

## Violence at the Birth of Religion

Exodus 19-40 in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Texts

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### Summary

The intensive study of texts from Ugarit, North-Syria and Mesopotamia allows for a new and better understanding of the religious world of Ancient Israel. The outcome of the extensive work on these texts enables scholars to put the Israelite religion in a historical perspective, and to trace the changes and developments in beliefs and in cultic customs and traditions.

In this article I examine Exodus 19-40 as a document reflecting the cultic activities of the Israelite religion at its birth. These activities are read in light of cultic practices found in Akkadian texts from Emar, and in Hittite texts from central Anatolia, all texts dated to the second Millennium BCE. This reading reveals a new characteristic of Moses as a religious leader, and provides the contrast between different layers of the Exodus text.

**Keywords:** Moses, Calf, Ritual, Hittite, Emar

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### 1. Introduction

In recent years we witness a new wave of scholarly research attempting to describe the nature of God and the origin of monotheism as narrated in the Hebrew Bible. The emphasis in many of these works is on the context in which biblical monotheism was born and cultivated.<sup>1)</sup> With the increase of our knowledge of the religions and cultic practices of the peoples surrounding Ancient Israel, more and more scholars treat the subject of Ancient Israelite religion and monotheism in the context of the Ancient Near Eastern (=ANE) cultures. The intensive study of Ugarit and North-Syrian texts allows for a better understanding of the religious world of Ancient Israel.<sup>2)</sup> In this article I wish to contribute to the ongoing study of monotheism by looking into the first struggle of Israelite monotheism, reflected in Exodus 19-40, in light of ANE texts.

Exodus 19-40 includes a series of cultic texts from different sources, assembled by a redactor who tried to give a uniting coherence to the different traditions.<sup>3)</sup> However, behind the united form we may still discover the evidence of a violent struggle, launched against the background of religious innovations and change. I intend to highlight some of the main religious

developments described in the biblical text, and to check them against documents of the religious traditions of Hittite Anatolia and Akkadian North Syria originating in the Second Millennium BCE.

## **2. Basic cultic practices in Exodus 19-40**

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### **2.1.**

Exodus 19-40 depicts the establishment of the legal relationship between the divine YHWH and the people of Israel.<sup>4)</sup> The relationship, however, is described as being established through the conduct of worshiping the divine. The context of the relationship between the divine and its worshipers is clearly a cultic one.

This relationship is represented in three forms: A. Using legal language to describe a set of laws regulating cultic and social behavior; B. Description of a theophonic appearance of the divine before the community; C. Descriptions of cultic practices, mainly in Ex. 24 and 32.

As noted by M. R. Hauge in the introduction to his literary study of these chapters,<sup>5)</sup> the latest approach to this text among biblical scholars tends to stress the “creative significance of the redactor and the final shape of the composition,” while giving much consideration to the fact that the text is a “composite narrative related to categories of ‘early’ and ‘late.’” On the other hand, following Wilcoxon’s idea of “patterning activity, reflecting the collective experiences of religious activity of many generations, suggesting a most complex editorial process,” Hauge introduces an alternative model of reading these texts: as the story of “the divine movement from mountain to tent.”<sup>6)</sup> Indeed, the divine descends from Mount Sinai to dwell among its people, in order to travel with them in a tent.<sup>7)</sup>

These chapters have also been described as the “initiation ritual” of young Israel.<sup>8)</sup> As such, Israel assumes a new identity after going through a “rite of passage.” What is the nature of this ritual, and what is the role to be played by Moses in this context?

### **2.2.**

Chapters 19-40 present several different cultic practices, which can be considered as part of the shift of the divine place of manifestation from the mountain to the tent:

1. Ex 24 – On Mount Sinai, and at the foot of the mountain.
2. Ex. 32 – The worship of the golden calf.
3. Ex. 40 – The worship at the tent or the tabernacle inside the camp.

These three ritual performances are joined together by the activity of Moses, who receives the law on tablets, breaks the tablets, and re-writes them anew. In the following, I examine the presentation of the law written on tablets and the description of the rituals in light of some Hittite and Emar cultic texts from the second Millennium BCE.<sup>9)</sup>

### **3. The Worship at the mountain and the function of the pillars**

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#### **3.1.**

Chapter 24 depicts a cultic practice of worshipping a mountain god.<sup>10)</sup> The chapter, as it appears today in the Masoretic text, is a composite which includes several ritual descriptions. The cultic ritual takes place both on the mountain itself (24:1, 9-11) and at the foot of the mountain (24:4). The participants are Moses, the priests Aaron and his sons, and seventy Elders of Israel, meaning the political leadership. The ritual at the foot of the mountain includes sacrifices of bulls on the altar, and the setting up of twelve pillars.

Hauge demonstrated how literary constructions detected in the biblical texts can shed light on the main ideas presented by the redactors. He correlated the calf episode with the story of the “strange fire” in Lev. 10.<sup>11)</sup> The same actors are involved in the cultic scenes in Ex. 24, in which Moses, the priests, and the Elders ascend the mountain, and in Lev. 10, in which Aaron’s sons Nadav and Abihu are destroyed by divine fire for a sin which is termed by the biblical writer as “unauthorized,”<sup>12)</sup> or “which he had not commanded them” (Lev. 10:1). When Aaron and his sons follow the commands of God, **delivered to them by Moses**, all is working well. Once they act on their own, there is wrong conduct, a sin, which causes a punishment as awful as death. It should be pointed out that the misconduct of the priestly family, i.e. Aaron and his sons, is basically incongruent with Moses’ new religious demands, yet may not deviate from the existing priestly conduct to which they were accustomed. As we shall see below, the same is also true for the calf episode in Ex. 32.

#### **3.2.**

In the ANE cults, worship of the divine may be carried out either in a certain enclosed structure, such as a house or a tent, or in relation to a monument, such as a statue, a pillar, a natural object, etc. Both kinds of worship are present in Ex. 19-40, and they create a twofold way of worshipping the divine. The account in Ex. 24 describes worship at the deity’s mountain- or sky-related dwelling area, while the twelve pillars at the foot of the mountain represent divine presence for the worshipers at that place. Ex. 32 introduces the presence of the divine within a statue of a calf, and Ex. 40 establishes a divine dwelling place within a temple - a tent or a tabernacle in this case - with the representation of the divine in a cloud. The new form of the cult introduced by Moses is the transfer of the divine into a stable dwelling without a representation in a statue housed at this dwelling, and while creating a new religious-social formation for the twelve tribes. The divine entity is not changed: it is the same god YHWH, the god of the People of Israel. His cult, however, undergoes certain changes to which the priesthood must adjust.

### 3.3.

Hittite cultic texts of the second millennium from Anatolia show mixed ways of worshipping a divine entity. In the Hittite texts we find the established temple as the dwelling place of a divine entity next to instances of the worship of that same god or goddess at different locations, and where the divine is represented either by a pillar (Hittite *huwaši*) or by a statue depicting the divine in animal or human form.

An example of such use can be seen in the text KUB 25.23, which dates to the time of king Tudhaliya IV (13th century BCE) and describes the cult of the towns Urešta and Hakmiš.<sup>13</sup> The text lists several festivals, the first of which is a festival in the beginning of spring, “when it thunders” (obv. i 8’-33’). The people of the towns make preparations and “The next day the SANGA-priests, the GUDU-priests, the lords, the noblemen [—broken—] arrive (in town). They carry the (deity) Halwanna<sup>14</sup> up to the mountain, and the statue is set next to its *huwaši*” (lines 10’-12’). Next there is a ceremony held with bread, beer, and meat, donated by the neighboring towns. The festival, then, is a social event for the residents of that area. They celebrate with eating, drinking, and wrestling until evening. Then they “bring the deity home to the town, and place him inside the temple” (lines 21’-24’). The next day the priests celebrate at the temple in town, and the following day “they take up the deity and carry him home to Hakmiš. And he is to stay there.”

The statue of the god, representing the mountain-god Halwanna, pays a visit to its mountain. The mountain is its sacred place. The statue, however, also dwells permanently in a temple at the town of Hakmiš.<sup>15</sup> Priests as well as the lords and noblemen—the political leadership—accompany the statue’s trip to the mountain. This visit includes a ceremony of eating, drinking, and amusements, constituting a celebration of the god at the mountain, where the deity reveals its presence.<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that while the priests, the lords, and the noblemen play a specific role in the ceremony, the community also participates.

The comparison indicates that while the Hittite cultic practice enabled several forms of manifestation for the divine, the biblical text of Exodus declares that there is only one correct way to be followed, that which Moses introduces after descending from the mountain. He brings the divine with him into the camp, and demands that it be worshiped in one specific way alone.

Hittite texts of a cultic nature, which represent different cultic practices in different locations within the Hittite lands, describe alternatively the establishment of a temple, the creation of statues, and the celebration of the divine in front of a pillar outside a built shrine. The main cultic activity in each celebration for the deity may change, but it always includes the presentation of food and beverages to the divine. All this may be compared with the three cultic practices found in our Exodus account: mountain and pillar, statue, and tabernacle.

### 3.4.

The account in Ex. 24 describes—according to the text’s words in 24:8—a covenant ritual.<sup>17)</sup> As such the ritual involves ceremonies of a religious nature, which are aimed at joining “separate groups together for certain purposes,” as well as being “performative ceremonies to achieve important social goals.”<sup>18)</sup> This story brings a new nation into being by establishing an exclusive way of worshiping an exclusive god. However, the ceremonies, which embrace the legal implementation of the covenant, portray a regular religious ritual of celebrating the divine like that seen in the Hittite text above. The ceremonies at the foot of the mountain include setting up twelve pillars (Heb. *maṣēbāh*) and an altar (Ex. 24:4) on which bulls are sacrificed. The people eat and drink (although this is explicitly stated only for Moses, the priests, and the Elders, at 24:11).

### 3.5.

The cultic object called *maṣēbāh* in Hebrew has a counterpart in both Hittite and north-Syrian cults. The object is called *huwaši*<sup>19)</sup> in Hittite, and in the Akkadian of north-Syria, *sikkanum*. M. Hutter<sup>20)</sup> wrote at length on the correlation between these three terms. He already pointed out the fact that the *huwaši* represents a god or a goddess, on the one hand, and the divine place, on the other, typically the house or temple of the divine.<sup>21)</sup> However, it is quite clear that the pillar is of an aniconic character in contrast to the statue. Hutter uses the story of Jacob in Genesis 28, which tells of his dream at Beit-El, to show how the *maṣēbāh* represents both the presence of the divine and the dwelling place of the divine. Thus, Hutter suggests that Jacob’s story shows a progression from a pillar to an abode of a god.<sup>22)</sup> The pillars in Ex. 24, therefore, represent the appearance of the presence of the divine among the twelve tribes.

The use of the pillars in Ex. 24 also suggests another meaning. In Hittite and in North-Syrian cults the pillars (written with the Sumerogram ZI.KIN) can also indicate border-stones.<sup>23)</sup> In that sense the pillars, set-up at the foot of the mountain, determine the boundary of the holiness of the mountain and thus indicate the sacred place, the dwelling of the divine at that location.<sup>24)</sup>

### 3.6.

The West-Semitic word *sikkanum* has shown up in the cuneiform texts of north-Syrian Emar.<sup>25)</sup> Hutter had already quoted those texts in his comparative article,<sup>26)</sup> but I would like to linger on one text in relation to Ex. 24. Among the cultic texts found at Emar there is a detailed description of a festival named *Zukru*.<sup>27)</sup> D. Fleming has studied this festival lately,<sup>28)</sup> and his work suggests a most interesting comparison with the cultic practice in Ex. 24.<sup>29)</sup> Fleming, in a previous study, already noted that the meaning of the Akkadian word *Zukru* is related to the Semitic root *zkr* meaning “to name, mention, and remember.”<sup>30)</sup>

The *Zukru*-festival was an annual event, but once every seven years it was celebrated most elaborately. The *Zukru*-festival of the seventh year mainly honors all the gods of Emar with sacrifices of animals and bread and offerings of beverages. The principal activity of the festival focused on the arrival of the gods' statues at a complex of stone pillars (Akk. *sikkanu*) located outside the town walls. It is said in the text that the gods go out; we assume they go out of the town.<sup>31)</sup> Fleming emphasizes that the main concern of the text is twofold: one is the movement out of the town and back in, and the second is the procession during the rites conducted at the stone pillars, when the main god of Emar, the head of the pantheon - Dagan - passes between the pillars, thus demonstrating his presence.<sup>32)</sup> The most important element of the festival is the fact that the god Dagan is celebrated at the pillars.<sup>33)</sup> After the god leaves the town he passes between the pillars in a wagon; then he returns to the town, to his temple. After the people eat and drink, they anoint the stone pillars with oil and blood.<sup>34)</sup>

### 3.7.

In light of Emar's *Zukru*-festival, Ex. 24 reveals a combination of cultic acts presenting Moses as the main active character and the people as somewhat passive observers. There are numerous correlations between these cultic ceremonies. Ex. 24 tells the story of a festival which the people of Israel celebrate in the wilderness, compared with one that takes place outside of town in the Emar text. Originally they asked Pharaoh permission to go and celebrate their god in the desert (Ex. 3:18). This is what they do in chapter 24; they celebrate their god, they acknowledge his power and invite his presence among them. During the ritual in Ex. 24:6-8 Moses throws sacrificial blood on the altar, which may have included the nearby pillars, as done in Emar. He also dashes the blood on the people after they accept the terms of the covenant, thus making them holy. In the next stage a similar ceremony is performed at the tabernacle: the altar and the priests were made sacred when they were anointed with blood and oil (Ex. 29: 19-21). The consecration of the pillars in Emar is done after the gods return to the town, to show that the place has become sacred by their presence. This compares with the sacredness of the tabernacle, its personnel, and its furnishings. Their sacredness indicates the presence of the divine. Thus the divine is present among the pillars at the foot of the mountain. However, his presence is not visible. The People of Israel do not see any statue of the god; instead they see his representative Moses. Indeed, later on Moses will assume an even higher, divinized status.

## 4. Older traditions and the introduction of innovations

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### 4.1.

Moses stays on the mountain to enter into direct contact with the divine. Others are not allowed to come with him (24:14). Moses enters the realm of the divine, and from being

a representative of the divine he himself is divinized. However, before treating this subject in detail, I would like to discuss the main activity of Moses as a mediator between the divine and the people.

Moses presents the people with the covenant, a written text called *sepher haberit* (24:7). This text, if we follow the biblical order of events, is not the written communication to be brought down from the meeting with the divine in Ex. 32: 15-16. It seems to me that the text of *sepher haberit* (according to which the worship at the foot of the mountain and in front of the pillars took place) belongs to a previous or early stage of the relationship between the people and the divine, where the cultic practice seems to have been similar to that of the cultures surrounding Ancient Israel. Once Moses goes up to the mountain he comes back with a new understanding, and with new religious practices, which are the reason why Aaron was not able to anticipate the anger of Moses when he created the statue of the calf. In order to clarify this idea I will later present a few other ANE texts.

#### 4.2.

Moses is a messenger of God; he sets the *berit* - covenant - with God. The word *berit* has long been shown<sup>35)</sup> to be parallel to the Hittite word *išhiül*, which literally means “obligations, rules,”<sup>36)</sup> bonds which tie one party to another, and can be translated as “treaty” or “covenant.” The idea that stands behind the word is the creation of a legal relationship between two parties, validated by oaths.<sup>37)</sup>

In Ex. 24 Moses imposes the content of *sepher haberit* upon the people of Israel at the time of creating the legal relationship with God. Later he twice “brings down” from God two tablets termed *lūhot haberit* - the covenant tablets - (Ex. 32:15-16). As I pointed out above, *sepher haberit* preceded the *lūhot* and should be regarded as containing a different kind of covenant.

The Hittite use of the term *išhiül* in cultic context may shed light on this point. In several Hittite texts we find that the word *išhiül* is used to indicate ritual procedures, cultic instructions for handling the worship of the gods.<sup>38)</sup> An interesting fact is that the Hittite king imposes the instructions or rules of cultic conduct, delivered to the priesthood in these texts. The Hittite text KUB 32.133 is of special interest in this context. The text tells a story dictated by king Muršili II, reporting on the cult of the town Samuha. He tells that his father, king Tudhaliya III, son of Šuppiliuma (of the 14th century BCE), ordered a new cult for the Deity of the Night to be established in Samuha. However, a short while after “the wooden-tablet-scribes and the temple-men (=priests) came, and they falsified the ceremonies and the cultic obligations (*išhiüleš*), which he had mandated for the temple of the Deity of the Night. Muršili, the great king, [after hearing about the incident] rewrote the cultic obligations on the spot.”<sup>39)</sup>

Tudhaliya III introduced a new deity to the cult of Samuha. He did it by entrusting the

priesthood with written tablets (in cuneiform), which are tablets of *išhiūl*. By these tablets the priests are obliged to fulfill the worship of that deity. But the priests did not like the change in their cultic procedure and they rewrote the tablets. Muršili II, who learned of their conduct, rewrote the tablets anew and imposed the laws and regulations of the new cult, which was transferred from Kizzuwatna to Samuha. We learn three things from the Hittite text: 1) the introduction of a new cult is formalized through tablets of *išhiūl* upon which the regulations and laws of the cult are written; 2) the introduction of a new cult is initiated by the king and carried out by cult professionals, in our case the priests; 3) the priests tend to reject changes to their familiar cult practice and adhere to their old ways, unless forced by the leadership to change them.

Ex. 19-40 tells the story of introducing a new cult, the cult of YHWH, to the Israelites, who were a group of twelve separate social units. Moses carries out the introduction of the new cult with written tablets, on which he is delivering the demands of the divine.

What is the status of Moses when introducing this new cult? To answer this question we have to understand the account of the celebration of the calf in chapter 32.

## 5. The calf episode in light of Hittite texts

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### 5.1.

Ex. 32, usually taken as one literary unit with chapters 33 and 34, presents the new religion and its champion Moses in a difficult situation. Many scholars have treated these chapters at length in recent decades, and their works are numerous. The point of departure to be taken in this study is to try to understand the Israelites' cultic activity in light of Hittite practice. Hittite cultic practice is described on many cuneiform tablets, and in many cases we receive a similar description of festivals even though the festivals' names may differ. One example is the Hittite text KUB 17.35. This text is an inventory of festivals held in several towns, probably written down by the administration of king Tudhaliya IV. C. Carter first presented the text in transliteration and translation.<sup>40</sup> When reading the list of the festivals, one gets the impression that their main activities were identical. We may therefore summarize a typical town's festival for either a god or a goddess.

The schema of such a festival could be as follows: The time for the festival arrives. The cult personnel cleanse themselves and wash the statue of the deity at the temple in town. They prepare offerings of bread, meat from sacrificed animals (bulls or sheep), and beverages. All is set before the (statue of the) deity. On the next day the statue of the deity is carried by the temple personnel to the *huwaši* of the deity outside of town. The statue is set in front of the *huwaši*. As we have seen above (2.3), the *huwaši* is the aniconic representative of the deity and is a pole or a stone pillar. The *huwaši* is washed and also anointed with oil.<sup>41</sup> Next the priest sacrifices animals that are slaughtered at the *huwaši*, and the people (probably also the people



of the town), celebrate before the deity. They eat and they drink, they fight or they wrestle, and the temple's female personnel entertain the deity – probably by singing and dancing. When evening comes they take the statue of the deity back to its temple in town and set it back on its pedestal. The next day they offer the deity meat, bread, and wine. There may be small differences of detail in the description of these festivals, but in general this is the main outline of the cultic activity.

### 5.2.

Examining Ex. 32:1-6, we find a similar festival in celebration of the deity. The deity YHWH had earlier never been present in a temple, therefore his statue is erected in a way similar to the descriptions of statue making we find in Mesopotamian texts.<sup>42)</sup> The celebration thus can be regarded as the introduction of the cult-image to the cult. The stone pillars set at the foot of the mountain earlier may designate the place where the statue is celebrated. The statue is identified as YHWH, and Aaron announces that the festival (*hag*) will take place on the next day. As in the Hittite text, during the first day the celebrants honor the statue itself and the festival takes place on the next day. On the morning of the second day they first sacrifice to the deity, as in the Hittite festivals, and then they eat and drink, and as the biblical text says: *wayāqūmū leṣahēq*. The JPS translation reads “(they) rose to dance,” in accordance with the description given in 32:19 that Moses “saw the calf and the dancing.” However the word *ṣāḥaq/sāḥaq* can also mean, “laugh, entertain” (Gn. 18:13), “play, sport” (Gn. 21:9; Jud. 16:25). This is indeed what the Hittites did after the meal: they entertained the deity by dancing and singing, and also with sports.

The episode of the calf resembles the description of a regular, perhaps annual, celebration for a deity in the Hittite cult. This episode may also be considered the regular celebration of *hag leYHWH* announced by Aaron. We may now understand why Aaron's reaction to the people's request was positive. The celebration of the calf, then, can be taken as the continuation of the cultic activity held at the foot of the mountain in Ex. 24.

### 5.3.

Verses 7-8 in chapter 32 indicate that this is not the way Israel should celebrate its deity from now on. The divine did not order the erecting of the calf. As noted above, in the Hittite world the one responsible for ordering the making of statues to deities or building new temples was the Hittite king alone.<sup>43)</sup> Aaron, in his position as a priest, was not entitled to set up a statue. Aaron's function is that of a cult professional, a priest; he is supposed to abide by the rules given to him by Moses.

The transmission of the message to Moses, the mediator, by the deity on the mountain took too long for the impatient people of Israel. Yet Aaron's initiative brings a fierce reaction from Moses. He orders the Levites to kill the people who are celebrating (32:27). A massacre

takes place. Three thousand people die on that day (32:28). Moses destroys the calf, but also the divine tablets issued by God. It was a moment of uncontrolled anger, which caused fear of the man and made Moses the undisputed ruler - nearly to the degree of a divine entity. The fact that Moses was divinized is most important to the understanding of this moment.

## 6. The status of Moses

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### 6.1.

Hauge, in his above mentioned study of these chapters,<sup>44)</sup> shows that from a literary point of view they “seem to function both as intermittent events and as part of the linear development of successive events.” Moses is being replaced in 32:1 with a statue, the golden calf. The people ask for a statue in place of Moses, to guide them on their way: “come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt – we do not know what has happened to him.”<sup>45)</sup> I believe that the guidance they look for, replacing Moses, is divine. That is the first clear indication of Moses’ new status. Support for this point, already noted in the scholarly research, is the description of Moses’ anger in the language used to describe YHWH’s anger.<sup>46)</sup> Moses’ divine essence intensifies as the story continues.

### 6.2.

Ex. 33:7-11 is another stage of Moses’ approach to being worshiped as a divine figure. In v. 10: “When all the people saw the pillar of cloud poised at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise and bow low, each at the entrance of his tent.” The people of Israel treat Moses as one who is in the realm of the divine, and who causes the presence of the divine to be among them. The last stage, which completes the image of Moses as divinized, is in chapter 34:29-34. In these verses Moses receives a special description as a man whose face presents a divine power: “*veqāran ‘ôr pānāw*”. His “shining” face, elsewhere (Num. 27.20) called his “radiance” (*hod*), has been compared with ancient Mesopotamian attributes of the gods and is as well an attribute of YHWH himself.<sup>47)</sup> The shining of his face, which caused anxiety among the people of Israel, made Moses hide his countenance behind a veil. This act of Moses, covering the face, has a most interesting parallel in the ceremonies conducted during the *Zukru*-festival in Emar. When the god Dagan appears at the *Zukru*-festival he comes from his temple riding a wagon. When he is brought out to the pillars his face is covered, and the same is the case when he goes back to the town. But when he is passing between the pillars - when he shows his divine presence - his face is uncovered.<sup>48)</sup> Thus indeed is Moses’ activity represented: when he is delivering the word of God, the presence of God is made present via him - he is actually the divine entity - and in these moments his face is seen and it shines; when he is off duty, his face is covered (34:33). The biblical description of Moses is a

description applied to the deity's statue in the Emar cult.

### 6.3.

The above comparisons with the ANE material open a possible reading of chapters 19-40 as an introduction of a new cult to the already existing, or even established, Israelite cult. The basic descriptions of the previous cultic customs are used in order to distinguish them from the newly commanded practice of worship.

Two points can be stated clearly: 1) The divine is represented by a human being who transmits the will of God. He is regarded as a replacement for a statue representing the presence of the divine. 2) The celebration for, or worship of, the divine must be conducted within a "house," and the instructions for building that house are provided in a written document (Ex 31:18; see below 6.5).

### 6.4.

The tension between Moses and Aaron is best understood in light of the Hittite text of KUB 32.133 (above 4.2). In both stories the tension between the king/leader who is also the representative of the divine, on the one hand, and the priests on the other, is a result of the latter not following the prescribed conduct regulating cultic practice for that divine entity. Their neglect is understood as a betrayal of the king! The priests in Samuha simply did not want to include the worship of the Goddess of the Night imposed upon them by king Tudhaliya, so they sat down and re-wrote the tablets bearing the rules of worship. In so doing they actually betrayed the king. Since the offended king was not Muršili himself we are not told of their punishment, but only of the re-writing of the tablets. Moses, too, had to re-write the tablets. But he also reacts as one who was betrayed: he calls out a punishment for disloyalty, which is actually disloyalty shown to him personally!<sup>149</sup> In both cases the re-writing of the rules of the cult was a result of cult officials having rejected the deity's new cultic practice.

It becomes clear that Moses is imposing a new cult on an existing cultic tradition. Moses introduces to the Israelite cult the separation of the place of worship from the iconic or statue object of worship. The temple-building description (Ex. 25-30, 35-40) represents the concentration of the new cult in the sacred place identified with the "house." The building of a dwelling is already indicated in setting up the pillars. The Emar and the Hittite texts, as well as Jacob's story in Gn. 28, show a direct relationship between the divine dwelling and the pillars (*sikkanum/huwaši*). The setting up of the pillars is the prelude to the setting up of the tabernacle. The god descends from his previous abode to the new one. The instructions for establishing the tabernacle, and the description of how it was executed, have an interesting counterpart among the Hittite cultic texts.

### 6.5.

Among the Hittite texts quoted above, we have presented the introduction of the cult of the Deity of the Night into the cult center of the town of Samuha (KUB 32.133, above 4.2). This deity originates in Kizzuwatna (Cilicia region). The priesthood rejected that deity for unstated reasons which, however, may be guessed. The new cult shares the offerings presented originally to the other deities at the Samuha cult center. This suggests that the priestly share in the cult would also have suffered. Introducing the deity to the temple brought upon the priests more work and additional festivals to celebrate. They did not like it, and therefore tried to change it back.

Among the Hittite texts, however, we have a long text describing the procedure for establishing a new temple for that same deity “The Deity of the Night,” recognized as a goddess (CTH 481 - KUB 29.4).<sup>50)</sup> This text describes setting up a new temple for that deity in a different location. The new temple is built in along side an old one. The text indicates the creation of a new statue of the deity made of gold, and there is a description of the clothes presented to it. A long sequence of ceremonies taking several days (almost a week) is described, for which a priest and an administrative official are responsible.<sup>51)</sup> Most illuminating among the ceremonies indicating the welcoming of the deity to the temple are two: 1) A ceremony of “attracting the deity to its new temple,” which mainly involves summoning the deity to come from any place in the world to its new dwelling: “they pull/ attract the deity from Akkad, from Babylon, from Susa, from Elam, from Hursagkalama, to the city which she loves, from the mountain, from the river, from the sea, from the valley, from the meadow, from the *ušarunt*, from the sky, from the earth by means of seven roads and by means of seven paths.” The deity is called upon to come and dwell at the new temple. 2) Later, when the transfer of the deity to its new precinct is finished, “they bloody the golden (image of the deity), the wall and all the implements of the new deity. Then the new deity and the temple are pure.”<sup>52)</sup>

### 6.6.

While the Hittite text describes a new temple with a new divine statue, the biblical religion introduced by Moses includes only a sacred dwelling without the statue, which Aaron thought so naturally to be the first item to prepare.<sup>53)</sup> The divine presence is attracted to the temple, as YHWH descends from the mountain into his new place of dwelling among the People of Israel. In order for the presence of the divine to enter the place, it is purified by the same means: sacrificial blood and oil. However, while the deity in the Hittite cult is introduced to its dwelling place with a statue, the Israelite cult clearly rejects that form, and instead Moses himself descends from the mountain and his appearance bears a resemblance to the divine.

In both cults the introduction of the deity is accompanied by written instructions called

*berît* or *išhiūl*. But where the Hittites accept the new deity and its cult as part of a complex of other divine entities, the biblical text shows a fight for exclusiveness. The place of dwelling, the temple, becomes the center of the cult concern; it is regarded as the site of the divine presence, not the image of a divine entity. Where the Hittites showed tolerance, and enabled several divine entities to reside in the same temple, under Moses the Israelites are made to adopt monotheism in the form of one god worshiped at one place only. The image is forcefully destroyed, and instead of it the representation of the deity is transferred to the mediator, Moses, who is actually a vehicle transferring the divine call. Moses' greatest opponent is the statue, not Aaron.

## Conclusion

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Ex 19-40 contains a series of cultic texts that were used on different occasions or represent different stages in the development of the ancient Israelite religion. These cultic practices are in many cases similar to those carried out by the peoples surrounding ancient Israel. The weaving of the different texts into one literary tradition did not erase their original essence. As we saw above, the worship at the mountain or in front of sacred pillars, the making of the sacred image, and even the erection of a permanent dwelling place for the deity, all have their precedence in the religious documents of the ANE. The innovation introduced by Moses, according to the biblical account, is twofold: the destruction of images, and the introduction of an exclusive place of worship for the God YHWH.

During this process of innovation and change, there is an interim stage, in which Moses is regarded as a divinized being. However, Moses did not become an object of worship. After the crucial phase of introducing the divine into its dwelling place, he remains a mediator. The biblical text describes the mediator, as a person incarnating the divine power, such as will be seen later with some prophets - for example, Elijah.<sup>54)</sup> Some of these prophets will embark on zealous battles in defense of the cult of their exclusive God, according to the brutal example set by Moses when he introduced this new concept of religion.

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## NOTES

- 1) To record just a few of these works: T.N.D. Mettinger, *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism and its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Stockholm) 1995; J.C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism* (Leuven) 1997; M. S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* (Oxford) 2001. K. van der Toorn, *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the ANE* (Leuven) 1997; Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallelectic Approaches* (London) 2001.
- 2) Among the recent works: S. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (SBLMS 34, Atlanta) 1988; J.G. Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological evidence for the*

- sun worship in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield) 1993. See also the recent book edited by B. N. Porter, *One God or Many? - The Concept of Divinity in the Ancient World* (Casco Bay) 2001.
- 3) See already W. Beyerlin, *Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Tradition* (tr. S. Rudman; Oxford) 1965, who argued that the origin of the tradition lies in a combination of the cultic recital of covenant-renewal and cultic-historical events, pp.163-164.
  - 4) The issue was summarized already in 1973 by E. W. Nicholson, *Exodus and Sinai in History and Tradition* (Oxford 1973) 33-52, and has been elaborated on since then. For a summary on the issue see: E. W. Nicholson, *God and his People* (1986), with K. A. Kitchen's review, "The fall and Rise of Covenant: Law and Treaty," *Tyndale Bulletin* 40 (1989) 118-135.
  - 5) Martin R. Hauge, *The Descent from the Mountain: Narrative Patterns in Exodus 19-40* (Sheffield, JSOTSS 323, 2001) 14-15.
  - 6) *Ibid*, p. 22.
  - 7) In Hauge's words, *ibid*, p. 140: "Permanently settled in the world below, the theophonic presence is related to a new version of divine and human co-movement."
  - 8) J. A. Wilcoxon, "Some Anthropocentric Aspects of Israel's Sacred History," *The Journal of Religion* 48 (1968) 349.
  - 9) During the second millennium Emar was a town of commerce in northern Syria. In the 13th century it was rebuilt and controlled by the Hittite kingdom, but allowed to continue to run its religious and social institutions and traditions. See D. Fleming, "Emar: On the road from Harran to Hebron, in: M.W. Chavalas and K. L. Younger eds., *Mesopotamia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: 2002) 222-250.
  - 10) Although it is also possible to identify the theophonic appearance as belonging to a Storm-god, for which see V.A. Hurowitz, "From Storm God to Abstract Deity: How the Deity became More Distant from Exodus to Deuteronomy," in *Bible Review* 14/5 (1998) pp. 40 – 47.
  - 11) M. R. Hauge, *ibid*, pp.196-198.
  - 12) See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16 (AB, 1991)* 598.
  - 13) The latest treatment of the text is in J. Hazenbos, *The organization of the Anatolian local cults during the 13th Century BC* (Brill, Leiden: 2003) 27-36. See also my dissertation "Hittite Priesthood in Anatolia of the Second Millennium BCE According to Hittite texts and in Light of ANE texts" (Ben-Gurion University, 2004) p. 220.
  - 14) They carry the statue of the mountain god named Halwanna. The statue is most probably in a human shape.
  - 15) Hakmis/Hakpis is one of the ancient sacred towns of the Hittite kingdom. See J. Gartang and O.R. Gurney, *The Geography of the Hittite Empire* (London: 1959) 18. See also RGTC 6/1 pp. 65-7.
  - 16) It is not specified whether they are on the mountain or at the foot of the mountain, which would seem a more convenient location for eating and for sports activities.
  - 17) For the terminology "ritual" see D.R. Hillers, "Rite: Ceremonies of Law and Treaty in the Ancient Near East" in: Edwin B. Firmage *et al.* (eds.) *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, (Winona Lake, 1990) 353-4.
  - 18) Hillers, *ibid*, p. 363.
  - 19) J. Puhvel, *Hittite Etymological Dictionary* 3 (1991) 438-441 "stone or wood pillar, occasionally

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- with metal (silver, iron) serving as outdoors or sheltered cult object, or as boundary marker.”
- 20) M. Hutter, “Kulten und Baityloi: Die Ausstrahlung eines syrischen religiösen Phänomens nach Kleinasien und Israel,” in B. Janowski, K. Koch and G. Wilhelm (eds.) *Religionsgeschichtliche Beziehungen zwischen Kleinasien, Nordsyrien und dem Alten Testament* (OBO 129, 1993) 87-108.
  - 21) Hutter, *ibid*, p. 93.
  - 22) Hutter, *ibid*, p. 101-2.
  - 23) Puhvel, *HED* 3, p. 438.
  - 24) This understanding enables us to consider Ex. 24 a direct continuation of the cultic description of Ex. 19 where the people of Israel are limited to the foot of the mountain.
  - 25) For Emar see the volume edited by M. W. Chavalas, *EMAR: The History, Religion, and Culture of a Syrian Town in the Late Bronze Age* (Maryland) 1996.
  - 26) Hutter, *ibid*, p. 88-9.
  - 27) The *Zukru* text was first published by D. Arnaud as *EMAR 373* in *Recherches au pays d'Astata: Emar VI/1-3* (Paris) 1985-6.
  - 28) D. E. Fleming, *Time at Emar: The Cultic Calendar and the Rituals from the Diviner's House* (Winona Lake, 2000) 48-140. For a general overview of the Diviner's archive see his introduction.
  - 29) This idea was noted in his article quoted above note 9, pp. 238 n. 57.
  - 30) D. E. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar* (HSS 42, 1992) 76-79, where he related this name to the biblical Passover-festival where the main idea of *zkr* is “remember”. In his new treatment of the *Zukru-festival* he emphasizes the meaning “to name” indicating naming a god, acknowledging his power, and inviting its presence, see Fleming, *Time at Emar*, *ibid*, p. 124.
  - 31) Fleming's view is that the gods go out of town in a procession, since the celebration does not take place in town. Fleming, *Time at Emar*, *ibid*, p. 133ff.
  - 32) Fleming, *ibid*, p. 54.
  - 33) Fleming, *ibid*, pp. 87-91.
  - 34) Fleming, *ibid*, p. 239 lines 34-5.
  - 35) M. Weinfeld, “The Loyalty Oath in the Ancient Near East,” *Ugarit Forschungen* 8 (1976) 379-414.
  - 36) J. Puhvel, *Hittite Etymological Dictionary*, vol. 2 (1984) 400.
  - 37) More on that see below.
  - 38) The texts were treated in my dissertation, note 13 above, pp. 459-461.
  - 39) For a treatment of this text see my dissertation, note 13 above, pp. 293-4.
  - 40) C. Carter, “Hittite Cult-Inventories,” (Ph.D. dissertation University of Chicago, 1962) 123-153. More on the cult inventories see J. Hazenbos, *The Organization of the Anatolian Local Cults During the 13th Century B.C.*, (Brill, Leiden) 2003.
  - 41) Blood is not used in these cases.
  - 42) See the discussion of V. A. Hurowitz, “The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123,1 (2003) 147-157.
  - 43) In the words of A. S. Kapelrud, “Temple Building: A Task for Gods and Kings,” *Orientalia* 32 (1963) 56-62.

- 44) See note 5 above; he has a whole chapter on “the Apotheosis of Moses,” pp. 156-189.
- 45) See Hauge, *ibid*, 168ff.
- 46) See v. 19 “*wayihar ap Mōšhe*.” See Klingbeil’s treatment of the use of this phrase “Quebrar la ley’: Algunas Notas Exegeticas Acerca de Exodos 32:19,” *Davar Logos* 1 (2002) 77-79. He emphasizes the breaking of the tablets as a ritual act, symbolizing the breaking of the covenant.
- 47) M. Haran, “The Shining of Moses’ Face,” in: *In the Shelter of Elyon*, eds. W. B. Barrick and J. R. Spencer (JSOTSS 31, Sheffield, 1984) 159-173. Also S. L. Sanders, “Old Light on Moses’ Shining Face,” *Vetus Testamentum* 52,3 (2002) 400-406.
- 48) For the text see Fleming, *Time at Emar*, *ibid*, p. 247 line 164; p. 249 lines 171-173, 176, 181-2; p. 251 lines 189-192.
- 49) A similar disloyalty of priests towards a king, which was punished severely, may be recorded in the annihilation of the priesthood of Nov by King Saul (1Samuel 22). See my forthcoming article: “Political Loyalty in the Biblical Account of 1Samuel 20-22 in Light of Hittite Texts,” *Vetus Testamentum* (forthcoming 2005).
- 50) For latest translation see B. J. Collins, “Establishing a new Temple for the Goddess of the Night, in: W.W. Hallo and Younger (eds.) *Context of Scriptures* 1 (1997) 173-177.
- 51) I intend to treat this text in detail in another study.
- 52) See H. Kronasser, *Die Umsiedelung der schwarzen Gottheit* (Wien, 1963) pp. 32-333, column iv, lines 38-40.
- 53) Note that the Hittite statue of the goddess is termed “the golden deity (DINGIR<sup>LUM</sup> GUSKIN),” and compare with Ex. 32:31 *’elōhē zāhāw*.
- 54) See Hauge, *ibid* pp. 176-182.