</td>
<td>Ex 35:12</td>
<td>Ex 39:34</td>
<td>Ex 40:3</td>
<td>Ex 40:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incense/golden altar</td>
<td>Ex 30:1-9</td>
<td>Ex 37:25-28</td>
<td>Ex 39:38</td>
<td>Ex 40:5</td>
<td>Ex 40:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening Curtain: tent entrance</td>
<td>Ex 26:36-37</td>
<td>Ex 36:37-38</td>
<td>Ex 39:38</td>
<td>Ex 40:5</td>
<td>Ex 40:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basin (and water)</td>
<td>Ex 30:18-21</td>
<td>Ex 38:8</td>
<td>Ex 39:39</td>
<td>Ex 40:7</td>
<td>Ex 40:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court</td>
<td>Ex 27:9-18</td>
<td>Ex 38:9-17</td>
<td>Ex 39:40</td>
<td>Ex 40:8</td>
<td>Ex 40:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screen curtain (at gate)</td>
<td>Ex 28:2-37</td>
<td>Ex 38:18</td>
<td>Ex 39:40</td>
<td>Ex 40:8</td>
<td>Ex 40:33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.2 Fivefold repetition of items*

Items mentioned fivefold in the biblical text are presented and organised as three different categories:

- Interior of the tent of meeting,
- Tent of meeting as a physical construction,
- Exterior to the tent of meeting.
The category “interior of the tent of meeting” incorporates items, such as the ark and liturgical furnishings (the table of showbread, the lampstand and incense altar); these things are situated in the tent. The “tent of meeting as a physical construction” refers to the parts that make up the physical structure of the tent such as interior curtains, exterior curtains, frames, cross-bars, or screening curtain. The “exterior to the tent of meeting” refers to that which is outside the tent of meeting and in the court, the altar in front of the tent, the bronze water basin between the altar and entrance of the tent, the court around with hangings and pillars. All three categories are repeated in each of the five panels.

The idea of panels is taken from Sean McEvenue’s work, *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer*.

McEvenue observes that some biblical narratives, such as the creation account of Genesis 1 and the spy story of Numbers 13–14, use a system of panels to advance the narrative, similar to an English oral literary form as found in “The Little Red Hen,” and “Henny Penny” stories. To these English oral stories can be added Edward Lear’s “The Jumblies,” or an English classic poem, “A Frog He Would A-Wooing Go.”

Characteristic of the panel structure in English literature and biblical narrative is repetition of vocabulary, repetition of the order of the vocabulary within each panel, and something new added in each panel which progresses the narrative as each new panel succeeds the former. In the biblical text, the panels may expand or decrease in length. The length of the panels in the tent complex text is variable as seen in table 3.3.

The order of categories in panel two to five is the same with a movement from the exterior of the tent to its interior. Only in the first panel is the order different (from the interior to the exterior). The idea of panels, with fivefold repeated contents and presented in the same

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11 “A frog he would a-wooing go,” the narrative script changes in each new verse as shown in the bold at the start of the second verse, the italics are repeated in each new panel:

Panel one: A frog he would a-wooing go,

_Heigh ho, says Rowley_,

A frog he would a-wooing go,

Whether his mother would let him or no,

_With a roly-poly, gammon and spinach_,

_Heigh-ho, says Anthony Rowley!_

Panel two: **So off he set with his opera hat**,

_Heigh ho, says Rowley, etc._
sequence four out of five times, gives form to the fivefold repetitive nature of the tent of meeting text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel 1</th>
<th>241 verses</th>
<th>Exodus 25:1–31:18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panel 2</td>
<td>165 verses</td>
<td>Exodus 35:1–39:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 3</td>
<td>10 verses</td>
<td>Exodus 39:33-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 4</td>
<td>16 verses</td>
<td>Exodus 40:1-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 5</td>
<td>17 verses</td>
<td>Exodus 40:17-33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.3 Variable length of panels**

The five-panel structure alternates between writing styles and addressees within the text. As shown in table 3.1, panel one is command in the form of divine speech addressed to the Israelites and fulfilled by the Israelites as described in the narrative of panel two. Moses is the addressee of commands in divine speech form in panel four which he fulfils as described in the narrative of panel five. Panel three is a narrative affirmation of panels one and two.

Characteristic of the five panels is the use of formulaic language to open and close panels. The opening of a panel is indicated with the introductory formulae, “the Lord said/spoke to Moses” (Exodus 25:1; 35:3; 40:1) and the closing with a concluding formula such as “as the Lord had commanded Moses” (Exodus 39:42; 40:16; 40:32). In addition to a closing formula, some panels close with a phrase that gives semantic conclusion, such as in panel two, “in this way all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished” (Exodus 39:32), panel three, “when Moses saw that they had done all the work, he blessed them” (Exodus 39:43), or panel five, “So Moses finished the work” (Exodus 40:33).

The advantage of the five panel structure over the bipartite structure is that it takes into consideration fivefold repetition of items, an implicit categorization and order of the repeated items, and the natural opening and closing semantic divisions. It also takes into account different addressees and writing styles that are not reflected in the bipartite structure.
The five panels are framed with an opening (Exodus 24:15-18) and closing narrative (Exodus 40:34-38). The setting is Sinai. In the opening narrative God communicates the pattern for the tent complex to Moses on a mountain covered (כָּסָה) in cloud and in the closing scene cloud covers (כָּסָה) the assembled tent of meeting. As the glory of God settled (שָׁכֵן) on Mount Sinai in the opening frame, so the glory of God settles (שָׁכֵן) on and fills (מָלָא) the tabernacle in the closing frame. Cloud and glory, suggesting the presence of God, are features common to a theophany, a typology (a form of writing with characteristics in common) used in the tent of meeting text. The opening and closing framework narratives contain theophanies and are privileged moments. The scenes are not private but verified before or in the eyes (Exodus 24:17; 40:38) of the people of Israel (בני ישראל) who function as witnesses.

The literary structure of the tent complex text in Exodus is one of five panels, clearly framed with an opening and closing narrative. The typology of a theophany, and the genre of divine speech are two literary techniques used in the text. The presence of God moves from mountain to the cultic structure of the tabernacle/tent of meeting. The people of Israel are the addressees and central persons of panels one to three and witness the scenes of the opening and closing narratives.

The next section of the chapter describes major textual evidence in each panel.

A. Describing the Evidence

Panel 1 (Exodus 25:1–31:18)

The primary function of panel one is communication of the design of the tent complex and its furnishings to the people of Israel. The designer of the tent complex is God. Instructions for the design of the tent complex start with the interior furnishings, continue with materials for the tabernacle tent, the courtyard and zone around the tabernacle tent and finish with instructions for cultic personnel.
The design is communicated through the genre of divine speech, a literary convention that allows the transmission of God’s words to human beings. Moses is the spokesperson, the medium for divine speech and communicates instructions (תורות) to the people of Israel (בני ישראל). The speech starts with the Israelites and addresses the attitude expected of each person, that their heart (לב) be moved (:bold) to give offerings (תרומות). The heart is the source of human motivation and the idea of movement is from the Hebrew verb נדב meaning “to urge on or prompt” in the qal. Offerings are mentioned three times in the opening two sentences of the speech (Exodus 25:2-3b), indicating their importance. The literary style of Exodus 25:2-3b is elevated language. It is poetic narrative with repetitions of words (תרומות and ל_ajax used three times), linguistic changes in the words used and shifts between voices, from God in the first person, Moses in the second, and the people of Israel in the third.12 That each person has a heart prepared to give offerings is the human context for the speech of panel one.

Three groups of “I” statements, places where God speaks in the first person in two or more consecutive sentences, occur in panel one (Exodus 25:8-9, 21-22; 29:42-46). God is the subject, the “I” of the “I” statements. In the “I” statements God’s interests are revealed and they are therefore privileged moments. Of note is the verbs that are used and the context in which the “I” statements are made. In the first group of “I” statements (Exodus 25:8-9) God says, “Have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell (שכן) among them.” The context is the people of Israel, as “among them” (בתוכם) means among the Israelites.13 The verb of note is “to dwell.” God desires to dwell among the people. The means to having God dwell among the people is a sanctuary. The sanctuary is not an end in itself but the means and for this purpose the pattern (תבנית) for construction of a sanctuary is given.

The second group (Exodus 25:21-22) of “I” statements concludes a section with instructions for construction of the ark unit (Exodus 25:10-22). God says, “There I will meet (יעד) with you (לך שם).” “There” refers to the space above the ark unit. God is subject, the one activating meeting in the sentence. The object is “with you,” and is in the second person singular in

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12 Sternberg, Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 72, 101-2.
13 Liss, in “Imaginary Sanctuary,” 678-81, develops the importance of prepositions in relation to people and God and Blum, Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch, 297, focuses on the centrality of the people of Israel in Exodus 29:42-46.
Hebrew. On the textual plane, the “you” of “with you” refers to Moses but any receiver of the
text is privy to the encounters between God and Moses and is therefore implicitly meant with
the object “with you.”

In the third group (Exodus 29:42-46) of “I” statements the verbs to dwell and to meet are both
used in a section that concludes instructions for the altar at the entrance of the tent of meeting.
God says, “I will meet (יעד) with the Israelites (לבני ישראל) there,” and “I will dwell (שכן)
balam the Israelites (בתוך בני ישראל) (Exodus 29:45). As in the first group of “I” statements the
people of Israel are the focus of meeting and dwelling. The sanctuary is a place and space
associated with God; the ark and altar are cultic objects within the tent of meeting complex
and are also associated with God. The people can access these spaces and see the cultic objects
that are identified with holy space. The primary focus of the “I” statements is God, who
desires to meet and dwell among the people. The means to this end is cultic space.

Communication of instructions for the construction of the tabernacle occurs in panel one. The
building plan is called in Hebrew a “pattern” (תבנית) (Exodus 25:9, 40) or a “plan” (מש申しפ)
(Exodus 26:30). Pattern (תבנית) is formed from the verb “to build” and is the biblical
terminology for the architectural design. Characteristic of Hebrew also is that instructions for
the pattern or plan of the tent complex are expressed as being shown, from the Hebrew verb
ראה. In Numbers 8:4 is a further reference to the design plan for the tabernacle but in this
instance with the Hebrew noun ראה, formed from the verb to show ראה. In Exodus 27:8 the
verb to show without a noun referring to a pattern or plan is used to imply building pattern.

Literary artistry is such that the audience of the text learn retrospectively that the pattern for
the tabernacle was revealed on the mountain to Moses. In the opening framework narrative
Moses is on the mountain in cloud, God speaks and a theophany witnessed by the people.
Only in the course of the first panel does the audience of the text learn that the pattern for the
tent of meeting was communicated to Moses in cloud on the mountain.

14 On ↵מש申しפ Exodus 26:30 see chapter 2 of this work n. 39.
A major characteristic of panel one is the design detail given for various parts of the tent complex. Many examples of detail are possible and it is not necessary to address every possible example. Three examples relating to the ark, the building frames and lampstand follow.

Dimensions for the ark (אָרֹן) are 2.5 cubits long by 1.5 cubits wide and 1.5 cubits high (approximately 1250 cm long by 750 cm wide and 750 cm high in metric measurements, Exodus 25:10-16). The ark is to be made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold inside and outside. Gold rings are to be made for the four feet and gold overlaid poles of acacia wood to be inserted into the rings. On top of the ark is a cover (כפרת). The derivation of כפרת is disputed. It is possibly from the Arabic kafara with the primary meaning “to cover” and leading to the translation of כפרת as “cover,” or possibly from the Hebrew כפר “to atone” and leading to a translation such as “mercy seat” in the NRSV. Hammered out of the same golden metal unit as the cover are two cherubim with their wings stretched out and facing one another.

It is pertinent to comment on the ramifications of the design of the ark. Rings and poles on the ark are for portability, suggesting that it can be carried on human shoulders. Portable furniture corresponds with the idea of the wilderness setting of the opening framework and a people on the move. However, it is not evident that the gold fashioned cherubim with outstretched wings are easily portable so the combination of portable ark and not easily portable cherubim is incongruous. For example, the ark is mentioned in the packing prescriptions for human transport in Numbers 4:5 but not the one piece unit of cherubim and cover.

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16 Visualizations of the cherubim of the cover vary in both pictorial representations and verbal renditions of the biblical text. The book of Exodus in The Chumash. Stone Edition, 157, offers an image of the cherubim, like elegant birds with raised wings. Sarna’s JPS Exodus commentary, 161, gives no picture but his words describe The Chumash, Stone Edition picture well, “Their fully outstretched wings were turned upward, sheltering the main body of the lid and the Ark below it.” Some pictures of the cherubim render them as squat e.g., Nelson’s Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 38. In general it is understood that the wings of the cherubim do not extend beyond the edges of the cover.
The frames (קרשׁים) for the tabernacle tent are made of acacia wood, 10 cubits high by 1.5 cubits wide (5 metres high by 750 cm wide in approximate metric measurements, Exodus 26:15-25; 36:20-30). The word for frame (קרשׁ) is translated variously as board (JPS 1917) plank (NJPS 1985) or frame (NRSV). Different translations of the Hebrew suggest varying degrees of volume for the frame, anything from the idea of three-ply plywood to truly a dense plank. Alternatively, קרשׁ suggests a frame, a rod-like flexible form, and not a dense slab of wood. קרשׁ is used only in the context of the tent of meeting in the Hebrew Bible and only an approximate meaning is possible.

The density of the frames is one unclear feature of the tent construction. Another unclear feature is that each frame is to have “two tenons (ידות), parallel to each other” (JPS 1999) or “two pegs (ידות) in each frame to fit the frames together” (NRSV) (Exodus 26:17). Tenons or pegs are translated from the Hebrew ידות which literally means hands but no more information is given of the pegs or tenons than this general impression. Pictures of reconstructions of the tenons or pegs often have them on the foot of the frame so they can be inserted into the metal sockets.17 Again the text does not allow a definitive design.

Yet again an incoherent feature is assemblage of the corners. Provision is made for two extra corner frames (Exodus 26:22) at the west end of the tabernacle tent but it is not clear whether the two corner frames are like an L-shaped bracket allowing the non-bracketed frame to rest into the bracketed corner or something different again.18

The tabernacle is 30 by 10 cubits and set within the court 100 by 50 cubits with hangings of 5 cubits high. Directionally the entrance of the court and tabernacle are to face the east (קדמה מזרחה) or forwards, meaning looking towards the rising sun (Exodus 27:13) but where the tabernacle sits in relation to the court is not stated—in the centre of the rectangular court area, or further backwards to the west, or some different positioning again. Despite design elements of the tent appearing to be detailed, in fact many of the design features are not

specific and only suggestions of design. Similarly, instructions for assemblage seem to be clear but are not in fact clear.

Thirdly, instructions for the lampstand (Exodus 25:31-39; 37:17-24) stipulate a structure with a base (ךָנֶה) and shaft (ךַּנֶּה) and three branches on either side, creating seven branches in total. Every branch (ךַּנֶּה) is to have three cups (גָּפֹעַים) shaped like almond-blossoms (משׁקִּים) and each almond-blossom is to be replete with calyx (כְּפַתְוָה) and petals (פָּרְחִיה). The calyx is the outer case of a bud which contains the petals. Almonds are native to the Middle East in wild and cultivated form. Noteworthy is less the function of appendages to the lampstand, such as cups to hold the lamps, than its ornamentation with its calyces and cups. The description of the lampstand of the tent of meeting is the most detailed botanical description within the Hebrew Bible. Petals are mentioned in connection with the interior of Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 7:49) but it is not clear whether they are related to lampstands or not. No lampstand portrayed in the Hebrew Bible is as detailed or as ornamented as the lampstand of the tent of meeting. The array of botanical references: calyces, petals, branches, and almond blossoms, features that adorn the lampstand, suggests the interest and eye of an artist. Yet again, despite apparent detail, the construction and appearance of the lampstand is not definitive. Pictures of the lampstand in Propp’s commentary to Exodus are different to those in *The Chumash. Stone Edition* and in Strong’s *Tabernacle of Israel.*

The function of the lampstand can be understood as the word suggests, to light up space, namely the foreroom of the tabernacle in the context of the tent of meeting, or as having a cultic function, namely that it is attended to twice daily (תמיד) as part of priestly rituals in the sanctuary.

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19 Propp offers two different illustrations of the lampstand, one lampstand is on a bulbous base with a short stem from which a further six branches circle out and the other lampstand is on a three footed base, a further six branches coming out of the stem on an angle, *Exodus, 19–40, 398-99;* in the book of Exodus, *The Chumash. Stone Edition,* 161, the base is three-legged and the stem is long and elegant rather than stubby as in the Propp illustrations; Strong has the lampstand on a base that is large and sturdy in relation to its diameter and finesse of the branches, *Tabernacle of Israel,* 67-72.

20 Exodus 30:8; Leviticus 24:2-4.
Panel 2 (Exodus 35:1–39:32)

Panel two tells of the fulfilment or execution of the instructions given in panel one. The people gift the required materials for construction of the tent. The gifts are brought to artisans who then supervise that the materials are worked into the required parts or work the materials themselves. Many of the phrases and language used in the instructions delivered in the format of divine speech in panel one are repeated and changed into third person narrative format in panel two.

The subject matter of panel two is ordered slightly differently to that of panel one as can be seen in table 3.3 where the thematic order of given material in panels one and two is tabulated. Panel two starts where panel one ended, with Sabbath instructions. The people of Israel are the addressees of the divine speech in panel one and respond to the address by bringing offerings of materials in panel two. In panel one God calls for the attitude of a heart that is moved (נדב). The idea of an appropriate attitude is expanded in panel two. The call for an attitude from the people of a heart that is moved in panel one becomes a heart that is stirred (נשׂא) or willing (נדב) and a willing spirit (רוח) in panel two (Exodus 35:21-22; 36:2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel One</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude of People/gifts Pattern</td>
<td>Sabbath</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tent Interior</td>
<td>Attitude of People/gifts artisans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tabernacle</td>
<td>Tabernacle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tent Exterior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Priests and Vestments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artisans</td>
<td>Priests and Vestments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabbath</td>
<td>Sabbath</td>
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</table>

*Table 3.3 Order of subject matter in panels one and two*
The artisans introduced in panel one, Bezalel and Oholiab (Exodus 31:2-6), move into action to construct and supervise construction of the parts of the tent complex in panel two (Exodus 35:30–36:5). The name Oholiab (אהליאב), made up of the Hebrew for tent (אהל) and father (אב), means “the Father is my Tent,” and Bezalel (בצלאל) from the Hebrew for shadow or protection (צל+ב) and God (אלהים) means “in God’s shelter/shade”. Oholiab is described as from the tribe of Dan in the north (Exodus 35:34; 38:23) and Bezalel from Judah in the south (Exodus 35:30; 38:22). The artisans are under the protection of God as their names suggest. Their names are emblematic, that is, serve as an illustration of a type. They are filled (מלא) with creative gifts such as the “divine spirit” (רוח אלהים) and “skill, intelligence, and knowledge” (Exodus 35:30). As the glory of God fills (מלא) the tent of meeting, so the artisans are filled (מלא) with divine spirit. The vocabulary that is used to speak of God’s creation of the world is that used to describe the divine-like skills of the artisans. The genealogy or naming of the fathers is not given for the two lead artisans and the wide range of skills that Bezalel masters are extraordinary: artistic design, working with metals, cutting stone and carving wood. The emblematic names and divine-like creative skills of the artisans suggest that they stand for a human type, a person with a specific role, rather than that they existed as actual historical persons.

The description of the parts of the tent that the artisans construct in panel two is as detailed as the instructions given in panel one and makes up a substantial amount of repetition within the five panels overall. In the last section of the panel the formulaic phrase, “as the Lord had commanded Moses” (Exodus 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31, 32) is used with increasing regularity and brings the panel to a close.

**Panel 3 (Exodus 39:33-43)**

Panel three tells of people bringing the completed parts of the tent of meeting and the priestly vestments to Moses. The completed parts are listed in the order common to panels two to five.

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Panel three functions as confirmation of fulfilment of the instructions given in panel one. The people have duly brought offerings and the parts of the tent have been made.

Panel three concludes with two sentences of elevated language. Words in sentence one are repeated or placed in an inverted position in sentence two (Exodus 39:42-43). Sentence one is made up of two semantic units A+B, which are developed in sentence two with the addition of two new units C + D. The A + B structure of the first sentence expands to a five unit structure in the second sentence of C + B +A + B+ D.

A. According to all that the LORD commanded Moses,
   B. so the children of Israel did all the work.
   C. And Moses saw all the work,
   B. and, behold, they had done it;
A. as the LORD had commanded,
   B. even so had they done it.
   D. And Moses blessed them. (JPS 1917, Exodus 39:42-43)22

Another reason for the elevated and poetic nature of Exodus 39:42-3 is the rapid change in voices, the subject of action moving from God to Moses to the Israelites, and then from Moses to God to the Israelites. Panel three concludes with Moses blessing the people.

Panel 4 (Exodus 40:1-16) and Panel 5 (Exodus 40:17-33)

Panels four (Exodus 40:1-16) and five (Exodus 40:17-33) are a pair and follow the command-fulfilment pattern. Moses is the addressee of the divine speech in panel four. He is instructed to set up (קום), or literally “to raise up,” the parts of the tent of meeting and anoint it along with the prescribed personnel.

22 The JPS (1917) translation conveys the poetic nature and order of the Masoretic Text better than the NRSV.
Panel five narrates that Moses fulfils the instructions for assemblage of the tent. The tent is set up as instructed in panel four. As Moses puts each cultic furnishing in its place the position of the various cultic objects within the tent complex is conveyed. The table is on the north side with the lamp opposite on the south side within the tabernacle. The incense altar is placed before the sanctuary. In the court the basin is set between the tent of meeting and the altar. Washing of the priestly personnel as part of consecration rites is performed but not the anointing which is related in Leviticus 8-10. Information unique to the fifth panel is the positioning of the furniture within the tent complex.

Panel five is the culmination of the panels as the formula “as the Lord had commanded Moses” concludes every second sentence (Exodus 40: 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32). The fifth and last of the panels clearly concludes with the words “So Moses finished the work.”

**B. Discussion of the Evidence**

As each new panel is added to the previous panel the narrative advances. The Israelites are the primary addressees of the divine speech in panel one. The desire of God is to be amongst the Israelites and the pattern for a cultic structure is conveyed. In panel two the people respond by bringing materials as gifts for construction of the tent and make the parts of the tent under the supervision of Bezalel and Oholiab. Panel three confirms the fulfilment of the command of panel one. Panel four is addressed to Moses and concerns assemblage of the tent. Moses fulfils the instructions of panel four when he assembles the tent of meeting and positions all the parts that make up the tent complex in panel five. The commands to Moses of panel four that are not fulfilled in panel five, such as consecration of the priestly personnel, are fulfilled in Leviticus 8–10. The narrative advances as the panels proceed and the tent complex grows from a mere pattern into an assembled structure.

Repetition is one of the most marked characteristics of the panels, repetition of the same items in three different categories and in the same order in four of the five panels. Repetition has several functions. It stresses what is important and it activates the memory. Detailed features
seem equally as important as general features, an object is as important as its parts. For example, recall of the lampstand is linked with recall of the associated liturgical utensils, its “snuffers and trays” (Exodus 25:38), its function, “to give light on the space in front” (Exodus 25:37), its position in the cultic space, south and opposite the table of showbread (Exodus 40:24), and cultic obligations, that it “burn regularly” (Exodus 27:20).

The same terms and categories are used in each panel and in panel two to five in the same order. The first panel moves from the interior of the tabernacle to the exterior and the following four panels move from the outside inwards. The inwards and outwards movement within the tent complex can be compared to that of a babushka doll. Each doll can be removed from the other, from the largest to smallest or put back together again from the smallest to the largest. Each panel repeats essential items in nearly the same sequence, and facilitates memorization of the text. A listener or reader then carries the tent complex in the body and the memory and can move through the different zones of the tent complex. The listener or reader who knows the text can journey to the centre of the tabernacle.

1. Journey and the Senses

Sufficient information is given that the tent complex can be visualised from an aerial view or approached as one would a major building and its precincts. From above the tent complex is a rectangular area, 100 by 50 cubits, with an altar before a tent inside the complex. The exact position of the tent within the complex is not given. Whether it is situated at the centre of the complex or set more to the back or set more forwards is not stated. On a level plane, anyone who has memorised the text can approach the tent of meeting complex and journey through it. The journey in more detail and what can be seen on the journey follows. Standing outside the enclosure one is before the fence, 2.5 metres high and higher than any human can peer over (Exodus 38:18). The fence is made of pillars with bronze bases and silver capitals, twenty in the length and ten in the width, and covered with linen hangings (Exodus 27:9-18; 38:9-19). The enclosure surrounds an area of approximately 50 by 25 metres, that is, about the size of an Olympic swimming pool. It would take more than fifty strides to walk the length. The
courtyard precincts are impressive. The hanging surround is majestic in height and extent, splendid and made of fine materials.

The complex faces east and is entered through a screen of hangings, “embroidered with needlework in blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine twisted linen” (Exodus 38:18). The material of the entrance screen to the court is more colourful than the simpler linen material of the enclosure hangings.

After passing through the entrance screen of the gate into the enclosure, the tabernacle, approximately 5 by 15 metres, is easily recognisable as a tent. Pegs and guy ropes are used to fix the tabernacle as they were the enclosure hangings. Once in the court the altar before the tabernacle is visible, the place of central action for the performance of offerings. The pleasing odour of a freshly offered sacrifice might be smelled. Between the entrance of the tent and the altar is a bronze water basin where the hands can be washed (Exodus 30:19). The person journeying might wash their hands as a cleansing act and feel the water. Then one passes into the next zone, through the screen of the tabernacle and into the foreroom of the tent. One is now inside the world of the tabernacle text, enclosed. The table of showbread is on the right and the seven stemmed lampstand on the left. Incense on the incense altar before the sanctuary burns and invites into the sanctuary.

The person journeying enters the inner sanctuary through a third and final screen. The inner sanctuary can be called sumptuous because its hangings are made of exquisite materials: blue, purple and crimson yarn twisted into linen, and with cherubim worked into them (Exodus 26:1, 31). The bases of the pillars are of silver. The flight and movement of the cherubim in the hangings echo the grace of the two golden sculptured cherubim facing one another on top of the ark unit. Ingredients of the incense recipe are sweet spices made from valuable aromatic resins and gum resins such as onycha and galbanum (Exodus 30:34-38). The incense altar is

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23 Masoretic Text uses מְיתָר, literally meaning cord, which can be understood as guy ropes in the context of a tent.
24 References to pegs in Exodus 27:19; 35:18; 38:20, 31; 39:40; Numbers 3:37; 4:32, and to cords in Exodus 35:18; 39:40; Numbers 3:26, 37; 4:26, 32.
24 Two “divine recipes” are given: one for anointing oil, reserved for the consecration of the tabernacle, cultic objects and cultic personnel (Exodus 30:22-33) and the other for incense for the so-called gold or incense altar (Exodus 30:34–38).
positioned before the screen into the sanctuary where the ark is situated. The burning of spices and frankincense in the form of incense would emanate an enticing aroma. Explicitly stated is that the spice mix is not to be used for human purposes. Its only use is to be set before the ark.\textsuperscript{25}

The closer the journey to the heart of the tabernacle the more the different senses are evoked. The sense of sound may be evoked in the sanctuary with the rare sound of the bell ringing in the hem of the high priest's vestments as he walks. Though theoretically only the high priest may enter the sanctuary and only once a year, at \textit{Yom Kippur} as related in Leviticus 16, the person journeying may enter the sanctuary by right of knowing the text.

The journey through the tent complex to the sanctuary is possible for several reasons. Anyone who knows the text of the tent complex knows the geography of the tent complex. A sense of space and zones is created with screens. Familiarity with the panels is to know that the tent of meeting is pitched with an orientation towards the east and where objects are placed within the tent. One knows what the cultic objects look like and what they are made of. Some details appeal to the technical sense, for example, the need for clasps and loops to join the hangings, other details are evocative to the senses such as the colours of the materials and ingredients of the incense. In many different ways an image of the tent of meeting world is created via words.

2. The Tent Nature of the Complex

The Exodus text gives the impression that the tent of meeting complex is truly portable. The enclosure and tabernacle have typical tent features. As mentioned previously, the tent structure is fixed with pegs and guy ropes. In the context of tents, verbs such as pitching, putting up,

\textsuperscript{25} Unique to panel one are the recipes for the anointing oil (Exodus 30:22-33) and incense (Exodus 30:34-38). Though panel two makes no mention of fulfilment of the command to prepare the spices for incense and anointing, memory of the spices is retained with references to anointing oil and fragrant incense in Exodus 35:8 and 28. The anointing oil recipe calls for spices such as liquid myrrh, sweet-smelling cinnamon and aromatic cane (Exodus 30:23-24), evocative for the sense of smell. Commentaries often note that the exact translation of the spices is not known nor their sourcing: the book of Exodus, \textit{The Chumash. Stone Edition}, 197; Propp, \textit{Exodus 19–40}, 481-82.
erecting and taking down are used in English. Hebrew also uses a variety of verbs such as set up (קָוֹם Exodus 40:17), pitch or make camp (חָנָה Numbers 1:51) and take down (יָרָד Numbers 1:51) in relation to the tent. Screens constructed of hangings function as delimiters to mark different zones in the tent complex. One enters or exits zones via screens not gates or doors as in a fixed structure.

The furniture of the tent complex is also portable. As contemporary catalogues for camping advertise an array of accessories such as folding chairs and tables suitable for easy transport, collapsible washing up basins, light-weight bowls and dishes, knives and forks, so the cultic tent has specially designed portable furniture. The altars: incense (Exodus 37:25-28) and sacrificial (Exodus 27:1-8; 30:1-4; 38:1-7), table of acacia wood (Exodus 25:23-28; 37:10-14) and ark (Exodus 25:12-15; 37:1-5) are constructed with rings at each corner through which poles are drawn so the furniture can be carried. Instructions are given in Numbers 4 for the taking down and packing of the tent and its furnishings, and which group of Levites is to carry what parts of the tent. The exterior of the tabernacle looks like a tent. Tent features are mentioned such as pegs, ropes or frames and there is even specially designed portable furniture. The text clearly gives the image of a tent.

3. The Temple Nature of the Complex and Reality Issues

When the contents of the five panels are read as literal and therefore historical—that God spoke and the tent complex as described in Exodus 25–40 was built and assembled at Sinai and daily sacrifices were offered—then, much in the text is incongruous. Great artistic skill is required to make the tabernacle. A wide variety of tools are necessary to plane, cut, hammer, sew, weave and spin. Clasps need to be made from gold to attach one hanging to another hanging. Copper and tin have to be purified and melted before they become the alloy of bronze, poured to make the bases for the pillars of the enclosure. The two cherubim for the mercy seat need to be hammered out of gold. Yarn needs to be spun. The degree of artistic skill suggests an urban lifestyle where a society is capable of supporting specialists. 2.5 metres

long acacia cross-frames are prescribed. Large trees that can cater for 2.5 metres lengths of wood seem unlikely in the desert. Similarly it seems unlikely that tools were available to splice or dovetail the timber to such a length.\textsuperscript{27} As de Wette and Wellhausen point out, Solomon had to employ foreigners to help make his temple yet in the desert there are ample skilled men and women to make an ornate sanctuary structure.\textsuperscript{28} That people skilled in sophisticated construction trades and arts are available in a nomadic setting is not easily comprehensible.

The framework narratives and contents of the panels refer to one group of people only, the Israelites. No passing caravans and no other peoples are mentioned in Exodus 25–40. The Israelites are isolated, sealed off and away from other peoples in the texts. There is no suggestion that trading was possible.

It seems highly unlikely that the Israelites had the costly materials necessary for construction of the tent of meeting, spices for the incense and spare animals for sacrifice. It is unlikely that a desert community that is given “food from heaven” such as manna (Exodus 16:35) because of lack of food then has animals for sacrifice. Furthermore, olives need to be beaten to make oil for the lamps (Exodus 27:20) and the best available flour ground for the sacrificial bread (Exodus 29:2, 40). Anomalies are rife between the apparent setting, Sinai, and the consequences of the meaning of the text, daily sacrifice of animals. The setting is life in the desert but the cultic requirements suggest an economic system within a stable farming community.

Dating within the text is in the realm of fantasy. The Israelites arrive at the wilderness of Sinai (Exodus 19:1) on the “third new moon” after leaving Egypt. They leave Sinai in the second year, second month, 20\textsuperscript{th} day (Numbers 10:11). Reading the dates literally, the Israelites were at Sinai for less than a year yet the sophisticated tent complex is put together within that time. It is unlikely that construction of the wilderness tent takes less than nine months when

\textsuperscript{27} Milgrom, \textit{Numbers}, 367.
Solomon’s temple took seven years (1 Kings 6:38) and his palace thirteen years (1 Kings 7:1) to complete.

The economic sustainability of the tent complex in the wilderness and organization of its priestly personnel is questionable. It is unlikely that a community, purportedly in the desert where life is fragile and on the periphery of sustainability, can support priests along the lines of Aaron’s family with a minimum of four sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar (Exodus 28:1). The prescribed structure of cult personnel and ritual requirements is better suited to a sophisticated urban setting than a desert sanctuary. Another sustainability issue is water. It is unlikely that the wilderness can provide the quantity of water required for the washing of entrails of sacrificial animals and the ritual washing of priests’ hands and feet (Exodus 30:18-19). 29

Though much of the pattern of the tent appears to be comprehensively prescribed, the construction (the making of the parts) and the assemblage (the putting together of the parts) of the tent of meeting is not clear. If a model of the tent of meeting is attempted based on the given instructions, insufficient information is given on how to put together the various sections. Corner frames are provided for and thereby indicate that corner frames are necessary to allow the joining of different sides, but how the corners of the tabernacle tent are actually put together is not clear. Similarly, it is clear that the hangings need to be attached to one another. Prescriptions call for hooks and loops to join the hangings suggesting that provision is made for their joining but how they are to be joined is again not clear. Neither is it evident whether the hangings are to be pulled over or through the frames. How the tent is assembled has occupied and still concerns scholars. James Strong in The Tabernacle of Israel (1888) and William Propp in Exodus 19–40 (2006) illustrate possibilities for the joining of corners and hangings yet do not reach the same results, apparent when comparing the differences in their drawings of what is meant to be a reconstruction of the same part of the design. 30 How the

29 Compare the extensive water supply system via aqueducts and into cisterns at Qumran in phase Ib of settlement, Roland de Vaux, “Qumran, Khirbet,” NEAEHL 4:1235-41; Jodi Magness, The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 106, 131, 137-42.
corner frames are constructed or how the curtains are actually joined is not the point of the
text. Mention of corner frames and curtain loops is to suggest that they need to be joined and
the mind’s eye completes the image.

The representation of a temple in tent form is suggested by the text, not the requirement to
construct a tent that is fitted out like a temple. The text offers a picture, an impression of a
cultic environment which brings to mind the idea of mimesis (representation not imitation).
The combination of temple cultic world and travelling tent does not mirror something that
existed but offers a word image of something new. Construction and assemblage of the tent
parts suggests something possible and make-able to the mind’s eye but the audience is not
expected to be builder or engineer and take up material in their hands and follow out the
instructions.

The environment of the tent of meeting is temple-like in that areas of increasing holiness are
represented, from forecourt to foreroom of the tabernacle then to the sanctuary. The materials
used for the hangings, pillars, bases and tent frames are the finest available as befits a major
cultic centre. The liturgical furnishings and the required utensils are described with
photographic-like detail. The tent of meeting is more than a portable tent with portable cultic
furnishings. The cultic paraphernalia alludes to a temple without the word temple being used.
The text portrays a temple world in tent guise and can with right be called a temple-tent. Cultic
tent and temple-tent are two of the terms I use to express the dual image of the tent of meeting,
a tent fitted out like an Israelite temple.

4. Foci of the Text

Two foci of the tent complex are the altar and the ark. The altar is positioned before the tent of
meeting and visible to all persons in the court. It is public space. The altar is the place for
people to make offerings (qal עשה Exodus 29:36, 38) or it is approached by priests (qal נן
Exodus 28:43; 30:20 or qal ה passphrase Exodus 40:32). It is a privileged location, a place where God

for assembling the structure are unclear. Thus, it is unlikely that this section contains actual directions for making
a real shrine.” Jacob, Exodus, 760, claims that the text is not concerned with “technical description.”
Cultic Place

The other major focus of the tent complex is the ark and again like the altar a privileged place because the meeting and dwelling of God is associated with the ark unit. The ark unit is positioned in the innermost part of the tent complex, the sanctuary (שְׁמַדְּתָה) or literally, “holy place.” The sanctuary of the tabernacle functions as would the central position or niche of a temple and the ark is positioned in it. (No statue is set in the sanctuary.) The sanctuary may be entered only once a year, by the high priest on Yom Kippur. However, anyone who knows the tent of meeting text knows what is inside the sanctuary, and has as much information about the interior of the sanctuary as the high priest of the text.

The five panel structure invites on a journey into the innermost part of the tent complex, implicitly private as opposed to public. The people of Exodus 33 go out to the consultation tent to seek (pi’el שֵׁבַת) or consult with God. Though the Hebrew verb (שֵׁבַת) is not used in the tent of meeting text, the idea that people can seek God and go to the tent of meeting is implicit by way of concept transference. The text on the consultation tent outside the camp is set between the long first and second panels of the text on the cultic tent to facilitate such concept transference. The primary human focus of the tent of meeting text is the people of Israel. The main physical areas in the tent text are before the tent of meeting where the altar stands and to which people bring their offerings and the sanctuary where the ark is positioned and people can seek God. Actions associated with the two main foci in the tent of meeting text are that people make offerings at the altar or seek God near the ark in the sanctuary.

31 כָּרָב is used 105 times in Leviticus 1:2f, 5, 9f, 13ff; 2:1, 4, 8, 11ff; 3:1, 3, 6f, 9, 12, 14; 4:3, 8, 11, 14; 5:8; 6:7, 13f; 7:3, 8f, 11ff, 16, 18, 25, 29, 33, 35, 38; 8:6, 13, 16, 18, 21f, 24f; 9:2, 5, 7ff, 14ff, 10:1, 4f, 19; 12:7; 14:12; 16:1, 6, 9, 11, 20; 17:4, 10; 18:6, 14, 19, 29; 20:3, 5f, 16, 18; 21:6, 8, 17f, 21; 22:3, 18, 20ff, 24f; 23:8, 16, 18, 25, 27, 30, 36f; 27:9, 11.
The people of Israel are the primary focus of panels one to three and in the opening and closing framework narratives. They are the narrative addressees, those who act by bringing gifts to the artisans, oil for the lamps, and through presence witness and thereby verify events. The “I” statements demonstrate the desire of God to dwell amongst the people (שֶׁכֶן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) and meet with the people (לֶבַנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) and the means to this is through a cultic medium. The operative idea is God and people rather than God and cultic place.

5. The Tent of Meeting and Myth

Since the early 1800s two terms used to describe the tent complex text are mythic and more frequently historical. De Wette speaks of the entire Pentateuch as mythic and dared to write such in the European environment when the philosophy of Hegel (1770-1831) on the evolution of history and rationalism were dominant. De Wette notes that archaeological evidence of the tent of meeting as described in Exodus is non-existent and regards the tent text as building on stories of previous sanctuaries such as the sanctuary at Nob (1 Samuel 21:1; 22:9-19). As Chronicles gives its version of earlier cultic practices found in Samuel—Kings so the tent of meeting of Exodus 25–31, 35–40 is a different story to that of the tent of meeting outside the camp of Exodus 33:7-11.

De Wette responds to the aesthetics of the tabernacle which he calls a fantasy building. For him the descriptions and eye for the construction materials betray the spirit of the muse and he talks of poet authors who turn older material into mythic form. The purpose of mythic

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32 Elliger in “Sinn und Ursprung der priesterlichen Geschichtserzählung,” and Noth in A History of Pentateuchal Traditions, write of the historicity of the tent of meeting; de Wette, Beiträge, 1:3, 78, and Beiträge, 2:iii, 259-62 speaks of the tent of meeting in literary terms as myth. The relationship between myth and history in what is commonly termed the priestly writings is found in e.g., Norbert Lohfink, “The Priestly Narrative and History,” in The Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy (ed. W. Zimmerli; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 136-72.

33 There is often a polemic voice in de Wette’s writing, arguing for literary and poetic rather than historical readings of the biblical text: De Wette, Beiträge, 1:78 and Beiträge, 2:396-408.

34 Rogerson writes on de Wette’s understanding of mythic writing in “The Modern World,” 106: “religious beliefs were to be understood with the help of art, and especially a study of the way in which the mythologies of ancient peoples were the poetical expressions of their apprehensions of the divine. De Wette thus argued that much of the Pentateuch was mythical, by which he did not mean that it was false, but that it contained poetic expressions of the divine, in story-like form.”
writing is the communication of religious not historical thoughts according to de Wette. On the other hand, a hundred years later than de Wette, von Rad treats the text of the tent complex as an historical work coming out of priestly circles in Jerusalem and containing very old material as well as reworked material. According to von Rad some traditions precede the tent of meeting and others then grow out of the tent of meeting.

Descriptions of the tent of meeting as mythic or historical polarised discussions on the tabernacle text from the 1800s until post World War II. When a text was described as mythic the objects, persons or places within the text text were not understood to be historical. The word, myth tended to be equated with false and untrue, and historical with true. The consequences are that if someone describes the tent of meeting text as mythic then it is understood to mean that the text is not historical and therefore is not real. Historical tends to be associated with truth and reality.

Brevard Childs treats the subject of biblical Hebrew texts and myth differently to de Wette in his book, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (1960). He looks at some biblical texts as mythic and real and departs from the dead end that had developed of thinking of them as mythic or historical. Describing the tabernacle text as mythic or historical came to mean understanding it as historically false or true. Childs moves the focus of debate to myth and reality and away from myth and history. Influenced by phenomenology, Childs gives his working definition of Old Testament myth as—the Israelite understanding of reality; reality is not found in historical happenings but “in the memory, consciousness, and reflections of Israel” in the Old Testament. Unfortunately Childs writes little on what he understands by the term “phenomenology” and the general field of phenomenology. Despite using the term, “phenomenology” he makes no mention of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who is generally accepted as the main proponent of phenomenological theory. However, Childs does address

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reality as conveyed via concepts of time and space. Broadly, mythic time is understood as absolute; it maintains primeval reality with no distinctions between past, present and future, and in mythic space different realities are brought together.  

Childs does not use the tent of meeting text as an example of Old Testament myth but the theories on time and space in his book are applicable to the tent of meeting text. Chapter 2 of the thesis describes the sparse framework narrative of the tent of meeting text as functioning like a picture frame which surrounds the textual contents. One of the key words of the frame is Sinai. Whether Israelites are bringing gifts for construction of the parts of the tent complex or bringing offerings to the altar once the tent complex is consecrated, the setting is always Sinai. The setting remains constant, or absolute in Childs’ vocabulary, from Exodus 25 through to Numbers 10. By implication the camp of Israelites is at Sinai from the start to the finish of the text too.

Sinai (Horeb in Deuteronomy), understood as real time and space, is identified with Mount Sinai (Jebel Musa) and St Catherine’s Monastery on the Sinai Peninsula today. However, the Sinai of the tent of meeting text is about mythic time and place. The name “Sinai” eludes etymological clarification. Sinai as a geographical location is also elusive, whether viewed as the traditionally accepted location in the south of the Sinai Peninsula or as east of the Gulf of Aqaba, in Arabia. Benno Jacob prefers to talk of Sinai as geographic and religious orientation rather than a geographic location.

Sinai as a mountain is the zone between earth and sky (Exodus 24:16). Cloud hinders visibility yet permits communication between God and a human, Moses. At the end of Exodus 40 the cloud covers the tent of meeting which substitutes for Mount Sinai, the threshold space between God and people, between the divine and human. It is a dangerous space, not easily defined and comprehensible. God moves from mountain and nature to the tent of meeting and

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42 References to “Mount Sinai” in the tent complex text, Exodus 24:16; 31:18; Leviticus 7:38; 25:1; 26:46; 27:34; Numbers 3:1, and in the consultation tent section, Exodus 34:2, 4, 29, 32, and to the “wilderness of Sinai” in Leviticus 7:38; Numbers 1:1, 19; 3:4, 14; 9:1, 5; 10:12.
44 Jacob, *Exodus*, 1061.
cult. Theologically this move is presented in the text as divinely willed, with the authoritative voice of God in the genre of divine speech. The special nature of the zone of the tent of meeting is reinforced with use of the literary technique of the typology of a theophany. One of the features of a theophany is the appearance of God in glory. God appears as glory on the mountain where Sinai has a mythic function and then again at the tent of meeting.

An extraordinary amount happens at Sinai where the people apparently stay just under a year, from the first day of the third month of the first year (Exodus 19:1) until the twentieth day of the second month of the second year (Numbers 10:11):

- Two sets of law codes are given: the Covenant Code on the mountain (Exodus 19–24), and the instructions of Leviticus 1–27 from the tent of meeting,
- The pattern for the tent of meeting is communicated, followed by its construction (Exodus 25–31, 35–40),
- Instructions are given for the camp arrangement of the Israelites,
- Instructions for transport of the newly constructed temple-tent (Numbers 1–10).

God speaks from two places at Sinai, on the mountain and then from the tent of meeting.

Sinai is in the wilderness, outside of reality and a place where strange things happen. It is a hermetically sealed place, distant from other peoples, other cultures and other distractions. There are theophanies. God writes on tablets of stone. It is where God moves from mountain to the cultic tent of meeting. At Sinai too, two law codes are promulgated. Whoever is constructing these texts and organising their material is deliberately placing them into a capsule of time and place called Sinai. By setting the cultic tent of meeting and its associated instructions at Sinai, the temple-tent gets the mythic stamp of being willed outside the realms of time. I suggest this is part of the literary creativity of the temple-tent text authors.

Sinai is wilderness place, on the periphery of reality, removed from human communities and related social organization such as economics and politics. No travelling caravans encounter

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the Israelite encampment and no trading occurs with other people. In fact no “other” is ever mentioned in the tent of meeting text. Men suitable for conscription are counted in Numbers 1 but no skirmish or battle occurs at Sinai. Israelites and their cultic centre are defined in isolation from any other peoples or other gods. Different social worlds are brought together such as nomadic Israelites in the wilderness with an urban style temple environment which corresponds with Childs’ idea of myth as making no distinction between past, present and future.

Just as Sinai is a hermetically sealed place so is time sealed and stationary. Sinai is mythic time, long ago: the time when God spoke, the time when laws were promulgated via Moses, away from other peoples and gods and cultures. For Barry Powell in his well recognised book, Classical Myth, a setting far removed from the familiar world of human beings and hence unapproachable is often a criterion for mythic writing. Sinai functions to biblical writing as Mount Olympus does to Greek mythology. Sinai is its own time and space, not related to the time and space of the temple-like world of the cultic tent.

Most authors who write on myth mention story as one of the major criteria of mythic writing. The importance of story as an element of mythic writing is noted in Barry Powell’s Classical Myth and an intuitive approach such as Karen Armstrong’s A Short History of Myth. Aristotle’s literary theory in Poetics facilitates discussion on story here. A story is a whole that must have a beginning, middle and end. Two important elements of the whole are plot and characters. Aristotle writes of plot as the arrangement of incidents. Applying Aristotle’s idea on plot to the tent of meeting text, some advancing of the plot is perceptible. At the beginning of the narrative there is no cultic centre and by the end the tent of meeting is constructed and set up. At the beginning of the narrative God appears on a mountain and by the end God has moved from mountain to the tent of meeting. Movement in the text proceeds through a series of repeated panels rather than through action or incidents. In panel one God speaks, in panel

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48 Aristotle, Poet. 6-7
two the people act as commanded in panel one, and panel three confirms that panels one and two have been fulfilled. In panel four God speaks to Moses and in panel five Moses acts as commanded. It is difficult to argue that narrative movement through panels in this fashion is plot, though there is advancement of the story. In short, the tent of meeting text is not a story in terms of plot.

The role of characters within the story is now applied to the tent of meeting text. The named beings in the narrative are God, Moses, Aaron, the people of Israel and as is common in narratives across all cultures, the audible yet invisible presence of the narrator. Except for the commanding figure of God and the narrator, all characters do what they are commanded to do. The characters are robotic and vehicles of divine command. There is no drama in the text save the scene of the death of two of Aaron’s sons (Leviticus 10). There is next to no dialogue and where there is rare dialogue it is in reported form thereby distancing it from the idea of active dialogue between two characters. It is difficult to talk of human action as there is no freedom to act or not to act. Command dominates the text. It is also difficult to engage in the characters of the text as the characters are acted upon. They are in the service of construction of a tent. The tent of meeting text is not a story in terms of characterization.

If a myth is understood as a story with the requirements of plot and characterization, the tent of meeting text does not meet these criteria, and is therefore not a myth. However, the text does have a mythic element, not in the form of characters, not as a genre such as mythic story but on the level of location and place in the references to Sinai. References to Sinai are the mythic element in the tent of meeting text. They signal Sinai as mythical place and time, beyond or outside real place and time; they occur only in the framework narrative, the sparse text surrounding the divine speeches.

De Wette uses the adjective, mythic, to describe the tent of meeting text as a whole; he uses mythic meaning inspired and fantastic, as the product of creative activity. With the meaning of mythic as fantastic, de Wette describes not the unhistorical or historical nature of the tent of

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49 Refer to the scene when Bezalel and Oholiab tell Moses that they are receiving more donated materials for the temple-tent construction than they can use (Exodus 36:3-6).
meeting but an imaginative feature. Karen Armstrong echoes de Wette when she writes on the importance of imagination as one of the criteria of myth criteria. The tent of meeting is the product of creative imagination, inspired in its fantasy. Characteristics of the text such as the length, the repetitive panels and the imaginative features suggest a written rather than an oral text.

6. Mimesis

The Israelite cultic atmosphere of the tent of meeting text is a mimetic world. A sense of temple and tent space is painted, produced not with brush strokes but with words. Some of the word pictures are detailed and others are suggestive. For example mention of clasps and loops recognises the necessity for the hangings of the tent of meeting to be joined. The quantity of clasps required, two sets of fifty, and what they are to be made of, bronze or gold, is stated but how they are actually joined is not explained (Exodus 26:6, 10; 36:13, 18). The necessity that the hangings be joined is recognised but the next step, how they are technically joined, is completed by suggestion. The suggestive word images can be compared to an impressionist painting such as Édouard Manet’s “The Balcony” (1868-9). The balcony of the foreground is painted with greater definition than the middle field and background. The flower pot is painted with more detail than the faces of the two women who are centre field. On a further level back the shoulders of the gentleman behind the two women merge into the background so where his shoulders begin and end is left to the eye of the viewer.

The text of the tent of meeting is full of word images. An understanding of mimesis is a key to understanding the mimetic world of the temple-tent. Ideas on mimesis in painting facilitate discussion on visual representations suggested by words. The well respected English artist and reviewer, Roger Fry, influential in bringing impressionist and post-impressionist exhibitions to London in the early 1900s, talks of degrees of visual representation, from what he calls the more complete science of representation to abstract representations. Descriptions of

50 Armstrong, A Short History of Myth, 1-11.
51 Original at the Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
liturgical furnishings such as the lampstand are like a photograph in their clarity of detail and are examples of what Fry calls the “more complete science of representation.”

The overall image of the temple-tent, like Manet’s painting “The Balcony,” is made up of abstract representations. Corner frames and clasps for the hangings are mentioned in the text. Because they are mentioned they belong to the picture but how they are joined is suggested, and does not function in reality. The descriptions of different parts of the tent are abstract representations and suggest features of reality such as a real structure with walls made of hangings.

The threefold colours of the hangings made of “fine twisted linen” with “blue, purple, and crimson yarn” are an abstract representation of the blue colour palette. Cherubim are worked into the hangings (Exodus 26:1). Several commentaries offer explanations on different animals: marine snails, insect eggs, or worms, from which the desired colour of dye, blue, purple or crimson, may have been produced, but this style of historical research loses the point of the text.\footnote{Meyers, The Torah: A Women’s Commentary, 453; Propp, Exodus 19–40, 373; Sarna, Exodus, 157.} The colours mentioned in the biblical text become colours in the mind’s eye of the audience and appeal to the senses of internal visual conception. The colours may be inspired by knowledge of highly valued and esteemed dyes but the requirement of the text is not that they be real, it is that they suggest an extraordinary beauty and intensity of colour. The colours of the text are inspired by valued colours that existed at the time of writing but take on a life of their own as they are appropriated by what were the contemporary audience at the time of writing and then future audiences. The internal visualization of the colours by the receiver of the text can be just as intense and beautiful as the colours in reality, if not more so as they are further enhanced through the imaginative eye.

Freedom is left to the internal visualization of the listener or reader with for example the embellishment of the hangings. Cherubim are worked into the hangings of the tabernacle tent but the colour of the cherubim is not stated. Are they one of the two colours suggested by the text, in the blue palette of the hangings or in gold like the cherubim on the ark? The text is open and leaves such imaging to the recipient. Several scholars remark on the visual invitation
of the tent of meeting text. Hurowitz writes that the factual and objective descriptions "seem intent on enabling the reader to visualise the items described."\footnote{Hurowitz, “Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle,” 23.} Benno Jacob refers to the “reader’s imagination” to fill gaps in understanding.\footnote{Jacob, Exodus, 762.} Erhard Blum writes of the descriptions in several sections of the text functioning like pictures.\footnote{Blum, Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch, 306.}

The rich blue spectrum of the tent of meeting hangings and the gold of the cherubim on the ark are two instances of great flashes of colour in the picture of the temple-tent. The blue colour is in the textured setting of the material linen, gold is in the texture of metal with properties that allow it to shine or reflect. Internal visualization on the part of the recipient of the text may function in different ways. The form of the sculptured cherubim on the ark may be reflected by a listener or reader into the gold cherubim in the hangings, or the cherubim embroidered into the hangings may be seen as reflected in the shiny surface of the two sculptured gold figures. Such imaging is left open to the visual freedom of the recipient of the text.

A further freedom is how the cherubim on the ark unit are visualised. The text has them at opposite ends of the ark, facing one to another, on the same base, with spread out (qal שָׁפָר) wings, such that the wings overshadow (NRSV), whereby the JPS 1917 translation of “screen” is a closer rendition of the Hebrew (qal סָכָה), the cover on the ark (Exodus 25:20; 37:9). The shape of the cherubim and the wings: their flow, their angles, is left to the internal visualization of the recipient of the text. The most colourful place in the temple-tent complex is the sanctuary.

Fry speaks of internal visualization in his work on impressionist painting and of imagination as one of the necessary skills of the artist.\footnote{Reed, Fry Reader, 100.} An artist observes the world and with imagination, one of the most important artistic skills, creates an imaged reality with paint. In turn the work of art, the image, appeals to the viewer. If the image appeals to the viewer’s imagination, the senses are engaged. Fry even goes so far as to say that through the senses the picture speaks to the spirit of the viewer. The blues of the tabernacle hangings and the gold of the cherubim may

\footnote{Hurowitz, “Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle,” 23.} \footnote{Jacob, Exodus, 762.} \footnote{Blum, Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch, 306.} \footnote{Reed, Fry Reader, 100.}
appeal and awaken the senses of the recipient of the text. The temple-tent can be compared to an impressionist painting; flashes of colour are used for the sanctuary, the pillars, the clasps and hooks, the hangings. The picture of the tent of meeting is one of the greatest paintings of the Hebrew Bible.

**Summary**

To sum up, the tent of meeting text is not the genre of myth though mention of Sinai in the framework narrative has a mythic function. The text is narrative-like rather than a true story. It has a kind of plot as the action proceeds via the progression of five panels. The characters do not develop or show any change in the course of the narrative. They are the same at the beginning and end. The translation and meaning of a considerable number of words is unclear such as the words for cover (כפרת), frames (קרשׁים) and some of the ingredients given for incense recipes. Much vocabulary is unique to the tent of meeting text and hence meanings are not verifiable in relation to other biblical passages. Detailed descriptions of the lampstand or the priestly vestments suggest the eye of an artist. The tent nature of the tent is suggested with pegs and frames and portable furniture but its actual construction is unclear. A spatial sense of the tent is communicated and zones of increasing holiness the closer one gets to the sanctuary. The language of the text invokes different senses: the sound of the bells in the high priest's vestments, the aroma of incense, the beauty of the colour gold and the blues in the sanctuary. The contents of the panels unveil a magnificent artistic cultic structure with a sophisticated urban-like priestly personnel structure but they are vicariously related to the wilderness setting of the framework narrative. The artisans are emblematic by name and function. Literary techniques such as the motif of cloud and theophany are used to transmit the idea of the presence of God and highlight moments of God’s favour. The genre of divine speech is used so that God can speak to humans, namely via Moses. The text is a literary text as opposed to a non-literary text. The text is mimetic. The space of the tent of meeting is painted with words, and represents Israelite cultic space, a world which any recipient of the text is invited to enter. The tent of meeting text is a word picture. It paints a mimetic cultic Israeliite world. The text invites its listener or reader to journey into the inner world of the tent complex.
Chapter 4

Cultic Rites at the Tent

Leviticus 1–27

The book of Leviticus is the focus of chapter four. To begin and for orientation, general comments are made relating to research in the field of Leviticus and a brief structural overview of the book is given. The chapter then proceeds in two sections. In section A three examples of textual evidence from Leviticus are presented and in section B the evidence is discussed.

General Comments relating to the Book of Leviticus

Leviticus has tended to be disregarded in Christian biblical research in the last two hundred years. One of the major reasons is that methods of diachronic research such as source analysis and traditional-historical approaches to the Pentateuch have dominated research until recently and their focus is more on narrative than law.¹ As most of the book of Leviticus is viewed as law it then falls outside the area of scholarly interest. For example, when Martin Noth writes of the main interest of the Priestly narrative, as “establishment of the legitimate cult,” the

¹ Much diachronic research goes together with attempts at reconstructions of a history of Israel, apparent in works such as Wellhausen’s Prolegomena or Martin Noth’s A History of Israel. Under the influence of Hegel’s theories on history, the interests of biblical research were historical traces in the existent text and reconstructions of Israelite traditions prior to the text. German scholarship was at the forefront of biblical studies from the early 1800s to circa 1950. German Christian traditions tended to have a distrust of what they perceived to be the legalism of Jewish law. Furthermore, cult tended to be associated with magic and in contrast to a preference for the prophetic or free spirit. Frank Gorman addresses this subject with an overview in “Ritual Studies and Biblical Studies: Assessment of the Past; Prospects for the Future,” Semeia 67 (1994): 13-36, and “Ritualizing, Rite and Pentateuchal Theology,” in Prophets and Paradigms: Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker (ed. S. Reid; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 173-86.
operative word is narrative. He works with Exodus 25–31, 35–40, Leviticus 8–9 and Numbers 1–9 as the narrative base (Pg) to which then law units (Ps) are added. While Noth recognises commonalities such as cultic and ritual interests, language and terminology, between the priestly narratives and laws he separates the final text into parts. He sees Leviticus 1–7 as interrupting the strong narrative connection between Exodus 35–40 and Leviticus 8–9 and having no specific literary relation to the Priestly narrative.

Noth finds a narrative unity from Exodus into Numbers but as a consequence the Pentateuch is divided into narrative and law and the focus is on narrative to the omission of law. Biblical scholars do address law but it tends to be separately from narrative in works such as A. Alt’s “The Origins of Israelite Law,” Martin Noth’s *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Essays,* or Michael Fishbane’s *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel.*

In the introduction to his Leviticus commentary Gerstenberger talks of the varied contents of the book of Leviticus with the metaphor of a “patchwork quilt.” He treats narrative and law sections in Leviticus as belonging together and posits them in the wider biblical context of Exodus 19—Numbers 10. He notes many blocks of instructions, Exodus 20–23; 25–31; Leviticus 1–7 and Numbers 1–2 within the section of biblical text set at Sinai (Exodus 19 — Numbers 10). As previously mentioned, collections of instructions and the setting of Sinai are typical of the biblical material, Exodus 19 — Numbers 10. The point is that Gerstenberger treats Leviticus as a unity despite what he calls its “different, individual pieces.” Recent studies on Israelite ritual and cult, such as those of Frank Gorman and Alfred Marx, address narrative and law in the Pentateuch intertextually and do not separate out narrative from law.

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7 Gerstenberger, *Leviticus,* 2. Gorman’s essay, “Ritualizing Rite,” 173, talks of the priestly ritual material as being at the “heart” of the Pentateuch.
Overview of the Book of Leviticus

Agreement is almost unanimous that the book of Leviticus divides into two parts, Leviticus 1–16 and 17–26+27, as shown in table 4.1.

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*Table 4.1 Structure of Leviticus 1–27*

In at least three commentaries, those of Gerstenberger, Levine and Milgrom, Leviticus 1–7 is treated as relating to sacrificial systems and Leviticus 8–10 or 8–9 to the initiation of worship. There is more variance in the grouping and specific thematic understanding of Leviticus 9–16 or 9–17 though all commentaries use a term relating to purity. Leviticus 16 deals with *Yom Kippur*, known as the “Day of Atonement” in the Christian tradition. Milgrom entitles the unit of Leviticus 17–27, “The Holiness Source,” and Levine entitles Leviticus 17–26, “Pursuit of Holiness.” Leviticus 17–26 or 27 are often known as the Holiness Code and deal with a wide range of social issues from sexual taboos to the community and daily life (18–19), festivals and Jubilee year (23–25) and some priestly matters (21–22).


Gerstenberger’s OTL *Leviticus*; Levine’s JPS *Leviticus*, and Milgrom’s AB volume on *Leviticus 1–16*.

Interestingly, Gerstenberger in his Leviticus commentary makes explicit reference to blood when he entitles the unit of chapters 16–17, “Atonement Festival and Sacrificial Blood”; blood as a symbol is explored later in this chapter.

August Klostermann first uses the term “Heiligkeitsgesetz” (Holiness Code in English) in 1877 in the chapter, “Ezechiel und das Heiligkeitsgesetz,” in Der Pentateuch, 368-419.
This work focuses on the tent of meeting and its cultic world. Therefore, the chapters of Leviticus that deal with cult and worship (Leviticus 1–16) are more pertinent than the later chapters 17–27 which deal more with instructions for daily life and social interaction among Israelites. Three examples are taken from Leviticus 1–16 to explore ways in which Leviticus texts develop the sense of cult and ritual in the tent of meeting text. The first example is taken from a legal or prescriptive part of Leviticus and the other two from narratives in Leviticus.

A. Presenting the Evidence, Three Examples from Leviticus

1. Ritual at the Altar (Leviticus 1:1-9)

Thematically, Leviticus 1–7 is a series of instructions relating to the Israelite sacrificial system and ritual. God communicates instructions for different kinds of sacrifice (קרבן) to Moses at the tent of meeting and the place for the performance of these rites is the altar before the tent of meeting. The following example of a ritual at the tent of meeting, the burnt offering of a bull, is just one example of many possible examples of rituals prescribed in Leviticus 1–7.

The burnt offering of a bull, Leviticus 1:1-9 (NRSV translation), is copied in full below as the text is closely followed during presentation of the evidence. The text is in three parts. It starts with an introduction (Leviticus 1:1-2a), then a section addressed to the offerer (Leviticus 1:2b-5a) and finishes with a section addressed to the priests (Leviticus 1:5b-9). Underlining highlights occurrences of the term “tent of meeting” and bold indicates references to the Israelite offerer.

Introduction

*The Lord summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying:* 2 Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: (Leviticus 1:1-2a)

Prescriptive information for the offerer
When any of you (תְּנָסָך) bring an offering of livestock to the Lord, you shall bring your offering from the herd or from the flock. If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you shall offer a male without blemish; you shall bring (בְּנֵן) it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, for acceptance in your behalf before the Lord. You shall lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be acceptable in your behalf as atonement for you. The bull shall be slaughtered before the Lord; (Leviticus 1:2b-5a)

Prescriptive information for priests

And Aaron’s sons the priests shall offer the blood, dashing the blood against all sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. The burnt offering shall be flayed and cut up into its parts. The sons of the priest Aaron shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. Aaron’s sons the priests shall arrange the parts, with the head and the suet, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; but its entrails and its legs shall be washed with water. Then the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on the altar as a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the Lord. (Leviticus 1:5b-9)

The scene for the ritual of the burnt offering of a bull is established in the introduction. It is the tent of meeting and referred to again in each of the further two sections. The offering of the bull is made at the large altar before the tent. The altar is described in Exodus; its dimensions are 5 cubits long by five cubits wide by three cubits high (a 2.5 metres square structure, approximately 1.5 metres high). Materials for construction of the altar are acacia wood and bronze (Exodus 27:1-8). It is positioned “before the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting” (Exodus 40:6), within the enclosure of the tent complex. The altar is described as most holy and whatever touches it becomes holy (Exodus 29:37-38). Most importantly of all several “I” statements are associated with it. God says “there,” there referring to at the altar, “I will meet” (היה), “I will consecrate” (פִּקְדָשׁ), “I will dwell” (שָׁכֵן), and “I will be (היה) your God” (Exodus 29:42-46). The altar area is a favoured area for God’s presence. It is also the
zone where bulls and all ritual animals are offered and killed, as part of daily rites or as offerings of Israelites.

The second section of the rite of the burnt offering of a bull focuses on the person of the offerer, “any man” from the “people of Israel,” and is marked in bold above. Several actions to be performed on the part of the offerer are stated:

Bringing (קרב) an offering Leviticus 1:2b
(Choosing a male animal) without blemish Leviticus 1:3b
Bringing (קרב) it to the tent of meeting to the entrance Leviticus 1:3c
Laying (סמך) the hand on its head Leviticus 1:4
Killing (שׁחט) the bull Leviticus 1:5a

Choosing a male animal is in round brackets above because choice of the sacrificial animal is prior to the part of the ritual at the altar and to be understood implicitly in the instructions of Leviticus 1:1-7. Customary knowledge of the correct type of sacrificial animals is presumed and not stated. Some customs pertaining to ritual offerings are conveyed through instructions in other parts of Leviticus. Examples of what are considered blemishes are blind, injured or maimed animals, limbs that are too short or long, or damaged testicles (Leviticus 22:18-25); such animals are not acceptable as offerings. Instructions on the killing of an animal are given indirectly along with the prohibition of eating blood (Leviticus 7:26-27; 17:10-12). An animal must be slaughtered in such a manner that all blood is let.

The third section of the burnt offering of a bull relates to instructions for priests. Various acts of the offering ritual are prescribed (not described) in the text, some of which are:

Sprinkling (זרק) of blood on the altar Leviticus 1:5b
Cutting up (נתח) the offering into its parts Leviticus 1:6
Putting (נתן) fire on the altar Leviticus 1:7a
Arranging (ערך) wood on the fire Leviticus 1:7b
Arranging (שׁרף) the parts, with the head and the suet Leviticus 1:8a
Washing (רחץ) the entrails and legs with water Leviticus 1:9
If the ritual of the burnt offering of a bull is visualised, it becomes evident that only some actions are mentioned and not others. The verbs in the prescriptions suggest action. The overall picture is that of an Israelite with a bull before an altar attended to by priests at the entrance of the tent of meeting in the desert. However, the ritual scene is presented in a mimetic manner. The ritual of the burnt offering of a bull is not the imitation of an actual ritual offering of a bull, it is a representation. The scene is more about showing than telling. Understanding the scene is by virtue of having the necessary knowledge to fill gaps where information is not given such as criteria for valid sacrificial animals. The text does not describe the performance of the ritual of a burnt offering of a bull that occurred at a specific place at a given point in time. It prescribes the bare essentials of a ritual offering.

Rolf Knierim’s work on ritual in Text and Concept facilitates an explanation of what is meant by mimetic. He views the surface text as ritual text and the implicit text as ritual act and speaks of thirteen individual actions and nine stages. He notes that though the biblical text states various actions, it does not prioritise them, which actions are more important than others. The order of the actions is not clear, nor is it clear who performs some of the actions, for example whether the sacrificial animal is slaughtered by the offerer or the priest. In the NRSV translation, slaughter of the animal is mentioned at the end of the list of actions that apply to the offerer and before mention of priests, suggesting that it is the offerer who slaughters the bull, yet in the Masoretic Text reference to slaughter of the animals opens the sentence introducing the section of the prescription that seems to apply to priests, hence it may be priests who have the function to slaughter the animal.

It is sometimes ambiguous whether actions are performed simultaneously or successively.

Although the general actions of participants in the rite, priests or lay persons, are given, the text does not describe exactly what has to be done. Knierim recognises elements of ritual in

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13 Marx comments on the lack of a comprehensive treatment of the sacrificial system in Leviticus in, “Theology of the Sacrifice,” 103-20.
15 Knierim, Text and Concept, 89.
16 Expressed in German as Haupt- und Nebenhandlungen.
17 Knierim, Text and Concept, 52.
18 Knierim, Text and Concept, 26.
19 Knierim, Text and Concept, 100.
the text but also notes many prescriptive gaps. He reads the text as though it concerns the actual performance of ritual and observes that several stages of the rite are not noted. However, there are prescriptive gaps because the text is not about regulations for the actual performance of a rite, it is a literary text—about ritual. The prescriptions relating to ritual are mimetic, having the appearance of real ritual prescriptions. Just enough offering prescriptions are stated to make them recognisable as ritual prescriptions, yet at the same time the prescriptions are not quite real.

With the burnt offering of a bull text some actions of the ritual are prescribed suggesting a ritual scene but other facets, such as prayers to be spoken or the appropriate attitude of the offerers, are not mentioned. Instructions for the burnt offering of a bull give offerers general guidelines but presume knowledge of other instructions as mentioned previously in the case of blemishes. The few prescriptions that suggest the rite of the burnt offering of a bull are mimetic (representational), and not to be performed at an actual physical place such as the wilderness tabernacle, Solomon’s temple, or the restored Jerusalem temple. The offering instructions do not function in the same way as a *Rituale Romanum* (an official book of ritual functions to be performed by priests in the Roman rite, what is to be done and how to do it). They gesture to and suggest the actions of ritual performance. They indicate some stages of a possible ritual performance. The prescriptive form means the temporal sense is, henceforth, from now on. They are not descriptive, describing what was and has been and shall continue to be. The case of a selected few stated prescriptions and silence on other prescriptions regarding offerings applies equally to both lay persons, who are the offerers, and to priests. The instructions are not an account of a ritual as might be observed by an anthropologist, then written down, nor are they are some stages of traditional rites from which the real rite can be reconstructed.  

The background to the rites of Leviticus 1–7 was almost certainly inspired by ritual practice but there is a sense of distance or removal from the actual performance of the rites. The rites are in the world of the text. Leviticus 1–7 is a literary text about Israelite rituals. Some actions

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20 Bibb, *Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds*, 34, also observes that Leviticus 1–7 is not an anthropological text.
of a ritual are prescribed, enough to suggest a ritual world. It is a mimetic text, showing parts of the rite of offering a bull and thereby suggesting what the ritual might be like.

2. Initiation of the Cultic World (Leviticus 8–10)

The second example of textual evidence in this chapter is Leviticus 8–10, which is the fulfilment of commands given in panel one (Exodus 29:1-46; 30:22-33). The subject matter is the consecration of priests, the altar and associated cultic utensils, and initiation of the first offerings. A thematic overview of the narrative of Leviticus 8–10 is given in table 4.2.

Three different points follow regarding the consecration of cultic personnel and cultic paraphernalia in Leviticus 8–10. The points start with the importance of the Israelites as witnesses of the consecration rites, observe that blood and oil function as symbols of consecration, and address the first human deaths in the cultic zone of the tent of meeting.

Witnesses are necessary to validate the consecration rites. From verses 3 to 5b gathering vocabulary associated with people abounds. The verb “to assemble” (קהל) is used twice. The Israelites are referred to three times with the word, congregation (עדה), a cultic term referring to the gathering of the people of Israel; therefore, the people of Israel are present at the consecration rites in a cultic role. The place to meet is the tent of meeting (אהל מועד). The word meeting, as noted previously, derives from the verb “to appoint” (יעד). The tent of meeting is the appointed place and linguistically linked with the assembled people who are the appointed people. The consecration and initiation rites take place before the eyes of the people.

The importance of the people recurs after the first offerings are made with the phrase, “and the whole congregation drew near and stood before the Lord” (Leviticus 9:5). The Hebrew verb to “draw near” (קרב) is used in cultic contexts, either for approach to the cultic area or the bringing of an offering (קרבן) as in Leviticus 1:2; 3:12; 4:14. The gathered people are the

21 Milgrom records similarities and differences between the instructions of Exodus 29 and their fulfilment in Leviticus 8 in, Leviticus 1–16, 545-49.
22 Bibb, Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds, 81, 88, 98, observes too the importance of the presence of the congregation at the rites.
human context in which the consecration rites of Leviticus 8 and the first official sacrifices of Leviticus 9 take place. The first sacrifices are valid because the people witness them as shown by the final verse of Leviticus 9:24, “Fire came out from the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.” The act of the people falling to the ground in response to the inaugural offering is an expression of communal agreement, an “amen” expressed physically.

Symbols such as blood and oil are an integral part of the inaugural ritual actions. They function as symbols in that their exterior use by prescribed persons according to prescribed

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23 Gorman, “Ritual Studies,” 23, comments on the importance of gestures, the senses, and a symbol system to convey the world of ritual.
rites brings about an effect and a change in the objects or persons consecrated, thereby making the anointed things holy. The anointing oil is composed of rare aromatic ingredients (Exodus 30:23-25) and the blood is from sacrificed animals. All blood must be let from sacrificial animals (and all animals for human consumption). On one level the bleeding of animals for food or sacrifice is practical and related to hygiene. On another level regarding blood, the Hebrew Bible communicates that life is in the blood which is in the flesh (Genesis 9:4); in an extended sense, God gives life. Hence it is logical that blood must not be consumed as the thought is anathema that God be consumed. However, in the area round the altar blood, and by analogy God, abounds. The altar area is the zone where animals are killed, blood is let and blood is collected. Priests and altar and liturgical furnishings are sprinkled with blood for consecration. Blood, which is life and given by God, is used to mark the holy from the non-holy.

The effect of the oil and blood is the consecration, literally the making holy of the objects and persons sprinkled. Objects sprinkled are the tabernacle and all within it, the altar and all its utensils, the basin and priestly vestments. Persons sprinkled are Aaron and his sons. The anointing oil and sprinkled blood mark boundaries such as priestly from non-priestly zones and priestly from non-priestly roles. For example, only priests may touch the altar.

The result is that the consecrated things are only to be touched by those permitted to touch them, the consecrated personnel. Priests must wash their hands and feet before going into the tent of meeting or serving at the altar. Only consecrated persons may touch the consecrated things. The consecrated world is a highly regulated environment.

In the highly regulated ritual world round the altar irregularity becomes apparent when Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, suddenly die. Irregularity is rare in the world of divine command and robotic human fulfilment in the tent of meeting text. The two sons offer strange incense with their coals, or literally with their fire (אשׁ זרה Leviticus 10:1).  

They use their fire pans in a non-prescribed manner. Prescriptions for appropriate use are not given in the text and

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24 See also Numbers 3:4; Exodus 30:9.
in hindsight one finds out that the young men did not adhere to non-specified instructions.\footnote{Levine, \textit{Leviticus}, 58-59 n. 1.} As a result, fire comes forth from God, the two young men are consumed and they die. Their deaths for a minor form of irregularity during the inaugural rituals are unfair, expressed through the silence of their father, Aaron, in the face of the situation (Leviticus 10:3). However, the altar and associated utensils are holy and holiness is dangerous. The death of Aaron’s sons is a warning and demonstrates the consequences of not adhering to cultic instructions. Not adhering to the ritual regulations incurs death. The message is that ritual regulations are not to be meddled with. Priestly responsibilities mean to act in a highly regulated environment that does not tolerate deviance. The cultic environment is a zone close to God, not fully comprehensible to human understanding and dangerous. The text portrays the sense that the cultic world close to YHWH is unpredictable.

The death of Aaron’s sons in Leviticus 10 is in contrast to all former text on the tent of meeting and cultic matters. It demonstrates that the cultic world of the tent of meeting is highly regulated. Carelessness or inattention to cultic instructions can lead to dire consequences.

**3. Holy Space and Holiness (Leviticus 16:1-19)**

In the third example of the cultic world in Leviticus a sense of holiness is again developed, and in this case in the space around the ark unit. The ark is not mentioned in Leviticus until chapter 16 and then only once. The ark is a unit of two parts made up of a chest and cover (on which are the two cherubim). The term cover rather than the ark is used in Leviticus (16:2, 13-15).

The area where the ark is contained may be approached by Aaron, the high priest, once a year, on \textit{Yom Kippur}. The word order of instructions for the high priest’s entry into the sanctuary (Leviticus 16:2a-g) reflects the highly privileged nature of the space. Aaron may not enter at
any time (Leviticus 16:2a). Entrance into the innermost place of the tent sanctuary is step by step with the word order:

- Holy place (ַל הקד Leviticus 16:2b)
- Within the curtain (מבית לפרכת Leviticus 16:2c)
- Before the cover (ַל פני הכפרת Leviticus 16:2d)
- That is upon the ark (אשׁר על הארן Leviticus 16:2e).

Prescriptions for the high priest’s entry into the sanctuary finish with the exhortation that failure to adhere to the prescription incurs death (Leviticus 16:2f). The significance of the step by step word order and need for precaution is given in the second clause of the sentence, with the “I” statement, “for I appear in the cloud upon the cover” (Leviticus 16:2g). Entering the innermost space of the tent is to approach God’s space.

An explanation of some of the terms follows. The most central area of the tabernacle is presented in spatial terms as “the holy place” (Leviticus 16:2; Exodus 36:1, 44) rather than with architectural terminology and a word such as “sanctuary” (Exodus 25:8, Leviticus 16:33). God speaks of appearing (ראה) in Leviticus 16:2 rather than meeting (יעד) as in Exodus 25:22; 30:6, 36. “The cloud upon the cover” of Leviticus 16:2 is explained in Leviticus 16:14. It is caused by the burning of “crushed sweet incense” on the coal pan of Aaron. The incense cloud produced must be sufficient and enough in order to disguise the front of the cover of the ark. The cloud of incense in the holy place echoes the cloud out of which God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18). Underlying the motif of cloud is the understanding that no-one is to see God face to face. Deviation from the instructions incurs death (Leviticus 16:2).

The last instruction regarding the ark unit is Leviticus 16:14 and the only explicit instance when blood is used in conjunction with the ark unit in the holy space. Blood from the previously offered bull is to be sprinkled on the front of the cover and before the cover seven times, seven standing for wholeness. Blood functions as a purifying agent, ensuring that the area of greatest holiness is pure. Leviticus 16:14 is a unique linking of action at the altar and ark via blood. Blood from the bull offered by the high priest on the altar before the tent of meeting on Yom Kippur is used to purify the holiest area. The ritual focus is on purging the
space within the holy of holies, a favoured space for God to appear, rather than on paying tribute to the testimony, or the ark.

B. Discussion on Leviticus

Three general comments follow and then the textual evidence from Leviticus is discussed in dialogue with the work of scholars such as Bryan Bibb and Mary Douglas. The first comment concerns the portrayal of Aaron. He may well be a stereotypical character, the name or reference to Aaron standing for standing for the role “high priest,” similar to Bezalel and Oholiab in the tent of meeting text who have emblematic names and stand for the gifted artisans who facilitate construction of the tent of meeting. Some scholars such as Bryan Bibb and Hanna Liss in recent work address the possibility of Aaron as a stylised character.26

It is difficult to trace the origin of the name Aaron. It may be of Egyptian origin similar to Moses’ name as Exodus 4:14 has both Moses and Aaron coming out of Egypt.27 Alternatively, Aaron may be of Hebrew derivation but the etymology is unknown.28 Moses and Aaron are static in the text, robotically performing what the instructions have prescribed. Leviticus 8:2 is a list of things and persons to be prepared as prerequisites for the initial ritual ceremonies. The inventory starts with Aaron and his sons, followed by vestments, sacrificial animals, and unleavened bread. Aaron is treated as part of the consecration inventory rather than as a character. Reference to Aaron signals the function of high priest and ritual responsibility, not an individual personality.

A further reason to suggest that Aaron stands for a stereotype is that he is presented as the first high priest in the tent of meeting text. There is no prior priestly lineage, but the names of those who succeed Aaron, four sons, are stated (Numbers 3:1-4). Aaron is not tested for his

26 Liss, “Imaginary Sanctuary,” 674; “Kanon und Fiktion,” 18; “Ritual Purity,” 334, and Liss’ review of Watts, Ritual Rhetoric in Leviticus,” 4. For characterization of Aaron and sons as priestly types, see also Bibb, Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds, 78-88.
suitability for the role of high priest. No prior ancestral house or clan is mentioned in relation to Aaron though they are in relation to Israelites and Levites in the book of Numbers. In the Hebrew text, Israelites (Numbers 1:2-4) and Levites (Numbers 3:6, 15-19) are described according to tribe (מטה), ancestral houses (לפ應用ת), and clans (למשׁפחתם). The tribe of Levites is made up of three sons whose names are given. They in turn are made up of clans and again the names of the clans are stated. This kind of information, even if it is information in symbolic form, is not given for the line of Aaron.\(^{29}\) Aaron comes from out of nowhere. The lack of characterization for Aaron in the tent of meeting text suggests that he and his sons are constructed to be priestly personnel for the purpose of the cultic world of the tent of meeting.

The second comment concerns the most central point of the tabernacle tent, the holy place, which is emphasised more in Leviticus than the ark. Holy space is the focus of Leviticus 16:1-19, not the ark unit as a furnishing. This is in contrast to the attention given the unit in Exodus where physical details for construction of the ark are given in panel one (Exodus 25:10-22) and its parts are constructed in panel two. Moses is told that he will receive a testimony (עדות) to put in the ark (Exodus 25:21) but no explanation is given of what the testimony is or its significance in either Exodus or Leviticus. Important observations are that in Exodus the ark unit is associated with the “I” statements, the theological moments, when God via Moses says there, that is, above the ark, “I will meet with you” (Exodus 25:22; 30:6); in Leviticus 1–7 cultic action is at the altar not in the holy place, and in Leviticus 16 the holy place and the atmosphere of holiness are more important than the ark.

The third comment concerns incongruence. In Exodus the aesthetic eye sees beauty and coherence in the ritual world of the tent of meeting. For example, both the curtains and screen to the entrance of the tabernacle are made “of gold, of blue, purples and crimson, yarns, of fine twisted linen” as are the ephod and decorated band of the priestly vestments (Exodus 26:1, 36; 28:6-8). On the other hand the pragmatic sense questions the sprinkling with blood and the fat of burning animals that must spit out from the altar onto the costly priestly vestments in Leviticus. The ritual action is dramatic. There is blood, animal parts, fire and the smell of

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\(^{29}\) In comparison, Ezekiel, understood as a priest in the line of Zadok, speaks of levitical priests as “descendants of Zadok” (Ezekiel 40:46; 44:15; 48:11). The issue of Levitical and Zadokite lines cannot be dealt with here but its importance is recognised.
burning meat and fat from the altar yet the consequences of realism are not catered for. There is no provision made for the washing of the priestly vestments or arrangements for where cultic utensils or oil spices are stored. Only a handful of chosen ritual scenes are portrayed such as the inaugural offerings and consecration of the holy place and notably the inaugural ones not on-going ritual practice.

The use of symbols such as blood and oil in a mimetic context of consecration and sacrifice and stereotypical characters indicate a literary text. Leviticus 1–16 has cultic subject matter and the cultic world described conveys the essence of a ritual world. The text is not a ritual text for the actual performance of rites—there are gaps in the prescribed regulations, no prayers or incantations are stipulated, no knife is mentioned, neither is the text an anthropological text such as an anthropologist might write. Over the last twenty years scholars have increasingly worked with the literary nature of the Leviticus texts.30

Bryan Bibb in his recent dissertation for a Princeton Theological Seminary doctoral thesis, published as Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds, treats the book of Leviticus as a literary not an anthropological or historical text.31 Instead of using conventional terminology such as narrative and law to describe the major genres of Leviticus he coins two new terms, “ritualized narrative” and “narrativized ritual,” which reflect his idea that the text is the end of a process of literary development. For Bibb, the act of writing and reading the text is ritualization.32 Actual performance of ritual in the past is transformed beyond ritual prescriptions into what he calls “transformed fictive description.”33 Bibb notes several indications of fiction in the text such as the use of regulatory language in the form of prescriptions and formulae, traditionalism in what he sees as archaic language, archaic priestly dress and public ceremonies.34 Aaron is characterised as type rather than as an historical personage by Bibb (I propose that this is the case for Moses too but which cannot develop the proposal here).

30 For example the collections of Jüngling and Fabry, eds., Levitikus als Buch and Rendtorff and Kugler, eds., The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception as noted in chapter 1.
31 Bibb, Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds, 41.
32 Bibb, Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds, 55.
33 Bibb, Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds, 73.
34 Bibb, Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds, 58-61, 82-88. The archaising tendency of the priestly writer is also noted by David Carr, Reading the Fractures of Genesis (Louisville, Ky.; Westminster John Knox, 1996), 135.
The textual evidence in section A of this chapter suggests that Leviticus 1–16 is at least one step removed from actual ritual, demonstrated by the mimetic, representative order of the rite for the sacrifice of a bull. Like Bibb I think that the rites of the First Temple were most likely the inspiration for composition of ritual prescriptive texts and that the ritual instructions in Leviticus are not texts for the performance of actual ritual because of the mimetic nature of the text. As Bibb argues, what was once probably actual ritual has been ritualised into text; former performance is transformed into a ritual that can be observed or practised in the act of reading, hearing and engaging in the text.

Scholars analyse the literary means by which the speech of God is communicated in Exodus 25—Numbers 10 with different vocabulary. Wilfried Warning and Nicholas Wolterstorff use the conventional terminology of divine speech or divine discourse. In reference to priestly writings, Jean-Louis Ska talks of “divine discourses” and claims that they are often like “narrative programs,” thereby articulating form and content in the same sentence. Bibb coins the terminology of “narrativized ritual.” Knierim argues for the opening of Exodus 25:1-9 as “narrated instruction,” which is understandable as the speaking style at the beginning of the first panel in Exodus is more like related speech as the people are addressed in the third person.

Whatever the genre description of instructions in Exodus or Leviticus, the primary drama suggests that God speaks. God’s voice exceeds half of the total text and is therefore dominant. The imperative tone of the prescriptions is confirmed with command formulae in the format or some variation of the format, “as the Lord commanded,” or exhortations such as “that they may not die.” The convention is that God does not have vocal chords and cannot speak and hence God’s words are conveyed by the most suitable human being possible who is Moses.

36 Jean-Louis Ska refers to the priestly writings of the Pentateuch not specifically Leviticus in, Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch, 155.
Whether the receiver of the text thinks that God really speaks, or that God speaks through Moses, or that human authors speak via Moses, the literary rhetoric creates the effect that God speaks.

Another scholar, the English social anthropologist Mary Douglas (1921-2007), had an ongoing interest in the Hebrew Bible and brought her own particular insights to the book of Leviticus. Although not a biblical scholar she was interested in literary ideas related to Leviticus as seen in her essay, “Poetic Structure in Leviticus,” where she addresses the idea of a ring structure. However, it is not this essay that is of interest to us here but *Leviticus as Literature* where Douglas makes analogies between Mount Sinai, the tabernacle and sacrificial animals, drawing from texts relating to the tent of meeting in Exodus and Leviticus. She sees the tabernacle as a tripartite structure suggested by three screens: the entrance screen at the gate of the court with the altar, the entrance screen to the tabernacle, and the screen separating the tabernacle from the most holy place. Sinai is regarded as a holy mountain with three zones: God speaks at the summit to Moses who has restricted access, Aaron, two sons and seventy elders may access the middle area, the lower slopes are open access to the Israelites. The sacrificial animal is also understood in three parts as 1) the head and meat sections which are food for priest and people, 2) the midriff area of dense fat which covers kidneys and liver and is burnt on the altar, and 3) the lower abdomen with entrails and loins which corresponds to the inner sanctuary, the top of the sacrificial pile.

Douglas addresses details in the text such as interior animal parts and finds a tripartite meaning as mentioned above. Her dividing up of the animal into three parts is conjectural but at least she engages in the bodies of slaughtered and sacrificial animals which are after all mentioned extensively in Leviticus 1–7. However, she overemphasises the role of priests in the rites. Douglas is informed by Jacob Milgrom’s work which treats the ritual prescriptive texts as primarily the domain of priests, as old, and composed in First Temple times. In contrast to Milgrom, Rendtorff takes a different slant to the role of priests, one of setting rather

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than dating, and talks of the ritual language of Leviticus as the “internal cultic language used in the priestly circles in the temple of Jerusalem.”

Douglas, Milgrom and Rendtorff read the ritual prescriptions of Leviticus as though they deal with the real performance of actual offering in the First Temple period and focus on the role of priests rather than that of the people.

The textual evidence of this chapter observes the active role of the people in witnessing the rites of the first offerings at the altar at the tent of meeting. The Israelites are close to the slaughter zone, described in the text as the forecourt of the tent complex. The people observe the killing of animals, the separation and dividing up of parts, some for priests and people, other pieces to be burnt on the altar. These are not esoteric texts for some elite or for priests only. They are directed at the Israelite and for the Israelite. The Israelite participates in the tent of meeting scenes. Characters within the text and receivers of the text are close to action at the altar and have knowledge of what is involved. The tent of meeting text encourages the full involvement of the offerer in the ritual process, what is stated and what is not stated.

As mentioned in the textual evidence on the burnt offering of a bull, selected moments of the offering rite are prescribed and others left out, creating gaps in the text. Provisions are made for various utensils that are necessary for offerings at the altar: pots to collect the ashes and shovels, presumably for the ashes; basins, presumably to collect the blood; forks, presumably for turning the meat (Exodus 27:3); but there is never mention of a knife with which to kill the animal. Neither is there any mention of the length of time a participant has in the process of the rite to collect blood and sprinkle it before it clots. There is enough mention of entrails and blood and washing to suggest a real ritual world without the text actually having to deal with the dirty stuff. Blood symbolically cleanses, hence it can be sprinkled on the cover of the ark unit in the holy place and not dirty the high priest’s vestments. Similarly the vestments of the officiating priests presumably remain clean because they are not fat besprinkled and blood ridden as they would be if the rites were really real.

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42 Rendtorff, “Two Kinds of P,” 79.
43 Levine, Leviticus, 7 n. 5; Jacob, Exodus, 761.
Returning to Douglas, she extends her tripartite idea to move from tabernacle to temple, the structure of the 27 chapters of Leviticus resembling the proportions of a temple.\textsuperscript{44} She divides the book of Leviticus into three narrative sections: chapters 1 and 17 are marked by the gate screen, Leviticus 8–10 is the textual screen into the tabernacle and Leviticus 24:10-22, the story of the Egyptian blasphemer, is the textual screen to the inner sanctuary.\textsuperscript{45} Chapters 1–17 correspond with the forecourt and altar, chapters 18:1–24:9 with the tabernacle and 25–27 with the sanctuary. An association between cultic tent of meeting and Israelite temple can validly be made despite the biblical evidence of Exodus and Leviticus never describing the cultic tent as a temple or house of God. Douglas associates tent with temple in Exodus and temple rites with cultic rites in Leviticus, what I call the temple-tent.

It is how Douglas processes her structure of the book of Leviticus into a pilgrimage text that is of particular interest. She puts herself in the place of an exilic Israelite who has no temple but who can, by walking through the book of Leviticus and learning the “spiritual geography,” internalise the tabernacle.\textsuperscript{46} She has the pilgrim walk from the gate entrance toward the tabernacle, enter the tabernacle and approach the sanctuary from the north or table of showbread side before exiting along the south side. I prefer the idea of a journey to the centre of the tabernacle, the movement in and out, rather than around. However, what is in common is the idea that the space of the tent can be entered and moved into. Unfortunately, Douglas’ major interests in her book are elsewhere, for example, revising her thought on forbidden animals such as the pig. She takes barely two pages in her book to communicate her vision of spiritual geography in Leviticus and thereby her insight is not developed.

**Summary**

The textual evidence of this chapter demonstrates that several literary techniques are used to convey the sense of an Israelite cultic world in Leviticus. Aaron is a stereotypical character standing for the high priest. Symbols such as blood and oil are used in the context of sacrifice

\textsuperscript{44} Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 58.
\textsuperscript{45} Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 223.
and consecration. The motif of cloud is a literary technique through which the manifestation of God can be portrayed. The text communicates an atmosphere of holiness through accumulative prescription and description. Holiness may be approached within a highly regulated environment but it is dangerous, not predictable and to be approached with caution. The Leviticus texts on offerings are not anthropological or historical texts, or a handbook for the actual performance of rites. Leviticus 1–7 is a mimetic text in that the general procedure of ritual action is communicated through gestures. Ritual performance or the drama of rite is prescribed through the order, though sometimes ambiguous, of action. No words or prayers are stipulated for participants who take part in ritual practice, thereby reinforcing the importance of performance. The example of the burnt offering of a bull demonstrates in particular that the ritual texts of Leviticus are literary and mimetic.
Chapter 5

The Cultic People

The Book of Numbers 1:1–10:28

The primary cultic focus of Numbers 1–10 is the people of Israel. This chapter begins with some general comments and an overview of the structure of Numbers 1–10. The format is the same as the previous two exegetical chapters and proceeds in two sections. In section A the textual evidence is presented and in section B the evidence is discussed. Reasons to treat Numbers 9:15–10:28 as the conclusion of the entire tent of meeting text (Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28) are given at the end of the chapter.

The participants within the text of Numbers 1–10 are the same as in the rest of the tent of meeting text (Exodus 25–40 and Leviticus 1–27), God, Moses and the Israelites. The cultic term, congregation (עדה), continues to be used to describe the Israelites; new in Numbers 1–10 is that the Israelites are defined in terms of twelve tribes. The geographical setting is the wilderness of Sinai. The location is the tent of meeting. The text continues to be made up of framework narratives encompassing sections of divine speech or various subjects but narrative is more frequent in Numbers 1–10 than in Exodus 24:15–40:38 and Leviticus 1–27. The framework narrative continues to function as a picture frame for the contents.

One of the differences in the framework narrative in Numbers 1–10 in comparison with the tent of meeting text in Exodus and Leviticus is the introduction of time in the opening framework, “the first day of the second month in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt” (Numbers 1:1). Time is suggested in two ways in Numbers 1:1, in reference to a prior event, departure from Egypt, and in a measured manner as years, months and days after the event. The event, departure from Egypt, is prior to the now of the text which is life in
the wilderness of Sinai suggesting a chronological order of Egypt then Sinai. Reference to years, months and days gives the aura of measurable or specific time. The seemingly quantifiable time of the framework is in contrast to the lack of a sense of time in the contents.

The thematic structure of Numbers 1:1–10:28, table 5.1, allows some general observations to be made. The terms outer and inner camp are appropriated for the structure of Numbers 1–10 from the work of Coats and Knierim. Outer and inner refer to proximity to the altar and tent of meeting at the centre of the camp. Thematically, the centre of Numbers 1–10 is the dedication of the altar by the lay people, highlighted in bold and italics in table 5.1.

A very minimalist thematic overview of the structure is:

- **location at Sinai**
  - People
  - Levites
  - People
  - **Altar**
    - Levites
  - Departure from Sinai

At the heart of the ten chapters is the altar to which a representative head from each of the twelve tribes brings offerings for its dedication. The altar is at the centre of the camp, surrounded by the Levites who are then encircled by the people of Israel.

People are the major theme of Numbers 1:1–10:28. The text opens and closes with the people of Israel presented in military terms as regiments (צבא), camped around the cultic tent of meeting at the centre and by implication guarding it. Military concepts are those of conscription (Numbers 1:3), organization of men in companies (דגל Numbers 1:3; 10:1) or regiments with ensigns (דגל Numbers 2:3). The tribe of Dan functions as rearguard (NRSV

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1 Knierim and Coats, *Numbers*, 27.
Numbers 10:25) and trumpets sound the alarm for war (Numbers 10:9). Of the first ten chapters of Numbers, three deal with the people of Israel (Numbers 1, 2, and 7), three with Levites (Numbers 3, 4 and 8), two with various instructions (Numbers 5–6) and the other chapters with the departure of the Israelites from Sinai (the latter half of Numbers 9 and all of Numbers 10).

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Table 5.1 Overview of Numbers 1:1–10:28
The people of Israel in Numbers 1–10 are defined in different categories: as men capable of military conscription; as Levites or priests or Israelites, and according to ancestral lineage, belonging to either one of the twelve tribes, or the line of Levites. Counts are made of the different categories of groups. Israelites are also all defined in relation to the tent of meeting and their cultic role. The entire people are presented in different formations round the tent of meeting, circular and linear and subsequently explained.

A. Textual evidence

1. Representations of Israelites as Twelve Tribes

After the very brief opening framework narrative (Numbers 1:1), the book of Numbers immediately launches into its particular interest, the Israelites. A head count of the whole congregation of Israelites (כֹּל־עֵדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל) based on eligibility for conscription is ordered (Numbers 1:2-3). Two points follow, one regarding the translation of the Hebrew רֹתֵעַ and the other regarding the quantity of people who are not included in the headcount.

Firstly, from Exodus 24:15—Numbers 1:1 רֹתֵעַ is one of the Hebrew terms used to describe the people of Israel in contexts where they are gathered either to hear the divine speeches via Moses, or assembled in the forecourt before the tent of meeting; the people can be said to gather as a community or congregation. (In these two contexts it is understandable that רֹתֵעַ is translated as congregation as in the NRSV.) In Numbers 1:2-3 רֹתֵעַ is used in a different sense, namely to refer to an assembly of adult males bearing arms. Suddenly, in Numbers 1:2-3 רֹתֵעַ is found in conjunction with words that refer to a military context. Nowhere previously in the tent of meeting text have military vocabulary or concepts been used. The NRSV translation of “congregation” does not suitably render רֹתֵעַ in the military context and therefore the NJPS translation of “community” becomes more appropriate.

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3 Milgrom, Numbers, 4.
Secondly, many people are excluded from the count, males under twenty years, non-military-capable males, the elderly, all women and children. Counting is organised so that the head of each ancestral house registers the numbers. The heads of the twelve tribes are named. The total count adds up to 603,550 men available for conscription (Numbers 1:46).

The lineage of Aaron is counted according to the number of his sons and totals four (Numbers 3:1-4). Levites are registered in a different head count to that of the Israelites and on different criteria, namely according to males over a month old (Numbers 3:15). A count of Levites and their three levitical groups totals 22,000. A second count of Levites based on men qualified to serve from thirty to fifty years old at the tent of meeting adds up to 8,580 persons (Numbers 4:46-49). Overall, the counting systems reveal two major interests, the number of men of appropriate lineage to serve at the tent of meeting as priests or Levites and the number of men eligible for conscription. The two different groups, those for service at the tent of meeting and those eligible for military purposes, are organised as a whole in two different formations, a circular formation for encampment (Numbers 2:1-34) and a linear formation for war and travel (Numbers 10:13-28).

**Circular Formation**

The stationary formation for encampment can be designated as circular. Men capable of military service are organised in twelve regiments according to their ancestral tribe round the tent of meeting (Numbers 2:2). The tent of meeting is set up to face east and is at the centre of the camp (Exodus 27:13). Each of the twelve tribes is assigned a position in relation to the four points of the compass and in relation to the tent of meeting: three tribes on the east side (Numbers 2:3-7), three to the south (Numbers 2:10-17), and three respectively to the west and north (Numbers 2:18-24, 25-31). The first regiment noted is that of the people of Judah lead by Nahshon and positioned to the east. Diagram 5.1 shows the location of the different tribes.
Diagram 5.1 Circular formation of Israelites

The camping instructions are not more specific than giving the general compass direction. The tribe of Issachar is to camp next to Judah, then the tribe of Zebulun. Whether Judah is at the most central eastern point then Issachar to the south of Judah and Zebulun to the north of Judah, or Judah at the most central eastern point, Issachar and then Zebulun in a fan around Judah, or yet again another variant, is not stated. Whether the formation is exactly circular or partially circular, the point of the text is that “the whole congregation of Israel” is camped round (בעיוון) the tent of meeting—the centre of social organization (Numbers 2:2).

Reference to the whole of Israel in groups of twelve in the book of Numbers is allied with the twelve stones of the breastpiece of the high priest’s vestments (Exodus 28:15-21; 39:8-14), the first time the number twelve appears in the tent of meeting text. The breastpiece consists of four rows of three stones, making a symmetrical and rectangular shape. Each stone is engraved with the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel, which in turn stands for all the members of that tribe who make up that name. The tribal names to be engraved on the stones are not stated in Exodus. This information is “saved” until Numbers 1–10. The symmetry of four times three
rows suggests that each stone is of equal size and of equal value. Though the text does not say each stone is equally important, equality is alluded to.

Numbers 3:2-4 refers to Aaron and his sons as “anointed priests” thereby confirming the consecration and initiation of rites in Leviticus 8. The death of two of Aaron’s sons is also recalled in Numbers 3:4. The same vocabulary of “strange fire” (אשׁ זרה) is used in Numbers 3:4 as in Leviticus 10:1 and is a reminder that any irregularity in the highly regulated environment of holiness is dangerous. In the circular camp arrangements, positioning of the Levites is the following: Gershonites behind the tabernacle to the west, Kohathites to the south, the Merarites to the north and Aaron and the priests to the east. Presumably priests and Levites camp closest to the tent of meeting as that is where they serve and the centre of holiness. Holy are the consecrated altar, tabernacle tent and all the cultic furniture inside the tent. The congregation camps in the next circle out from the Levites and from the tent of meeting. The idea of inner and outer camp is expressed with the terminology of Coats and Knierim in the structural overview of Numbers 1–10. No matter where a person is located, which tribe one belongs to and whatever the direction of the compass, the sense is that each person has equal access to the tent of meeting at the centre of the camp. Terminology for concentricity is not used but the format around the tent of meeting suggests such.

**Linear Formation**

When stationary and encamped the Israelites are in circular formation but when travelling they are in linear formation (Numbers 10:13-28). The tribes are divided into four lots of three groups in the linear formation just as they are in the circular. The three tribes camped to the east, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun, head the travelling contingent. They are followed by two of the three levitical groups, the Gershonites and Merarites who have wagons drawn by oxen to carry the tent (Numbers 7:1-9). The Gershonites are responsible for transport of the curtains of the tabernacle, the coverings of the tabernacle, and the hangings of the forecourt (Numbers 4:21-28), the Merarites for the frames, bases and pillars (Numbers 4:29-33).
Diagram 5.2 Linear formation of Israelites

Diagram 5.2 illustrates the travelling formation. The travelling position of Aaron and sons is not stated. The three tribes that were camped to the south, Reuben, Simeon and Gad, in the circular formation follow the Gershonites and Merarites. The third levitical group, the Kohathites, carry the tabernacle furniture and religious vessels. Prescriptions are given in Exodus for the tabernacle furniture to be constructed with rings for poles for carrying by humans. Thereby Exodus anticipates the instructions of Numbers 4 that explicitly prescribe the Kohathites as the designated group to carry the consecrated furnishings of the cultic tent. The consecrated objects are called the “the holy things” in Numbers 4:4, 15, 19-20. The Kohathites travel on foot without the aid of wagons at the centre of the linear movement. They carry the holy things, the things that no one must touch for fear of death, and travel at the centre of the formation, followed by the tribes that were camped to the west and north when in circular formation.

The sense that all twelve tribes and their members have equal access to the consecrated tent and furnishings is not as evident in the linear travelling formation as it is in the circular encampment formation. However, the twelve tribes are mentioned in the same sequence in the linear as in the circular order and also divided into the same four groups of three tribes. Similarly the three levitical groups and their travelling formation and function are recorded in the same order in the linear as in the circular formation. Together all twelve tribes have donated six covered wagons and twelve oxen for the Merarites and Gershonites to transport the parts that make up the tent of meeting (Numbers 7:3). Equal communal donations from the twelve tribes for transport of the tent of meeting and its paraphernalia imply that each tribe is equally responsible for the tent of meeting.
Equality of Position

The different number counts of Israelites are based on genealogical descendence from one of the twelve tribes, or as Levites or as priests. All Israelites camp in circular formation with equal access symbolically to the tent of meeting and travel in a specified position within a linear format according to tribe, again with equal responsibility for the tent by virtue of all having donated the same quantity of travelling equipment. Equality, or the equal standing of each tribe in relation to other tribes, is implied whenever there is reference to twelve, such as names featuring in a list (Numbers 1:5b-15; 1:20-42) or with the twelfe-fold repetition of the offerings that each tribe brings for the dedication of the altar (Numbers 7:10-88). The list of offerings, brought by the first tribe is the formula used for all twelve tribes. The lengthy formula recurs twelve times giving the text an extraordinary repetitiveness yet also reinforcing the message that each tribe gives the same offerings in the same quantity. The donations are significant as they express dedication of the altar by the people.

The twelfe-fold repeated formula follows. The features in bold and underlined are variable each time the formula is repeated. For example, 1/12 stands for first or second day through to the twelfth day. X son of Y is the formula of “Nahshon son of Amminadab” in the first instance and “Nethanel son of Zuar” in the second instance.

On the 1/12 day X son of Y, the leader of Z tribe, presented an offering; he presented for his offering one silver plate weighing one hundred thirty shekels, one silver basin weighing seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of choice flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one golden dish weighing ten shekels, full of incense; one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, as a burnt offering; one male goat as a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of well-being, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of X son of Y. (Numbers 7:18-23)

Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 88-113, proposes that techniques of repetition in biblical narrative ensure that an illiterate audience catches the major gist of a narrative, it being unlikely that an audience is in the situation where every word can be heard.
Once each tribal head has brought offerings and gifts on behalf of his tribe, dedication rites for the tent of meeting are complete. The tent of meeting, all its furnishings and associated utensils, the altar, and the priestly personnel are consecrated. Both people and priests have brought the appropriate offerings for the inauguration of the tent of meeting world. A fully functioning cultic world is now established. What is unusual is that the cultic world is portable, designed for travel. The tabernacle furnishings are fitted with rings and poles for carrying by a designated levitical group, the Kohathites. The tabernacle tent is also suitably designed to be portable by the designated groups of the Gershonites and Merarites.

The Israelites often participate actively in the tent of meeting text. They donate the materials for the tent. With the assistance of Bezalel and Oholiab as the designated artisan leaders, people are taught and supervised in the making of the parts of the tent of meeting complex. Women spin cloth (Exodus 35:25). The offerer of a sacrifice has an active role in the burnt offering of a bull rite (Leviticus 1:1-9). Customary knowledge of animals appropriate for sacrifice is necessary and the offerer lays (سفך) their hand on the sacrificial animal as part of the ritual to make the offering acceptable.

In a similar form of active participation, it is the people, not the priests, who “lay (سفך) their hands on the Levites” as part of the dedication ritual of Levites before God (Numbers 8:10). The importance of the people is already apparent in the previous sentence (Numbers 8:10) and dense with cultic language. Moses is to “bring (כבר) the Levites before the tent of meeting, and assemble the whole congregation of the Israelites” (Numbers 8:9). “You shall bring,” causative active, is from the Hebrew verb “to approach.” The approach is to the cultic area before the tent of meeting, the appointed place. You shall “assemble” (קהל), again in the hip’il, concerns actively “calling an assembly” of people who are required for dedication of the Levites. Israelites are referred to with cultic terminology as the appointed people, a congregation (עדה). Similar to priests and Levites, the people participate in rites at the tent of meeting but they do not speak. The action of the people in the rituals is as much part of the rites as the actions of priests. These are not esoteric texts, for priests only, but for all. There is

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5 The role of the Israelites in the cult as opposed to that of priests is addressed in Römer, “Périphérie au Centre,” 15; Marx, “Theology of the Sacrifice,” 119, and Marx, “Sacrifices de l’Ancien Testament,” 11, who writes: “le culte sacrificiel n’est pas une affaire réservée au sacerdoce, mais qu’il est d’abord l’affaire de chaque Israélite.”
an unusual democratic mix and inclusive ring about the cultic texts relating to rites at the tent of meeting.

B. Discussion of Numbers 1:1–10:28

The Twelve Tribes of Israel

Incongruities are a feature of the tent text. The urban style temple-like world of the tent of meeting in a wilderness setting in Exodus and Leviticus seems out of place. Literally read, at least 625,550 persons, made up of 603,550 men over 20 years old and available for conscription and 22,000 Levites are counted. The very high head count of people in the wilderness in the book of Numbers seems unlikely. Jacob Benno notes the incongruity of so many people in a wilderness setting too when he writes that the people of Israel as presented and counted in the text of the book of Numbers never existed and calls the figure, the result of artificial arithmetic.6 Women, children and the elderly are not even included in the total figure. Despite emphasis on the portability of the cultic structure, the speed with which over 600,000 persons can pack and unpack their tents makes the maneuverability of the whole complex, cultic structure and people, doubtful. Furthermore, sustainability and hygiene for over 600,000 persons in a wilderness setting is questionable.

The high numbers suggest a nation rather than a nomadic people. One wonders where the “twelve tribes” came from. It seems improbable that so many people fled from Egypt, wandered in the wilderness or even entered and conquered Canaan. Two significant responses to the idea of twelve tribes and concepts of nation are those of Martin Noth and Norman Gottwald. Martin Noth proposed the idea of the twelve tribes of Israel as a confederation in the premonarchic period, inspired by the Greek amphictyonic model, in his 1930 work, Das System der Zwolf Stämme Israels.7 He saw the confederation as a divinely willed sacred union

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6 Jacob, Pentateuch, 342, writes: “Ein Volk Israel, wie es hier gegliedert und gezählt wird, hat es nie gegeben. Es ist das Produkt einer künstlichen Arithmetik.”
7 Martin Noth, Das System der Zwölf Stämme Israels (BWANT 4; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930).
of Israel with cultic action in common. Noth was not only interested in reconstructing a history of Israel but also in investigating the origins of Israelite traditions that came to be incorporated in literary form into the Pentateuch. Noth gives the concept of twelve tribes historical feasibility by placing them at a stage, the premonarchic one, in his reconstructed history of Israel.

Gottwald, building on results from archaeology, socio-political and socio-economic theories, argues for the origins of Israelites as the result of an internal process of social revolution within Canaan out of which a new society is created in The Tribes of Israel (1979). For Gottwald there was no massive invasion or infiltration into Canaan. More than twenty years after his social revolution hypothesis relating to the origins of Israel, Gottwald in an interview with Roland Boer talks of the implausibility of many explanations for the origins of Israel and problems that arise if biblical traditions are regarded as straightforward history. What this leaves us with is that the origin of the tribes of Israel is an unresolved issue from historical perspectives. The textual evidence of this chapter suggests a different approach.

Twelve Tribes of Israel as Symbolic System

The graphic models of systems of twelve, rectangular in the high priest’s breastpiece, circular for encampment, linear for travel and lists of twelve heads and their tribes, are interconnected in the books of Exodus and Numbers. The concept of twelve is introduced but not explained with the breastpiece of the high priest in Exodus (28:15-21; 39:8-14). Numbers 1–10 supplies information on the twelve stones of the breastpiece by giving:

- Names of the 12 tribes,
- Numbers of each tribe,
- Number of men from each tribe capable of enlistment, and

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8 Noth, *History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 252-55.
9 For a comprehensive critique of Noth’s work see, A. D. H. Mayes “Amphictyony,” *ABD* 1:212-16.
List of the offerings presented by each tribe for inauguration of the tent of meeting.

Twelvefold repeated formulae and graphic models of the number twelve are examples of literary rhetoric. The rhetoric is forceful because the idea of twelve making up a whole is repeated in different variations. The theme is, “twelve is one and one is twelve.” A consistent message is that all twelve parts are of equal standing, each person having equal access to the tent of meeting. Some kind of self-definition is occurring on an ideological level in the text.

Numbers 1–10 presents Israel as a people made up of twelve tribes, each with a leadership structure, camped in a designated direction around an altar and tent. It is not a sociological description of Israelites where human interaction and collective behaviour is observed. It is a constructed picture of a “society” made up of God, priests, Levites and a people, presented through models. Symbolism is used to place the entire people of Israel round the tent of meeting, the space divinely willed by God, so God may be understood to be at the centre of the people.

Notions of symbolism are common in many disciplines, anthropology, literary studies or the social sciences just to mention a few. Classic books on symbolism in biblical studies are Raymond Firth’s anthropological work, Symbols: Public and Private, or John Skorupski’s Symbol and Theory, the sub-title speaking for itself, A Philosophical Study of Theories of Religion in Social Anthropology.¹² The thought of the French philosopher and theorist Paul Ricoeur, as found in “Criteriology of Symbols,” a section of his book, The Symbolism of Evil, offers the tools for a basic understanding of how symbols work.¹³ A symbol is a sign which communicates an initial meaning. The sign also aims beyond itself and thereby has a double intentionality, the literal and symbolic meaning. The first and literal meaning points to a second meaning which is opaque and is the depth of the symbol.

The breastpiece of the high priest in Exodus with its twelve stones is a sign but signals to more. The sign of the number twelve is carried on the chest of the high priest, worn by him before YHWH. Different versions of what twelve alludes to, the names of the tribes, the names of the leaders of the tribe, further names such as those of clans that belong to each tribe are given in the book of Numbers. The number twelve appears in different configurations but always as an equal whole. The twelve stones are set in gold, the metal of highest value. The vestments are worn by the high priest, the one person who may enter the holy of holies once a year. The possibility of meaning is open. It might be understood, for example, that each Israelite enters the holy of holies each year at Yom Kippur by virtue of being included symbolically within the breastpiece, or each Israelite is present via the breastpiece worn by the high priest when the Urim and Thummim are consulted.

A further form of symbolism is suggested by Michèle Lamont’s recent work in sociology that helps articulate the social construction of people in the tent of meeting text. She defines “symbolic boundaries” as the lines that include and define some people, groups and things while excluding others.¹⁴ Numbers 1–10 presents a society with defined social boundaries, not based on status or income, but articulated in relation to proximity to the tent of meeting, standing for God’s space. The priests are closest to the centre, then the Levites, then the many Israelites that belong to each of the twelve tribes. Others, non-Israelites, are excluded from the Israeliite social construction in that they are not even mentioned. Noteworthy is that the social boundaries of Numbers 1–10 are set within a social concept of only Israel and not in relation to other communities or nations such as Babylonia or Persia. The unit of Numbers 1–10 is a defining of Israel in relation to itself, a self-definition. Numbers 1–10 proposes a constructed idea of the entire Israelite people as twelve tribes around a wilderness cultic tent, rhetorically presenting a unified view of Israel.

Production of the priestly writings is often considered late and dated as the late exilic to post-exilic period (approximately 560-460 BCE) since Wellhausen and many scholars who work

with the hypothesis of pentateuchal sources or in diachronic research. As the text of the tent of meeting text is counted as part of the priestly writings, it can also be regarded as a late text. It is revealing to juxtapose one consensus (that of many scholars in diachronic research) on dating of the tent of meeting text with another consensus, that of historical dates regarding Israel and which follow:

- The united monarchy divided into Judah and Israel circa 928 BCE
- The kingdom of Israel was conquered and assimilated by the Assyrians circa 722 BCE
- After the Assyrian conquest, only Judah remained in the south
- The first Babylonian taking of Jerusalem and first wave of deportees to Babylonia was circa 597 BCE and further deportations circa 586 BCE. Some Israelites fled to Egypt.
- The first group of Babylonian Israelites return to Jerusalem circa 540 BCE (Cyrus conquers Babylonia in 539 BCE, approximately two generations after first deportations).

If the tent of meeting text is understood to be composed in the late exilic to early Persian period (approximately 560-460 BCE) the understanding of Israelite identity at the time of production of the text is revealing. If one places oneself as an Israelite in Babylonia in the exilic period (e.g., 565 BCE, a middle date between the deportations of 597-86 BCE and Cyrus conquering Babylonia 539 BCE), there has been no united Israel for centuries.

According to biblical sources, there was no united monarchy at the time of Judean deportations to Babylonia (597-86 BCE). Reckoned from the year 565 BCE, the kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians 157 years earlier. Reckoned again from the year 565 BCE, Israel was separated from Judah 363 years earlier. However, there is a strong sense in the tent of meeting text of Israelites as a whole and unified through the symbolic presentation, and this despite the people of Israel being separated for over 363 years. In the tent of meeting text, Israel is presented as united, made up of the twelve tribes of Israel with equal access to the cultic tent. The tent of meeting text makes no mention of the deportation of Israelites, no mention of Israelites who were not deported such as those who remained in the land, no

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15 Dating of the tent of meeting text is addressed in detail in section B of chapter 6 of this work.
mention of those who fled to Egypt from Judah, and no mention of northern Israelite tribes that were assimilated by the Assyrians. This implies that the idea of twelve tribes as proposed in the tent text is a late social construction defining Israelites at the time of the production of the text, late exilic to early Persian period.

There is an insular feel about the male dominated texts on Numbers 1–10. Israelite self understanding is created in terms of men only:

- Capable of military enlistment
- Priest or Levite
- Only Israelites, belonging to one of the 12 tribes.

Construction of Israelite identity is occurring in Numbers 1–10, not in terms of nationhood but in terms of belonging to YHWH and centred round Yahwist cult at the tent of meeting.

There is no apparent human leader among the over 600,000 persons counted in Numbers 1–10. Each ancestral tribe has a head or leader (Numbers 1:4, 16) through whom Moses and Aaron carry out the census. Moses is the spokesperson of God in the tent of meeting text. Spokesperson is his role, not leading. Aaron, the high priest, serves at the altar and tabernacle. His role is a cultic one, standing as the high priest of a cultic community, not as the leader of a land or a nation settled in one place.

References to land (גֵּדֵר) and nation (גוֹר) are rare in the tent of meeting text. For example, Egypt is mentioned but in a formulaic manner with a phrase such as “come out (בְּאָרָץ) of the land of Egypt.” The formula has several functions. It states a religious truth for Israelites, “God brought us out of the land of Egypt.” It also communicates the idea of liberation from the Egyptians and YHWH hearing the voice of the Hebrews. The formula is first and foremost a theological statement rather than one relating to nationhood. A future or forwards sense of land is suggested with references to Canaan in Leviticus 14:34, 18:3-27 and 25:38 but the land references are rare and very much a sub-theme. The main rhetoric of the tent text is on a cultic

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world, centred around the tent of meeting, not on movement towards or from a land or movement towards or from nationhood.

Much of the text of Numbers 1–10 is fictional. Israelite religious ideas are communicated in literary forms such as divine speech, symbolism, theophany, and formulae. The text is primarily about religious truths for Israelites and not historical, geographical or sociological evidence. The tent of meeting complex as prescribed and described in Exodus 25–40 was never constructed, did not exist and was not transported through the wilderness. The rituals as prescribed in Leviticus did not take place at the tent of meeting in the wilderness either. Neither was there a people organised as twelve groups each with a tribal head. In the wilderness, the prescribed quantity of sheep, cattle and birds were not available for food and ritual offerings.

**Conclusion of the Tent of Meeting Text (Numbers 9:15–10:28)**

There are several indications that Numbers 9:15–10:28 is the closure of the entire tent of meeting text (Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28). The two main reasons are use of the cloud motif and the packing up for departure. A further reason is that the text following on from Numbers 10:28 is very different to that prior to it.

The tent of meeting text comes to a close because the cloud lifts (:both), explained as a sign for decampment and setting out (both) in panel five (Exodus 40:36-38). This explanation is repeated at greater length by the narrator in Numbers 9:15-23. Lifting of the cloud is in contrast to the cloud settling (both), or covering (both), or remaining/being (both) over the tabernacle.

On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year the cloud lifts (Numbers 10:11) and the people set out in linear formation with the tabernacle tent and all its paraphernalia (Numbers 10:11-28). The tent is taken down and the three different levitical groups carry the different parts of the tent complex as instructed in Numbers 4:1-49; 10:17-24. The idea of the people departing from Sinai is emphasised through eightfold usage of the verb to set out (both).
in Numbers 10:11-28. The Israelites set out with the cultic tent (Numbers 10:28) and the last word of the sentence in the Hebrew text is even constructed from the verb set out (נסע). The contingent of the twelve tribes of Israel, Aaron and sons and three levitical groups transporting the cultic tent complex, as described in Exodus 25–40, is not encountered again after the departure from Sinai. The levitical groups of Gershonites, Kohathites, and Merarites are mentioned in Numbers 26:57 and in Joshua in relation to the division of land (Joshua 21:6, 27, 33) but any levitical cultic function in relation to the tent of meeting is not mentioned. The packed up tent leaves Sinai but does not go anywhere or arrive anywhere.

The camp sets out in Numbers 10:28. From Numbers 10:29 onwards the textual style is markedly different to what has gone before. In Numbers 10:29-36 Moses talks as if a human being, independently of words given him by God. He is no longer a mere divine spokesperson as he was in the tent of meeting text. Different vocabulary in regard to the ark is used in Numbers 10:29-36. In the tent of meeting text the ark is “the ark of testimony” (העדת ארון) but in the following text it is “the ark of the covenant” (יהוה ארון ברית). In the succeeding text (Numbers 10:29-36) the ark of the covenant is described as going before them, before the people (Numbers 10:33). The ark is not at the centre of the linear travelling formation as described in Numbers 10:13-28. It is at the front. In the linear march formation of the tent of meeting text the ark travels at the centre of the formation, behind six of the tribes of Israel and two levitical groups, not in front of the people. In the tent of meeting text no one may see the consecrated furnishings of the tent of meeting lest they die. The ark is covered with sanctuary curtains and a further protective leather cover for travel. The ark is not visible but the succeeding text (verse 33 in particular of Numbers 10:29-36) suggests that the ark is visible to all.

Numbers 10:29 is clearly therefore the start of a new subject and a different concept of the ark, for reasons of different vocabulary in relation to the ark, the position of the ark in the travelling contingent, and ark is visible to all. The tent of meeting text closes with the departure of the Israelites with the tent of meeting and the ark of testimony from Sinai in Numbers 10:28.
Summary

In Numbers 1–10 the twelve tribes of Israel are a literary symbolic construct, standing for the cultic people of YHWH centred round the tent of meeting. Scholars such as Noth and Gottwald are cautious regarding the historicity of the twelve tribes and treating the biblical text as an historical account. If the tent of meeting text was produced in the late exilic to early Persian period (560-460 BCE), there has been no united Israel for approximately 340 years yet the text transmits the idea of a united people. Presentation of the people of Israel in Numbers 1–10 is not as history and not as revisionist history either, it is as theological literature.

The people of Israel are defined in relation to the tent of meeting. Neither Moses nor Aaron is a leader in the social or political sense. Moses is spokesperson for the words of God and Aaron is to function as high priest. No political leaders are mentioned. Israelites are not defined in terms of other peoples, or in terms of other cults. Israelite identity is in relation to a cultic centre, not to a land or territory. The textual evidence of Numbers 1:1–10:28 presents the Israelites as a people symbolically assembled round the cultic tent of meeting, standing for the presence of YHWH.
Chapter 6

Bridging:

From Text to Author

Chapter six is a bridge between the first and second parts of the thesis. Discussion moves from the world of the text in the previous three chapters to the world of those who created and produced the text in the next three chapters. The chapter proceeds in two sections. Section A is a synthesis of the textual evidence of chapter three to five and leads to a hypothesis that is developed in section B.

A. Synthesis of the Textual Evidence

The Image of the Temple-Tent

The Israelite cultic complex of Exodus 25—Numbers 10 has tent and temple characteristics. The image of an Israelite cultic world centred round a tent and altar that has the feel of a temple environment is one of the amazing features of the tent of meeting text. A tent is portable and suggests impermanence. Tents tend to be pitched in places that are not inhabited and where land is not possessed. When people move on they take their tents with them. In the tent of meeting text the people, the Israelites, possess no land and no sense of nationhood is apparent. They have come from Egypt. No mention is made of where they are heading. What the people of the text do know is that a cloud, a sign for the guidance of God, will show them when to move on.
The Israelite cultic complex is definitely a tent construction. Paraphernalia associated with tents such as guy ropes, pegs, bases and frames and verbs such as pitching and taking down are used. The acacia wooden frames have the function of modern aluminium poles, most likely capable of flex in windy conditions and giving the impression of a real tent. The furniture of the tent of meeting is a mix of temple and tent features. As might be expected for a temple, there is furniture such as altars for animal sacrifices or incense and a lampstand. The furniture is unique and unlike any other temple environment. It is designed for portability; rings are attached to the frames of the furniture and through which poles are to be inserted to then be carried by humans.

The portable Israelite cultic complex also resembles a temple environment in size and location. Like many major cultic places in the ancient world, the tent complex is located at the centre of the community for which it is conceived, in this case, the Israelite wilderness camp. The complex is extensive. It consists of a central tent surrounded by a court. The exterior of the temple-tent zone is marked by hangings on pillars that function as a fence. The tabernacle at the centre is approximately 5 by 15 metres. Comparison with other Israelite temples as described in the Bible facilitates an understanding of the size of the temple-tent complex. Solomon’s temple is only 30 metres (or 35 metres length if the vestibule is added) in length by 10 metres wide, small in comparison to the temple-tent of 50 by 25 metres. In Ezekiel’s vision of a temple the quadrate sanctuary has fantastical proportions, 250 by 250 metres, and is a megatemple (Ezekiel 42:20; 45:2). Juxtaposed the sizes of three biblical cultic complexes are:

- Tent of meeting: 50 metres long by 25 metres wide
- Solomon’s temple: 35 metres long by 10 metres wide
- Ezekiel’s temple: 250 metres long by 250 metres wide

Descriptions of the altars in the different cultic complexes vary. The altar of the tent of meeting is 2.5 metres long by 2.5 metres wide and 1.5 metres high (Exodus 27:1), provision is made for a grating for ashes, and it is positioned at the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting (Exodus 40:29). Information on the size and positioning of the altar in Solomon’s temple is vague. The king makes royal offerings at a bronze altar but detail on the altar’s size
and location is confused (1 Kings 8:64; 9:25; 2 Kings 16:14), probably the inner court. Ezekiel’s altar is on a raised platform the hearth of which is 6 by 6 metres, probably accessed by a ramp and positioned in front of the temple at the centre of the court (Ezekiel 43:13-17; 40:47).

Most research on the tent of meeting text (Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28) emphasises the tabernacle tent rather than the altar in the courtyard. It focuses on the tabernacle unit and what is inside it rather than what is before it, which is the altar. The tabernacle is the five by fifteen metre tent at the centre of the complex within which is the sanctuary, the approximately five by five metre innermost part of the tent. The altar area is where animals are offered and consumed. The altar area is also where people can officially and publicly gather. Too much focus on the tabernacle and sanctuary diminishes the tent complex to merely the central tent and overlooks the importance of the altar and courtyard in relation to the whole of the cultic complex. Purity regulations, for example, require washing with water when going into the tent of meeting, or approaching the altar (Exodus 30:20) and do not prioritise the tent over the altar and courtyard, or the altar over the tent.

The tabernacle surround and tabernacle tent make up a conceptual unity as the same materials are used for both surround and tabernacle. In most cultures an important cultic site is generally made up of a central edifice and courtyard with an impressive approach. In the ancient world of the 6-5th century BCE two examples of big impressive cultic sites are worthy of note, in particular Etemenanki in the imperial city of Babylon in Babylonia because some deported Judeans would have seen it, and the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens. The highest edifice in the Neo-Babylonian city of Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar II in the sixth century BCE was the ziggurat or temple tower of Etemenanki, noticeably visible from the distance. It was over 91 metres high, made up of seven stories in the form of terraces.¹ It was approached by passing through the biggest and artistically finest gate of the city, the Ishtar Gate, and by walking

along the magnificent Processional Street lined with ceramic friezes on either side.\(^2\) The other example of a magnificent structure from the ancient world, though more recent, is the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens, constructed in the mid 5th century, prominent on top of the Acropolis, a flat-topped raised rock, a privileged position and approached by ascending. The size and magnificence of the tent of meeting compares with these two cultic centres in the ancient world. The tent of meeting complex is conceived similarly, startling in size, magnificence, and approach. It is entered through beautiful hangings at the gate of the courtyard into the complex. The tent of meeting is a “temple-tent” in that it has tent characteristics and resembles a temple environment.

**The Mimetic Drama of Rituals at the Altar and Forecourt**

Mimesis is conveyed in at least two different manners in the tent of the meeting text, through visual words as discussed in chapter three and through gestured action as discussed in chapter four. An understanding of the concept of “mimesis,” from the Greek verb *mimeisthai*, meaning to “mimic” or “imitate,” is important to this work. Mimesis is the representation of some object or person or event in an artistic manner. Mimesis is typical of communication in the arts and a concept used by an art critic such as Roger Fry to articulate communication between the artist and the viewer in the context of impressionism in painting. Paintings for example have the capacity to evoke sensory responses in the viewer. The world of the tent of meeting is a word picture. Its words can set off sensory responses in its audience, responses relating to colours or sound or smell. There are similar sensory triggers in the dramatic drama of the rituals in Leviticus such as the consecration of priests or the sprinkling of blood at *Yom Kippur*. To mime and to mimic are two English verbs related to mimesis in the context of drama. Mime is silent in that no words are used. In mime through physical movement and facial gestures a sequence of action is enacted and that which is typical of a person or a role is captured and reproduced by another. In mimicry the voice is used as in reproducing the sound of a bird’s call.

\(^2\) Marzahn et al., *Babylon: Mythos und Wahrheit*, 619.
Actions and gestures in the ritual world of the temple-tent, as in mime or mimic, are shown via words to suggest the process of ritual ceremony and drama in Leviticus 1–10, 16. The words of the divine speeches prescribe the ritual action for the presentation of offerings in Leviticus 1–7. They dictate the actions necessary for a valid offering. No prayers are communicated, only some of the necessary actions. Not all necessary actions are shown but enough actions are shown so that the Israelite has sufficient information on each rite in order to participate in its process. Each person who brings an offering participates by watching in the slaughter of the animal, in the cutting up of the parts, the preparing of wood for the fire, the wood burning, the fat sizzling, the blood being sprinkled, the offering being consumed. In the scenes that relate rites such as the consecration of the first priests and inaugural offerings, the actions of Moses, the priests and the Israelites are shown. The step by step entry of the high priest into the sanctuary on Yom Kippur (Leviticus 8–10, 16) can be observed by the recipient of the text.

In Exodus 25–40, Leviticus and Numbers 1–10 the tent of meeting is represented as a quasi cultic world. An image of a cultic structure, the tent of meeting is given in Exodus, mimetic ritual drama portrayed in Leviticus, and the cultic people presented in symbolic constructs in Numbers. When the three blocks of text are combined a fully functioning cultic world is suggested, communicated via visual mimesis in the image of the temple tent and via dramatic mimesis with prescribed ritual gestures and actions. Mimesis is the key idea in describing the evidence of the temple-tent and how the text works.

**Paul Ricoeur**

Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* makes a philosophic analysis of mimesis and thereby draws concepts of mimesis into a wider context than the arts alone. The three volume work is made up of four parts. Part one deals with theory on time and narrative and Ricoeur breaks mimesis down into three levels, author, text and reader. History and narrative are addressed in part two, fiction and narrative in part three and narrated time in part four.

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As Ricoeur looks at how temporal sense is conveyed through words he observes the mimetic nature of nearly all human communication. Three examples follow which demonstrate the mimetic, representative manner, in which time is expressed verbally. The first example relates to an experience in the past. If I tell someone in the afternoon about an experience I had in the morning, what I relate is a representation of what happened. I cannot convey the actual experience as that can only be experienced at the moment of experiencing. Actual or true living is the present, now. The experience of the morning has passed, in contrast to the now of the present.4

The next example relates to conveying a sense of the present such as a sound resonating which then ceases to resonate. It is difficult to speak of a split-second moment of sound, the now, as sound-waves are transmitted through the air. When the sound stops it is a thing of the past. It no longer exists and is not measurable. The measurability of physical or scientific time is the issue Ricoeur is dealing with here, what he calls cosmological time.

For a further example Ricoeur moves to perceptions of time inside the person, demonstrating that the mind can compare long and short periods of time. The mind has the capacity to remember and expect. Memory is linked with the past and expectation with the future. The act of remembering triggers emotions and is in the realm of phenomenological time.5 If a memory arises in the mind the act of remembering is experienced in the now of the present though the content of the memory is of the past. The memory is a representation of the past, it is not a replica of the past experience.

The ramifications of these examples on time are that the present is experienced in the split-second moment of the now in the cosmological scientific sense, measurable as a specific point in time as hour, second and micro-second and perhaps measurable as a chemical mix in the body. When an account of the time experienced is expressed verbally the communication is in the realm of the as-if. Human communication of time is mimetic and phenomenological. What Ricoeur lays bare is that there is a far higher degree of mimesis, of representation, in all

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human communication and text than perhaps commonly recognised. Mimesis is occurring on the level of the author, text and reader.

An author is involved in mimesis in many different ways: through the activity of writing, organising the plot by choosing what events do or do not go into a text, presentation of the characters by selecting what characteristics of a person are transmitted, communicating some idea and which elements of the idea to develop. The author writes choosing elements from a possible sum total to go into the creative composition and is involved in mimetic activity by virtue of mediating between one piece of data and the representation of that data. Ricoeur talks of the author pre-figuring a text.

Mimesis on the level of the text is the configuration of plot, characters and thought. The text is mimetic in that it is events organised into a system, not the actual succession or concurrence of events. The text mediates between author and reader. The text is created out of elements from the world of the author and by corollary the world of the author is represented within the text to some degree. Ricoeur talks of plot as the mimesis, the representation of action.

Mimesis on the level of the receiver of the text is where the world of the text intersects with the world of the listener or reader. The world of the listener or reader is where real action occurs and the unfolding of the text occurs in a specific temporality. The listener or reader refigures a text. Action is brought to conclusion via the plot within the text, and outside of the text by virtue of an effect on the recipient. The effect of the text might be an action, or an internal response along the lines of Aristotle’s idea of catharsis or purgation.

One of the results of the application of mimetic theory to historical and fictional narratives for Ricoeur is that both kinds of narrative are configured by the author. In both instances the author invests thought in the organization of the narrative structures. However, Ricoeur does note differences between historical and fictional narratives. He speaks of fiction narratives as being "characterised by a kind of referring" and related to the use of metaphor. 6

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7 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3: 5.
Sensory Triggers and Symbols in Mimesis

Techniques of referral are one of the characteristics of the temple-tent text, in the form of symbolism and words or phrases that function as sensory triggers. A prerequisite for referral to function is interaction between the listener, or reader, and the text. When writing on mimesis in the visual arts Roger Fry talks of the power of a picture to trigger the senses of the viewer.8 The temple-tent text has the power to trigger the senses of its audience, dependent on two things, knowledge of the temple-tent text and the desire to participate in its world. Some of the triggers that may activate the senses of its audience are: the bell in the high priest’s hem, the incense from the altar, the blue-hued hangings, the atmosphere of holiness, the water in the purification basin, the action of laying hands on an animal being offered, the sprinkling of blood.

If a listener or reader picks up the sensory triggers of the text, responses may be spatial such as movement of the recipient of the text through the entrance gate into the court and on into the tabernacle sanctuary. One may stop to wash and purify the hands in the basin in the court by the altar. One may see the light burning in the foreroom of the tabernacle, or stop to marvel at the beauty of the lampstand, or smell the incense from the incense altar. One may participate in one of the twice daily regular services in the tabernacle. As one approaches the sanctuary, one may feel a sense of holiness. The text uses the technique of recall within itself. In Leviticus 10 the death of two of Aaron’s sons is narrated. An associated memory with the narrative is the consequence of not adhering to ritual prescriptions and recalled in Numbers 3:4. The text contains reminders that the consecrated things such as the altar or lampstand table must not be touched for fear of death. As the reminders accumulate, communication of a sense of holiness intensifies. The holiness of the priestly zone may be approached with a mix of a sense of danger, awe, fear and perhaps desire.

There are no secrets in the tent text. The furniture of the tent complex, instructions for the daily ceremonies and how the ceremony for Yom Kippur is celebrated inside the sanctuary is shown. One does not have to be a priest to know what happens at the altar or inside the

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8 Reed, Fry Reader, 50, 100.
tabernacle. Priests, Israelites, and in fact any recipient of the text, have the same information relating to the temple-tent. Those who know the text have access to all zones of the temple-tent. By virtue of knowing the text, a listener or reader may enter zones which according to the text only a priest may pass through. Not all recipients of the text may respond to the sensory triggers. Discovery of the full cultic world thereby eludes them and they do not participate in a refiguring of the text.

The sensory triggers in the temple-text text bring a three dimensional element to the ritual world if the receiver of the text engages in them. The listener or reader of the text may give it sensory depth, bridging exterior sense with interior awareness. Symbols such as the gradated metals from bronze to gold, or three hues of the spectrum of blue, spatial zones of increasing holiness, are signs in the text that are open to being internalised on the part of the receiver. Symbols reinforce the idea that getting closer to the heart of the tent complex is to increasingly approach holiness. A symbol is an exterior sign but simultaneously invites into further meaning, though the further meanings are not specified. The deeper meaning is what a listener or reader makes of the exterior sign informed by knowledge and awareness of the text as a whole. The symbols and sensory triggers mutually enhance one another making the cultic world of the temple-tent open to many understandings.

A further difference for Ricoeur between historical and fictional narratives is what he calls fictive and historical time. In fictional narratives the narrator is emancipated from the obligation to “conform to the specific connectors acting to reinscribe lived time upon cosmic time.” This means the voice of the narrator can be independent of the time which is being written about or that fictional characters are not constrained by having to fit into a real experience of time. What happens here is that characters from different periods of time are brought together as though meeting in the same period. Understood in a biblical context, this would be having a reputedly late biblical character such as Esther meet with a reputedly early biblical character such as the Queen of Sheba at Solomon’s court.

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Combining different periods of time occurs in the tent of meeting text. The textual evidence indicates that the artisans of the tent of meeting, Bezalel and Oholiab, are stereotypical of ancient Near Eastern artisans rather than real persons. Their artisan skills, which could only be required and supported in a city or large temple setting, are prescribed for supervision of construction of the tent of meeting—in a desert setting. They have emblematic names reflecting their role. They are tent artisans, adherers to YHWH. The Ohol, of Oholiab, (אהל) relates to tent and the El of Bezalel (אל) relates to God. No genealogy is given for them. Aaron, and possibly Moses, are stereotypical characters, according to my exegesis of the tent of meeting text and Liss and Bibb as discussed in chapter four. Neither Moses nor Aaron act as individuals in the tent text; they are robotic, performing actions as commanded by God. Moses has functions such as conveying divine speech and consecrating the first priests. No genealogy is given for Aaron. He has the role of the first high priest (within a year of the Israelites leaving Egypt according to Exodus 16:1) and is therefore associated with the priestly role and cult. He is high priest of a cultic complex with extraordinary daily ritual requirements—the offering of animals, grains and the finest oil—in a desert setting. Aaron and Moses, Oholiab and Bezalel, are not bound by the confines of real time. Moses is associated with law giving and Sinai. If Moses or Aaron really were human beings that lived, then Moses and Aaron are most probably not from the same historical period. Their bringing together in the tent of meeting text is along the lines of having characters from different times put into the same scene and time frame.

The “As-If” World of Mimesis

Ricoeur comments that if mimesis is understood as imitation then mimesis is not the copy of some pre-existing reality but rather creative imitation. He prefers to talk of mimesis as representation, not in the sense of the redoubling of presence as in Platonic mimesis but as “the break that opens the space for fiction.” He continues, “Artisans who work with words

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10 Blenkinsopp makes several references to Aaron as an eponym, the name standing for the priestly caste in “The Judean Priesthood during the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Periods: A Hypothetical Reconstruction,” *CBQ* 60 (1998): 25-43, and the inconclusiveness of the origins of the Aaronite branch of priesthood in “Assessment of the Alleged Pre-Exilic Date,” 501-02.
produce not things but quasi-things; they invent the as-if.”\(^\text{11}\) Several points in Ricoeur’s observations of mimesis impact on the tent of meeting text.

“The breaks that open the space for fiction” are where an author may be creative, just as a listener or reader completes gaps in a text that an author may deliberately or not deliberately leave. The pattern of the tent of meeting is given in the form of divine instructions but the plans are not complete. Too much construction detail is missing, such as how the corners are joined or how the long curtains are stretched over the framework, for actual construction to be possible. The prescriptions for construction of the temple-tent are mimetic. As in an impressionist painting, chosen parts of the tent-temple are painted and others not. Just enough description to give the impression of a real temple is suggested. The audience of the text may see the wooden acacia cross beams supporting the hangings, indicating the tent nature of the space. The hangings are attractive, made of expensive materials and rare dyes as befits a temple. Reality questions abound such as whether it is possible to find acacia trees that can produce, even laminated, ten cubit (five metre) length acacia rods (Exodus 26:16). Although provision is made for the curtains to have loops indicating that they are attached to the next curtain (Exodus 26:4-6), how the loops are actually attached is not clear when one attempts a visual or practical reconstruction. However, the point in naming the materials and indicating that they can be joined together into a construction is the suggestion of construction, not the aim of actual construction. The design is not meant to be for construction of an actual physical temple building. The design shows a cultic centre that resembles a tent and temple and is an imaginary temple-tent.

Ricoeur speaks of authors as “artisans who work with words” and “produce not things but quasi-things; they invent the as-if.”\(^\text{12}\) The idea of mimesis as portraying an as-if or quasi sense is particularly apt to the tent of meeting text as the term “as-if” is sometimes used when scholars sum up their work on the texts of the tent of meeting. Görg talks of the ritual instructions of Leviticus as “Quasi-Rituale,” and Liss writes of the purity laws in Leviticus as

\(^{11}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1: 45.

\(^{12}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1: 45.
an “As-If,” (Als-Ob) world.\textsuperscript{13} The textual evidence demonstrates that the tent of meeting is
temple-like or a quasi-temple.

The tent of meeting text is a literary text. Much of it is mimetic; a quasi-temple world in tent
format is conveyed. Incongruence between what appears real but is not real and the
improbable are often observed in the biblical account of the tent of meeting in chapters three
to five. Incongruity is the clash between the image conveyed by the words and the
improbability of that image in reality. The incongruities are clashes between mimesis and
reality, between fiction and non-fiction. Six hundred thousand men capable of conscription are
counted in the desert. Daily animals are sacrificed, from bulls to sheep to birds. A
sophisticated cultic personnel structure consisting of professionals is required for the cultic
functioning of the tent complex. Priests and Levites are supported by the offerings of the
people. It is inconceivable that a desert environment can sustain such a complex cultic system.
The text does not convey pragmatic realism. It conveys a virtual cultic world but not realism.
The mix of temple and tent springs from the imagination, the creative vision of the authors.
The focus of discussion now moves from the level of textual evidence to the world of the
author.

\textbf{B. Developing the Hypothesis}

Like any text, the tent of meeting text does not come from nowhere. It is the product of
authors who lived in a real world. This leads to questions such as, “Who wrote the tent of
meeting text? When and where was it written?” Over the last 200 years the tent of meeting
text is generally regarded as part of the priestly writings. Ideas on the dating, authorship and
context of the authors of the tent of meeting text are found amongst theories on the priestly
writings as follows.

\footnote{Görg, \textit{Zelt der Begegnung}, 171; Liss, “Ritual Purity,” 354.}
Dating of the Temple-Tent Text

Until the 1990s theories on the dating of the priestly writings can be categorised into three groups. Jewish scholars such as Y. Kaufmann, Menahem Haran and Jacob Milgrom generally regard them as pre-exilic.14 Some of the reasons given are that the language of P is old, or that ritual laws have their origins in first temple rites. It appears nearly impossible to ascertain whether the language of the priestly writings is old or deliberately archaic, that is, written in a style using archaic words or making archaic words to give the semblance of an old text.15 Many scholars agree that there are instructions among the priestly writings which are old and incorporate traditional material.16

Another group of scholars tends to date the priestly writings at the end of the exile or the early Persian period when exiles are permitted to return to the land. This group often reads the priestly writings as orientated towards the future and uses terminology such as programmatic or utopian to express a perceived sense of future directedness in the text. For example, Noth writes of the priestly writings as a “program for a future organization,” or Lohfink that “the stories narrated in Pg are paradigmatic.”17 Elliger reads the wilderness of Exodus as a

15 Hurvitz for example makes a case for P as older than Ezekiel in *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel*. Blenkinsopp evaluates attempts by Moshe Greenberg and Avi Hurvitz to distinguish Early and Late Biblical Hebrew as untenable in “Assessment of the Alleged Pre-Exilic Date,” 495-518, and rebutted by A. Hurvitz in “Once Again: The Linguistic Profile,” 180-91. Ernst Knauf, “Bethel: The Israelite Impact on Judean Language and Literature,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (ed. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 291-349, gives yet again a different overview of the development of Hebrew. He builds on the idea that “Jewish national literature” came out of the Exile and Persian Restoration. He argues that during the Neo-Babylonian period Northern traditions via Bethel, whose inhabitants were not affected by the Babylonian deportations, had as much influence on Judean language and literature as those deported to Babylonia. Knauf works with two areas of influence on Jewish literature in the Neo-Babylonian period—Bethel and Babylonia. Knauf indirectly thereby supports the idea of some sources of Jewish literature coming out of Babylonia.
paradigm for exile in Babylonia.\textsuperscript{18} He understands both the wilderness and exile periods as a time of transition. The paradigm is that as wandering in the wilderness precedes entry into the land and consequently the building of a temple, so there is a parallel in the experience of exile before return to the land and restoration of the temple.

A further group of scholars dates the priestly writings after reconstruction of the restored temple. They read the priestly writings, the tent of meeting text in particular, as rhetoric promoting the leadership role and hierocracy of Aaronide priests. For example, Wellhausen reads the Priestly source as assigning Second Temple authority to priestly leadership by retrojecting Aaronide priestly origins into the Mosaic period; Watts reads Leviticus 1–16 as the rhetoric of Aaronide high priests used to justify priestly control over Israelites and thereby protect their source of income from offerings of the people.\textsuperscript{19}

A new consensus views the Persian period as the birth of the Pentateuch, the founding document of Judaism as expressed by Thomas Römer, in his editorial introduction to \textit{The Books of Leviticus and Numbers}.\textsuperscript{20} Several of the textual studies in Römer’s edited volume demonstrate that a good number of passages in the books of Leviticus and Numbers reflect the last stages of the formation of the Pentateuch. Römer focuses on the second half of the Persian period for what he calls a first edition of the Torah.\textsuperscript{21} A further common agreement amongst scholars is the influence of Persian imperial authorization on Torah and the book of Ezra as an important dating point for post-exilic legal history, noted by M. Vervenne in his editor’s introduction to \textit{Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction-Reception-Interpretation}.\textsuperscript{22}

If a new consensus is that the Torah is completed in the second half of the Persian period, then logically the parts of the Torah precede the whole; the tent of meeting text which is one part of the whole is therefore earlier than the second half of the Persian period. Socio-historical

\textsuperscript{18} Elliger, “Sinn und Ursprung,” 140-43.
\textsuperscript{20} Römer, \textit{Books of Leviticus and Numbers}, xiv, 10-12.
\textsuperscript{21} Römer, \textit{Books of Leviticus and Numbers}, 10.
thought and some biblical sources allow insights into the early Persian period. Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah 1–8 are biblical sources with some perspectives on the early Persian period (539–400 BCE).\footnote{Grabbe, \textit{History of the Jews}, 1:70-89.} Rainer Albertz influenced by Blum’s \textit{Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch} and with a socio-historical approach to history writes of the early Persian period (539–400 BCE) as one of the “most productive eras in the history of Israelite religion.”\footnote{Albertz, \textit{History of Israelite Religion}, 2:437.} Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming build on Albertz’s idea of the early Persian period as one of cultural significance in the introduction to their volume, \textit{Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period}.\footnote{O. Lipschits and M. Oeming, eds., \textit{Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period} (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), ix-x.} It is apparent that the early Persian period is increasingly seen as a time of literary creativity and production by scholars such as Albertz, Blum, Lipschits and Oeming, and Berquist.\footnote{Jon Berquist, ed., \textit{Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period} (Atlanta: SBL, 2007).}

One of the astonishing things about the tent of meeting text is its length, suggesting its importance. It features at the centre of the Pentateuch, from Exodus 25 on, all of Leviticus to the first 10 chapters of Numbers, fifty two chapters in all. Once the tent of meeting is assembled all law instructions until Numbers 10 are communicated from it. The temple-tent text is much more extensive than the description of Solomon’s temple, covering only two and a half chapters (1 Kings 6:1–8:9) or Ezekiel’s vision of a temple, covering nine chapters (Ezekiel 40–48). Several literary techniques are applied to create it: Sinai as mythic place and time, symbolism, mimesis and the idea of word-picture. These literary techniques indicate the extraordinary creative energy that has gone into its composition. Albertz writes of the early Persian period as literarily a productive period; the length and the literary creativeness of the tent of meeting text fit with the idea of production in the exilic or early Persian period. Production of the tent of meeting text can validly be considered prior to the second half of the Persian period as discussed next.

The tent of meeting text as in the final form of the Pentateuch did not originate in the wilderness. Many aspects of the wilderness tent are fantastic—the sophisticated Israelite cult...
as described in the text could not have been practised in reality. The text is about an imaginary temple-tent, not the reproduction of something that existed. It is also most unlikely that it originated during the monarchy as in monarchic times there was a central functioning temple in Jerusalem. It is nonsensical to produce a text about an imaginary cultic world when an actual cultic temple is functioning.

Joseph Blenkinsopp looks at the period between the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and the rebuilding of the temple in 515 BCE as that of production of the Priestly narrative; he writes “in light of the little that we know of the situation of Jewish communities during this period, it seems most likely that the Priestly Grundschrift was composed in the Babylonian diaspora.” Blenkinsopp’s reasons for dating the Priestly narrative to the Babylonian exile are founded in his research on priests. He thinks most of the priestly class were deported to Babylonia and notes the considerable number of priests and probably other cult personnel listed amongst returnees in Ezra (2:36-54, 61-63) and Nehemiah (7:39-56 63-65). I agree with Blenkinsopp’s dating and context, that Israelite writing was occurring in the Babylonian Diaspora, but not with the make up of his writing team as primarily priests. Priests officiate at the rites and ceremonies in for example Leviticus 1–10 but they do not dominate the rites. The textual evidence indicates extensive involvement of different kinds of Israelites in the tent text.

**Context for Production of the Temple-Tent Text**

The next area of discussion is the context for production of the tent of meeting text. It is unlikely that the quantity of creative energy that has gone into the tent of meeting text would occur in a situation where a people has a cultic centre to which it can go for festivals, take offerings and go up for pilgrimages. There is no need for a literary imaginary cultic centre when an actual functioning cultic centre exists such as in Jerusalem in monarchic times or for those in the land after restoration of the temple in the middle Persian period. An imaginary cultic world in a text is more likely for a people without an actual cultic centre and who yearn for one. The only period when there was no Israelite temple was the exilic period,

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approximately seventy years or more from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587-6 BCE to the rebuilding of the temple in 515 BCE.

In the exilic period Israelite communities were in Judah and scattered in Babylonia and Egypt. The three locations are theoretically possible contexts for production of the tent text. Judah is surveyed first as a possible context for production of the tent text. Recognised exilic and post-exilic biblical texts offer varying insights on life in exilic Judah. It is unlikely that the tent of meeting text was produced in Judah or Jerusalem of the exilic period as the area was politically turbulent before and after the destruction of Solomon’s temple by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:1-21). The Babylonians moved political control in the form of governorship to Mizpah (2 Kings 25:22-26). An insight into the early years of governorship at Mizpah is one of an imploding society (Jeremiah 25:21-27). There may have been a sanctuary at Mizpah and some priests but the environment was not conducive to creative writing.28

Two post-exilic prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, give a later perspective on life in the land. Historical contexts are suggested in Haggai and Zechariah texts. Addressees are the “people of the land in Yehud.” Historical persons such as the Persian king Darius, or the governor Zerubbabel and high priest Joshua are mentioned. Zechariah 7:14 describes the land as desolate and gives the impression of an impoverished people with no sense of community. Haggai encourages the people to cooperate and put community energy into rebuilding the temple using the resources of the land. Zechariah 4:7 mentions Zerubbabel laying a foundation stone and calls for restoration of the temple and reconstitution of communal life but the interest is on an actual temple not an imaginary temple.

Both Haggai and Zechariah use royal vocabulary and royal metaphors. For example Haggai speaks of Zerubabbel as a “signet ring” and talks of kingdoms and thrones (Haggai 2:21-23). Zechariah speaks of a crown for the priestly branch of the diarchy. God is called the “Lord of Hosts” in both Haggai and Zechariah. Royal terminology is used by Haggai and Zechariah which suggests that concepts of kingship still have some validity for the people living in the land or at the least that such metaphors can still be used. This implies that those in Yehud

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remain politicised in some local or national manner. Royal concepts or the possibility of monarchy are still prevalent in their thought. An historical setting, textual addressees at a specific time in history, mention of land, royal language, and attributes of God are data and references used in the texts of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah yet they are totally absent in the vocabulary and terminology of the temple-tent text. There are no references or even allusions to kings or political leaders in the tent text and royal vocabulary is not applied to the Aaronide priests. Neither are there any references to the land of Israel, nationhood, explicit temple, or political structures such as a diarchy in the tent text.

Ezra texts offer yet again a different insight into life in post-exilic Yehud in the form of social tensions between remainees and returnees in the land. Those who remain in the land are denigrated by Ezra and returnees presented as the pure ones who return to the land. Davies and Rogerson sum up the situation when they write “political inferiority was countered by an assertion of religious superiority,” those who remained in the land are viewed as inferior to those who suffered or were purified by the exile experience.29

The varying biblical accounts, with insights into life in the land during the exilic and early post-exilic period, portray a dysfunctional society in Yehud. Both Haggai and Zechariah have to exhort residents to create community before building of the temple can even start to happen. Talk is of constructing a real temple from resources of the land, not of an imaginary temple to function as a substitution for the real thing. Restoration of the temple in the land proceeds slowly and with opposition but the focus is a real temple. Those who remain in the land could possibly offer sacrifices at the rural sanctuaries, or even on the ruins of the destroyed temple in Jerusalem. Survivors in the land, even with the destroyed temple, live close to the remains of what was the real temple. They do not need a substitute temple but a temple of wood and stone. If remainees in the land are reluctant to help restore a real temple how much more unlikely they are to want to celebrate some kind of a substitute cultic centre.

The next possible location for production of the tent of meeting text is Egypt. In the sixth century BCE some Judeans left Judah and fled to Egypt to escape the effects of Babylonian dominance in Judah. Some settled at Tahpanes. One attested Israelite colony was at Yeb (Elephantine) an island in the Nile close to the border of Nubia or Syene, today’s Aswan in Upper Egypt. There was a temple or house to YHW (Yahu) at Elephantine perhaps as early as the pre-exilic period. It was destroyed approximately 410 BCE. It is debated whether there was animal sacrifice or not at the temple but the offering of cereal and incense appears to have been practised. As there was some kind of a YHWH temple at Elephantine, even if a variant of Yahwism, it seems unlikely that the Elephantine community of Egypt would engage in producing an imaginary text about Israelite cultic life.

The last alternative for production of the tent text is the Babylonian Diaspora. Several waves of Israelites were forced to move from Jerusalem to Babylonia as indicated by some biblical texts (2 Kings 24:12-16; 25:11; Jeremiah 39:9-14; 50:28-30). Babylonian documents such as the Murašu archives attest to the presence of Jews in Babylonia in the early Persian period. Laurie Pearce with several publications on Judah and the Neo-Babylonian period, talks of a Babylonian location that was even known along the lines of “Judah-ville.” However, no artifacts or documents attest to Israelite cultic centres, actual Israelite buildings at geographical places in Babylonia, despite there being an abundance of temples to Babylonian gods. Martin Noth writes the following as regards composition of the Priestly source, “I would not be able to adduce any decisive argument against the view that P may have been composed in the so-called Babylonian Exile: yet I can give no positive argument for it either.” Few scholars specifically address the Babylonian Diaspora as a place for Hebrew writing. Blenkinsopp says it explicitly; Albertz and Noth allude to it. Now is the chance to address the Babylonian Diaspora as a context for the composition of the tent of meeting text as the subject of the main text not in footnotes.

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34 Noth, History of Pentateuchal Traditions, 243 n. 636.
Authorship of the Temple-Tent Text

The authorship of the tent of meeting text needs discussion at this point. It is generally understood to be a priestly group by scholars such as, for example, M. Haran or J. Blenkinsopp. The evidence of chapters three to five and scholars who research the rituals of Leviticus 1–10, such as Erhard Gerstenberger or Alfred Marx, move from the dominant idea of priests as authors to a more community focus. Gerstenberger understands the book of Leviticus to be made up of a diversity of traditions, developed out of congregational structures. He approaches the question of authors, dating and context from the stance of Israelite communities, which are for him the producers and recipients of the book of Leviticus. He focuses on Israelite communities as authors of the text, not priests and posits the first generations of addressees in the postexilic Persian period.

For Gerstenberger the book of Leviticus reflects the life of the post-exilic Israelite communities and grew out of these communities. The driving force behind the writing is the members of the communities rather than priests or temple personnel. One of his main reasons for focusing on communities rather than priests for authorship is the importance of the voice of the people as typified in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26) where every person is called to strive for holiness not only priests. Another reason is the public nature of the altar which is visible to all within the court of the tent complex. He finishes by concluding that authors of the book of Leviticus were likely a post-exilic Diaspora congregation and not necessarily the priests and high priest in Jerusalem.

Gerstenberger sees Israelite communities spread throughout the ancient world but made up of two types. Jerusalem functions as what he calls a “mother temple,” a place where God’s presence is in the temple and sacrificial services are performed. Jerusalem is the spiritual symbol of Judaism and its influence reaches to include remote Diaspora communities. The

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36 Gerstenberger, Leviticus, 6-14.
37 Gerstenberger, Leviticus, 76.
38 Gerstenberger, Leviticus, 11, 76-77.
second type of community is made up of the family or clan, and meets in assemblies. There are human structures in place such as legal systems and elders.

**Summary**

The discussions in this chapter result in the following. It is unlikely that the temple-tent text grew out of Judah/Yehud for the following reasons. Re-construction of a real temple is possible on the traditional site of Jerusalem in Judah/Yehud, permitted by Persian authorities from circa 540 BCE onwards (the time of Cyrus). It is unlikely that a lengthy and sophisticated literary text, such as that of the tent of meeting text, is composed as an interim text by Israelites remaining in the land. Israelites in Judah/Yehud live close to the traditional site of the Jerusalem temple. There is no reason for them to produce a text with extended cultic material to substitute for a real temple. Furthermore, the situation in the land was not conducive to literary writing.

It is also unlikely that the temple-tent text grew out of the Egyptian Jewish communities. They had a temple or house to YHW (Yahu) at Elephantine perhaps from as early as the pre-exilic period. It is more likely that the temple-tent text grew out of the Israelite communities in the Babylonian Diaspora. Israelites who were forced into the Babylonian exile probably could not exercise customary temple rituals in Babylonia as there is no evidence of an Israelite temple or temples in Babylonia. Similarly, priestly families in exile could obviously not exercise their priestly function for the same reason, there was no temple. A substitute for customary cultic rituals that cannot be performed at a temple by the people and priests is to write them into a text, thereby remembering and preserving memories of the Jerusalem temple and former cultic practices. Memories of the Jerusalem temple and YHWH are what remain of Israeliite cult for Israelites in Babylonia, far from the land of Judah. Expressing the presence of God with the mimetic tent and cult round which the entire people of Israel are gathered is a way to keep the memory of YHWH and cult alive.

The community of all Israel witness and participate in cult as prescribed within the text. The receiver of the text is invited also to participate in the rites by virtue of accessing or knowing
the text. The importance of lay people communicates the idea that the cultic world of the tent of meeting is open to all—it is an inclusive and democratic environment. This suggests that lay people, not priests alone influenced the contents of the text.

The textual evidence and recent theories on the dating, context and authorship of the priestly writings result in the following major data:

- The tent of meeting text is mimetic. An imaginary Israelite cultic world is presented.
- Israelite or lay participation in the text is substantial suggesting significant lay involvement in production of the text.
- The text is an open world for all who read it. There is no esoteric information such as might be considered for priests or artisans or scribes only.
- The tent of meeting text predates the second half of the Persian period which recent consensus regards as a valid date for a first complete edition of the Torah.
- The Babylonian Diaspora is a valid possible setting for production of the tent of meeting text.

The major data leads to formulation of the hypothesis:

**Exilic Israelite communities in the Diaspora in Babylonia want a cultic place and cannot have a temple, so they create and author the idea of “the tent of meeting” which substitutes as a cultic centre.**

The second half of the thesis addresses the plausibility of the hypothesis which is broken down into three parts.

The first part of the hypothesis, “Exilic Israelite communities in the Diaspora in Babylonia want a cultic place and cannot have a temple,” concerns the context of exiled Israelites in Babylonia. The world of Babylonia, conventionally known as “the exile” runs from the time of the arrival of the first wave of enforced immigrants until the Persians under Cyrus conquered Babylonia (597-539 BCE). Questions are addressed such as: What Judeans were forced to
migrate to Babylonia? What did they do to survive in Babylonia and where did they settle? What was the composition of the Israelite communities in Babylonia and how did these communities function? Could they meet for religious gatherings?

The second part of the hypothesis is “Exilic Israelite communities in the Diaspora create and author the idea of ‘the tent of meeting,’ ” and addresses authorship of the tent of meeting text. It looks at how writing inspiration functions and the transformation of memory and reality into a mimetic text.

The third part of the hypothesis investigates how a text such as the tent of meeting text can substitute for a real temple. Cultic space in textual format is addressed and how a scriptural temple-text functions. The hypothesis is investigated in the next three chapters.
Chapter 7

An Israelite Writing Circle:

In the Babylonian Diaspora

The first part of the hypothesis developed in the previous chapter is “Exilic Israelite communities in the Diaspora in Babylonia want a cultic place and cannot have a temple.” The hypothesis breaks down into the following areas which are explored in three sections as:

A. The Babylonian Diaspora
B. Exilic Israelite communities
C. Israelites in the Babylonian Diaspora yearning for a cultic place.

In section A the social status of the Judeans forced to migrate to Babylonia, and where they were settled in Babylonia, is investigated. Historical data relating to the city of Babylon and the region of Nippur is presented. Section B is an exploration of the structure of Israelite communities in the Babylonian Diaspora, modes of communication and the possibility of religious gatherings. In section C the background to a desire for an Israelite cultic centre by Israelites is investigated. The major outcome of the chapter is the proposition of an “Israelite writing circle” in the Babylonian Diaspora.

Overview of Dates in the Neo-Babylonian–Early Persian Period

A general understanding of significant dates in the Neo-Babylonian period follows. In 597 BCE the Babylonian army captured Jerusalem. The young king Jehoiachin and members of the Judean royal court were taken to Babylon as prisoners. Jehoiachin’s uncle, Zedekiah, was put in charge of Judah and was under the jurisdiction of the Babylonians. Zedekiah rebelled,
Babylonian forces overtook Jerusalem, and the temple was razed to the ground in 586 BCE. As a consequence further Judeans were deported to Babylonia.¹ The start of the exilic period is marked by deportations, 597-586 BCE. The Babylonian exilic period is generally understood to end in 539 BCE when Cyrus conquered the Babylonians. The term, exile, is a Judeo understanding and perspective on Neo-Babylonian history. It is a period of time of approximately 50-60 years, or two human generations, and when the Judeans were in Babylonia under the Neo-Babylonians. Judah was an insignificant power in the ancient New Eastern world in comparison with Egypt and Babylonia. Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BCE) and Nabonidus (556-539 BCE) were the most influential and longest reigning kings of the Neo-Babylonian empire in the exilic period.

Persian forces under Cyrus overtook Babylonia in 539 BCE, the date which marks the start of Persian rule in Mesopotamia. The early Persian period starts in 539 BCE and continues into the mid fifth century BCE with the reign of Xerxes I (486-465 BCE). Material in this chapter focuses on Israelite communities in Babylonia from the exilic period into the early Persian period (597/586-460 BCE). The key dates are:

- Deportations from Judah to Babylonia: 597-586 BCE
- Cyrus II conquers Babylonia: 539 BCE
- Early Persian period: 539-circa 460 BCE

I work with the late exilic to early Persian period as 560-460 BCE. The following research focuses on historical evidence from that period.

Two terms are used to refer to the people of Israel, Judeans and Israelites; I build on the distinctions that Grabbe makes in History of the Jews, Vol. 1. Judean is more specific than Israelite.² Judean refers to those people who voluntarily moved from Judah to Egypt, were deported from the region of Judah to Babylonia, or remained in the land of Judah during the

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¹ The term “Judeans” (יהודים) is used in 2 Kings 25:25 to denote the people of Judah who stayed in the land and were at Mizpah. Those from the land of Judah who were deported to Babylonia are recorded with the phrase, “So Judah went into exile out of its land” (2 Kings 25:21). The term “Judeans” is frequent in Jeremiah: 32:12; 34:9; 38:19; 40:11-12, 15; 41:3; 43:9; 44:1, 24, 26; 52:28, 30.
Babylonian exile. Israelite is used in a cultic sense and refers to all people of Israelite religious and ethnic identity. For example, Judeans were deported to Babylonia; however, I refer to the families of these Judeans as Israelites in the late exilic period in Babylonia as identity becomes more allied with ethnicity and religious customs than with geographic location. The term Israelite supersedes the term Judean. From 500 BCE on Israelites lived in different geographical areas and the differentiation is made between the Elephantine Israelites of Egypt, Diaspora Israelites of Babylonia and Israelites in the land of Judah/Yehud.

A. Diaspora Babylonia

Identifying the Deportees

The first section of the chapter addresses the social status of Judeans taken from Judah and settled in Babylonia. The identity of Judeans deported to Babylonia is important because it is their offspring and further generations born in Babylonia who make up the exilic Israelite communities. At least two waves of deportations to Babylonia occurred over a decade. Several biblical passages list the social standing of those taken into exile (2 Kings 24:14-16; Jeremiah 24:1; 29:1-2; 52:15).

In the first deportation (597 BCE) were the king of Judah, Jehoiachin, who surrendered to the Babylonians, extended royal family and the administrative personnel necessary for the functioning of a royal court and political structure in Judah. Nebuchadnezzar II,

Carried away all Jerusalem, all the officials (דarchs), all the warriors (גנים), ten thousand captives (עשרים אלף גולים), all the artisans (חצר), and the smiths (מלחים); no one remained, except the poorest people of the land. He carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon; the king's mother (אם המלך), the king's wives (נשה המלך), his officials (סריסים),

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3 Jeremiah 52:28-30 lists three deportation waves.
and the elite of the land (אָרָם יַהֲדוֹת), he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. (2 Kings 24:14-15)

The social standing of deported Judeans in the second deportation wave (586 BCE, Jeremiah 24:1; 29:1; 52:15) was similar to that of the first: officials of Judah (שרי יהודה), court officials (המשנה), artisans (חרשים) and smiths (המסגר).

Babylonian archival sources confirm that the Judean king, Jehoiachin, was in prison in Babylon. Administrative documents found in Babylon indicate that rations were given to foreign dependents from Greece, Tyre and Judah in the royal household. Jehoiachin, “king of Ja-ku-du,” Judah, is mentioned as receiving rations.4

Most Judeans in the first deportations were taken to the city of Babylon. Judeans of later deportations were settled in the Nippur region.5 Villages of Judeans on the river Chebar are mentioned in Ezekiel 3:15 and Ezra 2:59; 8:17. Israelites were settled under the Babylonian hatru system like many other deported ethnic groups such as Egyptians and Carians (from an area of what is today south west Turkey).6 Under the hatru system deported peoples were allotted an area of land. It was cultivated in family lots and can be understood as a status of “permanent settlement and use of land.”7 Lester Grabbe describes this status as that of small land holders.8

The texts of 2 Kings 24–25 and Jeremiah 24:1; 29:2; 52:15 indicate that skilled Judeans were taken to Babylonia in the deportations. There is general agreement among scholars that it was influential Judeans who were deported.9 Jerusalem and Judah were thereby effectively depleted of managerial, social and political infra-structure. Deportation of the king and

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4 ANET, 308; for additional discussion see Pearce, “New Evidence for Judeans in Babylonia,” 399.
5 Grabbe, History of the Jews, 1:317-18; Macmillan Bible Atlas, 125.
7 Briant, From Cyrus to Alexander, 506.
8 Grabbe, History of the Jews, 1:353.
9 Berquist, Judaism in Persia’s Shadow, 15-16; Briant, From Cyrus to Alexander, 45.
personnel of the royal court was equivalent to loss of political, economic and national self-determination for Judah.

Court official or minister of state is an extended meaning of סריס, thought to be derived from an unused root meaning “to castrate,” and applied to eunuchs or people in an influential palace position. The function of court officials ranged from diplomatic to managerial tasks and required skills such as writing, translating and accounting. In his research on textuality and education in the ancient Near Eastern world, David Carr surmises that, from the early Jerusalem monarchy on, those who were literate were involved in anything from international commerce to census and building projects. Some court officials may have memorised what can be called primary scripts such as royal genealogies, and military accounts. Scribes may have recorded important royal meetings, kept note of produce received and dispersed via the royal court, kept the archives if there were royal archives, and were probably capable of writing legal documents, contracts or treaties.

The Hebrew (שָׂר) meaning chief or prince encompasses a wide range of meanings. It can refer to administrators in different royal offices or major land owners. They may have travelled or organised others to travel for them for trade purposes and therefore likely functioned as merchants in Jerusalem. They are mentioned several times in the lists of the skills of leading personnel deported to Babylonia (2 Kings 24:12, 14; Jeremiah 24:1; 29:2).

Warriors (מְבָרָאִים) were perhaps professional military, trained to fight, whose services were paid through the royal coffers. After working through the biblical sources on literacy in ancient Israel, Carr concludes that some army commanders were literate.

Artisans (חרשׂים) and smiths (המסגר) are mentioned in the majority of biblical passages listing the skills of deportees (2 Kings 24:14, 16; Jeremiah 24:1; 29:2; 52:15). Judean artisans and smiths worked with materials such as wood, metal, and stone. Smiths or metal workers had a

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12 Carr, Writing on the Tablet of the Human Heart, 118.
wide range of functions, one of which was to forge weapons. Their skills may have extended to engineering. The royal palace and temple in Jerusalem were almost certainly the most magnificent buildings in the city. They were the major edifices and stood for the central political power of the region of Judah. Artisans probably maintained the buildings of the royal precincts in Jerusalem. Some of the skills required for the maintenance of those buildings are echoed in the techniques required of the artisans in the tent of meeting text. They supervise the making of the parts of the tent complex with its various materials such as metal, cloth and stone. They are also required to write (כתב) or engrave (פתח) names on the stones of the breastpiece of the high priest’s vestments (Exodus 28:9-36; 39:30).

Priests and Levites are not mentioned among the professional groups deported to Babylonia in 2 Kings and Jeremiah. They are mentioned however in the books of Ezekiel and in Ezra thereby indicating that priests and Levites were taken to Babylonia. Ezekiel writes of himself as “the priest Ezekiel” and references to “descendants of Zadok” suggest that other priests were deported (Ezekiel 1:3 40:16; 43:19). Priestly and levitical families are among the returnees to Jerusalem and listed by name in Ezra 3:8. The ability of priests to write is suggested in Numbers 5:23. It is a context where the ability to write is associated with magic and curses. If there were Levites before the exile then they can be considered a literate group. Carr speaks of literacy as mastery of a cultural tradition. Such mastery was generally associated with “artisans and professional functionaries” and applies to priests.

A high degree of literacy is one of the many skills of the Judeans deported to Babylonia. Judean officials, military men and artisans were likely used in the service of the Babylonian government. The Neo-Babylonian imperial system was vast. Human labour was necessary in many different areas: administrative personnel were needed for the daily functioning of the imperial government, artisans and labour were required for extensive building projects, and farmers needed to produce food for the royal court and armies and men for the military.

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14 Carr, Writing on the Tablet of the Human Heart, 116.
According to Jon Berquist extensive Israelite involvement in the Babylonian temple system is suggested by biblical passages such as Deutero-Isaiah 44:9-20; 46:1-7.¹⁶

What could deported Judeans take with them into exile? It seems likely that Judeans were deported to Babylonia as family groups. King Jehoiachin and most of the royal family were taken to Babylon according to several biblical accounts (2 Kings 24:12, 15; 2 Chronicles 36:10; Jeremiah 52:31-33; Ezekiel 1:2). Many different ethnic groups, such as Egyptians, Judeans and Arameans (from an area that is now known as Syria), were forcibly migrated to Babylonia after being subdued by Neo-Babylonian kings and each ethnic group generally settled in a specific region. This suggests that marriage within the ethnic groups was probable and that therefore women were deported along with the men. It seems unlikely that a subjugated people, when forced to undertake obligatory migration could take national texts or archives with them. Parchment or papyrus was probably too fragile to travel with and besides clumsy to carry. If there were temple or royal archives in Jerusalem, it is doubtful that they were taken to Babylonia.¹⁷

**Settling in Babylon and Nippur**

Deportees were taken from the small hill country city of Jerusalem or what Grabbe calls “a backwater” to the large administrative imperial centre of Babylon or the Nippur region.¹⁸ In contrast to Judah with its one temple in Jerusalem set in the highlands, Babylonia was flat, rich in rivers and waterways and had many temples. Architecturally and culturally Babylonia was sophisticated. The architecture of the imperial city of Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar II, to which the first wave of deported Babylonian Judeans were taken, was markedly different to that of the city of Jerusalem of the Judean kings.

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¹⁷ Carr also finds it unlikely that Judeans took texts to Babylonia, *Writing on the Tablet of the Human Heart*, 162, 168.
Judeans were settled in at least two Babylonian locations, the Nippur region and Babylon. Babylon was the imperial city and administrative centre of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. It lay on the Euphrates with the old city containing the imperial quarters on the east side of the river and the newer city on the west. At least four temples were contained within the walls of the old city and three within the walls of the new city. Protection of the old city was a double ring of walls. Nebuchadnezzar was interested in hydraulics; sophisticated metal gates controlled the in and out flow of the Euphrates river which ran through the city.

The period of Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BCE) is identified with extensive architectural activity. He ordered, for example, reconstruction of the imperial grounds, the rebuilding of the Etemenanki ziggurat which was seven stories high, construction of more city walls and the Ishtar Gate.

The most magnificent entry into the old city was on the northern side of the walls of the old city via the Ishtar Gate, which was nearly three stories high (14 metres). The gate was embellished with blue glazed bricks and ochre-coloured bricks depicting dragons and oxen, symbols of Babylonian Gods. The Ishtar Gate marked the start of what is called Processional Street. The street was more than 700 metres long, and lined on both sides with a frieze in the same blue glazed bricks as the Ishtar Gate. Pictures of the frieze with its striding lions are found in nearly every book on Babylonian history. The Ishtar Gate and Processional Street were reconstructed at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin in the 1930s. A visit to the museum means a sense of the splendour of Nebuchadnezzar’s city continues today.

Like many public works, the frieze of the Processional Street was grand architecture and a statement on the part of the king to the people. Nebuchadnezzar is recorded to have said of the royal residence, “a building for the admiration of my people, a place of union for the land, and

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19 Macmillan Bible Atlas, 128.
the seat of my royal authority.” Artisans designed and implemented construction of the public buildings and temples under the approval of the royal administration. Major public buildings are visual statements of the power of the person in control, and in this case of Nebuchadnezzar II, king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

The Ishtar Gate marked the start of Processional Street which was lined with at least three major building complexes. Entering from the north were first on the right the royal precincts, then the Etemenanki ziggurat and next the temple of Marduk. The palace of Nebuchadnezzar II consisted of five courts, and a colossal throne room. The palace covered an area of 325 by 220 metres. The seven storey ziggurat of Babylon (known as Etemenanki) was a stand-alone construction, visible from the distance as it towered above every other site in the city. The third major building on the right along Processional Street was the temple of Marduk (known as Esagila).

Nippur is the designation for a city and a region. Nippur, the city, lay approximately 55 kilometres south east of Babylon on a canal branch of the Euphrates. It was known as a religious rather than a political centre in Mesopotamia and had over a hundred temples according to McGuire’s studies based on a research project of the University of Chicago.

The main settlement of Judeans is generally considered as the area not far to the east of the city of Nippur. The main feature of Nippur was Ekur, a temple complex consisting of a ziggurat and temple to the god Enlil with courtyard, all contained within a wall enclosure. It was often visited by kings. The god Enlil was understood to be the “father of the gods,” “the king of heaven and earth,” and “the establisher of kingship.” Babylonian kings travelled to Nippur, with gifts and tributes for Enlil. Land was gifted by kings, trusting that their kingship would be legitimised by the god.

After successful wars even booty or prisoners of war were

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presented to Enlil. Nebuchadnezzar II ordered repairs to the temple of Enlil in Nippur.²⁸

Excavations by teams from the Universities of Pennsylvania and Chicago on the Enlil temple area have yielded artifacts typical of Babylonian temple worship and religious ritual such as offering stands, benches, altars and what appear to be offering bowls.²⁹

At least two other temples were in the vicinity of the Ekur temple complex in the sixth century BCE city of Nippur, the north temple and the Inanna temple. This area of temples is known as “the religious quarter” by archaeologists.³⁰ South of the religious quarter is an excavation area where several different kinds of artifacts with writing have been found. This area is called tablet hill and known as “the scribal quarter.” More than 30,000 cuneiform tablets of major literary, historical and economic importance have been found in the scribal quarter, which indicates the extent and importance of scribal activity in Nippur. These tablets make up over eighty percent of all known Sumerian literary compositions.³¹ Among the compositions are early versions of the Flood Story and part of the Gilgamesh Epic. The temples had their own administrative personnel, schools and often archives. Baked bricks dated to Nebuchadnezzar II’s time indicate that the scribal quarter was occupied in the Neo-Babylonian period.³²

Extensive public works in the city of Babylon and the presence of scribal quarters in Nippur suggest a high degree of urban culture in the Neo-Babylonian period and therefore the need for a wide range of professionals such as engineers for canals, artisans for buildings, and scribes for recording and writing. The importance of artisans for Mesopotamian urban culture was long-standing as one palace in Ur (late 3000 BCE) had its own workshops with as many as eight different artisan departments: metal workers, goldsmiths, stonecutters, carpenters, blacksmiths, leather-workers, felters, reed-workers.³³ In Esarhaddon’s time (681-669 BCE), artisans were even in the social position to negotiate terms of contract as demonstrated in what is known as the “Craftsmen’s Charter.” Three groups of craftsmen, carpenters, metal

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engravers and gold smiths, made an agreement with the administrators of the Eanna temple at Uruk. Artisans were in high demand. They could work for themselves, be in the full employment of a place or temple, or even organise a combination of both. In the case of the “Craftsmen’s Charter” at Uruk, the temple administrators wanted to ensure that certain named craftsmen made their services available solely to the Eanna temple. These examples indicate that deported Judean artisans could certainly be utilised in Babylonia, and may well have learnt new techniques to add to their already existing skills.

To summarise, according to biblical sources mainly the upper social strata of Judeans were taken to Babylonia, and settled in Babylon or the Nippur region. A wide range of professional skills, from a high degree of literacy, organizational and leadership skills, to construction and artistic techniques, were represented among the deported Judeans. These skills were probably utilised by the Babylonians in their burgeoning imperial economy. Many of the deported Judeans were settled on land holdings in the Nippur region.

**B. Exilic Communities: An Israelite Writing Circle**

The next investigations concern Israelite community life in Babylonia and issues such as the livelihood and organizational structure of the Israelite settlements. It was probably not too difficult for the first generation of Judean exiles to learn the vernacular Eastern Aramaic of Babylonia which was related to their Western Aramaic. Daily intercourse likely took place in an environment with a wide range of dialects. Dialects such as Eastern and Western Aramaic have the same linguistic and grammatical base; they are to be regarded as dialects, not as different languages. Variances were therefore more likely on the level of consonants.34

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Judeans assigned to *hatru* (land holdings) in the Nippur region were expected to work the land and to supply local Babylonian land holders and/or temple administrators with produce, a form of tax. Field crops grown were cereals ranging from barley, wheat, emmer or millet to other crops such as legumes, onions and garlic, herbs and greens. Amongst livestock, sheep, oxen, cows and calves are recorded. Further forms of tax were levied for example via the lease of ploughs. The lease of land closer to canals cost more than land further away from irrigation sources. Michael Stolper speaks of the situation of contract agriculture as one of a “ladder of rents” based on his research into the sixth to fifth century BCE Murašû texts. The scale of hierarchy in the agricultural sector, “primary landlords-contractors-tenants-subtenants-sharecroppers” is noteworthy for the quantity of hands and circles through which produce passes. Stolper’s article is full of terminology such as short-term credit, leases and sub-leases, contractors and sub-contractors. Judeans who farmed on the settlements in the Nippur region lived in a precarious economic context, with the traditional vagaries of weather and the burden of taxation.

The biblical sources give some insight regarding the settlements. Ezekiel was assigned to an area near a canal of the river Chebar (Ezekiel 1:1-3; 3:15). Travel between different Israelite communities was obviously possible as elders (זקן) gathered with Ezekiel (Ezekiel 14:1; 20:1-4), and Ezekiel visited Judean exiles at another settlement, Tel-abib (Ezekiel 3:15), also in the Nippur region. Approximately a hundred years later than Ezekiel, Ezra (or the construct of the persona of Ezra) knew of several Judean settlements. He organised a caravan of returnees to Judah. Some settlements are named such as those of Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, Immer (Ezra 2:59; Nehemiah 7:61) and Casiphia (Ezra 8:17) and were all locations along canals of the river Euphrates. Israelites gathered at a camp with Ezra before departure (Ezra 8:15) for a return to Yehud.

Vocabulary such as that of elders (זקן) or leaders (שׁרא) relevant to Judeans in Babylonia is used in Ezra 7:28; 8:16-17; Ezekiel 8:1; 14:1; 20:1, 3; this indicates that community structures...

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of some kind existed in each of the Babylonian Judean settlements. Some leaders are named, “Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam” (Ezra 8:16). Ezra appears to have known the names of the Judean elders and the whereabouts of the different Israelite settlements. Leaders and priests from different settlements gathered near Ahava for the return caravan. Ezra notes that Levites were not represented amongst those gathered for the return yet according to Ezra, Levites were required within the return convoy for forthcoming temple service. Ezra knew the name of the leader at a place called Casiphia, Iddo, and that Levite families were at that settlement (Ezra 7:28; 8:16-17). He has a message sent to Iddo and Levites duly arrive at Ahava to join the return caravan.

The biblical books of Ezekiel and Ezra suggest that Israelites in Babylonia knew of other Judean settlements and they knew where these settlements were located. Travel between the settlements was possible. Extensive road systems existed and travel was also possible via canals. Some scholars speak of the settlements as “self-governing units,” or even “autonomous organizations,” along the lines of the Israelite colonies in Elephantine, Egypt. Terms such as elders and leaders certainly suggest some form of social organisation within the settlements.

Judeans in settlements in Nippur probably heard of King Jehoiachin’s release from prison when Nebuchadnezzar II’s successor, Amel-Marduk (called King Evil-merodach of Babylon in 2 Kings 25:27-30; Jeremiah 52:31-34) took the throne. Communication was not only possible between Judean communities in Babylonia but also between Babylonia and Judah. For example, Jeremiah (29:4-7) in Jerusalem sent a letter to Judeans in Babylonia encouraging them to build houses, plant gardens, marry, have children, and to pray and work for civil peace. In the first years in Babylonia, the first wave of deportees may well have learnt of the arrival of new deportee groups. Communication amongst Israelites was possible on several levels, between Judean settlements in Nippur, between Judean communities in Babylon and Nippur, and between Babylonia and Judah.

37 Macmillan Bible Atlas, 128; Briant, From Cyrus to Alexander, 506.
38 Briant, From Cyrus to Alexander, 358.
39 Cogan, “Into Exile,” 358; Dandamaev, “Neo-Babylonian Society and Economy,” 257; Briant, From Cyrus to Alexander, 506.
The livelihood of Israelites in the city of Babylon was probably varied. Work opportunities abounded as the Babylonian empire of Nebuchadnezzar II expanded. Many skills were required for the running of the empire: scribes for administrative work, persons with foreign experience for translating and diplomacy, artisans for the many building projects. Food was necessary to feed the armies and residents of the imperial court. Judean artisans had the opportunity to observe, learn and copy the techniques of the Babylonian artisans when working on the construction and restoration of buildings. Judean scribes who worked within the imperial administration were probably close enough to the internal systems of Babylonian palaces and temples to observe the extent and storage of archives.

**Practice of Israelite Customs in the Diaspora**

It appears that Babylonian and then Persian rule permitted the religious expression of deported peoples. Passover was probably celebrated in Babylonia as it was among Judeans at the military garrison at Elephantine, Egypt, and attested in a letter from Elephantine Judeans to Jerusalem at the time of Darius. If the Elephantine Judeans kept Passover in the early Persian period then it seems likely that Judeans kept Passover in Babylonia in the period prior to Persian dominance in the ancient Near East. However, as Grabbe succinctly comments, cults of deportees were tolerated rather than promoted.

In Babylonia, Judeans probably continued many traditions which they had practised for generations in Judah. Customs, wherever one lives, are part of daily life. As immigrant peoples continue to practise the customs particular to them in the new land to which they come today, so it is likely that Judeans continued to practise many of their customs in Babylonia, depending on factors such as food available, climate and seasons, building materials of the human dwellings. Evidence of some of the customs practised by Judeans in Babylonia is found in prescriptions such as rites for the slaughter of animals (Leviticus 11 and 17), what

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40 Berquist, *Judaism in Persia’s Shadow*, 16, suggests that King Jehoiachin may have been used in an advisory capacity.


food was or was not permitted (Leviticus 11), customs regarding hygiene and mould (Leviticus 14), norms for social health and interaction (Leviticus 18–20). Each family would have continued to live their particular practice and understanding of customs, shared experiences of Judah, recalled sayings of the past, and kept memories of the Jerusalem temple alive in Babylonia.

Children were born to Judeans in the new land. Judean immigrants who died were buried in exilic soil. Only those Israelites who left Judah with the last deportation and returned with the first returning caravan could have done the long trip of a thousand kilometres twice. Some of the first generation of deportees may have resisted inculturation but already by the second generation, those born in exile knew of the land of their parents only by hearsay. Judeans would have acclimatised to the new climate, adapted new foods to their dietary understandings and developed an awareness of Babylonian customs and social organization.

**Writing in the Diaspora Settlements**

Joseph Blenkinsopp, author of many publications on priestly material and priests in the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods, writes of the Israelite settlement at Casiphia as a “cultic establishment under the regency of a certain Iddo, presumably a priest (Ezra 8:16-20).” He partially explains what he means by “cultic establishment” when he writes that Casiphia was “probably not the only center of worship and learning in the Babylonian Diaspora, and it was in all probability at such centers that the work of scholarship and piety we know as P reached its mature formulation.” Blenkinsopp understands that Israelites in Babylonia could gather to worship and study which suggests that they were also in a position to write.

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46 Background for Blenkinsopp’s statement in *The Pentateuch: An Introduction*, 238 is in, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 166: “At the least, there must have existed at Casiphia a school, comparable to the Egyptian “house of life,” for the training of temple personnel. Whatever conclusion is reached about the origins and location of the P source in the Pentateuch, the study of law, including ritual law, which was going on in the diaspora must have had some institutional basis.” M. Haran, “Ezekiel, P, and the Priestly School,” *VT* 28 (2008): 211-18, writes of Babylonia as a place, “where the exiles conducted their literary activity,” and speaks of of *Ezra* as a scribal expert in Torah.
I propose that an Israelite writing circle was possible at a worship centre such as Casiphia. Many of the deported Judeans were literate. Their literacy skills were probably utilised in Babylonia, and the same high level of literacy continued on to their children’s generation. The Babylonian environment of temples with archives and scribal quarters was likely a cultural stimulant for the Israelites to not only maintain their literary levels but to even further develop them.

Obtaining writing material was not an issue. Israelites in Babylonia more likely used parchment or papyrus rather than clay tablets as a writing surface as they were more appropriate for the writing of alphabetic and linear languages such as Hebrew. The action of pushing down with a stylus to produce the wedge shapes of cuneiform, rather than the incising of cursive lines more typical of the alphabetic languages, is better suited to soft clay. For good reason, clay tablets and cuneiform tend to be identified with Mesopotamian writing and parchment or papyrus with alphabetic languages.

Suitable writing material such as parchment rather than papyrus could be produced in the Israelite settlements in the Babylonian Diaspora. Many Israelites farmed on land holdings set among canal systems and assigned to them by the Babylonians. The papyrus plant, native to Africa and which grew in marshy areas of the Nile, was known in Transjordan but not common to Mesopotamia. It is unlikely that Israelites descending from the Judean highlands were familiar with techniques for the production of papyrus as the paper reed certainly did not grow in the Jerusalem region. It is also unlikely that they learnt papyrus making techniques from the Babylonians. Clay tablets were the most common writing material in Mesopotamia, attested by the large numbers of tablets found for example in the scribal quarters in Nippur.

Parchment was the most likely writing material for Israelites in the Babylonian Diaspora as many farmed. Animals and therefore skins were readily available. Parchment preparation techniques were probably known to the Babylonian Israelites, some of whom descended from Judean farming families and others from scribal and official circles where they would have

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been familiar with techniques for the making of parchment.\textsuperscript{49} In the tent of meeting text artisans are required to produce “tanned rams’ skins and an outer covering of fine leather” (Exodus 26:14). Centuries before the Neo-Babylonian Empire, leather-workers are listed in Mesopotamia at a palace in Ur. Knowledge of the techniques necessary for the production of parchment such as washing the skins and liming them, removing the hairs and scraping, paring down the inequalities, dusting with something like chalk and rubbing with pumice, were probably known to the Israelites in the settlements.\textsuperscript{50} Writing materials are mentioned in the book of Ezekiel. The prophet has a vision of a scroll on which there was writing on both sides (Ezekiel 2:9-10). In another vision a man in linen appears with an inkhorn (קַסַת) at his side (Ezekiel 9:2-3, 11). If scrolls and inkhorns appear in Ezekiel’s visions then such writing equipment was also probably in the consciousness of Babylonian Israelites. Parchment could have been acquired from any of the different Israelite settlements.

Members of the settlements probably gathered for meetings. Discussions would have included and revolved round issues such as ethnicity, Israelite customs which were different to Babylonian customs, a desire to continue the worship of their God, YHWH, not the Babylonian gods, Marduk, Sin or Enlil. Memories of Judah would have remained alive in the collective memory. It is speculative but if there was a writing circle in Casiphia, a delegate from each settlement representing the collective Israelite memory of that settlement could have travelled regularly to Casiphia to participate in a central writing circle. Delegates from the different settlements could inform the central writing circle in Casiphia of the understandings of Israelite customs and memories of the members of their specific settlement. In turn the delegates would report back to the members of their settlements. The gathering of Israelite customs and cultic understandings is presented in graphic format in diagram 7. 1.

The Israelite settlements such as Casiphia, Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, or Cherub were made up of Judeans with a variety of different skills. They were descendants of former Judean farmers, business people, court employees, artisans and priests. Any family where someone had visited


\textsuperscript{50} Demsky, “Writing,” 659.
the Jerusalem temple would have a memory of its rites and atmosphere. Different professions nurture different skills and different knowledge in regard to Israelite cult. When brought together the different perspectives make up a common understanding of Israelite cult. Artisans work with measurements. They design and shape materials such as wood, metal, cloth and skin. Families of priests would be aware of the former traditional daily Israelite ceremonies of the temple, and of furniture typical of the first Jerusalem temple and its positioning. There may be a higher percentage of artisans in for example the settlement in Tel-melah than in Tel-harsha or a higher percentage of ex-Judean priests in the Cherub settlement than in Tel-harsha. The point is that each settlement via their delegate/s to the central writing circle in Casiphia remains informed about ongoing developments in the writings of the Casiphia circle.

Blenkinsopp remarks regarding the writing down of the prophet Ezekiel’s visions that memory plays a much greater role in cultures that are not dependent on the printed word than in today’s Western urban societies which are generally dependent on the written word. An Israelite writing circle in Casiphia could have collected cultic and customary information via delegates from the different settlements, then created the idea of the tent of meeting and its cultic world which was subsequently put into textual format. This then substitutes for the former Jerusalem

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An Israelite Writing Circle

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cultic world yet also preserves it. However, at that time (the late exilic to early Persian period), the collective memory of Israelite cult was still more important than the role of the written word.

Collective memory within the settlements likely moved from memories of an actual Jerusalem temple to Israelite cult in the form of the tent of meeting composition. It is certainly possible to remember and internalise the sense of the tent of meeting text. The tent complex text is a literary composition, lengthy, and not necessarily to be remembered word for word but its repetitive five panels structure facilitates memorization. Each panel has a different function:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panel 1</td>
<td>Command to make a place for YHWH (tent of meeting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 2</td>
<td>Israelis fulfil command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 3</td>
<td>Confirmation of fulfilment of command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 4</td>
<td>Moses commanded to assemble tent of meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel 5</td>
<td>Moses fulfils command</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The five panel structure achieves narrative progression through additions or variants to the fivefold repetition. Each panel is essential as the narrative moves from the realm of the divine in panel one to the world of human beings in panel two; Moses’ fulfilment of the commands in panel five brings closure to construction of the tent complex. The difference between God and humans is clear. A hierarchy of command is established with YHWH, Moses as the human spokesperson between God and the people, and the Israelites. As previously mentioned the tent complex text has an inherent logic. It can be remembered from several perspectives. Through the senses internal seeing is invoked with the hues of blue, internal hearing with the bells of the high priest’s vestments when he walks, internal smell with the incense of the altar in the foreroom of the tabernacle, and touch with the water in the purification basin before the entrance of the tent of meeting. Spatial memory works with the directions of the compass: the tent faces eastward, the ark is at the heart of the complex, and the table with the showbread is positioned to the north. Materials function in gradations of three—coverings as linen, tanned rams’ skins and fine leather, or metals as gold, silver and bronze. The aim of the memorization techniques is that an Israelite can remember the temple nature of the tent of meeting complex and journey into its cultic world, a place for YHWH. Both Carr and Lemaire claim that
biblical written literature is focused on oral performance and internalization.\textsuperscript{52} Their observation of biblical literature can certainly be applied to the text of the temple-tent, that the text of the temple-tent can be internalised.

An Israelite writing circle in the Babylonian Diaspora in a settlement such as Casiphia appears to be feasible. The environment was conducive to the communal collecting of customs and traditions, their writing down, and even the production of new texts. Blenkinsopp writes of the Mesopotamian intellectual tradition of the Neo-Babylonian period having an influence on the production of what became normative Hebrew texts.\textsuperscript{53}

The tent of meeting text is unanimously designated by scholars as priestly writing and the general consensus is that priests were the collators/writers. However, authorship of the tent of meeting text may well have been a writing circle made up of descendants of Judeans deported from Judah to the Babylonian Diaspora. Literate ex-Judean artisans, court personnel, farmers, priests and Levites could gather, discuss and write in Babylonia. Ex-Judean priests turned farmers may also have been in the writing circle but it cannot be said that the circle was predominantly priests.

Martin Noth comments on lay influence in the so-called priestly text of the tent of meeting in \textit{A History of Pentateuchal Traditions} (1948). He writes, “It deserves to be noted that the original corpus of the P narrative contains very few details about the performance of the sacrificial cult. Therefore, it hardly communicates specific priestly knowledge or exclusive priestly interests. Rather, it is concerned with questions and affairs which for the cultic community as a whole were of importance and interest.”\textsuperscript{54} Therein Noth gestures towards the important role of the Israelite in the priestly texts and possibly the idea that non-priests had input into the text. Lay people may have had a major involvement in the production of the tent of meeting text and may even have written themselves into the text. It is lay people who supply materials for construction of the tent, witness its dedication, validate the consecration of priests through their presence, and lay their hands on offerings or on the Levites for

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\item[52] Carr, \textit{Writing on the Tablet of the Human Heart}, 134.
\item[53] Blenkinsopp, \textit{The Pentateuch: An Introduction}, 236.
\item[54] Noth, \textit{History of Pentateuchal Traditions}, 243-44 and n. 635.
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consecration. The text has no secret corners. Anyone who knows the contents of the text of the tent of meeting has the same information as a priest.

Gerstenberger is another scholar to notice the importance of lay witness in the tent of meeting texts and possibly their production. Commenting on Leviticus 4–5, he notes the extensive involvement of the ordinary Israelite in the instructions. He observes that the text is not written exclusively from a priestly perspective. The concerns of the community are foremost. He sees hierarchical levels within the text as YHWH, Moses, Israel then the priests who are to serve the congregation. The altar is the centre of attention and viewed by all. For Gerstenberger the diversity of traditions in Leviticus suggests Diaspora not Jerusalem authorship. Gerstenberger’s observations suggest that since lay understanding of the text is so important then lay people could well have participated in the formulation of the text. Noth and Gerstenberger’s observations regarding lay involvement in the text and possibly in production of the text support the idea of moving away from the general uncritical understanding that the tent of meeting text was written by P meaning a group of only priestly writers.

If there is non-priestly involvement in the tent of meeting text, and a diversity of traditions probably more typical of a Diaspora than Jerusalem setting represented in the text, then it could well be the result of an Israelite writing circle in Babylonia. Members of the writing circle were involved in different professions in Babylonia and are better described as Israelites of different skills and professions than as a priestly group. The writing circle is made up of descendants of former Jerusalem artisans, scribes, and priests who have become farmers through force of circumstances. The writing circle is to be understood as Israelites expressing religious identity rather than as Judeans expressing geographic origin. Religious and cultic thought is articulated not adherence to nationhood in the tent of meeting text. Artisans have the practical experience to give input on the necessary words to create a word temple-tent.

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55 Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 75-76.
58 Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 533 considers that the P source elevates the roles of priests and artisans, but noteworthy is that there are no references to kings or prophets.
59 Blum has the idea of a priestly workshop in *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, 224, but my point is that one does not have to presume that only priests are in the workshop, non-priests can be involved too.
Artisans know how to adorn the temple-tent, how to give it Israelite features. The sumptuousness of the beautifully embellished tent of meeting betrays the eye of artisans rather than priests in the circle. This is not to say that priests cannot have an aesthetic sense but it is the skill of artisans to have size, proportions, measurements, materials and adornment at their finger tips as that is their trade. Perhaps the farming priests in the writing circle had to restrain the artistic fantasy of the artisans!

Ex-Jerusalem priestly families who became farmers in Babylonia may have integrated former priestly functions with newly acquired agricultural skills and given such input into the Diaspora writing circle. Many Israelites farmed in the Nippur region, a possible background to the agricultural and social instructions of Leviticus 19 or 25–26. The vision of the Jubilee in Leviticus 25 has literary and theological elements. The Jubilee vision emphasises social concerns, for example, that the after-growth of a crop is left for the needy to glean. Social problems such as debt-slavery, unjust rates of interest and slavery are recognised and addressed. Stolper’s work on the sixth century Murašû texts indicates a complex situation on the land from “primary landlords-contractors-tenants-subtenants-sharecroppers” in Neo-Babylonian times. It is a possible social background to the vision of the Jubilee. In exile the Israelites have no political power. They note social perils and address them with a social vision. They also put their energies into constructing symbolically and theologically a cultic community with a cultic tent at the centre.

The social state of Babylonian Israelites is that of a deported people. They cannot determine their political future but they can live according to the customs and traditions that they know and brought from Judah. The customs and traditions of Judah were probably adapted to life in the new country but they were still essentially Israelite customs and traditions, as opposed to Babylonian ways of living. To survive in Babylonia Judeans probably needed to maintain political discretion as they were an ethnic minority and a displaced people, even after one or two generations. The authors of the tent of meeting text were not oblivious of their contemporary reality. They carefully produced an apolitical text out of the context in which they lived without overt political involvement. They could not politically change their reality

60 Stolper, “Farming with the Murašûs,” 326.
but they could adapt their customs to have validity in Babylonia. Collation of social and ethical customs into the instructional genre as in Leviticus 11–27 is an exilic reworking of Israelite ways, encapsulated within the dominant Babylonian world.

The addressees of the temple-tent text are designated as the “children of Israel” (בני ישראל), the “assembly” or “congregation” (עדה). The addressees within the text are a cultic people outside time, not bound to a specific period and place. The genealogies of Numbers 1 building upon a leader within each tribe of Israel are social and symbolic constructs. The phrase “children of Israel” is timeless in that it addresses people of the same origin, whatever the historical period. The right to belong to the children of Israel and to be an addressee of the text is not based on nationhood. “Children of Israel” is cultic terminology in the temple-tent text, not terminology of nationhood. Addressees of the tent of meeting text are primarily a cultic assembly not a people of a nation.

Babylonian Diaspora Israelites worked to serve the needs of the Babylonian then the Persian overlords. In Babylonia, Judeans lived in an environment where the visual ideology of Babylonia with its ziggurats and temples pervaded. In the city of Babylon, Babylonian ideology was even more prevalent with Processional Street, the imperial palaces and quarters. Through intercourse with Babylonian systems, Judeans became acquainted with various titles for the different Babylonian gods. Not the unpredictable seasons of the Judean highlands but the Mesopotamian seasons were the reality. Against this Babylonian backdrop and the necessity to be non-political, the Judean groups adapted their traditions to the new circumstances.

In the tent of meeting text no attributes of God are given, perhaps to prevent the impression of competition with the Babylonian gods. For example, it might be offensive to Babylonians or Persians if they hear of Israelites calling their God the “Lord of Hosts,” “the Lord of Lords,” meaning the God of all gods. There are no hymns of praise in the tent of meeting text and in

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Noteworthy is that the addressees of the tent of meeting text are not called “children of Judah,” but “children of Israel,” thereby incorporating all Israelites wherever they might be, stretching from the Babylonian Diaspora to Egypt, Judah/Yehud, and former Samaria assimilated by the Assyrians. The concept is created that the God of Israel addresses the entire community. The cultic community is the cultic community of entire Israel not of Judah alone.
fact no prayers, except the priestly blessing (Numbers 6:24-27). Stages of cultic action are prescribed in the ritual instructions of Leviticus 1–7 but nowhere are there words prescribed to be announced along with the action. The action of the cultic instructions of Leviticus 1–7 is in contrast to the cultic presentation of Solomon in 1 Kings 8-17. When Solomon completes a house for YHWH he prays and sacrifices many animals. He prays with words such as “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,” (1 Kings 8:15). With rhetoric he also proclaims that “even heaven and the highest heaven” is not capable of containing YHWH (1 Kings 8:27).

In the tent of meeting text Israelites do not pray to God with statements of praise but are called to live through action and doing according to the instructions. No Israelite and not even Moses or Aaron in Exodus 24—Numbers 10 invokes God with a term such as, the Lord God. God talks of self with the words, “I am the Lord your God,” but nowhere do the people or assembly respond with statements such as, “you are the Lord our God.” Amidst the wealth of Babylonian gods and temples the authors of the tent of meeting text are minimalist with expressions for the Israelite God. In fact there are none. The Israelite way is following instructions and receiving the word, not calling God or applying attributes to God, according to the tent of meeting text.

C. Yearning for an Israelite Temple in Babylonia

Contrasts between Judah and Babylonia

Some contrasts between the Judean and Babylonian cultures are:

- Judah had one official temple in Jerusalem (in Judah, after Josiah, according to 2 Kings 23:1-28) for the one and only God of all Israel. Babylonian cities had many temples, each for a different god.

- Babylonian temple complexes, often consisting of temple, ziggurat and courtyard stood on temple land. Ziggurats because of their height were a feature of Babylonian temple complexes. The Jerusalem temple shared a wall with the royal palace and was in the
royal precincts, not a separate construction on its own land. The Jerusalem temple was smaller than the Jerusalem royal palace.

- Babylon and Nippur were urban cities and Jerusalem a small provincial one.
- Babylonian temples often functioned as urban government yet were to some degree independent of the king. Temples had extensive personnel, resources such as land and functioned as local tax depots. Members of important local families were often in leading temple administrative positions. Neo-Babylonian kings paid tributes to some temples (though royal tributes to temples obviously ceased when the Persians took over Babylonia). To some degree temples and kings were separate in Neo-Babylonian society. The royal complex of royal palace and the temple in Jerusalem was a combination of political and religious control.
- Extensive tracts of land were attached to Babylonian temples. Was land attached to the pre-exilic Jerusalem temple? Probably not.
- Babylonian temples often had their own workshops for artisans and archives. Did the pre-exilic Jerusalem temple have its own workshops for artisans and archives? Probably, but possibly not as extensive as those of the larger Babylonian temples.

Once the first generation of Judeans in Babylonia overcame the trauma of adapting to life in the new country, they probably settled down yet remained a minority in a foreign land. They were different from the dominant Babylonian culture, which may have given them a sense of transience and impermanence. Life for Judeans in Babylonia was culturally rich, and provided them with a catalyst to articulate Israelite identity in new ways. Diaspora Israelites lived “outside” the land (הארץ) of Israel. One of the challenges for Diaspora Israelites was to express being an Israelite in terms of being a people with the God, YHWH, but without a temple, nation, king or land. The need grew to identify ethnicity in terms of being Israelite as opposed to being a Babylonian, and as a minority people with no temple in a land of many temples.

Many Israelites farmed in the Nippur region and took the agricultural products to the Babylonian temples. The agricultural products functioned as tax payments. Animals supplied may have been used for sacrifice at the temples of the Babylonian gods. The Diaspora Judeans

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encountered the many temples of Nippur whenever they went into the city yet they had no temple to their God YHWH. They supplied animals to the Babylonians yet probably did not sacrifice according to their own customary Israelite rites. This may have induced and increased the desire amongst Israelites to sacrifice and worship in their traditional manner. Israelite sacrificial rites and traditions were different from those of the Babylonians.

The Judean monarchy disintegrated when the Babylonians took Judah and the line of Babylonian kings ceased when the Persians conquered the Babylonians. Political systems and power are impermanent. The stone temple of Solomon stood for over 430 years yet was destroyed in the siege of Jerusalem. Babylonian buildings were constructed from mud-bricks and prone to early decay because of the nature of mud as a material, together with the effects of the annual rainy season. The stone Israelite temple and the mud-brick Babylonian temples were transient. Cultic centres are destructible and decay. It makes sense that the Israelite spirit turned to the idea of an indestructible cultic place, one that could be carried anywhere, any time. Hence originates the idea of the temple-tent, a perpetual temple for all Israelites outside the land.

**Synchronicity of Thought**

A different reason to argue for positing the writing of the tent of meeting text in Babylonia is what can be called “synchronicity of thought.” Often the time is right for parallel thought in a society; an idea is in the air and in the process of articulation by one or more people at a similar time. For example, Charles Darwin worked on *Origin of the Species* while continuing to research and collect variants in different plant or animal groups. He held back from publishing his work for fear of opposition from the church establishment for whom he held regard. However, when he heard that Alfred Wallace held similar ideas on the evolution of life and was about to publish, it was a catalyst for Darwin to quickly publish his own work. Two men in the mid 1800s were both working on theories concerning the evolution of life,

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independently of one another, yet one published before the other and received recognition for advances to the field.

There is also “synchronicity of thought” with two different Israelite texts, probably coming out of the context of the Babylonian exile, and which involve imaginary temples, Ezekiel’s temple vision (Ezekiel 40–48) and the temple-tent text (Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28). Temples are obviously in the thoughts of deported Judeans. They are surrounded by Babylonian temples but probably do not have one of their own. Deported Judeans have no physical place where they can offer official sacrifice, so they yearn and dream of a temple. Ezekiel 40–48 is the vision of a temple. In Ezekiel’s vision, the extent of the temple with its gateways, recesses and vestibules is conveyed with the measurements of a reed. The temple has courts and chambers. Orientation is with bearings to the north and east. There are slaughter tables for sacrifices and an altar. God is portrayed as coming in glory and God’s glory fills the temple (Ezekiel 43:5). Ezekiel is the medium of the vision, which is then communicated to the “house of Israel” (Ezekiel 43:10).

Ezekiel’s vision at Chebar is different from the temple-tent of the Israelite writing circle however. Ezekiel hankers after traditional images such as the temple on top of the mountain (Ezekiel 43:12), resonating with David’s Zion. In contrast the temple-tent pattern is conveyed by God on top of a mountain and then inaugurated amongst the people on the flat. (Jerusalem was in the highlands but Babylonia lay in river valleys). Ezekiel alludes to a prince, meaning a monarchic leader (Ezekiel 44:3; 45:7) but there are no royal references in the temple-tent text. The temple-tent text has left the monarchy behind, or gone beyond yearning for such political structures. Ezekiel mentions distribution of land (Ezekiel 45) but there is no distribution of land in the temple-tent text. Land is mentioned in the temple-tent text but in terms of the ideals of sabbatical and jubilee years (Leviticus 25) rather than reality. This suggests that the Israelite writing circle has better adapted to life in Babylonia, living in the present and towards the future rather than the more traditional concepts of Ezekiel which look back. The writing circle is not focused on an actual return to the land of Judah, but living Israelite principles in Babylonia. The temple-tent text has left behind concepts of an Israelite nation with for
example, king and kingdom, ownership of land and a royal temple. The Israelite writing circle creates a word temple world that can be lived and practised by Israelites anywhere, anytime.

Summary

To summarise, biblical and historical evidence indicates that Israelites gathered for meetings in the Babylonian Diaspora. Ezekiel and Ezra use the terms, elders and leaders, which suggest that there was organised community life within the Israelite settlements. Passover was probably practised. It seems unlikely that the construction of Israelite cultic places in Babylonia was permitted in the exilic period by the Babylonians. In the early Persian period Israelite temple focus moved to the possibility of reconstruction of an Israelite temple in Yehud with the decree of Cyrus.

Many Israelites farmed land holdings in Babylonia. They appear to have integrated well into Babylonian society as many did not return to Yehud when the opportunity arose. Life in Babylonia was probably stimulating. Schools and archival units were often found within the Babylonian temple complexes. This degree of learning may well have inspired Israelites to collate and produce their own Hebrew writings. New Hebrew composition and the collation of Israelite customs by an Israelite writing circle in one or more of the settlements in the Babylonian Diaspora are feasible. Israelites were an ethnic minority in the Babylonian then Persian Empire. There was little chance of a return to Judean self-determination and nationhood in the context of imperial powers such as Neo-Babylonia then Persia. Religious writing such as writing an Israelite cultic world into a text was one way to define and retain Israelite identity and adherence to the Israelite God, YHWH, as a minority group living in a dominant culture.
Chapter 8

Creative Authoring:

The Temple-Tent Text

This chapter explores the second part of the hypothesis, “creation and authoring of the tent of meeting” text. Issues such as prerequisites for literary and writing competency are addressed in section A. Section B looks at examples of creative writing in the tent of meeting text as given by scholars such as Martin Noth, Volkmar Fritz, Hanna Liss and Mark George. New examples arising from the textual evidence are also presented.

I argue that the tent of meeting text is a non-priestly work, the product of an Israelite writing collective in the Babylonian Diaspora. No scholarly literature addresses composition specifically of the tent of meeting text. However, authorship of the tent of meeting text is implicitly addressed when scholars such as Noth or Blenkinsopp or Blum address composition and authorship of the priestly writings. A range of different concepts, from compiling to editing or writing, are used to describe the origins and development of the priestly writings. Verbs such as “to compose” or “to author” suggest creative writing. Verbs such as “to edit” or “to compile” suggest a composition based on pre-existing materials of some kind. The Babylonian Israelite writing circle most probably did not have pre-existing texts such as archives or documents. It is unlikely that they brought documents with them from Judah to Babylonia. Parchment is fragile, bulky and clumsy to carry. Deported Judeans were a people in disgrace and had succumbed to the victory of Babylonian forces. It is unlikely therefore that provision was made for the transport of national and cultural material. Any writing done by Israelites in the exilic or early Persian period in Babylonia was produced out of collective memory and creative writing and can rightly be designated free composition.
The tent of meeting text has more the flavour of Israelite cult than priestly esoteric. The textual evidence demonstrates that lay participation in Israelite cult is equally as important as that of priests if not more important. Martin Noth and Erhard Gerstenberger observe the significant role of lay people in Israelite cult as discussed herein in chapters 6 and 7. The tent of meeting text is more likely the product of an Israeli writing circle or circles in the Babylonian Diaspora than a priestly team at the Jerusalem temple.

Recent insights of Erhard Blum point to creative writing dimensions in the priestly material, which are applicable to the tent of meeting text. He prises open the not so clear area between redaction (something similar to editing) and original or free composition. In *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, he looks at the production of the priestly writings from two aspects, as a combination of original writing and redaction, and at its intra-textual complexity. He observes that not all sections of priestly writing follow what might be called a general P paradigm. Priestly writing uses a wide range of compositional techniques and different kinds of material. It may be based on pre-priestly material, be a reworking of pre-priestly material to varying degrees, or it may distance itself from material that it is using as its base. Priestly writing may be in contrast to or corrective of pre-existing material, without any sense of obligation to harmonise with the pre-existing material. Blum is saying that putting different literary pieces together and adding some new writing to make a cohesive whole, or an extensive reworking of pre-existent material, are both writing forms that resemble an original composition.

The question of the priestly textual production as either original document or a redactional layer is taken up by Thomas Römer in *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers*. Römer speaks of the priestly redactors as authors. He extrapolates from Blum’s writing that “free composition” was one of the roles of priestly redactor/author. Römer writes:

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1 Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, 222-224. Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, 146 n. 69 describes Blum’s work on the role of the Priestly Writer (P) as contributing “important nuances.”

2 Blenkinsopp writes of the priestly document as “a multi-generic, multi-generational document” in “Assessment of the Alleged Pre-Exilic Date,” 511.

3 Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 133, proposes too that the difference between biblical writers and redactors is not clear-cut.
According to Erhard Blum, the choice is not between a “redactional layer” and an “independent document.” One can only imagine that the authors, read priestly redactors, were involved just as much in freely composing certain passages of their work, as integrating already existing texts.4

Although Blum does not explicitly say that the priestly redactor/author freely composes, this is Römer’s reading of Blum’s work. The tent of meeting text demonstrates use by its authors of a range of different literary techniques such as symbolism, myth, mimesis and motif; it also demonstrates the development and combinations of the different techniques.

The point in mentioning Blum and Römer on Blum is their observation of free composition within the priestly writings. The tent of meeting text is not a “redactional layer.” However, no text comes from nowhere. The tent of meeting text is a new creation. It draws on traditions and information from the past. It is constructed from what were the existing language and concepts at the time but it is new. Structures and forms are required for the transmission of ideas and skills are required to author a text.

A. Criteria for Literary Competency

What is required for literary competency and writing? David Lodge, a contemporary English literary critic, offers criteria in an essay, “Creative Writing: Can it/Should it be Taught?” which well apply to writing throughout the ages. 5 The four following requirements for creative writing are extrapolated from his essay:

1. Organic whole,
2. Literary precursors,
3. Skill,

4 My translation of Römer, “De La Périphérie Au Centre,” 7, “Selon Erhard Blum, l’autre alternative ‘couche rédactionnelle’ ou ‘document indépendant’ est mal posée: on peut imaginer que les auteurs, voire rédacteurs sacerdotaux, se sont employé tantôt à composer librement certains passages de leur ouvrage, tantôt à intégrer des textes déjà existants.”
4. Purpose, intended audience.

1. **Organic Whole**

Lodge’s first literary requirement is that a text gives the sense of being an organic whole. This criterion is met in several ways in the tent of meeting text. The main theme, Israelite cult, is introduced in Exodus with the tent complex as cultic place, and continues with cultic regulations in Leviticus and identification of the cultic people in the book of Numbers 1–10. The cloud motif recurs at selected high points in the text. Structurally, the command-fulfilment pattern is applied throughout the text. For example, consecration rites for priests are prescribed in Exodus and fulfilled in Leviticus. The symbolism and significance of the twelve stones in the high priest’s breastpiece are developed in Numbers where the people are identified as a unity of twelve equal tribes and all called to participate in Israelite cult. The sensory world of the cultic environment builds as the text advances. For example a sense of holiness is developed in the course of the text as stories are added such as the death of Aaron’s two sons, or events described such as the entry of the high priest into the holy of holies on *Yom Kippur*. Holiness attracts yet it is fearsome if not approached with the correct attitude. As the stories and events accumulate, an atmosphere of holiness develops in the cultic space. The people are addressed throughout the text as “the (whole) congregation of Israel” or the “children of Israel.”

If parts of the tent of meeting text were removed, such as Leviticus 1–10, vital information on the cultic environment would be missing. Without the ritual prescriptions of Leviticus 1–10, the altar of Exodus would be an altar without ritual practices and therefore have no function. Without the account of the death of Aaron’s two sons in Leviticus 10 an important insight into ritual ceremony and the ramifications of approaching the holiness of YHWH would be missing. One could journey into the heart of the tent as invited in Exodus but the sense of awe and fear would be missing. Similarly, Numbers 1–10 defines and genealogically identifies the cultic people, the Israelites. Important information on the cultic people would be missing if the information of Numbers 1–10 was omitted. The tent of meeting text of Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 is an organic whole.
2. Literary Precursors

Literary competency grows out of and builds on prior literary traditions. For Lodge, literary precursors are writers who have gone before him. He recognises the influence of at least three authors, literary precursors, to his own writing, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, and James Joyce. He speaks of their writing techniques becoming integrated into his own work.

David Carr recognises the work of literary precursors in his research on textuality in regions such as Mesopotamia, Egypt and Israel in the ancient Near East. He talks of Israelite scribes as “building on templates.” They write “new texts by internalizing ancient ones.” They author “new works that often echo those works in which the scribal author was trained.” It is unlikely that Judean deportees took physical texts into the Babylonian exile. However, some deportees such as scribes or court officials were probably recognised as professionals in a technical writing sense. They had probably memorised and internalised Hebrew texts, anything from stories of a tent of meeting to chronicles of kings and genealogies of family lines. Traces of these primary sources are in the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text; much of the text of the tent of meeting can be described as elevated language or Classical Hebrew. (Elevated language is understood as different from the vernacular or spoken Aramaic dialect of daily life; it is lofty, written, literary, cultivated.) Other deportees would have carried concepts of YHWH and customary laws with them. The classic pre-exilic oral Hebrew texts—stories, sayings, formulations of the nature of YHWH—would have been precious to the Diaspora Israelites, an important link for them with their past. Hebrew was the elevated language of rites, sayings, and an elevated tongue with which they no doubt spoke of their God. With literary competency, phrases and blocks of the internalised classic and oral Hebrew texts could be moulded by an exilic writing circle into new stories and possibly even new words created. Associations made with a word or phrase within one story or concept can be used in new combinations in new writing.

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6 For Lodge, Greene uses the technique of heightening selected details with metaphor or simile, Waugh juggles between the familiar and incongruous, and Joyce makes the new re-enact or echo the old.

7 Carr, Writing on the Tablet of the Human Heart, 159.
3. Skill

Literary competency is the skill associated with the art of writing. When Lodge speaks of competency in regard to writing he means amongst other things technical writing ability. For the purposes of modern prose fiction, he lists point of view, narrative voice, frame-breaking, or time-shifting as required writing techniques.

The issue of literary competency leads to the question whether the prerequisite writing skills were available within the Israelite writing circle. It seems that many of the deported Judeans had literary competency, not only priests and Levites but court officials, sometimes military commanders and artisans too. Carr goes so far as to say that in some cases scribes “may have radically reused parts of older long-duration texts so that they were no more recognizable as wholes than reused architectural elements are in a village of houses made up of columns, lintels, and other parts of older buildings.” The radical reuse of parts of texts echoes Römer speaking of the “freely composed” texts earlier in this chapter. Members of the Diaspora Israelite writing circle with very varied professions had literary competency, not only the scribes, but the artisans, ex-officials of the Jerusalem court, priests and Levites too. All could probably write in some capacity, and all carried “texts” within them.

The Diaspora writing circle was so competent that the artisans even write artisan types into the tent of meeting text. The chief artisans have literary names such as Bezalel and Oholiab. Bezalel means “under the shadow” or “protection” of God and Oholiab means “father’s tent.”

The twelve stones of the breastpiece are described as being engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel by artisans (Exodus 39:14). As if that is not enough, Bezalel is described as “filled with divine spirit” (Exodus 31:3; 35:31), suggesting that his skills are God-like. The artisans engrave the rosette of the headpiece of the high priest with the words, “Holy to the Lord” (Exodus 39:30). In this manner, members of the writing circle assign the attribute of holiness to God, and through the artistic act of engraving the words

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8 Carr, Writing on the Tablet of the Human Heart, 168.
9 Propp, Exodus 19–40, 486-89.
make the claim, “God is holy,” an artist’s hymn of praise of YHWH through the text. It is a hymn of praise of action and writing.

4. Purpose, Intended Audience

A further literary criterion is that writing has a purpose and is directed with an audience in mind. Lodge asks, “For what purpose do modern writers write?” and replies that writers do not write into a vacuum. Writers do not write for the sake of writing, they write for a reason. Lodge regards some people as writing to process or work out something for their own benefit; they are addressing themselves or their family. Others write because they have something to communicate that goes further than self or family.

This leads to the question of a possible purpose for the writing of the Diaspora circle. The purpose of the Diaspora writing circle is to declare, “YHWH is with us in exile, not confined to Yehud and the land. We want a sense that YHWH is with us in exile in Babylonia. We want to be assured of this and know it. How do our traditions permit us to create a cultic space so YHWH is with us in Babylonia? Let us create or rework our former traditions to have YHWH dwelling amongst us as Diaspora Israelites.” The reworking of cultic space in Babylonia is not in competition with cultic place in Jerusalem. The cultic space is not the place of Babylonia. The cultic space is a conceptual space for YHWH in exile. The Israelites in the settlements yearn to have an Israelite cultic space. Some of them become a Diaspora writing circle, in tune with their fellow Israelites, and create a text that theologically demonstrates that God has a dwelling place outside of the land of Israel but not in competition with the traditional temple in the land.

Through the reconstruction of internalised texts that Diaspora Israelites have taken in their hearts and bodies into exile, a valid identity is created for their exilic selves out of the building blocks of the language of elevated Classical Hebrew. By the reworking of words and phrases of Classical Hebrew into something new, Diaspora Israelites have a direct link to their forebears and God. Thereby they give Israelite and theological relevance to their life in exile, and in fact all Israelites who live outside the land. The writing circle produces a theology,
giving assurance that God is with Diaspora Israelites. The tent of meeting text grows out of a yearning of exilic Israelites to give the Israelite God a space to appear, to dwell, to be with them in the Diaspora. Diaspora Israelites need and want to confirm their identity. We have a God, YHWH, who is our God. We can and do honour our God in our cultic space. We bring our God offerings and sacrifices.

**B. Creating the Temple-Tent Text**

Interest in the verbal building stones of the tent of meeting text is not new. Martin Noth, Volkmar Fritz, Hanna Liss and Mark George are just some scholars who reconstruct elements from which they think the tent of meeting text is made up. Each scholar takes a different approach and therefore different results are obtained.

1. **An Old Tent Plaque set within the new Temple-Tent**

For Martin Noth the tent of meeting of Exodus 25–31, 35–40 is a combination of concepts of tent and temple.\(^1\) He treats the newer tent of meeting as building on an older tent tradition, which is found in Yahwist texts such as The Consultation Tent (Exodus 33:7-11), Seventy Elders and Sharing of Responsibility (Numbers 11:16-25), and the story of Aaron and Miriam (Numbers 12:1-16). In the older tradition, YHWH comes in cloud or as a pillar of cloud. Some of the associations with the tent of the older tradition are the Israelites as a wandering people, the tent as a place to meet God, Sinai as wilderness and a holy mountain.

The temple nature of the tent complex text is influenced by notions allied with the first Jerusalem temple such as temple furnishings and God’s dwelling presence above the ark. One of the additions of the priestly writers to the Yahwist base narrative is the idea of God coming in glory (כבוד יהוה), supplementing the idea of God coming in a pillar of cloud. Noth proposes that the purpose of the literary fusion of old tent traditions and the Jerusalem temple for the

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\(^1\) Noth, *History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 243-47.
priestly writers is a form of corrective theology. Ancient Canaanite traditions of cult and God’s dwelling are revised with ideas of the numinous (supernatural) nature of God as was once upon a time at Sinai.

Noth focuses on one of most fascinating features of the tabernacle, the fusion of tent AND temple character which according to him is created by the means of concept transference, mentioned previously in chapter one. What is known as a tent of meeting, pitched outside the Israelite camp and at which God would appear in cloud at Sinai in olden times is combined with features of the Jerusalem temple of monarchic times. The associations made with the old tent of meeting are transferred to the new tent of meeting according to Noth by way of what he calls concept transference.

I agree with Noth that the temple-tent is created out of a tent of meeting tradition and knowledge of the Jerusalem temple, but for different reasons. The authors of the temple-tent text give us part of the answer themselves. What appears to be an older tent of meeting story tradition (Exodus 33:7-11 + 34:34-35) lies in the middle of the text, Exodus 24:15–31:18; 35–40, which relates to a different tent of meeting. Exodus 24:15–40:38 consists of three sections that relate to tents:

1. New Cultic Tent
   Exodus 24:15–31:18

2. Old Consultation Tent
   Exodus 33:7-11 + Exodus 34:34-35
   (within the unit: Exodus 32:1–34:35)

3. New Cultic Tent
   Exodus 35:1–40:38

Two different images of a tent of meeting are portrayed in the three sections. The tent of meeting of sections 1 and 3 is a cultic tent and the tent of meeting within section 2 is a consultation tent. The subject matter of sections 1 and 3 is consistently cultic with references to cultic objects such as altars and priestly personnel and their vestments. Text on the old

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12 Exodus 34:34-35 is allied with Exodus 33:7-11 via verbs relating to the tent of meeting. Moses and YHWH are the focus of all these sentences. The tent of meeting is not explicitly mentioned in Exodus 34:34-35; however, the verbs to go in (בָּאוּ) and to come out (וַיִּצָּא) suggest that it is a tent not a mountain that Moses is entering into and exiting from. In Exodus 33:7:11 God talks to Moses and in Exodus 34:34-35 Moses talks to God.
consultation tent lies within Exodus 32:1–34:35. It is a unit of varied material; the unit is often entitled, The Golden Calf.\textsuperscript{13} Exodus 32:1-34:35 involves more than just text on the old consultation tent. It a mix of events, stories and themes set at Sinai such as Disobedience of the People, the Making of the Golden Calf, YHWH’s Presence, Covenant Renewal, and Moses’ Transfiguration. The complexity of themes in Exodus 32–34, authorship and dating must be recognised and avowed but cannot be dealt with here as it would detract from the primary interest of this work, the tent of meeting.

The texts on the cultic tent and the consultation tent are very different. The temple-tent text of sections 1 and 3 is a sustained theme, lengthy and twelve chapters in total. Sections 1 and 3 consist of five panels and the pseudo-narrative advances panel by panel forwards. Several sophisticated literary techniques, such as Sinai as a mythic element, emblematic names, stereotypical characters, theophanies and symbolism, are used to develop the idea of the temple-tent. The Sinai setting suggests mythic place and mythic time. Sinai is a timeless zone between what went before, departure from Egypt, and the now. There is no indication of what comes next or after. Metals, colours, materials and spatial zones marked with screens are symbolic and reinforce the sense of zones of increasing holiness within the tent complex. The text contains words and images that activate the internal senses via the external senses. The Israelites are identified as symbolically made up of twelve tribes, represented by the twelve stones in the high priest’s breastpiece. Some of the temple-tent is described in photographic detail and the rest is gestured to, similar to the function of atmospheric background in many impressionist pictures. The temple tent text suggests a work that is crafted as a written work.

Section 2 (Exodus 32–34) is a series of different events and accounts in story form. It is a unit of three chapters and suggests oral stories that have been collected and later written down. The story of the consultation tent is entirely in the third person but relayed with simplicity and naturalness. The narrator functions as a “master of ceremonies,” facilitating movement between characters, dialogues and making observations in the narrative. The consultation tent of Exodus 33:7-11 with additional material in Exodus 34:34-35 is in story format whereby many moments could be embellished by a story teller such as the character of Moses,

\textsuperscript{13} Childs, Exodus, 553; Noth, Exodus, 241.
diversions made with the recall of stories of a pillar of cloud, the atmosphere at the entrance of the tent, the nature of YHWH. The consultation tent text suggests an oral story or tradition that is written down and the tent of meeting text, lengthy and sophisticated in style, suggests conception as a written text.

Memories of stories and traditions of their cultural past were probably collected, discussed and written down by members of the Israelite writing circle in Babylonia. Sections 1 and 3 are a new literary creation. The old story of the consultation tent in the middle of the entirely new temple-tent text has the function of a plaque set in the wall of a new building. A plaque may tell of an old building that stood on the site of the new building or a tradition that continues on amidst new ways in the new place. (Metaphorically the other old stories of section 2, Exodus 32–34, could be understood as memory plaques.) The Israelite writing circle in the Babylonian Diaspora places an older tent story amidst its idea of a new tent, a cultic tent. The older voice sits alongside the newer voice. An old tent plaque is set within the new temple-tent.

2. The Authoring Fantasy of the Writing circle

Volkmar Fritz’s first interest in Tempel und Zelt (1977) is the influence of Solomon’s temple on the structure of what he calls the tent sanctuary. His work starts with comparisons of temple accounts and archaeological evidence of Bronze Age temples such as those of Hazor, Shechem or Megiddo, the temple of Jerusalem and Arad and post-exilic temples at Elephantine, Gerizim, Leontopolis, and Lachish. He concludes that the Jerusalem temple is a temple in long house form, but something new in that it is an adaptation of a Syrian ante-temple type (temple with a portico). More influence from the greater Palestinian Syrian environment on the Jerusalem temple is apparent than from the Bronze Age Israelite temples. The Jerusalem temple is made up of an entrance hall (אֲרֻמּוֹת), nave (היכל) and holy of holies (דִּבְרֵי). The result of comparing the available evidence of the mentioned temples is that the format of the tent sanctuary is influenced more by the Jerusalem temple than by Israelite Bronze Age temples.

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14 Fritz, Tempel und Zelt, 27, 34.
Fritz’s second area of interest is Israelite temple furnishings; he surveys them in three categories, typical of pre-monarchic temples, the first Jerusalem temple, or of the tent sanctuary. Fritz observes that pre-monarchic cultic objects such as ark, altar and table feature in the tent sanctuary account but not objects of the Jerusalem temple such as the molten sea or bronze basins with stands. Fritz concludes that the furnishings of the tent sanctuary are influenced by the first Jerusalem temple but are not a reproduction of the Jerusalem temple. Therefore, the tent furnishings are not a copy of the Jerusalem temple environment.\textsuperscript{15}

Fritz’s study then moves from architectural styles and temple furnishings to the sanctuary as presented in the text. He compares different biblical accounts of temples and cult and observes at least four features of the tent sanctuary text that are particular to it.\textsuperscript{16}

1. Temple and cult are generally associated with the dwelling of God in a fixed location such as the Jerusalem temple. Unlike the temple, the Sinai tent sanctuary is about cult AND holiness, not only cult. In the tent sanctuary text, cult is portable not confined to one location, holiness is identified with people not cultic place.

2. The transition of holiness from physical place to people is paralleled in the concept of cult moving from a fixed temple to a moveable tent. God becomes associated more with a theology of appearing than concepts of dwelling in relation to the tent sanctuary.\textsuperscript{17}

3. Unique to the tent sanctuary text is that the source or beginning of holiness and cultic regulations is the word of God, what Fritz terms word theology. Therefore for him, the origin of the sanctuary is word theology.

4. The cover (כפרת) of the ark is an addition to the ark unit and therefore a new feature of the tent sanctuary text. No mention is made of the ark having a cover in accounts of the ark in Solomon’s temple.

\textsuperscript{15} Fritz, \textit{Tempel und Zelt}, 148, 166.
\textsuperscript{16} Fritz, \textit{Tempel und Zelt}, 147-51, 170-71.
\textsuperscript{17} Fritz, \textit{Tempel und Zelt},151, writes: “Indem die Wohnvorstellung durch die Erscheinungstheologie abgelöst wird, …” Fritz pushes his point here as a biblical text such as, “And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them (Exodus 25:8),” clearly associates the tent of meeting with the dwelling of God.
Fritz’s comparative archaeological study confirms that the temple-tent text reflects knowledge of the Jerusalem temple. It therefore post-dates it. However, it is not the reproduction of the Jerusalem temple, it is something different. This is apparent in the different architectural and spatial vocabulary used by the authors of the tent of meeting text. The first cultic building linked with Jerusalem and the monarchy is called a temple (היכל) or the house of the Lord (הבית ליהוה) (1 Kings 6:1, 37; 7:48, 51; 8:10), meaning the place where God dwells. The word temple (היכל) is found in post-exilic oracles such as Haggai 2:15, 18 and Zechariah 6:12-15; 8:9. The vocabulary temple (היכל) and the house of the Lord (יהוה בית) is used in Ezra and Nehemiah but never used in the tent complex text. Hebrew architectural terminology for the Jerusalem temple is entrance hall (אולם), nave (היכל), and sanctuary (מקדש or דברי). Terms for the different zones of the tent complex are court fence (חצר), the area before the entrance of the tabernacle (לפני פתח משכן), the tabernacle (משכן) or the sanctuary (מקדש).

The authors of the temple-tent text do not use temple vocabulary, probably in order to avoid the idea of a temple replica. The tent complex is something different. By not using the terms temple or house of God, authors of the tent complex text ensure that the Diaspora temple-tent is not in competition with the destroyed Jerusalem temple or some other official Israelite temple.

A change of technical vocabulary for Israelite cultic space is not the only innovation of the Diaspora writing circle; it is also the fantasy they muster. The tent complex has extraordinary architectural unity. The same architectural features, pillars with bases, hangings of linen, pegs and guy ropes, are used for both the tabernacle tent and court fence. The same materials, linen, metals, and acacia wood, are used throughout the complex. The blues of the linen hangings are echoed in the blues of the linen vestments of the high priest. Embellishment of the lampstand is described with photographic precision and with the interest of an artisan’s eye. The cultic furniture is carefully designed to be portable. Rings are attached to corners of the tent furniture, through which carrying poles can be inserted, so they are transportable on

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19 Koch, Die Priesterschrift, 37, writes of the “Phantasie von P.”; de Wette, Beiträge, 2:262.
foot. The tent of meeting text notes where each piece of furniture is to be placed within the tent-complex. The concern for detail and the application of camping design to temple-like cultic furnishings is in the realm of the fantastic. The tent complex is not the world of the real but the world of the imaginary. The fantasy world of the temple-tent is an example of creative writing.

3. Innovative Expansion of Divine Speech into Command-Fulfilment Form

A further feature characteristic of the temple-tent text and often noted relates to divine speech. Fritz observes the unique manner in which instructions are used in the tent of meeting text in what he calls “word theology.” The Israelite writing circle appropriates and develops the genre of divine speech. A comparison can be made with Ludwig van Beethoven who developed several compositional techniques in classical music to an extraordinary degree, sonata form in particular. Classical sonata form is made up of two sections, an exposition and a development. Two themes that are psychologically linked are introduced in the exposition and explored through harmonic and rhythmic development in the second section. Beethoven often pushed harmonic exploration and rhythmic variations of the thematic material of the first section to their limits in the development, thereby exploring un-thought of new possibilities and resulting in a lengthening of the sonata form. Sometimes instead of a short few bars to draw the piece to a harmonic close, known as the coda, Beethoven would insert a false coda, a further expansion of the genre. This is the type of exploration that the Israelite writing circle is doing with the divine speech form.

Typical of divine speech form is that God gives instructions to Moses to then relay to the people from a special place in nature such as a mountain or a plain at Sinai. The content of divine speech generally consists of social, ethical and customary ritual instructions. Examples

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20 Examples of false codas are the end of the first movement Beethoven, Symphony Nr. 3 in E flat major Op. 55, and the end of the fourth movements of Beethoven, Symphony Nr. 2 in D major Op. 36, Symphony Nr. 5 in C minor Op. 67; fourth movement of Haydn, Symphony Nr. 90 HB I/90 in C major.
of divine speech with standard content are found in the Covenant Code (Exodus 20–23), the Deuteronomic Code (12–26) and the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26).  

The Israelite writing circle makes several developments in the application of divine speech format within the tent of meeting text. Unique to the tent of meeting text is the change of location for law promulgation. It starts at a place of nature, Mount Sinai (the Exodus section of the tent of meeting text), then moves to the cultic place, the tent of meeting (in Leviticus and Numbers 1–10).

The standard content of divine speech is social, ethical and customary ritual instructions. However, in the Exodus part of the tent of meeting text the contents of the divine speech genre are instructions for construction of a cultic place and its personnel (Exodus 25–31). This is a change in the standard contents of divine speech from social and ethical to building and cultic instructions. It is a change in thematic material, to use the vocabulary of classical sonata form. Instructions for the design of the tent are “clothed” as divine speech. The divine speech genre is appropriated to communicate the tent pattern such that the divine speeches of Exodus 25–31 and 40:1-16 (panels one and four) can be designated a cross-over genre. Applying the genre of divine speech to instructions for the pattern of the tent of meeting gives them the aura of divine origin and authority.

The divine speech genre undergoes a further expansion, or doubling, to develop into the command-fulfilment structure. The command-fulfilment pattern is the structure, a divine speech section followed by a narrative section. As a generalization first and second person address in the divine speech of command section changes to third person in the fulfilment or narrative section. The narrated fulfilment section of the pattern is an almost word for word repetition of the instructions of the divine speech section. The speech section in the tent of meeting text consists of commands to build and consecrate an Israelite cultic centre. When the

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narration section is read, the act of reading becomes fulfilment of the command. Time-wise, the text is directed at the present, not at the future. The effect is that the instructions are not to be procrastinated into the future but lived and applied in the present.

There are insertions into the divine speech genre such as “I statements,” sentences where God speaks of self using the pronoun “I.” For example, God says, “have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it” (Exodus 25:8-9). The “I” refers to YHWH. No humans use the pronoun “I” in the temple-tent text.

The Diaspora writing circle does not explicitly assign attributes to YHWH, that is, say how or who YHWH is. Through the “I statements” something of the nature of YHWH is conveyed by the authors. YHWH wants to dwell among the people, meet with them. For this purpose YHWH shows the pattern for a cultic space (a sanctuary, literally meaning holy space). It is also YHWH who names the artisans and endows them with skills: “I have called by name …” “I have given skill to the skillful…” “I have filled him with divine spirit” (Exodus 28:3-4; 31:2-3, 6). God is the cause of action through being the giver of creative skills. The text conveys that YHWH is initiator of the tent of meeting concept and that God gives people the necessary skills to carry out the building tasks.

The Israelite writing circle develops the Mosaic divine speech form into a lengthy new literary structure of command-fulfilment, divine speech-fulfilled narration. Divine “I” statements are added to some of the speeches and become highlighted moments. The “I” statements are to the divine speech genre what theophanies are to narrative, manifestations of God.

4. God’s Place and the Temple-Tent Complex: Altar and Ark Unit

Hanna Liss approaches the sanctuary text influenced by Wolfgang Iser’s theories on fictionalization in two articles, “Kanon und Fiktion” and “The Imaginary Sanctuary.”

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22 See also, Exodus 29:42-46; 30:6, 36.
Examples of creative authoring in the tent of meeting text for Liss are the fictionalization of cultic objects such as ark and altar. She argues for the ark unit of the priestly writings as a new creation, made up of one new element, the cover and two old elements, ark and cherubim.

Liss starts with the ark at Shiloh (1 Samuel 3:3 and 4:1–7:1) in pre-monarchic times. In Shiloh the ark has two functions—as an object situated in the sanctuary, and as a military mascot when the Israelites do battle with the Philistines. The ark is described as the ark of God (אלהים ארון) or the ark of the covenant (ברית ארון). Of interest to us here is the ark as an object within the temple. It is given a long designation as, “the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim” (1 Samuel 4:4). Reference to cherubim suggests that cherubim are identified with the ark at Shiloh and reference to God as enthroned suggests that the ark functions as a throne, upon which God sits or dwells. 23

In a different text, 1 Kings 6:23-28, cherubim are identified with royalty and cult at Solomon’s temple. In the sanctuary of Solomon’s temple, spatial impressions are given—the wings of the cherubim fill the entire ten metres width of sanctuary space and the heads of the cherubim look forward into the nave. The ark is placed under the wings of one of the cherubim (1 Kings 8:6). The effect is disproportionate: a very small ark in relation to the very large cherubim. In the biblical pre-monarchic and Jerusalem temple traditions God is understood to be enthroned above the cherubim. 24

The priestly writers amalgamate the ark of the Shiloh tradition and cherubim of the Jerusalem tradition by way of a cover on the ark and bring the three parts—ark, cover, and cherubim—into a proportioned entity according to Fritz and Liss. They understand the cover to be an innovation of the priestly writer. 25 In contrast to the large cherubim facing toward the nave of Solomon’s temple, the cherubim on the ark unit face one another and look down in Exodus 25:20. Liss sees the newer ark unit of the sanctuary as a different entity to that of Solomon’s temple. The cover between the ark and cherubim is the new and unifying feature of the unit. It

24 E.g., 2 Kings 19:15.
25 Fritz, Tempel und Zelt, 147-48; Liss, “Imaginary Sanctuary,” 686. Influenced by Martin Noth’s doctoral work on Semitic names, Liss along with Koch and Görg identify the artisan Bezalel with Judah and Oholiab as a Danite of the north. Koch, Die Priesterschrift, 37; Görg, Zelt der Begegnung, 39.
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is a break from the former visual image of God dwelling on a cherubim throne as in the Jerusalem temple or the ark as a divine military aid. A new spatial location, the cover on the ark unit, stands for God dwelling among the Israelites (Exodus 25:8; 29:45). Liss stresses the significance of prepositions such as among (שָׁכֵן תָּנָכָד). According to her, the priestly writers use the preposition to move concepts of God’s presence away from predominantly the sanctuary to the people.26

Fritz sees holiness moving from cult and temple to among the people and Liss sees the dwelling of God moving from sanctuary to the people. It may well be as Fritz and Liss argue, that the ark unit of the priestly writers is a new creation with a new theology, but I want to make a different point. In my opinion the Israelite writing circle have two foci in the temple-tent text. They make the altar in the zone before the tent AND the ark unit in the sanctuary the major foci of the tent complex. For several reasons, the spatial areas of both altar and ark are important:

- Hands and feet have to be washed before going into the tent of meeting or going near the altar (Exodus 30:18-20). Therefore, it is to be understood that washing or purification is required before moving into the areas of the altar and the tabernacle.
- God wants to meet (nip‘al שלם) with the people, “from above the cover” of the ark (Exodus 25:22) or “at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord” (Exodus 29:42), the two major areas of focus within the tent complex.
- “I” statements of God which offer insight into what God wants are made in the altar area before the tent and in the sanctuary. The “I” statements of Exodus 25:22 and 30:6 are made above the cover of the ark in the sanctuary and those of Exodus 29:42-43 at the entrance of the tent of meeting where the altar stands. The ark unit is not favoured over the altar and the altar is not favoured over ark unit as a place to meet God.
- Information is abundant on the major locations of sanctuary and altar area before the tent of meeting. The areas of the sanctuary and ark unit are prescribed in Exodus and developed in the Yom Kippur narrative. The holy of holies is the most central space

26 Liss, “Imaginary Sanctuary,” 678-80, understands Hebrew prepositions such as (מתוך) and (בתוך) to convey spatial movement.
which a traveller can enter in the tent complex. It is the most enclosed space and in a
sense private. The high priest may enter the sanctuary only once a year but anyone who
knows the text knows the prerequisites for entry to the most holy place and may dare to
enter it in their imagination. The altar is positioned before the entrance of the tent of
meeting. All the rituals prescribed in Leviticus 1–7 are to be offered at the altar.
Offerings are brought to “the entrance of the tent of meeting, for acceptance in your
behalf before the Lord (לפני יהוה),” as stated in Leviticus 1:3.

- The two ritual places for *Yom Kippur* ceremonies are the sanctuary and altar area
  before the tent. Both the cover and the altar are sprinkled with blood from the
  sacrificial bull and goat.

The biblical text presents two foci—altar and ark unit—of equal importance at the complex of
the tent of meeting. When the tent of meeting text is set in the context of an Israelite in Neo-
Babylonia, 6-5th century BCE, animal sacrifice was standard ritual practice at that time,
common to the religious practice of different ethnic groups. Sacrifices of animals, food and
drink were made at temples of many cults in the ancient Near Eastern world. Israelites who
farmed in the Nippur region for example brought animals and agricultural products as a form
of payable tax to their closest Babylonian temple and thereby indirectly supplied the
Babylonian temple system. The Israelite temple-tent text calls for offerings of animals,
produce, and oil, standard forms of offering for religious practice amongst different ethnic
groups at that time.

The Israelite temple-tent text also provides for a newer form of religious expression, access to
the central point of their cultic place—the tabernacle tent by entering on a communal or
individual journey. Most Babylonian temples had a niche with a pedestal for the statue of the
major temple god at the centre of the temple.27 Perhaps the ark takes the place of the niche.
The ark is the focus at the innermost space of the temple-tent complex.

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5. Clay and Temples: Babylonian Influences on the Temple-Tent Text

In *Israel's Tabernacle as Social Space* Mark George posits production of the tabernacle text in Diaspora Babylonia. He has an interest in the effects of the Babylonian context on what he calls the priestly writers.\(^{28}\) To facilitate investigation of cross-cultural interchange between Babylonians and Israelites he applies theories of the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre to the tabernacle text. One of these ideas is that of social energy, meaning the exchange of ideas, symbols, objects or practices between one culture and another culture.\(^{29}\) One of the examples of social energy given between Babylonian and Israelite culture is that of the Mesopotamian practice of foundation deposits.

The Babylonians and the Achaemenids in the early Persian period used foundation deposits, inscriptions that were put inside a stone container then placed in the foundation or wall of a building.\(^{30}\) Contents of the inscriptions ranged from details of the building process, inventories of the building materials to the name of the person commissioning the building. The building may be new or the reconstruction of a former building. More often than not, excavated foundation deposits are those of a palace or temple and linked with a king thereby indicating a royal context. One of the purposes for such deposits was divine sanction. The foundation deposit can then be said to be associated with a range of ideas such as: something written, placed inside a part of a building, royal, legal or divine imagery. The symbolism of the objects and acts can move from one culture to the next.\(^{31}\)

George makes a case for the tabernacle narrative as a building inscription. The contents of Mesopotamian building inscriptions ranged from indication of divine command, lists of materials and construction plans, to blessings and curses. As Ningirsu relays to King Gudea of Lagash (circa 2100 BCE) in a dream plans for a temple, so YHWH dictates plans for the tabernacle to Moses in divine speech format. Construction materials are listed on the Gudea

\(^{28}\) George, *Israel’s Tabernacle*, 9-10.
\(^{29}\) George, *Israel’s Tabernacle*, 148.
\(^{30}\) George, *Israel’s Tabernacle*, 152-57.
\(^{31}\) Sarna, *Exodus*, 160 n. 16, makes a connection between Moses placing the tablets of stone in the ark and the ancient Near Eastern practice of depositing legal documents in a sacred place.
Cylinder A and in the tabernacle text. George understands the structure of the priestly tabernacle with its various sections and contents to be an appropriation of a Mesopotamian literary form.

Another form of social energy, according to George, is a parallel between the ark and the building deposits. The ark functions as a depository box for legal documents such as the tablets or a testimony between YHWH and the people. Contrary to Liss, George sees the cover of the ark as having a separating not unifying function, keeping cherubim and chest apart. George associates the cherubim with royalty and the ark with a depository box. For George the words of the building inscription are written by the finger of God on the testimony (عاش) or tablet. It is not clear to human understanding how or whether God really writes words on the tablet. God does not have human hands to write, or, does one think of God writing via human hands. This query cannot be solved here; God is said to write on the testimony or tablet is put into the ark, which is then put into the sanctuary.

George’s parallels between Mesopotamian and Hebrew building texts build on the work of Victor Hurowitz. Hurowitz summarises in his 1985 paper that in its entirety, not its parts, the priestly account of the tabernacle resembles what can be called an ancient Near Eastern building temple account according to the sequence of building events. However, particular to the tabernacle account is repetition of the building story in both the command (Exodus 25–29) and fulfilment (Exodus 35–40) structure. More sober in his assessment of parallels between Hebrew and ancient Near Eastern literature than George, Hurowitz concludes that the sequence of events in the tabernacle building account is typical, but he does not go so far as to suggest that it is an appropriation of an ancient Near Eastern building inscription format as George does.

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33 George, Israel’s Tabernacle, 162-67. Further examples of ancient Near Eastern accounts of temple building are Tigrath-pileser I’s (1114-1076) restoration of the Anu and Adad temples in Ashur, Nabopolassar’s (625-605) account of building Etemenanki, and Nebuchadnezzar II’s (605-562) account of rebuilding Etemenanki in Victor Hurowitz, I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings (JSOTSup 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 69-70, 82-4.
Several aspects of George’s ideas are difficult to accept. It is inventive that the tabernacle account is equated with the testimony (עדות) of the tabernacle and even more fanciful than theories that the Ten Commandments or a legal code of the Torah are on the tablets put into the ark. On one hand, it seems unlikely in a practical sense that the tabernacle text is inscribed on the tablets, Exodus 24:15—Numbers 10:28 or even part of the text. On the other hand, the Hebrew text does not reveal what was written, or not, on the tablets or testimony. It is just not known. Much social energy is circulating but George does not make it sufficiently clear whether the significance of Mesopotamian objects is literal or symbolic. He appropriates them into the Israelite culture, out of which a new set of symbols and meanings emerges. The idea of cultural movement, from vague symbols to a new set of even vaguer symbols is tenuous. Though royal vocabulary and royal symbolism is avoided in the tent of meeting text, George reintroduces royal and monarchic concepts unnecessarily to the tabernacle text.

George does attempt to articulate influences of the Babylonian culture on those Israelites generating the tabernacle text. It is not easy at the best of times to articulate exchange between cultures. However, for me, two all-pervasive Babylonian cultural influences on the Israelites are temples and clay. The influence of a temple abundant environment in Babylonia on the Israelite writing circle is the yearning for an Israelite temple. Mud as a construction material is short-lived and implies impermanence.

Babylonian buildings, from the humble family home to imperial places and temples, were made from mud-bricks which were susceptible to water. The bases of walls slowly eroded from water splash because of rain and roofs caved in. The susceptibility of the mud-brick as a building material accounts for the frequency with which one reads of Babylonian kings restoring temples on former sites. Restoration was as frequent if not more frequent than new building projects. Stone was rare and if used then for absolute necessities such as the bases for the hinges of doors in palaces. The lifespan of a mud-brick building was barely a few years. Despite the extent of the Babylonian temples, Babylonian buildings scarcely withstand the elements and suggest impermanence and transience. In contrast the stone temple of Solomon stood for over three hundred and fifty years (from Solomon’s reign 968-928 BCE to the
destruction of Jerusalem temple in 586 BCE), yet it was destroyed. Stone and mud-brick temples are destructible, therefore impermanent and transient. Against this background the Israelite writing circle had the idea of a temple which is permanent and intransient, a temple of the word, and therefore created the idea of the temple-tent text.

Summary

Writing of a text is a creative act; it requires competency and a purpose. There were certainly Israelites in the Babylonian Diaspora with literary competence: artisans, former priestly families of the Jerusalem temple, and former Judean business people turned farmers. They created the temple-text for cultic purposes: to have YHWH among them, and among all Israelites in the Babylonian Diaspora communities. All members of the Israelite writing circle, and members of the Israelite settlements whom the writing circle served, carried Israelite customs, stories of YHWH, and memories of the Jerusalem temple within them.

One of the common stories was probably that of a consultation tent, a traditional place to encounter YHWH, and set amidst the new text of a sophisticated temple-tent complex. The consultation tent text functions similarly to a building plaque. The Israelite writing circle applied creative fantasy to the temple-tent, adorning it with amazing artistic features and designing the cultic furniture with fittings to allow transport. A conventional genre such as divine speech is innovatively expanded into the command-fulfilment pattern. The writing circle gave the tent complex two foci, the altar at the entrance of the tent and the ark unit in the sanctuary. One focus is public, the other less obviously public. The idea of an Israelite cultic world of the word within a text was in response to the transience and impermanence of the many Babylonian temples, and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. A cultic world in a text is indestructible, and portable.

The degree of historicity in the biblical accounts of Solomon’s temple is difficult to determine. If there is archaeological evidence of Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem, it is under the Dome of the Rock, an area not accessible for excavation and unlikely to be available for excavation in the foreseeable future.
Chapter 9

Cultic World of the Book:

From a Real to an Imaginary Temple

The final section of the hypothesis proposes that a text about an Israelite cultic tent and cultic world takes the place of an actual physical temple. The concept of substitution involves issues such as: How does a text relating to cult substitute for the practice of cult? What is the difference between texts that recount something that actually existed and texts that portray a representative world? The discussion involves differences between reality and mimesis (representational reality).

The last part of the hypothesis is approached from three angles and where material is available: literary theory, biblical texts on temples, and what some scholars write about the tent of meeting as a textual temple. The first angle is a return to David Lodge’s literary theories, this time not to literary competency but differences between realism and mimesis.

The second angle looks at three Hebrew Bible texts on Israelite cultic worlds. There are several texts on temples in the Hebrew Bible and two of those, 1 Kings 6–8 on Solomon’s temple and Ezekiel’s vision of a temple, are read in conjunction with the temple-tent text. The three biblical texts, Solomon’s temple, Ezekiel’s vision and the temple-tent text are discussed in relation to degrees of realism.

The third angle presents what several scholars say about the tent of meeting text as a substitute for an actual temple.
A. Mimesis and Realism

A short overview of connections between the literary theories of Aristotle, Ricoeur, Lodge and Fry in the visual arts context ensues, as it is these theories that have informed my reading of temple texts in the biblical context. One of the earliest works in the Western world to treat the principles of creative writing is Aristotle’s *Poetics.* For Aristotle, poetics, from the Greek verb ποιεῖν meaning to act, to do or to make, is about the making of the arts. It can be the production of literature through the means of words or a picture through painting or musical composition by means of harmony and rhythm. Artistic production demands skill, τέχνη in Greek. Lodge addressed skill in terms of literary competency in the context of writing.

In speaking of the arts in general Aristotle introduces the concept of mimesis, imitation, or artistic representation. Roger Fry, English art critic, turns to the concept of mimesis also to explain how painters communicate what they see via an impressionist painting and then the effects on a viewer. Parts of the tent of meeting are painted with great detail and other parts are gestured to, in an impressionistic manner. Some passages in the tent of meeting may touch the internal senses of the listener or reader and become highlights, from the colours of the sanctuary wall hangings, or the smell of incense, to a feel for the atmosphere surrounding the altar where offerings are made. If a receiver of the text engages in words or phrases that function as sensory triggers then their imagination is activated, and the inner world of the text is open to being understood as three dimensional in the mind of the receiver. Previously the gesturing or showing style of ritual action in Leviticus was described as mimetic. A sense of ritual is communicated in the prescriptions for the burnt offering of a bull. The order of actions, the person responsible for some of the actions, and even co-action are not always prescribed. Some stages of offering rites are prescribed in Leviticus and other stages left out. Gaps in the prescriptions allow or even provoke active understanding on the part of the listener or reader. They fill in what is not explained within the text via informed imagination such as customary knowledge.

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The result of Paul Ricoeur’s methods leads him to claim that all writing and in fact all human verbal communication is mimetic. However, he does go on to establish criteria typical of fictional and of historical writing. Characteristics of fictional writing are words that function as symbols of “referral,” the mixing of time zones, and the “as-if” nature of non-historical writing. Via philosophic analysis Ricoeur arrives at the stance that fictional and historical writing are both mimetic writing forms. However, he still differentiates between fictional and historical writing and thereby indicates that there are degrees of realism in mimetic writing. Writing can be more mimetic or less mimetic. There are greater or lesser degrees of realism.

Aristotle moves from mimesis, the representation of reality in different art forms, to address types of literary writing. He distinguishes between tragedy and comedy though Aristotle builds his literary theories in Poetics, primarily on his analysis of tragedy. What all these theorists are doing is establishing different levels of writing. Tragedy deals with serious action which he describes as noble; comedy deals with the ludicrous which he describes as ugly. Comparison of different kinds of literature is done by some literary theorists in order to demonstrate degrees of realism and mimesis. M. Bakhtin differentiates for example between the Greek Romance, the adventure novel of daily life, and the biographical novel, or E. Auerbach takes the literature of Homer and the Old Testament as two styles for comparison in chapter one of Mimesis. Auerbach talks of levels of writing from the sublime to the grotesque, the elevated and mundane in the epilogue of his book. From this point on, the literary theories of David Lodge are used to develop a discussion on realism and mimesis.

Lodge’s The Practice of Writing serves us for two reasons. He demonstrates that reality is the basis of fictional writing, and he proposes a scale of degrees of fiction running from realism to fabulation in novels that can be appropriated and adapted for texts on temples in the Hebrew Bible.

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1. Creative Writing Builds on Reality

Lodge advances ideas on fact and fiction in relation to literature in several essays in his book, *The Practice of Writing*. Lodge speaks of the writer being caught between a desire to claim an imaginative and representative truth and a respect for empirical fact. While Ricoeur notes that all writing, historical and fictional, is more mimetic or imitative than commonly thought, Lodge notes that fictional writing builds on reality to a greater degree than usually warranted.

For Lodge facts come from the writer’s own experience or acquired knowledge. Fiction is bound to the world of facts. It is made up from data culled from observation of the world. In the essay, “Fact and Fiction,” Lodge gives examples of his reworking of information and experiences that then become fiction in his 1984 novel, *Small World*. He writes of the background to his novel:

*Small World* resembles what is sometimes called the real world, without corresponding exactly to it, and is peopled by figments of the imagination. Rummidge is not Birmingham, though it owes something to popular prejudices about that city. There really is an underground chapel at Heathrow and a James Joyce Pub in Zurich, but no universities in Limerick or Darlington; nor, as far as I know, was there ever a British Council representative in Genoa. The MLA Convention of 1979 did not take place in New York, though I have drawn on the programme of the 1978 one, which did.

There is sufficient normality, examples of reality, in Lodge’s novel to make its world comprehensible. Towns have names that do resemble names as in the real world. Common public places of first world cities such as an underground, a pub and a university become part of the literary context. Human organizations such as the British Council or gatherings such as literary conferences are mentioned.

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3 Lodge, *Practice of Writing*, 27. It is not uncommon for authors to write a proviso prior to the start of a novel regarding how much of the contents of the story are founded in reality or not, from names and places to events.
Similarly, the environment of the tent of meeting is full of things that one would expect to find in an Israelite temple, an altar, lamps, an incense stand, a central or inner zone such as the sanctuary. The sanctuary of the tent of meeting contains the ark unit, typical of an Israelite sanctuary, rather than a niche for a god, typical for a Babylonian temple. Instruments necessary for the functioning of the altar, to deal with fire and for the collection of blood such as pots, shovels, basins, forks, and fire pans (Exodus 38:3) are mentioned in the tent of meeting text. In comparison, pots and kettles, forks, sacrificial boiled meat are noted in association with the priests at the sanctuary in Shiloh (1 Samuel 2:13-15). In Ezekiel’s temple vision, provision is made for chambers where the officiating priests can eat the grain, sin or guilt offerings (Ezekiel 42:13) but not for utensils that relate to a functioning altar. The cultic environment of the tent of meeting has similarities with other biblical texts relating to cult but it is also different and unique.

Fritz’s research on ancient Near Eastern and Israelite temples demonstrated that the tent of meeting is influenced by the form and proportions of Solomon’s temple. Based on Fritz’s assessment of the archaeological evidence one can say, yes, Solomon’s temple preceded the tent of meeting text and most probably inspired it. The tent of meeting does have a basis in reality, that of Solomon’s temple. The tent of meeting text builds on the idea that Israelites do have a temple in their cultic tradition.

The literary forms of the tent of meeting text build on existing literary forms as does Lodge with the structure of his novel which is inspired by that of the legend of King Arthur. The quest for the Holy Grail in the Arthurian legend becomes the quest for a woman, Angelica Pabst, by a certain man, Persse McGarrigle, in Lodge’s novel. Lodge’s revised version of the quest genre evolves out of an existing genre. The command-fulfilment pattern of the tent of meeting text is an extension of the divine speech genre as typically found in Exodus 20–23 or Deuteronomy 12–26. Divine speech, generally used for the promulgation of social and ethical instructions, is appropriated as a literary form in the tent of meeting text and used for promulgation of plans for construction of a building. The tent of meeting text is more sophisticated than the development of just one literary form as a literary temple template is also incorporated into the form. Victor Hurowitz proposes that there was a literary temple
template in the ancient Near East with a sequence of stages some of which are divine command for a cultic centre, preparations for construction, construction and description, dedication, and blessing. The temple template is incorporated into the command-fulfilment pattern which is an extension of divine speech genre. The Israelite writing circle developed writing genres that were prevalent at the time.

In Lodge’s novel, *Small World*, the name of one of the characters, Fulvia Morgana, is an adaptation of Morgan Le Fay, the powerful sorceress in the Arthurian legend. Fulvia Morgana, stands in contrast to the knight-like role of the other main character Morris Zapp. She is stereotypical, serving to illustrate a type of person, a woman with a strange seductive power. The use of stereotypical names is often a criterion of fiction rather than non-fiction realism. In the tent of meeting text, Moses and Aaron are the names of two persons who become identified with a role. Moses is associated with the giving of law and Sinai. He is the human vehicle for divine speech and is the medium through which the construction plans for the cultic tent are communicated. The name Aaron stands for Israelite priests. Stereotypical names, illustrating a type, such as Fulvia Morgana’s or Moses’ name, indicate fictional writing.

Creators of the temple-tent text build on different forms of reality and pre-existing literary structures. The tent of meeting text is inspired by what is already in the Israelite culture: knowledge and memory of an actual Jerusalem temple, existing literary forms such as divine speech, institutions associated with certain persons such as Moses with law and Aaron with cult and priests. Moses and Aaron are brought together in the temple-tent text. The temple-tent text grows out of what already exists and is a development of pre-existing forms and concepts.

2. Scale of Degrees of Fiction: from Realism to Fabulation

The second point from Lodge’s work relates to a scale of degrees of fiction within literature. The degree to which reality is faithfully imitated in literary writing varies. Lodge understands

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mimesis as the “realistic imitation of ordinary life.” At one end of the scale is realistic writing which Lodge terms traditional realism. It is strongly based in reality. At the other end of the scale is inventive writing or fabulation. It displays an excessive cultivation of the fictional and is loosely related to reality. A scale which differentiates between degrees of realism is reminiscent of Aristotle’s distinction between classical high tragedy and low comedy. It is not easy to distinguish between degrees of fact and fiction, as most literature is a mixture for Lodge of “history and mimesis.”

Two of the characteristics of what Lodge calls the “traditional realism” end of the realism scale in writing are a mimetic representation of experience and an organised narrative. A mimetic representation of experience creates an illusion of reality that is not fundamentally challenged or questioned within the text. In texts with a greater degree of realism narrative is organised according to a logic of causality or coherent temporal sequence. Examples of traditional realism in modern writing given by Lodge are Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (1965) or Bill Bryson’s travelogues. He calls the narrative style of these authors empirical. The manner in which reality is presented is empirical and resembles media film in terms of degrees of realism.

Characteristics of the loosely realistic end of the realism scale, or fabulation, are magic realism and relevant inconsistencies. At the fabulation end of the realism scale are works such as those of Salman Rushdie, or Peter Carey’s *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* (1994). As already mentioned, the difference between fiction and non-fiction is not always easy to discern.

Thomas Keneally’s book, *Schindler’s Ark* (1982), is ambiguous in this regard. It is described by some as an historical novel. It was published as non-fiction in the USA yet in 1982 it gained the Booker Prize for best novel. It is the quantity of relevant inconsistencies that suggest the fabulation end of the scale of degrees of mimesis in the tent of meeting text.

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7 Lodge, *Practice of Writing*, 5.
However, the temple-tent text is a mix—it has the characteristics of both traditional realism and fabulation. It has characteristics of traditional realism in that the illusion of reality is not fundamentally questioned within the text. The cultic world portrayed within the text is not challenged by the narrative characters. For the large majority of the text Moses obediently communicates God’s words to the people and the people obediently bring building materials to construct the tent as prescribed. The temple-tent text also has examples of fabulation. Irregularity enters the cultic world when two of Aaron’s sons deviate from the prescribed instructions (Leviticus 10). The consequence is unexpected. Fire comes out from the presence of God and consumes them. This is magic realism in Lodge’s terms as the consequence of cultic deviance is as dire as death. The two sons do not die according to a natural or accidental disaster. They die because they do not adhere to cultic prescriptions within the world of the text.

Examples of incongruence, or in Lodge’s terms relevant inconsistencies, between narrative settings and contents are throughout the tent of meeting text. Relevant inconsistencies range from rare metals and aromatic spices being available in the wilderness in Exodus, the daily offering of bulls and other animals in urban style temple rituals in Leviticus, and a people of over six hundred thousand men organised in groups of twelve tribes in the book of Numbers 1–10. The temple-tent text is a mix of realism and magic realism.

Though Lodge’s idea of a scale of degrees of realism is based on his analysis of the genre of the novel, the idea of a scale opens the way for the comparison of three biblical texts relating to texts on temples in the Hebrew Bible. The biblical text on Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 6–8) is at the traditional or empirical end of realism and Ezekiel’s temple vision (Ezekiel 40–48) at the fabulation end. The text of the tent of meeting stands between traditional realism and fabulation. Degrees of realism in the text are in the realm of literary evidence. In the following three biblical texts on temples, cultic issues such as God and people, rites and personnel, and the cultic building, are noted and compared.
B. Biblical Temples and Degrees of Realism

1. Traditional Realism and Solomon’s Temple

The account of Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 6–8) is at the traditional realism end of Lodge’s scale. It is told predominantly in the third person with waw (ו) consecutive clauses, the standard narrative style in the Hebrew Bible. Place and time are transmitted in a factual style with the narrator’s voice in the framework narrative. The setting is Jerusalem, in the land of Israel (1 Kings 8:1). The date is 480 years after departure from Egypt in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign, in the second month (1 Kings 5:1). Two dating formats are used, theological dating according to years after deliverance from Egypt and regal dating based on an official line of kings. The regal chronology transmits a sense of historical coherence. A royal line precedes Solomon and continues after him and Jerusalem continues to be the royal city and central place of worship of Judah for approximately another 350 years. The theological dating signals to a history of a relationship between YHWH and YHWH’s people.

Dates of Solomon’s reign create a sense of historical authenticity. Remains of Solomon’s temple likely lie under the Temple Mount today. Finkelstein and Silberman observe that despite extensive excavations of biblical Jerusalem no signs of Solomon’s temple let alone simple pottery shards have been found at the 10th century BCE level when, reputedly, Solomon’s city is to have existed. Finkelstein and Silberman’s observation is sober and there is not in fact tangible evidence, yet, for Solomon’s temple, though it is commonly accepted that there was a temple at what is called today the Temple Mount.

The biblical evidence on Solomon’s temple can be converted into travelling guide format for a visitor to Jerusalem at the beginning of the ninth century BCE. The guide might supply a list of Israelite kings starting with David, followed by Solomon then Rehoboam. It might suggest that word of mouth regarded Hiram of Tyre as the main architect of the royal complex, list the

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11 Many study bibles print a chronological table of rulers which adds to the sense of historicity.
expensive materials, comment on the amount of money spent to build the royal complex in relation to Gross National Product and finish with one sentence about the royal chapel, built along one side of the royal complex. Information in the travel guide indicates that there really was a temple that could be visited. As described in the biblical text, Solomon’s temple is at the empirical end of the scale of degrees of realism.

A cult or worship system is more than a building. Cult personnel and rites are required. Listed among Solomon’s high officials are not only a recorder and commander of an army but also priests. There is Azariah son of Zadok, Zadok and Abiathar, and Zabud son of Nathan, described as a priest and king’s friend (1 Kings 4:1-6). Rites at Solomon’s temple are not communicated in ritual detail but a sequence of events for the dedication of the temple is given in table 9.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Scriptural Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bringing up of the ark by the priests and Levites</td>
<td>1 Kings 8:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King sacrifices animals before the ark</td>
<td>1 Kings 8:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priests bring ark into the inner sanctuary of the house</td>
<td>1 Kings 8:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theophany</td>
<td>1 Kings 8:10-11ba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King blesses the assembly</td>
<td>1 Kings 8:14-61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King consecrates the court</td>
<td>1 Kings 8:64a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King makes further offerings</td>
<td>1 Kings 8:64b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closure of dedication celebrations</td>
<td>1 Kings 8:65-66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 9.1 Rites at Solomon’s Temple*

Though priests are listed among Solomon’s high officials in 1 Kings 4:1-6, priests are not named in the account of the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8:4-66. Priests, without name or specific rank, bring the ark into the temple and set it in its place in the inner sanctuary (1 Kings 8:10). As the priests exit the temple, a theophany takes place, one of many biblical typologies. Common characteristics of or typical to a theophany is vocabulary such as cloud (ענן) and glory (כבוד), God appears or fills the cloud (with divine presence), and cloud often signals a privileged event. In the tent of meeting text there are two theophanies, one on Sinai where Moses receives instructions for the plan of the tent of meeting (Exodus 24:15-18) and
the other on completion of the tent of meeting (Exodus 40:34-38). The theophany occurs in the account of Solomon’s temple after the priests have placed the ark of the covenant in the sanctuary and exit the sanctuary (1 Kings 8:6-13).

However, in the account of Solomon’s temple the theophany seems incidental. Solomon dominates the dedication account as can be seen in the sequence of events in table 9.1. Whoever the priests are at the temple dedication, they are background to Solomon as the centre stage character. Solomon pronounces the words of dedication “I have built you an exalted house a place for you to dwell in forever” (1 Kings 8:13). Solomon functions as priest and blesses the people (1 Kings 8:14). Solomon stands before the altar and before the people of Israel, spreads out his hands (1 Kings 8:22), and makes a prayer with seven petitions. At the end of the prayer, Solomon and all Israel offer sacrifices to God. The king and the forms of power associated with a king dominate the temple account.

The means by which God speaks in the three biblical temple texts varies. Complex literary conventions allow God to speak to humans. The person who receives God’s word bridges two worlds, the divine and the earthly. In the royal temple account the role is assigned to Solomon with the prophetic word formula “the word of the Lord came to Solomon” (1 Kings 6:11). Solomon becomes the conveyor of the divine word. Before construction of the temple God says to Solomon, “I will dwell among the children of Israel” (1 Kings 6:13) and after the dedication celebrations, “I have consecrated this house that you have built” (1 Kings 9:3). The anthropomorphic wishes of God in the account of Solomon’s temple are the desire to dwell amongst the people of Israel and to consecrate the cultic place. The wish of God to dwell and to consecrate is transmitted via “I” statements in a similar manner in the tent of meeting text (Exodus 29:44-45).

Solomon’s temple account is at the empirical end of the realism scale in regard to the temple as a building. Several literary devices are used to convey theological dimensions such as divine affirmation of the temple with a theophany and the imparting of the words of God with

13 Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O’Brien argue for an exilic and Diaspora setting for the seven petitions in the “Present-text potential” sections of Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 354-57.
a prophetic speech introductory formula. Priests and cult are mentioned but are background to Solomon as king who dominates the account.

2. Magic Realism and Ezekiel’s Temple Vision

Ezekiel’s vision of a temple stands at the fabulation or inventive end of the scale of the selected three biblical texts on temples. Magic realism is one of the characteristics of fabulation for Lodge and characteristic of the contents of the visions which Ezekiel has. Visions or inner seeing, (מראות) from the Hebrew verb “to see” (ראה), are related to outer seeing through the organ of the eye. Ezekiel is transported in his mind’s eye from the real world of life by a canal in the Babylonian Diaspora to a high mountain in the land of Israel, alluding to Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40:2). In the inner world, an unreal man, “whose appearance shines like bronze” guides him through the vision (Ezekiel 40:3). Within the vision Ezekiel is transported, “lifted up by the spirit” to the inner court of the temple (Ezekiel 43:5). Ezekiel’s temple vision takes on an even more fantastical tone when water flows from the eastern entrance of the temple. As the poetic image of the water unfolds, the sacred river becomes a river of life. Poetic and figurative language takes over to express a holy world that can be envisaged flowing from life centred on the temple. Even the theophany in Ezekiel is poetically embellished as God comes in glory, “accompanied by the sound of mighty waters” (Ezekiel 43:2).

YHWH is the source of the model on which both Ezekiel’s temple and the tent of meeting are to be made. Both cultic spaces are imbued with symbolism. Ezekiel’s temple plan is a geometric square, a square standing for perfection.14 Many measurements are given in multiples of five.15 For example, there are five spheres of sacred space—the people, the prince/lay leader, Levites, Zadokite priests, and God who are presented in a sequence from the lesser to the more holy. Architecture is in units of five—the vestibule is twenty five cubits deep and five wide (Ezekiel 40:30), or land is allocated (Ezekiel 48:8-22) in units of five

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15 Boyle, “Holiness has a Shape,” 7.
Cultic World of the Book

thousand cubits. Materials of the tent of meeting are in gradations of three: metals from bronze and silver to gold, three hues of blue as the colours for the curtain hangings, and the tabernacle has three coverings, curtains, tanned ram’s skins then fine leather (Exodus 36:19). Ezekiel’s temple and the tent of meeting are positioned to face eastwards (Ezekiel 40:6-44; Exodus 27:13). Ezekiel is concerned with the holy and access to the holy. Hence, gates/doors are open (or shut), in front of or behind the altar (Ezekiel 44:1-2). In both Ezekiel’s temple vision and the tent of meeting, holiness operates in gradations. Ezekiel’s temple is a vision and the cultic tent of meeting is a mimetic text. Models for the two cultic spaces are communicated but not for the purpose of actual construction.

Although Ezekiel’s vision is inspired by YHWH and Ezekiel addressed as “mortal” (יְהוָה בֵּן אָדָם), the vision is told through the eyes of a priest and reflects priestly interests. Chambers for depositing and eating the offerings and for disrobing (Ezekiel 42:13) are provided for priests in the temple (Ezekiel 40:46). The altar stands before the temple in the inner court with priests’ chambers along the north and south sides of the altar. The inner court is accessed by Levites and priests via gates to the north and south. The east gate is to remain closed except for festivals and the Sabbath (Ezekiel 44:1). In Ezekiel’s vision the people are described as the “House of Israel” (בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל), not as an assembly or a congregation as in the tent of meeting text. The people are restricted to the outer court and can only access the inner court on specific festivals and the Sabbath. They are obstructed from seeing the rites at the altar by the chambers around the inner court. Except for festivals and the Sabbath the people are spatially separated from the inner court unlike the court before the tent of meeting where the people may stand and watch close to the altar. Instructions are given for the conduct of priests in the inner court but not for the people in the outer court in Ezekiel’s vision.

Ezekiel’s vision focuses more on priests than on people. There is no call for the donation of money or materials for the temple and no reference made to the need for labour. In Ezekiel’s vision the people do not bring offerings, or a willing heart. They cannot watch the sacrifices on the fire at the altar from the court. They do not lay their hand on the animals being offered. The cultic and spatial centre in the temple complex of Ezekiel’s vision is the altar. It takes

16 Boyle, “Holiness has a Shape,” 6.
central place but no rites are described as being performed at it. No rites are performed such as on *Yom Kippur* in Leviticus 16 in the tent of meeting. Description of the inner space of the actual temple is perfunctory. There is no ark in Ezekiel’s temple.

Israel’s past is critiqued in Ezekiel’s vision. The king of Israel and the people are rebuked for their iniquities (Ezekiel 43:6-9). Kings are criticised for using the house of God as a royal chapel rather than as a temple (Ezekiel 43:8). References within the vision allude to past events through imagery such as the king as a prince (Ezekiel 44:3; 45:7). The self-chastising rereading of national history and national attitudes provides a sense of linear or chronological time and setting which is absent from the tent of meeting text. It is not difficult with Ezekiel’s vision to discern between actual events of the past and the surreal dimensions of the vision.

A political bent is conveyed through the metaphor of a prince, alluding to a monarchic or lay leader. Land is to be set aside for the king as well as priests and Levites (Ezekiel 45:1-6). The prince has a special chamber within the temple from where royal sacrifices can be made (Ezekiel 46:2-18). In the visionary world, the new temple incorporates a holy priesthood and royal leader of some kind.

Each temple account offers different images of God. Royal imagery is used in connection with God in Ezekiel’s vision, but absolutely no royal imagery or references to kings are made in the tent of meeting text. In Ezekiel, the temple is “the place of God’s throne and the place for the soles of God’s feet” (Ezekiel 43:7). The God imagery in Ezekiel is very different to that of 1 Kings 8:22 where Solomon addresses God as the God of Israel, and says, “There is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath.” In 1 Kings 8:20, Solomon is on the throne and in Ezekiel 40–48 the temple stands for God’s throne. Ezekiel’s vision finishes with the statement, “the Lord is there.” “There” refers to the temple, the place from which the divine presence emanates through to the holy city and among the holy people.

Historical time is not verifiable in the contents of the tent of meeting text. There are no allusions to kings or to political events such as wars to suggest historical time. There is no indication of the societies from which the customary laws might have originated. There is no
explicit or implicit reference to Solomon’s temple in ruins, or to life in exile. Incongruity is created between the information in the framework narrative and the contents. The contents are apolitical and ahistorical, as in a vacuum.

The temple of Ezekiel’s vision is seen through priestly eyes. Ezekiel is prophet and priest and the human medium through whom the vision of a temple is transmitted to the people. Israelites fall under the term “House of Israel” and are not actively involved in the world of the temple. The persons who dominate are the priests. They officiate and minister at the altar on behalf of the people. Instructions are given for sacrifices at the altar and priests to perform them but no instructions are given for people to bring animals or offerings. Ezekiel’s vision is seated in the royal Jerusalem temple tradition which is critiqued yet also the inspiration for the new temple. The visionary temple nurtures the idea that the temple must be the centre of Israelite life. The vision is traditionalist in that a prince is foreseen for future social leadership. Instructions relating to holiness are directed at priests.

Ezekiel’s vision is at the inventive end of a scale of texts on biblical temples. Ezekiel is the seer of the vision. He is transported from this world into the space of the temple. He does not walk but moves from space to space as in the world of dreams. The size and scale of temple is fantastic, it goes beyond the real into the realm of fantasy. Ezekiel’s temple covers an enormous area, 250 by 250 metres. Extraordinary density in the building construction is suggested with thickness of walls conveyed through measurements and the measuring rod. Ezekiel’s vision is food for the spirit; it nurtures the desire to worship at the one central Jerusalem temple, served by priests. It shows the might and glory of God. The temple house is at the heart of a God-centred polis in Ezekiel. The House of Israel, meaning the people, is represented by priests serving before the Lord YHWH (יהוה) at the temple house. The text of Ezekiel’s temple vision does not serve to substitute for actual temple worship, it nurtures the spirit towards the desire for such priest-like worship. The temple vision is described through the eyes of a priest.

The text on Solomon’s temple is about the construction and inauguration of the first official temple in Jerusalem. The text is marked by empirical realism and at the realistic end of a scale
of texts on biblical temples. The text deals with the representation of a temple environment that actually existed. The text on Solomon’s temple does not substitute for an actual temple, it tells of the first official Jerusalem temple. The text on Solomon’s temple is at the realistic end of the writing scale of the three biblical temples.

3. Realism and Fantasy: The Temple-Tent

The temple-tent of the Pentateuch lies on a literary scale between the realism of the account of Solomon’s temple and the inventive nature of Ezekiel’s vision. It is a mix of realism and fantasy. Solomon’s temple precedes the tent complex text and is the reality basis for the textual temple. As Lodge says, literary creation is bound to the world of facts. It culls data from the real world. In the case of the temple-tent text, data is drawn from the real world of the Jerusalem temple.

The temple-tent world is fantastic in its portable features and continuation of traditional Israelite temple characteristics. It contains traditional Israelite temple furnishings such as the lampstand and the table of showbread but the furnishings are designed with rings and poles for transport. The temple-tent displays traditional Israelite temple embellishment with cherubim worked into the material of the hangings. In Ezekiel’s vision the walls of the inner room of the temple are adorned with a cherub pattern. The cherubs have two faces, one human and the other a young lion, and are separated by a palm tree. The cherubim adornment is different again in Solomon’s temple where the doors of olivewood are carved with a combination of cherubim, palm trees and open flowers. Cherubim are typical for artistic embellishment in Israelite cultic environments, used in Solomon’s temple, the temple vision of Ezekiel, and the tent of meeting.

The cultic world of the temple-tent is transmitted in the form of divine instructions via Moses to the people, not via a prophet/priest/king such as Solomon, or via a Zadokite priest as in Ezekiel. The instructions, ritual and ethical, of the temple-tent text invoke a response of the spirit, a generous heart (נדי לב) from the Israelites—action in response to command. The divine instructions of Moses’ speeches are performative in the terms of J. Austin’s (1911-60)
speech-act theory. Austin’s main point is that saying is a kind of doing.\textsuperscript{17} Utterances are equivalent to actions. Applied to the tent of meeting text, divine speech is performativewhen the words of the text are heard, a response or action is expected. The moment of hearing the words is the call to enter and participate in the cultic world of the tent of meeting. Time is not that of a temple or cultic world of the past as in the account of Solomon’s temple or a nurturing of a desire for a temple in the future as in Ezekiel’s vision. YHWH’s command and call is in the present in the temple-tent text. It is not about YHWH’s temple in the past and not about the Lord YHWH’s (אֱלֹהִי יְהוָה) temple of a vision.

In the tent of meeting text, the Israelites or the community (עדה) are the explicit addressees of the majority of divine speeches. They are the recipients of the instructions, the people for whom the instructions are intended. They respond to the instructions—laying their hands on the offerings, or laying their hands on the Levites before the Levites are consecrated. The people bring construction materials for the tent of meeting. Women spin yarn and cloth. Holiness laws (Leviticus 17–26) are addressed to the entire community, not primarily to priests. The human focus of the temple-tent text is the community of Israelites, not the king as representative of the people as in the account of Solomon’s temple, and not the priests as representative of the people as in the vision of Ezekiel’s temple.

Extensive rites, predominantly sacrifices, are prescribed for cultic practice at the tent of meeting. The rites are inclusive and democratic. The rites presume knowledge on the part of the offerer regarding what sacrifice it is appropriate to bring. The tent of meeting gives a more comprehensive picture of an Israelite cultic world to the lay Israelite or common person than the texts on cult at the temples of Solomon or Ezekiel.

Two foci of the temple-tent text are the altar before the tent and the ark unit in the sanctuary. The foci provide two forms of specific involvement in the cultic world. One is the bringing of offerings and sacrifices to be offered on the altar at the entrance to the tent of meeting. The other is to journey to the heart of the tent into the sanctuary. One form of involvement in the

\textsuperscript{17} Kevin J. Vanhoozer, \textit{Is There a Meaning in This Text?} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 208-9.
cultic Israelite world does not exclude the other. The bringing of sacrifice and offerings to a
temple was common practice and typical for most cults in the ancient Near Eastern world of
the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. The Israelites in this regard were no different to the
Babylonians. The temple-tent world has characteristics of Israelite cult as opposed to
Babylonian cult. The God of the Israelites is YHWH, not Sin or Marduk. The cultic language
of the Israelites is Hebrew not Akkadian. Israelite customs in regard to sacrifices and cultic
rites, such as the offering of male animals without blemish, were Israelite customs as opposed
to Babylonian. The temple-tent text allows its recipients to continue to worship with the
traditional practice of bringing offerings and sacrifice. The desire to bring an offering to the
cultic place takes the place of the act of offering.

The traditional action in the temple-tent text is the bringing of sacrifices. A preference for this
form of Israelite cultic performance probably continued for as long as animal sacrifice was
common, or at least until the destruction of Herod’s temple in the first century CE. The key
verb for the Israelite in the context of the altar is to approach or draw near, from the Hebrew
(קרב). The newer variant of cultic involvement or worship in the temple-tent text is the
invitation to journey to the heart of the tent. The key word here is “to seek” YHWH (pi’el
שׁבָּק). As the Israelites went out to the (old) consultation tent outside the camp to seek YHWH
(Exodus 33:7) so they can seek YHWH in the new tent of meeting. The new tent of meeting
develops out of the tradition of a consultation tent (Exodus 33:7-11). Each Israelite is invited
to journey to the heart of the sanctuary to seek YHWH.

The temple-tent text is not an account of a temple and it is not fantastic to the degree of
Ezekiel’s vision of a temple from which water springs. The common person, the Israelite, is
the central addressee of the tent of meeting text. The commands of divine speech are directed
to the Israelites of the narrative within the text and to the receivers outside the text. Extensive
engagement in the meaning of the tent of meeting text on the part of the recipient is called for
as the instructions are performative—a response is expected. The model attitude of the
recipient of the text is that of a willing or generous spirit. Many objects in the tent complex
evoke sensory responses. The receiver of the text—the one who knows the text—can enter the
interior cultic space. No one can see inside the consultation tent of Exodus 33 but everyone
who knows the tent of meeting text can see inside the interior of the temple-tent. To know the interior of the tabernacle tent is to be attracted into its space and atmosphere. The light of the lampstand welcomes one’s entry into the foreroom of the tabernacle. The waft of incense signals proximity to the sanctuary, a place to enter, and seek YHWH.

Knowledge of the temple-tent text, or the carrying of the text within the memory, allows engagement in it and participation in a fully functioning cultic world. Absorption in any part of the tent complex world leads to the whole. When the complex is discovered, memorised and internalised, it is similar to a music composition that can be played by memory. It is carried within one. The invitation to seek or approach God is embodied.

C. Textual Cultic World as Substitute for Jerusalem Cult

The thought of four scholars, Benno Jacob, Volkmar Fritz, Jan Assmann and Hanna Liss, who write about the temple-tent as a text that stands for a real Israelite temple environment, is presented next. Most scholarly debate over the last two hundred years focuses on whether the text is an historical or fictional account. If the conclusion is reached that the sanctuary did not exist then that is often the end of the debate for those scholars. It is rare that scholars go beyond the conclusion that the text is fictional and proceed to ask why a long sophisticated literary text such as the tent of meeting was written and what function it might have. The number of scholars who write on the function or meaning of the tent of meeting as an Israelite cultic world transformed into textual form is therefore understandably small. The thought of the above mentioned four scholars is presented in chronological order.
The Sanctuary of the Text, Bigger than Reality

Benno Jacob, a Reform Rabbi specialising in Semitics, writes in *Der Pentateuch: Exegetisch-Kritische Forschungen* (1905) of the sanctuary as something bigger than reality.\(^{18}\) For Jacob, the power and attraction of the sanctuary lies in the fact that it never existed in the historical sense. The idea of the sanctuary stands for, or represents, something bigger than life. The representation of a sanctuary in the text functions in at least two ways for Jacob. It can induce a response from the receiver of the text, or it can function as a stimulus offered to the receiver.

Activation of the imagination of the listener or reader by the text is a requirement to enter the sanctuary world. Jacob talks of descriptions that are sparse, by which he means gaps in the text, and require the imagination of the listener or reader to fill in. One of his many examples is the inauguration of the priesthood scene. No mention is made of where animals are to be slaughtered, of a knife for slaughtering the animals, where the meat is to be cooked, or a designated place where priests are to eat their part of the sacrifice.\(^{19}\) The listener’s or reader’s imagination, informed by customary knowledge and the text, is left to fill the gaps in descriptions of the cultic world.

Jacob does not define what he means by reader, but presumably a reader is someone belonging to an Israelite community in the first instance. Engagement in the sanctuary text and activation of the imagination are more easily done by a recipient from an Israelite cultural or identity base. However, the text is sufficiently multi-dimensional that its religio-ethical world can draw a non-Israelite reader into the representation of an Israelite cultic world. Jacob writes of the cultic objects having an organic link with the historical past, or symbolising the invisible and divine which suggests that he is thinking of the reader as part of an Israelite community and therefore within the Israelite tradition.

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\(^{19}\) Jacob, *Exodus*, 760-62.
The impulse that the text gives a reader is inspiration. Jacob writes of the sanctuary text as leading to religious thoughts rather than technical thoughts such as considering what covered the frames or the absence of rooms for cultic objects. By religious thoughts I think Jacob means the sanctuary is an organic link to the atmosphere and spirit of previous Israelite cultic history and therein brings the attention to YHWH. Jacob speaks in a similar manner of Sinai as religious orientation rather than geographic designation. For Jacob the temple of Jerusalem lies in ruins but the idea of a sanctuary lives for ever. The writers who produced a cultic world in the form of the tent of meeting have created an indestructible cultic space.

**Spiritualization**

Volkmar Fritz speaks of the tent of meeting text as “spiritualization” of cultic place in *Tempel und Zelt* (1977). He writes, “mit der Vermittlung des Heiligtums im Wort hat die Priesterschrift die Kultstätte spiritualisiert,” that is, through transmission of a verbal sanctuary, a sanctuary of words, Israelite cultic place is spiritualised; it is given spiritual character. His concept of “spiritualization” builds on the connection between the practice of cult and the presence of God among the people. His understanding is that when the Jerusalem temple is destroyed, the cult cannot be practised and therefore God is absent. The tent of meeting, a verbal creation, substitutes for the destroyed Jerusalem temple. In this way the cult becomes reinstated, and more importantly, God becomes present again. Realization of a cultic place in text is assurance at the same time of the presence of God. Fritz finishes his book:

In the priestly Sinai story communication of a sanctuary takes the place of theophany. Cult becomes an action, performable through word. The cultic building is spiritualised in that the closeness of God is experienced not only in the temple but also in word.

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20 Jacob, *Exodus*, 760; *Pentateuch*, 345.
21 Jacob, *Exodus*, 1061.
22 Jacob, *Pentateuch*, 346.
Thus the priestly creation of a tent sanctuary marks the end of a temple building tradition in Israel, as the reality of a cultic place finds its place in the word. Fritz does not define spiritualization, however his writing indicates that spiritualization is about the presence of God, and the making of a place where God is understood to be present within a text. A cultic structure is the privileged place for the presence of God. The tent of meeting text is an example of a shift in theological understanding as cultic place moves from the physical world to the world of the text. The presence of God is no longer confined to a physical building such as a temple but becomes accessible at the tent of meeting in the form of a text.

The last phrase of the quote above from Fritz expresses the movement of cultic place in reality to cultic place in the word. This movement is elucidated in the work of the German Egyptologist, Jan Assmann. The advantage of Assmann’s work is that his thought covers a broad field. It is not confined to the exegesis of specific biblical texts, or to uncovering the particular contexts out of which texts may have been generated.

Living Memory as Reality

Jan Assmann distinguishes between cult religions and book-based religions in Religion and Cultural Memory. It is cult based religions such as those of Egypt or Babylon that lose validity and eventually succumb to time but the book-based, or the word-based religions, such as the writings of Judaism survive. Assmann addresses the transition from the practice of cult to the writing down of cult, then the canonization of writings. It is the first two stages that are of particular interest to us here as the Israelite writing circle writes the essence of an Israelite

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cultic world into script. What the writing circle puts into writing in new format are traditions and memories. For Assmann tradition is related to cultural memory, which he treats on two levels, synchronic and diachronic. I appropriate Assmann’s idea of horizontal and vertical axes of tradition to facilitate an understanding of the nature of the reality of the temple-tent text.\textsuperscript{27}

Synchronic memory functions on the horizontal level and is reciprocal in that tradition is communicated between humans, that is, amidst living generations. Assmann gives a working definition of tradition as “the lived knowledge that is embodied in living objects and that is passed on in active association with others, through teaching and, above all, through a nonverbal process of showing and imitating, a form of knowledge that is largely self-evident and that has become unconscious and implicit.”\textsuperscript{28} The Israelite Diaspora communities in Babylonia are living Israelite culture. They are estranged from the land of cultic identity but still live according to Israelite culture. The instructions of the book of Leviticus are written down lived knowledge that is embodied in the Diaspora Israelites, of which some examples are food customs, regulations relating to marriage, understandings of cult, and purity regulations.

Diachronic memory concerns traditions that reach back into the past, prior to the synchronic level of memory. Forced migration into Babylonia is a rupture from traditional Israelite cultic practice as Diaspora Israelites can no longer perform sacrificial aspects of Israelite worship at a temple. However, memories of the Jerusalem temple, its cultic furnishings, cultic practices, and what the Jerusalem temple stands for is living memory. Out of living memory, or what can also be called embodied tradition in the Diaspora Israelites, comes forth the literary production of the temple-tent text. The temple-tent carries the cultic essence of the Jerusalem temple. The temple-tent of Exodus 25—Numbers 10 is not a physical temple but in essence it portrays a temple environment to take the place of the functioning Jerusalem temple before it was destroyed. The temple-tent of words is not real in the physical sense but it is real in that it draws from memories of a former reality on an experiential level. The English word ‘real’ is from the Latin word \textit{res}, meaning thing and used to speak of that which is actual and true.

\textsuperscript{27} Assmann, \textit{Religion and Cultural Memory}, 8.
\textsuperscript{28} Assmann, \textit{Religion and Cultural Memory}, 69.
genuine, not depicted. The textual temple-tent is depicted; it is not genuine but on the experiential level of reality the textual tent-temple comes forth from living memory. The tent of meeting text portrays a mimetic cultic world which is essentially a textualised Israelite cultic world put into script from the memory and literary creativity of Diaspora Israelites in Babylonia.

Benno Jacob grasps the reality of the sanctuary in mimetic form when he writes of the sanctuary as an organic link with the past.\(^{29}\) For him the interior furnishings are more important than the tabernacle construction as it is the furnishings in particular that signal entry into the cultic or temple atmosphere.\(^ {30}\) If the reader’s eye is attracted by even one of the furnishings within the tabernacle, or the altar before the tent, then the reader is in the temple-tent world and present in cultic space. Furnishings of the tent such as the ark unit, the single lampstand, the table of showbread and the altar, are not the same physical construction and size and quantity as the furnishings of Solomon’s temple with its ark (1 Kings 6:19; 8:1-9), lampstands (1 Kings 7:49), table of showbread (1 Kings 7:48) and altar (1 Kings 8:22). They are a continuation of the same cultic tradition. The altar of the tent complex is a link with the altar of the Jerusalem temple. The lampstand of the tent complex is a link with the lampstands of the Jerusalem temple. A tradition of specifically Israelite cult continues from the Jerusalem temple into the tent complex. The essence of Israelite temple tradition is transformed into Israelite cult within a text. Tradition is a diachronic axis of the continuity of cultural Israelite memory.

**Embedding of Reality**

Hanna Liss talks of the priestly writings as “cult within literature.”\(^ {31}\) This is achieved through the “act of fictionalizing,” or the embedding of reality in fiction.\(^ {32}\) The combination of the embedded section and the frame receiving the embedding together make up something real. Liss’ idea of the “embedding of reality in fiction” needs explaining in order to be understood.

\(^{29}\) Jacob, *Exodus*, 762.
\(^{30}\) Jacob, *Exodus*, 1010.
\(^{31}\) Liss, “Imaginary Sanctuary,” 688; “Kanon und Fiktion,” 32.
\(^{32}\) Liss, “Imaginary Sanctuary,” 671.
Her theory builds on the thought of Wolfgang Iser and a triad of the real, the fictive and the imaginary.

In Liss’ writing, the term “fiction” refers to a text that is literary as opposed to non-literary. Fiction is not a matter of being “made-up,” or “not true,” but the literary quality of a text. Liss speaks of the priestly author wanting the reader to imagine the design of the sanctuary and by extension its cultic world.\(^3\) Imagination on the part of the reader is a prerequisite for entry into the world of the sanctuary. Liss talks of the real world being embedded in fiction; an example of the real world embedded in the fiction part of a text for Liss is customs that were practised in Israel. In these terms I propose that the reality of a temple such as the Jerusalem temple is not so much embedded as written into the fiction text.

Further biblical examples of Liss and from the priestly writings which demonstrate the embedding of reality in fiction are the ark unit and the purity laws of Leviticus 11–15. Northern traditions of an ark that go back to the sanctuary of Shiloh and southern traditions of a Jerusalem temple with cherubim in the sanctuary are in the realm of the real. The cover (כפרת) of the ark unit is “made-up,” fiction; it is an invention, a literary creation of priestly writers. The ark and cherubim are amalgamated into the ark unit via the cover to create a new and authentic furnishing for cultic space.

With the example of the purity laws of Leviticus 11–15, Liss demonstrates the link between legal traditions and cultic practices in the sanctuary text. Not only cultic practices (the bringing of offerings) are associated with sanctuary or temple but also customary laws such as corpse contamination or the emission of fluids from the body are to be understood in relation to the sanctuary. For Liss, the priestly writers take regulations from monarchic times that apply to the temple cult, and other practices that apply to cultural purity, and embed both types of instructions in the fictional context of the wilderness. The wilderness is the narrative and fictive setting. According to Liss, the tent complex of Exodus 25–40 and much of Leviticus are embedded in the Sinai narrative.\(^4\)

\(^3\) Liss, “Imaginary Sanctuary,” 670.
\(^4\) Liss, “Ritual Purity,” 334.
For Liss cultic practices and purity laws overlap in that they are part of the same world in the cultic space of the sanctuary of the text. The most private issues such as the emission of semen or menstrual bleeding are not under the control of others, often not even under the control of the person concerned. Defilement in the sense of impurity can only be understood as impurity in relation to the sacred space of the sanctuary. Liss writes that the priestly texts “set up a system of an ongoing imagination of the sanctuary” and the sanctuary is “the entity which intrudes” into the life and mind of men and women.\textsuperscript{35}

Summary

David Lodge demonstrates that the modern fiction novel is made up of a greater degree of reality than commonly understood. A fictional novel is not as untrue as one might think and neither is the text on the cultic world of the temple-tent. Reality is a major component of fictional writing as Liss demonstrates with her idea of the embedding of reality in a narrative. The Jerusalem temple tradition continues into the temple-tent with for example the adaptation of selected furnishings. The practice of Israelite culture, even estranged from the land of origin, continues in the living communities in the Diaspora and is embedded into the temple-tent text.

The texts of Solomon’s temple and Ezekiel’s vision are not textual substitutes for Israelite cultic practice. They are presented from the perspective of a king or priest, not that of the lay or common Israelite. The temple-tent text is explicitly directed at Israelites via the terms, “children of Israel (בני ישורע),” “congregation or community (ועד),” and “assembly (קהל).” The temple-tent text alone of the three temple texts is mimetic, meaning that cult in the text becomes the reality which takes the place of the cult at a physical temple.

The cultic world of the temple-tent text is real. It becomes reality via the internal visualization and understanding of those who know and carry the text within them. Those people in whom the text is embodied are called to live according to its instructions in the present. Liss speaks

\textsuperscript{35} Liss, “Ritual Purity,” 353.
of the depths to which the sanctuary world takes place in the body, intruding into peoples’ lives, and where Israelite customs and cult are lived. A verse from a contemporary poem by Sherry Blumberg, “At the Tent of Meeting,” conveys the idea of the invitation to enter the sanctuary:

Let the opening of the tent,
Encourage the opening of the text
And let me, Your humble daughter,
Enter and not hold back. 36

Embodiment of the text allows one to approach the altar and bring offerings to God, or journey into the heart of the sanctuary, to be, and to seek God.

36 Eskenazi, The Torah: A Women’s Commentary, 566.
Conclusion

In the 1800s it was debated whether the tent of meeting was mythic or historical. Brevard Childs moved the debate to the level of myth and reality in the mid 1900s. More recent research increasingly treats the text of the tent of meeting as a combination of fiction and reality. A more apt analysis of the text of the tent of meeting is to describe it as mimetic, textual representation taking the place of reality. To capture the essence of something is to show the most essential possible nature of that thing. Saying that the tent of meeting text is mimetic is to say that the essence of Israelite cult is captured in the text. Mimetic techniques transmit flashes of Israelite cultic reality. Many things are not prescribed and portrayed in the tent of meeting text, but what is prescribed and portrayed invites into a world centred on YHWH.

An Israelite cultic world is portrayed in the text of the tent of meeting: the cultic people are identified in Numbers 1:1–10:28, cultic instructions in Leviticus 1–27, and cultic place in Exodus 24:15–40:38. The cultic people are presented symbolically as a unity by the twelve stones in the breastpiece of the high priest’s vestments, and in terms of twelve tribes in circular format, equidistant to the tent of meeting at the centre of the wilderness camp. Equal distance to the tent of meeting is not so apparent in the linear format of the marching order. However, the same names for the twelve different tribes and the three different levitical groups are given in the linear format as in the circular format; each part of Israel has a designated place within the whole.

The tent of meeting with two foci, altar and sanctuary, is the favoured place for God to dwell, for God to meet with the Israelites, and from which holiness, consecration, emanates. The tent of meeting is the centre of cultic Israel, where YHWH is present in the most essential possible way. Finding one’s position within the circular format is to have equal right to access YHWH
at this centre. The cultic instructions are promulgated from the tent of meeting and inextricably linked with YHWH.

It is feasible that the tent of meeting text is the creation of an Israelite writing circle in the Babylonian Diaspora in the late exilic to early post-exilic period. Babylonia was one of several regions where Israelites were scattered in the ancient Near Eastern world. Israel was assimilated by the Assyrians, most influential Judeans were taken to Babylonia after the fall of Jerusalem, other Judeans migrated or fled to Egypt, and some Judeans remained in the land. All Israelites in the late exilic and early post-exilic period were living in a minority situation, first under the laws of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, then under the jurisdiction of the Persian Empire. Working on the idea that Josiah’s reform (2 Kings 22:1–23:30) took effect, then from Josiah’s reign on, the cult could be practised at one official temple only—in Jerusalem. Out of the context of a scattered people, with no temple and life under the laws of the reigning empire, the Israelite Babylonian writing circle creates a cultic world centred on YHWH. Israelites are identified. Israelite instructions for living and Israelite cultic space are written into the tent of meeting text. Being an Israelite is defined in terms of proximity to YHWH.

Babylon was the hub of the Babylonian Empire and to some degree also of the Persian Empire. Israelites in the Babylonian Diaspora probably had the opportunity to expand and develop their learning in an environment where many Babylonian temples had archives and even schools affiliated with their temple precincts. The Babylonian environment would have been a stimulus for learning. In this context, Israelites create the tent of meeting text, a sophisticated literary text. The writing circle draws on classical Hebrew, stories of the past, memories of the Jerusalem temple and Hebrew genres to create the tent of meeting text. Former genres such as divine speech are developed into a command and fulfilment pattern. “I” statements are added as highlights within the speeches. The ancient Near Eastern genre of a temple template may have been used. Theophanies are written into the narrative and the motif of cloud recurs giving unity to the text as a whole.

The tent of meeting text presents a fantastical amalgamation of tent dedicated to YHWH and temple cult. The consultation tent of Exodus 33:7-11 nurtures the idea that one can seek
YHWH. One can seek YHWH and one can meet YHWH. The source of this idea is left as a building plaque within the newer cultic temple-tent text. Authorship of the tent of meeting text succeeds the physical reality of the first Jerusalem Temple. Creation of the tent of meeting text is not possible without the reality of the first Jerusalem Temple, memories of which were carried in those Israelites who went into the Babylonian Diaspora. Memories of the temple and cult are transformed into portable camping format in the tent of meeting text. For this reason the title, “From Temple to Tent,” is chosen.

A cultic centre such as the tent of meeting is meaningless if it is only a structure and there are no rites. Spending time at a cultic place, bringing offerings, and performing rites is what brings life to a cultic place. The regulations of Leviticus allow daily life at the tent of meeting. In turn, the cultic and social instructions and purity laws are meaningless without the orientation of YHWH at the centre. For this reason the sub-title, “The Cultic World of Diaspora Israelites,” is chosen.

The tent of meeting text is lengthy and sophisticated and suggests a literary text, in contrast to the story of a consultation tent set within it. The fivefold repetition of the panels facilitates memorization of the details of the tent complex. The text has an inherent logic. The text functions so that an internal visualization of the tent of meeting world can grow within its recipient. A community, or a reader, may pass through the screens of the complex of the tabernacle tent world, bring an offering to the altar, and journey to the centre of the tent. Spending time within the tent is to be in the proximity of YHWH. Different features of the world of the tent complex evoke different senses. The internal world of the tent complex goes beyond the five senses. One is also introduced to an environment of holiness and dangerous attraction.

A minority ethnic group living within a different and dominant culture must find ways to articulate identity in order to maintain its heritage. In the Babylonian Diaspora a non-political exterior stance on the part of the Israelites was probably a prudent form of survival. As social and political action was not possible, cultural strength is therefore channeled into forms of energy and action that are possible. For this reason extraordinary energy goes into creation of
the tent of meeting text. The Diaspora Israelites are articulating their identity as a people centred round YHWH.

They know that the stone temple of Solomon that stood for centuries was burnt to the ground. They see the transient nature of life in Babylonia where the mud-brick buildings quickly succumb to rain and decay. The Israelite writing circle in the Babylonian Diaspora has the vision to create an indestructible Israelite cultic world, one that is portable anywhere in the world, one that will survive physical destruction. They write an Israelite cultic world into the tent of meeting text. It will live as long as people keep reading, and studying … and entering its world.
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