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I. Introduction



The English name of the second book of the Bible is "Exodus," a term that comes to us, via the Latin, as an abbreviation of the Greek title *exodos aigyptou* ("Road out from Egypt"). This title focuses the reader's attention on the narrative in the first fourteen chapters of the book, which tell the story of Israelites departing from Egypt. The remaining thirty-six chapters of the book recount the journey to Sinai and then the revelation there of the covenant and its stipulations; and they conclude with a description of a tabernacle and an account of its construction. The Hebrew title of the book follows ancient Semitic practice of naming a work by its opening words, in this case *wĕ'ēllê šĕmôt* ("And these are the names"), which is usually shortened to *šĕmôt*, Names. This title, which refers to the "names" of the sons of Jacob whose descendents are now in Egypt, conveys the connection of Exodus with the preceding biblical book, Genesis, which ends with the story of their descent to Egypt. In so doing, it indicates that Exodus is part of the larger literary unit known as the Torah, or Pentateuch.

According to Exodus, a group of people is oppressed in Egypt, manages to escape, and then journeys through the wilderness to a mountain where God reveals through Moses community guidelines and instructions for a national shrine, which they construct. It begins with the Israelites subjected to enforced service to a human ruler; and it ends with their willing service to a divine sovereign. The first part of the narrative, about the sojourn in and exodus from Egypt, reverberates throughout other parts of the Hebrew Bible – in psalms, prophecy, and narrative. Just as importantly, it becomes the grounding for the second part of Exodus, presenting the covenant and the tabernacle. It also integrates major Israelite rituals into the story of departure. And it has long been the focus of popular and scholarly attention, especially as it relates to the issue of historicity.

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EXODUS, THE EXODUS, AND THE PAST

A generation ago, most biblical scholars accepted the story line of Exodus uncritically, assuming that the account of oppression and deliverance, of wilderness journey, and of theophany and covenant at Sinai was historical fact. It was believed that the transmission of that story among different groups of Israelites led to the formation of separate narratives or sources that over time were combined into the master narrative as we have it in Exodus; and the attachment of the tabernacle texts to the exodus–Sinai account by priestly groups seemed likely. But the underlying veracity of most, if not all, of the events reported was never seriously doubted. Even by the 1970s and 1980s, when most scholars ceased to consider the ancestral narratives of Genesis as a record of life in the early second millennium BCE, assumptions about an exodus experience in the Late Bronze Age, sometime between 1500 and 1200 BCE, survived in many quarters of academia. Using what is known broadly as the historical–critical, or diachronic, approach scholars tried to understand what happened in biblical times by reconstructing the historical, social, and religious realities that were thought to underlie the text.

Changes, however, were in the offing. Frustration with the long-standing tradition of approaching Exodus as a compendium of sources, with concomitant neglect of overall themes, had already led by the 1970s to the emergence of studies that focus on the final product.[1] Such approaches are sometimes labeled canonical criticism. While not ignoring the likelihood that the text as it now stands has a complex history, they emphasize the importance of the canonical whole and are often explicitly theological as they seek to understand what its constituent sections contribute to that whole. At about the same time, trends in modern literary studies began to have an impact on biblical studies.[2] Like canonical studies, literary analyses of various kinds (such as rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism or narratology, reader-response criticism, and ideological criticism) are synchronic in approach. Concerned with the existing text and not its component parts, literary studies examine the existing structure, artistry, and themes of the biblical texts as communicative compositions. Whether intentional or not, such approaches have tended to assume, if not conclude, that the biblical materials are invented and that their authors have exercised consummate and imaginative creativity in their carefully arranged and rhetorically powerful discourse.

The emergence of these newer approaches late in the twentieth century has led to radical changes in traditional ways of understanding the relationship of the Hebrew Bible to the past. Two extreme positions, with respect to the veracity of

[1] Epitomized by Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974).

[2] Robert Alter's book (*The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: Basic Books, 1980]) is an early example of the outpouring of such studies.

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events and people mentioned in the Bible, can be identified. One, sometimes labeled revisionist or minimalist, dates virtually all biblical writings to the Persian period (sixth to fourth centuries BCE) or later and sees no value in them for understanding earlier centuries.[3] In its extreme, this approach has tended to negate the existence of an Israel that bears even the slightest resemblance to the monarchies of Samuel and Kings, let alone to the tribal groups of Joshua and Judges or the people experiencing escape from Egypt and nation-formation at Sinai. Biblical "Israel" is said to be a literary invention, or fictional construction, produced by Jewish groups of the sixth–fourth or third–first centuries BCE in order to stave off assimilation and create an identity in the face of imperial domination. Indeed, the exodus itself is said to be "without any plausible historical basis or other nonhistorical explanation."[4]

Some minimalist scholars do allow that Israel existed in the Iron Age (twelfth to sixth centuries BCE) but insist that evidence for its existence and for what sort of society it was can come only from archaeology or extrabiblical written sources. The Bible itself cannot be used; only written or material remains contemporary with the purported existence of a monarchy and a premonarchic group of affiliated tribes constitute legitimate witness to a preexilic past for Israel. Yet in their writings, scholars skeptical of the value of biblical materials also tend to malign or misuse archaeology and thus to find no extrabiblical evidence for Israel's preexilic past.[5]

This nihilistic view is often contrasted with what has been termed a maximalist perspective, which accepts the basic picture of Israel's past as related in the Bible as essentially reliable. Ironically, such positions likewise look to archaeology as well as to documents from the ancient Near East. But they attempt to use the results of excavations and surveys, along with written remains, to illuminate and perhaps even to "prove" what is reported in the biblical text, much as modern archaeology and Near Eastern studies set out to do at their inception in the nineteenth century.[6] In giving considerable weight to the assertions in Exodus, such approaches deal with its narrative in several ways. They attempt to show that the catastrophes that befell the Egyptians or the splitting of the sea could have happened as depicted in the narrative; they endeavor to establish a precise date for the birth of Moses and the escape of Israelites from Egypt; and they seek to trace the route of the exodus and establish the location of Mount Sinai.

[3] E.g., Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (London: Basic Books, 1999), and Giovanni Garbini, *Myth and History in the Bible* (JSOTS 362; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

[4] Philip R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'* (JSOTS 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 119.

[5] Pointed out by archaeologist William G. Dever, "Histories and Nonhistories of Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 316 (1999): 89–105.

[6] E.g., Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

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Between the relatively few revisionists and the somewhat more numerous scholars with allegiance to the general if not complete veracity of the information in the biblical record lie mainstream scholars who occupy a middle ground.[7] They reject the binary notions represented by the minimalist–maximalist opposition. As most biblical scholars have done for more than a century, they recognize that biblical narratives cannot be read as straightforward history. They seek to understand the relationship between the textual narrative and the real experience of human beings in the biblical past. And they realize that no two of us will see the biblical story in quite the same way, that we all read it with our own individual interests, training, and worldviews.

But let us go back to the revisionists again. However disturbing their perspective may seem in its complete rejection of the biblical account of Israel's beginnings and nationhood, their insistence that the Bible contains no history – and that there can never be a "history" of Israel or of any people, for that matter[8] – has done a service in causing mainstream scholars to reevaluate their own concepts of what history is and how it relates to biblical materials. Postmodern critiques of the very project of writing history have challenged traditional ways of using written sources to reconstruct the past. Realizing that it is often difficult or impossible to know what "really" is happening even in our own world, we "centrists" have let go of the notion that we can recover what "really happened" thousands of years ago. And we are far more sensitive to the ways that the world in which historiographers of any generation live colors their view of the past. Moreover, we are finally letting go of the modes of thought conditioned by European historicism, whereby we have tended to separate all written sources into categories of historical and true or not historical and therefore fiction.[9]

To be sure, the results of generations of source criticism and redaction criticism, which have sought to discover the component parts of the Pentateuch and to recover the process by which they were edited and joined, have shown that the Hebrew Bible is hardly a straightforward and factual telling of Israel's past. Awareness of what is involved in the construction of history now has helped us realize that, at least when it comes to Exodus, it is not even appropriate to think of its constituent materials as historiography. That is, the authors and redactors of Exodus were not writing about the events and peoples of the past in a way that involved the critical examination of sources and the attempt to use reliable materials. Literary analyses have shown Exodus to be a carefully

[7] John R. Bartlett, "Between Scylla and Charybdis: The Problem of Israelite Historiography," in *Biblical and Near Eastern Essays: Studies in Honour of Kevin J. Cathcart*, eds. Carmel McCarthy and John F. Healey (JSOTS 375; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 180–94.

[8] Such is the opinion of many of the essays in Lester L. Grabbe, ed., *Can a "History of Israel" Be Written?* (JSOTS 245; European Seminar in Historical Methodology 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

[9] Hans Barstad, "History and the Hebrew Bible," in ibid., 39–53.

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organized and artistic work. It has its own logic and plan that have no relation to the concerns of modern history writing. It draws on an unrecoverable array of traditions and materials; it incorporates legends, folklore, archival materials, institutional records, and legal collections. It does so not to preserve a record of the past but rather to demonstrate God's purposes and deeds with respect to one people, Israel, especially in light of conditions at the time in which an early draft of the preexilic biblical books was compiled, probably in the era of national catastrophe in the sixth century BCE. Like the Hebrew Bible as a whole, Exodus is meant to teach, not to record. It may look like a history book, and it is its appearance as history that has led to much investigation of the period about which it purports to tell us; but it is no longer useful to think of Exodus in such terms.

How then should we conceptualize what this literature is and what it achieves? At the outset of the twenty-first century, we are more willing than ever to look at other modes for understanding how it was formed and what connection it may have to real-time processes and events. Before suggesting what such new perspectives for examining the exodus traditions may be, the traditional historical–critical approaches that sought to locate the exodus in relation to Egypt and Sinai in the late second millennium BCE must be reviewed for two reasons. One is to indicate why the specific information in the narratives of exodus and Sinai remain outside the realm of verifiable history. The second is to show how the broad strokes of the exodus narrative might nevertheless reflect the past that can be recovered from primary sources other than the Hebrew Bible. Archaeology in its most inclusive terms – as a way to recover both artifactual and written remains – is the tool for this enterprise. Such remains constitute independent primary sources from the period the text seems to describe.

Archaeology has been enormously valuable in establishing the convergences between references in the biblical text and what can be recovered from the sites and documents of the biblical world.[10] Beginning with the Merneptah Stela, a late thirteenth-century BCE Egyptian inscription that contains the earliest extrabiblical reference to ancient Israel,[11] a wide range of artifacts, occupation levels, and epigraphic remains connect us to the Israel of the Promised Land. However, for the period before that, the era of the supposed departure from Egypt and journey through the Sinai Peninsula, archaeology is of little value. After more than a century of research and the massive efforts of generations of archaeologists and Egyptologists, nothing has been recovered that relates directly to the account in Exodus of an Egyptian sojourn and escape or of a large-scale migration through Sinai.[12]

[10] See William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001).

[11] Michael G. Hasel, "Israel in the Merneptah Stela," *BASOR* 296 (1994): 45–61.

[12] James Weinstein, "Exodus and Archaeological Reality," in *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence*, eds. Ernest S. Frerichs and Leonard H. Lesko (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 87.

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A few examples of this failure of archaeology to substantiate the narratives in Exodus will suffice. For one thing, no texts ever discovered in Egypt mention Moses or Aaron, their struggles with the political and religious leaders of the land, and the departure of a sizable number of Asiatics who had been forced to work on large-scale state projects. Another problem is that, despite extensive surveys and excavations throughout the 23,000 square miles of the Sinai Peninsula for more than a century, no trace of the movement of a group of people from the eastern Delta of Egypt to the southern Levant has been recovered. Indeed, although there are remains of way stations or strongholds in northern Sinai along the coast of the Mediterranean, the remote areas in central and southern Sinai that are presumably the setting for the wilderness narratives have no traces of human presence in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. Moreover, virtually all of the toponyms (place names) mentioned in the exodus account, including the land of Goshen, the store cities of Pithom and Rameses, the Red (or Reed) Sea, and even Sinai itself (for which as many as sixteen different possibilities have been proposed) escape positive identification despite the best efforts of generations of explorers.[13] Even one of the few sites that can be identified – Kadesh Barnea, the largest oasis in northern Sinai and an important staging ground for the Israelites before their entry into the land of Canaan, according to various passages in Numbers – does not appear in Exodus and in any case turns out to have been constructed in the tenth century BCE and to have no remains dating to the era (the Late Bronze Age, fourteenth–thirteenth centuries BCE) postulated to be the period of the exodus.[14] The archaeological evidence from Egypt and Sinai is all negative.

Archaeological research in the land of Israel itself, with accompanying theories of Israel's beginnings, has done nothing to help with the exodus problem. If anything, the opposite has occurred. Hundreds of new village sites in the highlands dating to the Iron I period (twelfth–eleventh centuries BCE) were discovered in the 1960s and 1970s. Built in areas left largely unoccupied by the Canaanites, who lived mainly in urban sites, city-states really, along the coast and in the larger valleys, these settlements have been identified as Israelite and linked with the biblical traditions of Israel's occupation of the land, which is generally dated to Iron I. These would be precisely the people to whom the Merneptah Stela refers.

But who were these settlers? For one thing, the biblical tales of conquest by tribal groups coming out of Egypt are not borne out by excavations. Of the thirty-one sites conquered by the Israelites according to Joshua, only one

[13] John Van Seters, "The Geography of the Exodus," in *The Land that I Will Show You: Essays on the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Honour of J. Maxwell Miller*, eds. J. Andrew Dearman and M. Patrick Graham (JSOTS 343; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 255–76.

[14] Carol Meyers, "Kadesh Barnea: Judah's Last Outpost," *BA* 39 (1976): 148–51.

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(Bethel) fits the criteria that could link it with the biblical narrative.[15] A mass invasion cannot be supported by the archaeological evidence. In addition, the material culture in the new settlements marks their inhabitants as heirs to much of the material culture of the indigenous Canaanites.[16] In addition, the language found on inscriptions of subsequent periods, and of course in the Hebrew Bible, is closely related to the language of the Canaanites.

Many archaeologists and biblical scholars thus identify the occupants of the new settlements as Canaanites who left their urban centers to strike out on their own in the hill country. Such movements of people apparently were the result of the profound turmoil at the end of the thirteenth century BCE because of collapse of the Late Bronze Age urban culture and the disintegration of Egyptian imperial control over the Levant, to say nothing of extensive drought, famine, and disease. Joined by other similarly affected groups from the coast and the north and perhaps also by some pastoral elements from the east, they became known as Israelites. The relatively isolated villages of the highlands provided a congenial environment for the emergence of a new ethnic identity, with an ideological component acknowledging Yahweh as their god.[17]

This compelling and widely accepted hypothesis is the substantial refinement of a theory called the *peasant revolt* model, which was first generated in the 1960s as a replacement for the *conquest* and *peaceful infiltration* models that were then vying for position as the way to understand Israelite origins. It has the unintended consequence of casting doubt upon the biblical account of the settlers of Canaan all being outsiders whose parents or grandparents had escaped from Egyptian servitude. If many of the new villages were really founded by displaced or disaffected Canaanites among others, the exodus account appears to be little more than a tale developed to dramatize their new settlements and justify their eventual displacement and absorption of the Canaanites still living in urban centers and strategic towns. Even those who contest this hypothesis do not claim an Egyptian origin for newcomers.[18]

The vigorous attempts to show historicity for the exodus narrative at best can show plausibility, as even those who have made such efforts concede.[19] Yet, as both conservative scholars and centrists are quick to point out, the lack of

15 Lawrence E. Stager, "Forging an Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 131–4 and Table 3.1.

16 Elizabeth Bloch-Smith and Beth Alpert Nakhai, "A Landscape Comes to Life: The Iron Age," *NEA* 62 (1999): 62–92, 101–27.

17 Beth Alpert Nakhai, "Israel on the Horizon: The Iron I Settlement of the Galilee," in *The Near East in the Southwest: Essays in Honor of William G. Dever*, ed. Beth Alpert Nakhai (AASOR 58; Boston: ASOR, 2003), 140–2.

18 Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 84–121.

19 James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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direct evidence – from the land of Canaan as well as from Egypt and Sinai – does not mean that the exodus and Sinai are pure inventions. What is presented as a series of momentous events, which would spawn religious cultures eventually affecting millions of people, would in their own time have been little more than a tiny blip in the shifting movements of peoples in the east Mediterranean, unlikely to be noticed or noted by the superpowers of the day and leaving no mark on ancient monuments or in the ruins of desert outposts. But although the specific events, leaders, and masses of people dominating the narrative thread of the first part of Exodus cannot be verified by historical research, the overall story line and many of its colorful details are open to verification by archaeology and Egyptology.

The first problem is establishing the era in Egyptian history to which one should look for materials that may relate to the narratives in Exodus. Attempts to use the Bible's own chronology to "date" the exodus is an exercise in futility. This is evident in the fact that there are strong proponents, with no consensus or prospects for resolution, of dates ranging from the sixteenth to the early twelfth centuries BCE.[20] But if one eschews the need to find an exact date in the highly schematic biblical data, such as the numbers in Exod 12:40–41 and 1 Kgs 6:1, the suggested range provides an adequate framework for examining germane materials. In other words, we can look to Egypt and Sinai of the Late Bronze Age, the period of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties, for circumstantial evidence relevant to the exodus narrative. Indeed, the general historical parallels or analogues to the three main components of the narrative – the descent of non-Egyptians from western Asia into Egypt, their sojourn there, and their departure – are found uniquely in this era of the Egyptian past.[21]

Information about intermittent movements by Asiatics into Egypt is plentiful for nearly all periods of Egyptian history, from the fourth millennium onward. However, in the second half of the second millennium BCE, when Egypt exercised hegemonic control of Syria–Palestine, substantial numbers of people from western Asia found themselves in Egypt. Many were brought there as slaves, captured by Egypt's frequent military expeditions into the southern Levant and beyond. For example, a late fifteenth-century BCE expedition into Syria–Palestine yielded "550 Maryanu [charioteers]; 240 of their wives; 640 Canaanites; 232 sons of chieftains; 323 daughters of chieftains; 270 concubines" in addition to great quantities of nonhuman booty.[22] Another Asiatic campaign brought astronomical and perhaps hyperbolic numbers of human booty, including "33,600 Apiru, 15,200 live Shasu [desert dwellers], 36,000 Syrians, . . . [and others] totaling

[20] John H. Walton, "Exodus, Date of," *DOTP*, 258–72.

[21] The Egyptian information about these three parts of the narrative are collected in Carol Redmount, "Bitter Lives: Israel in and out of Egypt," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 98–103.

[22] "The Memphis and Karnak Stelae of Amenhotep II," translated by James K. Hoffmeier (*COS* 2.3), 21.

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89,600."[23] The term *Apiru*, probably a social rather than an ethnic designation, is thought by some to be related to the Hebrews of the Bible.[24]

During this period, other Asiatics were sent to Egypt as tribute from vassal states. A fourteenth-century BCE letter from the pharaoh to the ruler of Gezer mentions that forty beautiful female cupbearers are to be transported to the royal court, and letters from the ruler of Jerusalem refer to people being sent as gifts to the pharaoh.[25] Still others entered Egypt as part of commercial ventures, with special residential quarters established in port cities for these foreign traders. Syrian merchants are depicted in tomb paintings from Thebes of the New Kingdom and were so prominent that the Egyptian term "to bargain" seems to have been synonymous with "to speak Syrian."[26] In addition, small groups of western Asiatics who were experiencing hardships in their own territories apparently migrated into Egypt, notably the eastern Nile Delta, in search of economic security. A late thirteenth- or early twelfth-century BCE letter refers to tribal groups from areas east, and perhaps west, of the Jordan River entering Egypt at its northern Sinai border to find relief for themselves and their flocks.[27] All these patterns of migration clearly indicate that in the fifteenth to twelfth centuries BCE, the descent of people to Egypt from western Asia would not be unusual.

Other sources attest to the sojourn of Asiatics in Egypt, especially in the New Kingdom in the second half of the second millennium BCE. Of particular interest in light of the story of Moses' childhood is the Egyptian practice of taking children of vassal rulers as hostage and raising them in elite Egyptian households, as if they were Egyptian children. Some of the Asiatics in Egypt held important positions – as scribes, overseers of building operations, palace butlers, and heralds – in the government, and those with technical skills were valued in artisans' workshops. But most of the immigrants, especially those brought into Egypt as captive or tribute, worked as menial laborers in state or temple projects. A thirteenth-century BCE text, for example, refers to Apiru used in building operations.[28] Foreigners in Egypt were generally dispersed among the general populace or served in its institutions and became assimilated into the local culture. However, sometimes groups of foreigners were settled in enclaves, especially in the Delta in the late thirteenth or early twelfth centuries BCE, and provide a reasonable parallel to the sojourn depicted in Exodus.[29]

23 Ibid., 22. The math in the document is wrong; the actual total is 101, 128!
24 See the discussion of Exod 1:15.
25 *The Amarna Letters*, edited and translated by William L. Moran (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 366 (letter 369), 326–8 (letters 286, 287).
26 C. Redmount, "Bitter Lives," in *Oxford History* (1998), 99.
27 "A Report of Bedouin," translated by James P. Allen (*COS* 3.5), 16–17.
28 Cited by William Johnstone, *Exodus* (OTG 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 19.
29 C. Redmount, "Bitter Lives," in *Oxford History* (1998), 102–3.

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Information about foreigners departing from Egypt is less abundant, no doubt because most foreigners were absorbed into Egyptian society and made no attempt to leave. Also, Egyptians were less apt to record their failure to retain foreign workers than their success in acquiring them. Still, a papyrus letter records that two laborers fled from Egypt into Sinai, apparently headed to Canaan, and resisted efforts to capture them.[30]

In sum, the sporadic movement, whether coerced or voluntary, of Semites from southern Syria into Egypt is particularly intense in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties, when Egyptian rulers were determined to maintain a firm grip on their imperial holdings in western Asia. This fits the vague biblical chronology. It does not constitute concrete documentation of what Exodus reports, but it does mean that the broad outlines of the biblical narrative are within the realm of the possible. Indeed, the general turmoil at the end of the Nineteenth Dynasty created precisely the kind of weakened Egyptian power that would have occasioned attempts of foreigners to leave Egypt. Moreover, the folklore and local Egyptian color embedded in the narrative imply familiarity with conditions of this period.[31]

Although there is no specific historical grounding for the biblical account of descent, sojourn, and departure, these analogues suggest a core of reality. But how was the experience of Semites, in and out of Egypt, transformed into the biblical story? If historicity ceases to be an issue, as perhaps it should lest the uniqueness of the themes of the overall story be compromised, how can we understand the narrative that links an account of escape from forced servitude with theophany, community regulations, and sacral institutions?

A fresh perspective is provided by bringing the category of *memory* into the analysis. Both Judaism and Christianity are communities for which memory of the past is central to present beliefs and identity. The same is arguably true for the biblical communities from which they emerged. Yet most debates about history and historiography have paid scant attention to the role of memory in the formation of tradition when, in fact, the consideration of memory is an approach that can transcend the pitfalls and shortcomings of historical analysis.[32] The term *mnemohistory* represents this kind of thinking, in which the biblical traditions of national origin are understood as phenomena of collective cultural memory rather than as historical record.[33] Moses and the exodus thereby become figures of memory rather than history. By replacing a positivistic investigation of the past with an analysis of how the past is remembered, mnemohistory allows

30 "A Report of Escaped Laborers," translated by James P. Allen (*COS* 3.4), 16.
31 Baruch Halpern, "The Exodus and the Israelite Historians," *Eretz Israel* 24: 89*–96*.
32 Michael A. Signer, "Introduction: Memory and History in the Jewish and Christian Traditions," in *Memory and History in Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Michael A. Signer (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).
33 The term has been coined and explained by Jan Assman, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 8–22.

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