

Torah and the Book of Numbers

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Contents

Preface	V
<i>Christian Frevel</i> The Book of Numbers – Formation, Composition, and Interpretation of a Late Part of the Torah. Some Introductory Remarks	1
<i>Thomas Pola</i> Back to the Future: The Twofold Priestly Concept of History	39
<i>Thomas Römer</i> Egypt Nostalgia in Exodus 14–Numbers 21	66
<i>Horst Seebass</i> Numeri als eigene Komposition	87
<i>Christophe Nihan</i> The Priestly Laws of Numbers, the Holiness Legislation, and the Pentateuch	109
<i>Christian Frevel</i> Ending with the High Priest: The Hierarchy of Priests and Levites in the Book of Numbers	138
<i>Aaron Scharf</i> The Spy Story and the Final Redaction of the Hexateuch	164
<i>Reinhard Achenbach</i> Complementary Reading of the Torah in the Priestly Texts of Numbers 15	201

Joel S. Baden

Source Stratification, Secondary Additions, and the Documentary
Hypothesis in the Book of Numbers: The Case of Numbers 17 233

Adriane Leveen

“Lo we perish”: A Reading of Numbers 17:27–20:29 248

Herbert Specht

Die Verfehlung Moses und Aarons in Num 20,1–13* P 273

Ludwig Schmidt

Sihon und Og in Num 21,21ff.* und Dtn 2,24ff.* –
Ein Beitrag zur Entstehung des Buches Numeri 314

Jonathan Miles Robker

The Balaam Narrative in the Pentateuch / Hexateuch / Enneateuch334

Olivier Artus

Numbers 32: The Problem of the Two and a Half Transjordanian
Tribes and the Final Composition of the Book of Numbers 367

Eckart Otto

The Books of Deuteronomy and Numbers in One Torah.
The Book of Numbers Read in the Horizon of the
Postexilic Fortschreibung in the Book of Deuteronomy:
New Horizons in the Interpretation of the Pentateuch 383

Index of Sources 399

Index of Authors 427

Egypt Nostalgia in Exodus 14–Numbers 21

Thomas Römer

1. Preliminary Note: The Role of the Book of Numbers in Pentateuchal Studies Today

Probably for the first time since the beginnings of historical-critical exegesis, the Book of Numbers is considered to be of decisive importance in current pentateuchal debates. As early as 1966, Noth noted that the traditionally employed documentary hypothesis could only be maintained by means of a *petitio principii* for the book of Numbers: “If we were to take the book of Numbers on its own, then we would think not so much of ‘continuous sources’ as of an unsystematic collection of innumerable pieces of tradition of very varied content, age and character (‘Fragment hypothesis’).”¹ In fact, the book’s complex literary design speaks against interpretative approaches comparable to those commonly used for the books of Genesis or Exodus because the texts contained in Numbers cannot be read, whether linguistically or on a content-related level, as a continuation of the priestly or non-priestly texts of the previous books. Nevertheless, two recent commentaries on the book of Numbers adhere to the documentary hypothesis, which they consider the best explanatory model, namely the *Biblischer Kommentar* by Seebass and the commentary in *Altes Testament Deutsch* composed by Schmidt.² Seebass does, however, take into account the peculiarity of the book of Numbers, and sees it characterized by a “Numbers composition” which dates back to the late 4th century BCE and has no structural

¹ M. Noth, *Das 4. Buch Mose. Numeri*, ATD 7, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1966, 1977 (3rd edition), 8 [“Nimmt man das 4. Mosebuch für sich, so käme man nicht leicht auf den Gedanken an ‘durchlaufende Quellen,’ sondern eher auf den Gedanken an eine unsystematische Zusammenstellung von zahllosen Überlieferungsstücken sehr verschiedenen Inhalts, Alters und Charakters (‘Fragmentenhypothese’)”]; ET: *Numbers: A Commentary*, London: SCM Press, 4.

² H. Seebass, *Numeri* 10,11–22,1, BK.AT 4/2.1–5, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener 1993–2002; *Numeri* 22,2–36,13, BK.AT 4/3, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener 2004–2007; L. Schmidt, *Das 4. Buch Mose. Numeri Kapitel* 10,11–36,13, ATD 7,2, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2004.

parallel in the other books of the Pentateuch.³ Similarly, Schmidt concedes that for the evolution of Numbers, the “focal point lay in the exilic-postexilic time from which most texts stem.”⁴ In contrast to Seebass, Schmidt regards the later additions as the results of redactional works on the Pentateuch, and he places much less emphasis on the particular character of Numbers.

Levin also attempts to trace the “Yahwistic” thread of narration in Numbers, but only very scarcely succeeds in doing so, mainly for Num 11* and some verses from the Balaam pericope.⁵ An even more extreme theory is put forward by Kratz. He thinks that no more than three verses of Numbers can be attributed to the “Elohist” who is responsible for the texts of Exodus through Joshua (20:1*; 22:1; 25:1a).⁶ Van Seters also believes that the book of Numbers contains Yahwistic and priestly texts that start in Genesis.⁷ Similarly, Blum identifies texts in Numbers that belong to the D-composition (beginning in Ex 3) as well as to the P-composition which starts in Genesis 1.⁸

An alternative model, suggested by Otto and particularly by Achenbach, assumes that the book of Numbers does not contain any texts belonging to P or to pre-priestly “sources.” Taking up some “traditions” (whose outlines remain, however, rather vague), this model characterizes Numbers as a result of interventions by the Hexateuch and Pentateuch redactions.⁹ According to Achenbach, the actual specific shape of Numbers must be attributed to the intervention of three theocratic redactions, younger than the redaction of the Pentateuch, from which the majority of texts in Num 1–10 and 26–36 stem.

³ H. Seebass, *Das Buch Numeri in der heutigen Pentateuchdiskussion*, in: *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers*, ed. by T. Römer, BETL 215, Leuven: Peeters 2008, 233–259, 239.

⁴ L. Schmidt, *Numeri* 10,11–36,13, 10 [“[...] der Schwerpunkt [...] in der exilisch-nachexilischen Zeit [lag] aus der die meisten Texte stammen”].

⁵ C. Levin, *Der Jahwist*, FRLANT 157, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1993, *passim*; idem, *Das israelitische Nationalepos: Der Jahwist*, in: *Große Texte alter Kulturen. Literarische Reise von Gizeh nach Rom*, ed. by M. Hose, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2004, 63–85, he considers that the end of J might have been lost.

⁶ R.G. Kratz, *Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments. Grundwissen der Bibelkritik*, UTB 2157, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2000, 301–304.

⁷ J. Van Seters, *The Pentateuch. A Social Science Commentary, Trajectories 1*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1999.

⁸ E. Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, BZAW 189, Berlin: de Gruyter 1990; idem, *Die literarische Verbindung von Erzvätern und Exodus. Ein Gespräch mit neueren Forschungshypothesen*, in: *Abschied vom Jahwisten. Die Komposition des Hexateuchs in der jüngsten Diskussion*, ed. by J.C. Gertz et al., BZAW 315, Berlin: de Gruyter 2002, 119–156.

⁹ E. Otto, *Das Deuteronomium im Pentateuch und Hexateuch. Studien zur Literaturgeschichte von Pentateuch und Hexateuch im Lichte des Deuteronomiumsrahmens*, FAT 30, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2000; R. Achenbach, *Die Vollendung der Tora: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Numeribuches im Kontext von Hexateuch und Pentateuch*, BZAR 3, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2003; idem, *Die Erzählung von der gescheiterten Landnahme von Kadesch Barnea (Numeri 13–14) als Schlüsseltext der Redaktionsgeschichte des Pentateuchs*, ZAR 9 (2003), 56–123.

Which one of the two alternatives seems more conclusive largely depends on how one is inclined to answer the questions of how P originally ended and whether a composition “J” or “D” existed which comprised several books. This complex debate cannot be unrolled again in this present paper. What we will do here is analyze the question of how the book of Numbers is intertwined with the other pentateuchal books, taking a close look at the rebellion narratives of Numbers 11–21.

2. Num 11–21 within the Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch

I am inclined to agree with Noth, who characterizes the content of the book as “very inconsistent” and its structure as “highly obscure.”¹⁰ According to formal and textual criteria, it is, however, possible to distinguish the following large sections: Beside descriptions of making camp and the size of the different tribes, Num 1–10 mainly contains addenda to priestly texts in Exodus; the end of this section is marked by the departure from Sinai in Num 10. Numbers 11–21 contains all of the rebellion narratives.¹¹ In Num 20–21, we find the first interlaced accounts of the march through and the conquest of Transjordan, introducing the last great section (21–36), which is the least homogeneous, with the theme of conquest being disrupted by a series of addenda to feast regulations, vows, law of succession, Levitical cities, etc. We do not know if the redactors favored this kind of tripartite division, and it is certainly possible that Num 1 and 26 actually suggest a two-part structure.¹²

Even geographically, the rebellion narratives of Num 11–21, set in the “wilderness,” contrast strongly with 1–10 (Sinai) and 22–36 (in the steppes of Moab). They can be structured as follows:

¹⁰ Noth, *Numeri*, 5 [“Inhalt des Buches ... sehr uneinheitlich”, “Aufbau reichlich undurchsichtig”].

¹¹ Num 25 no longer talks about the rebellion in the wilderness, but about apostasy in Transjordan.

¹² Cf. especially D.T. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New. The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch*, *Brown Judaic Studies* 71, Chico Calif.: Scholars Press 1985.

- A 11:1–3 *Introduction*: the people’s complaining, YHWH’s anger, and Moses’ intercession
 B 11:4–34: food; Moses’ revolt against YHWH
 C 12:1–15: revolt against Moses
 D 13–14: revolt of the people against the exodus (return to Egypt); Moses’ intercession
 C’ 16–17: revolt against Aaron (and Moses)¹³
 B’ 20:1–13: water; Moses’ and Aaron’s revolt against YHWH
 A’ 21:4–9 *Conclusion*: revolt of the people against Moses and YHWH, YHWH’s anger, and Moses’ intercession

According to this structure, Num 21:4–9 and 11:1–3 can be understood as a frame embracing the cycle of rebellion, with the refusal of conquest as its central point. However, Num 21:4–9 can also be read as an enhancement, for the pericope constitutes the only narration in which the people not only criticize Moses, but openly turn against YHWH.

Within the framework of the Pentateuch, Num 11–21 has certain parallels in Exod 15–18 and in Deut 1–3. The latter, however, contains no rebellion narratives apart from the spies’ report (Deut 1:9–45), and instead insists on the conquest of Transjordan (Deut 2–3). This focus makes the spies’ report appear as an introduction to the topic. The instruction of the judges in Deut 1:10–17 can be compared with the discharge of Moses in Num 11, though the theme of rebellion is completely absent, and the content of Deut 1:10ff. is undoubtedly closer to Exod 18. This might imply that the conquest of Transjordan in Numbers is part of a much older tradition which predates the rebellion narratives that were apparently unknown to the author or the authors of Deut 1–3.

The numerous connections between Exod 15–18 and Num 11ff. have often been described.¹⁴ Let us briefly name the most important parallels: manna and quails (Exod 16 and Num 11), water out of the rock (Exod 17 and Num 20), Amalekites and military conflict respectively (Exod 17 and Num 13–14), Moses’ wife (Exod 18: Zipporah; Num 12: the Cushite woman) and his father-in-law (Exod 18: Jethro; Num 10:29ff.: Hobab). At the same time, there are two interesting differences between Exod 15ff. and Num 11ff. that seem to have been created purposefully and which have also often been commented on. While in Exod 15–18, the lamenting of the people is always caused by life-threatening shortages (of water and food), the protests in Num 11ff. often arise from conflicts within the community (Num 12: Miriam and Aaron against Moses; Num 14 and 17: the people against Moses and Aaron; Num 21: the people – with no apparent reason – against Moses and YHWH, etc.). The lamentations in Exod 15–17 lead to YHWH’s helping intervention, while in Numbers 11–

¹³ The rebellion narratives directed against Aaronic priesthood are placed in a context of mostly priestly topics and instructions (Num 15 and 18–19).

¹⁴ Cf., e.g., E. Zenger/C. Frevel, *Die Bücher Levitikus und Numeri als Teile der Pentateuchkomposition*, in: *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers*, ed. by T. Römer, BETL 215, Leuven: Peeters 2008, 35–74.

21, the discontent expressed by the people and their leader causes YHWH's anger and retribution. This contrast is probably related to the fact that Exod 15–18 narrates events from before the revelation of the law at Mount Sinai, while Num 11ff. refer to a later period.¹⁵

The extensive parallels between the description of the time spent in the wilderness in Exodus and Numbers are reinforced by a certain “subtheme” that can be characterized as “Egypt nostalgia.” Seven lamentation and rebellion narratives, as much as the exodus account itself, not only deal with specific dangers or conflicts between different groups or individuals, but also involve an idealization of Egypt and in this context generally question the exodus.

3. The Motif of “Egypt Nostalgia” in Exod 14 to Num 21

The following texts address the people's criticism of their being led out of Egypt: Exod 14:11–12 (see also 13:17b); 16:3; 17:3; Num 11:18–20 (see also v. 5); Num 14:2–4; Num 16:12–14; Num 20:3–5; and Num 21:5.

All three Exodus passages in question are found in contexts which have a counterpart in Numbers, and, interestingly, the parallel texts in Numbers strongly accentuate the discontent of the people. While Exod 16:3 speaks of an actual shortage of food, the desire for the meat in Egypt expressed in Num 11:18–20 appears to stand for mere hedonism and greediness of a people who have grown weary of the manna. Whereas the thirst of the people is the focus of Exod 17, Num 20 seems much more morbid because instead of asking for water, the first thing the people utter is a death wish. And while in Exod 14, the people are effectively in mortal danger, in Num 13, they interpret the scouts' account pessimistically and reject YHWH's order of conquest.

Two text passages in Numbers have no counterparts in Exodus, namely the ungrounded refusal of Dathan and Abiram to “come up” in Num 16, and the ungrounded criticism that the people make of Moses and YHWH in Num 21.

The verses in Exodus and Numbers that question the exodus are composed of the following elements (see the appended table):

1. A question, mostly starting with למה (מה) (in Exod 14 מה זאת ; in Num 16 with an interrogative *he*),¹⁶ followed by a verb which expresses the movement away from Egypt into the wilderness (יצא, *qal* or *hif*; עלה, *hif*; בוא, *hif*).

¹⁵ The later redaction section in Exod 15:25b–26 attempts to level this contrast, explaining YHWH's accusation in Exod 16:28.

¹⁶ Only Exod 16 contains no explicit question, but a direct accusation, which raises the question whether the text can be rated among the corpus outlined above. Given that Exod 16:3 expresses nostalgia for Egypt, it does make sense to take this verse into account. The variance in (1) can possibly be explained on the basis of diachronic developments (see below).

	Exod 14:11–12	Exod 16:3	Exod 17:3	Num 11:18–20	Num 14:2–4	Num 16:13	Num 20:4–5	Num 21:5
1. "Why" a. Exodus b. Exodus	מהי זאת עשיא לנו להוציאנו ממצרים	כי אוננו יִהְיוּ אֲנֹכֶם	למה זה ממצרים העליתנו	v. 20 למה זה יצאנו ממצרים	v. 3 ולמה יתה מביא אתנו אל־הארץ הזאת	המעט כי העליתנו מארץ זבח חלב ודבש	v. 4 ולמה הבאתם העליתנו ממצרים להביא אתנו אל־המקום הרע	למה העליתנו ממצרים
2. "to (allow to) die in the desert"	לקחתנו למות במדבר	אל־תמדבר הוה להמית את־כל־הקהל הוה	להמית אתי ואת־הבני ואת־מקני		לנפל כחרב	להמיתנו במדבר	v. 4 אל־המדבר הוה למות שם־אנחנו	למות במדבר
3. "it is better"	כי טוב לנו עבד את־מצרים ממתנו במדבר			v. 18 כִּי־טוֹב לָנוּ בַּמִּצְרַיִם	הלוט טוב לנו			
4. Wish for death		מִיִּיתָמוּתֵנוּ בִּידֵי־יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם			v. 2 לִדְמוּתֵנוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם או במדבר הוה לִדְמוּתֵנוּ			
5. Return to Egypt	(cf. 13:17) ושבו מצרימה				v.3.4 שׁוּבוּ מִצְרַיִמָּה וְנִשְׁוֹבָה מִצְרַיִמָּה			

2. The accusation that the purpose of the exodus is the people's death in the wilderness (infinitive + מות, *qal* or *hif*; in Num 14 נפל).¹⁷
3. A (comparative) remark, opened with טוב לנו, which characterizes Egypt as preferable to the current situation.
4. A radicalization of (3): death is preferable to life in the wilderness (מות).
5. The (scarcely attested) intention of the people to return to Egypt (שוב).

This table shows that the elements (1) and (2) are consistently attested, while the idea of a return to Egypt is only explicitly mentioned in Num 14 and again – in an anticipating manner – in Exod 13:7. It is important to note that only very few similar texts can be found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The project of a return to Egypt is mentioned again in Neh 9:17: “they stiffened their necks and determined to return to their slavery in Egypt.”¹⁸ According to Coats, this text, which is probably a literary combination of Exod 14:12 and Num 14:4, constitutes “the only explicit reference to the problem of the Exodus which appears outside of the Pentateuch.”¹⁹

Apparently, the motif of exodus criticism uttered by the people in the books of Exodus and Numbers serves to describe the entire period spent in the wilderness as being profoundly characterized by Israel's intransigence. Relevant references occur from Exod 13–14 through to Num 21, thus embracing the beginning and the end of the period spent in the wilderness, which implies that they have a redactional function. We need to determine where this motif stems from and whether it is possible to attribute all references to one consistent redactional layer.

4. The Theme of the “Return to Egypt” in Deuteronomistic and Late Deuteronomistic Texts

In the last part of the deuteronomistically reworked curse chapter in Deut 28, v. 68 contains the following threat: “The LORD will bring you back (שוב, *hif*) in ships to Egypt, by a route that I promised you would never see again,” which,

¹⁷ A similar accusation can be found in Deut 1:27: “You grumbled in your tents and said, ‘It is because the LORD hates us that he has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to hand us over to the Amorites to destroy us’ (שמד)” [quoted, like all biblical passages, from: NRSV]. However, this verse differs greatly from the aforementioned texts, because it refers to a negative intention of YHWH.

¹⁸ Thus in LXX and in some Hebrew manuscripts. MT reads “in their disobedience.”

¹⁹ G.W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness. The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions in the Old Testament*, Nashville: Abingdon Press 1968, 246.

as von Rad stated, constitutes a “divine liquidation of the entire salvation history arranged by YHWH.”²⁰ Similar threats can be found in Hos 8:13, 9:3, and 11:5, which probably stem from a deuteronomistic redaction of the book.²¹ Here, in the same way as in Deut 28, the idea of a return to Egypt is placed within the context of divine judgment, which is seen as a “revocation of YHWH’s salvation act.”²² In Deut 17:16, the king is told not to “return the people to Egypt in order to acquire more horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You must never return that way again.’” Notwithstanding the fact that, from a literary point of view, the historical classification of this verse has been controversially discussed,²³ we can establish that here, again, the initiative does not come from the people, and if the king decided to lead them back to Egypt, he would act against the expressed will of YHWH.

The only passage in the Deuteronomistic History that speaks of a return of the people (still in Judea) to Egypt is found in 2 Kgs 25:26: “Then all the people, high and low and the captains of the forces set out and went (בִּיאָה) to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans.” Interestingly, the common root שׁוּב is not used in this context. Within the Deuteronomistic History, this historical event, in connection with Deut 28, can well be seen as a movement “from Egypt to Egypt,”²⁴ as Friedman called it, which consists in the revocation of the entire salvation history.

Possibly, this mention represented the starting point for the idea of questioning the exodus already at a time when it was only just happening. Late deuteronomistic texts like 2 Kgs 21:15 (“because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their ancestors came out of Egypt, even to this day”) and Jer 7:25–26 underline the attitude of disobedience of the people which sets in with the exodus, although its actual character is not specified (in Ezek 20, where the same idea is discussed, the disobedience of the people after they left Egypt consists in idolatry and noncompliance with YHWH’s commandments). The motif of questioning the exodus can therefore

²⁰ G. von Rad, *Das fünfte Buch Moses. Deuteronomium*, ATD 8, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1964, 126 [“göttliche Liquidation der gesamten von Jahwe veranstalteten Heilsgeschichte”].

²¹ G.A. Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea. A Redaction Critical Investigation*, SBL Diss. Series 102, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1987, 196ff.; 209ff.; 221ff.

²² J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea*, ATD 24/1, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1983, 117 [“Revozierung der Rettungstat Jahwes”].

²³ From a literary point of view, this might allude to Solomon’s horse trade. According to R. Albertz, the text refers to the situation under Jehoahaz, while N. Lohfink (Hos. xi 5 als Bezugstext von Dtn. xvii 16, VT 31, 1981, 226–228) has considered a polemic of the Babylonian against the Egyptian diaspora.

²⁴ R.E. Friedman, *From Egypt to Egypt: Dtr¹ and Dtr²*, in: *Traditions in Transformation. Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. by B. Halpern/J.D. Levenson, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns 1981, 167–192.

be understood as a late or post-deuteronomistic continuation of the deuteronomistic theme of Israel's permanent disobedience.

5. The Literary Classification of the Occurrences in Exod 13–Num 21

a. Exod 14:11–12 (and Exod 13:17)

With some certainty, we can distinguish a priestly and a non-priestly version (“J” and “D”) in the exodus narrative of Exod 14. The accusation of Moses in vv. 11–12, in which the people prefer the servitude in Egypt to death in the wilderness, does not belong to any of these lines of narration. Moses' answer in v. 13, which completely ignores the people's protest of 11–12 (“Do not be afraid”)²⁵ directly takes up the narrative line developed in v. 10 (“In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD”) and has to be attributed to a post-deuteronomistic and post-priestly redaction.²⁶ Verse 13:17b belongs to the same redactional layer because it prepares for 14:11.²⁷

b. Exod 16:3

The literary and diachronic history of Exod 16 has been discussed much more controversially than that of Exod 14. Traditionally, the original version of Exod 16 used to be attributed to P^g or P^s, which was later revised by post-priestly “deuteronomizing” redactors (cf., e.g., vv. 4, 28, etc.). Ruprecht and Schmidt attribute verses 2–3 to an original priestly document.²⁸ In contrast to that, Otto, Gertz, and others claim that Exod 16:3 textually depends upon Exod 14:11–12 and must therefore also be part of a “pentateuchal redaction” or a post-priestly revision.²⁹ According to Frankel, we can discern in Exod 16 a non-priestly (16:4a, 5, 21, 27–20) and a priestly (16:2, 9–10, 14–15a, 31–35*) text tradition. He suggests that Exod 16:3 was worked out by a redactor, combining the two

²⁵ J.-L. Ska, *Le passage de la mer. Etude sur la construction du style et de la symbolique d'Ex 14,1–31*, AnBib 109, Rom: Biblical Institute 1986, 64.

²⁶ Cf., e.g., J.C. Gertz, *Tradition und Redaktion in der Exoduserzählung. Untersuchungen zur Endredaktion des Pentateuch*, FRLANT 186, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1999, 212f.; 218, containing older literature. Even logically, 11–12 do not fit into the narrative context, as the people have not even reached the wilderness at this point.

²⁷ Cf., e.g., P. Weimar, *Die Meerwundererzählung. Eine redaktionskritische Analyse von Ex 13,17 - 14,31*, ÄAT 9, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1985, 244.

²⁸ E. Ruprecht, *Stellung und Bedeutung der Erzählung vom Mannawunder (Ex 16) im Aufbau der Priesterschrift*, ZAW 86, 1974, 269–307, 279f.; L. Schmidt, *Studien zur Priesterschrift*, BZAW 214, Berlin: de Gruyter 1993, 36–45; idem, *Die Priesterschrift in Exodus 16*, ZAW 119, 2007, 483–498.

²⁹ Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 36–45; Gertz, *Exoduserzählung*, 202f.

narratives.³⁰ A precise diachronic segmentation of Exod 16 will hardly be possible today,³¹ though some recent studies imply that Exod 16:3 must be classified as a redactional element.³²

c. Exod 17:3

In the thirst narration of Exod 17, the twofold lamentation of the people in vv. 2 and 3 constitutes a redundancy.³³ The explicit demand for an intervention to remedy the shortage of water in v. 2 (“The people quarreled with Moses, and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test YHWH?’”) is answered by YHWH in vv. 4–5.³⁴ By contrast, v. 3 (“But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, ‘Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock³⁵ with thirst?’”) poses a much more fundamental question, which, however, remains unanswered in the further course of the narration, where we do not even find trace of a reaction. As Coats, quite rightly, pointed out, there is “no word in the response about the problem of Moses’ authority in the Exodus.”³⁶ Thus, following Aurelius, we can attribute v. 3 (“the position and origin of which has been unclear since M. Noth”³⁷) to a post-priestly redactor.³⁸

This redactor might be the very same person whose textual work is reflected in Exod 13:17 and 14:11–12 and who was possibly also involved with Exod

³⁰ D. Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School. A Retrieval of Ancient Sacerdotal Lore*, VT.S 89, Leiden: Brill 2002, 324–329. For the reconstruction of an old pre-priestly basis see also Levin, *Jahwist*, 77 and 353–355: 16:1a*, 4a, 13b–14ba, 15, 21, 31.

³¹ Cf. Achenbach, *Vollendung*, 233, who sees in 16:3a, 84, 11–15* a hypothetical original version (232).

³² Theoretically, it is, however, possible to assume that Exod 16:3 represents the oldest text, which inspired the redactors of 14:11–12 and other texts. This might be suggested by the fact that Exod 16:3 contains the only reference where the exodus criticism is not introduced by means of a question.

³³ Differently in Blum, *Studien*, 150, n. 205.

³⁴ The mention of the elders in v. 5 possibly triggered the plural form in the lamentation passage of 2a. Differently Achenbach, *Vollendung*, 304, n. 1, who suggests an original singular form which “was discreetly changed into the plural, in view of the fact that Aaron is counted among the leaders of the exodus” [“unter der Perspektive, dass Aaron zu den Führern des Exodus zählt, unterschwellig in den Plural gesetzt worden”].

³⁵ The singular form, corrected in most versions, which we find in the second half of the verse, seems to collectively refer to the people. The preceding “us” must then be understood as summarizing the following list (“me, my children, my livestock”).

³⁶ Coats, *Rebellion*, 69.

³⁷ Blum, *Studien*, 150, n. 205.

³⁸ E. Aurelius, *Der Fürbitter Israels. Eine Studie zum Mosebild im Alten Testament*, CB.OT 27, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1988, 167f. Aurelius estimates that the basic narrative dates back to postexilic times.

16:3, unless the latter stems from an older, “priestly” textual layer which provided the starting point for the exodus criticism.

d. Num 11:18–20

The existence of two main themes (quails, the endowment of the seventy elders with Moses’ spirit) in Num 11 is unquestionable. It does, however, prove to be difficult to reconstruct two complete and independent narratives here because the central concept of *’asap^h* is present in both lines of narration (vv. 4, 16, 22, 24, 30, 32 [2x]³⁹). The starting point of the narrative development is probably a food narration,⁴⁰ which, differently from Exod 16, takes a negative turning. This, following the general introduction in 11:1–3, opens the rebellion cycle of Num 11–21*. In all probability, Num 11* refers to the combination of manna and quails in Exod 16 and midrashically continues this narration, in order to emphasize the permanent rebellion of the people. A redactor reworked this (already postexilic) text and integrated the themes of “endowment with spirit” and “discharge of Moses,” reinterpreting Num 11 as a confrontation of “flesh” and “spirit.”⁴¹

The verses 18, 19, and 20 probably belong to a later complex which consisted of vv. 17–23.⁴² YHWH’s instructions in vv. 18–20, which Moses shall communicate to the people, go beyond the initial lamentations of the people in vv. 4–6, interpreting them as a general criticism of the exodus: “because you have rejected the LORD who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, ‘Why did we ever leave Egypt?’” In all of Num 11, however, this exact question can only be found in YHWH’s recapitulating speech (11:20), where it is not directly uttered by the people. The way the question is asked implies that the people themselves initiated the exodus, which is also the case in the aforementioned late deuteronomistic passages of 2 Kgs 21:15 and Jer 7:25f. (cf. Deut 9:27). This coincides with the accusation of having rejected YHWH which, in this exact wording (מָאָס), is attested only this once in the whole Pentateuch.⁴³

Schmidt seems to be right to ascribe vv. 18–20 to a pentateuchal redaction that underlines a difference to the original quails-manna narrative in Exod 16*, by means of these verses. Very different from a feeding miracle, Num 11 turns

³⁹ Verses 4, 22, and 32 are part of the quail narrative, while vv. 16, 24, and 30 refer to the spiritual endowment.

⁴⁰ Within the framework of the documentary hypothesis, the quail narrative was generally regarded as being older, but cf. Seebass, Numeri, 36–40.

⁴¹ Cf. H.-C. Schmitt, *Die Suche nach der Identität des Jahweglaubens im nachexilischen Israel*, in: *Pluralismus und Identität*, ed. by J. Mehlhausen, Gütersloh: Gütersloher 1995, 259–278; 276.

⁴² Thus, e.g., P.J. Budd, *Numbers*, Word Biblical Commentary 5, Dallas: Word Books 1984, 125; Schmidt, Numeri, 22.

⁴³ Similar passages in the Pentateuch, with different objects, can be found in Lev 26:15, 43–44, and Num 14:31.

the offering of meat into a form of retribution for the Israelites, because according to vv. 18–20 they rejected the exodus and thus their God.⁴⁴

e. Num 14:2–4

After the people have heard the account of the scouts, they not only question the exodus, but openly utter the idea of returning to Egypt. In that respect, the theme of “Egypt nostalgia” has its first point of culmination. Now comes true what YHWH had feared at the beginning of Exodus: Exod 13:17 (ושבו מצרימה) is fulfilled in Num 14:4 (ונשובה מצרימה). Together with Num 21, Num 14 is still the only passage where YHWH is directly accused of having initiated the exodus: ולמה יהיה מביא אתנו אל-הארץ הזאת (v. 3).⁴⁵

Furthermore, Num 14 is the first text where divine retribution responds directly to the people’s Egypt nostalgia and the death wish they uttered: “I will do to you the very things I heard you say: your dead bodies shall fall (נפל, cf. v. 3⁴⁶) in this very wilderness (במדבר הזה, cf. v. 2)” (vv. 28–29). For the first time, Joshua and Caleb make a case for the land promised to the Israelites (14:6–9), thus responding, at least indirectly, to the question of why the exodus is taking place; the land pejoratively referred to as הארץ הזאת by the Israelites (v. 3) is described by them as being “exceedingly good” (v. 7) and a “land that flows with milk and honey” (v. 8).⁴⁷

Differently from Exod 14; 17; and Num 11, the criticism of the exodus and the project of a return to Egypt cannot be separated from the larger narrative context. Contrary to a widely accepted opinion, there is no need to assume a tension between v. 3 and v. 4⁴⁸ because v. 4 presents the first step to the realization of the plan outlined in v. 3.

Even if many scholars want to ascribe Num 14:1–10 to “P,” I am inclined to think of it as a “mixed text” which is linguistically characterized by priestly,

⁴⁴ Schmidt, *Numeri*, 26f.

⁴⁵ In Exod 14:11, 17:3, and Num 16:3, Moses is accused, in Exod 16:2 and Num 20:4, Moses and Aaron are accused, and in Num 21:5, YHWH and Moses are criticized by the people.

⁴⁶ The use of נפל instead of the verb מות, which is otherwise consistently used in “element 2,” can be explained by the narrative context referring to a warlike situation.

⁴⁷ Thus in Achenbach, *Erzählung*, 106. If, according to the traditional documentary hypothesis, one wanted to characterize 14:1ff. as a P^s text (thus, e.g., Schmidt, *Numeri*, 36, 39), one has to understand v. 8 as a later addendum, though from the literary point of view, there are barely any arguments that speak in favor of such an assumption.

⁴⁸ Thus, e.g., Noth, *Numeri*, 95. Against that, quite rightly, Seebass, *Numeri*, 88, who, however, postulates a “fraction” between verses 2 and 3. For that, there is no compelling reason, unless you want to achieve to a structure composed of two parallel narrative lines.

deuteronomistic, and other traits. Thus, v. 3 “does not take up P-texts, but continues Exod 14:12 and Num 11:18,”⁴⁹ while with יהוה מביא אותנו אל-הארץ⁵⁰ it also refers to Exod 6:8: והבאתי אתכם אל הארץ.⁵⁰

The thesis of ascribing Num 14:1ff. to a late pentateuchal or similar redaction is supported not only by the aforementioned relation between Num 14:3–4 and Exod 13:17 and Exod 14:11–12, but also by the war speech delivered by Joshua and Caleb, which, like Exod 14:13, contains the encouragement אל תיראו. Thus, Num 14 seems to be based on the latest redaction of Exod 14, which turned Moses’ plea for fearlessness into a response to the Egypt nostalgia uttered by the people (see above). For these reasons, I am inclined to assume a late redactional composition of 14:1–10, like Otto,⁵¹ the actual extension of which (Pentateuch or Hexateuch) cannot be determined at this point.

f. Num 16:12–13

Numbers 16 is an even more complex passage than Num 11, comprising three rebellions: Dathan and Abiram, the rebellion of the 250 men, and the revolt of “Korah and his company.” Of these three, the Dathan-Abiram narrative is often considered the oldest pre-priestly tradition.⁵² Nevertheless, scholars have conceded that of this old narrative, “only fragments” have been preserved, and that, as Schmitt has noted, “the existing version of the Dathan-Abiram passages in 16:12–15* and 16:25–34* are of post-priestly character.”⁵³ The use of נחלה in Dathan and Abiram’s rejection of the exodus (14:14) represents a combination of deuteronomistic and priestly language, and similarly, the ironic reference to the “land that flows with milk and honey” (vv. 13–14) presupposes deuteronomistic use of language, which is satirized here. Thus, it is possibly best to read the entire Dathan-Abiram account, like Schorn, “as a subsequent theological re-composition and final redaction of transmitted priestly writings.”⁵⁴ As in Num 14, the criticism of the exodus, which in Num 16:12–13 is leveled against

⁴⁹ Aurelius, Fürbitter, 132 [“nicht im Anschluss an P-Texte, sondern an Ex 14:12 und Num 11:18 formuliert”].

⁵⁰ Cf. A. Schart, *Mose und Israel im Konflikt. Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Studie zu den Wüstenerzählungen*, OBO 98, Göttingen/Freiburg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht/Universitätsverlag 1990.

⁵¹ Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 27, 38–40. See also Achenbach, *Erzählung*, 100–110, who, however, postulates a cesura in v. 5 and attributes vv. 6–10a to a theocratic redaction.

⁵² E.g., Seebass, *Numeri*, 189: “J”; also Blum, *Studien*, 270: D-composition.

⁵³ Schmitt, *Identität*, 270 [“die jetzt vorliegende Fassung der Datan-Abiram-Stellen in 16,12–15* und 16,25–34* nachpriesterlichen Charakter aufweist”]. Cf., e.g., עדה in 16:26, ברא in 16:30, and קהל in 16:33.

⁵⁴ U. Schorn, *Rubeniten als exemplarische Aufrührer in Num. 16f*/Deut. 11*, in: *Rethinking the Foundations. Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible. Essays in Honour of John Van Seters*, ed. by S.L. McKenzie/T. Römer, BZAW 294, Berlin: de Gruyter 251–268, 261.

Moses, cannot be detached from the episode, even if the other two biblical references to Dathan and Abiram in Deut 11:6 and Ps 106:16–18 do not mention a critical attitude towards the exodus. In vv. 12 and 14, this criticism is embraced by *לֹא נַעֲלָה*. This line is, at first sight, ambiguous, as it might relate to the walk up to the sanctuary, but, as verses 13 and 14 illustrate, it also comes to stand for the refusal to go to the Promised Land.⁵⁵ Egypt, originally the place of servitude, is so greatly idealized here that it is now ironically referred to as the “land flowing with milk and honey.” Within the narrower context of Numbers, the positive description of the Promised Land given by Joshua and Caleb in Num 14:8 is now rejected. The accusation that Moses wants to rule over the Israelites takes up the reproach he faced in Egypt (Exod 2:14⁵⁶). The reason why Moses sends for Dathan and Abiram is not given in the narrative, and, as Noth has stated, “the reaction of ‘angry Moses’ is peculiar, for it does not seem to respond to the specific content of the accusation.”⁵⁷

Against this backdrop, we could consider if the verses 12–13 were not, after all, added at a later stage, considering the resumption (*Wiederaufnahme*) of *לֹא נַעֲלָה*. In that case, however, Dathan and Abiram’s rebellion would be entirely incomprehensible, and the purpose of adding this episode would remain obscure.

The Dathan-Abiram episode thus serves the “final redaction” by adding to the conflict narrative of Korah and his company and the 250 men, the theme of general exodus criticism.

g. Num 20:4–5

It is almost uncontested that the narrative of Num 20:1–13 refers to Exod 17:1–7* which it re-interprets and continues. The questions of the literary origin and the consistency of the pericope, however, have been controversially discussed. The different scholars who have suggested that the pivotal narrative of Num 20:1–13 is to be ascribed to P^g have come up with extremely diverging reconstructions of the core of priestly writings. Thus, while Schmidt believes that P ends in 20:12, Frevel presents “ten reasons that speak against the idea that v. 12 is part of the basic text.”⁵⁸ According to Frevel’s interpretation, the P^g narrative contains no rebellion of the leaders of Israel, but “emphasizes that the

⁵⁵ Cf. Achenbach, *Vollendung*, 44.

⁵⁶ In this verse, Moses is even accused of intent to kill.

⁵⁷ Numeri, 111 [“Reaktion des ‘zornigen Mose’ ... seltsam, weil sie auf den besonderen Inhalt des Vorwurfs nicht einzugehen scheint”].

⁵⁸ C. Frevel, *Mit Blick auf das Land die Schöpfung erinnern. Zum Ende der Priestergrundschrift*, HBSt 23, Freiburg: Herder 1999, 328–330 [“zehn Gründe gegen die Zugehörigkeit von v. 12 zum Grundtext”].

alleviation of water shortage is a truly merciful deed of YHWH.”⁵⁹ Such a narrative, however, seems completely unmotivated and incomprehensible in the framework of the rebellion cycle of Num 11–21, as Achenbach has quite rightly pointed out.⁶⁰ Similarly incomprehensible is the dropping of the etiology of Meribah in v. 13 and its preparation in v. 3a (the quarreling of the people), especially if Num 20 is to be read as a priestly version of Exod 17. Yet another problem that contests the thesis of Num 20:1–13 being a P-text is the mention of Moses’ staff, which constitutes a redactional parenthesis within the exodus narration, as Gertz has demonstrated,⁶¹ and it is thus excluded from the core narration of Num 20 not only by him, but also by Frevel, Schmidt, and others. Apart from the *petitio principii*, however, there are no compelling reasons for this. Quite the opposite, v. 11b (ויצאו מים רבים ותשת העדה ובעירם), which is normally counted among P, relates directly to v. 8b, which together with the mention of the staff in 8a does not seem to belong to P^g:⁶² והוצאת להם מים מן-הסלע והשקית את-העדה ואת-בעירם.⁶³

Furthermore, the mention of the staff in v. 8a and 8b constitutes, at least partly, a literal repetition of Exod 17:5 and 6, which confirms that Num 20 does, in fact, represent a rewritten version of Exod 17 (including its redactional additions). As Nihan has observed, the staff has an important function in Num 20, because in relation to Exod 4:1–17 (a post-deuteronomistic and post-priestly text⁶⁴), it defines the role of Moses and Aaron. According to Exod 4:15, Aaron and Moses shall speak in the name of YHWH. The staff, on the other hand, is a symbol of Moses’ miracle-performing authority, and this same idea is at the base of Num 20.⁶⁵

This implies that Num 20:1–13 as a whole should be characterized as post-priestly.⁶⁶

Such an interpretative model may also explain the presence of verses 3–5. Struppe, however, thinks that 20:4–5 does not feature the characteristic narrative style and was probably added “in order to reinforce the people’s accusation

⁵⁹ Frevel, Blick, 326f. [“unterstreicht, dass die Behebung der Wassernot ... ganz und gar gnadenhafte Zuwendung YHWHs”].

⁶⁰ Vollendung, 308f.

⁶¹ Gertz, Exoduserzählung, 313f. See also Schmidt, Studien, 19–20.

⁶² Thus, e.g., in Schmidt, Numeri, 90.

⁶³ Observed by U. Struppe, Die Herrlichkeit Jahwes in der Priesterschrift, ÖBS 9, Wien: Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk 1988, 193; this thesis was taken up and further investigated by C. Nihan, From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus, FAT II/25, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2007, 27.

⁶⁴ Cf., e.g., Gertz, Exoduserzählung, 305ff.; T. Römer, Exodus 3–4 und die aktuelle Pentateuchdiskussion, in: The Interpretation of Exodus. Studies in Honour of Cornelis Houtman, ed. by R. Roukema, CBET 44, Leuven: Peeters 2006, 65–79.

⁶⁵ See also Achenbach, Vollendung, 312–314.

⁶⁶ Thus Otto, Deuteronomium, 15–16; Achenbach, Vollendung, 302–317; Nihan, Torah, 26–30.

against Moses and Aaron and emphasize their rebellion.⁶⁷ But this explanation is imprecise. Without a doubt, verses 4–5 (and v. 3) serve to underline the intransigence of the people, a motif which helps to ensure that Moses and Aaron are perceived as representatives of a rebellious community rather than two stubborn individuals. Thus, there are no compelling reasons to diachronically separate the exodus criticism of vv. 3–5 from the rest of the narrative. On the contrary, there are some aspects which speak against this possibility. Together, the end of v. 5 (the shortage of water) and v. 2a form a frame around the lamentation of the people.⁶⁸ The mention of the livestock in v. 4 is taken up again in verses 8 and 11. The fact that the mention of the wilderness in v. 4 precedes the question of why Moses brought the people out of Egypt (v. 5) does not suggest that these verses have to be treated separately from a literary point of view⁶⁹ because both verses quote from Exod 17:3 according to “Seidel’s law”:⁷⁰

Exod 17:3ba:	למה זה העליתנו ממצרים	Num 20:5a:	ולמה העליתנו ממצרים
Exod 17:3bb:	להמית אתי ואת־בני ואת־מקני	Num 20:4b:	למות שם אנהנו ובעירנו

If our thesis is correct that Exod 17:3 is to be ascribed to a “pentateuchal redactor,” the very same person might have redacted the verses of Num 20:1–13.⁷¹ And should this redactor have wanted to establish a connection with Num 16:13–15, the expression הרע המקום הזה in v. 5 might contain an anti-deuteronomistic undertone because in Deuteronomy it designates the sanctuary chosen by YHWH or the land given to the Israelites (cf. Deut 26:9: ויבאנו אל־המקום הרע הזה, and Num 20:5: להביא אתנו אל־המקום הרע הזה). Just like the re-interpretation of the “milk and honey” motif whose meaning is twisted right around by the rebels in Num 16:13–14, the criticism of the people can be understood as a rejection of deuteronomistic *maqôm* theology.

After the death of Miriam (20:1) and that of Aaron (20:22–29), which stems from the same redactional layer as Num 20:1–13, Moses is the only one left of the leaders of Israel. It is against him and YHWH that the people turn their last great criticism in Num 21:4–9.

h. Num 21:5

The narrative of the serpent of bronze is separated from the account of Aaron’s death by a peculiar mention of a military campaign in the Negeb, which

⁶⁷ Herrlichkeit, 190 [“um die Anklage der Gemeinde gegen Mose und Aaron zu verschärfen und so ihre Rebellion herauszustreichen”].

⁶⁸ Nihan, Torah, 28.

⁶⁹ Thus, e.g., in Seebass, Numeri, 271–273.

⁷⁰ Nihan, Torah, 28.

⁷¹ In fact, there are particularly close connections between Exod 17:3; Num 20:4–5; and 21:5.

Schmidt considers “younger than the pentateuchal redaction.”⁷² It is very difficult to determine the origin and intention of this parenthesis which has no counterpart in the parallel narratives of Deut 1–3. The redactor(s) might have wanted to subtly hint at the possibility that the conquest of the Promised Land already began under Moses.⁷³

There is a great consensus among academics that the narrative of 21:4–9 is in itself homogeneous. Conspicuously, no specific reason is given for the discontent of the people here, which makes the narrative look like a “combination of several preceding complaint narratives.”⁷⁴ Verse 5b summarizes the different reasons that, according to preceding narratives, led to the rebellion: hunger (Exod 16:3), shortage of water (Exod 17:1; Num 20:2), and probably also the tiresomeness of the manna. This summary is preceded by a criticism of the exodus in which YHWH and Moses together appear as the initiators of the exodus. A similar idea can be found in Deut 34:10–12, a passage which in recent studies has mostly been attributed to a pentateuchal redaction.

As Noth noted,⁷⁵ the accusation against YHWH and Moses (וידבר העם באלהים (ובמשה (העם ... ויאמינו ביהוה⁷⁶ ובמשה עבדו) Exod 14:31) contrapunctually refers to Exod 14:31 (ובמשה עבדו) Exod 14:31, a verse that is counted among the same redaction as Exod 14:11–12. Further cross-references to Exod 13:17–14:31 are represented by the mention of ים סוף (21:4), which recalls Exod 13:18, and by the accusation למות במדבר in Num 21:5, whose (only) literal counterpart is found in Exod 14:11. All of this confirms our thesis that Num 21:4–9 was deliberately designed to connect not only to the rebellion cycle of Num 11–20,⁷⁷ but also to the period in the wilderness that starts with the exodus described in Exod 13:17–14:31.

Thus, Num 21:4–9 should also be regarded as a late redactional composition, which has in fact been suggested in several recent studies. The episode of the serpent of bronze finally emphasizes the crucial role of Moses as an intermediary. The origin of the serpent motif, which cannot be clearly identified, might be related to religious practices in the Temple in Jerusalem. However, the motif of life-threatening serpents is also used in an account of Esarhaddon’s military campaign against Arabia and Egypt in the course of which “the Great King of

⁷² Numeri, 100 [“jünger als die Pentateuchredaktion”].

⁷³ Moses is (deliberately?) not mentioned explicitly. Cf. T. Römer, *Les guerres de Moïse*, in: *La construction de la figure de Moïse – The Construction of the Figure of Moses*, ed. by T. Römer, *Transeuphratène Suppl.* 13, Paris: Gabalda 2007, 169–193, 174–175.

⁷⁴ Aurelius, *Fürbitter*, 147 [“Kombination aus mehreren vorhergehenden Murgeschichten”]. See also Coats, *Rebellion*, 119; Blum, *Studien*, 123.

⁷⁵ Numeri, 138; see also Aurelius, *Fürbitter*, 147; Blum, *Studien*, 124.

⁷⁶ LXX reads τῶ θεῶ

⁷⁷ The structural analogies between Num 11:1–3 and 21:4–9 have been pointed out by Aurelius, *Fürbitter*, 141–160, and, more recently, by Schmidt, *Numeri*, 102f.

Assyria must fight several times with different deadly serpents in the wilderness, until Marduk comes to rescue him.”⁷⁸ A similar motif can be found in Herodotus (II, 75) and in Moses legends preserved in the works of Artapanus and Flavius Josephus (cf. Deut 8:15). Seebass has correctly emphasized the Egyptian traits of this narrative. The fact that the wilderness narrative concludes with Moses erecting the image of a serpent might be related to the inclusion of a popular narrative motif. Possibly, the author of Num 21:4–9 aimed to show that despite the continuous rebellion of the people and despite his own anger, YHWH decides not to destroy but to spare his people. YHWH’s healing intervention, however, largely depends on Moses’ intercession. This illustrates that despite Moses’ and Aaron’s wrongful act which is related in Num 20, Moses remains the indispensable intermediary between YHWH and his people.

This does not necessarily mean that the narratives of 20:1–13 and 21:4–9 have to be ascribed to two different authors or redactors, though it is, of course, possible. One gets the impression that 20:1–13 very discreetly seeks a form of “minimal guilt,” in order to be able to justify the narrative fact that neither Moses nor Aaron can enter the Promised Land within the framework of a theology of individual guilt.

The emphasis of Moses’ intercession in Num 21 assumes a compositional function within the rebellion cycle of Num 11–21, as it is mentioned in the beginning (11:1–3) and repeated both in the middle (Num 14) and at the end of the narrative. The question of whether Num 21:4–9 must be seen in connection with 2 Kgs 18 requires more detailed analysis. It is possible that the author of Num 21 wanted to deliver a positive etiology of the bronze serpent, which 2 Kgs 18 locates in the Jerusalem Temple of the monarchic period and ascribes to Moses. If this is true, Num 21 could stand for an “anti-deuteronomic” and more liberal concept of worship.

The two last rebellion narratives are interlaced with accounts (20:14–21; 21:1–3; 21:10–35) that introduce the third main theme of the Book of Numbers: the conquest and occupation of Transjordan. These passages are composed of different, partially old layers of narrative material, some of which was integrated into Deut 2–3. The texts in question are aimed at clarifying Israel’s relations with its eastern neighbors (Edom, Moab), but they also emphasize Moses’ military qualities, which are further developed in non-biblical legends that possibly stem from Jewish communities in the Egyptian diaspora.

⁷⁸ M. Arneht, Die Hiskiareform in 2 Reg 18,3–8, ZAR 12, 2006, 169–215, 207 [“bei dem der neuassyrische Großkönig im Rahmen seines Wüstenaufenthalts mehrfach mit unterschiedlichen todbringenden Schlangen zu kämpfen hat, bevor ihm Marduk zu Hilfe eilt”].

6. Conclusion and Open Questions

The rebellion narratives in Num 11–21 have an important compositional function, not only with reference to the book of Numbers, but also for the Pentateuch as a whole. Together with Exod 15–17(18), they embrace the Sinai pericope and underline its coherence. In this way, the affinity of Num 1–10 with the Sinai revelation is underlined, even though these supplemental chapters are separated from the “actual” revelation by the titles and subtitles used in Lev 26; 27; and Num 1.

Within this framework, narrative prototypes for Num 11ff. can be detected in Exod 16–17. These narratives originally related YHWH’s caring attitude toward his people, without emphasizing their persistent fractiousness. Thus, the oldest wilderness tradition characterized the relationship between YHWH and his people as a positive one, much like other texts in the books of Hosea and Jeremiah do. The negative image⁷⁹ of the wilderness period that prevails in the Pentateuch as we know it today is, in Exod 13–17, strongly influenced by the interventions of one or several redaction(s) of Egypt nostalgia which can possibly be traced back to the priestly “complaint theme.”

In Exod 13–14 and 17 (and possibly in 16), the passages questioning the exodus are easily recognizable as redactional interventions. With the exception of Num 11:18–20, the relevant verses in the Numbers text, however, can be discarded only with great difficulty, if at all. This implies that a large part of the text in Numbers stems from the same redactors who transformed the rebellion narratives of Exod 13ff. And if that is true, the relevant Numbers narratives represent a later textual layer, which speaks for a late composition of the book of Numbers. Obviously, the origin of Num 11–21 requires a more profound analysis.

With regard to the question discussed in this paper, we will have to determine whether all texts pertaining to the “Egypt nostalgia” tradition belong to the same textual layer or whether a diachronic differentiation is necessary. This raises the important methodological question of how consistent different redactions or authors have to be from a literary and theological point of view.

We will, furthermore, have to look at the radius of these redactions. Are we looking at pentateuchal or hexateuchal redactions, or is their radius a much narrower one? Just recently, Seebass and Fistill have argued in favor of a specific “Numbers redaction,” whose goal was the completion of the youngest Torah scroll.

If we could reach a consensus as to how redactions can be defined and differentiated from one another, Old Testament research would take a big step forward.

⁷⁹ With the exception of the war with Amalek in Exod 17 and Moses’ encounter with his father-in-law in Exod 18.

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