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"He Kept the Measurements in His Memory as a Treasure": The Role of the Tabernacle Text in Religious Experience

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"He Kept the Measurements in His Memory as a Treasure"

THE ROLE OF THE TABERNACLE TEXT IN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

By

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M.T.S, Harvard Divinity School, 2003

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An abstract of
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

"He Kept the Measurements in His Memory as a Treasure":
The Role of the Tabernacle Text in Religious Experience

By Amy H.C. Robertson

This study examines the literary idiosyncrasies of the biblical description of the tabernacle (Exod 25-31 and 35-40) using categories and insights borrowed from ritual and literary theory. It makes the case that the very features of activity that cause anthropologists to identify a particular activity as ritualized are not only present in literary form in the tabernacle text, but form the foundation of its character as literature. Building upon this observation, it considers the question of the reader experience supported by this text, ultimately making the case that the experience of an absorbed reader of this text can be fruitfully compared to the experience of an individual who participates in a ritual. Insights about the effects of specific features of ritualized activity on participants are applied, here, to the profound repetition, formalism, sensory appeal, and ambiguity in this literature. Furthermore, because the tabernacle text includes significant lacunae alongside its repetition and formalism, the experience of reading this text is ultimately compared to ritualized mandala construction, whose texts evince a similar juxtaposition of detail and gaps, and whose ritual is, primarily, imaginative. In a final chapter devoted to the communication of implicit messages through ritual, in conversation with the field of art history and religious philosophy, this study discusses several messages that are suggested by the literary form of the tabernacle text, but which are left outside the realm of discourse. The conclusion sketches the application of the methodology employed in the present study to the Temple Text.

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Contents

1

A Context for Engaging the Tabernacle Text

Responding to Literary "Strangeness" in the Canon

The description of the tabernacle in the book of Exodus is not the subject of many sermons, nor is it the subject of many lectures in introductory college courses on biblical literature.[1] It is skimmed lightly even by many graduate students and commentaries, particularly those with a theological focus.[2] The sensibilities of this text do not fit easily into modern life, nor do they fit easily with the sensibilities of other biblical authors. The text is interested in detail, and yet leaves gaps in the (detailed) information it presents, seeming thereby to imply a level of precision that it does not maintain – it sets expectations and then fails to meet them. It is repetitive on both a small and a large scale. It contains exceedingly little in the way of narrative, and almost no abstraction or commentary at all. All of these features of the literature are compounded by the fact that the text describes a structure that stands at the center of a theological system that makes most modern people uncomfortable. Had it described heaven, had it talked about the nature of God, had it contained lively narrative, had archaeologists found evidence that such a structure existed, perhaps this text would have fared better with the modern reader.

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[1] The quotation in the title of this dissertation, "He kept the measurements in his memory as a treasure," is from an inscription referring to the Babylonian king Nabopolassar. It can be found in its entirety in Stephen Herbert Langdon, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften*, Vorderasiatische Bibliotek 4 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912), 62-63.

[2] Though the tabernacle account takes up about one third of the book of Exodus, the following is a sampling of commentaries that devote less than ten percent of their pages to it (including its translation). For example, Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (IBC 2; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991); Brevard Childs, *Exodus* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster, 1974) ; J. Gerald Janzen, (Westminster Bible Companion 2; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997). The Exodus volume in the Interpretation Bible Studies series, which highlights and discusses ten key passages from Exodus, does not cover the tabernacle text at all: see James Newsome, *Exodus* (Interpretation Bible Studies; Louisville: Geneva, 1998).

As it is, the text offers a concrete, detailed, repetitive, and yet gapped text about a space that may never have existed, and which fits uncomfortably into most modern theologies even if it had. As it is, most attempts to give the lay of the biblical land, whether in a university classroom or a religious congregation, skip from Moses' covenant in Exod 24 to the golden calf episode in Exod 32, touch down briefly as the tabernacle is completed, and consider their study of Exodus complete.

In this study, I will make the case that there is, in fact, a coherence to the literary features of this text: taken together, they offer the reader a religious experience comparable to that of a ritual experience. In fact, the literary features that mark this text as unusual in the biblical canon are precisely the features of activity that mark it as "ritualized" rather than mundane activity. In this way, the present study is a form-critical study that suggests a new generic category: ritualized text.

It is important to differentiate the genre I have in mind from the genre of ritual text suggested by Wesley Bergen and Frank Gorman in reference to the texts of Leviticus.[3] Bergen notes that while Leviticus 1 itself is "not a ritual. It is a text… about a ritual, (and) this is not the same thing," he also suggests that "the reading of the text becomes part of the ritual … the ritual 'reading Leviticus' becomes a substitute for the ritual 'animal sacrifice.'"[4] That is, Bergen understands the reading of Leviticus as a ritual performance in itself, both in ancient times and in the present. Similarly, Gorman states that during parts of Israel's history when there was no available tabernacle or temple,

[3] Wesley J. Bergen, *Reading Ritual: Leviticus in Postmodern Culture* (JSOT 417; London: T&T Clark International, 2005) and Frank Gorman, "Leviticus" in *Theological Bible Commentary* (ed. Gail O'Day and David Petersen; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 41-50.

[4] Bergen, *Reading Ritual, 7.*

"reading and hearing were translated into ritualized activity."[5] In that sense, the reading of Leviticus can be understood as ritualized. If Bergen and Gorman consider Leviticus to be more likely to be read as a ritual performance than other biblical texts – a question they do not directly address – I imagine this is so because it is a text *about* a ritual performance.

The ritualization of text that I find in Exod 25-31 and 35-40 is closer to the ritualization that Bryan Bibb discusses in his recent book, *Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Book of Leviticus.* Though his book still makes frequent reference to the content of the book (that is, the fact that ritual activity is being narrated), one of the goals of the book is to identify ways in which the literary form of Leviticus echoes its ritual content: Bibb describes the genre of Leviticus as both "narrativized ritual" and "ritualized narrative."[6]

The present study begins with this notion, shared by Bibb, that it is possible for literary features themselves to reflect some aspects of ritualization. Just as ritual theorists have identified ritualized activity based on their *form* and not based on their *content*, I consider the tabernacle pericope to be ritualized because of its literary form, not because it pertains to the cult. Certainly, the latter contributes some credence to the notion that ritual and ritualization was a familiar world for the authors of this text, but the topic of this text is not the cause for its categorization as ritualized. Bergen himself suggests that whether or not an activity is ritualized does not depend on the presence or absence of a

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[5] Gorman, "Leviticus," 42

[6] Bryan Bibb, *Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Book of Leviticus* (LHB/OTS 480; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 35. Bibb's study will be considered in greater depth in ch 1.

deity in the narrative accompanying the ritual,[7] or the presence or absence of some "material connection"[8] between the actions and the intended results – that it is not the "content" of a ritual that is characteristic, but rather the form.[9] The logical extension of this into the literary realm is to identify texts as ritualized based on their literary form and not on the information they impart.

Identifying this text as ritualized in form, and not merely as a text that may be recited as a part of a ritual performance, brings with it access to an entire field of cross-cultural studies about the effects of these ritualized features on participants. Furthermore, because the field of ritual studies has identified trends in the way that people respond to ritualized activity that seem not to be dependent on cultural or historical setting, classifying this text as "ritualized" allows for a discussion of how this text might have functioned (and might still function) in the life of readers without requiring a decision on the historicity of the tabernacle structure.

This introductory chapter will do three things. First, it will introduce the tabernacle pericope, pointing to some of its most frequently noted features in the process. Secondly, it will discuss some of the ways in which scholars have responded to this text, including inquiries into historical realia referred to in the text, studies of textual origins, and previous attempts to understand this text better by clarifying its genre. The third task of this introduction begins from this question of genre, and introduces the set of questions and theoretical conversation partners that will be at work in the remainder of this study.

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[7] Bergen, *Reading Ritual,* 2.

[8] Ibid, 3.

[9] Bibb's study on Leviticus examines both form and content, ultimately identifying ways in which the form resonates with the content.

Ultimately, reading this text with this new theoretical framework in mind offers a new set of generic expectations that, in my estimation, offer a context in which the diverse set of features of this text work together toward a particular end.

Introduction to Exodus 25-40

The description of the tabernacle and its construction occupy approximately one third of Exodus. It follows immediately upon the well known covenant ceremony of Exod 24, wherein Moses throws blood of the sacrificed ram upon the crowd of people (as well as placing some upon the altar), is interrupted by the well known account of the golden calf incident, and end with the deity's entrance into the tabernacle in the form of a cloud.

The information about the tabernacle begins in Exodus 25, and comes in the form of instructions: the reader is privy, here, to God's תבנית of the tabernacle,[10] shown to Moses on Mount Sinai. After some introductory remarks regarding the materials that should be gathered (Exod 25:1-8), the account begins with instructions for the furnishings of the most holy area of the tabernacle, then details the furnishings of the holy area, and then gives instructions for the construction of the tent structure that will cover these areas. In Exod 27, instructions for the construction of the courtyard altar are given, followed by instructions for the enclosure around the courtyard area. Exodus 28 turns its attention to the establishment of the priesthood, and describes the garments that must be made for Aaron (first) and then for his sons, while Exod 29 prescribes the ordination ritual that must be performed to inaugurate the priesthood. Exodus 30 turns its attention back to the furnishings of the tabernacle and its courtyard (otherwise accounted for in

[10] The word תבנית is used in Exod 25:9; the תבנית is described between Exod 25:10 and Exod 30:10, interspersed with occasional instructions for the use of an item (rather than the plan for its construction).

chs. 25-27), giving instructions for the construction of an incense altar to be placed in the holy area, then for taking a census of the Israelite people, and then for the construction of a copper laver and its stand, to be placed between the tabernacle proper and the altar that is located in the courtyard. Instructions for making anointing oil and incense follow. Exodus 31, finally, introduces the master craftsman, Bezalel, and his assistant, Oholiab, and addresses the observance of the Sabbath. At the end of this chapter, Moses is given "the two tablets of the testimony" (Exod 31:18).

For the duration of these seven chapters, the text gives the reader little choice but to focus on taking in directions – the plot itself does not progress insofar as no significant action is taken and there is no perceived change in the state of things (physical, emotional, or otherwise).[11] Indeed, the extant state of things is hardly a concern of these chapters at all. This focus on receiving direction changes in ch. 32, where the reader's attention is drawn to the Israelites who are at the foot of the mountain awaiting Moses' return. Growing impatient and assuming they have been abandoned, they create a new god for themselves: a golden calf. Seeing this, the Lord is enraged and wants to destroy the Israelites, but, in response to Moses' plea, does not. When Moses rejoins his people and sees for himself what they have done, he too becomes enraged, and smashes the tablets he received on the mountain. He and, later, the Lord, do punish the Israelites, though the punishment is not so severe as had originally been threatened. In ch. 33, the golden calf episode is put aside, and Moses begins to meet with God regularly in a tent pitched outside the camp – the Tent of Meeting. It is also in this chapter that Moses gets

[11] Given this, I refer to a plot because the information is presented as an account of an event: God showed plans to Moses and explained them to him. This is not a very interesting plot, to be sure, but neither is it an uncontextualized description.

to see God pass before him. In ch. 34, Moses is given two new tablets of stone. God promises to drive out the peoples in the land that he is giving to the Israelites, and gives several rules regarding the ways in which they should conduct themselves in that land, ranging from holiday observance (including the Sabbath) to the need to create separation between themselves and the natives of the land. After this meeting, it is said that Moses' face is radiant, and he begins to wear a veil when he is not meeting with the Lord.

I have provided this lengthy summary of the contents of chs. 32-34 in order to emphasize the extent of the difference between these chapters and the tabernacle texts that surround them: ch. 35 opens with a reminder to keep the Sabbath, and then the text returns to the details of the tabernacle, this time providing an account of its construction. Materials and skilled workers are collected. Bezalel and Oholiab are singled out, the people are told that all necessary materials are present, and, in Exod 36:8, construction begins with the structure of the tabernacle: the curtains which serve as its walls and ceiling, its covering of goats' hair and protective layer of leather, and then the wooden structure supporting these. Then the curtains marking off sections of the structure are made: first that which separates the most holy area from the holy area, and then that which separates the holy area from the courtyard. In ch. 37, Bezalel makes the furnishings for the most holy area, then the holy area (including, this time, the incense altar, the anointing oil, and the incense). Chapter 38 records the construction of the copper altar and laver that stand in the courtyard, and then the enclosure of the courtyard, ending with a record of all the gold, silver, and copper used for its construction. Chapter 39 turns its attention to the priestly vestments and, at its close, we are told that the Israelites brought all the parts of the tabernacle and its furnishings to Moses.

Chapter 40 begins yet another section, recording the setting up of the tabernacle rather than the construction of its component parts. The first half of the chapter records the Lord's instructions to Moses in this regard, and the second half of the chapter records Moses' performance of these actions. The final section of this chapter describes the cloud that appears to indicate the presence of the Lord, its comings and goings from the Tabernacle, and the appropriate responses to its presence or absence.

Delimiting the Tabernacle Text

As has long been recognized, Exod 25-40 contains wide-ranging types of literature. In response to this diversity, the content of Exod 25-40 has been typically been divided such that sections of the text that appear similar (according to various standards) are grouped together; these respective groups are then frequently arranged according to proposed date of authorship or incorporation into the text. Beyond that, and perhaps more significantly, the guild has witnessed several arguments about the relative value of various portions of the text, frequently based on equation of "earliest" with "most valuable" for our understanding of the tabernacle.[12] It is my intention here neither to dispute nor to support these diachronic arguments, but rather to offer criteria by which the core tabernacle text for the purposes of this study might be delimited without focusing on questions of origin, authenticity, or chronology. It is not the imagined origin of different sections of the text that constitutes the primary issue for this study, but rather the extent to which each section coheres with the bulk of the text in terms of generic qualities (both generally and in specifics), topic, and linguistic and literary agreement. This

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[12] Neither have synchronic treatments of Exodus generally treated Exod 25-40 as a unit. See the brief summary of these scholarly divisions in Mark S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus* (JSOT Supp. 239; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 180-183.

requires a slightly different conversation than that which has been had already in academic circles.

Meaning beyond origin

One of the reasons that the question of a text's origins and history are of such interest is because of the widespread association between what a text means and what an author meant when he or she wrote it. The ability to identify layers within the development of a text is assumed to bring with it the ability to speculate about why the text developed the way it did. What did each successive author think about what he or she was writing? What was the author's intent in phrasing things a certain way or in juxtaposing certain pieces of information?

If one puts aside the question of a text's straightforward "meaning" – a methodological issue taken up in greater detail in chapter one – the question of what the author meant is of considerably less interest. To be sure, it is possible to discuss what an author intended for his or her readers to experience, but after a text is available to an audience, the author not only does not control their interpretive process, but he doesn't even *mediate* that process.[13] Just as the tabernacle itself is not available to the reader, the author, too, is not available to the reader. All readers have is the text.

Because of the tendency of traditional scholarship working within the molds of source, form, or tradition criticism to look at question of *origin*, I have intentionally eschewed their methodologically-specific conventions and, often, terminology. I am not

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[13] Bibb responds to James Watts's interest in the rhetorical purpose or "intent" of biblical texts by saying "The difficulty with Watts's view of the text's intentionality from a literary-critical point of view is the problematic notion that readers have access to the original 'intent' of the authors." Even though we do not often have reliable information about the authors, "this is not exactly the point" – the problem with this idea is that after a text is written, it is available for interpretation by its audience, and the author does not have control of that interpretive process. See Bibb, *Ritual Words*, 17.

seeking to categorize absolutely any aspect of Exod 25-40, but rather to describe it in relationship to the other parts of this text, and determine which parts do and do not appear to function toward a similar end, relatively speaking. Whatever the source of these observed differences, it is more important here to recognize their presence and use them as a means of demarcating "the tabernacle text" for the purpose of this study.[14] Using these criteria, "the tabernacle text" is best defined as Exod 25:1-30:10 and 17-37; 31:1-11; and 35:1-40:38.

Types of Content

Stories Peripheral to the Tabernacle Text

Exod 32-34

The texts that are most obviously differentiated from the bulk of these chapters differ on two or even all three accounts: Exod 32-34. Whereas the bulk of the text in Exod 25-40 pertains directly to the establishment of the tabernacle cult, these texts do not. Topically, the text has moved from measurements and specific regulations surrounding the functioning of the tabernacle to stories about what *else* was going on while Moses was receiving this information (namely, a golden calf was made); this is followed by stories of the relationship between Moses, God, and the Israelites during the desert encampment, prior to the establishment of the tabernacle.

To be sure, Exod 32-34 is not wholly disconnected from the surrounding texts about the tabernacle. From the beginning (Exod 32:1), for example, the text explains that the reason for the Israelites' anxiety is the duration of Moses' absence – he has spent too

[14] That said, I take seriously the present form of the text, and, as will be explored below, this entire block of text holds together logically (for the most part). Furthermore, the juxtaposition of sections which I designate as peripheral with those sections that I designate as central certainly contributes to the impact of the text as a whole.

long away from them while learning about the proper form for the tabernacle, the very whose description has just been interrupted. Thematically, too, the texts fit together: Exod 32-34, like the tabernacle texts surrounding it, focuses on the importance of God's presence in the midst of the people. In these three chapters, the need for God's presence amidst the people communicated through the disaster that takes place when the people do *not* feel reassured of God's existence and commitment to them; in response to this, Moses ultimately insists that God be *with* the people in an almost physical, embodied way, [15] if they are to continue to trek through the desert – thus dovetailing this diversion perfectly with the account of God's tent. Indeed, the entirety of Exod 25-40 deals, in some way, with the issue of (and need for) God's presence in the midst of the Israelites.

That said, Exod 32-34 and the surrounding tabernacle texts tell very different kinds of stories about the same central issue, using different starting points and different (though not necessarily mutually exclusive) assumptions. In the case of Exod 25-31 and 35-40, discussion of God's presence primarily entails discussion of the proper construction of the tabernacle, which makes possible conditions in which God will dwell with the Israelites; it is assumed that the Israelites will obey with great care that which God commands through Moses. In Exod 32-34, on the other hand, the text assumes that the Israelites, Moses, and God are all emotional beings with complex relations to one another, and discussion of God's presence primarily entails issues of emotional response – anger, attachment, fear of abandonment. It would be entirely possible for the tabernacle texts and the stories of Exod 32-34 to exist without knowledge of one another.

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[15] It is worth noting, too, that this is where Moses asks to *see* God – and this wish is granted.

In terms of the generic differences, Exod 32-34 is plot-driven in a way that most of Exod 25-40 is not. If parts of Exod 25-31 and 35-40 can be called a story – the story of Moses seeing God's תבנית for the tabernacle, and the story of that תבנית taking shape at the hands of Bezalel and the Israelites – it is not a very interesting one. It is exceedingly repetitive, and there is a profound lack of action, drama, internal dialogue, and characterization that, perhaps along with the high levels of repetition, has been a hallmark of this text. Exod 32-34, on the other hand, packs a great deal of drama into a relatively short space, and permits us access to the inner emotional life of several characters. As such, one would be hard pressed to argue that these chapters are generically the same – or even similar to – Exod 25-31 and 35-40.

Considering the third of the criteria mentioned above – linguistic or word choice issues – brings to light the awkward use of the phrase "Tent of Meeting" between Exod 32-34 and the surrounding tabernacle text. On the one hand, Moses is said to meet with God in a "Tent of Meeting" in Exod 33:7; on the other, the tabernacle under construction in Exodus – the one that is not complete until Exodus 40 – is referred to as the Tent of Meeting no less than 32 times in Exod 25-31 and 35-40.[16] The identification of the tabernacle with the Tent of Meeting continues into Leviticus. If the tabernacle is the Tent of Meeting, and it has not yet been erected in Exod 33, to what structure does Exod 33:7 refer? Clearly, there is some disagreement about what exactly the Tent of Meeting is and when it was erected.

Beyond this lack of agreement, there are few points of clear disagreement between Exod 32-34 and the surrounding texts, likely because the genre and the topic of

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[16] 15 times in the prescriptive account of 25-31, five times in the descriptive account of Exod 35-39, and twelve times in Exod 40.

Exod 32-34 are considerably different than that of the tabernacle texts – that is, they don't frequently treat the same subject in any detailed way. Since Aaron is largely responsible for the great sin of the Golden Calf story, however, the fact that he is named head priest in the tabernacle texts without a moment's hesitation catches the eye: this seems an unlikely combination of events and, as such, one could argue that this betrays disagreement over the leadership abilities of Aaron. Is the one who created the golden calf worthy of the post of anointed priest?

Information Peripheral to Tabernacle Construction
Exod 30:11-16, 31:1-11 and 12-17

Another type of content present within Exod 25-40 that might be separated from the tabernacle texts is that which contains legislation that is not immediately and obviously related to the discussion of the tabernacle. There are several sections within Exod 25-40 that fall into this category: Exod 30:11-16 discusses the census and ransom requirement for each person; Exod 31:1-11 introduces Bezalel and Oholiab; and vv. 12-17 discuss Sabbath observance. Though the *topic* of these texts is not the tabernacle itself, the *genre* of these texts is similar to that of the tabernacle texts – they give instructions, and it is often the case that later biblical texts contain confirmation that these rules have been followed.[17]

For several reasons, I consider the texts about Sabbath prohibitions and the census requirement to be outside the core of the tabernacle texts, and think them likely to be later additions.[18] First and perhaps most obviously, these regulations are not fulfilled in any

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[17] Bezalel and Oholiab do, indeed, lead the construction effort, as reported in Exod 36:2, and the priests are consecrated in Leviticus 8. A census is taken in Num 1, though there is no mention of the associated ransom paid to the cult. Though the Sabbath requirement is repeated in Exod 35, this text does not contain confirmation that it is properly observed in the context of tabernacle construction.

context that is related to the tabernacle. Though the requirement to observe the Sabbath is *repeated* in the parallel tabernacle account of Exod 35-39, it is never said to be *observed* in the construction process. This stands in stark contrast to the construction of the tabernacle itself, which quite carefully enacts the instructions that Moses received. Similarly, though there is a report that Moses took a census in Num 1, there is no reference in that text to a ransom paid to the tabernacle; it seems that the census was taken for reasons unrelated to the functioning of the cult.

As with the integration of Exod 32-34 into the tabernacle texts – indeed, even more so in this case – let me be clear that though we can reasonably discuss the fact some of these topics are not *necessarily* and *inherently* connected to the construction of the tabernacle, neither are they completely unrelated. The text, as it stands, has some logical coherence: the census is discussed because the monies coming from it support the tabernacle, and the Sabbath may be considered relevant because it relates to the practices of the Israelites during their construction of the tabernacle. It is, however, a fairly loose connection, and the tabernacle text coheres equally well, if not better, without them.

Tabernacle Texts Sometimes Identified as Secondary
Exod 25-31, Exod 35-39, and the problem of the incense altar

Finally, within the texts that relate immediately and inherently to the inauguration of the tabernacle and its cult, there are texts that some scholars have identified as demonstrating a lack of agreement in ideas, in vocabulary, or in both. Perhaps the most well known of these is the text relating to the incense altar. Though Exod 25-31, 35-39, and 40 all contain reference to this altar, the unexpected placement of its prescription (in

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[18] Noth, *Exodus*, also views both the census passage and the introduction of the craftsmen as secondary, though he bases this no on its content, but on its "stereotyped formula which is not necessary in the context" (236 and 239). Of the prescriptions for the Sabbath, Noth considers only 31:15-17 to be secondary additions (241).

Exod 30 rather than 27; see excurses below) vis-a-vis its placement in Exodus 35-40 and other MSS, combined with its absence in other MSS and other texts related to cultic worship, suggests that there was some debate regarding the presence or absence of an incense altar. The academic discussion of this particular issue will be traced below as a case study in literary-critical (as opposed to historical-critical) approaches to this pericope.

Capturing the Academic Imagination

I have mentioned already that the literary features of the tabernacle texts have captured the attention of scholars of the Bible for centuries. The text is exceedingly repetitive: not only does it detail the structure in its entirety twice (once as a prescription and once as a description) using almost exactly the same words and phrases in each account, but several of the accounts of given items show a high level of internal repetition as well. The text also generally adheres to a particular form: both within and between descriptions, the information is ordered according to specific, consistent rules – though in at least one case (that of the incense altar prescription, described below), it departs dramatically from this form. Further emphasizing the orderly progression of the text, the beginnings and ending of particular sections are frequently marked with punctuating statements or refrains, and several scholars have noted that these formal features tend to appear in sevens, suggesting, at most, a connection to creation, and at least, adherence to a literary form that we can reasonably assume is intentional. Finally, though the text offers a great deal of detail, much of which is presented several times, certain critical

points in the construction – particularly points of juncture – are unclear, and details are occasionally missing.[19]

This unlikely combination of lacunae, detail and repetition – of regular adherence to and then sudden divergence from literary rules – has led to two dominant types of tabernacle scholarship. The first seeks to ground and clarify the account by looking past this somewhat confusing text to questions of historical realia. This, too, is a difficult area of inquiry, because, as William Propp writes, "How may we comprehend this technical manual, written in inscrutable jargon, at times unnecessarily full and at times maddeningly vague, referring to illustrations that somehow have gotten lost? All analyses, including my own, necessarily negotiate between two interrelated questions: How is the Tabernacle constructed? And is it real or fictitious?"[20]

As is the case for much of biblical scholarship in general – and certainly much of biblical scholarship focused on priestly writings – a primary task of biblical scholars for the past several decades has been to respond to the immensely influential scholarship of Julius Wellhausen. On this issue, Wellhausen offered two conclusions: the structure described in Exodus did not exist, and it was born entirely of the imagination of its author(s).[21]

Though it is now generally accepted that there is likely *some* ancient basis for this text, whether it be an ancient legend or an actual structure, the arguments presented

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[19] See Michael Homan, *To Your Tents, O Israel!: The Terminology, Function, Form, and Symbolism of Tents in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 89-185 for a discussion of the problematic aspects of the instructions given in this pericope from the perspective of construction.

[20] William Propp, *Exodus 19-40* (Anchor Bible 2a; New York: Doubleday, 2006), 496.

[21] Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh: Adams and Charlie Black, 1885), 44.

beyond that consensus are diverse. Menahem Haran presents a fairly complex origin story for this account. The steps of his argument are as follows: first, there was, historically speaking, a tabernacle shrine at Shiloh; second, there were legends built up about this shrine – legends that P knew and firmly believed; third, by the time the tabernacle text was penned, the Shiloh shrine no longer existed, and the more dominant place of worship in the minds of the priestly community was Solomon's temple. What we have here, according to Haran, is a Jerusalemite recasting of the legend of the Shiloh tabernacle, wherein the grandeur of Solomon's temple has been projected onto the outline of the more ancient temple legend as it existed.

In response to Wellhausen's two claims about this text, then, Haran first agrees that the tabernacle as it is described in Exodus did not exist.

> It is evident that as depicted in P the tabernacle is largely imaginary and never existed in Israel. Anyone who believes that the semi-nomadic tribes who made their way from Egypt to Canaan were capable of erecting such a magnificent edifice in their midst violates the laws of historical reality, and it is up to him to substantiate his argument.[22]

Second, countering Wellhausen, Haran believes that the authors of this text meant what they said: "Whoever attributes to them conscious literary invention of an imaginary state of affairs fails properly to grasp the character of the material before us."[23]

Writing over twenty years later, Daniel Fleming offers support for Haran's argument in the form of a Mari text, M.6873, which supports the existence of a tradition of tent worship in pre-exilic times. Fleming moves a step farther, however, in pointing to

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[22] Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 189.

[23] Ibid, 197

a critical feature of the perceived grandeur of the priestly tabernacle – its sheer size – and arguing that this tradition has ancient roots as well. Speaking of a term that the Exodus pericope uses for the wooden frame that supports the tabernacle structure, Fleming points out a point of connection between Exodus and M.6873 while also pointing out a disjuncture between Solomon's Temple structure and the tabernacle: "(The framing *qerdasm*) have no place in Solomon's temple, and the Mari *qersu* suggest that the Hebrew term stands in an ancient heritage of large tent construction."[24] Indeed, as Haran has argued, this construction might be impractical – "both M.6873 and the priestly tabernacle account require more than a few of these frames to set up the tent, and each framing unit is too large to be carried by one person."[25] This does not necessarily indicate, however, that it is a retrojection of Solomon's Temple. On the contrary, there is a clear trajectory for this tradition coming from Mari.

Using a very different dataset – an almost exclusively biblical one –Richard Elliott Friedman begins from F.M. Cross's suggestion that the tabernacle is historically equivalent to the Tent of David,[26] and takes up the question of the fate of this structure as David's leadership passed on to Solomon. He argues that the tabernacle does indeed reflect a historical pre-Solomonic structure, and takes seriously the biblical reports in 1 Kgs 8:4 and 2 Chr 5:5 that it was placed in the Temple. He spends his effort, then,

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[24] Daniel Fleming, "Mari's Large Public Tent and the Priestly Tent Sanctuary," *VT* 50:4 (2000): 486. Fleming's article continues (and makes much more concrete) a comparison between the Canaanite notion of a large, portable sanctuary and the biblical tabernacle was introduced already in F. M. Cross, "The Tabernacle: A Study from an Archaeological and Historical Approach," *BA* 10:3 (1947), 45-68, and made more specific in Richard Clifford, "The Tent of El and the Israelite Tent of Meeting," *CBQ* 33:2 (Apr 1971): 221-27. For a more general discussion of the phenomenon of temporary temples in the ancient Near East, see also Victor Hurowitz, "Temporary Temples," in *Kinattūtu Sa Dārâti*: *Raphael Kutscher Memorial Volume* (ed. Anson Rainey; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1993), 37-50.

[25] Fleming, "Mari," 497.

[26] Frank Moore Cross, "The Tabernacle."

working in detail on the dimensions of the tabernacle and the Holy of Holies in order to better imagine how this might have occurred.

Looking across this section of biblical scholarship – and indeed, many more theories of this ilk could be detailed – few conclusions seem secure. Such a structure might have been similar to the description here, as Cross argues,[27] or quite different, as Haran[28] would argue. It may have been in Jerusalem,[29] in Shiloh,[30] or moved from Shiloh to Jerusalem and placed in the Temple.[31] This depiction of the tabernacle might be informed by Solomon's Temple, by ANE traditions reflected in Mari texts, [32] or by a pre-exilic Israelite temple legend. The line between historical reality and what was "authentic tradition" as opposed to intentional fabrication on the part of the author – the two areas in which Wellhausen commented – is, at times, blurred. Reasonable theories proliferate in this arena, and barring the discovery of new data, this is likely to continue.

The second predominant academic approach is to consider the history or origins of the text itself. At its best, this type of scholarship invites readers to look at this text alongside its contemporaries in order to properly set our expectations for the genre, and, sometimes, to posit that that which is inconsistent with those carefully set expectations is a later addition to some core that has been variously defined. At its worst, this type of

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[27] Frank Moore Cross, "The Priestly Tabernacle in the Light of Recent Research," in *The Temple in Antiquity* (ed. Truman G. Madsen; Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1984), 91-106.

[28] Haran, *Temples*, 189-204.

[29] Cross, "Recent Research," 99-100.

[30] Haran, *Temples*, 189-204.

[31] Richard Elliott Friedman, "The Tabernacle in the Temple," *BA* 43:4 (1980):241-48.

[32] Fleming, "Mari," 484-498. Cross has also argued that the depiction of the tabernacle is influenced by legends surrounding El's tent dwelling. See F.M. Cross, *From Epic to Canon* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2000), 84-95.

scholarship invites inappropriate and often implicit comparison to bodies of literature that are fundamentally unlike this pericope. Sean McEvenue, in the introduction to his own analysis of the priestly writer, quite rightly points out that the 19th and 20th century German scholars who found P texts so distasteful were looking for something quite specific in their biblical texts; they had in mind Homeric epics, with which J compared reasonably well. [33] P is doing something entirely different, and scholars like Hermann Gunkel, Theodor Noldeke, Julius Wellhausen, H. Holzinger, S.R. Driver, and Gerhard von Rad were not moved by his project. As such, they described priestly writings – including but certainly not limited to the tabernacle pericope – as without a sense of poetry,[34] lacking in vibrancy and warmth, [35] pedantic,[36] making no attempt to appeal to the reader,[37] and "nowhere touch(ing) on the deeper problems of theology."[38] Of course, these assessments say as much about the scholars' theological dispositions as they do about the biblical text. That is, a text is only considered pedantic if it harps on details the reader is not interested in reading. If the reader *is* interested, the repetition is understood

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[33] Sean McEvenue, *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), 8. The general bias against Priestly material in Protestant scholarship on the Hebrew Bible is well recognized by now. It is discussed, for example, in Frank Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time, and Status in the Priestly Theology* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 8; J.H. Hayes and F. Prussner, *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 274-75; and, even earlier, in Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1977), 17-23.

[34] H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1966; repr., Gottingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1901), xciii.

[35] T. Noldeke, *Untersuchungen zur Kritik des Alten Testaments* (Kiel: Schwers, 1869), 133-34.

[36] Gerhard von Rad, *Die Priesterschrift im Hexateuch* (BWANT IV; Stuttgart, 1934), 24.

[37] Ibid., 187

[38]S.R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1898). For a history of similar assessments of the priestly work, see McEvenue, *Narrative Style*, 1-9, and Childs, *Exodus*, 529.

differently. Similarly, the expectation that this text *should* somehow explicitly (and in some colorful, narrative form) touch upon the questions of theology that interest the modern reader comes from outside the world of the text. The tabernacle text and texts like it – whether other ancient Near Eastern texts about temple construction or other priestly texts within the biblical text – do not discuss theological issues in a manner similar to J or the Psalmist, two authors who have been better received by modern readers. It is, of course, a reader's prerogative to decide that a particular text is not of interest to him or her at a particular time, but this does not reflect some objective flaw in the writing; rather, it is a result of the way that the text and the reader interact. Indeed, it is a reflection of reader experience.

The field of biblical studies has also demonstrated, however, that it is possible to fruitfully discuss the origins of a text – and, indeed, to posit that there is some core text to which additional materials have been added over time – without inherently de-valuing anything outside of the perceived core. Academic discussion of the relationship between Exod 25-31 and Exod 35-40 illustrates well the methods of these schools of thought.

The Relationship Between Exodus 25-31 and Exodus 35-40

The texts of Exod 25-31 and Exod 35-40 recount almost exactly the same material with some minor differences: the order in which the material is presented in the two halves of the pericope is different, the verb tenses are different, and synonymous phrases (rather than exact duplication of language) are sometimes used between them. To this extent, the parallel texts create something very similar to a classic doublet, covering the same material in slightly different ways. This model doesn't quite fit, however, as the differences are in some places more substantial: the first portion of the pericope is far less

systematic in its presentation. In this first portion of text, items (such as the incense altar) are out of place, and material that appears to be extraneous to the project is included (e.g., the Sabbath regulations in Exod 31). The most famous example of this is the problematic placement for the incense altar prescription.[39] The second portion, on the other hand, is systematic and orderly, though the information is presented in a different order.

Wellhausen[40] and Noth[41] proposed the following solution: the original/oldest tabernacle account is a short kernel, perhaps containing only Exod 25-27. It has sustained many literary accretions since that time, resulting in a number of textual anomalies, one of which is the incense altar text.[42] Exodus 35-40 in the MT is seen by these scholars to

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[39] The infamous "problem of the incense altar" is that the text prescribing the manufacture of the incense altar appears to be out of place in Exod 30:1-10. This is indicated, first, by the place within the prescription where the altar is described: Exod 25 began with the Holy of Holies, moved from there to the holy area and its furnishings (the lamp, for example, is described in Exod 25:31), and finally ended up in the courtyard, describing the *olah* altar in Exod 27. Exodus 28 deals with the preparation/dressing of the priests, and 29 with the ordination rituals for the priesthood and the institution of the *tamid*. We appear, at the end of chapter 29, to be finished with the description, and even with its priesthood and regular offering. Exodus 30's prescriptions for the golden altar of incense are totally out of place – they should have been in chapter 25, near the description of the lamp.

The second indication that this prescription doesn't belong comes from literary cues that are discussed in chapter two. For the purposes of the present discussion, the most notable piece of this puzzle is that in the descriptive portion of the tabernacle texts in the MT – Exod 35-40 – the incense altar appears to be an organic part of the description (Exod 37:25-28; 40:5, 26). To complicate the issue yet further, the LXX contains the awkwardly placed prescription in Exod 30, lacks the report of the *ketoret* altar's production in Exod 37, but mentions it twice as it describes the setting up of the tabernacle, after all of its component parts have been constructed, in Exod 40 (as does the MT).

This issue will be taken up as it comes up in the MT in chapter two. Theories of composition that take into account versional evidence can be found in, e.g., Anneli Aejmelaeus, "Septuagintal Translation Techniques – A Solution to the Problem of the Tabernacle Account" in *Septuagint, Scrolls and Cognate Writings*: *Papers Presented to the International Symposium on the Septuagint and Its Relationship to the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Writings* (ed. George Brooke and Barnabas Lindars; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 381-401.

[40] Julius Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bucher des alten Testaments*, (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1889), 134-144.

[41] M Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1962).

[42] The notion that the incense altar prescription is not original to the text has also raised questions about the cultic realities to which the text refers. See, for example, Haran's argument that the absence of the altar in the original text does *not* indicate an absence of an incense altar in the cult in Haran, *Temples*, 227-28.

be a later text, composed after Exod 25-31 had reached its current form. The purpose of Exod 35-40 was, in addition to exercising certain obsessive-compulsive tendencies, to harmonize and systematize the information contained within Exod 25-31. That is, they posited literary dependence between these two segments of the pericope, identified literary growth within the prescriptive segment, and essentially argued that the descriptive section was not only late, but also pedantic and of minimal value.

Wellhausen and Noth posited their theory using only the biblical text as evidence. Since then, Baruch Levine[43] and Victor (Avigdor) Hurowitz[44] have explained the biblical evidence in quite a different way, using both biblical *and* comparative evidence from the ancient Near East. Based on this comparative work, it seems that scholars can dispense immediately with efforts to explain the different orderings of materials between the descriptive and prescriptive portions: Levine has demonstrated that prescriptive texts are typically presented in one order (beginning with the innermost furniture, moving to outer furniture, then describing the structure itself, and finally describing the courtyard and its furniture), while the descriptive texts are typically presented in another (beginning with the structure itself, then describing furniture, and ending with the courtyard). Each order has a reasonable logic and a predictable progression of its own; neither move randomly through the space. Indeed, Solomon's Temple, which is *de*scribed in detail, not

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Because this discussion focuses not on the text itself but on the text's historical referent, it will not be treated here.

[43] Baruch Levine, "Descriptive Tabernacle Texts," *JAOS* 85 (1965): 307-318.

[44] Victor (Avigdor) Hurowitz,"The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle", *JAOS* 105:1 (1985): 21-30 and, more generally, V. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and NW Semitic Writings* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

*pre*scribed in detail, is detailed in the order we would expect from ANE examples of descriptive temple texts. This is a simply an issue of genre norms.[45]

As Levine points out, it is not at all unusual that Solomon's Temple contains much more description than prescription: most of the evidence we have from the ANE is for descriptive, not prescriptive, texts. In fact it is rather unusual, though not unheard of, for a text to contain such an extensive command section as we see in the tabernacle text. The ANE inscription that both Levine and Hurowitz identify as being closest to the mishkan text in this way is the Samsuiluna B inscription, which recounts the full details of the structure twice – once as they are prescribed, and once as the prescriptions are fulfilled. The two accounts within the Samsuiluna are nearly identical, as is the case in the tabernacle text, and the places where the accounts differ align very closely to the ways in which Exod 25-31 differs from Exod 35-40: verb tenses differ between command and fulfillment, there is a chiastic relationship between certain elements, some use of synonymous expressions is evident, and perhaps most importantly for the question of the incense altar, *elements are mentioned in the fulfillment section that had not been mentioned in the command*. Samsuiluna B offers a precedent for the general form we see in the Tabernacle texts.

Lest scholarship rest on a single inscription that recounts the details of the structure twice, Samsuiluna B can be put aside in favor of the far more standard Solomon story, the Gudea inscription, or the Sippar cylinder of Nabonidus as a comparison.

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[45] As Hurowitz articulates the point in light of his extensive study of the genre of texts about temples in the ancient Near East, even if 35-40 is "chronologically posterior" and ultimately dependent on 25-29, they are story elements required by a traditional pattern of building stories. We have no parallel to the original as proposed by Wellhausen (the command in 25-30 plus a statement of fulfillment). "If we are to accept the literary primacy of chapters 25-29, then we must seek formal parallels not in the realm of building stories but in some other genre" (Hurowitz, "The Priestly Account," 29).

Though none of these recount the details of the structure twice, in all of these examples, the details are contained in the *fulfillment* portion, not in the command portion. Wellhausen's notion that the command portion was original and the fulfillment portion was not only late but also *inauthentic* is considerably less compelling in light of the comparative evidence that we have. Though most scholars – Levine and Hurowitz among them – are willing to entertain the idea that Exodus 35-40 may be chronologically posterior to Exodus 25-31, they assert against Wellhausen that Exodus 35-40 is an independent literary form, not mere pedantic repetition.

New Approaches to the Literature

The studies outlined above have offered compelling answers to many of the questions of origin surrounding this text, and comparative evidence has effectively demonstrated that though the form of this text may not appeal to some readers, it is, nonetheless, an authentic part of literature at the time it was written. Indeed, I accept Levine's conclusions about the likely origin of this text, and the work of Hurowitz and Levine informs my own understanding of this text in helpful ways. It does not, however, answer all of my questions about this text.

Samsuiluna B is the only example found to date of a text that has both the prescription and description for a temple – thus evincing the "macro level" repetition present in the tabernacle text. Still, in important ways, it is nothing like the tabernacle text. Hurowitz himself points out differences that are critical to the experience of this text's readers, acknowledging as an aside that "the tabernacle story may be encumbered

by constant repetitions, long lists, and seemingly displaced fragments…"[46] and that this makes it somewhat unlike the Samsuiluna B.

While Samuiluna B undoubtedly witnesses the structural macro-repetition present in the tabernacle text, the experience of reading it is not at all comparable to the experience of reading the tabernacle text; the features that have set the tabernacle text apart in the minds of scholars and lay reader alike are simply not present in the Samsuiluna B inscription. Here is Hurowitz's translation.[47]

> Command: "Sippar, the ancient city, his holy city, its walls to build. Ebabbar to its place to return. The *ziqqurrat*, his *gegunu*, (the) lofty, its head like the heavens to raise. Samas and Aya to their abode, pure in happiness and joy to enter."
>
> Fulfillment: "The wall of Sippar, like a mountain I raised. Ebabbar I restored. The *ziqqurrat*, his *gegunu*, (the) lofty, its head like the heavens I raised. Samas, Aya and Adad to their abode, pure in happiness and joy, I caused to enter to Ebabbar its *lamassum*. Good I restored."

While there is chiastic repetition between the descriptive and prescriptive portions of the inscription, the instructions in this inscription are so short that reading them twice seems more like poetic symmetry than obsessive pedantry. In comparison with the 13 chapters of text that comprise the tabernacle account, Samsuiluna B is exceedingly short, eliminating the challenge and reward of reading the tabernacle account that will be

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[46] Hurowitz, "The Priestly Account," 23. Haran, another scholar who takes great interest in the priestly text, also seems to almost wash his hands of trying to make sense of the patches of micro-level repetition and strangely placed fragments, saying that while the priestly *regulations* are orderly and precise, priestly *writing* is not necessarily so, and accordingly, readers ought not read too much (historical) meaning into the details of the priestly presentation. See Haran, *Temples*, 227-29.

[47] Hurowitz, "The Priestly Account," 27. Punctuation and capitalization added to aid the sense of the passage; they are present neither in the original nor in Hurowitz's translation.

discussed at length in chapter two, and it lacks proximal repetition and formalism entirely. There appears to be a generic relationship, certainly, but the genre that Hurowitz identifies does not, to my mind, adequately make sense of the totality of the tabernacle text.[48]

Broadening the purview from the tabernacle text to the priestly work more generally, Sean McEvenue has offered an interesting study that shares many of the goals and approaches of my study, though with a slightly different outcome. McEvenue felt that "the general categories applied to the priestly document up to now had failed to touch the essence of this writing."[49] He therefore begins with the minute rather than the general, the "stylistics" rather than "structure."[50] McEvenue attempts to understand the features of the priestly work in comparison with other types of literature, seeking a mindset or generic expectation that leads to an appreciation of, rather than a frustration with, the features of the text. Ultimately, the most sympathetic type of literature McEvenue finds is children's literature: the very features that some scholars have found so tiresome, he points out, are quite common in children's literature and, indeed, quite delightful to children. Though he finds a good deal of similarity between the stylistic features of these two bodies of literature, offering a solid foundation to his thesis, McEvenue himself says that "the leap" he makes in setting out his argument is "wild."[51] Finally, he articulates the hope that his study will lead others to "a more sympathetic

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[48] Chapter one contains additional discussion of Samuiluna B as well as several other ANE, biblical, and post-biblical temple texts.

[49] McEvenue, *Narrative Style*, 11.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

approach to priestly texts, and to greater empathy in interpreting them."[52] While my conclusions differ from McEvenue's – I find a different comparison to be more fruitful – I see my own work as lying in the trajectory he laid out.

In one way, my leap is less wild than McEvenue's. Building upon the conservative assumption that this text was written by an author or school of authors that was somehow involved in and informed about the world of the cult, I assume that ritual practice played a significant role in the life of the writer. To my mind, these conservative assumptions render it reasonable to draw parallels between the features of this text and the features of ritualized action; they suggest that there is an organic connection between this text and the world of ritual.[53]

Because the field of ritual studies is established in a way that the study of children's literature was not when McEvenue was writing, drawing a connection between this text and ritual activity also offers a great deal more fruit than McEvenue's study. Beyond simply noting parallels in a way that offers an appreciative frame for the priestly text, the present study is able to use the insights of ritual theory in order to talk specifically about the response that these literary features are likely to evoke in a reader who is truly a "reader-participant" – a reader who is absorbed in the world of the text.

In another way, my leap is profoundly wilder, for it is not a genre of literature to which I wish to compare the tabernacle pericope, but rather a type of activity. This entails

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[52] Ibid.

[53] As in McEvenue's *Narrative Style*, however, whether or not the biblical authors intended for the features to be there, the fact of their presence is demonstrable. This is not ultimately a study of the author's intention, but of the nature of the text the author has created.

a methodological step that McEvenue's study did not: the establishment of reading as experience. For this, I will turn to experts in the field of literary theory.

Outline of the Present Study

Chapter one of this study lays the methodological groundwork for my analysis of the tabernacle pericope. It engages literary and ritual theory in order to first make a case that it is valid to compare a reading experience with an activity-centered experience, and then to outline the findings of ritual theory that will be most helpful in elucidating this text. The identification of persistent features common to ritual activity through history and across cultures allows, first, for this text to be considered "ritualized"; anthropological reports about the ways in which such features tend to function psychologically and sociologically (again, through history and across cultures). Furthermore, this identification allows for educated speculation about the ways in which reader-participants of this text would be likely to experience it. This chapter also discusses a pool of biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts to which the tabernacle text is most similar, in an effort to establish the extent to which the tabernacle text stands out in its "ritualization."

Chapters two and three contain my analysis of this text. Chapter 2 focuses on larger scale stylistic issues (e.g., repetition between Exod 25 and Exod 37 and formal structures that mark separation and connection between chapters), wherein the features that most strongly suggest a connection to ritual are repetition and formalism. Chapter 3 focuses on smaller scale stylistic issues (e.g., repetition within the description of the lampstand in Exod 25, formal structures within Exod 39). Repetition and formalism are

analyzed on this smaller scale, and an additional feature common to ritual is introduced: performance. While certainly a text cannot perform in quite the way that a ritual action is performed, I argue in chapter three that both the types of repetition and the relative presence or absence of smaller scale repetition mimic sensory and motor experience.

The more profoundly conjectural areas of Israelite history are generally eschewed in chapters two and three of this study. Again, this is not because they are uninteresting or unworthy pursuits, but because first, they are being taken up by other scholars, and secondly, at this point in the trajectory of their study, we lack reliable information beyond the fact that the *notion* of a tent-dwelling god is ancient. Because of this, introducing historical theories at this point carries with it the risk of simply distracting us from the text itself. Unfortunately, the data to adjudicate properly between the manifold scholarly opinions on the historicity of the tabernacle is, I believe, unavailable. Furthermore, while questions about historical realia are an important first step, equally important to the task of understanding the literature is what the authors and readers *believed* to be true.

Acknowledging the significance of such questions in the experience of readers, and mindful of the limitations of our field in this regard, chapter four seeks to broaden the conversation surrounding why this story is being told in the way that it is by shifting the conversation from reader experience to rhetoric. Here, I find an additional conversation partner in art history, where there is a term for precisely what we witness in this text: ekphrasis. Ekphrasis is a literary description of art or other aesthetic objects; virtual ekphrasis is the literary description of an aesthetic object that is absent – indeed, one that may never have existed.[54] How do the use of ritual and ekphrasis shape the way that

readers are likely to understand the tabernacle text? Though they use different terminology, scholars of both ritual and ekphrasis have noted the ability of these genres to carry many messages at once: art historians call this a "subject/object split," and identify the object (the item being described) while noting the potential for other subjects to be present as well (e.g., a message, usually left implicit, about the person who owned or crafted the item). Ritual theorists refer to the phenomenon as ambiguity, noting not only that a ritual can simultaneously communicate several messages to an individual – even contradictory ones – but that different individuals might take slightly different messages from the ritual. This flexibility in communication is understood to be a great strength of ritual.[55] In this final chapter, then, I will also introduce four messages that might be taken as "subjects" of the tabernacle pericope.

[54] It is perhaps most famously noted in the description of the shield of Achilles in Homer's *Illiad*, found in book 18, lines 478-608, and in the poem "Ode to a Grecian Urn" by John Keats.

[55] See additional discussion and examples in ch. 2.

2
Form, Meaning, and Experience: A Theoretical Framework

In seeking to articulate more fully something about the effect of a ritual or a text on a participant, scholars of both ritual theory and literary theory have problematized the category of *meaning* and replaced it with a discussion of a plurality of effects that create a particular *experience*. For it is not only that these stimuli – text on the one hand, and ritual on the other – prompt the participant to think a particular thought or internalize a particular idea; like any experience, these stimuli work in several ways – sensory and cognitive, rational and a-rational – to shape their participants. Dispensing with the category of "meaning," however – especially meaning expressed in language, which by definition communicates symbolically[56] – is a cumbersome task. This study undertakes such a challenge, in part, by bringing together the theoretical insights of ritual scholars and literary scholars, marshalling their combined intellectual force toward a new understanding of the tabernacle text. The conclusions that anthropologists have drawn about the ways ritual performance shapes practicing individuals and communities will, here, be used to shed light on a very different object of study.

This raises two central methodological points that this chapter will endeavor to establish. First, I will make the case that it is reasonable – and, indeed, helpful – to bring together conclusions drawn from the performative realm and questions arising from the

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[56] In saying that language communicates symbolically, I mean only that any given language communicates effectively only by convention. This follows the sense of the symbol developed by Charles Sander Peirce. That is, speakers of English agree that the word "tree" refers to tall, living structures with wood on the bottom and some type of foliage on the top. There is nothing inherent in the word itself that indicates the object it refers to, however – it is associated only by social custom – and another word could just as easily have been used in its place. The word "stands for" the thing because a given culture has decided that it should. Leslie White talks about language as a primary symbolic form in human culture; see his seminal article, "The Symbol: The Origin and Basis of Human Behavior," *Philosophy of Science* VII (October 1940): 451-63.

literary realm. I will do this in three steps: I will introduce the fields of ritual theory and a type of literary analysis commonly known as reader-response; I will demonstrate that there is an area of overlap between ritual and literary theory, wherein the two fields ask similar questions and come to similar conclusions; and, finally, I will make the argument that the insights of ritual theory about *how* these features would be likely to affect participant audiences[57] can reasonably be applied both to *a* body of literature and to *this* body of literature.

Secondly, I will try to establish that it is possible to discuss the responses of "the reader" without having a particular reader (preferably one available to be studied) in mind. No doubt, discussing the effect of any given experience on individuals within a community is necessarily complicated, particularly in situations where the resulting experience is entirely contained in the mind of each individual (such as is the case with reading) and is therefore not easily measured. "When I talk about the responses of 'the reader,'" asks Fish,

> am I not really talking about myself …? Yes and no. Yes in the sense that in no two of us are the responding mechanisms exactly alike. No, if one argues that because of the uniqueness of the individual, generalization about response is impossible.[58]

Fish points us, here, to the importance of the reader's expectations for his or her reading experience. Were they met? Were they frustrated? While certain of these

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[57] I say "participant audiences" rather than simply "audiences" and "reader participants" rather than simply "readers" quite intentionally for reasons that are discussed under the heading "authenticity" the end of this chapter.

[58] Stanley Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics" in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (ed. Jane P. Tompkins: Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 83

expectations may vary from individual to individual, it is reasonable to assume significant overlap between readers within a particular culture: a given community of readers will be familiar with particular genres and generic expectations, surprised by particular turns of phrase, or moved by references to culturally significant phenomena. Within that particular community of readers, fruitful discussion of a general reader's experience is not impossible if a central point is granted: individual members of a cohesive society do not respond to stimuli in wholly unique and self-determined ways. Knowledge about a community of likely readers – or, at least, the ability to identify other literature they were likely to be familiar with – allows for educated speculation about how that community would have been likely to respond to a particular text.

The second methodological perspective in play is that of ritual theory. Strikingly, ritual activity consistently evinces the same characteristic qualities across cultures and historical periods, and, perhaps yet more striking, these qualities have the same apparent effects in the exceedingly geographically and culturally diverse communities that have been studied. Because of this, ritual theorists work from the assumption that these characteristic features of the ritual genre serve a similar experiential purpose across cultures – even those to which we do not have access. That is, as long as it can be established that a particular behavior is more repetitive than is typical in any given culture, ritual theorists talk about the effects of that *repetition* in ways that are not constrained by the particular culture, though the understanding of the *thing being repeated* might differ. This assumption is foundational to the present study as well: if it can be established that this text is considerably more ritualized than other texts that the reading community would have been likely to encounter, it will be assumed that the

effects of that ritualization are similar for any reader who views him or herself as a "participant" in rather than an "observer" of the text.[59]

In addition to introducing ritual and literary theory as conversation partners for this study, then, a second purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that readers would, in fact, be likely to have taken note of these features in the first place. This demonstration requires the establishment that this text does, in fact, contain notably higher concentrations of the specific characteristics under study than typical ancient Near Eastern temple building accounts, typical biblical prose, or typical priestly biblical prose – the corpus of texts with which the imagined reader would have been likely to be familiar. The second portion of this chapter will undertake this task.

Reading and Experience, Reading as Experience

The central question of this study is not one of what the text *says*, but what the text *does* – that is, how the way that the text says what it says creates a particular kind of experience for its readers. Just such a focus on the reader's experience has brought together a wide swath of literary scholars in an area of study commonly called reader-response criticism, which

> is not a conceptually unified critical position, but a term that has come to be associated with the work of critics who use the words *reader, the reading process,* and *response* to mark out an area for investigation…. Reader-response critics would argue that a poem cannot be understood apart from its results…, since (its) meaning has no effective existence outside of its realization in the mind of the reader.[60]

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[59] Participation in vs. observation of ritual activity is discussed below in the section on Performance.

Because of its focus on the effects of literature on readers and the experience of reading a particular work, this sub-field of literary criticism offers a valuable methodological model for several of the questions that are central to this project.

The entire range of methodological tools and ideas common to reader-response criticism need not be engaged here, as its area of inquiry is considerably more broad than its intersection with this particular project. What will be useful here is a focus on three questions as they have been posed by literary scholars: 1) Why think of reading as an experience? 2) How can this experience be studied? What factors affect a reading experience? 3) Who is "the reader" – or does it matter?

Perhaps the fundamental thing for reader response critics to establish is that reading *is* an experience – it is something that happens; it elicits a time-bound, guided progression of thoughts. Though it often happens quickly, "it is impossible to absorb even a short text in a single moment. Thus the reading process always involves viewing the text through a perspective that is continually on the move, linking up the different phases, and so constructing what we have called the virtual dimension."[61] This perspective on reading negates the idea that acquiring information through text is simply a flash-bulb moment wherein core bits of information are passed from one person to another. Furthermore, readers' minds are active during this process, interacting with the information they have just received and wondering (or guessing) what will come next. "[I]t will always be the process of anticipation and retrospection that leads to the

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[60] Jane P. Tompkins, "An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism," in *Reader-Response Criticism*, ix. It is not so much the insistence that the effect of a piece of literature on a reader is *the only* thing worthy of study, but rather that it *merits* study at all that underlies this particular project.

[61] Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (ed. Jane P. Tompkins: Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1980), 56.

formation of the virtual dimension, which in turn transforms the text into an experience for the reader. The way in which this experience comes about through a process of continual modification is closely akin to the way in which we gather experience in life."[62]

Once reading is conceptualized as an experience, some of the questions that commonly accompany reading become awkward, if not inappropriate. Specifically, can one speak in any sort of straightforward way about what an experience means? What, for example, is the meaning of traveling to Italy? What is the meaning of getting the mail? On the one hand, one could identify a significance or purpose for an activity. Perhaps a trip to Italy means – that is, signifies – that a person has reached a point in life where he or she can afford more luxurious forms of recreation, or perhaps it signifies an attempt to escape from one's daily reality. On the other hand, while both of these are possible motivators for a trip, do either of them adequately capture the experience? Certainly not. Similarly, those who focus on the experience of reading dispute those who approach texts in search of a singular meaning.

Is all reading experiential?

Considering reading to be *necessarily* experiential runs counter to a longstanding assumption that different genres of texts arouse different mindsets in the reader, some of which are experiential and some of which are not. According to this idea, if a reader is reading in order to extract information from the sentence, he or she would scan a sentence for the kernel of meaning and be essentially unaffected by the particular turns of phrase used to communicate this information. This notion of reading translates a sentence into a sort of formula directed to a particular outcome. Text understood to be primarily

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[62] Ibid.

instructional, for example, is often thought to function in this entirely instrumental way. The reading of text understood as poetry, however, makes little sense using this first model: to summarize a poem or, worse, reduce it to a formula, is either impossible or ridiculous. Sometimes there is no underlying point or destination; even when there is some sort of identifiable conclusion, simply articulating this point hardly captures the poem itself. For example, what is the *point* of Emily Dickinson's well known poem, "I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died"?

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset – when the King
Be witnessed – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable – and then it was
There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –[63]

Is Dickinson trying to tell us that it was quiet when she died? Or that her moment of death brought together the grandeur of a king's entrance with the profanity of a bug? Was the moment of her death anticlimactic, after all that anticipation, or does she want us

[63] Emily Dickinson, *Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1976), Poem 465.

to think about the buzz of a fly differently than we had before? What is *the point* of this poem?

Wolfgang Iser has commented that the experiential nature of reading explains the fact that "when we have been particularly impressed by a book, we feel the need to talk about it … we have undergone an experience, and now want to know consciously *what* we have experienced."[64] That is, the mere words that we have read are not, themselves, the experience – if they were, why seek to encapsulate the experience in (other) words? The words on the page are the provocation, not the experience. Returning to Dickinson's poem, this notion is illustrated, for example, by the author's inclusion of pausal punctuation that causes her reader slow down and experience some bit of quiet. The experience this tactic creates for the reader, in combination with all of the other nuances of language unique to this poem, simply will not be replicated in a summary.

Iser's comment seems to support the idea that some texts are more experiential than others – certainly, not all genres of text inspire dinner conversation. Does this mean that these others do not engender some experience? Literary theorists such as Stanley Fish have argued that this division between instrumental and experiential texts is not at all so clear. While readers may approach a text for different purposes – on the one hand, to learn how to drive to a particular destination, and on the other hand, to appreciate some aspect of the world in a different way – reading a text is *always* an experience, whether or not the reader is consciously aware of that. Whereas Iser imagines that a reader would recognize having had some experience and want to bring to consciousness the details of that experience, Fish argues that sometimes the mere fact that there has *been* an

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[64] Iser, "The Reading Process," 64

experience needs to be brought to the fore. He writes that he often starts his courses by writing two statements on the board, and asking students whether they are truly equivalent:[65]

He is sincere.

Doubtless, he is sincere.

Certainly, these statements can be summarized in the same way. If all we are looking for is a kernel of information, these sentences are the same. The experience of a reader encountering these two statements, however, is not at all the same. There are several things that might be said about the inclusion of the word "doubtless." It makes the utterance more conversational; it seems to cast the statement as a response to something, whether that be another thought of the writer or the presumed thought of the audience. Either way, the thought articulated here brings the reader into a thought process rather that simply conveying the state of things. It also suggests that there may be some other shortcoming in the person, implying a "but." Perhaps he *is* sincere, but he is also, for example, incompetent. None of these implications are clear from a dictionary definition of "doubtless."

Frequently such considerations are relegated to discussions of *style* or *voice*, which is considered apart from (and, generally, less significant than) *meaning*. Fish, however, argues that "the word 'meaning' should be discarded, since it carries with it the notion of message or point. The meaning of an utterance … is its experience – all of it."[66] Rather than asking questions about

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[65] Fish, "Literature in the Reader," 98-99.

[66] Fish, "Literature in the Reader," 98.

function: "what does this *do*?" How does the inclusion of the word "doubtless" affect the reader?[67]

It is the simple introduction of this line of questioning that constitutes the method employed by many reader response theorists. Fish's approach slows down the reading process such that "events" experienced by the reader are noticed, tuning in to the particular experiences that come of the interaction between a reader and a given text and illustrating the ways in which particular turns of phrase or sentence structures, combined with the reader's background, motivation, and expectations, shape a reader's experience of a text. "The value of such a procedure," says Fish, "is predicated on the idea of the meaning of an event;" something made available to us "by the regular introduction of a 'searching question' (what does this do?)."[68] That is, how does a particular articulation of an idea – a literary event such as a double negative rather than a simple positive, or a complex subordinate clause structure – fundamentally alter the reader's response to a text?

Though it is tempting to pit Iser and Fish against each other around the question of whether all texts or only "interesting" texts are experiential, the substantial difference between Fish's notion of "experience" and Iser's notion of "experience," make it difficult to put the two scholars in fruitful conversation about reading and experience. It seems clear enough that reading is always in some way experiential; perhaps the more important

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[67] This approach, to some degree, runs counter to the notion of "deep structure" put forth by Noam Chomsky. Chomsky's theory is that two sentences that contain essentially the same information but express that information differently share a "deep structure." For Chomsky, it is this deep structure that drives the linguistic experience of a reader – the surface structure is generally considered to be more of a vessel than anything else; Chomsky envisions a mental process wherein the mind of the reader essentially discards the surface structure once they have apprehended the deep structure (or meaning) of a statement.

[68] Fish, "Literature in the Reader," 74-5.

question here is when that experience merits reflection. Indeed, the same can be said of the experiences of daily living. The example of a trip to Italy was considered earlier along with the possible ways it might be significant. All of these, however, came from the assumption that this trip was notable to the traveler. It is certainly possible for someone living near Italy's border to make frequent trips to Italy simply to purchase whatever he or she may need; in this case, the trip bears very little significance. Is it an experience? It is, as surely as walking to the mailbox is an experience. If, however, nothing about the experience sets it apart from all of the other experiences generally encountered in a day, it is quite unlikely to beg one's attention the way that Iser speaks of a text that compels readers to talk about it. As ritual theorist Nancy Jay has articulated this point, "meaning is not a simple and direct product of action itself, but of reflecting upon it."[69] If a reader is not drawn into a text such that he or she interacts with, responds to, and is affected by it on some level, perhaps there is no "meaning" to speak of. Whether or not there has been some experience is no longer the central question.

There are several ways in which an experience – or a text – might grab the reader's attention by setting itself apart from others. It might be unusual or even "new" as an individual experience (like the trip to Italy was assumed to be above) or as a communal one (breaking a world record). Encountering the unexpected generally catches the attention, as well: indeed, many see the foiling of expectations as the hallmark of high quality literature precisely because it is so likely to keep the reader from switching into a passive mode of reading. Finally, either a text-based experience or an experience out in the world might set itself apart through unusual features surrounding a quite common

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[69] Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 8

type of event or storyline. For example, a meal may draw extra attention by occurring at an odd time of day, by being particularly large or small, or by taking place in unusual company.[70] A text might set itself apart with unusual literary features, such as the absence of capital letters, rather than with an unusual plot. Arguably, this is largely how poetry works: it communicates to the reader through its literary features that he or she needs to give this text a different type of attention than might be given to instructional text or a news blurb. Poetry and poetic prose commonly contain more repetition than prose; they appeal to the senses through rhyme, rhythm, and alliteration; they sometimes defy a logical, linear progression, so if a reader were tempted to read only for information that is communicated explicitly, that reader would be refused the satisfaction of a logical summary. The combination of these features increases the likelihood that the reader will introduce Fish's "searching questions" in the first place, though they might theoretically be entertained in response to any text.

From a literary perspective, then, some texts are better suited to experience-oriented study, which pays special attention to the details of the *medium* over and above the *goals* or *referents* – frequently referred to as the *subject* or *content* of a text – than others. The tabernacle text, because of the unusual density of literary features that will be highlighted and discussed in the following two chapters, is among those that invite this type of inquiry.

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[70] Catherine Bell, for example, cites the Passover seder and the taking of communion as two rituals that have grown out of the mundane act of eating. See Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

"Meaning" and Experience in Ritual Practice

The overlap between ritual theory and literary theory begins in the search for meaning and continues in the ensuing debate about whether isolating a particular straightforward meaning – a rationale for the ritual – can adequately express the effects of ritual on its performing community.[71] As in the study of literature, many early scholars of ritual have attempted to isolate the underlying referent of ritual behavior from the medium – the ritual form itself – and have taken the *referent* to be the *meaning*.[72] One type of meaning identified in this fashion is communicative in nature – specifically, communicative through the use of symbols. This notion of ritual is exemplified in the modern performance of the Jewish seder, for example: many parts of the seder are assigned symbolic meanings, and items are manipulated in certain ways in order to

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[71] For a critique of the notion that rituals and ritual texts are necessarily rational – an assumption held by Jacob Milgrom, for example – see James W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus* (New York: Cambridge, 2007), 3-15.

[72] In seeking language to articulate the meaning of ritual activity, many nineteenth century scholars focused on the relationship between myth and ritual. The Myth and Ritual school, founded by Sir James Frazer, believed myth to be an outgrowth of ritual. This thinking is exemplified in Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (3rd ed; London: Macmillan, 1955); Samuel Henry Hooke, *Myth and* Ritual (London: Oxford University, 1933), and Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (2nd ed; Cleveland: Meridian, 1962). The reverse perspective, that myth is a primary form of expression around which ritual activity develops, is argued by phenomenologists of religion like Mircea Eliade, as explored in "The Quest for the 'Origins' of Religion," in *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969): 37-53. Part of Eliade's focus on myth and symbol over ritual arose from its greater accessibility. That is, it is easier to bring myth and symbol into the level of discourse.

Both the Myth and Ritual School and those interested in the phenomenology of religion have studied primarily they way in which ritual activity reflects beliefs about fundamental questions of human existence. Emile Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of Religions Life* [1915] (trans. J.W. Swain; New York: Free Press, 1965) discussed the "meaning" of ritual differently by looking not at its psychological dimension, but at its sociological one. Taken to an extreme, this view supports the notion that ritual activity was primarily a means of reflecting social realities in the guise of religions beliefs. This line of thought was carried forward but with greater nuance by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, who argued for specific correlations between a society's views of God and its social structures in Radcliff-Brown, "Religion and Society," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 75 (1945): 33-43. Most recently, Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever*, and Saul Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of the Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000) have focused on the ways in which ritual activity reflects and shapes the society of performers.

express certain sentiments or beliefs of the performing community. For example, ten drops of wine are ceremonially removed from each wine glass as the ten plagues are recited; many modern Jews would explain that wine is removed from the glass because the joy of the Jewish people (symbolized by the wine) is diminished because of the suffering of the Egyptians. Another type of meaning identified by directing attention to the goal or referent of a ritual is instrumental in nature. The ritual described in Num 5, for example, is said to reveal whether a woman has committed adultery; the attainment of this information is claimed as the motivating purpose and desired end for performing the ritual. Focusing exclusively on either instrumental or communicative ends of a ritual, however, presents a vast oversimplification of the ritual's effects, as will be demonstrated in what follows.

Before attempting to move beyond these two notions of meaning in ritual, however, the fact that both the instrumental and communicative sense of meaning find counterparts in the discussion of literary meaning merits attention, as it offers a clear bridge between the two fields. Questions surrounding instrumental meaning and whether it can exist apart from any "experience" might be compared to Iser and Fish's discussion of whether an instrumental text offers its readers any experience at all, and, if so, whether that experience merits reflection – or if, in fact, an instrumental text is essentially equivalent to its summary. In ritual theory, as in literary theory, the suggestion that a particular complex can serve an instrumental purpose is certainly valid. For example, I recently attended a ritual cleansing of a friend's new home, wherein she burned sage and sweetgrass at each place in the structure that she considered vulnerable to the outside (doors, windows, vents, electrical outlets, etc.). She clearly articulated an instrumental

purpose for this activity, just as many texts are written with an instrumental purpose in mind: so that a reader will understand an idea and, when appropriate, act on that understanding.[73] The problem comes when the presence of that instrumental purpose is necessarily taken as the *only* effect of the ritual or text.

Furthermore, the discussion of symbolic communication as the primary meaning of a ritual is inherently suggestive of literature, as language is, by definition, a symbolic system of communication: "according to this approach, as a word is the expression of a meaning so a ritual act is the expression of a meaning."[74] This equation of a word with a single symbolic referent is, of course, precisely what literary theorists interested in reader response argue against; indeed, it is precisely what many ritual theorists argue against as well.[75] To be sure, words have referents – and there are certainly rituals (such as the Passover seder mentioned above) that make extensive use of symbols – I do not mean to quarrel with this. In the case of both text and ritual, however, to single out that symbolic communication and see the text or the ritual *only* as a means to refer to the symbolic

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[73] That is, if one understands that one has an appointment, one attends. Other ideas – historical reconstructions of the exilic period, for example – do not suggest action on the part of the reader.

[74] Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever*, 3-4.

[75] The notion that ritual is first and foremost symbolic action is still prominent in the work of many scholars of religion. See, for example, Jonathan Klawans, "Methodology and Ideology in the Study of Priestly Ritual," in *Perspectives on Purity and Purification in the Bible* (ed. Baruch Schwartz; New York: T&T Clark, 2008 *)*, 84-95. In an effort to build bridges between the worldview of the Israelite prophet and the worldview of the Israelite cult, Klawans attempts to draw out similarities between prophetic sign-acts (like Isaiah's naked stroll through the streets of Jerusalem) and ritual activity, saying "how could the prophets believe in the efficacy of their own symbolic behavior, but deny the efficacy of ritual? Indeed, the phenomenon of prophetic symbolic action demonstrates the *fact* that symbolic action was part of the culture of ancient Israel. This, in my view, is the most compelling reason various aspects of priestly cult (sacrifice included) ought to be understood as symbolic" (90). That is, Klawans argues that because sign-acts are intended to be "read" symbolically, other activity (like ritual activity) should be as well. But whereas Is 20:1-6, Hos 1:2, Jer 27:1-15 *tell* the reader that these acts are signs and portents, the texts surrounding ritual contain no such notice. I believe this to be a critical distinction. That symbolic activity exists within Israelite culture does not mean that all activity that seems to modern readers to be "strange" should be thought of as symbolic.

meaning is to seriously undercut the way that participants are affected by a ritual or a text. Recently, the attempt to separate the means (the experience of the participant) from the end (either the communication of a message or some instrumental purpose) in ritual practice has come under intense critique by ritual theorists, precisely because this separation seems to carry with it the assumption that it is primarily (if not only) the *ends* that are worthy of attention.

That some of the central questions entertained by the two fields overlap is clear: just as Fish argues that readers do not – cannot – entirely separate a core meaning of a word from some shell of language that encapsulates it, so Nancy Jay argues that ritual "does *not* so divide meaning and matter."[76] Roy Rappaport echoes this notion of complexity in the relationship between meaning and matter – or form and referent – in ritual: "much of what is 'said' *in* ritual is, of course, 'said' in myth or in lawbooks or in theological treatises or, for that matter in novels, drama and poetry, but … there are things 'said' *by* all liturgical rituals that cannot be said in other ways."[77] That is, the medium matters. The ritual form itself is not merely a vessel for meaning – the meaning is not in the ritual "like the gin is in the bottle, in such a way that you can get it out, unadulterated, by performing certain operations."[78] A short review of the progression of academic thought on ritual performance will demonstrate the ways in which conversations about meaning in text and ritual have not only come together at this particular point, but have progressed in parallel en route. Furthermore, since the notion of

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[76] Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever,* 4.

[77] Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 38.

[78] Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever,* 8

simple, singular meaning has been more broadly problematized by ritual theorists than by literary theorists, theories of meaning in the context of ritual experience can suggest a trajectory for a more thorough-going consideration of "meaning" in the context of literary experience.

The Problem of Separating Medium and Referent in Ritual

The Unstable Nature of Symbols over Time

The suggestion that ritual is best understood as communicative activity offers an alternative to the equally problematic notion that the entire purpose of ritual is instrumental or "magical," as in the case of the home cleansing ritual cited above.[79] This instrumental focus brought with it the assumption that to understand a ritual's stated purpose was to understand the ritual, allowing interpretive activity to skip over the particularities of the ritual act altogether. Looking at ritual acts as a means of communication tips the boat perhaps too strongly in the other direction, calling considerably more attention to the specific actions undertaken in any ritual. Two types of ritual communication, in particular, have been identified: symbolic communication and indexical communication. Due to both the complex and unstable nature of symbols and the frequent absence of symbolic meaning in the minds of participants, the reliability of

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[79] This example is explained on page 45 above. The discussion of instrumental purpose in ritual, frequently termed "magic," is well summarized by Catherine Bell, who says "the nineteenth- and twentieth-century debate over magic, religion, and science has successively define ritual activity as nonrational, then as rational given its premises, ad finally as a fundamentally symbolic form of communication, which means that it is irrational with respect to science but rational in terms of its internal coherence and purpose." Bell, *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions*, 50. The reductionism associated with scholarship on "magic" is problematic to be sure, but the perspective also brings an important corrective to ritual scholarship that focuses on social effects and symbols: that is, it takes into account what the ritual performers claim to be doing. Many symbolic interpretations identified by scholars and community members alike are not claimed uniformly (if at all) by performers, and certainly many individuals within a society do not engage in such abstraction as to observe the effects of their societal rituals on the structure of that society.

symbolic communication as a key for understanding ritual action has come under heavy critique, paving the way for a shift toward reliance on indexical communication.[80]

That sacral symbolism can be a component of ritual activity is certainly true, but the presence of symbolism does very little to help us identify some central, stable meaning of the ritual. First, though symbolism is often a part of ritual activity, the stated symbolic significance of ritual practices often changes over time, suggesting that that which makes the ritual action compelling is not, in fact, a particular symbolic understanding. One example of this phenomenon of changing symbolic significance can be seen in the shared Jewish and Christian practice of eating bread and drinking wine as a part of worship: in the Christian community, this act carries entirely different meaning than in the Jewish practice out of which it grew. The constant here is *not* the declared symbolic meaning of the act, but the ritual act itself. One might also point to the symbolic meaning commonly associated with the removal of ten drops of wine from each glass as the ten plagues are recited during the Passover seder, mentioned above. Whereas many modern Jews will articulate that this is done because the joy we feel over our freedom is diminished by the suffering of the Egyptians. The common modern interpretation of this "symbolic act" – that the joy of the Jewish people is diminished by the suffering of other – was only introduced in the early modern period. Prior to that, the removal of the drops of wine was viewed as a kind of "magical" removal of the threat of the plagues coming

[80] When Roy Gane writes that "ritual actions have no inherent meaning," citing F. Staal's evidence that a "given ritual action can have more than one meaning," he is referring primarily to these *symbolic* meanings. See Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2005): 4, and F. Staal, *Rules without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras and the Human Sciences* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989). Gane's effort to "[spare] us the trouble of searching for some 'holy grail' of essential meaning and [keep] us from unjustifiably importing meaning from one context to another because we incorrectly assume that the function of identical actions must be the same" is an important corrective to the Myth and Ritual school of the 19th century, where certain central messages – namely, the death and rebirth of a god – were found in virtually every religious ritual.

on the Jews: taking out the drops of wine ritually removed each plague from the life of Israel.[81] That the articulated symbolic meaning of this ritual has developed over time while the ritual practice itself has remained constant gestures toward the significance of *practice* independent from any particular symbolic interpretation. The significance of this behavior in the experience of the performers cannot be limited to the articulated symbolic meaning, or the behavior would have changed when the belief changed. That the symbolic meaning is unstable, however, doesn't necessarily mean that there is *no* perceived significance to the act. There must also be something compelling in the action itself – a meaning that cannot be extricated from the act and summarized.

Secondly, the presence of such sacral symbolism in particular rituals cannot be taken as an indication that symbolic meaning is always present in ritual practice. On the contrary, when asked about the meaning of a given ritualized practice, participants often do not articulate any symbolic expression at all, but rather state that the act in all its particularities is done in that way simply because it is always done that way. Many Americans who bring a Christmas tree into their homes, for example, would not assign a particular symbolic meaning to it. Surely, it is associated with Christmas, but what does it *symbolize* – the tree (living, cut, or artificial?), the lights (colored, white, or candles?), the particular ornaments? Wesley Bergen has strongly challenged the notion that ritual activities must have some symbolic referent, suggesting that asking about the meaning or purpose of the blood manipulation rituals of Leviticus is akin to asking about the meaning or purpose of sitting down for a family dinner each night. While Americans might enjoy

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[81] In his 1949 book on Passover traditions, Theodor Herzl Gaster writes of this custom that it "is a relic of the ancient custom of pouring libations to forfend evil spirits. It is felt that the very mention of the plagues must be accompanied by the protective measure!" Gaster, *Passover: Its History and Traditions* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1949), 62.

the opportunity to discuss the significance of eating dinner as a family, they would likely not assign symbolic meanings to particular aspects of the dinner. Is a roast chicken a symbol that would differ, somehow, from a lasagna or a meatloaf? Even if a family commonly has chicken on Friday nights, does that *symbolize* something?[82]

The "Snapshot" Meaning of Symbols

Even if we were to assume a symbolic meaning *and* control for the passage of time – even if we could take a snapshot of how a symbol was understood at a particular time in a particular community – declaring something to be "symbolic" hardly solves the problem of meaning because symbolism, by nature, carries with it a great deal of ambiguity even in a particular moment and within a particular culture. Ritual theorist David Kertzer discusses two features of symbolism that contribute to its imprecision: multivocality and condensation of meaning.[83] The former refers to the ability of symbols to mean different things to different people, while the latter refers to the multiple, complex associations that a given symbol can stir in an individual. The complex symbolic understandings of the American flag will illustrate the two concepts.

Americans who generally have exceedingly little in common can frequently unite under the symbol of the flag because they all understand it as a symbol of whatever they

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[82] Mary Douglas's essay, "Deciphering a Meal" in *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1999): 231-51, highlights the question of whether people are conscious of the objective complexity of their own meal patterns. The symbolism I am arguing against is captured by a reading of the Douglas family's tripartite Christmas meal, which is described on page 238, as symbolizing the trinity. Indeed, Douglas talks about the significance of the fact that this meal has three courses – it is, relative to other meals consumed during the year, quite a grand meal – perhaps the most grand. But the fact that there are three courses has more to do with the fact that other meals during the year have either one or two courses than the fact that Christian theology gives a significant role to a particular triad.

[83] David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University, 1988), 11. Though Kertzer's discussion of these characteristics of ritual has been particularly helpful to me, he is not the only scholar to have articulated them. Frank Gorman refers to them as condensation; unification of disparate referents; and polarization of meaning (Gorman, *Ideology*, 24).

hold most dear about their homeland; it has the potential to represent what is in fact a very diverse group of beliefs. This is an example of ambiguity – and, more specifically, multivocality – in symbolism. Though, objectively, the flag is simply a piece of decorated cloth, it symbolically connotes a host of values and emotions: loyalty, home, pride, freedom, and democracy, among others. Furthermore, the things it connotes are themselves not very specific. Most Americans, for example, would agree that they strongly support the principle of freedom, and that the American flag connotes that principle – but "freedom" carries with it no clear political course of action.[84] Those claiming to support freedom can support or oppose any given war or nearly any domestic policy: freedom for whom, and freedom from what? Kertzer argues that every symbol is multivocal in nature: it means different things to different people.[85] This is a source of great power in building community. Individuals who otherwise have little in common identify with a particular symbol, allowing an opportunity for members of that group to identify, to a greater or lesser extent, with each other.

The other property of symbolism that Kertzer discusses under the rubric of ambiguity is condensation of meaning. Whereas multivocality describes the diversity of meanings ascribed to a symbol within a group of people, condensation of meaning describes the diversity of associations that a symbol brings together in a particular individual, and these might be associations that are otherwise unrelated. I mentioned above that for some individuals, the flag might connote several things, including both freedom and loyalty. It is possible, however, to view these things as contradictory:

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[84] This is a sort of "symbol within a symbol," then – the flag connotes "freedom," which is itself a symbolic idea.

[85] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 11.

wouldn't absolute freedom mean freedom from any obligations – and wouldn't loyalty carry with it certain obligations? A person looking at his or her country's flag is not likely to think through any such logical tension, but rather to allow the ideas to simultaneously co-exist in his or her mind, to sit juxtaposed. Kertzer explains that "at a subconscious level, these various ideas are not just simultaneously elicited but also interact with one another so that they become associated in the individual's mind;"[86] that is, precisely because the flag connotes both freedom and loyalty, many Americans will see those things as related, though that relationship is hardly inherent. As Rappaport has said of ritual more generally, this process allows for the possibility that "various parts of the psyche ordinarily inaccessible to each other may be brought into touch"[87] in a way that feels completely organic to the individual.

In discussing this single symbol, it becomes clear that symbols and, by extension, symbolic acts, do not have a "single precise meaning;" they are not "arcane ways of saying something that could be more precisely expressed in simple declarative form."[88] As the juxtaposition of Rappaport's notion of ritual and Kertzer's notion of symbolism suggests, much of what has been said here with regard to symbolism can be broadened to apply to ritual activity more generally. Though the ritual form may contain any number of possible meanings, "ritual is not simply an alternative way to express any manner of thing, but [rather] certain meanings and effects can best, or even only, be expressed or achieved in ritual."[89]

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[86] ibid.

[87] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 51.

[88] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 11.

This discussion of symbolism leads to the conclusion that focusing on the symbolic meaning of ritual acts does not adequately explain the ritual act, because 1) not all ritual acts are accompanied by symbolic understandings, 2) even when symbolic meaning is articulated, it is likely to change over time, regardless of whether the ritual acts themselves change, and 3) even when symbolic meaning is articulated, because the symbolism is by nature ambiguous, discussions of symbolic meaning are far more complicated than a decoding exercises.

The ability to maintain a certain degree of ambiguity is a strength of ritual and symbolism, giving it a kind of flexibility that sets this mode of expression apart from other modes of communication, allowing symbolic and ritual acts and objects to appeal to an exceedingly broad audience and endure major cultural shifts. But that very ambiguity also makes it very difficult to assign precise, discrete meaning to any ritual act – and this "translation" of ritual is exactly what scholars have attempted in the past, and what modern ritual theorists have critiqued. On the contrary, "it is precisely because of the shortage of fixed theology or doctrines that ritual programs can adjust themselves … to new conditions of life;"[90] to rigidly decode them is to strip them of the very power that makes them interesting to scholars in the first place.

Tying Form and Meaning: The Index

Though symbolic communication in ritual is both difficult to discern and prone to change over time, the notion that *ritual communicates* remains important, and there are

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[89] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 30.

[90] John A. North, "Sacrifice and Ritual: Rome," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome* (ed. M. Grant and R. Kitzinger; New York: Schribner's, 1988), 984.

indeed other ways that the messages of ritual have been considered. In his study of ritual blood manipulation in the Hebrew Bible, William Gilders, continuing a line of thought initiated by Roy Rappaport, seized upon a way of discussing the communicative value of rituals without relying on the decoding of symbols: the index.[91] Indices and symbols are both types of "signs"[92] as they were delineated by the great philosopher and scientist Charles Sanders Peirce, but whereas a symbol connotes a particular meaning or message by convention, "an index, such as an act of pointing, is in existential relation to its object,"[93] "connected with it as a matter of fact,"[94] – the index itself embodies and demonstrates, physically, that which it is communicating. An index can be present in a socially constructed ritual, but it can also be present in the natural world; indeed, it is in that context that it was first discussed by Peirce. One can tell which way the wind is blowing, for example, by looking at the direction in which the blown leaves point – the wind against the leaves causes them to appear in a certain way, and the appearance of the leaves then indicates the direction of the wind.

In general, indicies express a relationship between two things. In social behavior, they may, among other things, indicate separation or connection (e.g., through the donning of identical clothing), a hierarchical relationship (e.g., through bowing), or a directional relationship (e.g., through pointing). That is, an observer may not know exactly what is going on during a Mexican wedding ceremony, but he or she will no doubt recognize a connection between the bride and groom as the lasso is placed over

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[91] Gilders, *Blood Ritual* and Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion.*

[92] Charles Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 6 vols. (eds. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss; Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1958-60.)

[93] Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever,* 6

[94] Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 447.

their heads, literally tying them together – this is an indexical act. The nature or extent of that relationship may not be clear – and marriage is indeed a complex relationship that is indeed understood variously – but in this case, the fact that these two people are bound in relationship is made obvious through indexical, rather than symbolic, action.[95] Another example from wedding ceremonies is the exchange of rings. The notion that the ring is placed on the fourth finger because that finger is somehow connected directly to the heart – and that this indicates devotion – is symbolic. Not every culture sees the heart as the seat of emotion, and it is certainly not readily apparent that the fourth finger has any "direct line" to the heart in any case. Speaking of this act as an index, however, one might simply point out that the donning of matching rings – and the act of placing the ring on the other person's hand – suggests reciprocity and connection. There are indices in language, as well: repetition, for example, generally indicates emphasis.

Insofar as an index typically creates or reflects a relationship without clearly defining its nature or its parameters, it, too, invites interpretations that evince both multivocality and condensation of meaning. The most basic level of indexical communication, though – typically, that two things are related in a certain way – will be understood across individuals, cultures, and time.

The ritual form itself is an index of sorts. The very fact that communication is taking place via a ritual and not through some other means carries meaning: because most communication does not take place through ritual, the simple act of ritualizing something signifies difference. This "difference" is commonly described with a different word: it is described as "sacred," which literally means it is set apart or extra-ordinary. That which

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[95] The fact that it is a lasso that is used rather than some other material, however, symbolically connotes a traditionally Mexican livelihood.

is sacred is neither to be treated nor to be interpreted like mundane actions, objects, places, or times – it is to be treated differently. This may mean that sacred objects should be kept in a place apart from mundane objects, or that sacred time should not be encroached upon by the unique needs of the moment. *Such sacred things need not necessarily connote religious value*. If a person commits to setting aside a certain hour of the day for exercise, a beloved television show, or a cup of tea, over time this activity becomes more or less untouchable by potential interrupters: appointments are scheduled around it, the phone goes unanswered, etc. The sacred act is understood to be different in that it, unlike most other things in daily life, is uninterruptible. Sacred time, activity, or space is controlled.

Accidents – insignificant, "meaningless," unexpected events – simply do not occur during sacred time or in sacred space, and this is for two reasons. First, the one performing the act or guarding the space does his or her very best to control the environment, so unexpected things are less likely to take place. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, when something unexpected *does* occur, *it is not construed as an accident* – the mindset of the individual causes him or her to view the event differently. The simple fact that it occurred during this sacred time or activity imparts significance to what otherwise might have been ignored, and the performer is predisposed to interpret the "accident" as meaningful. It becomes "a sign." Particularly when that which is sacred also carries with it religious connotations, sacred times and places serve as a "*focusing lens*, marking and revealing" things as significant.[96] The time, act, or space itself, then – the ritualized thing – signifies "significance without contributing signification." [97]

Rather than going through one's daily life reading such significance into every event – a disposition that would quickly prove overwhelming – establishing a relatively controlled environment, where the unexpected is intentionally kept to a minimum, allows a space in the human experience for meaning to be assigned to unexpected events: where "men [sic] and gods are held to be transparent to one another," where "static and noise are decreased so that the exchange of information can be increased."[98]

One might then answer the question "what does the ritual form itself signify?" by saying not only that ritual communicates *difference,* but that ritual communicates *significance*. That is, the recognition that an act, space, or time is "ritualized" communicates to participants that anything occurring within that sacred (ritualized) space or time should be construed as potentially significant – it signals that a particular mode of interpretation has become appropriate. As Rappaport has articulated this point, "in taking ritual to be a mode of communication some of its strangest features … become clear. The effectiveness of signals is enhanced if they are easy to distinguish from ordinary technical acts. The more extraordinary a ritual movement or posture the more easily it may be recognized as a signal[99] and not a physically efficacious act."[100] Reading Smith alongside Rappaport strengthens this statement: for Smith, it is not only the fact that ritual is communicative that comes to the fore, but the *type* of message that the ritual form

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[96] Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual," pages 53-65 in *Imagining Religion: from Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 54.

[97] Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 108.

[98] Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 54

[99] A signal, in this case, is something that is communicative.

[100] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 50.

communicates – it is an "italicizing device" for the meanings of particular words or gestures contained therein.

The specifics of the *signification* is a next step in the process of interpretation, and is more likely to vary by individual – this is where symbolism comes into play. It is this marking as significant that *allows* for the glut of symbolic understandings of various items and actions involved in ritual activity: participants understand the actions as significant and, thus, may look for symbolic meaning in the most minute of details. Sacral symbolism is an outgrowth, not an origin, of ritual.

Ritual and Literature; Ritualized Literature

Though interpreters of ritual and literature share the task of fighting a tendency to "discard the husk" and identify some essential (symbolic) kernel of meaning, interpreters of literature face an additional hurdle in accomplishing it. Whereas ritual theorists have convincingly argued that not all ritual acts are symbolic, this is simply not true in the case of literature: language is symbolic by definition. This fact has sometimes been a distraction, offering readers a false "end point" to interpretation, as if the symbolic meaning were the *only* significance of a given set of words. The subtlety required to acknowledge both the symbolic meaning of words on a page and the other meanings or effects of a linguistic event without letting the former overshadow the latter is a complex undertaking for which clear methods are wanting.

Because there remains the possibility that a particular ritualized act does *not* carry symbolic meaning, however, ritual theorists have developed ways of talking about a ritual's significance without attention to symbolism. Talking about literature using the

tools and language of ritual theory reframes the discussion such that the symbolic meaning that has ruled the roost for so long is less likely to eclipse the other communicative aspects of the literary form.[101]

The Ritual Form: Characteristics of Ritual

Though recent scholars have called into question the whole notion of a true "break" between ritual and pragmatic activity, suggesting instead a continuum between the most ritualized activity and the least ritualized activity, [102] they have also articulated a shared understanding of which characteristics are most common to ritualized behaviors. Bell suggests that these include formalism, invariant repetition, traditionalism, sacral symbolism, rule-governance, and performance;[103] to these, we might add Kertzer's notion of ambiguity (which he applies specifically to symbolism, but which Rappaport applies more generally to ritual activity) and Rappaport's idea of "perceived authenticity." Though these are not a litmus test for ritualization, they are an exceedingly helpful heuristic for anyone seeking to identify relative similarities and differences in the form of a particular type of behavior.

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[101] While this study will occasionally refer to the symbolic (translatable) meaning of the words on the page – what will be referred to in this study as the "content" or "topic" of the text – its focus is quite intentionally on other aspects of the reading experience. This division is, of course, a heuristic device. The symbolic meaning of words and the cognitive process of understanding them is part of every reading exercise, as Stanley Fish has rightly pointed out. However, because this cognitive process is so commonly favored – indeed, to the exclusion of everything else – this study intentionally delays its integration into the discussion of the text. "Content" per se is the focus of ch. 4, but will discussed only rarely prior to that point.

[102] This "blurring" of the boundaries of ritual is one of the central points Catherine Bell makes in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*.

[103] Bell, *Perspectives and Dimensions*, 138-172.

The existence of this list offers more than just a means of identifying ritualized behaviors cross-culturally. The mere fact that scholars are able to assemble such a list from such far-flung ethnographic studies as they have has sparked a general discussion of the ways in which each of these characteristics are likely to affect ritual participants. That is, because the ritual characteristics listed above are not themselves limited to a particular historical or cultural context – on the contrary, they seem to be nearly universal – and because the effects ascribed to them do not rely on conventional or symbolic meanings, practitioners of ritual theory generally work from the assumption that their effect on participants is similar across historical and cultural situations. As Roy Rappaport has observed, "If, in contrast to the infinite variety of ritual contents, the ritual form is universal, then it is plausible to assume that the metamessages intrinsic to that form are also universal."[104] This allows scholars not only to identify any particular act as ritualized but also to discuss the effects of that form on participants who are quite far-flung both geographically, culturally, and historically.

I noted above that literature, like activity, cues its audience when the turns of phrase contained therein merit an unusual type of attention. More specifically for the purposes of this study, however, if ritual theorists can identify activity as ritualized based on the presence of *particular* characteristics, so too can textualists identify literature as ritualized using these characteristics. A *ritualized text*, in the context of this study, is a text that contains, in a literary incarnation, the same characteristics that are common to ritualized activity.[105]

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[104] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 31

Furthermore, to speak of literature as being ritualized offers us new tools in understanding the ways in which readers might experience a given text. If 1) a particular experience can be deemed to be more or less ritualized according to the presence or absence of specific features, 2) these specific features can generally be assumed to affect participants in a similar way, and 3) reading is an experience, then it logically follows that 4) a text evincing the same particular characteristics present in ritualized activity would provoke an experience similar to ritual activity, to which 5) readers would again respond in a similar way.

The remaining task, then, is to identify literary forms of what have otherwise been described as features of a performance. The following section will continue the discussion of ambiguity and sacral symbolism begun earlier in this chapter, as well as introduce formalism, invariant repetition, and "perceived authenticity" in activity and in literature. Exploring likely manifestations sets the stage, in later chapters, for their identification in the tabernacle pericope and a discussion of the effects these features are likely to have on their participating readers.

Formalism

Formalism is among the most frequently cited and commonly observed characteristics of ritualized behavior. It entails a limitation in the ways in which one can express him or herself, either in words or in gestures; "a restricted code of

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[105] Somewhat ironically, the intersection of ritual and text has previously been explored primarily through literature whose *topic* is ritual. This has, quite understandably, been heavily critiqued on the grounds that the description of a ritual is being confused for the ritual itself, the ritual itself often being inaccessible. Such interpretations treat the referent of the text as though it were equivalent to the text itself, repeating precisely the error that I seek to avoid by using the language of ritual theory in the first place. Just as ritual action can arise around any number of issues or topics, so can ritualized texts center on any number of subjects. Therefore, instead of identifying ritualized acts through their subject, ritual theorists have generally identified them through specific characteristics commonly shared in ritualized acts. The same will be true of this study of ritualized literature.

communication or behavior in contrast to a more open or elaborated code."[106] Outside the sphere or religious ritual, one might point toward the rather extreme example of formalism in the courtroom. The roles of each individual (the judge, the lawyers, the jury, the defendant and the plaintiff), and some hierarchy between them, is clearly delineated. While the information communicated necessarily differs in each case - indeed, the point of the trial is to communicate the specifics of the particular situation – it *must* be done according to a particular form. A lawyer must call "objection!" and not "hey!" A defendant or plaintiff cannot speak out of turn. The judge – who sits above all the others in the room - is addressed as "your honor," even when the speaker clearly believes the judge has made a mistake. The form of the event is clearly defined; it is not up to each participating individual to communicate in the manner that seems most efficient to him or her. This does not, however, mean that all formal behavior is necessarily polite. "Although the concepts of 'formality' and 'decorum' are overlapping, they are not synonymous, nor does formality necessarily entail decorous behavior;" stereotyped behavior of any kind adheres to a particular form.[107] We might imagine, for example, two American teenagers greeting one another. They might nod at one another, hands in pockets, and say "hey, what's up" – and anyone who knows this "form" knows that there is a limited form of appropriate responses to this apparent inquiry.[108] Formalism – stereotyped behavior – is everywhere in life; it is certainly not limited to the realm of

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[106] Bell, *Perspectives and Dimensions,* 139. Frank Gorman talks about this general characteristic of ritual – which he subdivides into the categories form, order, and sequence – as being "patterned," predictable, and easily replicable in *Ideology*, 39-60.

[107] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 33

[108] Certainly, another group of teenagers might greet one another with hugs - but in either case, members of that group understand and generally abide by the "form" of greeting.

ritual. Simply, in actions typically deemed to be ritualized, the level of formalism – the extent of the restrictions on what one can say and do – is greater.

Ritual scholars have noted two primary effects of formalism on participants. First, limiting the pool of possible words and actions available to participants in a formal situation indirectly limits the types of things which one might express: if the situation requires calm, quiet exchange, for example, particularly emotional topics like parenting or politics are generally eschewed. Because it is difficult to express one's personal passions within a restricted, formalized code of language and gestures, "high degrees of formality force people to state or affirm very generalized and rather impersonal sentiments" – such as, for example, the nearly requisite conversation about the weather that most Americans have several times per week. Within a formal framework, what is said and done, at least on a general level, represents very little about the participants personally – they are merely playing out roles that were predetermined socially or otherwise by the situation. The lawyer, for example, does not necessarily think of each and every judge as particularly honorable, though he or she treats the judge this way in the context of the court. The teenager who responds "nothing" to "what's up?" (or, better, replies only by repeating the question) may in fact be in the throes of some sort of emotional upheaval – and may articulate this later in the conversation – but the formalism of the greeting generally excludes this expression.

Secondly, formalized situations, Bell has argued, force the speaker and the audience into roles that are more difficult to disrupt than is the case with quotidian situations: since it is not the participants, but some larger and less clearly defined social force that has determined these roles in the first place, they do not invite the type of

engagement that may bring dissent – they do not invite personal reflection. Thusly, "(recalcitrance) no more occurs to a ritual performer than it occurs to a dancer to move to a different rhythm than that being played by the orchestra":[109] the constraints perceived in a given environment can very closely guide behaviors. The ability of formalism to control the behavior of participants in this way plays directly into the notion of the sacred mentioned above. Sacredness requires some control, some limitation of the pool of possible outcomes; formality offers it.

Formality in Text

Just as patterned behavior might be considered formal, so might patterned text. These patterns may occur on the level of grammar – that is, in sentence structure – or may run across an entire composition. In a formal text, for example, sentence structures are more likely to be consistent, creating a particular rhythm. Abbreviations that might help to communicate more information in fewer words – but which would be disruptive to the grammatical pattern of each utterance – are avoided, and fully detailed accounts are preferred to the articulation of general rules or summarizing statements. Avoiding variation in the way that information is communicated gives the impression that the form of this text is not arbitrary – not merely a function of the author's fancy. Formality creates a self-sustaining system: every time the text abides by the particular form, the stability and implied significance of that form seems to grow.

The presence of refrains is another type of pattern often present in formal texts, this time creating a framework that crosses the boundaries of the sentence. A refrain is a particular phrase that appears periodically throughout the course of a piece of writing,

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[109] J.G.A. Pocock, "Ritual, Language, and Power: An Essay on the Apparent Meanings of Ancient Chinese Philosophy," *Political Science* 16 (1964):6.

generally marking the beginnings and endings of sub-sections. In addition to helping the reader to experience the text as being ordered by serving to punctuate the sections of a whole, refrains communicate an underlying similarity in all of the information being presented. That is, the refrain is a statement that must be equally true of every section to which it is attached. Whereas the particular information conveyed in each section no doubt differs in its details, the inclusion of a refrain helps the reader participant to see past these differences to similarities that underlie them all. Adele Berlin offers an example of this phenomenon in Ps 136, which recalls the miracles God has performed for the Israelites throughout history. After the psalm recalls each act in history,[110] it repeats the phrase "His steadfast love is eternal." Berlin argues that while the psalm lists several events that are historically unique in their detail, "the repetition … superimposes similarity (of an extreme type) upon contiguity."[111] That is, the fact of God's love is untouched by the passage of time; it merely manifests itself differently under different historical circumstances. Arguably, the most important thing about these historical events for the purposes of this psalm is not their variety, but their sameness. This sameness – that which is not affected by the particularity of each example – is expressed both through the content of the repeated phrase and, more importantly for this discussion, through the structured repetition of this particular phrase.

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[110] E.g., in vv. 5-9, several acts of creation; in vv. 10-16, several acts surrounding the exodus from Egypt; in vv. 17-22, the destruction of Israel's enemies and the inheritance of the land

[111] Adele Berlin, *Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1992), 139

Invariant Repetition

Bell identifies instances of invariance as a disciplined set of actions marked by precise repetition, demonstrating "non-utilitarian thoroughness and exactitude."[112] There are at least two types of repetition common in ritualized behavior: repetition of words or gestures within the context of a particular ritual, and the repetition of a given ritual over time. That is, an individual might participate in community prayer each morning. Each morning's prayer session might entail the repetition of particular actions, such as, for example, tracing the cross over the body at particular points in the service, or the repetition of certain phrases. This is a repetition I will call "proximal," because it occurs within the context of a single ritualized event. There is repetition on another level too, however, in that the same series of actions and words are said each morning; this I will call "distant repetition." It is important to differentiate, too, between repetition and what Bell terms "traditionalism." Traditionalism, on the one hand, refers back to an original model, and gains significance from that original, whereas repetition does not. To take an example entirely outside of the ritual world, there are many "Eiffel towers" around the world, but they are all built in imitation of the one *real* Eiffel tower in Paris. People who visit these towers are, no doubt, thinking of the original as they do so. One the other hand, the proliferation of Target stores is a type of repetition that has no significant origin. Surely, there was an original Target store, but people who visit these stores are not generally not interested in that original. In terms of ritual, then, there are actions that intentionally recall a significant moment in history, such as ritualized reenactments of Jesus bearing the cross, and there are actions that do not refer to a particular historical

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[112] Bell, *Perspectives and Dimensions,* 151.

moment, such as the Jewish tradition of laying tefillin – a practice based on a biblical imperative found in Deuteronomy, but for which performers do not call to mind some original act.

One function of such invariance identified by Bell is the subordination of the individual to a sense of the encompassing and the enduring:

> while traditionalism involves an appeal to the authority of the past that subordinates the present, invariance seems to be more concerned with ignoring the passage of time in general. It appears to suppress the significance of the personal and particular moment in favor of the timeless authority of the group, its doctrines, or its practices.[113]

One example of invariant repetition that Bell cites here is monastic practices, wherein the individual is subordinated to something greater than him or herself through practices that might, in isolation, be described as monotonous or meaningless. Indeed, what is the significance, per se, of a monk carefully stacking and unstacking bowls in the same manner prior to each meal? The act in itself arguably has no particular signification. It does not call to mind some holy original unstacking of bowls, and there is no particular symbolic association with the act. It is the fact that this same act is done in the same way several times each day that lends it significance – and the significance has nothing to do with the details of the act. It imposes some aspect of consistency over the progression of time, in a sense denying the power associated with time: the power to make things change.

Invariant repetition also allows a depth of familiarity with – a "mindfulness" of – an act that would otherwise be impossible. Repetition causes an act to become familiar not only cognitively, but to come into sensory and motor memory as well. Bell has

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[113] Ibid., 150.

articulated this function of invariance as the "foster[ing of] holistic and integrated experiences that close the distance between the doer and the deed."[114] That is, when a ritual act is familiar enough to you that you can anticipate what is to come next – indeed, you can hardly imagine anything else coming next, this is the *only* thing that feels right – the gap between doer and deed is closed. The level of intimacy with which the doer knows the deed is such that the end of the one is hardly distinguishable from the beginning of the other: the doer is a vessel of the deed, the deed an extension of the doer. An example of this phenomenon from outside the ritual world can be seen in music appreciation. Indeed, it is usually not the novelty in music but the familiarity that creates powerful experiences for active listeners, whether this is the repetition of a particular theme in a work or the performance of a work that the listener already knows. The ability of the listener to cognitively anticipate what will come next – and, indeed, almost to hear the notes before they are played – allows the listener to feel a strong connection to the music. When it is deeply familiar, ritual action, similarly, is perceived by the actor as an embodied expression of the self, even though the performer has very little autonomy over the acts he or she is performing.

These two effects of repetitive activity – the identification of the self with the act and the subordination of the particularities of the present moment – are, of course, complementary. On the one hand, repetition allows the performer an opportunity to fully identify him or herself with the act being performed, thus offering the ritual as a vehicle for perceived self-expression, making each execution of the act feel significant and, indeed, personal. On the other, subordinating each execution to the trajectory in which it

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[114] Ibid., 151.

lies – that is, each performance is only one of many – gives it a generalized significance that is not at all tied to any single execution of the act.

Repetition in Text

The challenges involved in discussing repetition in literature do not lie, of course, in its identification, though repetition in text evinces the same variation as it does in activity. There is proximal repetition in text – repetition within a particular sub-section of a text – and distant repetition – repetition across sub-sections. There is also repetition that recalls and gains significance through reference to an original, and repetition that doesn't refer to any particular model. All of these things, however, are fairly self evident. The question, instead, is how such repetitions affect readers. Scholar of literature and film Bruce Kawin essentially uses a very early form of ritual theory to explain the force of repetition in literature, referring to "the universal belief that an act or a word becomes more real through being repeated, not less real."[115] His study of repetition in literature identifies two primary effects on the reader: namely, an altered perception of time and the transcendence of logic (or an ability to escape from the confines of cognition).

Repetition and the Perception of Time

As one might expect given the experiential nature of both ritual activity and reading, the way in which repetition affects a participant's perception of time in these two media is quite similar: repetition, as Bell said, evokes a sense of the encompassing and the enduring. As in ritual activity, repetition in literature makes the reader experience what seems to be the same moment over and over again, thereby making "us doubt that this thing was ever not here, or that there was any time in which it could have not been

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[115] Bruce Kawin, *Telling It Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1989), 93.

here, any time other than this time."[116] Following along with a particular text is, generally speaking, a sequential, time-bound experience: one idea follows another. Repetition, however, denies the dominance of time as an organizing principle, subordinating the particularities of a given moment to a sense of that which is constant, "(allowing the mind) to see past the illusion of change to the truth (unity)."[117] Repetition itself makes the case that one moment is not, in fact, so different from the next – allowing it to serve as "a deliverer from history, and ultimately from time."[118]

Transcending the Bounds of Discursive Communication

As in ritual performance, repetition itself – that is, not the referent of the word that is being repeated, but the *fact* that it is repeated – communicates to the reader outside the bounds of what might be considered straightforward, logical exchange. It is often said, for example, that repeating a word over and over again causes it to "lose meaning." Of course, it does not actually lose meaning, but because the audience has already acknowledged the symbolic referent of the word, and because no additional referent is connoted through the repetition of the word, the repetition causes people to experience the word apart from its definition. This shift in focus from conventional methods of symbolic communication (through language) to a more experientially-based level of communication, one which "lead(s) the reader to understanding … through the reduction of language to its suggestive, arational, primary element (the syllable),"[119] represents the literary version of ritual theory's focus on the ritual form itself, as opposed to the

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[116] Kawin *Telling It Again and Again,* 104.

[117] Ibid., 45.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid., 170.

symbolic significance of particular acts within a ritual performance. That is, just as ritual theory discusses the effect of repetition in general, across many cultures of ritual practice, so, too, can the effect of repetition in literature *generally* be discussed.

One advantage of appealing to the a-rational in the midst of such a highly rational means of communication as the written word is that it offers a way to talk about topics that are in some way too complex to be adequately captured by the symbolic referents of words. "There is something about repetition that evidences a difficulty in the subject matter"[120] – that is, repetition is often used in literature when there is an element of the ineffable in what the writer seeks to communicate to the reader. What it is that cannot be expressed in common discourse may or may not pertain to the realm of the sacred or divine (as is the case with ritual), but the kind of "emphasis (signified by repetition) is nearly always expressive of frustration at the inadequacy of the simple statement to convey experience – that is, to give one the sense of having experienced the truth."[121] That is, again as in ritual, a logical summary of points to be communicated often does not adequately communicate their import. Instead, the particular words used can take a backseat to the fact that they are repeated: "when the subject is beyond direct expression, what one builds with is almost less important to the emotional communication than the fact that one is building."[122] That is, it is the repetition of the word, not the translatable meaning of the word, that serves to communicate the ineffable aspect.

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[120] Brent Strawn, "Keep/Observe/Do – Carefully – Today!: The Rhetoric of Repetition in Deuteronomy" in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller* (eds. B.A. Strawn and N.R. Bowen; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 239.

[121] Kawin, *Telling it Again and Again*, 50.

[122] Ibid.

The ability of repetition to provide an escape from, or complement to, cognitive understanding is certainly not limited to the realm of "difficult topics." Even without knowing a language – a symbolic system – an individual who recognizes repetition in language is affected by it, just as the westerner who begins to practice yoga repeats mantras in languages he or she does not understand in order to promote relaxation. Repetition can create a particular experience for the reader entirely apart from the definition of the word being repeated.

Performance

Performance as a characteristic of ritual refers to the *doing* of a thing, as opposed to the discussion of that thing. Instructions for a ritual must not, therefore, be conflated with the ritual itself. It may seem odd, then, to discuss this category in a study of a text.

There are two *effects* of performance as a ritual feature, however, that are closely replicated in the tabernacle text, making this category worthy of attention here. First, Bell argues that performance in ritual helps to create a more controlled version of the profane world – a sort of reenactment with corrections. Jonathan Z. Smith offers an example of this in his description of a set of bear-hunting rituals as reported by paleo-Siberian peoples, wherein he points out the many places where the ritual seems to acknowledge some tension between the ritualized, controlled bear hunt and the way the hunt generally occurs out in the world.[123] Ritual, says Smith, "represents the creation of a controlled environment where the variables (the accidents) of ordinary life may be displaced precisely because they are felt to be so overwhelmingly present and powerful."[124] In order to maintain some parallelism between the real world and the ritual world, we must

[123] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Bare Facts."

[124] Smith, *To Take Place*, 109.

also do – and not just talk about – things in the ritual world, just as we do in the real world.

A second effect of performance is an appeal to participants on many different levels. There is likely to be a cognitive, interpretive aspect – what individuals say they are doing and why; there is likely a sensory component, whether it be aural, visual, tactile, or pertaining to smell or taste; and there may be a kinesthetic component. Just as students in a classroom are often more sensitive to one or another of these avenues of engagement, so also the combination of them in ritual performance allows for the ritual to more deeply affect its participants.

Performative Aspects of Literature

Both the sense of control and the multiple levels of connection between the performer and the content of the ritual can be accomplished, too, by means of literature. For example, Bell argues that performance does not replicate the world as it is, but simplifies it such that it becomes coherent. Translating safety, coherence, and control into literary form leads to a text that is predictable and formal, and that inculcates a strong sense of familiarity and comfort, either through internal repetition or by utilizing words and themes that would familiar to the reader from other sources. Similarly, patterns of repetition in text "create a rhythm"[125] that appeals not only to the logical capacities of the reader, but also to his or her sensory memory.[126]

Finally, I believe it is possible, in some way, for literature to "do" as well as to "say." Instead of simply stating that an object is to be treated with particular formality, it might,

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[125] Kawin, *Telling It Again and Again,* 5.

[126] This is particularly the reader can be assumed to be hearing the words in his or her mind while reading, an assumption that is certainly fair for early readers of the biblical text.

for example, use more formal structures when describing such an object. Instead of simply saying the three items are similar, it might describe each of them using similar words and constructions. Instead of simply saying that two people are interdependent, it might make the description for one dependent on the description of the other – and similarly, it might depict independence by taking care not to refer to one in the description of the other. In all of these ways, text can illustrate rather than explain ideas to its reader.

Authenticity in Ritual Experiences

While a ritual must, by definition, be performed, not any formal, repetitive performance is a ritual. One way of distinguishing theatre from ritual is through the mindset of the participants. Indeed, "the defining relationship of (those present at a ritual) to the event for which they are present is *participation*"[127] -- they do not understand themselves merely to be an audience. While the type and degree of participation in a ritual varies quite widely – and there is often substantial "spectator-like behavior" as a ritual is performed, a congregation witnessing ritual activity is invested, involved, and affected by the ritual in a way that observers of a performance are not.[128] Similarly, individuals performing ritual acts understand what they are doing to be authentic activity, not merely a reenactment of something from the "real" world. Whereas actors in a drama are "only acting, … ritual, in contrast, is 'in earnest' … it is understood by the performers

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[127] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion,* 39.

[128] Ibid., 40-41.

to be taking place in the world." It is considered to be a genuine type of behavior, not an attempt to imitate other behaviors occurring in the world.[129]

That this is a feature not so much of the ritual itself, but of the way in which participants *relate* to the stimulus (whether that be text or activity) underscores the complexity of this enterprise. Just as literary theorists who study reader response have argued that it is impossible to talk about a meaning that is inherently present in the words on the page – insisting, instead, that the meaning is a coming together of reader and text – so also this can be said of meaning making in ritual activity.

Authenticity in Reading Experiences

The way in which a reader engages with a text can also be described as more or less authentic, and this has been described in part by Brent Strawn: the reader must be "*truly involved*"[130] in a text. That is, "the positive effects of repetition are only experienced if they are *truly experienced*, if they are *really felt* and this, of course, means if *we* (readers) truly experience them, if *we* really feel them."[131] Certainly, it is possible to read a text without being personally affected by it, just as it is possible to witness a performance (or, indeed, participate in one) without perceiving it to be somehow real, true, or personally relevant. It is also quite possible, however, to be deeply involved and

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[129] Ibid., 42-43. Durkheim suggests a similar idea when he states that community gatherings for the purpose of cultic ritual are the beginning of the separation between the sacred and profane – some quality of the gathering itself makes one believe that there is a special realm away from everyday life. Thus, whereas an audience gathers to observe a performance that is construed as mundane, a congregation gathers to observe a performance that is construed as sacred – and in such sacred performances, the congregation construes itself as participants in that sacred realm. See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Rockford, Ill.: BN Publishing, 2008), 148-56; repr. of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology* (trans. Joseph Ward Swain; New York: Macmillan, 1915).

[130] Strawn, "Keep/Observe/Do," 223.

[131] Strawn, "Keep/Observe/Do," 236; Though Strawn is talking specifically about repetition, this is arguably true of any characteristic of a text.

invested in a reading experience. The way in which readers see themselves in relation to a text is as important as the way in which participants – or members of a witnessing congregation – see themselves in relation to a performed activity. Lacking ancient Israelites for ethnographic study, it is impossible to prove that early readership of this text was deeply invested in the reading experience, though it is a reasonable hypothesis. Subsequent chapters will, however, point out several ways in which the text itself invites and rewards this level of investment.

Ritualization and the Sum of the Parts

Each of the effects discussed above – formalism, repetition, performance, and authenticity of engagement, though originally discussed as features of activity, can just as easily be discussed as features of literature and the experience of reading it. Just as these features mark activity as ritualized when they occur together, so also they can mark text as ritualized; and just as scholars can identify specific effects of these features on performers, so also it is possible to identify specific effects of these features on readers.

It is important here to emphasize that these features do not function in isolation; on the contrary, it is the combination of these features, and not any of them on its own, that marks an experience as ritualized. Without authentic engagement, for example, the lack of personal input inherent to formal and repetitive acts could lead participants simply to tune out, or to try to explain away literary features that they perceive as a distraction from the purpose of the text that they have (mis)identified. This is precisely, I think, what has happened in previous study of the tabernacle pericope. Rather than assuming that this text works against its own interests, I hope to show in this study that this text makes sense – and, indeed, coheres beautifully – when its unusual literary features are understood to

function together, offering something quite different from what previous scholars have sought.

The Tabernacle Text and Difference

Is it possible to discuss "the reader" without having a particular reader (preferably one available to be studied) in mind? Discussing the effect of any given experience on individuals within a community is necessarily complicated, particularly in situations where the resulting experience is entirely contained in the mind of each individual, such as is the case with reading, and is therefore not easily measured. Still, there are areas of reader response that, within the boundaries of a particular community, are predictable. For example, one factor shaping a reader's experience is the way in which the text creates, meets, or frustrates the reader's expectations. Indeed, the expectations developed in response to a text may vary from individual to individual, but within a particular culture, it is reasonable to assume a significant overlap: a particular community of readers will be familiar with particular genres and generic expectations, surprised by particular turns of phrase, or moved by references to culturally significant phenomena. Within that particular community of readers, fruitful discussion of a general reader's experience is not impossible if a central point is granted: individual members of a cohesive society do not respond to stimuli in wholly unique and self-determined ways.

It will be the task of subsequent chapters to illustrate the level of formality, repetition, and ambiguity present in the tabernacle text. In order to establish the place of the tabernacle texts on a continuum of literary features, other points on that continuum must first be established; this is, after all, a relative exercise. Without a comparison to other texts likely to be familiar to the early audience (and authors) of this text, however,

the mere presence of these characteristics cannot stand alone as evidence of a ritualized form: in order for a particular work to be considered "ritualized," these features must be considerably more pronounced in *that* work than they would be in other works known in that community. The remaining task of this chapter, then, is to provide points of comparison for the tabernacle text by discussing the features common to both priestly literature and ancient Near Eastern accounts of temple construction, both of which have been carefully assessed by previous scholars. This will lay the groundwork for the case that the tabernacle text is, relatively speaking, more ritualized than other related texts. As will become clear in the following chapters, while the author of the tabernacle pericope certainly used the same types of literary techniques witnessed in these other texts, they are more prominent in the tabernacle text than they are in any of these other works.

Temple Texts in the Ancient Near East

The features of the tabernacle text cannot be discussed as somehow distinctive without an examination of the features that are typical of its literary inheritance. Victor (Avigdor) Hurowitz has demonstrated that we can, in fact, talk about a genre of texts about temples. Based primarily on *The Cylinder Inscriptions of Gudea of Lagash* and confirmed through comparison with numerous other ANE sources (including Old Babylonian, Assyrian, and Neo-Babylonian inscriptions), he offers the following general outline of a temple text.[132]

1. Divine decision to build temple, notification of human
2. Clarification to human, revelation of temple's spiritual layout
3. Preparations for building, more clarification, form revealed
4. Construction process, description of structure and furnishings

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[132] Hurowitz, *I Have Built*, 56. Hurowitz articulates this list as it applies specifically to the Gudea Inscriptions; here I have generalized it.

5. Gods assemble in temple
6. Patron god brought to temple
7. Presentation of gifts, appointment of temple personnel
8. "Determining destinies" – 7-day divine/human festival

In his study, Hurowitz uses the Gudea inscription as a focal point for comparing other biblical and ancient Near Eastern inscriptions; as such, it is worth summarizing its contents briefly here. The Gudea inscription, which is contained on two cylinders,[133] reports that the high god Enlil became suitably pleased with the city of Lagash so as to compel the god of Lagash, Ningirsu, to have a temple built there. Ningirsu communicates the imperative to the city's governor, Gudea, through a dream. After the details are suitably clarified through the help of a goddess and dream interpreter, Gudea prepares for the construction project by instituting some social policies that might be called utopian (e.g., introducing some social equality[134]) and ritually purifying the city and the building city. Gudea himself is involved in all aspects of the preparation, many of which incorporate ritual elements (e.g., the molding of the first brick), and various gods participate in the laying of the foundation. This is followed by a description of the temple structure and furnishings. Cylinder B reports the dedication of the temple. After some gaps in the narrative, the patron god finally enters the new temple, and the accompanying rituals and celebrations are described.

Hurowitz describes numerous temple building inscriptions from Sumerian and Old Babylonian literature, Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Royal Inscriptions,

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[133] Hurowitz reports that there may have been a third (which would have preceded cylinder A), but that it is highly unlikely to have contained information immediately relevant to the Temple construction project. (*I Have Built*, 33-38.)

[134] Hurowitz, *I Have Built*, 39.

Mesopotamian mythology, Northwest Semitic writings, and biblical and post-biblical texts that follow this general structure, thereby making a strong case that there is indeed a "genre" of temple texts. To be sure, there is variety among this group – some lack certain elements of the traditional form, expansion and contraction of particular elements is common, Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions show a "continuation and slight deterioration of what has become recognizable as a traditional format,"[135] and Assyrian inscriptions evince some development, wherein the blessings and curses are tied directly to one's level of respect for the temple just constructed. Still, the fact that the basic form remains recognizable across these many ancient Near Eastern cultures and even into the biblical text, in the case of Solomon's Temple, speaks to the existence of a genre for such writing. Indeed, such flexibility is inherent in the notion of genre.

Formally speaking, the tabernacle text can be compared to other ancient Near Eastern temple texts both on a small scale, at the level of sentence structure, and on a large scale, at the level of thematic progression. The summary statements at the end of the construction, too, are parallel. But what of the features that "encumber"[136] the tabernacle text? While this conversation offers an important foundation for the question of whether the curious features of the tabernacle text are generic or unique, in the end only a small portion of the wide swath of Hurowitz's data can be directly applied to the particular issues raised by the tabernacle text. This is because what is curious about the tabernacle text is contained entirely in one of the eight components of the genre Hurowitz includes: component four, wherein the building itself is described. In this area, the

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[135] Hurowitz, *I Have Built,* 82.

[136] Hurowitz, "The Priestly Account," 23.

tabernacle text diverges from the common generic form in three ways. Each of these ways are witnessed in at least one other manuscript – none are entirely unique when considered independently – but their combination is witnessed only in the tabernacle text, and I believe it is in combination that they support the reader experience under study here.

First, the tabernacle text contains considerably more detail about the structure than most of the ancient Near Eastern texts in this genre. In this it is like the other biblical accounts of temples, 1 Kings 5:15-9:25 and Ezek 40-48. Mesopotamian descriptions of buildings and furniture are more poetic but also more general; they serve to praise the builder and the building, but the reader can't the visualize structure after reading the text. That is, component four on Hurowitz's list is simply not central for most of these texts. In comparison, Kings, Ezekiel, and Exodus are all unusual in giving so many measurements. Although there are still data points missing in the biblical text, the very fact that so many people have tried to reconstruct the Temple with dioramas – and with some degree of success – is indicative of the nature of the text.

The tabernacle text diverges from is biblical counterparts, however, in that it relates those details in both the command and the construction report – that is, all of the details are contained twice.[137] "If (Solomon's) Temple story is taken as a standard for the characteristics of building stories,"[138] something "justified by the fact that (the story of Solomon's Temple) continues a richly attested ancient Near Eastern tradition of building

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[137] The effect of this on the reading experience will be considered in chapter two under the heading "distant repetition."

[138] Hurowitz, "The Priestly Account," 25.

stories,"[139] then "the Tabernacle story is close to standard in the fulfillment section but very widely deviates from the standard in its command section."[140] Indeed, none of the other biblical accounts and only *one* other ancient Near Eastern account include all of information given in the prescription again in the construction account. Because this one other ANE account – Samsuiluna B – doesn't include *nearly* as much detail in its reports to begin with, the two texts, while formally similar in this way, offer very different reading experiences.[141]

Samsuiluna B is a bilingual (Akkadian and Sumerian) inscription that gives an account of King Samuiluna's construction of the Temple Ebbaba. It is most notable for the present study because the instructions given are repeated almost verbatim in a fulfillment account. Along with the tabernacle text, this is the only temple account from that general geographic and historical area that repeats in this way. Furthermore, the much commented on differences between the command and the fulfillment portions of the tabernacle text have a model in this text: the fulfillment *almost* exactly repeats the command, but there is some information included in the fulfillment that is absent in the command.

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[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid.

[141] John Van Seters has rightfully pointed out the gulf between the *Gestalt* of the temple and tabernacle descriptions in the Bible and the ancient Near Eastern inscriptions to which Hurowitz compares them. "Apart from some rather general phrases about laying the foundations and making a particular temple beautiful … there is (in the ANE texts) little in the way of precise description. There is no measurement of rooms or objects, no size or arrangement of parts by which to visualize the structures" (John Van Seters,"Solomon's Temple: Fact and Ideology in Biblical and Near Eastern Historiography." *CBQ* 59, 1997: 45). The closest parallel in this regard, the Esagila Table, offers measurements and a general position for one piece of furniture (a bed), a foundation plan for a ziggurat, and measurements pertaining to the basic layout of the space. For a translation of the Esagila Table, see E. Unger, *Babylon, die heilige Stadt, nach der Beschreibung der Babylonier* (Berlin/Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1931), 246-49.

Hurowitz's translation of the relevant portion of Samsuiluna B follows. Like the tabernacle text, the distant repetition in Samsuiluna B describes the temple construction, and serves to envelope intervening material – which, also like the tabernacle account, is an account of an uprising.[142]

Command	*Fulfillment*
8. Sippar	79. the wall of Sippar
9. the ancient city, his holy city	80. like a great mountain
10. its wall to build	81. I raised
11. Ebabbar to its place	82. Ebabbar I restored
12. to return	
13. the *ziqqurrat*, his *gegunu*	83-84. The *ziqqurrat*, his *gegunu*
14. (the) lofty	85. (the) lofty
15. its head like the heavens	86. its head like the heavens
16. to raise	87. I raised
17 Samas and Aya	88. Samas, Aya and Adad
18. to their abode	89. to their abode
19. pure	90. pure
20. in happiness	91. in happiness
21. and joy to enter	92. and joy I caused to enter
22. by his mouth which will not	93. to Ebabbar its *lamassum*
23. be altered	94. good
24. he commanded me	95. I restored[143]

Whether the distant repetition in Samsuiluna B would be recognized by a reader, however, is questionable. There are fifty five lines between the end of the command and the beginning of the fulfillment, and the repetition evinced here is of very short phrases. Even if it were to be recognized, the amount of time that the reader spends reading material that is familiar would be exceedingly brief. This text may offer some of the pleasures of encountering the familiar, but on a relatively small scale. Because this discussion is also intended as a backdrop for the later discussion of the tabernacle text, it

[142] In contrast, in Samsuiluna A, the construction account was the central material that was enveloped by the chiastic repetition of other material.

[143] Hurowitz, "Priestly Account," 27.

is also worth noting that there is no "proximal" repetition – repetition of words and phrases within the command section or within the fulfillment section. Given these things, it seems to me that this repeated element serves primarily as a *formal* element, marking a beginning and an ending, and providing a sense of coherence to the work overall.

The third way in which the tabernacle text sets itself apart from other temple texts is in its "tight literary construction" – that is, formal, patterned writing on both a large scale (spanning across the thirteen chapters of the overall composition) and a small scale (in the description of particular features of particular items of furniture). One other ancient Near Eastern temple text known for its repetition, formalism, and general attention to literary matters merits individual comparison to the tabernacle text: Samsuiluna A.

Samsuiluna A is an inscription in Akkadian that celebrates the construction projects of Samsuiluna, king of Babylon from ca. 1749-1712 BCE. The inscription is frequently noted for its literary artistry and tight (i.e., formal) construction. In fact, in his studies of temple texts in the ancient Near East, Hurowitz singles out Samsuiluna A as containing a particular "literary value," having been "created with much precision and artistry."[144] In the fifteen grammatical sentences that he identifies in Samsuiluna A, Hurowitz uncovers a complex system of conjunctive and disjunctive formal elements. The first section of the text is punctuated "by repetition of words and expressions in structurally critical loci"[145] that both mark topical transitions in the text and, through the use of repetition, create some literary unity between the sections. Hurowitz goes on to

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[144] Victor (Avigdor) Hurowitz, "Literary Structures in Samsuiluna A," *JCS* 36, 1984: 191-2.

[145] Ibid., 198.

identify grammatical and terminological chiasm, "forward repetition,"[146] and sevenfold repetition of words. Framing these more minute literary elements, the overall structure of the text evinces chiasm as well: the text progresses from the third person to the first, and then back to the third in a fashion that "reflects the thematic development of the text." Literarily, Hurowitz argues, "the heptads, chiasms, and the overall structure of the inscription combine to center in on, and draw our attention to, two ideas: the great king of Babylon, and the six fortresses which the king has built and which are celebrated in his inscription."[147] That is, the literary features of the text support the content of the text.[148]

In order to make a comparison with the tabernacle text later in this study, it is important to look carefully at the *prominence* of chiasm and repetition in Samsuiluna A. I have underlined repeated phrases below.

1. When Anum and Enlil, the kings of <u>the heavens and the earth looked happily</u> upon Marduk, the prime son of Ea –
2. gave to him lordship of <u>the four quarters</u> –
3. <u>called him a great name</u> among the Anunnaki –
4. and <u>founded for him the foundations of Babylon like the heavens and the earth;</u>
5. at that time Marduk, the chief god of his land, the god who creates wisdom, gave me, Samsuiluna, the king of his desire, the entire land for shepherding.
6. Verily, he greatly instructed me to cause his land to lie down in pastures and to guide his broad people in well being for ever.
7. I, Samsuiluna, the mighty king, the king of Babylon, the king who makes the four quarters obedient, with my own power and my great wisdom, in the course of two months molded the bricks for the fortress Dimat-Ellil for Ninmah the mother who created me, for the fortress Pada for Adad my ally, for the fortress of Lagaba for Sin the god who created me, for the fortress Iabusum for Lugal-asal who greatens

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[146] That is, "repetition of (prior) elements … in the same order in which they appear(ed previously)." (Ibid., 198.)

[147] Hurowitz, "Samsuiluna A," 200.

[148] This is in contrast to the effect of the envelope structure in both Samsuiluna B and the tabernacle text, where the topic of the repeated element is so different than that of the intervening account that the literary "envelope" does not so much focus our attention on the intervening material as it minimizes its importance. That is, for Samsuiluna B and the tabernacle text, the uprising seem ultimately to have made no difference to the world of the temple.

my kingship, for the fortress Gula-BAD, and for the fortress Usiana-Irra for Nergal who destroys my enemies; for those six great fortresses which Sumula'el, my great ancestor, my great-great-great-grandfather, had built and which had in their old age fallen apart by themselves.

8. I built greatly.
9. I elevated their tops like a mountain.
10. I made firm the foundations of all the lands.
11. I exalted the name of Babylon.
12. I made it excel in the four quarters.
13. The awesome radiance of my kingship covered the border of the heavens and earth.
14. For that, the great gods looked at me with their shining countenances.
15. They gave me as a gift life which renews itself monthly like Sin, the performance of shepherding the four quarters in well-being for ever, the achievement of my heart's desire like a god, and walking constantly daily with an uplifted head and happiness of heart.[149]

To be sure, there is artful repetition here. Though it is generally only the repetition of a word or short phrase, in a piece as short as this one, that is all that is necessary to catch the reader's attention. The phrase "heavens and earth" occurs in lines one and thirteen; the reference to the happy countenances of Anum and Enlil (which are more similar in Akkadian than in the English translation) are referred to in lines one and fourteen; the reference to the four quarters is in both lines twelve and two; the reference to "the foundations" in four and ten; the reference to a great name in eleven and three; the reference to Babylon in four and eleven. As Hurowitz points out, this particular pattern of repetition highlights the material that lies between it: the report of Samsuiluna's construction project, described in line seven. The repetition also creates a sense of unity in the work. It is aurally satisfying to hear these words and phrases repeated in such close proximity. Though the particular repetitions that stand out to me are not perfectly

[149] This is the translation of Victor Hurowitz, given in "Samsu-iluna A," 194. He includes, too, a treatment of the text with reference to the Akkadian original, in addition to offering a transliteration of the Akkadian.

chiastic, the fact that there is near chiasm contributes a sense of formality to the text that lends an air of stability and significance.

It is equally important to observe, however, that when words and phrases are repeated in this piece of writing, the context in which they are used is quite different. That is, though the phrase "heavens and earth" is used twice – and in both cases is a description for the boundlessness of someone's dominance – it refers to the dominance of different beings. In line one, it is Anum and Enlil who are kings of the heavens and earth, while in line thirteen it is the radiance of Samsuiluna's reign that is celebrated with this phrase. The other occurrence of this phrase describes the boundlessness of the land of Babylon, but here it is not the kingship of Samsuiluna or Anum and Enlil that is celebrated, but that of Marduk. Thus, while the phrase is used three times in similar constructions, in context, the phrase means something different each time.

The same observation can be made of each of the repetitions noted. The identity of the lucky recipient of the happy gazes of Anum and Enlil is variously Marduk (line one) and Samsuiluna (line fourteen); the laying of solid foundations is ascribed first to Anum and Enlil (line four) and then to Samsuiluna (line ten). The author is using repetition as a means to draw parallels between Samsuiluna, Marduk, and Anum and Enlil, and between Babylon and the heavens and the earth. Indeed, it is a most effective literary means of doing so.

It does not, however, encourage the reader to pay attention *primarily* to the aural quality of the repetition, or to encounter the word differently each time (such that it might "lose all meaning"). If the reader were to do so, he or she would clearly miss the point of the repetition, because the information is not actually being repeated; only the words are

being repeated. Though the repetition and formalism in this piece creates an artistically satisfying, aurally coherent work, the advancement of a plot and the communication of content in this piece still seems to be primary, and the reader must not shift his or her mode of attention so drastically as to surrender attention to the text on that level.

Using Hurowitz's research, I have tried to establish here three things for the purpose of this study. First, there is such a thing as a genre for temple texts that is reflected in the literature of several ancient Near Eastern cultures. The boundaries of this genre are somewhat fluid, as is the case with the boundaries of all genres, and particular texts may cohere more or less closely with the traditional form. Secondly, while the tabernacle text shows some relationship to the ANE, this genre does not sufficiently explain the characteristics of the tabernacle text. There are several points of departure from which the type of "difference" witnessed in tabernacle text might be considered. First, the tabernacle text might be considered in relation to the description of Solomon's Temple, the biblical temple text that fits most easily into the genre of ancient Near Eastern temple texts. The primary difference here is that the tabernacle text presents all of its structural details twice: whereas Solomon's Temple already stands out among the ancient Near Eastern texts for its inclusion of detailed measurements, Exodus gives these measurements in both the prescription and the construction report. There is another text that does this too: Samsuiluna B. However, while Samsuiluna B includes both a prescription and a construction report, it lacks the detail-oriented nature that sets apart the biblical texts in the first place. Because of this, I find the nature of these reports to be quite different than what we find in Exodus (and Kings); approaching this inquiry from

the perspective of reader experience, I believe the extent to which they are similar has been overstated.

In terms of its "smaller scale" formal features, several literary features of the tabernacle text find predecessors in ancient Near Eastern texts. Certain formal elements, such as the use of the refrain and the consistency in sentence structures, are present in both of the Samsuiluna inscriptions discussed here, as well as other ancient Near Eastern texts. The repetition and formalism present, however, differ in both quality and quantity. Though both texts contain repetition, the context surrounding these episodes of repetition creates a profoundly different reader experience than that which stems from the tabernacle text. Furthermore, on a continuum between less and more formalism and repetition, chapters two and three will demonstrate that the tabernacle text is far to the right of Samsuiluna inscriptions A and B – which, already, have been selected because *they* are to the right of other ancient Near Eastern texts.

The Priestly Work: Narrative and Instruction

To be sure, repetition and formalism are hallmarks of priestly style generally, and so it is important to locate the tabernacle text on the continuum of priestly literary style as well. In his study of the style of the Priestly writer, Sean McEvenue points, for example, to a feature he calls an "echo": "a repetition of a key word, phrase, or clause which has occurred in a previous unit … [in order] to unite units and [suggest] a hidden order and plan in the world,"[150] which is not unlike the use of the formal refrain discussed above. He points, too, to the way in which the Priestly writer very clearly frames narratives,

[150] McEvenue, *Narrative Style*, 38.

offering structure to what McEvenue (and most other scholars) assume was an inherited narrative.[151] He highlights repetition across priestly texts: in the flood account, for example, he points to several instances where the same word is used several times in fairly close proximity,[152] and describes this as a means creating a sense of unity in the story.

While indeed McEvenue demonstrates that repetition and formalism (in various particular incarnations) are widespread in Priestly narrative, as in the comparison with ancient Near Eastern texts, the type of repetition he points out is much less pronounced than that which is found in the tabernacle text. While he, too, remarks that a literary feature such as an echo (or refrain, in the terminology of this study) "must be sufficiently imposing to be really experienced by the attentive reader as … recalling something familiar,"[153] McEvenue's examples of unifying repetition in the flood narrative are generally limited to single words in close proximity or short phrases at a greater distance. What we have in the tabernacle pericope is far more profound: precise repetition of phrases in close proximity, and repetition of large blocks of verses occurring at a distance. McEvenue's examples may indeed be adequate to catch the attention of the attentive reader; I do not mean to quarrel with this point. Rather, I wish to argue that if priestly texts broadly writ are an example of a particular type of writing, the tabernacle pericope is an exaggerated model of that same type.

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[151] E.g., Gen 6:9-10 introduces the story of Noah and the flood, and Gen 9:28-29 ends the story with a notice of his death.

[152] McEvenue, *Narrative Style*, 40. The word "Noah" is used six times within the frame of the flood account: Gen 6:9-10 contains it four times, and Gen 9:28-29 contains it twice. See also his discussion, on page 41, of the repetition of the word אֶרֶץ and the root שׁחת in Gen 6:11-13

[153] McEvenue, *Narrative Style*, 38.

One might also look to Lev 1-7 as a sample of priestly text, this time instructional rather than narrative; certainly, this text is ripe with repetition and formalism as well, and Bryan Bibb has recently published a study that argues that the entirety of Leviticus should be construed as "ritualized" literature.

Bibb argues, as I do, that text can be ritualized, and that the biblical text bears witness to this phenomenon in the priestly texts. Bibb focuses on formalism, traditionalism, invariant repetition, and what I consider under the rubric "ambiguity"; he understands the category of performance to apply to text only as it is read aloud. Following Bell's model, wherein one should imagine a continuum between "mundane" and "ritualized" activity, Bibb's study makes a strong case that Leviticus is, to some extent, ritualized – but I find the tabernacle pericope to be considerably moreso.

Bibb articulates the type of formalism witnesses in the text of Leviticus this way: "compared with the language in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, even with Exodus and Deuteronomy, Leviticus contains the most highly structured and formalized language."[154] That is, the speech pattern stands out. The first example Bibb offers for this is the presence of five different verbal forms that imply speaking in Lev 1:1.[155] While this is unusual, how it is *formal* per se is less clear. Nevertheless, there *is* a clear structure present in Lev 1: The entire pericope opens with the framing statement "When any of you presents an offering of cattle to the LORD, he shall choose his offering from the herd or from the flock,"[156] and follows a clear structure moving forward: If his offering is a

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[154] Bibb, *Ritual Words*, 58.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Lev 1:2

burnt offering from the herd (instruction).../If his offering for a burnt offering is from the flock (instruction) .../If his offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds (instruction) ....

That traditionalism is present in the literary form of this text is less clear. While it is true that the authority of these texts assumes the importance of abiding by an ancient tradition – after all, it is presented as instructions delivered to Moses! – whether this is reflected in the language itself is a complicated question. Bibb is careful not to overstate this case, but he does suggest that "Leviticus and other cultic writings are deliberately archaic or 'archaizing.'"[157] The complexity of the argument surrounding attempts to date certain language as relatively early or late, and then to identify certain late uses of "early" language as archaizing, would merit a study in and of itself; for good reason, Bibb does not devote sustained attention to this question in his work, and thus his suggestion must remain a conjecture of convenience.

Perhaps the most compelling of Bibb's cases are for invariant repetition and ambiguity. For the former, Bibb points out that there is a great deal of overlap in the information presented in Leviticus, and as such, it would be quite easy for the author to have abbreviated the instructions. That is, the information given in Lev 3 is quite similar for the sacrifice of a bovine, a sheep, or a goat, and as such, the chapter repeats "three times almost verbatim the instructions for preparing the offering."[158] Similarly, the instructions found in Lev 1 "are repeated almost verbatim in vv. 5-9 and 11-13"[159]

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[157] Bibb, *Ritual Words,* 59.

[158] Ibid., 60.

[159] Ibid.

because the same rules apply to both of these cases. McEvenue calls this structure "panel writing,"[160] and it is present in many priestly texts.

There are two ways in which the repetition in these sacrificial instructions is less intense than the repetition in the tabernacle pericope. First, Lev 1-7 lacks the sort of concentration and repetition of details within each set of instructions that will be demonstrated below *within* each set of instructions. Second, while there is repetition of words and phrases from instructions for previously described sacrifices,[161] there are also several cases of abbreviation. For example, Lev 4 describes the procedure for a חטאת offering. It includes four "levels" of purgation, depending on the nature of the transgression. Lev 4:11-12 explains the procedure for the parts of a sacrificed bull that should not be burned on the altar in the purgation following a high priest's transgression.

> But the hide of the bull, and all its flesh, as well as its head and legs, its entrails and its dung – all the rest of the bull – he shall carry to a clean place outside the camp, to the ash heap, and burn it up in a wood fire; it shall be burned on the ash heap.

The next scenario, wherein it is an Israelite who has committed the transgression, offers abbreviated instructions regarding how to treat the parts of the bull that are not to be offered, by referring back to the prior instruction **"**he shall do with this bull just as is done with the (priest's) bull of sin offering; he shall do the same with it." Lev 4:21a similarly refers back to Lev 4:12 "He shall carry the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned

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[160] Sean McEvenue, *Narrative Style*, 15.

[161] For example, note the absence of repetition within the instruction of Lev 3:3-4 "the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is about the entrails; the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, that is at the loins; and the protuberance on the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys" and Lev 4:8-9 "the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is about the entrails; the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, that is at the loins; and the protuberance on the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys."

the first bull." This is precisely the kind of abbreviation that Bibb notes is absent in Lev 1 and 3, and he is certainly correct in his observation. Even within Lev 1-7, however, this characteristic is not consistent. Leviticus is indeed more formal and more repetitive than a "typical" biblical text, but the tabernacle pericope is even more repetitive and more formal than Leviticus.

The final characteristic of Bibb's that I wish to engage is that of ambiguity, which Bibb relates to Catherine Bell's notion of "negotiated acceptance" – that is, "despite the appearance of a single, well-defined ritual path, the participants actually choose their own paths within larger ritual boundaries."[162] Bibb finds this to be true not only in the ambiguity in instructions, but also in the fact that the ritual leaders in Leviticus "are not merely passive enacters of a set ritual script… each character and reader must negotiate this dangerously contoured landscape."[163] That there are gaps in the ritual instructions themselves seems to me not to be particularly indicative of ritualized ambiguity. Are the performers of the ritual really meant to ascertain their own individual ways of performing these rituals where there are gaps in the instructions – are there several "right answers"? More significant for ambiguity and negotiated acceptance, I think, is the lack of articulated "meaning" behind each step in this process. Bibb points out quite rightly that "the impressive inferences and interpretations in Milgrom's commentary demonstrate the success of the text's ritualization strategies."[164] That is, because the text doesn't tell the reader why things are the way they are, there is the possibility of negotiated acceptance. I

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[162] Bibb, *Ritual Words,*78.

[163] Ibid. This might be fruitfully compared to the notion that different members of a community understand the communicative value of symbols differently, thereby allowing symbols to act as a unifying force within a diverse population. This is taken up in the discussion of symbols in chapter two.

[164] Bibb, *Ritual Words,* 78n4.

take up this feature of ritualization in the tabernacle pericope in the final chapter of this study.

Finally, Lev 1-7 appears to be offering actual instruction – it is not presented as a one-time event that occurred in history, as is the tabernacle construction. Of course, the lay reader of these texts (and we might ask at what point there *were* lay readers) does not require most of this information, as it concerns the priest more than the layperson. Still, on a continuum of instrumental vs. ritualized text, I would argue that this is far more instrumental and less ritualized than the tabernacle text.

It is difficult to articulate a conclusion for a section whose purpose is to serve as a point of comparison for a text that has not yet been presented. Rather, now that I have commented on the extent of repetition and formalism present in these texts, I will demonstrate in what follows that in relation to Samsuiluna A and B, Lev 1-7, and Gen 6-9 – and these are among the most formal and repetitive texts on which scholars have commented – the tabernacle text contains a higher concentration of these elements. That is, on a continuum between "normal" text and "ritualized" text, the tabernacle text is more ritualized than any of these.

Concluding Question: Where Does Meaning Reside?

This chapter has brought together the theoretical perspectives of two fields, literary theory and ritual theory, in order to demonstrate that even though one pertains to activity as observable performance and the other pertains to mental or imaginative activity, the two fields share not only similar questions about how to comment in a meaningful way on the activities they study, but also proceed similarly in their response to those questions. Many ritual theorists have argued that the "meaning" of a ritual is not

found in the ritual objects or decodable symbolic acts – that the *stuff* of ritual is not the ritual itself, and the whole category of "meaning" is activated only when the ritual is performed. Similarly, the whole category of literary meaning is activated only when the text at hand is read. That is, the significance of ritual and text is in how they affect the world around them, and ritual and the text affect the world around them only when people choose to participate in them.

Assigning such an important role to the participant in this "meaning making" endeavor does not mean that either text or ritual are likely to be experienced in entirely different ways by different individuals. The way in which a particular ritual or text affects the world is in many was predictable based on the textual or ritualized features; simply, these effects do not take place if nobody participates in them. That is, "meaning" and experience – including reading experience – are inextricably linked.

The question of whether the meaning resides in the text or in the interaction between the text and the reader is, perhaps, more complicated than it appears. On the one hand, what takes place when a participant brings a ritual or a text to life can be compared to "just add water" recipes – yes, they must be activated with water, but the outcome once that water is added is predictable. Some features of ritual, repetition and formalism among them, seem to affect a geographically and temporally diverse group of people in much the same way. Indeed, these features arguably have the same affect on individuals who are having a mental or imaginative experience through reading as they do people who are performing an activity – the observations that Bruce Kawin has made about the effect of repetition in literature and film substantially overlap with the observations that Catherine Bell has made about the effect of repetition in ritualized activity. As long as

one can demonstrate that a particular community would find a text or activity to be unusually repetitious compared to other texts or activities that community would commonly encounter, the effects of repetition are fairly predictable. Similarly, the message associated with practices that might be considered *indexical* – bowing before authority figures, sharing food with another person, matching one's clothing to another person or place, are understood in predictable (if general) ways cross-culturally. In all of these examples, the meaning, message, or significance of the activity is fully intertwined with the form of the activity itself. The medium is the message.

At the same time, however, there is a level of ambiguity in that which is communicated through repetition, formality, and even indexes that is so commonly recognized that one of the most noted features of ritual is its ability to mean different things to different people – and, indeed, to connote logically contradictory things in any given person. The flexibility that surrounds the message that any particular individual might derive from ritualized activity or literature is one of the great strengths of this medium for creating common ground. It is also a source of considerable consternation for scholars of ritual or literature who wish to assign definitive meanings to particular symbols or symbolic acts: to know, once and for all, what it means. One way that biblical scholars have negotiated this issue has been to ask, first and foremost, what any particular portion of the biblical text *meant to the author*. Certainly, this reins in ambiguity, and it is indeed an interesting question, but it does not determine, once and for all, what the text *means* any more than the pagan ritual of bringing greens into the house around winter solstice determines what Christmas trees *mean*.

These two aspects of meaning in ritual and in literature – that which is understood similarly cross-culturally and that which is understood with different nuance even within a fairly uniform group of people – may seem to gesture toward wholly different answers to the question of where meaning resides. In fact, they do not. In both cases, "meaning" must be based on experiencing the text or the ritual first hand; it comes out only through participation, either as a ritual participant or as a reader participant. To read a summary of a ritual or to read a summary of a text necessarily *both* separates the meaning from the form, trying to extract the former from the latter, *and* forces a translation or interpretation of that which was ambiguous in the original, thus both sidestepping meanings that are not likely to vary from person to person and simplifying those that are. In ritual and in literature, form matters. In the chapters that follow, I will highlight not only how I believe the form of the tabernacle text shapes the experience of reader participants, but also make the case, in chapter three, that for this text in particular, the text itself indicates in several places that its form is more important than the details its presents.

3
Distant Literary Patterns: Formality, Familiarity, and the Work of Orientation

The goal of the next two chapters is to describe the pericope in detail, to identify therein literary manifestations of ritual characteristics, and to discuss the ways in which those characteristics – individually and in combination – create a text that offers the reader an experience comparable to ritual performance. One of the most compelling aspects of this examination is the fact that the same set of patterns of literary characteristics appear both in a detailed study of a small portion of the text – i.e., within a single account of a single item – and in a broader study of the entire pericope, demonstrating patterns that occur across blocks of text found several chapters apart. The synergy created between the micro-level features and the macro-level features is a source of great power in this text. This chapter will assume that second perspective, taking a wide-angle view of chs. 25-31 and 35-39, and looking at the shape of the text as a whole.

Repetition

In his extensive treatment of the tabernacle text, William Propp notes, "a … pervasive difficulty for source analysis is the redundancy between the commands in chs. 25-31 and their execution in chs. 35-39." He points to Wellhausen's opinion of this repetition, which many scholars after him have echoed: "Exodus 35-39 is 'utterly meaningless in terms of content … [it] would not be missed, if it were absent."[165] Propp

[165] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 367. The Wellhausen quotation is from Julius Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs*, 142.

rightly counters that "economy … plainly was not the Priestly Writer's [ideal]."[166] But more can be said. Indeed, economy was not an ideal of this author; on the contrary, the high levels of repetition seem to indicate that repetition itself was valued. Though the storyline that surrounds these details offers a logical explanation for the macro-level repetition – that is, the details are given once as instructions and once as a construction report – this certainly does not *require* that all the details be given *in their entirety* twice. Most ancient Near Eastern accounts of temple construction do not, in fact, give the details twice. The repetition of content is particularly notable in this text because there is simply so *much* content – for each item described, we are given information about measurements, structure, material, and appearance that often spans several verses – *all* of which is repeated in the construction report. Furthermore, many of these accounts are not themselves written in a particularly economical way. Rather, there is a great deal of repetition *within* many individual descriptions, which are, of course, then repeated themselves. The repetition in this pericope affects the experience of the reader and, I will argue, brings it closer to that which one experiences in ritual performance.

Repetition manifests itself in various ways in this text. The type of repetition most relevant to this macro-level analysis is what I will call "distant repetition, " a repetition wherein the first appearance of a given set of words and ideas is contained in the prescriptive portion of the text, and the second in the description portion (and, thus, at a distance). For example, the prescriptive words about the altar found in Exod 25:10, "They shall make an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high," are repeated almost exactly in the descriptive account found in

[166] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 367.

Exod 37:1: **"**Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high."

Another type of repetition present in this text is "proximate repetition," wherein the repetition of a given set of words takes place within several lines of the first instance (and within the same account of the tabernacle space). For example, within the prescriptive account of the lampstand, we read **"**On one branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals, and on one branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals" (Exod 25:33): of twenty words in the Hebrew text, the verse breaks down into A (seven words) + A (precisely the same seven words) + B (six words). Proximate repetition will be considered in the next chapter, where smaller sections of this text will be considered in detail.

There are yet other types of repetition, too, such as the repetition of the phrase "just as the Lord commanded Moses," which occurs seven times in Exod 39. The way in which this verse is distributed throughout the chapter marks the end of each section of description, contributing to the formalism of the text. As such, it will be discussed as a part of the section on refrains, within the section on formalism below.

A Survey of Distant Repetition

The distant repetition of the material in Exod 25-31 in Exod 35-39 begins with a note about the importance of the Sabbath in Exod 35:2-3, which recalls the concluding note of the prescriptive text in Exod 31:13-17 through repetition of both the semantic core and of specific words and phrases between these two verses.[167]

[167] Because the focus of this study is the experience of a reader as he or she encounters this text, this survey of distant repetition will move sequentially through the text.

Exodus 35:2

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֵּעָשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִהְיֶה לָכֶם קֹדֶשׁ
שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן לַיהוָה כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה בּוֹ מְלָאכָה יוּמָת׃

> On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.

Exodus 31:15

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים יֵעָשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן קֹדֶשׁ
לַיהוָה כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה מְלָאכָה בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת מוֹת יוּמָת׃

> Six days may work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does work on the sabbath day shall be put to death.

The next instance of distant repetition occurs shortly thereafter, in 35:10-19, which lists the things that must be constructed for the tabernacle. This repetition exists only at the level of semantics, not at the level of the morpheme: there is a similar list in vv. 7-11 of ch. 31, but it is less detailed. The listing of items required in Exod 35, though longer than the summary listing in Exod 31, does not introduce any information that is not contained in chs. 25-31. The reader can, at least, nod along in agreement; it is familiar.

As ch. 36 slips into the details of constructing the fabrics that will constitute the walls inside the sanctuary, the repetition grows closer. It now evokes texts that are increasingly distant – 36:8-38 recalls with great precision instructions first read 10

chapters earlier, in Exod 26. This time, however, the repetition is nearly identical at the level of the morpheme:[168]

Exodus 36:8-10

ויעשׂו כל־חכם־לב בעשׂי המלאכה את־המשׁכן עשׂר
יריעת שׁשׁ משׁזר ותכלת וארגמן ותולעת שׁני כרבים
מעשׂה חשׁב עשׂה אתם׃
ארך היריעה האחת שׁמנה ועשׂרים באמה ורחב ארבע
באמה היריעה האחת מדה אחת לכל־היריעת׃
ויחבר את־חמשׁ היריעת אחת אל־אחת וחמשׁ יריעת חבר
אחת אל־אחת׃

> Then all the skilled among those engaged in the work made the tabernacle of ten strips of cloth, which they made of fine twisted linen, blue, purple, and crimson yards; into these they worked a design of cherubim. The length of each cloth was 28 cubits, and the width of each cloth was four cubits, all cloths having the same measurements. They joined five of the cloths to one another, and they joined the other five clothes to one another.

Exodus 26:1-3

ואת־המשׁכן תעשׂה עשׂר יריעת שׁשׁ משׁזר ותכלת וארגמן
ותלעת שׁני כרבים מעשׂה חשׁב תעשׂה אתם׃
ארך היריעה האחת שׁמנה ועשׂרים באמה ורחב ארבע
באמה היריעה האחת מדה אחת לכל־היריעת׃
חמשׁ היריעת תהיין חברת אשׁה אל־אחתה וחמשׁ יריעת
חברת אשׁה אל־אחתה׃

> As for the tabernacle, make it of ten strips of cloth; make these of fine twisted linen, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, with a design of cherubim worked into them. The length of each cloth shall be 28 cubits, and the width of each cloth shall be four cubits, all the cloths to have the same measurements. Five of the cloths shall be joined to one another, and the other five cloths shall be joined to one another.

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[168] In nearly every case, the distant repetition at the level of the morpheme is imperfect because the verbal conjugation differs. Often, however, this is the only variation, morphemic or otherwise.

The concentration of exact repetition continues to grow, peaking in Exod 37, which describes the construction of the furnishings of the tabernacle proper. Within this most intensely repetitive chapter, the peak is the description of the lampstand in vv. 17-22, which recalls with great precision the description first given 12 chapters ago, in Exod 25.

Exodus 37:17-22

ויעשׂ את־המנרה זהב טהור מקשׁה עשׂה את־המנרה ירכה
וקנה גביעיה כפתריה ופרחיה ממנה היו׃

וששׁה קנים יצאים מצדיה
שׁלשׁה קני מנרה מצדה האחד
וּשׁלשׁה קני מנרה מצדה השׁני׃

שׁלשׁה גבעים משׁקדים בקנה האחד כפתר ופרח
וּשׁלשׁה גבעים משׁקדים בקנה אחד כפתר ופרח
כן לששׁת הקניםהיצאים מן־המנרה׃

ובמנרה ארבעה גבעים משׁקדים כפתריה ופרחיה׃

וכפתר תחת שׁני הקנים ממנה
וכפתר תחת שׁני הקנים ממנה
וכפתר תחת־שׁני הקנים ממנה
לששׁת הקנים היצאים ממנה׃

כפתריהם וקנתם ממנה היו כלה מקשׁה אחת זהב טהור׃

׃

Exodus 25:31-36

ועשׂית מנרת זהב טהור מקשׁה תעשׂה המנורה ירכה וקנה
גביעיה כפתריה ופרחיה ממנה יהיו׃

וששׁה קנים יצאים מצדיה
שׁלשׁה קני מנרה מצדה האחד
וּשׁלשׁה קני מנרה מצדה השׁני׃

שלשה גבעים משקדים בקנה האחד כפתר ופרח
ושלשה גבעים משקדים בקנה האחד כפתר ופרח
כן לששת הקנים היצאים מן־המנרה׃

ובמנרה ארבעה גבעים משקדים כפתריה ופרחיה׃

וכפתר תחת שני הקנים ממנה
וכפתר תחת שני הקנים ממנה
וכפתר תחת־שני הקנים ממנה
לששת הקנים היצאים מן־המנרה׃

כפתריהם וקנתם ממנה יהיו כלה מקשה אחת זהב טהור׃

Chapter 38 is nearly identical to ch. 27 in its account of the courtyard and its furnishings. There are several minor differences, generally occurring once every 2-4 verses, the categories of which will be discussed below, but the level of repetition on the level of the morpheme is still extremely high.

Chapter 39 can be divided into two parts: the first part, vv. 1-31 or possibly 1-32a,[169] repeats that which was communicated in Exod 28 – information about the garments for the priests – and the second,[170] vv. 32-42, summarizes the activities of the past five chapters. The material in each of these parts repeats familiar information, but repetition at the level of the morpheme is decreasing. The section pertaining to priestly garments indeed includes long sections of repetition at the level of the morpheme, but

[169] Exod 39:1-31, or possibly 1-32a. It is difficult to discern whether the comment that "all the work of the tabernacle was completed" is best read as a conclusion to the construction report, or an introduction to the upcoming summary of construction activities. In any case, this question is immaterial to the present discussion.

[170] Exod 39:32-42; again, the proper starting place may be v.32b, but this change would have no effect on the discussion at hand.

also long sections of fairly substantial differences: Exod 28:15b-29 is nearly exactly the same as Exod 39:8-21, but Exod 28 then goes on to privilege information about Aaron's garments over those of his sons far more than Exod 39. That is, Exod 28 follows the discussion of the breastplate with the Urim and Thumim of the high priest, which are altogether absent from Exod 39, then Aaron's robe, and then the frontlet unique to Aaron. Only after all the unique aspects of Aaron's outfit have been accounted for does it mention the articles of clothing common to both priests and the high priest (linen tunics, headdresses, breeches, and sashes). Exod 39, on the other hand, moves from the account of Aaron's robe into a description of the common garments – the tunic, the headdress, the linen breeches, and the sashes – before discussing Aaron's special frontlet.

Variation in Distant Repetition

Although the level of repetition of specific words and phrases within each paired set is extraordinarily high, there is some variation present between certain repeated items. Several types of minor variations are present. Some differences between the prescriptive text of Exod 25-31 and the descriptive text of Exod 35-39 are required by the narrative frame: the verbal conjugations, for example, must differ. Other types of minor differences include phraseology, the addition of clarifying details ("plusses"),[171] the addition of information related to set-up or purpose, and the addition of punctuating statements or refrains.[172]

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[171] I follow, here, Emmanuel Tov's use the word "plus" in Emmanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001). I mean simply that one account has it over and above the other. I do not mean to imply that one text is historically prior to another, or to suggest a particular genetic relationship between the two. Indeed, both account A and account B have "plusses."

Differences in Phraseology

One type of difference is simply a matter of phrasing. These divergences do not add to, subtract from, or change the information given in the comparable account. Such a difference can be as insignificant as the placement of an adverb or the use of a synonym, or it can witness a slightly fuller phrasing in one account over the other. Two pairs of texts exemplify this phenomenon.

Exodus 25:12a
ויצקת לו ארבע טבעת זהב ונתתה על ארבע פעמתיו
cf.
Exodus 37:3a
ויצק לו ארבע טבעת זהב על ארבע פעמתיו

The difference between these two verses is the inclusion of the word ונתתה – "you shall attach" (JPS). Nevertheless, both verses include the same information about where the rings should be: namely, on the four feet.

Exodus 27:10a
ועמדיו עשׂרים ואדניהם עשׂרים נחשׁת
cf.

Exodus 38:10a
עמודיהם עשׂרים ואדניהם עשׂרים נחשׁת

Here, Exod 27 reads *its* posts and *their* sockets, whereas Exod 38 uses the possessive pronoun *their* in both cases. Perhaps Exod 27 is referring to the posts of the tabernacle enclosure (singular) and the sockets of the posts (plural), and Exod 38 is referring to the posts of the hangings that make up that enclosure; the verse prior to this one in both cases

(Exod 27:9 and Exod 38:9) refers to both the enclosure (singular) and the hangings (plural) of the enclosure. In any case, the meaning is essentially the same.[173]

Clarifying and Orienting Plusses

Two types of plusses merit discussion. One of these is the presence of clarifying details in one account that are absent in the parallel account. These plusses do not conflict with information given in the parallel account, but offer additional (clarifying) information.

Exodus 25:29
ועשׂית קערתיו וכפתיו וקשׂותיו ומנקיתיו אשׁר יסך בהן זהב
טהור תעשׂה אתם׃

cf.

Exodus 37:16
ויעשׂ את־הכלים אשׁר על־השׁלחן את־קערתיו ואת־כפתיו
ואת מנקיתיו ואת־הקשׂות אשׁר יסך בהן זהב טהור׃

This example also contains some minor differences in phraseology – jugs and jars vs. jars and jugs; inclusion of the direct object marker; missing the resumptive "you shall make them."

Exodus 27:9
ועשׂית את חצר המשׁכן לפאת נגב־תימנה קלעים לחצר שׁשׁ
משׁזר מאה באמה ארך לפאה האחת׃

cf.
Exodus 38:9
ויעשׂ את־החצר לפאת נגב תימנה קלעי החצר שׁשׁ משׁזר
מאה באמה׃

[173] For an account of how several MSS employ its and these verses, see Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 338. Propp agrees that "in any case, it hardly matters" how these differences came to be.

Once again, this example also contains minor differences in phraseology: Exod 38 uses a construct to say "curtains of the court," while Exod 27 uses a preposition, "curtains for the court."

We also find plusses that are related to set-up and not to construction. These are generally included in Exodus 25-31, but not in 35-39. Some of them are picked up in the completion report of Exodus 40, but this is inconsistent. For example, Exodus 25:30 includes the following addition over its parallel account in Exodus 37:

Exodus 25:30
ונתת על־השׁלחן לחם פנים לפני תמיד׃

Exodus 40:23 describes the completion of this act, which is also commanded in Exodus 40:4, in slightly different language:

Exodus 40:4a
והבאת את־השׁלחן וערכת את־ערכו

Exodus 40:23a
ויערך עליו ערך לחם לפני יהוה

Exod 26:12-13, which describes how the curtains should fold over one another when set up, has no parallel in either Exod 38 (the parallel chapter) or Exod 40.

Exodus 26:12-13
וסרח העדף ביריעת האהל חצי היריעה העדפת תסרח על
אחרי המשׁכן׃ והאמה מזה והאמה מזה בעדף בארך יריעת האהל יהיה
סרוח על־צדי המשׁכן מזה ומזה לכסתו׃

It seems reasonable to postulate that the individual(s) who penned these sections did so based on known (that is, internalized) traditions, and may have combined traditions concerning construction and set up that another author chose to separate.

Summary and Punctuating Statements

Finally, we can note the presence of certain "punctuating" statements in one account that are absent in its parallel. Chapters 25, 26, and 27[174] all contain notes that the tabernacle is to be constructed as it was shown to Moses on the mountain; such statements are lacking in parallel portions of the descriptive texts. The descriptive text, on the other hand, contains several punctuating statements reporting that the work was done exactly as the Lord had commanded Moses,[175] and these statements are lacking in the prescriptive portion of the text. Certainly, there is some logic to this: the instruction section emphasizes the importance of following directions, while the descriptive section emphasizes the fact that the instructions have, in fact, been followed. One might have expected, however, that these "call and response" (do it; he did it) statements would occur in portions of the text containing parallel content, and they do not. In the prescriptive text, they surround information about the furnishings of the tabernacle; in the descriptive portion, they are interspersed within the account of the construction of the priestly garb.

Orality and Variation

These types of variation suggest to me that these texts were neither composed in isolation from one another, nor copied from the written version, but rather that they were

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[174] Exodus 25:9, 26:30, 27:8

[175] Exodus 39: 1, 5,7, 21, 26, 29, 30, and again, with slightly different phrasing, in vv. 32 and 43.

"copied" from a "text" that was known orally.[176] To the extent that the types of variation described above are 1) utterly insignificant to the meaning of the text and 2) immediately juxtaposed with extended sections of perfect repetition, they suggest to me the possibility that the connection between the texts is an oral one. That is, it seems unlikely that someone who was reading and copying from one instance to another would make *only* these mistakes; scribal errors, being typically driven not by a thought process but by mechanical error, have more random effects on meaning, and are quite often more significant in that regard, while one would expect intentional scribal changes to alter meaning in some significant and consistent way. The suggestion that the relationship between these two texts is oral is significant insofar as orality connotes, first, the internalization of a text, and secondly, that the text was heard and spoken – that is, that it was associated with a performative, sensory experience. Both of these suggestions support the notion that this text was primarily experiential rather than instructive.

Aid and Challenge in Recognizing Repetition

Having described the extent of distant repetition in this text, in order to appreciate the ways in which specific features of the text guide the reader's experience, it will be helpful to identify those features that aid a reader in recognizing its distant repetition and features that pose a challenge in that regard.

Three literary features present in varying concentration aid the reader in recognizing that content is being repeated: precision in repetition, preferably at the level

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[176] It is interesting, too, that several of the features I have identified with ritualized activity are also associated with orality as articulated by Susan Niditch in *Oral World and Written Word* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996). Though Niditch focuses her discussion of repetition, formality, and variation, more on content and message, whereas I focus more on sound quality, rhythm and sensory response, the characteristics we have observed are quite similar.

of the morpheme; length of the repetition; and distinctiveness of the text being repeated. Precision at the level of the morpheme is helpful for several reasons. Most simply, it adds to the ways in which a text is repetitive: it repeats both conceptual information and the aural quality of the first text. The ability of a text to appeal to more than one sensibility – in this case, the cognitive and the sensual – significantly increases the likelihood that it will be remembered, as is well known by any student who has tried to learn a language that he or she cannot pronounce. In the case of a text such as this one, which repeats not only words but entire *phrases*, this appeal is not only to the sounds of each word individually, but to the rhythm or cadence created by their combination.[177]

A second feature that calls repetition to the attention of the audience is the distinctiveness of that which is being repeated. That is, if a particular section of text comes up frequently in the biblical text, readers are unlikely to associate two particular instances of repetition.

A third feature that highlights repetition is really a product of the first two: the longer the repetition – the greater the number of sequential words that are repeated – the more easily the repetition is recognized. On the one hand, this is simply because the reader has more time to recognize that this text has been experienced before. Aurally, it adds to the repetition of sound and cadence. On the other hand, the reason that a long string of repeated words is particularly conspicuous is related to the second feature: the longer the particular string of words being repeated, the more unlikely it is that that

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[177] While I believe the types of variation witnessed in this text suggest that it was known orally, consideration of the aural quality of the text is merited based simply on the assumption that readers of this text are not reading silently, but rather reading quietly to themselves – and hearing the words pronounced as they do so – or reading aloud.

particular combination of words would randomly repeat. That is, in most cases, the longer the text being repeated, the more unusual it is. This catches the reader's attention.

The primary challenge to our ability to recognize repetition in this text is distance between repeated elements. If there are several lines (translating to a minute or two, assuming one encounters a text sequentially as it appears) between the first and second encounter with a particular sentence, one is much more likely to recognize the repetition than if there are several chapters or books between the encounters.

Aid, Challenge, and Reader Involvement

If a text offers too much aid, a reader doesn't need to work – to be absorbed or involved – in order to recognize the repetition, and, as such, even if the repetition is noted, it is unlikely to have great impact. If, on the other hand, a text offers too much challenge, a reader may not recognize the repetition therein. If challenge and aid are well balanced, a reader is most likely to recognize a text's use of repetition because he or she remains *invested* in the experience of reading.[178] Wolfgang Iser has discussed that which inspires reader involvement in slightly different terms, but similarly recognizes the critical balance between work and enjoyment in a reader's experience: "reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative. In this process of creativity, the text may either not go far enough, or may go too far, so we may say that boredom and overstrain form the boundaries beyond which the reader will leave the field of play."[179] Indeed, the

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[178] The gratification that comes of properly balanced challenge and aid can lead to what psychologists call "flow," wherein an individual becomes so engaged in the challenge at hand that the hard work it requires produces positive emotion. See, for example, M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

[179] Iser, "The Reading Process," 51.

particular shape of the tabernacle text artfully matches aid to challenge in a way that maximizes reader involvement.

The very first instance of distant repetition in this text regards the Sabbath regulation. The core message of the text – observe the Sabbath! – is familiar to the reader, not only from its mention in Exod 31 and 35, but also from prior biblical texts that are unrelated to the tabernacle.[180] This topic is not, then, particularly unusual. Further, the fact that the topic itself is not organically and necessarily related to the overall topic of the pericope (tabernacle construction) further minimizes the relationship between the closing of the prescription and the opening of descriptive account. There is some repetition on the level of the morpheme, but it limited in length to a single verse. The distance between the repeated elements, however, is not great. Thus we have here a text that is low in both aid and challenge. The reader may or may not recognize Exod 35's imperative as repeating that of Exod 31.

The second instance of distant repetition is similarly faint. The topic is an unusual one in the Bible – a listing of materials needed for the tabernacle – but this instance lacks repetition on the level of the morpheme, and the second instance includes detail that is lacking in the first. The distance, again, is not great: Exod 35:10-19 recalls Exod 31: 7-11. The reader may or may not recognize the repetition, but in this case, the clear re-introduction of the principal topic – the tabernacle – gestures more clearly to the prescription than did the single verse of morphological repetition found in the Sabbath prescription.

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[180] Prior to Exod 31, the Sabbath is mentioned by name in Exod 16:26 and 20:10-11; the concept of resting on the seventh day is also raised in Gen 2:2-3 (where it describes Divine, rather than human, rest), and Exod 23:11. Between the prescriptive and descriptive tabernacle accounts, the command to rest on the seventh day also appears in Exod 34:21.

The third instance is a more significant one: the recollection of the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle fabrics contains morphological repetition of three full verses (Exod 36:8-10 and Exod 26:1-3), and the topic and specific instructions are quite unusual. The level of challenge has increased significantly, too: the repetition occurs a full ten chapters later.

The peak of distant repetition, however, occurs in ch. 37. Here we find a text that repeats at the level of the morpheme for six full verses *and* repeats precisely a text that is itself internally repetitive. This is truly the model of unusual texts to repeat: not only are the content and specific words and phrases unusual, but the literary style of the text is extremely unusual because each account is so internally repetitive on its own. The aid offered here, then, is the greatest we have come across. So, however, is the challenge: this repetition occurs at a distance of twelve chapters.

Chapter 38 repeats almost exactly the instructions found in ch. 27, but because those instructions are not as internally repetitive (and are thus less unusual in terms of literary style), the intensity with which the text draws the reader's attention to the repetition has lessened. As may be anticipated based on the pattern witnessed above, so, too, is the challenge lessened – the distance has gone from twelve chapters to eleven. While the level of both aid and challenge is still significant, this chapter marks the denouement of the pattern of distant repetition witnessed to this point.

That the development of the pattern discussed above is winding down in ch. 38 is confirmed by a new pattern of repetition found in ch. 39, marked not by strongly cued distant repetition, but rather by the highly concentrated use of a new refrain, "just as the Lord had commanded Moses," which occurs seven times in this chapter and *not at all*

prior.[181] The full effect of this will be discussed below; as it relates to the pattern of distant repetition discussed here, we need only note that while the repetition of content between Exod 39 and Exod 28, in combination with the semantic emphasis of the refrain (Moses did the things he was told to do in earlier chapters) maintains a connection with prior chapters, the connection, in this case, is primarily at the level of *content*, not morpheme. The aural quality of the distant repetition is decidedly diminished, and a new pattern of repetition – one that is contained within this chapter – is introduced. This repetition occurs at fairly close proximity (seven times in one chapter), and is morphologically precise – that is, it can hardly be missed. Such an easily recognized repetition balances and ultimately overpowers the lengthy pattern of distant repetition encountered earlier, pulling the reader's energy out of the A-B relationship and heaping it up on this concluding chapter.

In many ways, Exod 40 completes this withdrawal from the A-B pattern described above. As an account of the set up rather than the construction of the tabernacle, it pulls together pieces of information that were scattered through the prior texts. That is, most of the information is not new, but neither would it be likely to evoke an aural memory of material in Exod 25-39. Instead, it presents a new A-B pair, though an imperfect one: Exod 40:1-15 and 16-38. Just as the consecration of the priests commanded in Exod 29 has no pairing in Exod 35-39, so also the commands regarding the priesthood have no pairing in the latter half of Exod 40.[182] Furthermore, the latter half of Exod 40 consistently contains more detail than the instructions in the former part of the chapter,

[181] In the context of construction of the priestly garments, this phrase is used in Exod 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31. After the construction process is complete, it is also used in Exod 39:32, 42, 43 as a retrospective covering the entirety of the construction process.

[182] This is finally carried out in Leviticus 8.

and the latter half is strongly punctuated (as is Exod 39) with the phrase "just as the Lord commanded Moses."[183] While this chapter has clear ties to the tabernacle texts, its degree and style of repetition differs sufficiently to guide the reader *out* of that ritualized literary pattern.

The Effects of Distant Repetition in this Text

Having demonstrated the overwhelming presence and artful execution of recognizable repetition on the macro-level, I now turn to the question of how this all affects the experience of the reader beyond simply increasing the likelihood of the reader investment in the process. The repetition creates three effects that merit discussion: a sense of familiarity, a sense of permanence, and a sense of ambiguity.

Familiarity

Because familiarity functions here much as it does generally – and has therefore been discussed in chapter one – it will suffice to recall that though in literature *generally* one might make the case that novelty is king, this notion makes little sense when translated to the world of ritual, where the invariance of a ritual from one performance to the next is a central source of the ritual's power. If one of the purposes of ritualizing an action (or a place) is to create a small area of space or time that can be carefully controlled[184] – where there are no accidents, if only by virtue of the fact that every event is construed as significant rather than accidental[185] – then surely the unexpected is not

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[183] Exod 40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32

[184] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Bare Facts," 63.

[185] *Ibid.*, 54; Smith refers to the "eagerness with which ritual takes advantage of an accident and, by projecting on it both significance and regularity, annihilates its original character as accident."

celebrated. On the contrary, it is the ability of the participant to feel connected to the actions being performed that determines the extent to which the participant will be affected by the ritual and, thus, the efficacy of the ritual: if the ritual acts are seen to be organically connected to the performer in some way, their performance becomes either an expression of or a vehicle to shape the performer's identity. Both of these are eminently relevant to the performer.

The repetition of this material creates a sense of organic connection to or oneness with material that is, on the whole, complicated, detail-oriented, and presumably fairly overwhelming at first blush. Through repetition, the tabernacle – the dwelling place of God – is no longer a strange place, but rather is exactly how the reader, having been exposed to the information multiple times, expects it to be.

Permanence and Control

Exodus 25-40 certainly contains within it non-ritualized portions of text that portray a universe very much at odds with that which is portrayed in the highly controlled tabernacle text. The description of the Israelites dancing around their newly formed golden calf is, perhaps, one of the most powerful descriptions of chaos as a result of human behavior in the entirety of the biblical text, if not all of western history, and the associated risks of such behavior are made quite clear: at God's bidding, thousands are killed – indeed, God nearly decides to abandon the people altogether. To envelope this chaotic narrative between two highly ritualized portions of text wherein the second mirrors almost exactly the first effectively denies the power of that narrative; Kawin describes such repetition as "annihilate[ing] what comes in between."[186] For all the

[186] Kawin, *Telling It Again and Again,* 85.

fearful emotion that Exod 32-34 may inspire in an ancient reader – not only that humans are prone to misbehavior, but that God may abandon them for such – when the text returns to the topic of the tabernacle, *nothing has changed as a result of the episode*. God's presence among the Israelites, as it is represented by the tabernacle, and the Israelites' access to God through the tabernacle (or, as I have suggested, through an experience of the tabernacle texts) is as available after the incident as it is before. It is especially important in this case to emphasize that it is not just the content – the information – that is repeated, but the aural quality as well: "the impression" – the experience – "literally repeats."[187]

There is, of course, a tension here: on the one hand, the biblical text reports a historical rupture in the relationship between God and the Israelites. On the other hand, the text suggests, through the careful repetition of the Exod 25-31 experience in the Exod 35-39 experience, that no such rupture has occurred. *Ritual supports the assertion of controlled space and time, often in conscious tension with the utterly uncontrollable progression of history.*[188] Precisely *because* the tabernacle text is not a plot-based, time-focused pericope, Exod 32-34 can stand in its midst without causing a direct conflict; the texts do not speak directly to one another, but run on two different planes, suggesting two wholly different trajectories. It is simultaneously true that the Israelites and God have had, and will continue to have, a relationship that is not without strife *and* that God, ultimately, does not abandon the Israelites; indeed God seems unable to extract Godself from the relationship even in the face of exceptionally bad behavior. Certainly these

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[187] Ibid., 84.

[188] Smith, *Imagining Religion,* 63.

things are simultaneously true in the biblical text as a whole, but they are also true within the microcosm of Exod 25-40.

Directionality and Relationships

When two chapters contain the same content, clothed in the very same words, this "mirroring" automatically creates a relationship between those two chapters. If indeed there is power in repetition, and if this power is essentially contentless in and of itself,[189] then the creation of a relationship between two episodes that repeat a particular block of content creates some directionality for that power. That is, the two episodes – two chapters, two acts, two words, whether separated by time or space, whether or not brought into being by two different people – are inherently, indexically tied by the fact of their close similarity. They lean toward one another.

Throughout Exod 35-38, the pattern of repetition in the text points back to Exod 25-31, just as Exod 25-31 points forward to Exod 35-38; the power created by the repetition binds the texts together. In Exod 39, as noted above, the type of repetition is different. Rather than (very) closely echoing material from Exod 25-31, a pattern of repetitions internal to the chapter develops. If we were to create a visual metaphor for the combination of repetition-based intensity and the relationships created by that intensity, we might envision a watercolor paintbrush moving between each occurrence of a phrase. The brush would pass regularly back and forth between the first block of text (Exod 25-31) and the second (Exod 35-38), ultimately creating so many nearly overlapping paths of connection that the lines themselves would become as intense in color as the repetitions they mark. The two blocks of text would ultimately be nearly overwhelmed by their

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[189] See discussion of ritual as creating a "focusing lens" and "signifying significance" in chapter one.

connections, one gesturing always toward the other. In ch. 39, however, the pattern shifts, and most of the color remains within that one chapter. Here, the power that is a product of the repetition perches upon that chapter alone, heaping up weight and energy on the conclusion of the paired accounts. By breaking out of the pendular relationship between the two blocks of text, this chapter offers a satisfying conclusion: it does not (primarily) point back to something else, but rather gestures toward itself. It is, in that sense, self-contained. Exodus 40, which is increasingly sparse in its connections to the bulk of the tabernacle text and increasingly self-referential nature, serves to confirm that we have exited from this literary pattern, releasing us from the texts that came before.

In addition to communicating both the inviolable nature of this material (or, at least, its ability to endure through historical[190] rupture), and the mere fact that these two blocks of text have a strong but unspecified relationship, this repetition offers a non-discursive form of emphasis. The reader understands, on some level, that these details are both enduring and important.

Formalism

The Order of Detail

The lack of abridgement in the two accounts of the tabernacle space that has been noted above is one aspect of formalism present in this text, but this is not the dominant manifestation of the trait. It is the presence of rules surrounding order of detail, both in the description of each item of the sanctuary and in the order in which those items are described, that is most striking in this regard.

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[190] The historicity of the golden calf episode is not the point here, but rather that it is narrated as a historical event in the literature under study.

Though the contents of this block of text have been surveyed already in the introduction, the variation in the order in which details are presented merits review as we venture into a discussion of formal features in this text. After relating the materials that will be required, account A starts with information about the furnishings of the Holy of Holies, moves outward to describe the furnishings of the Holy area, and then describes the structure and fabric of the Tabernacle proper (that is, the Holy of Holies and the Holy area). We then hear about what is immediately outside the Tabernacle (in its courtyard), and the enclosure around that area. The clothing and anointment process for priests is laid out, followed by an "oddly" placed chapter, which gives additional information about furnishings – the incense altar, which is in the Holy area, and the bronze laver, which is in the courtyard. Information about the mixing of anointment oil and incense follows, and the pericope ends with the introduction of Bezalel (the lead craftsman) and comments highlighting Sabbath observance.

Generally speaking, then, Exod 25-31 moves from the inner-most part of the sanctuary to the outermost, consistently discussing the enclosure of a given area *after* the furnishings of that area have been detailed. Only after the space has been accounted for in its entirety do we learn about the creation of Tabernacle paraphernalia that must be periodically replenished, such as the incense, oil, and human attendants.[191]

The beginning of account B (Exod 35-39) seems, at first glance, to lie in perfect chiasm with the first: though the Sabbath account appended to the end of the prescriptions of Exodus 25-31 may seem non sequitur,[192] it is retained as an introduction

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[191] While the institution of the priesthood is permanent, when this group passes away, new individuals will need to be ordained

to the descriptive account in 35-39. Immediately juxtaposed to this, in each account, is an accounting of materials. The order of detail following this, however, is not quite chiastic. As mentioned above, account A consistently describes the contents of a space before describing the structure enclosing the space (Most Holy area, Holy area, Tabernacle, Courtyard contents, Courtyard enclosure); a text in chiasm would have to consistently describe the enclosure of a given space *before* the contents of that space (Courtyard enclosure, Courtyard contents, Tabernacle, Holy area, Most Holy area). Instead, Exodus 35-39 *frames* the description of all the furnishings with the description of all the enclosing structures (Tabernacle, Most Holy area, Holy area, Courtyard contents, Courtyard enclosure). Following the description of the space, the two texts seem to move in parallel, rather than chiasm: each section contains a description of the priestly vestments after the bulk of the tabernacle has been described, and each section contains some sort of summary account at the end (the first as a list of the things the craftsmen will construct, and the second as a list of things constructed and brought to Moses).

The second two accounts share Exodus 40, and are considerably shorter. Their focus is setting up the tabernacle, rather than merely constructing its elements. Though the first half of the chapter is prescriptive and the second descriptive, the order in which the tabernacle is described follows, in both cases, the order witnessed in account B above: the descriptions for the physical enclosures serve as bookends for the description of the contents.

In *all four* accounts, the order in which things are described appears to be dictated by the arrangement of the physical space. That is, we don't find a description of the Most

[192] The inclusion of the Sabbath parallels the creation account, as well. Analogically speaking, then, it is not unexpected. Without knowledge of these other accounts, however, it does not seem topically related to the tabernacle instructions.

Holy area followed by a description of the courtyard, or a description of all the altars and then all the curtains and then all the "hammered work" – we are moving through the physical space in an orderly fashion, not through categories of items found therein, though if one were trying to make all of these items, it might have been more practical to categorize them according to type or material rather than according to location in the tabernacle. There are aspects of the accounts that lie in chiasm, and two of the accounts (25-31 and 35-39) appear to have an order that reflects a genre as either prescriptive of descriptive text, but these observations hold true for only part of the data set under examination here.

Excursus: The Problem of the Incense Altar, Part A

The infamous "problem of the incense altar" is that the text prescribing the manufacture of the incense altar appears to be out of place in Exod 30.1-10. This is indicated, first, by the place within the prescription where the altar is described: Exod 25 began with the Holy of Holies, moved from there to the holy area and its furnishings (the lamp, for example, is described in 25:31), and finally ended up in the courtyard, describing the bronze altar in ch. 27. Chapter 28 deals with the preparation/dressing of the priests, and 29 with the ordination rituals for the priesthood and the institution of the regular offering. We appear, at the end of ch. 29, to be finished with the description, and even with its priesthood and regular offering. Chapter 30's prescriptions for the golden altar of incense are totally out of place – they should have been in ch. 25, near the description of the lamp.

The second indication that this prescription doesn't belong here is the literary form. Previously in this pericope, changes in topic (or movements from one gradation of

holiness to the next) have been indicated in the text by introductory phrases (**Exodus 25:1-2a** וידבר יהוה אל־משׁה לאמר׃ דבר אל־בני ישׂראל and **Exodus 29:1a** וזה הדבר אשׁר־תעשׂה), a fronted object (**Exodus 26:1a** ואת־המשׁכן תעשׂה), or a specifically named referent to the commands (**Exodus 28:1a** וְאתה הקרב). *Within* each section, as we move from prescriptions of one object to another, we typically see ועשׂית, ועשׂה or ועשׂו**.** Not only is the description of the incense altar out of place in terms of the literary progression through the building, it begins with ועשׂית, as if it were not a major change of subject. It is yet more jarring because Exodus 29 ends with a memorial of God's bringing the Israelites out of Egypt – the only one we have had in this description, thus appearing to be a pretty solid indication that the description is complete. We have moved through the entirety of the tabernacle and described everything in an orderly fashion, we have closed the pericope literarily, and then we abruptly pick up again somewhere in the middle of the conversation we just closed.

Rules Surrounding Accounts of Each Item

Another manifestation of formalism in the structure of this text is found in the order in which each item is detailed. Every item, each time it is detailed, is detailed in the following order: object, material, dimensions, appearance (e.g., gold overlay and ornamentation), accessories, and use. Not all furnishings contain information on all these points – but the order is consistently followed. In both the Most holy and the Holy sections of the tabernacle, the prescription for the item made of wood precedes the item of pure gold (hammered work). For the items of wood, there is a section describing the

rings and poles that will be used to carry them, and for the solid-gold items, there is more elaborate discussion of appearance.

Punctuating Statements, Repetition, and Formalism

As discussed in the case of the refrain in ch. 39, to the extent that punctuating statements are identified precisely because *they themselves* serve to echo something already said, these statements certainly contribute to the repetitive quality of the text. As is frequently the case in the world of ritual performance, formalism and invariance are, here, related. One of the most basic purposes served by punctuating statements, however, is to make plain the structure of a text: they mark the beginnings and endings of sections and, sometimes, communicate to the reader how the smaller sections relate to one another.

Throughout the prescriptive account, major beginnings and endings, such as the account of all furnishings in the sanctuary; moderate beginnings and endings, such as the account of the furnishings in the Most holy area or the account of a particular piece of furniture; and minor beginnings and endings, such as the account of one feature of one piece of furniture, are marked by a type of punctuating statement.

Exodus 25 – the beginning of this entire pericope – begins with the "major" punctuating statement, "Exactly as I show you – the pattern of the Tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings – so shall you make it,"[193] and ends, after accounting for all the furnishings in the tabernacle, with its corollary: "Note well, and follow the patterns for them that are being shown you on the mountain."[194] Lest one think that this chapter conveyed the entirety of the information given to Moses on the mountain, however, a

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[193] Exodus 25:9

[194] Exodus 25:40

similar statement is made at the next major transition, between the end of the account of the construction of the tabernacle itself and a short section detailing how the furnishings should be set up: "Then set up the Tabernacle according to the manner of it that you were shown on the mountain."[195] Finally, after the instructions for the courtyard furnishings, we have one more punctuating statement: "As you were shown on the mountain, so shall they be made."[196] In each case, not only does the punctuating statement indicate to the reader that they have reached the end of a section, but by referencing the plans that were shown on the mountain, it ties the various parts of the prescription together: we know not only that a section has ended, but that the section we have just finished was related to the section that came before it, and that all of it is related to the whole of Exod 25-27.

The formal structure of Exod 39 differs from that of the other chapters, as discussed above. Exod 39:1-32a, a description of the construction of the priestly garb, contains the phrase "as the Lord had commanded Moses" seven times, marking transitions from one part of the priestly ensemble to another. The second section of the chapter, Exod 39:32b-43, is introduced and concluded with a similar statement that the Israelites had done all that the Lord commanded them. The effect of the seven-fold refrain on the overall shape of the A-B account – that is, the way in which it shifts the type of intensity from distant to proximate, from reaching across to piling up – has been described above. The statement that envelopes the concluding summary found in vv. 32b-43, "just as[197] the Lord had

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[195] Exodus 26:30

[196] Exodus 27:8

[197] v. 32 reads ככל אשׁר rather than כאשׁר

commanded (Moses),[198] so (the Israelites)[199] had done," on the other hand, serves the almost contradictory purpose of formally tying the end of account B to account A, reminding the reader that all that has been done has been done precisely because it was commanded in the prescriptive portion of the text.

Like the major punctuating statements in Exodus 25-27, these statements help the reader not only to see the beginning and ending of a section within the text, but also to understand that these pieces are related to one another. The fact that the punctuating statement that sets apart the final notes on the completion of the project is so similar to the statement that punctuates the rest of ch. 39 also ties this final segment to that which came immediately before it. The structure of ch. 39, thus, accomplishes several things: it connects, through the details it conveys, to the prescriptive text of account A; it indicates, through its novel pattern of repetition, that it is to be literarily distinguished in some way from the prescriptive text; it communicates, through the content of its formal refrains, that it bears a connection to the prescriptive text; and it signifies, through the similarity in the seven-fold refrain of vv. 1-32a and the refrain that envelopes vv. 32b-43, that this chapter is a formal unity of itself.

Punctuating Statements, Meaning, and Ambiguity

In addition to underscoring the structure of the text, these punctuating statements in both the prescriptive and descriptive sections of the text emphasize to the reader the import of what he or she is reading. That is, afloat in the wash of details, the reader may lose track of the officially stated significance of this account but for the fact that this

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[198] Moses' name is present in v. 32 but absent in v.43.

[199] "The Israelites" is present in v. 43; it is used earlier in verse 32, which reads in its entirety "The Israelites did according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses, thus they did."

official statement is encapsulated for us in the refrains: it provides readers with a logical overlay within which one can make sense, in some way, of the significance of the details without denying the possibility that the details have other types of significance as well.

While it is true that the content of the refrains found in Exodus 25-27 and Exodus 39 offers a clear, logical understanding of the significance of the heaps of details that fill these chapters, to the extent that they recall the literary structures of other significant texts,[200] the specific structural features of these refrains contribute to the text's ambiguity by creating a relationship – though a vague one – between two blocks of literature. In other words, as discussed above in the context of repetition (as refrains are *both* formal markers *and* instances of repetition), the fact that these two blocks of text are clothed in the same literary garb creates a relationship between them, though the nature of that relationship is never explicitly stated in the text. I turn, now, to some of the relationships that the structure of this text suggests. They are not incompatible with the "official interpretation" that comes from the semantic meaning of the refrain, but neither are they directly related.

One relationship that the structure of this text suggests is between the priests and the tabernacle. This connection has been suggested by previous scholars based on the materials that the priests wear: it corresponds directly to the materials found in the holiest area of the tabernacle complex in which the priest functions. For the high priest, this is the tabernacle itself – both the Holy and Most holy areas, whereas for the other priests, it is the courtyard. The cloth and metal that make up the tabernacle is also that which makes up the garments that are unique to the high priest: gold, blue, purple and crimson wool,

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[200] See discussion of creation below, page 131.

and fine twisted linen – in that order. The workmanship of the material is חֹשֵׁב. Just as the most holy of the furnishings must be covered by the most holy of the fabrics during transport – lest the holiness be communicated to the individual transporting the item[201] – the priest's body is "protected" from his most holy garments by appropriate fabrics. As the items of the sanctuary – where the high priest performs most of his ritual duties[202] must be covered with blue wool during transport[203] to contain their holiness, so also the priest's body is covered with a blue wool robe, marking the boundary between his holiest garments (the breastpiece, shoulder pieces, and ephod) and his undergarments.[204]

The presence of punctuating statements gestures toward a similar relationship between the priest and the tabernacle space: in both the prescriptive and descriptive texts, the sections detailing these areas stand out as *the only* chapters that contain punctuating statements that serve to tie the details into the entirety of the tabernacle project. While the prescriptive text contains punctuating statements in the section that covers the construction of the tabernacle, the descriptive text – rather than matching this exactly and punctuating the construction of that same space – punctuates the construction of the priestly vestments. Just as the priest's garments are like the tabernacle furnishings in terms of their materials (and, indeed, both the priests and the furnishings will be anointed

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[201] Holiness is thought to be contagious and, in the wrong circumstances, dangerous in the priestly school. See, for example, Menahem Haran, *Temples*, 187-88, and Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus* (AB 3; 3 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 443-56.

[202] The high priest goes into the Most Holy area only once each year, on Yom Kippur (see Lev 16). The lesser priests are permitted to perform rituals in the courtyard. This, the sanctuary is the area of the tabernacle complex most closely identified with the high priest.

[203] Numbers 4:7, 9, 11, 12

[204] For further discussion of the gradations of holiness in the tabernacle and how they are reflected in the use of particular materials, see Haran, *Temples*, 158-88.

and consecrated), the text recounting the completion of the garments hearkens us back *structurally* to the instructions for the tabernacle itself. It is not just the fact that each section *contains* punctuating statements that suggests this, but that the punctuation found in Exodus 39 *responds* to the imploring refrain of Exod 25-27, telling us that it has, indeed, been done.[205] This relationship, too, is suggested by the fact that within account A, it is chs. 25 (the tabernacle furnishings) and 28 (the priestly garments) that demonstrate the highest levels of several ritual characteristics, as will be discussed in chapter four.

A second relationship that this literary structure gestures toward is that between the creation of the tabernacle and the creation of the cosmos (and, indeed, the tabernacle and the cosmos more generally). Again, the possibility of a connection between temple building and world building is certainly one that finds support outside of the literary form of this text, as well.[206] Most immediately related to our discussion of formality, however, is the presence of seven instances of the refrain in Exod 39, which may bring to mind the creation account of Gen 1 (wherein there are seven speech acts that bring about creation, creation is called "good" seven times, and there are, of course, seven days). Both the creation of the world and the imperative to build the tabernacle end with a reference to the Sabbath, the former with the divine observance and the latter the divine imperative to observe. This connection is noted by several scholars, perhaps most notably Peter

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[205] That is, account A's refrain urges that everything be constructed exactly according to the instructions that the Lord gave Moses on the mountain, and account B's refrain asserts that Moses did exactly as the Lord told him.

[206] See, for example, Jon Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 78-99, and similar assertions in Terrence Fretheim, "Because the Whole Earth is Mine," *Interpretation* 50 (1996), 238 and Mark S. Smith, "The Literary Arrangement of the Priestly Redaction of Exodus," *CBQ* 58 no1 (1996), 49.

Kearney,[207] for whom the seven instances of the refrain in Exod 39, therefore, serve both to "recall … God's seven speeches in Exodus 25-31" and to recall the creation theme "particularly with reference to the Aaronide priesthood."[208]

Though the notion that Gen 1 and the tabernacle texts bear literary resemblance – and that this resemblance is theologically significant – is widely accepted, on what grounds – and with how much force – one should argue for an implicit connection between creation and Exod 25-31 or Exod 39 is debatable. Kearney has tried to demonstrate that each of the seven speech acts in Exod 25-31 finds a direct parallel in Gen 1, and has been critiqued for arguing for such a careful connection between the two.[209] Joseph Blenkinsopp offers completely different literary evidence for the connection, pointing to execution formulae.[210] Jon Levenson, once again, agrees with the general principle that these pericopae are thematically and literarily connected, but he offers yet a third set of evidence: conclusion formulae.[211] Hurowitz, for his part, acknowledges a connection between texts about creation and texts about temple

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[207] Peter J. Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25-40," *ZAW* 89 no3 (1977): 375-387. See also Peter Weimar, "Sinai und Schopfung," *RB* 95 no3 (1988): 337-85 for literary and theological study of different sections of the tabernacle text leading to similar conclusions and Dennis Olson's "Exodus," in *Theological Bible Commentary*, 27-40. For a more general discussion of connections between temple building and world building, see Jon Levenson, "The Temple and the World," *Journal of Religion* 64:3 (1984): 275-298 and W.L. Moran, " A New Fragment of DIN.TIR.KI – BABILU and ENUMA ELIS VI 61-66 (Plate XVIII)," in *Studia Biblia et Orientalia* (AnBib 12; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1959), 257-65.

[208] Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy," 380. Indeed, in his article, Kearney focuses a great deal more on the seven speech acts than on the refrains, though he clearly sees a connection between the two.

[209] A cogent rebuttal is offered by Levenson, *Creation*, 83.

[210] Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Structure of P," *CBQ* 38 (1976): 276-78.

[211] Levenson, *Creation*, 85-86.

construction in the ancient Near East broadly speaking, but believes that it is more likely that creation accounts are being modeled on temple building accounts than vice versa.[212]

The use of implicit means to suggest such connections – such that the reader may not even be conscious that the message has been received – is a powerful thing precisely because it is remains in the realm of the non-discursive. David Kertzer writes "rulers should always avoid giving commands … for commands, being direct and verbal, always bring to the subject's mind the possibility of doing the opposite."[213] This text asserts certain parallelisms – that is, the high priest is parallel to the tabernacle, the construction of the tabernacle is parallel to the creation of the world – in an essentially non-verbal (that is, implicit) way, and thusly is unlikely to invite arguments to the contrary.

Furthermore, if a general principle were stated regarding the relationship of the priests to the tabernacle, or the priests and the tabernacle to creation, one might be inclined to take that statement at face value, and think it refers to only the particular type of similarity that is articulated. But because the information is presented to us implicitly and we must deduce these analogies ourselves, the text leaves open the possibility, to my mind, that the analogy is not limited to a particular arena. Simply, both the structure of this text and the other evidence cited above communicate in some way that the priests are like the tabernacle, and like creation, however that might be construed. The ability of a group of people holding a plurality of beliefs on these topics to unite under this text is a great strength.

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[212] Hurowitz, *I Have Built*, 242.

[213] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 13-14.

Conclusion: Constructing the Tabernacle *in Meditatio*

This is a text that, I have argued, carefully draws active participation from its readers; boldly marks beginnings, endings, and transitions in order to guide participants through its occasionally unconventional form; is highly suggestive of generally imprecise relationships; and emphasizes the significance of its own words by expressing them in unusual, patterned ways. For all of these reasons, it is likely to arouse in readers a response similar to that which is aroused by ritual performance.

The way in which the power of this text resides largely in its appeal to the senses rather than to logical facilities makes it more than simply a guided cognitive process. Beyond this, however, the combination of spatial organization, repetition of detail, and lacunae in this text suggest its use as the basis for envisioning the tabernacle, and perhaps imaginatively constructing it, but not for a process of physical construction.

Though the text offers a great deal of detail, much of which is presented several times, several biblical scholars have noted that the tabernacle text, for all its detail, contains several points where the instructions are either unclear or problematic, especially where different components of the tabernacle structure come together; indeed, "nobody has yet definitively calculated the Tabernacle dimensions."[214] Some of these difficulties stem simply from an absent detail in the text. For example, the width of the corner קרשׁים – the posts that support the tabernacle structure – is never given; "[this] matter is not trivial, because the Tabernacle's overall width depends on the width of these corner pieces."[215] In response to this silence, scholars generally make one of two assumptions:

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[214] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 497.

either the corner posts are of the same width as the other posts, described earlier, and contribute negligibly to the overall width of the structure, or, in the absence of such information, we are permitted to freely conjecture as to their size.[216] I propose a third option: the width is not given because this level of detail is not consistently required in order for the reader to envision the tabernacle structure, and this envisioning, rather than actual construction work, is what the text is enabling and encouraging readers to do. Envisioning or imaginatively constructing a structure simply does not require the uniformity in detail that would be required by physical construction.

A second example strengthens this point: the text contains not merely an oversight in detail, but a piece of information that works perfectly well for a visioning exercise but is quite awkward for actual construction. The fabrics that are to be laid over the structure of the tabernacle are described as rectangular in shape, with the dimensions 28 x 40 cubits. Indeed, if I were to picture a fabric to lay over the frame of a rectangular tent frame, this is precisely what I would picture. But in fact, a rectangular fabric would not hang evenly over the frame – it should be cruciform. As William Propp has noted, "the whole thing seems esthetically strange, like a poorly fitting garment."[217] That is, a rectangular fabric hung over a rectangular frame would hang lower and thicker at its corners than around most the perimeter. To date, scholarly reconstructions have had difficulty accounting for the size and shape of the fabric, and have regularly involved "overhangs, shortfalls, and

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[215] Ibid., 503.

[216] Ibid. Propp is a proponent of the first assumption.

[217] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 506.

bunches of fabric."[218] If the author simply wants the reader to envision this structure, rather than recreate it physically, this is not an issue for most readers.

A comparison with the Eastern practice of mandala construction, though it may initially feel far-flung, offers a model for thinking about the living practices that may have surrounded a text such as ours. In fact, texts accompanying mandala construction witness remarkably similar patterns of repetition and lacunae, of intricate detail and mismatched points of juncture.

A mandala is commonly understood as a two- or three-dimensional representation of a god's palace and its grounds. Like the Temple in biblical tradition, it is also understood to be a microcosm of the universe. Also like the biblical God's dwelling places, frequently referred to with the root קדש, the Sanscrit word mandala "suggests a …sacred center that is marked off, adorned, or set apart."[219] The construction of physical mandalas, a practice that occurs across religious traditions in India as well as the far east, is commonly achieved using colored sand on a horizontal surface or, occasionally, ink on fabric, though they are sometimes produced in three dimensional form as well.

In addition to these physically constructed mandalas, however, there are mandalas formed "*in meditatio*."[220] In the Tantric notions of ritual that inform mandala construction, "ritual reality has primacy over physical reality… Ritual reality is manipulated through visualization, to which the external objects used in the ritual are but

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[218] Ibid.

[219] Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1999), 2.

[220] Martin Brauen, *The Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 11.

props or supports."[221] It is this visualized mandala that is considered the *actual* mandala: the physical representations of the mandala are intended to serve only as a support for visualization.

There are texts associated with mandala construction (whether physical or visionary in nature), but these texts are frequently memorized by practitioners and thus may not be referred to in written form during the construction. As mentioned above, the features of these texts are similar to the tabernacle text in their formality, in their high instance of repetition and – perhaps most importantly – in the points at which they completely break down as a set of functional instructions. As Propp has noted of the tabernacle text, "it is striking that the text's chief ambiguities pertain precisely to the points of juncture. Rather than fault the priestly writer for imprecision, we might conclude that *we are not meant to understand*, lest we make a Tabernacle ourselves." [222] Indeed, this is very similar to the way in which Buddhist scholars understand the presence of gaps in the texts associated with mandala construction – the gaps can exist because the texts are not meant to facilitate the physical construction of three-dimensional structures. On the contrary, it is widely understood in Buddhist studies that these difficulties in the textual detail point directly to the purpose of these texts: to engender visualization. In a visualization exercise, the precise measurements involved in the integration of two components of a larger whole are easily lost in the shuffle: nobody picturing all the details of the tabernacle would hold in his mind enough detail for this to matter. The example of the mandala texts and practices encourages serious consideration

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[221] Richard Kohn, "The Ritual Preparation of a Tibetan Sand Mandala" in *Mandala and Landscape* (ed. Alexander MacDonald; Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1997), 397.

[222] Propp , *Exodus 19-40,* 497.

of the possibility that a primary purpose of the tabernacle text was to evoke a visionary, meditative experience. The same types of thought that scholars have given to the practice of meditative mandala construction – for example, that it provides the practitioner with an internal pilgrimage experience – can fruitfully be applied to the experience of reading the tabernacle text.

Excursus: Revisiting the Problem of the Incense Altar

Returning to the problem of the incense altar with this new perspective offers solutions quite different from those offered by previous scholarship. I would like to suggest two different (though related) ways in which we can make sense of this textual oddity, both of which stem from practices surrounding the completion of an object when that completion is thought to affect the status of the object in some significant way. The first example comes directly from the world of ritual theory: in the construction of a sacred object, it is often the case that an important detail is left until the end, so that it can be *that* detail which completes the whole. Regardless of the logic that drives the order of construction for the majority of the project, a church, for example, is generally not completed with the installation of the last doorknob. Instead, a symbolically significant item from the space – the cross – is generally installed last, marking the transition of the building from a profane building to a sacred, Christian space. Similarly, in the construction of icons, a specific and significant detail is generally left off until the artisan is confident that the object is *ready* to be completed – that everything else is in order – and then can act with intention as he or she adds the finishing touch. If minor details are left to the end, one might accidentally finish the object without realizing it is finished,

which could lead easily to the commission of ritually inappropriate acts. The liminal period of construction is ended boldly and knowingly.

Another apt comparison is in the construction of items that can be dangerous in their final form. In the priestly mindset, holy items falls into this category – but one could just as easily talk about assembling a power tool: one should know the precise moment that blades and electrical current will come together in order to insure that the proper safety devices are installed beforehand (and in order to move one's fingers!). One does not want an incomplete chainsaw to accidentally get fired up – and, as such, the maker must leave out aspects of it that are critical to its function until he or she is prepared to treat the item with appropriate caution.

I submit that the "misplacement" of the incense altar and the bronze laver descriptions in Exodus 30 can be better understood in this light. If the reading of this text has the power to create imaginative reality – if the reader is, in some way, constructing and exploring a mental tabernacle as he or she reads – then it is appropriate for significant objects to be intentionally left out of the ordered description and, instead, appended when the rest of the instructions are complete.[223]

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[223] Both Gary Anderson and Carol Meyers have suggested that the instructions for the incense altar are intentionally placed where they are, but for slightly different reasons: Anderson argues that this is a literary foreshadowing of the significance of the incense altar in the death of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10, immediately after the priesthood is established. Meyers argues that the way in which the altar functions is such that it crosses boundaries: ritual involving the incense altar connects the human and divine dimensions, as blood is brought from the earthly realm to the altar, and incense/smoke is brought from the altar into the Most Holy part of the sanctuary. This kind of functionality may help to explain why the incense altar (and the bronze laver) would be appropriate items to use as capstones to the imaginative construction: they are so fundamental to the functioning of the tabernacle that the tabernacle is not really functional until they are present. The notion of dangerous items being left out of assembly until one is truly ready, as discussed above, pulls in Anderson's notion that the incense altar is "misplaced" because of the Nadab/Abihu incident: the incense altar is both critical to tabernacle being tabernacle, and, as such, is dangerous. See Carol Meyers, "Realms of Sanctity: The Case of the "Misplaced" Incense Altar in the Tabernacle Texts of Exodus," in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (eds. Michael Fox, Avi Hurvitz, and Baruch Schwartz; Winona Lake, IL: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 33-46 and Gary

To some degree, this manner of punctuating the end of account A is in tension with other literary cues. As noted above, there are strong cues that the description is complete in ch. 29, and the beginning of ch. 30 does not seem to recognize, literarily, that it is heralding rather a different topic than that which preceded it; it is as if the account was written in its expected order, and the sections on the incense altar and the bronze laver were simply removed from their place and attached to the end. Functionally, this is indeed what has happened, and what is typical in the construction of ritual objects.

The question must follow, then: why isn't the *actual* construction, reported in Exodus 35-39 and the *actual* set-up, reported in Exodus 40, ordered in this fashion? Wouldn't that be the more significant moment to delay the placement of the central altar? *If this text is performative* – that is, if the reading of this text is thought to imaginatively construct a space to which the reader has access once the text has been read – it is important only that the first account be ordered in this way. When we read the second, third, and fourth accounts of the space, we are simply revisiting the tabernacle that has already been constructed in our minds – we are not constructing it again.

The problem of the incense altar, considered in this light, is not really a problem at all. The prescription is not located literarily where the item would be located physically, but in the construction of sacred space, this is not such an oddity. The very fact that it is so *obviously* not ordered according to the rules that govern the rest of this text serves to underscore the power of adhering to form: as readers, we not only understand that this text is ordered according to the physical space, but we notice and struggle with aspects of the text that do not conform in this regard.

Anderson, "The Textual Gap Between Leviticus 8 and 9; Or, Why the Devil is in the Details." Unpublished Manuscript.

4

Proximal Literary Patterns and the Process of Discovery

The literary terrain of the tabernacle pericope, when considered on the proximal level, is highly varied. There are sections of this text with very high concentrations of proximal repetition and formality, and sections where these features seem to be lacking altogether. There are different types of repetition, only one of which can properly be called "invariant," and different types of formalism, one of which works alongside the repetition and one of which replaces it. The waxing and waning of proximal literary patterns and the significant variety present *within* those literary patterns creates a veritable literary symphony and, needless to say, facilitates a complex reading experience. The ways in which these patterns function, both in isolation and cumulatively over the course of the entire pericope, is the driving issue of this chapter.

The chapter is divided into three sections, all of which focus on proximal patterns of repetition and formalism and the experiences they engender. The first section describes the three patterns of proximal repetition and formalism I have found to be most prevalent in this text; these patterns are most concentrated in Exod 25 and 28 and their parallel chs. 37 and 39. The second section discusses the complex interaction of "content" – that is, straightforward information about the tabernacle – and literary form. Specifically, I find in this text several places where the text seems clearly to prioritize *form* over *content* – where the particular turns of phrase that encapsulate information seem to distract the reader from those informative details or otherwise undermine the notion that communicating this information is the primary purpose of this text. Certainly, this elevation of form over content makes the task of studying the experience engendered by

that form all the more pressing. This broader discussion of different elements of the reading experience and the ways in which they might interact is the third and final component of the chapter – a discussion of both the parts and the whole. In this section I will suggest that understanding the text to be a guide for an imaginative visual experience offers a coherent model for understanding its diverse literary terrain.

Proximal Patterns of Repetition

I have identified three patterns of proximal repetition in this text: illustrative repetition, building repetition, and blurring repetition. The category of "illustrative repetition" describes patterns of repetition where the text verbally illustrates the item it is describing. That is, if a feature of an item is present more than once – if it is repeated visually – its description is also repeated in the text. The alternative to this means of accounting for repeated visual features would have been to *explain* rather than *exemplify* this visual repetition: to say "there are three of these items that are all the same" rather than to include an unabbreviated description three times. Illustrative repetition supports an experience of receiving information that is similar to a process of receiving information about an object by actually examining it: the examiner sees individual elements first, and from there, creates more abstract notions about patterns in the object.

The second pattern of proximal repetition is what I have termed "building repetition." In cases of building repetition, some general statement or instruction about the object being described is repeated several times, with additional details added to each articulation. For example, a general statement in this case might be "it is a bookshelf." As the details of the bookshelf are revealed, the reader is reminded at regular intervals of the

broader context in which these details exist: “You will make a bookshelf that has three horizontal shelves that are three feet long. It is a bookshelf that is five feet tall. The shelves shall be fifteen inches apart, vertically, so that books may be kept there. It is a bookshelf.” In building repetition, all of the statements about the item being described build toward a single coherent image, some central aspect of which is being repeated.

The primary difference between building repetition and blurring repetition is in that final point: whereas in building repetition, all of the statements about the item build toward a single image, in blurring repetition, they do not. The reader, therefore, is left with a clear understanding of the central information of the item that has been repeated several times (e.g., “it is a bookshelf”), as well as a sense that the central information is important in some way (having merited this repetition), but the details that are provided alongside this general statement do not lend themselves well to the creation of a mental image that integrates all that the text tells readers about the object: “Draw fog at the very base of the tree. It is a thin tree, probably young, with its base in the mist of fog, fog of evaporating dew rising from the ground. It is tall, with thin, wiry branches and bright white buds shooting out like a sparkler, like a waterfall, each surrounded by its own halo, a mist of fog.” In this example, the central image seems to be the “mist of fog,” which is described both as coming from the ground (as evaporating dew) and as somehow surrounding each of the flower buds that we’re told are high in the air. Certainly this is not an impossible image to create, but it’s unclear whether the fog is continuous from the base to the top of the tree, or whether the fog around the buds is coming from some other source (either dew from the buds themselves or even a low cloud). This description makes better poetry than instructions.

Because repetition and formalism are encountered together in the text, considering the *interaction* of these features in facilitating a particular reader experience is at least as important as considering each feature separately. That said, since repetition is the most prevalent literary feature in this pericope, this discussion will be organized according to the three different types of repetition present. As each type of repetition is discussed, surrounding formal features will be identified and discussed.

Illustrative Repetition

The first and perhaps best known type of repetition in this pericope is the word for word, back to back repetition that I have termed "illustrative" because it verbally illustrates an instruction for an item where some feature is visually repeated. There are three very straightforward examples of this, found in the descriptions of the כפרת and the lampstand (chs. 25; 37), and the account of the pomegranates and bells around the hem of the priestly gown (chs. 28; 39). Because it is the most straightforward example, I will begin with the instructions for the priestly gown.

Exodus 28:33-35

33 ועשׂית על־שׁוליו רמני תכלת וארגמן ותולעת שׁני
על־שׁוליו סביב
ופעמני זהב בתוכם סביב:
34 פעמן זהב ורמון
פעמן זהב ורמון
על־שׁולי המעיל סביב:

On its hem, make pomegranates of blue, purple, and
crimson yarns,
all around the hem,
with bells of gold between them all around:
a golden bell and a pomegranate,
a golden bell and a pomegranate,

all around the hem of the robe.[224]

Here, the phrase "a golden bell and a pomegranate" is repeated word for word and back to back. A fairly clear instruction introduces the repetitive pattern – make pomegranates with golden bells between them all around the hem of the robe. Arguably, then, the repeated statement is not necessarily being repeated as a means of communicating information about the hem; the reader already knows that there are bells between the pomegranates around the hem. The repeated phrase seems to function as an illustration or example of that instruction.

A second example, the description of the cherubim on the **כפרת**, takes a very similar form: a word-for-word, back-to-back repetition follows a general instruction, literarily illustrating a feature that is visually repeated on the object in question.

Exodus 25:18-19

ועשׂית שׁנים כרבים זהב מקשׁה תעשׂה אתם משׁני קצות הכפרת׃

19 ועשׂה
כרוב אחד מקצה מזה
וכרוב־אחד מקצה מזה
מן־הכפרת תעשׂו את־הכרבים על־שׁני קצותיו׃

Make two cherubim of gold – make them of hammered work –
at the two ends of the cover.

Make one cherub from this end and one cherub from this end;
of one piece with the cover
shall you make the cherubim at its two ends

[224] Exod 28:33-34

Here, the repeated phrase is lost in most published English translations, which generally favor clarity to poetry and translate, for example, "one cherub at one end and the other cherub at the other end."[225] My own, more literal and poetically-minded translation, of course, makes sense only if the reader pictures the item being described and envisions each side of the כפרת in turn as the Hebrew is read.

As in the case of the high priest's hem, the repetition here fleshes out a set of instructions that are already clear: make two cherubim at the two ends of the cover. Since the general instruction for the high priest's hem indicated only that there were to be bells between the pomegranates, but did not specify a perfect "bell-pomegranate-bell-pomegranate" alternation, one might argue that some ambiguity was addressed by the illustrative repetition. That does not seem to be the case for the cherubim, however; here, there is no ambiguity to start with. Even moreso than in the previous case, this repeated verse, from the perspective of *information*, seems non-utilitarian, marking this repetition as a ritualized feature.

The reader is made to linger considerably longer over the description of the lampstand, where the particular features of the text make it perfectly clear that the illustrative repetition is not present for utilitarian reasons.

Exodus 25:33-35

33 שלֹשה גבעים משׁקדים בקנה האחד כפתר ופרח
ושלֹשה גבעים משׁקדים בקנה האחד כפתר ופרח
כן לשׁשׁת הקנים היצאים מן־המנרה׃

[225] Published translations generally change the language in order to clarify that the Hebrew מקצה מזה refers to different things in the two times that it appears. This is true of New American Standard Bible (1995), New Revised Standard Version (1989), Jewish Publication Society Tanakh (1985), New International Version (1984), New King James Version (1982), and even Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898).

[34] ובמנרה ארבעה גבעים משׁקדים כפתריה ופרחיה׃
[35] וכפתר תחת שׁני הקנים ממנה
וכפתר תחת שׁני הקנים ממנה
וכפתר תחת־שׁני הקנים ממנה
לשׁשׁת הקנים היצאים מן־המנרה׃

On one branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals
and on one branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals
so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand.

And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with a calyx and petals:
a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches;
and a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches;
and a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches;
so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand.

This text is different from the other two in that there is no introductory instruction that is being fleshed out through the proximal repetition. Even so, the inclusion of the phrase "so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand" – a veritable "and so on" – makes it unnecessary for the text to articulate the same line over and over again. That is, it would be equally understandable if the text simply said "a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches; so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand." Instead, there are two three-fold repetitions here that are virtually back-to-back and word-for-word: first, the phrase "cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with a calyx and petals" appears three times in a row. Immediately after this, the phrase "a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches" appears three times.

That the text invests time illustrating this instruction for us is clear enough, but this fact alone does not fully describe the ways in which this example is different from

the others. The ways in which this instance of repetition is different from the others is closely connected to the use, in this text, of another literary feature – namely, punctuating statements that mark beginnings and endings of sections of the text.

Punctuating Statements and Illustrative Repetition

The description of the lampstand contains two examples of punctuating statements that signal to the reader beginnings or endings of a particular section or subsection. The description begins with an introductory statement:

> You shall make a lampstand of *pure gold*
> the lampstand shall be made of *hammered* work
> its base and its shaft, its cups, calyxes, and petals shall be *of one piece*.[226]

It ends with a chiastic restatement of the same information:

> Their calyxes and their stems shall be *of one piece* with it,
> the whole of it a single *hammered* piece of *pure gold*.[227]

These paired statements are interesting from the perspective of the readers' experience because they do not merely *tell* the reader that the description of the lampstand is over, they literarily disentangle the reader from the description. That is, the first statement might be considered a cue that the text is about to focus on this particular item, moving from the most general information about the appearance (the material) to slightly more specific information (the workmanship) and then to even more specific information (about the connections between the elements of the piece). The second statement literarily undoes this focusing; expanding the readers' purview using precisely

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[226] Exod 25:31

[227] Exod 25:36

the same terms that were used before. In this way, the second statement leaves off just before the first statement began.

Within the lampstand's prescription itself – between these two statements – there is a second layer of punctuation marking the transition from one feature to another. First, there is a description of the cups found on each branch:

> On one branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms,
> each with calyx and petals
> and on one branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each
> with calyx and petals
> *so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand.*[228]

Then there is a description of the cups that are on the lampstand itself:

> And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups shaped like almond-blossoms,
> each with a calyx and petals:
> a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches;
> and a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches;
> and a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches;
> *so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand.*[229]

The phrase "so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand" may seem to be there simply to communicate basic information about the lampstand: just as these cups and branches have been described, so shall it be for all the cups and all the branches. At least in the second case, Exod 25:35, though, the repetition and the formalism are redundant. *The text has already described what should be done for all the branches: it has articulated instructions for each of three pairs of branches.* Nothing has been abbreviated, and thus the reader has no need for a statement saying "and so on." The only literary function of this statement is to reinforce the idea that the procedure described is

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[228] Exod 25:33

[229] Exod 25:34-35

the same for all the branches, and to cue us that this description is over. The fact that this text *both* articulates instructions for each pair of branches without abbreviation *and* includes a punctuating statement at the end is truly formalism heaped upon formalism.

The short section of illustrative repetition in Exod 28 and 39 – the end of the account of the gown's hem – also bears a punctuating statement that marks its conclusion, separating these lines from their immediate context.

Exod 28

> [33]On its hem make pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, *on its hem, all around*,
> with bells of gold between them *all around*:
> [34] a golden bell and a pomegranate,
> a golden bell and a pomegranate,
> *on the hem of the robe, all around*.

Exod 39

> [24] On the hem of the robe they made pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, twisted.
> They also made bells of pure gold, and attached the bells between the pomegranates, *on the hem of the robe, all around*, between the pomegranates:
> [26] a bell and a pomegranate,
> a bell and a pomegranate,
> *on the hem of the robe, all around,* for officiating.[230]

In this case, the formal statement "on the hem of the robe, all around" clarifies for how long this literarily enacted pattern – the alternation of bell and pomegranate – should go on: all around the hem of the robe. This information is given both at the beginning and at the ending of the illustrative repetition, containing it between literary bookends.

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[230] The phrase "for officiating" seems to be an abbreviated reference to the explanation that Exod 28 offers for the purpose of this element of the priestly ensemble. Exod 28:35 reads "Aaron shall wear it while officiating, so that the sound of it is heard when he comes into the sanctuary before the LORD and when he goes out -- that he may not die." In both cases, the Hebrew reference to officiating is לְשָׁרֵת.

Having now linked the conclusion of that illustrative repetition to that which came before the illustrative repetition, the text cues the reader that one discrete set of instructions has concluded.

Centering Repetition

In addition to this repetition that might be termed "invariant" and which fits nicely with the categories set up by ritual theory, this text contains a type of repetition that is *not* invariant in terms of its words and phrases. Instead, it is the repetition of a central idea or image within the account of a particular item to no obvious utilitarian end. In this case, it is through this lack of utility alone that the repetition contributes to the ritualization of the text. Noticing centering repetition involves less attention to diction and more attention to what is traditionally termed "content" – that is, the ideas being communicated, rather than the words being used to communicate them. Within the tabernacle account, there are two types of centering repetition – one that begins with the centering idea and builds toward a coherent idea or image (building repetition), and one that blurs the details that surround that central idea or points to different images at once (blurring repetition).

Building Repetition

Building repetition is the repetition of an instruction central to the construction of a particular item, wherein different details pertaining to that instruction are fleshed out each time that central instruction is repeated. In building repetition, all of the information presented, taken cumulatively, creates a coherent image.

One example of this is found in the account of the two cherubim atop the כפרת, where the pattern of building repetition is intermingled with the

illustrative pattern already discussed. In the passage below, the illustrative repetition – where the same words are repeated back to back – is found in v. 19.

כרוב אחד מקצה מזה וכרוב־אחד מקצה מזה

one cherub at this end and one cherub at this end

Before and after this statement, however, there are two additional statements that describe the presence of two cherubim, one at each end of the כפרת. We learn this in v. 18, hear it again through the illustrative repetition, and are reminded of it a third time later in v. 19.

Exodus 25:18-19

ועשׂית שׁנים כרבים זהב מקשׁה תעשׂה אתם משׁני קצות הכפרת׃

19 ועשׂה
כרוב אחד מקצה מזה
וכרוב־אחד מקצה מזה
מן־הכפרת תעשׂו את־הכרבים על־שׁני קצותיו׃

Make two cherubim of gold –make them of hammered work –at the two ends of the cover.

Make
one cherub at this end
and one cherub at this end
of one piece with the cover shall you make the cherubim at its two ends.

Clearly, this image of a cherub on each of the two sides of the כפרת is primary for this text: the image itself is, in that way, the central message. Attached to the first and third articulation of this central message is some additional detail about the appearance of

the cherubim.[231] First, in Exod 25:18, we are told that they are of hammered work (a type of craftsmanship), and then that they are of one piece with the cover (Exod 25:19). As it gradually fills in details about this piece of furniture, the text takes every opportunity to ground the reader's process of envisioning of this item in the existence of those two cherubim.

A second example of this type of building repetition occurs in the command to engrave the lazuli stones that are found on the shoulderpieces of the priestly vestments (Exod 28:9-11). Twice, as underlined in the excerpts below, Moses is told to engrave the names of the sons of Israel onto these stones. The first time, this central instruction is fleshed out with information about the content of those engravings – six names should be on one stone, and six names on the other.

Exodus 28:9-10
ולקחת את־שׁתי אבני־שׁהם ופתחת עליהם שׁמות בני ישׂראל׃
10 שׁשׁה משׁמתם על האבן האחת ואת־שׁמות השׁשׁה
הנותרים על־האבן השׁנית כתולדתם׃

> Then take two lazuli stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth.

The second time, the central instruction to engrave these names on the stones is fleshed out with information about the craftsmanship of the engraving – these engravings are to be the work of a lapidary.

Exodus 28:11
מעשׂה חרשׁ אבן פתוחי חתם תפתח את־שׁתי האבנים על־שׁמת בני ישׂראל

[231] Only in the context of the illustrative repetition found in v.19 is no additional information appended to this central, repeated element.

מסבת משבצות זהב תעשה אתם:

> On the two stones you shall make seal engravings -- the work of a lapidary -- of the names of the sons of Israel. Having bordered them with frames of gold …

To the extent that these texts build toward a final, coherent picture of an item or process, they progress in a fairly linear way. That said, by circling the reader back to the same idea repeatedly, rather than simply presenting each image, idea, or piece of information once, the text both emphasizes the repeated information and slows the pace of the reading experience. That is, the reason the repeated element becomes central in the mind of the reader is that, following the cues of the text, the reader has spent more time thinking about that element than about any other element.

This slowed pace becomes even more clear in an example that might be considered "building repetition" in form – it repeats one main idea – but which does not describe an object, but rather refers to a process. The verses below serve as an introduction – a veritable prelude – to the instructions for the manufacture of the vestments found in Exod 28:2-4. [232] The central element that is repeated here is the imperative to make holy garments for Aaron. As this is repeated over the course of three verses, the added details communicate who is to make the garments and for what purpose, what kind of garments, and of what material.

The central imperative is straightforward in its first telling:

Exodus 28:2
[2] ועשית בגדי־קדש לאהרן אחיך לכבוד ולתפארת:

[232] After all, the first step of the process – that is, giving the materials to the craftsmen – is the last piece of information we receive in this group of repetitive verses.

Make sacral vestments for your brother Aaron, for dignity and adornment.

Immediately after this, the imperative is not only clarified, but modified. In fact, it is not "you" (Moses) who is to make the garments, but the "wise of heart" – *they* will make the garments. The text also offers a reason for the garments: they will exist so that Aaron can serve as priest. The several discrete garments that will make up this holy ensemble are then named.

Exodus 28:3-4a

[3] ואתה תדבר אל־כל־חכמי־לב אשר מלאתיו רוח חכמה
ועשו את־בגדי אהרן לקדשו לכהנו־לי׃
[4] ואלה הבגדים אשר יעשו חשן ואפוד ומעיל וכתנת תשבץ מצנפת ואבנט

You shall instruct all who are wise of heart,
whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom,
to make Aaron's vestments, for consecrating him to serve Me as priest.
These are the vestments they are to make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe,
a fringed tunic, a headdress, and a sash.

The third and final time that this text presents the imperative to make the garments for Aaron, it adds to this imperative a list of the materials that the craftsmen will need to carry out this task.[233] In an interesting variation on the pattern of centering repetition witnessed, the phrase לכהנו־לי , introduced in the second articulation of the central imperative, carries through to this final articulation as well. The core itself has expanded.

[233] Whether the listing of materials should be considered as an appendage to the second or the third articulation of the central imperative is difficult to discern and, in any case, not important for the purpose of this study. What is important about this group of verses is that the central imperative is repeated, and that new details are revealed with each repetition. This is true for either textual grouping.

Exodus 28:4b-5

וְעָשׂוּ בִגְדֵי־קֹדֶשׁ לְאַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ וְלִבָנָיו לְכַהֲנוֹ־לִי׃
[5] וְהֵם יִקְחוּ אֵת־הַזָּהָב וְאֵת־הַתְּכֵלֶת וְאֵת־הָאַרְגָּמָן וְאֵת־תּוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי וְאֵת־הַשֵּׁשׁ׃

> They shall make sacral vestments for your brother Aaron and his sons, for priestly service to Me;
> they, therefore, shall receive the gold, the blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and the fine linen.

The slowed pace created by this pattern of building repetition stands out here because it is only at the end of this prelude that a reader would be equipped to start the process of construction; it is only at the end of the prelude that the text reveals which materials need to go to the skilled craftsmen. Prior to the last line of this prelude, the imperative contained therein cannot properly be carried out.[234]

Blurring Repetition

The third pattern of repetition I have identified in these chapters is a second type of centering repetition that I have termed *blurring repetition*. In this kind of repetition, the repeated element – the center – is again combined with new information each time it is articulated, but, in this case, these pieces of information do *not* build on each other to create a single coherent image. Instead, they present what appear to be parallel and, sometimes, nearly (but not quite) incompatible traditions about particular elements of the ensemble. At least, they are details that seem improbable in combination. Blurring repetition is present in the pericope's two distinct accounts of where the names of the Israelites are placed on Aaron's ensemble – on his shoulderpieces and over his heart –

[234] In the conclusion, I consider the experience of reading a text that is written in the guise of instructions when the reader is not the implied executor of those instructions.

and the two separate accounts of what is carried over his heart – the names of the Israelites, and the Urim and Thummim.

The names of the Israelites are found on Aaron's ensemble on both the **אפד** and on the חשׁן. In the description of both the **אפד** and the חשׁן, the presence of the names is first mentioned in the context of instructions and then reinforced by a reference back to them. First, there is the doubled instruction to engrave the names onto two stones for the shoulderpieces of the **אפד**, which I discussed above (Exod 28:9-11a).

ולקחת את־שׁתי אבני־שׁהם ופתחת עליהם שׁמות בני ישׂראל:
שׁשׁה משׁמתם על האבן האחת ואת־שׁמות השׁשׁה הנותרים
על־האבן השׁנית כתולדתם:
מעשׂה חרשׁ אבן פתוחי חתם תפתח את־שׁתי האבנים
על־שׁמת בני ישׂראל

> Then take two lazuli stones and engrave on them the names
> of the sons of Israel:
> six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the
> remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth.
> On the two stones you shall make seal engravings -- the
> work of a lapidary -- of the names of the sons of Israel.

In the verse that follows (Exod 28:12), the text refers back to the presence of the names on the shoulder pieces and also clearly articulates *why* the names are being carried – for remembrance.

ושׂמת את־שׁתי האבנים על כתפת האפד אבני זכרן
לבני ישׂראל ונשׂא אהרן את־שׁמותם לפני יהוה על־שׁתי
כתפיו לזכרן:

And you shall attach the two stones to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod,

as stones for remembrance of the Israelite people,
whose names Aaron shall carry upon his two shoulder-pieces
for remembrance before the LORD.

It is in combination with the next instruction that this notion of the high priest donning the names of the Israelite tribes begins to conjure two different images: the image of Israel's names engraved upon the priest's ensemble occurs in the text again, this time in the description of the חשׁן in vv. 21 and 29.

והאבנים תהיין על־שׁמת בני־ישׂראל שׁתים עשׂרה
על־שׁמתם פתוחי חותם איש על־שׁמו תהיין לשׁני עשׂר
שׁבט׃

The stones (on the breastpiece) shall correspond to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, corresponding to their names. They shall be engraved like seals, each with its name, for the twelve tribes.[235]

Again, this instruction is followed by a statement that clearly articulates the purpose of carrying the names: it is for remembrance.

ונשׂא אהרן את־שׁמות בני־ישׂראל בחשׁן המשׁפט על־לבו
בבאו אל־הקדשׁ לזכרן לפני־יהוה תמיד׃

Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel on the breastpiece of decision over his heart, when he enters the sanctuary, for remembrance before the LORD at all times.[236]

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[235] Exod 28:21

[236] Exod 28:29

Bringing together these two descriptions creates an ensemble that represents the Israelite tribes in three ways: their names are engraved on the two stones of the shoulder pieces, their names are engraved on the twelve stones of the חֹשֶׁן, and, presumably, they are represented by the presence of the twelve stones themselves. Both engravings are fully described, and neither refers to the other place where the names are carried. Further underscoring the overlap between the account of the names on the shoulderpieces and the names on the חֹשֶׁן, the purpose of these names being carried by Aaron is articulated in the same way in connection to both instructions. While it is possible for the names to be carried in two different places and in two different configurations, the fact that the text does not acknowledge this doubling with as much as an "also" works against the formation of such a coherent image.[237]

The image of Aaron's ensemble that is presented by this text becomes yet more confused when this second instruction – to carry these names on the חֹשֶׁן – finds a strong echo in a third instruction. Again, the reader learns that Aaron will carry something over his heart before the Lord. And again, this thing is explicitly connected to the Israelites. But here, it is not their names, but the instrument of their decision:

ונתת אל־חשׁן המשׁפט את־האורים ואת־התמים והיו
על־לב אהרן בבאו לפני יהוה ונשׂא אהרן את־משׁפט
בני־ישׂראל על־לבו לפני יהוה תמיד׃

[237] A study focused on the authorial process behind this text, rather than the reader experience likely to be generated by this text, would likely approach this question using tradition criticism. Indeed, it appears that there are competing traditions present here, though that observation has no bearing on the question of reader response.

> Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and Thummim, so that they are over Aaron's heart when he comes before the LORD. Thus *Aaron shall carry the* instrument of decision for the sons of Israel over his heart before the LORD at all times.[238]

The similarity between vv. 29, which refers to the names, and 30b is even more obvious when one compares the Hebrew text, rather than a translation, directly.

Exodus 28:29
ונשׂא אהרן את־שׁמות בני־ישׂראל בחשׁן המשׁפט על־לבו
בבאו אל־הקדשׁ לזכרן לפני־יהוה תמיד׃

Exodus 28:30
ונתת אל־חשׁן המשׁפט את־האורים ואת־התמים והיו
על־לב אהרן בבאו לפני יהוה
ונשׂא אהרן את־משׁפט בני־ישׂראל על־לבו לפני יהוה
תמיד׃

In terms of costume manufacture, it is certainly possible for the breastpiece to have the names of the Israelites on it and the Urim and Thummim in it. As a written description, though, it is odd that there is no word or phrase that puts these things together. Rather, each of these two items, the engraved stones and the die,[239] are ensconced in separate (and remarkably similar) statements of location and purpose. The language used by the text does nothing to encourage readers to merge these two images into a single breast piece bearing both features.

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[238] Exod 28:30

[239] I refer here to the Urim and Thummim as die, though all that is really clear is that these items somehow function as instruments used in decision making or revelation. For a recent survey of the available data on the function and the form of these instruments, see Cornelius Van Dam, *The Urim and Thumim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1997).

What is repeated through these three texts about the high priest's clothing – the centering aspect of this repetition – is that the Israelites are represented on Aaron's ensemble, that he brings things before the Lord for remembrance by way of his ensemble, and that something significant is carried over his heart. It is clear that Aaron, as priest, functions not as an individual but as a representative of the Israelite people (or, perhaps, their system of governance), and this is the piece of information upon which the text invites the reader to dwell. The image of the ensemble itself, however, is less coherent.

I have described three types of repetition: illustrative repetition (and the associated punctuating statements), centering repetition that builds toward a coherent image, and centering repetition that gestures toward several images at once. Both illustrative repetition and building repetition can be sources of a visual experience. Whereas illustrative repetition literarily mimics repeated visual features – almost as though it is leading the mind's eye over the surface of an object – building repetition creates a visual experience that is more conscious of the larger context. That is, the process of seeing certainly involves taking in detail, but it also involves putting that detail in context. Without that context, the details are difficult to parse. (This is precisely why visual riddles – where only a small piece of an object is shown, sometimes magnified – are so challenging and amusing.) Centering repetition that builds toward a single, coherent image directs readers toward a visual experience where the context is always at the front of one's mind: readers do not get lost in the details. It reflects an interaction between a purely sensory experience and the experience of categorizing and contextualizing that sensory data.

In a pericope that offers a strongly visual experience, the lack of a coherent visual component in centering repetition that blurs marks a significant shift. Whereas illustrative repetition and building repetition both contribute to some kind of visual experience for the reader, centering repetition focuses on particular *ideas* that are significant, and emphasizes these ideas both by repeating the ideas *and* by blurring visual details that might otherwise distract the reader. That is, since the text does little to help the reader create a coherent mental image of the priestly ensemble, the reader is discouraged from focusing on that endeavor, and is more apt to pay attention to the abstract concepts that are the object of the repetition. The repetition of central ideas works with the blurring of related images to direct the reader's focus in a particular way.

The Priority of Form

Mismatch of Form and Content

In chapter one, I discussed the tendency of modern readers to approach most writing that is not understood to be explicitly "art" writing (e.g., poetry, song, perhaps a novel) as though the most important thing about it is the information it conveys. If the writing is organized so that the information it contains comes through clearly, it is considered successful. This is particularly true in certain genres of writing – namely, those that attempt to teach. Two examples of this genre of writing are instructional text and text whose purpose is to convey a particular argument or point of view. In thesis-driven papers, for example, it is the task of the writer to marshal all of his or her evidence behind certain central points. If the project is executed poorly, the reader has difficulty in determining what those central points are or why certain details are being presented. Similarly, in an instructional text, the reader looks for a fully articulated set of steps to be

followed, generally presented in the order in which they would need to be performed, preferably with orienting statements that allow the reader to understand something about the overall project so that he or she can fill in small gaps in the instructions in an appropriate way. In both genres, the success of the writing project is properly judged based on whether the literary form facilitates transmission of the content, communicating emphasis and sequence clearly. This type of interaction between form and content, wherein the form clearly supports the content, is frequently cited in the ritual world as well. For example, in the synagogue, as the *Aleinu* is said, congregants bow before the opened ark. Lowering the body physically reinforces the idea of humility in the face of the deity, which is expressed, too, in the words of the prayer: "we bow, and we prostrate ourselves, and we offer thanks." Congregants in Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, and Lutheran congregations are instructed to hug or shake hands with one another as they wish for peace within their community. In both of these situations, the action reflects the theology the undergirds the liturgy.

It is also possible, however, simultaneously to "say" and "do" different things in the ritual world, in the real world, and in literature. It is for precisely this reason that American culture contrasts the phrases "talk the talk" and "walk the walk"; this is why there is conversation about what people *really* value as opposed to what is receiving "lipservice." I contend that segments of the tabernacle pericope, in various ways, give such "lipservice" to the details of the tabernacle, but that what the text *does* in terms of the experience it engenders is something quite different. I find in the tabernacle text three places where repetition and formalism direct the reader *away* from a reading that is truly attentive to the details being presented. That is, while details about the tabernacle provide

raw material for the reading experience, communicating these details is not an end in itself.

The first instance where the form of this text does not align with the content occurs in the description of the lampstand.[240]

> On one branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals
> and on one branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals
> so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand.
>
> And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with a calyx and petals:
> a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches;
> and a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches;
> and a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches;
> so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand. (Exod 25:33-35)

If this text is intended to communicate details about the lampstand such that it might actually be constructed, it is highly inefficient in numerous ways. In addition to being repetitious, there are gaps in necessary information. In the second section of the prescription, the reader learns that there are four cups on the lampstand itself, and the reader is told that there is one under each pair of branches, and that there are six branches. After all that repetition and detail, this text only accounts for three cups! The focus introduced in the first line of this stanza – that is, the fact that there are four cups on the lampstand – is not the orienting element of this stanza, insofar as the text does not go on to talk about each of the four cups. Instead, the text uses intense (and non-utilitarian) repetition[241] to describe the placement of *three* of the cups and then offers a clear, formal

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[240] The illustrative repetition and punctuating statements present in this section of text have been discussed above.

"the end" to the account. Because the end is formally marked this way, readers know that the text is about to move on to a new description.

My point here is not merely that the text is gapped, for this is hardly a new observation. My point is that through the use of intense repetition and a clear formal marker, the text gives the reader a sense of stability and completeness, even though its *content* is *not* complete. The formal markers in this text distract readers from that incompleteness.[242] Or, to frame it more positively, this apparent mismatch between form and content suggests that, at the end of the day, the issue of "completeness" for this text is not determined by whether the details have been completely articulated. The completeness of this description stems from the formal characteristics of the text, not its content.

This mismatch of form and content is witnessed too, albeit differently, in another example of illustrative repetition mentioned above: the account of hem of the high priest's gown (Exod 28:33-34 and 39:25-26). Here, the mismatch is not within a single account, but between the content of the two paired accounts.

Before exploring this example, I need to emphasize that invariant repetition is an incredibly "strong" literary form whose importance as a characteristic feature of the text is clear from the fact that it is retained between the descriptive and prescriptive portions of the text *in all cases.*[243] In two of the three cases, it is impossible to separate the form from the content – the construction reports precisely echo the prescriptions, and retain

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[241] Relative "intensity" as a relevant category for describing repetition is discussed in ch. 1.

[242] Bryan Bibb makes a very similar observation about the effect of the juxtaposition of formalism and ambiguity in Leviticus. See Bibb, *Ritual Words,* 98.

[243] In contrast, centering repetition (both that which builds and that which blurs) is not retained between the prescriptive and descriptive accounts.

both the form and the content. What is notable about the account of the hem is that it retains the *form* more precisely than the *content*: its distant repetition of the illustrative phrase is actually imprecise. The descriptive account lacks the word *golden* from the instructional account. The prescriptive text reads this way:

> On its hem, make pomegranates of blue, purple, and
> crimson yarns,
> all around the hem,
> with bells of gold between them all around:
> *a golden bell* and a pomegranate,
> *a golden bell* and a pomegranate,
> all around the hem of the robe. (Exod 29:33-34)

In contrast, the descriptive text reads this way:

> They also made bells of pure gold, and attached the bells
> between the pomegranates, all around the hem of the robe,
> between the pomegranates:
> [26] *a bell* and a pomegranate,
> *a bell* and a pomegranate,
> all around the hem of the robe for officiating in.[244]

The second account of the priestly hem retains the small sample of illustrative repetition that is present in the first one *even though the words of that illustrative repetition are not quite the same*. That is, the presence of illustrative repetition seems to be more important to the "essence" of this text than the precise words being repeated. Just as it is the form, rather than the content, that is "complete" in the account of the lampstand, so also it is the form, more so than the content, that is maintained across accounts of the hem. In both cases, the form seems to take priority.

Yet a third example illustrates how the literary form of the text directs the reader's attention beyond its details. Exodus 39 introduces the refrain "as the LORD had

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[244] Exodus 39: 25-26a

commanded Moses."[245] It occurs seven times, marking the fulfillment of each step in the construction of the priestly garment. As I noted in chapter one, refrains communicate an underlying similarity in all of the information being presented. In a text that seems intent upon communicating such detailed (if gapped) information about the tabernacle structure, the use of a refrain sends a very different message: what is important is *not* (only) the details, but (also) that which is common to all the various items being discussed. As Bruce Kawin states, "we attach new material to the refrain as it comes to us, as we would clip a sail to a mast."[246] A refrain keeps us from drowning in details – and it does so, at least in part, by encouraging readers *not* to prioritize the uniqueness of those details. Refrains orient readers toward a single idea that is equally true of all the various details it connects, directing our attention away from aspects of them that are dissimilar. The very details out of which this pericope has been built – many of which have been highlighted with the centering, emphatic repetition in the instructional account – become merely evidence for the truth of the refrain: the tabernacle was built, in its entirety, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. The interaction of form and content on the micro-level suggests that though the content of this text looks a lot like the content of an instructional text, something about its genre is very much unlike instructional text. In the aforementioned examples, form not only does not support the communication of its information, but it seems to take priority over that information.

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[245] Exod 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 28, 31. In the final verse of the account (39: 32), a similar phrase is repeated once more: "Thus was completed all the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting. The Israelites did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so they did."

[246] Kawin, *Telling it Again and Again*, 43

Framing the Reader Experience in Terms of Form

The preceding three texts provide evidence that the literary form of this pericope merits as much of our attention as the content of its details. But while the literary form is clearly important, it is not clearly consistent: the patterns of repetition and formalism described above do *not* pervade the entirety of the pericope. Many of the chapters lack these proximal patterns of formalism and repetition altogether, and seem not to mince words in the communication of their content. How might we understand the experience that stems from reading a text with such diverse literary cues as this one? If the primary purpose of the literary features is, at least in some passages, something other than effectively to communicate details about the tabernacle's furnishings, what is it?

I contend that the tabernacle pericope is best understood as a guide for an imaginative visual experience rather than a true "blueprint" or instruction manual for the construction of the tabernacle. The illustrative repetition, the building repetition, *and* the notable absence of repetition found in other sections of this text work together to create a coherent visual experience that is comparable to that of a guided tour.[247] Such a tour consists not only of a guide telling visitors about the items that are there; at least as important to the experience is the fact that he or she *shows* the visitors the items that are there. It is a *visually*-oriented experience. In many ways, this text behaves like a tour guide: it treats different objects in different ways. Some objects receive a lengthy and quite complete treatment, some have particular details pointed out at great length, and some are hardly discussed. Visual availability and visual interest are of great importance

[247] While *like* a guided tour in many ways, the marked delay of any information about where these items are to be positioned relative to one another makes it more like a tour of *objects* rather than a tour of space. The effects of this literary form are discussed in chapter 4.

in determining which items are and are not highlighted during a guided tour. Applying these ideas to the tabernacle text offers a way to understand its apparent capriciousness in its treatment of the various contents of the tabernacle.

Repetition and Visual Experience

Both illustrative repetition and the type of centering repetition that builds toward a coherent image support visual experiences by mimicking, in literary form, a particular way in which visual information is received. The three examples of illustrative repetition discussed here (the cherubim, the lampstand, and the hem of the priestly gown) are illustrative not only in that they offer an example of a particular command (thereby "illustrating it,") but insofar as they actually mimic a sensory experience of the object being described. That is, rather than simply offering a summary statement of the rules by which the item is constructed (e.g., under each pair of branches there should be a calyx), the text guides the reader to picture each successive element just as though his or her eyes were moving over the object itself. If a feature is present several times on a particular object, it is present several times in the description of that object. If the text is designed to provide a visual experience of the tabernacle and its furnishings, repetition that might otherwise be puzzling becomes fairly straightforward in purpose: every word said about the cherubim, or the lampstand, or the priestly gown, or the table, causes the mind's eye to move across the surface of that object for a moment longer. If this reading experience is construed as something akin to a guided tour, neither is it surprising that the textual guide dwells on different objects for different lengths of time, nor is it important to articulate some logical reason beyond pure visual interest for it to do so.

Patterns of centering repetition that build toward a coherent image evoke a compatible, if not similar, experience of visually oriented discovery. Whereas illustrative repetition focuses on presenting data that would come, serially, through the sense of sight, centering repetition pairs this process of visual discovery with a repeated statement of the context of these details. This context orients all of the details that are presented. That is, as a person examines an object in the real world, he or she frequently has in mind a category into which the item falls, even while his or her attention is focused on particular details. This category sets expectations about what details might be presented and helps the viewer to sort and process the details. To illustrate this idea, here is a description of an object without an orienting statement:

> There is a small aluminum circle and a large aluminum circle; the small is inside the large, and there are strips of metal connecting the two. Attached to the larger aluminum circle, there is a black circle, ornamented on top with several parallel strips of designs.

There is no general, orientating statement about this object in this description; were the statement "it is a bicycle tire" included, the experience of reading this would be quite different. Indeed, much of the visual information that one receives during a typical day is not taken in only – or even primarily – as a series of details to be pieced together. Rather, the viewers recognizes the generally familiar "whole," and only then looks closely enough to take in detailed information about the pieces. The ways in which we process the details of an item are heavily influenced by our knowledge of its visual context; learning detailed information about "parts" without any information about the "whole" that they constitute can make the most familiar of objects seem foreign. For the tabernacle text to refer to this more general image periodically as details are presented is

wholly in keeping with the way someone might process information about an object that is encountered visually.

If the goal of this text is to create a visual experience of the tabernacle and its furnishings, the order in which details are revealed in this text also makes a great deal more sense: readers simply notice the most obvious things – the things that would be most easily visible from a distance – first. In the case of building repetition, each detail is understood with reference to some whole. In the case of the engraved lazuli stones, for example, an observer would first see that there were two stones, and then that there were engravings on them. As he or she moved closer, the fact that the engravings were actually tribal names would be clear – and then, that they were in a particular order. Finally, he or she might observe the craftsmanship of the engravings. The fact that there are two cherubim on either side of the כפרת is a piece of orienting visual information that one could take in from a distance. Moving closer, the fact that they are of one piece with the cover would become clear.

The corollary to this is also true – while the order in which details are revealed makes good sense in terms of visual perception, it makes little sense in terms of the process of construction. One would need to know upfront that the cherubim are to be hammered out of the same piece of metal as the cover, for example, before one could embark on the project. One could not begin engraving the lazuli stones without all of the information about the type of craftsmanship required. One would need to know that it is not actually "you," but skilled craftsmen, who are to construct the priestly vestments, before the process could begin. The information that one would need to begin the project

is generally *not* revealed upfront, supporting, once again, the idea that these parts of the text offer better support to a visual experience than a construction project.

The Visual Experience and the Absence of Repetition

I noted at the outset of this chapter that the literary terrain in the tabernacle pericope is varied in its use of repetition and formalism. In addition to the various patterns of these features that are present, there are also several chapters in this pericope that witness a profound *lack* of these features. Before discussing the ramifications of this for the reader's experience, a presentation of the data is in order.

Whereas Exod 25 does not offer merely a general rule for construction (e.g., under each branch, put a calyx) but rather verbally illustrates the rule, Exod 26, 27, and 29 frequently present general rules of construction with no further comment. Even where the nature of the instruction would easily allow for invariant repetition – that is, where the instruction is to do the same thing repeatedly, or where a feature is visually repeated on an object – invariant repetition is not used in these chapters.

Exodus 26 alone offers several cases where the absence of repetition is pronounced. The chapter prescribes joining 10 cloths into two groups of five – these will serve as the inner-most fabric covering of the tabernacle structure. Rather than using this opportunity to illustrate the fact that these two groups are the same by using the very same words – something the text did in describing the two cherubim – it seems almost to go out of its way to make parts a and b of each verse literarily different. The text describes the need for loops of wool on the edge of each of the two groups (such that they might later be joined together with rings); the instructions are the same for both sets of cloth, but the words used are not.

Exod 26:4

4 ועשׂית ללאת תכלת על שׂפת היריעה האחת מקצה בחברת
וכן תעשׂה בשׂפת היריעה הקיצונה במחברת השׁנית׃

> Make loops of blue wool on the edge of the outermost cloth of the one set; and do likewise on the edge of the outermost cloth of the other set.

The next verse adds the fact that there are to be fifty loops on each of these cloths, but again, does so without using illustrative repetition. The number of word-level differences between these two phrases is remarkable.

Exod 26:5ab

5 חמשׁים ללאת תעשׂה ביריעה האחת
וחמשׁים ללאת תעשׂה בקצה היריעה אשׁר במחברת השׁנית

> Make fifty loops on the one cloth, and fifty loops on the edge of the end cloth of the second set

A similar example is found where the text describes the loops that should be made on the edges of two large strips of goats' hair that are to be placed above the interior cloth hangings, presumably as a layer of protection.[248] Like the cloth of the interior hanging, these two large strips of goats' hair are made up of ten strips that have been joined in groups of five. Also like the cloth hangings, they are to be attached to one another with rings. The instruction is set up in a way that could easily support illustrative repetition – attach the fifty loops to one, and attach the fifty loops to the other – but the text does not quite echo the "sameness" of the instruction by using the same words.

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[248] This layer will then be topped with a third and fourth layer of leather, the details of which are not described (Exod 26:14).

Exodus 26:10

ועשׂית חמשׁים ללאת על שׂפת היריעה האחת הקיצנה בחברת
וחמשׁים ללאת על שׂפת היריעה החברת השׁנית׃

> Make fifty loops on the edge of the outermost cloth of the one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the cloth of the second set.

This chapter also contains general rules for construction that appeal more to a reader's sense of abstract understanding than a sense of vision. The length of the curtains, for example, is described once: it is the length of "each" curtain. This is precisely the kind of abstraction that is absent in the descriptions of the lampstand, cherubim, and priestly ensemble.

Exodus 26:8

ארך היריעה האחת שׁלשׁים באמה ורחב ארבע באמה
היריעה האחת מדה אחת לעשׁתי עשׂרה יריעת׃

> The length of each cloth shall be thirty cubits, and the width of each cloth shall be four cubits, the eleven cloths to have the same measurements.

Were this instruction written in the style of Exod 25, I imagine that a statement like Exod 26:8 – if such an introductory summary statement would even have been included in the style of Exod 25 – would have been followed by something like "the length for this one shall be thirty cubits and the width four cubits; the length for this one shall be thirty cubits and the width four cubits; the length for this one shall be thirty cubits and the width four cubits; so for all eleven cloths of the tent."

Examples like these, where there would be a simple, almost natural way to incorporate invariant repetition, but where the text does not, are plentiful in Exod 26. Exodus 27 and 29 offer fewer "natural" opportunities for such repetition, since they describe fewer items that repeat a visual (or procedural) pattern. Certainly, though, these chapters do not dwell over the information they present. In contrast to Exod 25 and 28, where I have argued that the form seems more prized than the content, Exod 26, 27, and 29 evince little attention to form for its own sake.

This difference in literary features is entirely in keeping with the visually-oriented "tour" model introduced above. This model offers two simple reasons that the information in Exod 26, 27, and 29 would be treated differently from the information in Exod 25 and 28. First, some of the structural elements being described would be visually unavailable to someone standing inside the tabernacle – standing on the inside, one would not be able to see the leather tent covering, for example, which is described briefly in Exod 26. Second, many of the items described in these chapters are visually uninteresting. By "uninteresting," I certainly do not mean "simple" – many a scholar has striven to figure out how exactly the corners of the tabernacle are meant to be put together based on the information contained in the tabernacle pericope. Indeed, if these were instructions, many more details would be in order. By "uninteresting" I also do not mean "unimportant." On the contrary, some of the most important items of furniture for the functioning of the cult – namely, the altars – are the object of no repetition. What I mean by "uninteresting" is simply that as objects to be aesthetically appreciated, altars merit considerably less attention than the lampstand. No matter how important altars may be to the functioning of the cult, the fact of the matter is that they are essentially boxes

that have been overlaid with some metal and given a rim and some means of easy transport; there is simply not that much to see. If the appearance of the altar is not sufficiently interesting to merit pause in the text, all the more so is this true for the structural and generally utilitarian aspects of the space that constitute the material for Exod 26 and 27.

The question of which objects elicit literary pause and which do not seems to be based more on the visual interest of an object than on the significance of the item for the cult. I use the phrase "literary pause" here quite intentionally, because the pace of the reader experience shifts considerably when the text focuses on this visual experience. The pace at which a text such as this one is experienced depends on how frequently the text presents a new idea, image, or detail for the reader to contend with: if each new thing is a proverbial step forward, then a text packed with new information has a quick pace. The ways in which this text mimics a visual experience by preferring literary forms that present details serially, either by repeating central information about the item being described or by representing repeated visual aspects of the text by repeating the literary incarnation of that feature as well, slow the pace at which the reader learns about the tabernacle. Two features of this text make its pace fairly quick: the sheer volume of detail communicated over the course of this pericope, and the many places in the text where the text stacks a great deal of new information without much pause. All three patterns of repetition discussed above mitigate this rush. The slowed pace causes the reader to relish the details of each item one at a time and creates for the reader a sense of discovery that would be absent in an instructional text. It allows the details of the

tabernacle space to be encountered over a more appreciable period of time, allowing the space to unfold as it would for an individual walking through.

If indeed many of the features of this text can be best understood as literarily enacting a visual experience, then, given the constraints of literature, this text is characterized to a remarkable extent by its performative quality, highlighting yet another connection to ritual activity. In Exod 25, 26, and 27, the text spends most of its time illustrating in words the objects that would be most likely to hold the attention of a person walking through the space: the items meriting pause need to be both visually interesting and visually available to someone standing in the tabernacle. Concentrating repetition around the molded cherubim and details of the lampstand rather than the ark of the covenant – aspects of the tabernacle that are rarely[249] discussed in the context of the rituals that are to take place in the tabernacle, aligns the reading experience more closely with a visual experience of being in that space. Understanding this text as a "guided tour" of the tabernacle also offers an explanation for the lack of literary illustration in Exod 26 and 27. That which would not be easily visible to someone standing in the tabernacle (e.g., the tent covering over the structure, the tenons of the beams) is explained quickly. Other aspects of the structure – the beams, the bars – are simply not visually interesting, thus their descriptions are fairly perfunctory. Exodus 27 mandates things that are, again, of limited visual interest – the wood and fabric that mark off the boundaries of the courtyard, and the altar for burnt offerings, which is no more visually interesting than the ark. The attention to particular details of the priestly ensemble supports this notion as

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[249] The lampstand is mentioned in the context of some action beyond initial construction, set up and transporting the tabernacle, only in 2Chr 13:11 and Lev 24:4. Outside the context of construction, these cherubim are mentioned primarily as the location of the enthroned deity.

well: the alternation of pomegranates and bells on the priestly hem seem to be for the sake of decoration rather than utilitarian function.[250] That which would draw the eye for a longer period of time is afforded, here, more words – and, thus, more of the reader's time.

Another Discovery: Non-Visual Aspects of Reader Experience

To identify a strong visual orientation to this text is not, however, to suggest that this characterization sufficiently captures the complex reading experience engendered by this pericope. The type of centering repetition that produces a blurred image, witnessed primarily in ch. 28, and absent in its parallel chapter, Exod 39, begins to bridge the largely visual experience described above and the more message-based, cognitive experience that is the central topic of chapter four. In centering repetition that blurs, the repeated central idea seems not only to *orient* the visual details being conveyed, but to overshadow them – against the blurred backdrop of unclear or improbable details, the repeated, central element comes into stark relief. That is, a reader surely comes away from the tabernacle pericope knowing that the Israelites are represented on the priestly ensemble, but the presence of two overlapping traditions of where and how they are present blurs the final image associated with this fact. What is discovered here is less an image and more a *priority* of the text. This blurring makes it difficult for a reader to focus mistakenly on the image rather than the value it connotes. Brent Strawn has observed a similar literary effect (albeit without the visually-based starting place) in the trope of repetition found in Deuteronomy, where he argues, similarly, that the muddling effect of contradictory details has a sharpening effect on the central message of the text: "it is a

[250] The bells themselves are said to have a function, however, pertaining to Aaron's safety. In any case, what is repeated is not the function of the bells, but the alternation.

heaping up, a getting-at-by-all-possible-means."[251] This muddling effect "produc(es) a sharpened focus on concepts that are closely similar and frequently repeated."[252] Because the Exodus pericope has so effectively guided the reader into a visual mindset, it has to work that much harder to shift the reader's orientation from the concrete to the more abstract. Strawn's work on Deuteronomy helps to guide the discussion at hand out of the visually based discourse that has served well to this point, and into a discourse about the ideas or values that the central image conveys: namely, in Exod 28, that Aaron, in his role as priest, is connected to the Israelite people by definition.

The chapter reporting the construction of the priestly garments, Exod 39, uses a different literary form to further this movement from an entirely visual experience to a more conceptual one. Though the chapter presents the very same information we encountered in Exod 28, the centering repetition in Exod 28 – both that which builds to a coherent image and that which blurs its context – is entirely absent in Exod 39. Instead, this chapter inserts the formal refrain "as the LORD had commanded Moses"[253] each time it moves from one aspect of the description to another. I discussed above how this might be construed as a case where the literary features of the text direct the reader away from some of the content of the text – that is, the use of a refrain orients the reader toward

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[251] Strawn, "Keep/Observe/Do," 228. See also Edward Greenstein, "An Equivocal Reading of the Sale of Joseph," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives II* (ed. Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis; Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 114-25.

[252] Strawn "Keep/Observe/Do,"233. Though he is not dealing with repetition per se, Edward Greenstein arrives at much the same conclusion regarding the literary effect of what appear to be two parallel account of what happens to Joseph at the hands of his brothers. That is, because two competing sets of details are offered, the reader *cannot* focus (incorrectly) on details in plot. The blurring causes the most important aspects of the plot to come into more stark relief. See Greenstein, "Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative," in *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*. (ed. Steven Kepnes; New York: New York University Press, 1996), 21-54.

[253] This refrain occurs initially earlier in this chapter.

that which is common between all the elements joined by that refrain. In doing so, it downplays that which is distinct about the elements being joined. What is downplayed in this chapter, then, is the account of the priestly garment itself.

The combination of the *absence* of slowing repetition and the *presence* of a refrain creates a markedly different reading experience in Exod 39 than what was encountered in Exod 28. By directing the reader's attention *away* from the details and presenting a countering message that all of these details are fundamentally in service of the same idea (the idea that is contained in the refrain), the text encourages the reader to read through these details lightly and quickly. This is another literary feature that propels readers out of visual experience and into the world of ideas. This reading experience is in keeping with that which comes from the blurring repetition – that is, it focuses on one thing and blurs everything else – but whereas Exod 28 focuses on a concept related to the role of the priest, Exod 39 expands the conceptual focus to the construction process. That is, we did this right. The tour of the space is over.

Compared with the rest of this pericope – and especially compared with the slow pace of the opening chapter, Exod 39 feels almost reckless in its rush, but it is not so much the *pace* that has changed as the *orientation* – this chapter releases the reader from the visual orientation in which he or she has been enmeshed and offers something much simpler: a single idea. As the text begins to release readers from the visual orientation and its many, many parts, the content of the refrain tells readers quite clearly why it is appropriate to skim over these at this point – the work is done, and it has been done properly. Exodus 39 releases readers from the detailed work of reading this pericope; it releases the reader from the entire experience of Exod 25-39, strongly punctuating its

end, and the reader, like a bicyclist who has finally reached the top of a long hill, can enjoy the comparatively effortless ride this chapter offers. This literary form suits well the final chapter of the construction report: this is the exit point.

Vision in Ezekiel and the Visual in Exodus

To be more fully cognizant of the rhetoric in the Exodus pericope and the way in which it reflects the nature of the object it describes, it is worth reflecting for a moment on the differences between the tabernacle description and the description of another well known temple in the Bible: the temple in Ezekiel, presented in Ezek 40-48. Both offer a visual experience of a sacred space in detail, and yet their approach in doing so is substantially different. Beyond the fact that the ritualized elements of the literary form observed in the tabernacle text are absent in the Ezekiel text, Ezekiel describes a tour of the emple wherein the orientation of the reader to the emple as a whole appears to be a primary goal: the text immediately situates each item in terms of the other items present, so the reader never loses a sense of the way these items relate to one another.[254] Building from this structural element, where relationships between items and that which they may represent are so valued, Ezekiel's temple account is far more narrative in nature than the tabernacle account, including narrative unnecessary to the description[255] and dialogues

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[254] This rhetorical decision makes perfect sense in light of the view that Ezekiel seeks to express, through the social geography of the Temple, the relative power he envisions for various components of Israelite society. See Kalinda Rose Stevenson, *Vision of Transformation: The Territorial Rhetoric of Ezekiel 40-48* (SBLDS 154; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), who introduces geographical criticism to the study of Ezekiel. Mark George considers the Tabernacle from a similar perspective in *Israel's Tabernacle as Social Space* (Atlanta: SBL, 2009).

[255] E.g. the fact that his tour guide held a large stick that measured a certain length, and that the guide held this stick up against different items within the Temple in order to show Ezekiel how large they were.

between Ezekiel and his tour guide, both of which refer the reader away from the temple itself and back to Ezekiel's story of seeing the temple.

Whereas the tabernacle description is couched in terms of instructions and a construction report, Ezekiel actually claims to have a vision: as Ezekiel tours the envisioned temple, he narrates what he sees for the reader. While this could certainly inspire a visual experience in a reader of this text, literarily speaking, the text is one step removed from the visual experience. That is, rather than bringing the reader's eye across the surface of an item and encouraging a process of discovery on the part of the reader, Ezekiel offers something more like a summary report on the findings of his own process of discovery. Any number of examples from Ezekiel might illustrate this; here is only one, describing the pattern carved into the inside walls of the great court.

> (The pattern) consisted of cherubs and palm trees, with a palm tree between every two cherubs. Each cherub had two faces: a human face turned toward the palm tree on one side and a lion's face turned toward the palm tree on the other side. This was repeated all over the Temple; the cherubs and the palm trees were carved on the fall from the floor to above the openings. (Ezek 41:18-20)

Ezekiel presents a pretty clear image, but he articulates it in terms of general rules – he *explains* the image, such that it might be recreated in the mind of the reader. Unlike the Exodus pericope, this does not encourage the reader to actually discover these things for himself; it does not mimic for the reader the experience of seeing something. It does not present small pieces of data serially, but instead describes the pattern. In this way, while Ezekiel certainly offers readers vivid pictures of what he has seen, he also offers an experience of the objects that is more mediated and less sensory-focused.[256]

The Discovery of Images and Priorities

The highly varied terrain of this pericope, studied on a proximal level, makes sense when considering the way in which the text orients the reader. Most of this pericope is visual in its orientation, offering the absorbed reader an experience akin to a walking tour through the space. Anyone walking through a space for the sake of appreciating it – a tourist, a museum-goer – would certainly note information about the materials and craftsmanship, and this text follows suit in including this information. Also like a visual experience of the space, though, details are not equally weighted. The amount of time that the text lingers on particular details varies, generally, according to the visual interest of particular items. There are two different kinds of visual appreciation that this text inspires – one that is almost entirely detail focused, moving serially from one feature to another and pausing even to appreciate multiple iterations of the same feature, and one that is more contextually focused, slowly adding details to flesh out a central image.

The tabernacle text is not exclusively visual in its orientation, however, and it crosses over into more abstract ideas and values in two ways. First, the literature blurs slightly the image of the priestly garment. All of this blurring occurs around aspects of the ensemble that somehow link the high priest to the Israelites, and the ways in which the Israelites and their system of governance are concretely represented. This central idea – that the Israelites are represented – is the object of repetition, indicating to the reader its

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[256] In light of my own comparison between the literary features of this text and the literary features of texts that accompany mandala construction, found in chapter two, and my argument here that the literary form of Ezek 40-48 is quite different than that of the tabernacle account, I read with great interest Susan Niditch's article comparing Ezekiel's temple with a mandala. She is speaking of content and symbolic value, however, not literary form. See Susan Niditch, "Ezekiel 40-48 in a Visionary Context," *CBQ* 48:2, Ap 1986: 208-224.

importance. The blurring of visual details that surround that idea pushes the reader from the visual orientation that has dominated so much of this text into a more abstract, value-based mindset. This move is yet more clear in Exod 39, where the literary features of the text – the refrain that is repeated seven times encourages the reader to emerge completely from this visually-based experience by emphasizing a single idea that is common to all of the details: the details are important here not on their own merit, as they seem to have been earlier, but in service to a single idea or value.

Most importantly, the literary features of this text are best not understood as instructions. Read as instructions, this text is confusing. It has seemingly random variations in the pace at which new information is presented, and offers a bizarre juxtaposition of repetition of information that is already known and gaps in information that would be required for construction to take place. Read as a textual guide for a reader's experience, one that moves between a visual and an ideological orientation, the literary features of this text work in perfect harmony.

One of the hallmark characteristics of ritual is its performance. That is, to talk *about* a ritual is not somehow akin to performing the ritual – there is something in the doing that is important. It goes without saying that a reader is not physically *performing* a ritual by reading to him or herself. However, the experience-oriented nature of this text – its strong appeal to senses, its indexical system of communicating the relative value of ideas, [257] and its general preference to avoid abstraction (until Exod 39) – these things offer the absorbed reader an experience that very closely mimics an actual ritual

[257] See the discussion of indexical communication in chapter one. Here, I mean simply that the most important ideas are repeated several times – the repetition communicates that these ideas are important without presenting a reason for considering them as such.

performance. The fact that this experience is facilitated largely through repetition and formalism – two features commonly associated with ritual performance – creates a strong case for understanding this text as ritualized literature.

5

Messages and Meanings

The preceding chapters in this study have focused exclusively on the literary features of the tabernacle text and the ways that those features function to create a particular experience for the reader. The *topic* under discussion in this pericope – the physical details of the tabernacle – has been largely and, indeed, purposefully, eschewed. Theoretically, a text on any topic could be marked with the literary features observed in this study; a plot-driven drama, a poetic description of the nature of moral goodness, or an adult novel could evince the same literary patterns of repetition, formalism, and ambiguity and, theoretically, these features would have a similar effect in those contexts as in this one. Having argued that the literary form of this text lends itself to a particular type of experience for the reader, I will now addresses several ways in which the particular *content* of this pericope works together with the literary form in creating a particular experience for the reader.

There are two reasons that this is important. First, as Roy Rappaport has argued, "in *all* ritual performances there is a substantiation of form and an informing of substance, and I therefore fully agree that it would be an error to ignore either form or substance in the analysis of *any* ritual."[258] Clearly, reader experience is going to be affected by the topic of the text. Second, while it is inappropriate to talk about ritual *only* as a means to communicate a message, ritual activity *does* impart messages to its participants. As anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff has written, "our senses are naturally persuasive, convincing us of what the mind will not indulge. Presentational symbols have

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[258] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 29

more rhetorical power than discursive ones (the latter require exceptional skill and some veracity); in ritual, *doing is believing*, and we become what we display."[259] Having spent the last three chapters thinking almost exclusively about the literary features – the "doing" – of the text, the question I must now address is "believing what?"

The most basic observation to be made about the content of this pericope is that it is a description of an object. Accordingly, this chapter begins by introducing a new theoretical conversation from the discourses of art history and rhetorical study – the conversation surrounding the phenomenon of *ekphrasis*, "a verbal representation of a visual representation."[260] Both ekphrasis – and the visualization it requires – and ritualization are understood in their respective fields to have similar effects on readers and participants: they both require an activation of the senses, they both have the ability to connote several messages beyond their most obvious purpose and, often related to one of these messages, and they both direct attention away from the passage of time. The ways in which ekphrasis and ritualization are understood to affect readers and participants will then be brought together with the topical concern of this text: the centralized, portable location where Israel and God are to meet.

Meaning and Ekphrasis

The attempt to capture the visual in words is hardly a modern phenomenon; neither is the recognition of these attempts as a particular genre of writing. The term for this practice, *ekphrasis*, was coined as early as the 2nd century CE, at which point the task

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[259] Barbara Myerhoff, "Life not Death in Venice: Its Second Life" in *The Anthropology of Experience*. (eds. V. Turner and E.M. Bruner; Urbana: University of Illinois, 2001), 268.

[260] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 91:3 (1992): 696.

was commonly assigned to Greek boys as a rhetorical exercise meant to "vividly (bring) the subject before our eyes."[261] In the modern world, the term is used to describe what might otherwise be considered different genres: on the one hand, it refers to poetic works such as Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn," and on the other, to the written descriptions that precede an art historian's analysis.

This genre of writing, especially when intended to be artistic in its own right, is not necessarily purposed with providing a full and accurate description of an extant object. First, it is quite common for ekphrastic works to single out certain aspects of an art object for interpretation while ignoring many others. Even those works that are presented as mere (objective) description are, of course, subjectively guiding the way in which the reader encounters the object. If a translator necessarily changes the text being translated to some greater or lesser degree, all the more so is this true when the art object is being "translated" into the world of discourse, where there is no one-to-one correlation between an artistic feature and words on the page. Indeed, the "strangeness" of ekphrasis "lies as much in what it does not notice as in what it singles out as points for interpretation."[262] Trying to unpack a work of ekphrasis, then, requires consideration both of what is and what is not described or interpreted. Secondly, the requirement that the visual representation actually, physically exist has been debated: "the realm of notional ekphrasis is partially extended to include what are virtually notional – ekphrastic poems or passages in literary works which may or may not describe some actual, but

[261] William H. Race, "Ekphrasis," in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (ed. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan; Princeton: Princeton University, 1993), 320.

[262] John Hollander, "The Poetics of Ekphrasis," *Word & Image* 4 (1988): 212

totally lost, work of art." [263] That is, the poetics of presenting a visual experience verbally function in the same way whether or not the visual object being verbally presented actually exists.

The relevance of conversations surrounding the phenomenon of ekphrasis should be immediately apparent: just as I have contended that studies of the tabernacle text ought not focus entirely – or even primarily – on the referent of that text (that is, the tabernacle structure), so also studies of ekphrasis have insisted that the value of these texts cannot be located primarily in their ability to refer to something else: "under such stringencies, any ekphrasis would have to be slavishly other-regarding."[264] Just as biblicist Gary Anderson has so eloquently pointed out, the field of biblical studies has been so mesmerized by the possibility of reconstructing the cultic realia that it has virtually ignored study of the textual description *for its own sake*. The tabernacle and its cult as described may or may not have existed; the existence of the text, however, is certain.[265] To be sure, ekphrastic texts take a visual representation – real or imagined – as their starting points, and these visual representations delimit, to some extent, what might be included in the text. The visual object, however, is hardly the final arbiter of what is included and how it is presented. The text is not just another form of the object, and must be treated apart from the object.

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[263] Hollander, "Poetics," 209.

[264] Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992), 24.

[265] Gary Anderson makes a similar point about the sacrificial cult more broadly in "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings," *ABD* 5:870-886.

Ekphrasis, Ritual, and Rhetoric

Both ritual and ekphrasis are modes of expression that support the simultaneous communication of numerous messages, offering a straightforward, concrete focal point while also connoting more abstract and potentially contentious ideas. That is, in the case of ekphrasis, while the *object* of the text is the art object being described, the *subject* or *message* of the text might be something else entirely; while a particular ritual might have a straightforward, explicit purpose, e.g., to determine whether a woman has committed adultery as in Num 5, the way in which the ritual performers interact with each other and with the ritual objects communicates additional messages about the systems – social, religious, or otherwise – that are at play in the world around them. Communicating in this way may be rhetorically valuable in making concrete an abstract subject, in subtly presenting what is essentially propagandistic material, or in indirectly addressing a sensitive or controversial subject matter.

Ancient descriptions of temples, palaces, and ceremonial tents offer a clear example of texts that have a clear object – the temple or tent – but also communicate a message about the king associated with the project. Accounts of ancient Near Eastern temples, such as the Pseudepigraphic Inscription of Lugalannemundu, which "demonstrates that the building story functions at an early date as a literary topos which may be exploited by a writer to portray an idealized situation,"[266] and Athanaeus's description of the celebratory enthronement of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285 BCE) over Egypt, which includes a lengthy description of the tent set up for the occasion, are

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[266] Hurowitz, *I Have Built*, 63. See also J.J. Finkelstein, "Early Mesopotamia, 2500-1000 BC." Pages 50-110 in *Propaganda and Communication in World History: The Symbolic Instrument in Early Times*. (ed. H. D. Lasswell et al; Honolulu, HA: University of Hawaii, 1979),76.

generally understood as a means of communicating the tremendous power and wealth of the king, and, in the case of temple construction, the king's close connection to the deity. The fact that this is communicated through the creation of a mental image rather than a historical narrative, a list of personal attributes, or a logical case presented in support of the king's legitimacy, however, alters the way that this information about the king is received, changing the way in which the reader interacts with that information and thus changing its significance. The presentation offers a concrete focal point with which the reader is unlikely to disagree, while also connoting messages or values that are never expressly stated. It allows the reader to come to those conclusions (perhaps among others) after "witnessing" a demonstration of such things. Rhetorically, this is a powerful means of guiding readers toward certain conclusions without forcing upon any reader a conclusion that he or she will find so unappealing that he or she will cease to associate with the community. It is a proverbial back door.

If the object – but not the subject – of this text is the tabernacle, the task of identifying the other subjects or messages becomes the natural charge of this final chapter. Many of what I have termed "ambiguities" stemming from this particular examination of the text derive merely from the fact that it does what it does non-discursively. This is precisely the power Kawin so stresses in his study of repetition in literature: repetition can "open on areas of experience generally considered inaccessible to language,"[267] and "generate nonverbal states of apprehension."[268] And yet once we have entered the world of non-verbal apprehension, it becomes increasingly difficult to talk in any sort of intelligible way about what is being apprehended. The remainder of

[267] Kawin, *Telling It Again and Again,* 4.

[268] Ibid., 8.

this chapter, then, will focus on the information that is presented, noting the aspects of it that seem to receive more emphasis than others, as well as those that receive no mention at all, in an attempt to think about the question of subject.

Four Messages

In the following section, I discuss four suggestions of messages, values, or "subjects" of the tabernacle text. First, concrete details about God's preferences are worth knowing, even if they have no obvious application, because everything about God is worth knowing. Second, no piece of knowledge related to God should be construed only as a means to something else, even if that "something else" also pertains to God. Each piece of knowledge should be treasured for its own sake. Third, though God acts in history, God – or Israel's connection to God – is not ruled by time. Finally, if a community views itself as bound to the tabernacle, it must also view itself as bound to the priesthood. In each case, I have tried to articulate how the particular literary form, when brought together with the immediate topic of this text, gestures toward a particular message.

As in all rituals, I think that these messages are left implicit for a reason. In some cases, it may be that they are abstract and difficult to articulate; in others, it may be that they have the potential to be controversial and are less likely to incite controversy if they are, first, not the focal point of the text, and second, not brought into the realm of discourse.[269] As Catherine Bell has said of symbols – which I find to be true of ritual

[269] See my discussion of Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, in ch. 2; as a scholar of ritual in politics, he discusses at some length the ability of ritual to communicate controversial messages in a way that is

practice more generally – they "not only fail to communicate clear and shared understandings, but the obvious ambiguity or overdetermination of much religious symbolism may even be integral to its efficacy."[270] For each message suggested, I have tried to suggest reasons for communicating that message implicitly rather than explicitly. Though this is indeed a speculative endeavor, the fact that it is possible demonstrates, once again, a close connection between the functioning of this text and functioning of ritual performance.

The Inherent Value of Divine Details

One message conveyed by this text is that concrete details about God's preferences are worth knowing, even if they have no obvious application, because everything about God is worth knowing. The level of detail and the extent of the repetition found in this text clearly communicate that this information is important, and the reader who participates in this text, simply by devoting time and attention to these details, implicitly agrees. In this case, the repetition can serve simply as *emphasis* – the tabernacle text, by repeating as much as it does, imbues its details with a sense of importance. The importance of the information comes not from its practical nature, for the reader of this text, whether ancient or modern, is not responsible for creating this structure. Rather, it must be understood to have inherent value. Knowledge of these details about God's abode offers a type of concrete, intimate knowledge of God.

In a tradition that disallows knowledge of or speculation about the physical being of God, the tabernacle text offers knowledge that is arguably the next best thing: knowledge

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unlikely to inspire disagreement, in part because the messages are not communicated in a discursive fashion.

[270] Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 184.

about God's chosen dwelling.[271] As reported in the text, decisions about the physical details of this space have been made entirely by God and thus, in a very basic way, can be taken to reflect God's own preferences, offering the reader intimate knowledge of what can best be described as God's unique, "personal" (in this case, divine) decisions. That reasons are not given for each piece of instruction – indeed, reasons are quite rarely given for a particular item being constructed in a certain way – only adds to this sense that we are privy here to God's personal preferences.

More broadly, there is a biblical notion of intimacy expressed in knowledge of seemingly insignificant or arbitrary physical details.[272] A sense of the joy and significance of this intimate knowledge is expressed most clearly in Ps 48:12-14:

> Walk about Zion, go all around it, count its towers,
> consider well its ramparts; go through its citadels, that you
> may tell the next generation that this is God, our God
> forever and ever. He will be our guide forever.

It is clear from Ps 48 that the physical structures of Zion are in some consequential way being paralleled quite directly to God: after considering the physical structures of Zion, the NRSV translates "this is our God"![273]

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[271] Jon Levenson, "The Jerusalem Temple in Ancient Devotional and Visionary Experience" in *Jewish Spirituality*, Vol I. (ed. Arthur Green; New York: Crossroad, 1986): 32-61. One may compare the modern interest in seeing the bedrooms of famous people; many people experience this knowledge as a particularly intimate or personal way of knowing a person.

[272] There is a New Testament expression of this idea as well: in both Matthew and Luke, the idea that a person has worth is correlated with the idea that his or her hairs are counted (Matt 10:30, Luk 12:7). That is, worthwhile things – in this case, a person, as considered from God's perspective – are known/worth knowing in all their detail.

[273] The lack of the stative verb in Hebrew yields different translations by different publications. NIV translates "This God is our God forever," while JPS translates "For God – He is our God forever." The Hebrew, זה אלהים אלהינו עולם ועד seems to support the more direct relationship between God and Jerusalem.

In this case, having the tabernacle as a focal point allows for a sanctioned, concrete conversation that plays upon ideas that are highly abstract and, indeed, forbidden by Israelite culture for speculation. The notion that the physical structures of holy space can legitimately represent God in some way suggests that the construction of holy dwelling places for God can serve as an alternative to the illicit construction of idols. Embedding the story of the Golden Calf in the story of the tabernacle construction underscores the gulf between the sanctioned construction of God's dwelling space – that which is commanded by God – and the prohibited construction of the idol, which is demanded by the travel-weary Israelites – of which the claim אלה אלהיך is also made.

Ritualization generally springs up around topics or areas of life that are perceived by the community to be "difficult" in some way because it allows participants "indirect" access to those difficult things.[274] Perhaps the prohibitions against activity centered around the physical nature of God – and the abstraction that resulted from that – resulted in the need for some concrete way to think about – and, indeed, envision, some aspect of God. Kawin adds to a quotation from Qohelet, saying " 'Man cannot utter it,' but he can utter around it." Furthermore, "he can, through repetition, make it manifest."[275]

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[274] A case for the fact that ritual allows societies to deal with (existentially) difficult or complex things is laid out rather implicitly in the Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion,* 1-22. Perhaps the clearest articulation is on page 15: "Aspects of religion, particularly as generated in ritual, ameliorate problems of falsehood intrinsic to language." Brent Strawn has made a similar observation of repetition more generally: "There is something about repetition that evidences a difficulty in the subject manner." See Strawn, "Keep/Observe/Do,"239.

[275] Kawin, *Telling It Again and Again,* 7-8

Divine Knowledge as an End in Itself

A second message conveyed by this text is similar to the first: no piece of knowledge related to God should be construed only as a means to something else, even if that "something else" also pertains to God. Kawin articulates beautifully what is at stake in "bucking" the sense of the whole in favor of an appreciation of the parts. He argues that in any system built upon the assumption of temporal sequence and logical progression, "it is not possible for each unit to have a complete identity … we see each unit not for what it is but for what it comes from and leads to."[276] That is, the presence of temporal or logical flow so dominates any given sequence that "each pictorial or language unit is seen as leading necessarily to another, and takes its meaning from that relation and progression."[277] In order to appreciate each artistic morpheme on its own terms, this progression must be overthrown – or at least seriously undermined.

Each piece is to be cherished for its own sake. The tabernacle text makes it difficult for readers to orient themselves both in relation to time, through its use of repetition and ekphrasis, and in relation to space, by delaying the communication of where each item of furniture stands in relation to every other. By undermining both time and space as orienting sequences, the tabernacle text disallows readers from focusing primarily on "where this is going" and insists that they focus on the specific object being literarily placed in front of them.

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[276] Ibid.,172.

[277] Ibid.

Ekphrasis as a means to altering the sense of time

Describing an object that is itself unaffected by the passage of time is one way to approach such an undertaking in literary form: "forcing us to pause over an extended verbal picture," "break(s) into and halt(s) the temporal flow of discourse."[278] Without a logic to follow, a reader need not focus on the movement between words and phrases, but rather can focus on each perceived unit in the writing as artful in its own right, allowing an "aestheticizing of language"[279] to occur. Murray Krieger, for example, has discussed the ability of ekphrasis to shape "language into formal patterns that 'still' the movement of linguistic temporality into a spatial, formal array. Not just vision, but stasis, shape, closure, and silent presence … is the aim."[280] That is, according to Krieger, the temporal orientation characteristic of narrative can be challenged and, indeed, *replaced* with a spatial orientation, when the text describes not actions, which must exist in time, or ideas, which may be timeless themselves, but are typically experienced through a series of thoughts that must occur in a particular sequence, but static, unchanging objects. There is, in such descriptions, no necessary point of beginning or end – the object itself does not progress. This is indeed an incredible power to which a writer might appeal – the ability to transcend time.

The idea that descriptions of objects somehow offer respite from the fourth dimension in the other three is, of course, not quite so straightforward as that. Just as ideas that may *themselves* be unchanging are arrived at through a time-bound *thought*

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[278] Krieger, *Ekphrasis,* 68.

[279] Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other," 697.

[280] Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other," 697.

process, so also static works of art are approached and absorbed through a time-bound *seeing process*. Ekphrasis, in that case, narrates a time-bound process of seeing at least as much as it presents the object itself. In fact, precisely the reverse of the prior argument has been made, as well: rather than participating in the stasis of the art object, ekphrasis might be said to birth the "pregnant moment"[281] present in the visual object, exploring what came before it and after it, contextualizing the moment and drawing out all the temporally-bound thought processes that might be occurring.

Both perspectives suggest – admittedly to quite different ends – that by bringing about an interaction between discursive thought and non-discursive experience,[282] describing a visual object somehow brings about an interaction between stasis and temporality that may not otherwise have occurred. One can argue that through ekphrasis, either the world becomes static, or the object enters time, and this boundary crossing is either a great accomplishment or something to be mourned – but both arguments depend upon the notion that spatial and temporal orientations are brought together in ekphrastic works.

Undermining Time as an Organizing Principle

The tabernacle text clearly contains elements of both the temporal and the spatial. Exodus 25-31 narrates Moses's process of seeing the תבנית, the blueprint of the

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[281] James Heffernon, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbury*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 112.

[282] Modeling again the widespread recognition that ekphrasis allows two quite different modes of expression to "talk" to one another, scholars have debated the character of that proverbial conversation. While some scholars have described the interaction between visual and verbal expression as a power struggle of some sort, describing ekphrasis as "the final trick … for language to complete its bid for supremacy by taking on the here-ness of the plastic arts," (Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, 22) others have simply highlighted the desire for our highly discursive culture to verbally express and process that which we find powerful about visual/sensory experiences.

tabernacle, and reports God's explanatory words detailing how the tabernacle should be built. Indeed, the process of construction itself is narrated, albeit using the imperative and future tense – certainly, this cannot be said to exemplify "stasis" in text. True stasis, one would think, would be represented by verbs of being, the use of the present tense, and the absence of any ongoing process.

In terms of temporality versus spatiality, however, the degree to which the action of construction is minimized by the language of the text indicates, once again, that the visual image is key. That is, the verbs used for the construction are extremely limited and are generally vague.[283] By far the most common is עשׂה, to do or make, and the most detailed images usually come in clauses that are not associated directly with any action on the part of the builder or artistan. For example, Exod 25:20, "The cherubim shall have their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings. They shall confront each other, the faces of the cherubim being turned toward the cover," describes one of the more artistically complex aspects of the tabernacle, and contains no verbs related to the actions of the artisan. Similarly, Exod 25:31-36, the most detailed description of *any* single item in the tabernacle, contains no verbs related to the building process outside of an initial "you shall make." Here, the primary topic appears to be the nature – not the construction – of the item.

> You shall make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its base and its shaft, its cups, calyxes, and petals shall be of one piece. [32] Six branches shall issue from its sides; three branches from one side of the lampstand and three branches from the other side of the lampstand. [33] On one branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals, and on one branch there shall be three cups

[283] Do/make, insert, overlay, cast, נתן (put, place, give)

> shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals; so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand. [34] And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals: [35] a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches; and a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches, and a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches; so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand. [36] Their calyxes and their stems shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it a single hammered piece of pure gold.

The fact that a sequentially progressing "plot" is not the orienting dimension of the tabernacle pericope is further evinced in the history of response to the text: namely, the great scholarly concern with the "misplacement" of the incense altar in Exod 30. As described in excursus one of chapter two, there has been much scholarly consternation over the literary placement of the prescriptions for the incense altar. Within the tabernacle compound, it is located in the Holy area, near the table and the lampstand. Literarily, however, it is located after the entire complex – even the priests' garments! – have been accounted for. The prescriptions for the golden altar of incense seem totally out of place in ch. 30– following the logic of the text, they should have appeared in ch. 25.

This scholarly consternation is based entirely on the near universal (though oft unarticulated) understanding that the organizing principle behind the text is the spatial layout of the tabernacle. The issue is not one of clarity: based on the text as it is, it is not at all unclear where the altar is to be placed within the tabernacle – this is clearly explained in Exod 30:6. Whether it is *temporally* mislocated – that is, mislocated according to the order of construction that is to be followed – is a question for which we have no data with which to respond. Indeed the order differs in the construction report of Exod 35-40, but this difference could as easily be considered a mistake in the construction report as a mistake in the instructional report, though no scholar has

suggested such a thing. Based on cues internal to this text, readers over many centuries have taken for granted, whether consciously or not, that space is the organizing dimension.

Underminig Space as an Organizing Principle

Finally, the tendency of the tabernacle description to isolate descriptions of each object from any explicit comment about where they are placed in relation to one another makes good sense in light of Kawin's observation that understanding an item in sequence necessarily undermines the appreciation of that item for its own sake. That is, for long stretches of the tabernacle text, the reader is presented with images serially, without reference to anything else in the structure. It is only after we have "seen" the ark and its cover, the table, the lampstand, and the structure of the tent itself – both the fabric and the wood underneath it – that the text offers a more general picture by situating these things in relation to each other. This delayed orientation challenges the reader's memory (see below), but also forces the reader to focus on and appreciate the details of each item without reference to any other item. We cannot focus on the layout of the room or abstract our thinking to create any overall impressions over and above the item of furniture being described because, at least for chapters at a time, the text provides no information to support that. Whereas Ezekiel offers narrative, spatial orientation and descriptions wherein every piece is understood as a part of a larger whole, Exodus offers a series of short visual experiences whose connections seem almost to be an afterthought. The chapter that focuses on arranging the newly-constructed furnishings in the space, Exod 40, bears no mark of the literary ritualization that has characterized the rest of the pericope.

Portability and Lack of Orientation

Indeed, the hesitation of the text to situate the reader mirrors a central aspect of the object being described: the tabernacle is, of course, portable, and there may be profound theological import to the taberancle's portability. The composition of this text is frequently dated sometime after the destruction of the Temple, a time when the Israelites had suddenly lost access to their holy land and the singular home of their deity, and had little in their proverbial arsenal of sanctioned religious practice that would enable religious connections without the Temple.[284] Taking this traditional manner of relating to the deity (that is, through a seemingly centralized cult) and making it portable offered both continuity with past theological systems, which may well have included the notion of portable sanctuaries,[285] and innovations that addressed real-life challenges to that theology. In light of the spotty and fairly inconsistent nature of the detail found in this description generally, it is remarkable that *every* account of *every* aspect of the tabernacle includes information about how that structure will be made portable (generally, by attaching rings and poles). The practicality of this is even considered, at least minimally, by the use of gold overlay rather than solid gold for larger furnishings – as solid gold would have been considerably heavier and more difficult to transport.[286] While the

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[284] John Van Seters, for example, has tried to make the case that the presence of so much detail in the biblical descriptions of temples (Solomon's and Ezekiel's) and the tabernacle is meant to enable readers to visualize them *because the people were without a Temple at the time*. While this may be so, it is also true that most Israelites would not have had regular access to the Temple/tabernacle even when it was functioning, and certainly any access they had would have been quite limited. Most of what the tabernacle text describes would never have been visually available to a lay Israelite. See John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History*. (New Haven: Yale University, 1983), 109-10.

[285] See discussion on page 17.

[286] Note that the LXX prescribes both a table and a menorah of solid gold rather than wood overlaid with gold – certainly this would be impractical for travel. Given that the other overlaid items – including the

portability of the tabernacle is not *explicitly* explored in detail until Num 4, wherein the reader witnesses the packing up and moving of the structure, the tendency of this text to downplay both temporal or spatial context effectively sets up that discussion.

The tabernacle text effectively blocks a reader's attempt to feel "oriented," then, in three ways. First, through the use of ekphrasis and repetition, it blurs the reader's sense of the progression of time. Second, by delaying information about how the objects in the tabernacle are arranged relative to one another, it disallows the construction of a coherent mental image of "the whole," wherein each item described would be merely a part of that whole. Rather, each item is first presented as "whole" unto itself, and the items are *then* arranged in relation to one another. These two aspects of the literary form resonate well with the topic of this pericope, which is the third way in which the text undermines the reader's desire to understand this text in light of other things he or she knows: because the tabernacle is a portable structure, it cannot be conceived in relation to other geographical landmarks. The tabernacle text and the structure it describes cannot be understood primarily in relation to temporal or spatial points of reference that come from outside the world of the text.

The Timelessness of Israel's Relationship With God

A third message conveyed by this text is this: though God acts in history, God – or Israel's connection to God – is not ruled by time. Throughout most of the Hebrew Bible, God is known by God's acts in history; much of the Hebrew Bible tells the story of God's history with Israel.[287] The tabernacle text offers a counterpoint to that historical

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altars, the ark, and the structural aspects of the tabernacle itself are described as overlaid wood, though, it seems unlikely that there is theological significance to the difference in the composition of the table and menorah in the LXX. See MT Exod 25:23-24, LXX Exod 25:23.

relationship with God by presenting a dimension of the God-Israel relationship that seems virtually untouched by historical events and is largely self-referential. Indeed, in his recent commentary, William Propp has noted several anachronisms within the priestly literature of Exodus.[288] Taking this feature alongside P's proclivity to precision in measurements, dates, and lineage, Propp suggests that P's anachronisms are not a mistake, but rather that "the writer *deliberately slurred time*,"[289] creating a sense that the material of this text is not subject to the ordinary progression of history.

Perhaps the most powerful expression of time being somehow slurred is in the juxtaposition of the nearly invariant repetition between Exod 25-31 and Exod 35-40 and the plot of the interceding chapters. The tabernacle text seems blissfully unaware of the episode with the golden calf narrated therein.[290] It is as if there are different planes on which God and Israel have relationships – the historical one has all the ups and downs necessitated by history; and then there is another, more utopian (but less interesting) one, where history brings no threat. These two ideas never enter into conflict or even dialogue with one another; it is nowhere suggested that the reader should adjudicate between them, even though they present fairly different ideas about the nature of Israel's relationship

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[287] For expressions of acts in history as the foundation for God's relationship with Israel, see, e.g., Deut 26:5-9, Josh 24: 2-12, both of which precede a commitment on behalf of the Israelites to participate in the covenant with the Lord. Psalm 78 also retells of God's acts in history as a foundation for Israel's relationship with the deity.

[288] He notes, for example, that Num 17:3 reports that the bronze of Korah's censors are used to plate the bronze altar, but according to Exod 27:2 and 38:3, that altar was already plated in bronze. See Propp, *Exodus*, 692 for additional examples and discussion.

[289] Propp, *Exodus*, 692, emphasis original.

[290] Scholars interested in the origins of this text argue, quite rightly, I believe, that Gen 32-34 comes from a different source, and that they have been inserted in the midst of the tabernacle text by a redactor. I don't mean to argue otherwise. Rather, my interest is not in the origins of this text – I do not locate its "meaning" in authorial intent. The case for considering the significance of texts apart from the intent of the texts' authors is presented in chapter two.

with God. They are presented simply as simultaneously true: God has a relationship with Israel that is characterized by acts in history, and God has a relationship with Israel in which history plays an exceedingly small role.

The Priesthood as an Extension of the Tabernacle Itself

A fourth message conveyed by this text is that if a community views itself as bound to the tabernacle, it must also view itself as bound to the priesthood. As discussed already, both ekphrastic texts and ritual acts work on several levels. Ekphrastic texts commonly have both an object, the item being described and a subject, the purpose or message underlying or motivating the description. For example, the subject of a description of a king's palace might be the wealth and power of the king; the object of the description is the palace itself. Similarly, many ritual acts are understood to have a particular purpose. In the case of Levitical sacrifice, for example, sacrifices might be understood to purge the "aura" of sin from the community; the blood serves as ritual detergent. Functionally, however, the sacrificial system also establishes a clear hierarchy among Israelites, wherein different people have varying levels of access to the altar. When people accept the stated purpose of sacrifices and consider themselves to be part of the population for whom these regulations are operative, by default, they accept the concomitant social system, because the two are inseparable.[291]

If the object of this text is the tabernacle, the most likely subject, according to its own rhetoric, is the relationship between God and the Israelites, specifically as mediated through the priesthood and its cultic system. Certainly, God's enduring presence and the

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[291] This conceptual underpinning is critical to the work of many scholars of both biblical ritual and ritual in general, including Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever*, Saul Olyan, *Rites and Rank*, William Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2004), and Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*.

portability of that presence are components of this relationship, but several aspects of the tabernacle pericope focus attention *specifically* on the priesthood. Perhaps the simplest marker of this is that it is the priesthood, more so than any other aspect of the tabernacle, that is described as God's own. In a text that contains remarkably few first person possessive constructions to indicate God's personal "claim" on this tabernacle, the prominence of that construction in reference to the priesthood is notable: in Exod 28, four times (Exod 28:1, 3, 4, 41), in Exod 29, twice (Exod 29: 1, 44) and in Exod 30, once (Exod 30:30).

The descriptions of the priestly garments themselves also draw the reader's attention to the significance of the priesthood in several ways. The body of the high priest is represented as one place where Israel and God meet,[292] paralleling the tabernacle itself, insofar as his ensemble includes both the words "holy to the Lord" and representations of the twelve tribes (on both the breastplate and the shoulder pieces). That is, the high priest is marked both as the territory of the Lord and the territory (or representative) of the twelve tribes: the Lord and the Israelites meet, symbolically, on the body of the priest.

In addition to bearing symbols of both God and the tribes of Israel, the high priest embodies the connection between Israelites, because he himself is an Israelite, and the tabernacle, because his body is marked many times over as being essentially part of the tabernacle furniture.[293] Each priest's garments reflect the materials in the area of the

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[292] Though the structure is referred to almost interchangeably as the אהל מועד (Tent of Meeting) and the *mishkan* (commonly translated "tabernacle;" literally meaning place of temporary dwelling), the motivation given for building the tabernacle, "that (God) may dwell among (the Israelites)," is mentioned only once, while the fact that God will meet with the Israelites there is mentioned five times.

[293] See Menachem Haran, *Temples*, 149-259. The indexing through literary features is described in ch. 2; in short, the literary structures present in the chapter detailing the manufacture of the priestly garments hearken back to the literary structures present in the chapter detailing the instructions for the manufacture

tabernacle to which he has access; for example, the high priest's garments are made of multi-colored wool of חֹשֶׁב workmanship interwoven with strips of pure gold, while the other priests' garments are of רֹקֵם workmanship and contain no gold. As one might expect, then, the ordination of the priests mimics quite closely the consecration of the tabernacle furnishings, including the daubing of blood on the horns of the altar and the right ears and big toes of the priests.[294] This relationship is expressed, too, in the formal details of the text: in both the prescriptive and descriptive texts, the sections detailing the tabernacle space proper[295] and the priestly garments stand out as *the only* chapters that contain punctuating statements that literarily tie those details into the entirety of the tabernacle project.[296]

The priests are, in many ways, what makes this divine-human meeting possible, but there is no priest without priestly regalia,[297] and there is no priestly regalia without the tribes. Just as the connection between Aaron and the Israelites is not explained, but rather is demonstrated by inscribing their names onto the very garments that identify him as priest, so also the *importance* of the connection between Aaron and the Israelites is not told to us in the text, but shown to us, literarily, through repetition. That is, the account of

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of the tabernacle. For more on the gradations of holiness present in different parts of the tabernacle structure, see also Phillip Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World.* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

[294] Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 96-104.

[295] The "tabernacle space" refers not to the tabernacle's courtyard and not to its structural elements, but only what you would see standing inside the tabernacle.

[296] This idea is introduced and discussed further in chapter three in the context of a discussion of macro-level formal features.

[297] The text describing the manufacture of this regalia, Exod 28:3, specifically says that it is made "to sanctify him, to make him a priest for me." Presumably, then, he could not have been a priest without the regalia.

the priestly garments repeatedly refers to the aspect of his ensemble that communicates this connection.[298] Using the presence of these names as the center for the type of repetition that blurs its visual context makes it yet more clear that it is the idea that the priest represents Israel, and not the details of how exactly that representation looks on the body of the priest, to which the reader should devote attention. Communicating a message about the centrality of the priesthood and the relationship between the priest and Israel through this blurred repetition of visual details allows this more message-based text to seem right at home tucked among measurements and materials.

Beyond the account of the priestly regalia, the enduring divine-human relationship is stressed yet again by the emphasis placed on the incense altar through its unexpected literary placement. As described above, while every other item on the tabernacle grounds is described in the order in which it would be encountered in the space – that is, the order of description is spatially determined – the incense altar stands outside of this literary structure. It is only after the entirety of the tabernacle grounds have been prescribed that the incense altar, whose prescription we would have expected in the very first chapter of the pericope, is found. I suggested in the second excursus of chapter two that this "misplacement" could be understood as resulting from a desire to leave the capstone off the tabernacle until minutiae are in place, lest it become functional before being truly complete. What I have not yet addressed is why it is the incense altar rather than the ark that serves as the capstone. After all, is not the presence of God over the ark

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[298] Moses is told twice in Exod 28:9-11 to engrave the names of the Israelites on the stones of the priest's shoulderpieces; in Exod 28:21, he is told that there should be 12 stones on the breastplate to represent the 12 tribes, and that they should be inscribed with the names of the tribes. The presence of the names on both the shoulderpieces and the breastpiece are referred back to later in the text, reminding the reader of their presence there, in 28:12, 29.

the most central aspect of the tabernacle functionality? According to this text, the answer to that question is no. The purpose of the incense altar as it is described – a description that is minimal at best – is to serve as a locus for purification when missteps have been taken either by the entire community or its highest representative, the high priest.[299] Without this altar and the locus for purification that it provides, an enduring presence of the Divine among the Israelites and the relationship that allows would almost certainly be impossible; the pollution of the space would eventually overwhelm the sanctity, and God's presence would be forced to depart. By treating the incense altar, rather than the ark, as the capstone of the tabernacle, this description emphasizes not the enduring presence of God in the abstract, but the system that will provide conditions under which God can remain with Israel despite human shortcomings.[300] This relationship *must* be mediated by the priesthood; indeed, it is only the *high* priest who works with the incense altar.

From the perspective of ritual theory, this is a case where that which is ritualized is both communicative and instrumental: it is instrumental as a force shaping the society of its practitioners through that which it communicates. As Gilders has argued, "[u]nderstanding ritual as communicative activity … does not limit it merely to transmitting messages about existing personal or social situations. Rather, as a number of theorists have suggested, the messages transmitted through ritual not only say something about the existing status or identity of the participants, or about the context in which they

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[299] See Lev 4.

[300] The ark is the object of purification once a year, as described in Lev 16, but I believe the incense altar is a better representative of the system that allows God's presence to endure for three reasons: first, this event is determined by the calendar rather than in response to the behavior of the Israelites, second, it occurs only once a year, and third, the incense altar is also used (to create smoke) on the occasion of the ark's purification in any case.

find themselves, but also affect status and identity."[301] That is, messages communicated through ritual *create* and *change* reality as often as they reflect reality.

Ekphrasis, in this case, offers a rhetorical tool that allows the subject of the priesthood to be introduced in a way that is unlikely to inspire dissent. Rather than including direct discourse about the importance of the priesthood, which might be perceived as unseemly, this text does the opposite: in its barrage of details about the tabernacle, it almost distracts the reader from paying direct attention to the importance of the priesthood. While the reader focuses on the tabernacle – a topic that seems relatively uncontroversial – he or she also comes to associate priesthood with tabernacle.

The Work of Visualization and the Transformation of the Reader

The tabernacle text is difficult to read. In chapter two, I discussed at some length the nature and extent of the challenge posed by the particular pattern of repetition. In that context, I discussed the position of literary scholars regarding the ability of challenging texts to keep a reader engaged: a text that presents no challenge at all is unlikely to inspire a truly absorbed reading, whereas a text that is too challenging will likely lose the interest of the reader all together. Such an observation, of course, is not limited to the field of literary studies. Indeed, both ritual theorists and religious philosophers have also discussed the role of *work* in support of religious experience. Rather than making the end state easier to attain, abbreviating or simplifying an experience that has the potential to be transformative makes it less effective as a path to transformation and, therefore, pushes the end point farther from reach. That is, the end one reaches is only the sum total of what

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[301] Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 3.

took place during the process of getting there, so minimizing the means necessarily diminishes the ends. This focus on process rather than endpoint is a definitional quality of ritual – the ends and the means are not (at least functionally) separable.

In the world of ritual theory, self-discipline is typically considered as part of the challenge presented by invariance in ritualized behavior and the self-control that such behavior requires. Catherine Bell cites, for example, the daily routine of a monk who concentrates on the perfection of each act (sitting cross-legged, unpacking breakfast bowls, eating slowly and completely, washing the bowl, etc.) in order to achieve a state of "no self." Such behavior is understood to reshape the individual by subordinating the "demands, desires, and indulgences of the body, thereby encouraging the greater discipline needed to control the mind"[302] and "mold individual dispositions."[303] Such a process can empower the individual as he or she becomes "allied to a group,"[304] or subordinated to a "sense of the encompassing and enduring."[305]

Those who concern themselves with religious thought rather than action are interested, too, in the issue of discipline and the related ability to achieve the aforementioned state of "no self." Religious philosophers like Iris Murdoch have also engaged the question of how any individual might hope to appreciate what is godly – what is Ultimate in the world – if the human process of understanding lacks the ability to grasp things that are fundamentally unlike that which we experience in our mundane lives. In referring back to oneself – making comparisons with other thoughts or

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[302] Bell, *Perspectives and Dimensions,* 151.

[303] Ibid., 152.

[304] Ibid.

[305] Bell, *Perspectives and Dimensions,*153.

experiences one may have had – one's ability to appreciate an item or an experience *on its own terms* is inherently compromised. By following this quite normal process for understanding, an individual fundamentally misperceives certain aspects of the object, reshaping it so that it aligns more closely with whatever he or she has experienced before. Murdoch argues that the fact that "we are blinded by the self" in this way is the greatest challenge to true relationship with the Good.[306] That is, the unique qualities of true goodness or godliness go unrecognized because individuals cannot comprehend the Good without fundamentally altering it. In trying to bring every aspect of the world into the realm of humanity – to translate it into language we understand – the "Otherness" that is a definitional quality of godliness is lost. In order to engage in authentic religious or theological thought, then, one needs a process for transcending this entirely self-referential system.

Murdoch argues that one way to transcend this self-referential system is to engage in difficult intellectual work: "An intellectual discipline can … stretch the imagination, enlarge the vision and strengthen the judgment."[307] The discipline involved in trying to apprehend a new area of mathematics or learning a new language, for example, both require an individual to surrender to an unfamiliar system, often picking it up in bits and pieces and slowly assembling a framework for understanding the system. Having to learn each piece of information separately and create a framework for understanding it only *afterwards* prohibits learners from re-shaping the newly acquired information (at least in the early stages of learning) in order to best suit his or her own consciousness. This serial

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[306] Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 100. Murdoch, a professed atheist, uses the term "the Good" to refer to what a religious individual would likely term "God."

[307] Murdoch, *Sovereignty*, 90.

presentation of information and its delayed contextualization – the move to appreciate fully each part of a whole on its own terms – of course, is precisely the type of challenge presented to the Buddhist monk described above, who seeks to be mindful of each detail of his morning routine. It is also the challenge presented by the juxtaposition of uncontextualized descriptions in the tabernacle text.

The tabernacle text makes its readers work in several ways. It forces the reader to hold individual pieces of information in the memory for extended periods of time before allowing any visual context for them. As noted in chapter two, it also draws out the distance between repeated elements, forcing the reader to *work* in order to experience the pleasure of familiarity that comes with the repetition. Finally, the text forces the reader to relinquish basic generic expectations about the pace at which it will progress, [308] disorienting the reader once again, and *requiring* that any reader who wishes to understand the structure being described surrender his or her expectations and learn the system of the text.

Perhaps the most basic way that the text makes its reader work, however, is simply by being ekphrastic – by inviting the reader to create a mental image of each item, to construct it *in meditatio*. In chapter two, I compared the construction of mandalas *in meditatio* to the imaginative construction of the tabernacle. The texts that accompany both of these imaginative undertakings evince similar (and otherwise unusual) characteristics: most notably, the juxtaposition of detail with lacunae, of repetition that seems almost emphatic with pieces of information that would not make sense if one were to carry out the instructions. If indeed this is a fair comparison, the tabernacle text asks its

[308] For example, that each salient item is described once and only once. See discussion in chapters 2 and 3.

readers to do the work of visualizing, to take in all this detail, to step into the disorienting world of the text, and to pay close enough attention to follow its unexpected twists and turns until the point at which the text is familiar enough that nothing is unexpected.

Conclusion: Doings and Ambiguity

As a ritualized text and a work of ekphrasis, this text has a unique ability to connote several messages or purposes at once, only one of which is explicit. While this is a text with virtually no explicit commentary, it *does* work – implicitly – to shape the reader's perceptions of and associations with the object it describes. This final chapter of my study stands apart from the others in that it works not only with the literary form of the text, but also with its topic, and has sought to make explicit four of these implicit messages about the tabernacle, the cult, and God that are present in this text: 1) concrete details about God's preferences are worth knowing, even if they have no obvious application, because everything about God is worth knowing; 2) similarly, no piece of knowledge related to God should be construed only as a means to something else, even if that "something else" also pertains to God – one should cherish each piece for its own sake; 3) though God acts in history, God – or Israel's connection to God – is not ruled by time; 4) if a community views itself as bound to the tabernacle, it must also view itself as bound to the priesthood.

Ritual activity affects the world around it in at least two ways. On the one hand, it is understood to be efficacious. For example, the biblical text tells us that the reason blood is put on the altar is to purge the sanctuary of sin. Why is it blood that is used? Why is bleach used to purge a house of germs? In most cases, it is used because a trusted

individual has said that it works. Those who use bleach this way don't believe that bleach symbolizes something; they believe that it works. Those who perform rituals that are understood to have a particular effect think similarly about what they are doing. What, then, does this text *do*? I discussed in this chapter two ways in which this text might play a role in religious "doings" (that is, experience): first, I considered the work this text (and all visualization) requires and the role of work in religious transformation as understood by ritual theory and religious philosophy; second, I recalled from chapter two the connections between the literary features of this text and the literary features of texts that accompany mandala construction. These similarities suggest to me a similarity in purpose: that is, imaginative construction.[309] By offering a focal point and guide for these experiences, this text offers a path to religious transformation by engaging the absorbed reader in religious work. It requires this reader to surrender his or her sense of "typical" progression (either through time or space), it requires a significant feat of memory. There is no way to separate the "path" from the "end" in this process; an apocopated path would yield an inferior end.

Another way in which ritual activity is known to affect the world around it is through the shaping of social reality. As Nancy Jay and Saul Olyan have argued, ritual behaviors create specific relationships between participants: rituals create connections, they create hierarchies, they create boundaries between insiders and outsiders.[310] By

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[309] Bergen has similarly argued that the purpose of the sacrificial instructions in Lev 1-7 is to allow "a form of participation in the ritual by those unable actually to participate." He calls this type of participation "imaginative participation" in the ritual act. Bergen, *Reading Ritual*, 8.

[310] Olyan, *Rites and Rank*, addresses a variety of contexts in which "ritual action in cultic and quasi-cultic contexts shapes social configurations, inscribing status on participating individuals and groups" (11), including issues of "admission or exclusion" based on the category of ritual cleanliness (ch. 2), issues of Israelites and the "other" (ch. 3), and issues of the blemished body (ch. 4). Jay focuses more specifically on

accomplishing these ends outside the realm of direct discourse, ritual often affects social reality without inspiring dissent. An important social reality being created or reinforced by this particular ritualized text is the role of the priesthood vis-a-vis Israel, God, and the cult. The priesthood is so intimately connected to the functioning of the tabernacle that every word spent reinforcing the importance of the latter indirectly reinforces the importance of the former as well.

A central source of power for this text is its ability to connote these several messages – and perhaps others, as well – in a way that supports condensation of meaning and multivocal readings. That is, because the text itself does not engage these ideas discursively – because it does not assert them – this text can perform as a *symbol* that demonstrates both condensation of meaning and multivocality.

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the relationship created between males who participate in sacrifice together, arguing that participation in this ritual creates a concrete sense of "descent" that would otherwise be reserved for the woman from whose womb a boy emerged. (See especially Jay, *Generations*, ch. 3-4.)

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Conclusion: Engaging Literature as a Source of Religious Experience

In *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Catherine Bell has made a case against "reading" ritual as though it were written in language.[311] She means by this that the impact of ritual on the performing community cannot be reduced through some simple translation of activity into words that summarize thoughts, feelings, or intentions associated with the ritual. The present study suggests that most texts should not be read only in this way, either. Reading a text as though it were merely another means to communicate some summarizable essence is similarly problematic. While it is possible to skim a text, looking only to extract kernels of information, it is equally possible to become highly invested in the reading process, such that reading, whether publicly or privately, whether aloud or silently, becomes an experience unto itself. Reading, like ritual performance, invites a hiatus from the mundane world, and both can affect the participant in ways that last far beyond the reading or ritual experience. Reading has the potential to be as profound an experience as activity performed out in the world; it has the potential to alter the lens through which one sees ones everyday experiences.

In the case of the tabernacle text in particular, the nature of the reading experience is similar to that of ritual performance because the literary features of the text are so similar to the performative features of ritual. In this particular case, this experiential comparison also resonates with the ritually-focused content of the text and the apparent interests of the community of authors. That is, ritual and cult go hand in hand in the biblical text, so the presence of ritualized features in the literature that describes the

[311] Bell, *Perspectives and Dimensions*, 68-72.

world of the cult creates a synergy between topic and literary form.[312] The larger methodological lynchpin of this study, however, is the notion that the process of reading causes the reader to have an experience – an experience that, when the text is understood by the reader to have religious value, is properly described as a religious experience, and one that merits study just as other types of religious experience merit study. Viewing reading as a legitimate path to a religious experience that has the potential not only to be logical, idea-centered, and contemplative, but also to activate the senses and evoke complex and logically unrelated (or even contradictory) attitudes and emotions suggests a connection between biblical studies and anthropological and philosophical studies of religious experience that has, to this point, rarely been studied. Furthermore, if individual members of a cohesive community will respond in relatively predictable ways to particular experiences – an argument made by both literary and ritual theorists – then the study of those predicted responses is a fruitful means for considering the experience of individual members of that community. In talking about a section of the biblical canon using not only the insights of ritual theory but also questions about religious experience more generally, this study straddles the fields of biblical and religious studies, both suggesting a new type of discourse about biblical texts and suggesting new objects of study for scholars of religious experience.

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[312] In addition to Bibb's observation of this resonance between content and literary form in Leviticus as well – wherein the commonground for the content and the literary form is, again, ritual – the priestly school of authors has been observed to tend toward such resonances in other texts. For example, Umberto Cassuto has noted in Genesis 1 the presence of many different patterns of sevens in the language of the text, which resonates with the story of the world's creation in seven days. See Cassuto, *Commentary on Genesis, Part I* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jersualem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1961), 12-15.

Summary of the Present Study

The simplest goal of this dissertation is to identify the unique literary characteristics of the tabernacle text, to consider the way in which they might affect the experience of the reader, and ultimately to describe them using terms and concepts from ritual theory. This methodological lens has brought with it new insights into the significance of this text for those who read and experience it. By using perspectives drawn from ritual theory to study this biblical pericope, I explored the tabernacle text as a document that both reflects and inspires religious experience.

The forgoing chapters have focused on four characteristics that are common to ritualized activity in many cultures, each of which I have found to exist prominently in the tabernacle text in literary form. In the summaries that follow, I will touch briefly on the way in which each feature appears in the tabernacle pericope and, where necessary, the effect that ritual and literary theorists argue it is likely to have on readers. The four ritualized features on which this study focuses are formalism, repetition, performance, and ambiguity.

Formalism is the adherence to particular type of language or behavior based not on practicality or personal preference, but on social norms or rules. Formal speech might limit an individual to a particular pool of vocabulary or sentence structures. For example, many a colloquial phrase has been eliminated from this dissertation even though they clearly communicated a particular message; neither are infinitives to be split in this more formal writing, even though this might be common practice in daily parlance. Formal behavior might require someone to select from a pre-determined pool of gestures and behaviors upon meeting someone for the first time: it is acceptable to smile and nod or to

extend one's hand, while it would probably not be acceptable to wink. To be sure, formalism is not limited to ritualized behaviors, or even to particular spheres of life – it is ubiquitous. The extent to which words and actions are restricted in ritualized behaviors (or texts) is simply greater. High levels of formality have two known effects: first, they limit what participants can communicate, and encourage individuals to affirm general statements rather than to express anything particularly personal. To this extent, they can support group adhesion by setting up an interaction that is based more on group norms than on particular individuals. Second, and perhaps related to the first, formal situations are much more difficult to disrupt. Once participants accept the formal "mindset," they are less likely to consider (or, at least, express) their own individual preferences, and more likely to behave in the expected manner. A formal text eschews any air of arbitrariness; details are assumed to be present for some reason other than the author's idiosyncratic interests and preferences. Readers who sense formality in a text are less likely argue with it.

There are several types of formality present in the tabernacle text. First, the descriptions of each item contain the same kinds of information presented in the same order. Second, and closely related, abbreviations are eschewed even when this leads to a great deal of repetition, and even when the lack of abbreviation makes the information presented in the text more difficult to absorb. Third, the text contains "punctuating statements" that serve to envelope descriptions of particular objects (such as the menorah) and areas (such as the tabernacle proper), marking the beginning and ending of a particular description. These punctuating statements play an important role in marking the beginnings and endings of descriptions that are both incomplete and repetitive – that

is, a reader could not predict where this description *should* end, as the form of the description seems not to be based on logic and practicality. Formal markers that the text is about to move on to another object, in this case, orient the reader toward the interests of this particular text, and ultimately distract him or her from the fact that if the details are construed as instructions, they are incomplete.

The recognition of repetition in literature is even more straightforward than the recognition of formalism, and the tabernacle pericope is rife with repetition. I analyze it using two broad categories: distant repetition, which is the repetition of text from the prescriptive account in the construction account, and proximal repetition, which is the repetition of words and phrases within a single account (whether prescriptive or descriptive) of part of the tabernacle. Chapter two examines the former, and therein I describe substantial variation in the intensity of distant repetition over the course of the pericope. Some prescriptions (e.g., Exod 25) are repeated with great precision in the construction report (in this case, Exod 37), while other paired accounts have a considerably looser linguistic relationship (such as the list of materials needed for the tabernacle, which appears in both Exod 35:10-19 and Exod 31: 7-11).

I make the case in this chapter that this pattern of ebb and flow works to create a level of challenge appropriate to the task of keeping the reader absorbed and actively participating. That is, as some factors make it increasingly difficult for the reader to recognize the repetition – the distance between the two occurrences increases, for example – other factors, such as precision at the level of the morpheme or a memorable topic, make it easier.

There is another way, too, in which distant repetition draws the reader in. In addition to creating appropriately matched challenge and reward, the presence of repetition on this scale offers the reader a sense of familiarity. Whereas the topic of the tabernacle text is unusual enough in the context of the Bible that it runs the risk of alienating readers merely through its perceived "foreignness," the repetition of the instructions in the construction report offers, through familiarity, a sense of connection to or oneness with the material. Through repetition, the tabernacle – the dwelling place of God – is no longer a strange place, but rather is exactly how the reader, having been exposed to the information multiple times, expects it to be. This effort to draw the reader in – to make of the reader a "participant" – suggests an additional connection between the world of literature and the world of ritual activity, for the way in which the ritual congregation construes itself has considerable impact on whether the activity itself is best understood as theatrical, ritual, or something else entirely.

A third effect of distant repetition in this pericope is to communicate a sense of permanence, particularly in light of the dramatic events that occur in the intervening chapters of Exod 32-34 – this is an effect of invariant repetition that has been observed in both ritual theory, by Catherine Bell and Roy Rappaport, for example, and literary theory, where it has been studied in depth by Bruce Kawin. Whereas the progression of time in the world generally brings with it change – history is a series of events that are generally perceived by their relative difference from one another – precise repetition suggests that, at least in the sphere of ritual or literature, this need not necessarily be so. In the case of the tabernacle pericope, the word-for-word repetition of the instructions in the construction report offers a sense of timelessness and permanence in one aspect of God's

relationship with Israel – that which is expressed through the construction of the tabernacle – even as Israel's acts in history have created such a profound rift that God calls into question whether that relationship can endure.

I have also identified in this pericope three different types of proximal repetition: illustrative, building, and blurring. Illustrative repetition repeats verbal descriptions of features that are visually repeated on a particular object. That is, if a chair has two arms that look exactly the same, illustrative repetition might describe them this way: "on this side there is an arm of curved wood, polished to a shine and on this side there is an arm of curved wood, polished to a shine." It would *not* say "on each side there is an arm of curved wood, polished to a shine," nor would it say "on this side there is an arm of curved wood, polished to a shine, and on the other side of the chair, there is a second polished arm, whose curve is like a cat's paw." Because the two arms look just the same, the two descriptions, in illustrative repetition, are just the same. I call this repetition "illustrative" because it guides the mind's eye over the surface of the object. Illustrative repetition is an exceedingly "strong" repetition: in every case in which illustrative repetition exists in the prescriptive portion of the text, it is repeated in the parallel section of the construction account. This precise distant repetition of precise proximal repetition creates a profoundly repetitive text.

The second two types of proximal repetition, building and blurring, are in some ways similar to each other. First, and perhaps most notably, this type of repetition does not necessarily involve the repetition of precise wording; it is the repetition of ideas or images. Second, what is repeated in both building and blurring repetition is some central information about the object being described: the presence of a characteristic feature, for

example, might be mentioned several times. Each time this central characteristic is mentioned, additional details are appended to it. The difference between building and blurring repetition is that in the former, all of these details cohere perfectly to flesh out a single, clear image, whereas in blurring repetition, the details are not easily brought together into a coherent image.

Both illustrative and building repetition support an imaginative sensory experience for the reader – the text presents information about the tabernacle in a way that mimics, in two different ways, the process through which an observer would receive the information visually. Whereas illustrative repetition focuses on taking in details serially, allowing the reader to discover each nook and cranny of the object before stepping back to think about the whole object, building repetition continually refers the reader back to a single characteristic feature as a context in which the other details should be understood. Rather than presenting all the details as equally important, as illustrative repetition seems to do, building repetition prioritizes a single characteristic feature of an object. Both of these are true-to-life ways of taking in visual information: sometimes a salient feature affects the way in which a viewer perceives all other parts of an object, while at other times, the viewer discovers each part serially, without one seeming obviously more salient than another.

Unlike Ezek 40-48, the tabernacle text does not offer an account of someone else's experience of seeing; it does not assemble all of the visual pieces, articulating a context for each item, nor does it present patterns as such, but rather requires the reader to sift through a series of repetitive statements and eventually discover for him or herself that there is a pattern. Ezekiel facilitates the creation of a mental image by offering a

higher level of abstraction to the reader – Ezekiel does the work of discovery and presents the results. Exodus, however, requires the reader to do the work of assembling its serially presented details, just as one would have to do upon seeing such an object. While Ezekiel arguably offers a much clearer vision to the reader, the Exodus text more closely mimics the experience of seeing.

The intensity of proximal repetition, like the intensity of distant repetition, waxes and wanes over the course of this pericope, and the relative presence or absence of repetition correlates to whether the item or area being described is, first, visually available to someone standing in the space and, second, visually interesting and likely to hold the attention of someone standing in the space.

Whereas identifying formalism and repetition in literary form was a fairly straightforward exercise, the task of identifying the performative aspects of a text is considerably more complicated. In this study, I link the concept of performance in literature primarily to the ways in which this text appeals to the senses of sound and sight. The way in which this text appeals to the reader's sense of sight has already been described: illustrative and building repetition mimic, in slightly different ways, a visual encounter with an object. The patterns of word-for-word repetition in this text, both proximal and distant, also carry with them some appeal to the sense of hearing. Regardless of whether this text was first encountered in writing or as read aloud, early readers presumably came from a culture that was transitioning from orality to textuality, and as such, written texts were "heard" in the mind of the reader even when read silently.[313] Outside the realm of sensory experience, I find this text to encourage

"performance" on the part of the reader by making the reader *work*: it makes the reader work to recognize the distant repetition, to envision the objects being described, and, finally, to hold all of these images in mind until Exod 40, at which point the text finally presents the way in which they will be arranged in relation to each other. If the reader does not *do* these things, the reading of the text is quite boring indeed.

Finally, I find in this text a great deal of ambiguity – that is, multivocality and condensation of meaning[314] – in the messages it communicates about the social and religious world of which it is a part. Because this pericope does not offer straightforward statements about the nature of God,[315] the nature of God's relationship to Israel, or the cult that is made possible by the construction of this tabernacle, it allows readers to sit lightly with these ideas rather than forcing readers to engage them on a discursive level. I have identified in this text four implicit messages: 1) Concrete details about God's preferences are worth knowing, even if they have no obvious application, because everything about God is worth knowing; 2) Similarly, no piece of knowledge related to God should be construed only as a means to something else, even if that "something else" also pertains to God. One should cherish each piece for its own sake; 3) Though God acts in history, God – or Israel's connection to God – is not ruled by time; 4) If one sees oneself as part of the community of the tabernacle, one must also see oneself as part of the community that is bound to the priesthood. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list,

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[313] As Susan Niditch has so eloquently framed the question at stake here, "What are the boundaries on the oral-literate continuum that allow this literature to exist in writing while seeming to breathe with the aesthetics of an oral culture? To begin with a most basic question, what does literacy mean in such cultures?" See Niditch, *Oral World*, 40.

[314] Multivocality and condensation of meaning as functions of ambiguity are discussed in chapter one.

[315] Such a statement is found, for example, in Ps 86:15, which reads "But You, O Lord, are a compassionate and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."

nor do I intend to argue that each reader of this text would walk away articulating these ideas. Rather, as in the case of ritual activity, I think that this text juxtaposes certain ideas and values in a particular way in order to create in the mind of the reader a connection between those ideas, and I think that it works as much through literary *indices*, like the use of repetition to communicate emphasis, as through *symbols*, like the use of words about importance to indicate emphasis.

Continuing the Conversation

It is my hope that this study not only builds from the fields of biblical and religious studies, but that it suggests fruitful trajectories for and conversations between these fields as well. What does it mean to consider the experience of reading religious text not only as contemplative practice,[316] but as a process for exploring a plurality of non-discursive ends?

As a first step in response, I have sketched below how such an approach might begin to play out using another text that has been of interest to biblical scholars, looking at only one part of one measure of relative ritualization: the order in which information is presented in the Temple Scroll. [317]

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[316] To be sure, there is a well established tradition of contemplation of religious texts in many religious traditions, but this is the contemplation of a singular meaning of a text – that is, the focus of such exercises is to spend time thinking discursively about that to which the text refers. The difference I am suggesting is similar to the difference between "Proustian" and "Victorine" readings as described by Paul Griffiths in "Reading as a Spiritual Discipline," in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher* (eds. L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 32-47. Griffiths seems to most highly value the Victorine, or theologically discursive, mode of reading.

[317] 11QT was so named by Yigael Yadin when it was first published in Yadin, Yigael, *The Temple Scroll*. Three Volumes and Supplement. (Jerusalem 1983). The Temple Scroll does not limit itself to a description of (or prescription for) the Temple, but contains information about the Temple proper in Col. 3-13:8 and Col 29, and about courts and associated structures in Col 30-34, 35:10-44:16, and 46:5-12. I focus my discussion on these sections of the text.

Engaging New Texts: The Temple Scroll

Because of its topical concern, the Temple Scroll stands out as worthy of exploration not only in terms of reading experience in general, but in terms of relative ritualization more specifically. To be sure, this text poses a challenge beyond the challenge of studying biblical material: the extant text is quite broken, making it difficult to sustain an argument about the details of the literary form. It is because of this brokenness that I take as an entryway to this discussion the relative formality of the text as it is expressed by the order in which the scroll presents information; this is an area of inquiry that is fairly forgiving of the state of the textual evidence.

Generally speaking, the Temple Scroll seems to move from the most to the least holy area of the Temple complex[318] and to list the materials used for the construction of the temple in an order that seems not to be arbitrary; indeed, the order witnessed in the Temple Scroll is not unrelated to the order adhered to quite rigidly by the author(s) of the tabernacle pericope. The adherence to these "rules" regarding the order in which materials are presented, however, is less rigid in the Temple Scroll than it is in Exodus.

This relaxation in formality relative to the tabernacle pericope is apparent even in the initial presentation of materials in the Temple Scroll. While col 3 line 2 lists the colors following precisely the notion of material holiness present in the biblical text (blue → purple → crimson) and may have been taken directly from Exod 25:3 or 35:6,[319] the next mention of materials lists silver before gold, reversing the order of material holiness found in the biblical text. This biblical understanding is present not only in Exod 25 and

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[318] See, for example, Johann Maier, *The Temple Scroll: An Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (JSOTSup 34; Sheffield 1985), 6.

[319] Exod 25:3 and 35:6 use exactly the same phraseology that survives in line 2

35, but indeed, nowhere in a full biblical description of any Temple is silver listed before gold in an accounting of materials. As it would be difficult to make the case that silver was construed as more valuable or holy than gold at Qumran, it seems that that this section of text is not constrained literarily by the rules that constrain the biblical accounts.

The list of materials in col 3 is also remarkable for its inclusion of iron, which aligns it most closely with the biblical Temple account found in 2 Chronicles, the only biblical account to include iron. While the Temple Scroll lists iron in the same material order the Chronicler uses[320]; compared to other biblical Temple accounts the Chronicler's Temple account is itself quite informal. The chapter that lists iron (2 Chr 2) also lists the colors of fabric in two different orders, both of which deviate from the biblical norm: 2 Chr 2:6 (Heb) lists purple → crimson (using כרמיל instead of שני) → blue, while 2:14 lists purple → blue → crimson (also using כרמיל). In its listing of materials, col 3 is both inconsistent with what appears to be the biblical norm and, perhaps more importantly, internally inconsistent. It does not seem, then, to be appreciably rule-bound in its manner of listing materials.

Due to the brokenness of the extant text, it is unclear at precisely what point col 3 moves from a listing of materials to be collected to a description of objects to be constructed, though l 7 follows a list of materials with the phrase "in order to build," while l 8 uses the phrase "[furnishing] they shall make of [material]," suggesting this as a point of transition. The extent to which formality is present in the descriptions of objects will be assessed, for present purposes, by considering whether the text seems to account

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[320] Iron is listed between bronze and stone in col 3 l7. In 2 Chr 2:6, iron is listed as the last of the metals, immediately prior to the listing of fabrics, but stone is omitted from the list altogether. 2 Chr 2:13 lists "gold, silver, bronze, iron, precious stones, and wood" prior to textiles.

for furnishings by moving in an orderly, space-oriented way through the taberancle, or whether it moves more haphazardly.[321] Line 8 begins with vessels of pure gold, the כפרת, and something else of "pure gold" – the text lacks a clear referent here. If one assumes that pure gold is the most holy of materials, and that this most holy of materials is contained in the most holy area of the structure, then this section describes that Most Holy area. The text moves then into the Holy place, where it mentions incense and a table – both of which are in the biblical model of the Holy place of the biblical Temple/ tabernacle. The Temple Scroll also refers to a sprinkling bowl, perhaps the bowl for the drink offering mentioned in the tabernacle; in both Exodus and the Temple Scroll, the bowl is specified to be pure gold. The menorah is also mentioned, as one would expect based on the biblical Temple accounts. Col 3 then goes on to mention the altar for burnt-offerings and its gratings, and the word "bronze" is used several times in the following lines. Though the noun corresponding to that adjective has been lost, those familiar with the biblical Temple or tabernacle would expect the bronze עלה altar to be outside of the Holy area. Column 3, then, appears to move in a straightforward manner from the Most Holy area outward. What is unusual, then, is what follows.

Column 4 appears to start immediately outside the Temple, with a description of the stepped or storied structures that surround the Temple. These structures were part of same building; Lawrence Schiffman explains their presence at this point in the account by saying that "since they were entered from the outside they were not considered to be

[321] Theoretically, one would also want to look at the order in which information about each piece is given (e.g., measurements, materials, appearance and finishing details, means of transportation (rings), etc.). The Temple Scroll, however, is too broken to be assessed at this level of detail.

part of the actual Temple and are taken up first."[322] That is, Schiffman envisions that col 4 has started over again, this time describing the structure from the outside inward, and in doing so starting with the structure immediately outside the Temple proper. He goes on to argue that the very fragmented l 13-14 are speaking of the Most Holy area; he bases this judgment on both the dimensions given and the possible presence of a *pey* and a *bet*, which he reconstructs to read "overlaid with gold."[323]

In light of the pattern for temple construction accounts in the Bible and the ancient Near East, as discussed in the introduction and chapters one and two of this study, it is not surprising that the text moves the reader through the space first in one direction and then in the other. What is different in the case of the Temple Scroll is that the verb tenses do not change between those two accounts. That is, unlike Samsuiluna B and the tabernacle text, this text does not have a command section (using imperatives) and a construction section (using the perfect), but rather two command sections – one that moves from the inside out, and one that moves from the outside in. Furthermore, while col 5 apparently moves back to the portico, at least briefly (l 13, *parur*), and col 6 into the upper chambers, by col 7, the text is clearly describing the Most Holy area again. While there is some debate here about whether the descriptions of the boards fit the presumed measurements for this area,[324] the description of the פרכת and the cherubim make our general location fairly clear. This is the second time the פרכת has been described, and

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[322] Lawrence Schiffman, "The Construction of the Temple According to the Temple Scroll." *RevQ* 17 no 1-4 (1996), 557.

[323] Schiffman, "Construction," 566

[324] Ibid.

the third time we have been in the Most Holy area: beginning in col 3, the text moves from the Most Holy area to the courtyard, then from the portico to the Most Holy area, and then from the upper chambers and portico to the Most Holy area once again.

It is worth calling to mind again that the tabernacle text also guides the reader through the tabernacle a third (and, indeed, a fourth) time as the assembly and arrangement of furniture is described in Exod 40. In the case of the Temple Scroll, however, the rationale presented in Exod 40 for walking the reader through the space yet again – that is, to communicate the arrangement of furnishings relative to one another – is absent. Even in a text as broken as this one, it is clear that col 7 is rearticulating information about the construction of the furnishings (e.g., the positioning of the cherubim on either side of the כפרת in l 11-2) rather than talking about the positioning of items once they have been constructed. That said, the Temple Scroll, like the tabernacle text, allows the reader repeated access to each space in the tabernacle.

Based on the text in its present form, it seems that the Temple Scroll is less formal than the Exodus pericope: the order of materials is certainly less rule-bound, and while the movement through the space is not entirely haphazard and seems generally to follow the spatial layout in the first two "walk throughs," the third walk through breaks from the pattern by skipping from the Most Holy space (in col 5) back out to the portico and then upper chambers (in col 6) and then back to the Most Holy space (in col 7), after which it moves outward in an orderly fashion. To the extent that the relative presence or absence of formality alone can be an indicator of relative ritualization, I conclude that this text is less ritualized than the tabernacle pericope in Exodus. This is, of course,

despite its ritually focused topic, underscoring the fact that content pertaining to ritual does not necessarily imply ritualized literary form.

Given the considerably lower level of formality present in this text, is Johann Maier's suggestion that "for the compilers or redactors of the Temple Scroll the text-form seemed to be less important than the content"[325] valid? In other words, since this text diverges from what a rule-bound form might look like, is it reasonable to assume that the author was not interested in literary details? While it is certainly valid to observe the lack of formality – indeed, I have done so as well – it is also possible to observe not only what the literary form *does not* do but also to observe what the literary form *does*. Rather than assuming that disorientation of the reader would result merely in confusion and frustration (as it might for modern readers who are attempting to reconstruct the Temple being described), might this three-fold access to the Most Holy space be understood to grant special, repeated access to the most highly restricted area? Might the disorientation in some way set this text apart from ordinary reality, creating a dream-like reader experience? Is the repeated "walking through" of the space modeled in some way upon the tabernacle text, which also gives several accounts of each area – even though the tabernacle text offers a logical overlay for this (command for construction, construction, command for arrangement, arrangement), while neither the verb tenses nor the nature of the information in the Temple Scroll seem to change? If one assumes that the authors of The Temple Scroll were familiar with the tabernacle text, one might even speculate that the absence of such a logical overlay to make sense of the repetition in the Temple Scroll indicates that it was not this logical "plot" that was significant enough to replicate in the

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[325] Maier, *The Temple Scroll*, 4

new temple vision, but rather the repeated access to holy space. Indeed, the text lacks formality, but perhaps formality was not the ideal in this case. Or, to put aside the issue of authorial intent, the fact that this text does not offer a formal experience for a reader does not mean that it offers no experience at all.

Religious Studies

I hope that this study will be of use to scholars of religious experience, too, by suggesting a new approach that might yield fruit for their area of inquiry. This approach is wholly in keeping with the trajectory that ritual studies is already on, wherein the notion of a sharp distinction between action and thought is already being called into question. The present study simply moves further down this intellectual path, drawing yet closer the spheres of thought and action by considering the effects of imaginative action. Furthermore, by considering the texts that might inspire and guide such imaginative activity, this study suggests a type of text and a type of reading that fits naturally with the principles of ritual theory.

In chapter two of this study, I introduced the Buddhist practice of mandala construction as a living ritual that involves a performative aspect, an imaginative aspect, and a text that shares many of the unusual literary features of the tabernacle pericope. The texts that accompany mandala construction are often memorized by practitioners, and as such their existence frequently goes unrecognized by observers, but similarities between the literary features of these texts and literary features in the tabernacle text are profound: not only do both sets of instructions juxtapose great detail with lacunae, but they both do so at areas of juncture (e.g., corners) in the structure they are describing. In both cases, the details presented lend themselves well to a visualization exercise, but

create confusion when one tries physically construct to that which is described. Indeed, though ritualized mandala construction frequently involves the production of an object – sometimes with an audience – practitioners understand the mandala that is physically constructed not as the *true* mandala, but as a way of supporting the construction of the *real* mandala *in meditatio*.

In addition to gesturing, methodologically, toward the potential benefit of using living ritual practices as a lens through which to think about the biblical text, the example of the mandala suggests a new area of inquiry in religious studies: texts as a focal point for the study of religious experience. First, in addition to the observable performance, the texts that accompany mandala construction might also be studied with an eye toward the question of ritualization. Second, further study of the way in which practitioners of ritualized mandala construction interact with the oft ignored texts merits investigation. How is the text taught and learned? How frequently is the written text referred to – or does it exist largely in oral culture? How are the tabernacle and mandala texts similar to or different from other prescriptive texts from the ritual world, and are there any patterns in the perceived similarities and differences? For example, is there any consistent difference in relative ritualization between texts that are typically memorized and texts that are not? Are texts whose prescriptions were not intended primarily to be physically enacted more likely to be ritualized? Inquiries such as these have the potential to contribute to our understanding of the interaction between text, memory, and ritual performance, whether imaginative or actual.

As with all comparative study, the answers to these questions do not provide answers to questions about the historical use of the biblical text. They do, however,

broaden the pool of possibilities that scholars typically entertain. Seeing the ways in which a living religious community interacts with and derives religious meaning from a text that is literarily similar to the tabernacle text has the potential to push academic studies of the tabernacle in new directions.

Conclusion: Envisioning Religion

This study might also contribute to a broader conversation about the effects of *ekphrasis* in religious literature. Chapter four introduced the term *ekphrasis*, a verbal representation of a visual representation, and engaged some conversation within the field of art history – and, indeed, literary theory – about the effect of *ekphrasis* on the reader. Chief among these is the ability of *ekphrastic* texts to communicate about both a subject and an object: to describe an object while also connoting, outside the realm of discourse, messages about the significance of that object. Moving forward, an investigation of other texts that interrupt narrative with lengthy *ekphrasis* is in order. What, if anything, do these texts have in common? Is there a moment in the narrative trajectory that is commonly interrupted this way? Do other such embedded ekphrastic texts tend to encourage visual discovery on the part of the reader, as I have argued of this text in chapter three, or does the tabernacle text just happen to bring together this "performative" dimension and *ekphrasis*? What topics tend to be approached through ekphrasis? Surely, significant research is required to fully answer to this question, but two very well known examples of ekphrasis embedded in 19th century novels merit attention here: Henrik Ibsen's *When We Awaken the Dead* and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*. The former refers to a sculpture called "Resurrection Day," and the latter describes the painting "The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb," by Hans Holbein. That is, both of these well-

known examples use *ekphrasis* to introduce complex religious topics, underscoring a connection between envisioning and religious understanding or contemplation.

The fact that the tabernacle text encourages its readers to envision the structure it describes begins a very different conversation in religious studies, as well: a conversation with religious philosopher and self-proclaimed atheist Iris Murdoch. Murdoch, also introduced in chapter four, makes a case for a two-fold path to religious transcendence. First, she argues that a particular realm of the visual sphere – beauty – is the ultimate portal to religious transformation because it offers a means to escape the well-trod path of one's daily, mundane thoughts and existence. The second path Murdoch advocates is, quite simply, work. By both appealing to the sense of vision and requiring the reader to do the work of envisioning, the tabernacle text guides the reader down both of Murdoch's paths simultaneously. Furthermore, the fact that the tabernacle, this ornate and beautiful thing, is quite directly linked to a particular notion of God and religious community calls upon the reader to associate the transformative experience Murdoch described with the values of that particular set of religious beliefs and practices. The tabernacle text is masterful in creating in the reader an association between transcendence (through beauty and through work) and the cult.

The connection between the experience of transcendence and that of reading scripture is one that I believe Murdoch would not have seen for the very same reasons that many ritual theorists and many Jewish and Christian readers do not see it. That is, it is easy to read the tabernacle text and focus only on the information it presents about the cult it portrays: to respond to the text not as literature, but as some ultimate statement of *authority*, and thus to spend one's effort either trying to understand this authoritative

word, or, if one does not accept this source of authority, simply to recoil from it. It seems to me, however, that the tabernacle text offers precisely the path to transcendence that Murdoch recommends when it is considered to be evocative of an experience for the reader. Consideration of this text as a source of religious experience, particularly one that is not based on the contemplation of *ideas* that must ultimately cohere, but rather one that inspires a complex sensory response and suggests several messages at once, offers a bridge between both the motivating questions and the methodological approaches of Biblical and Religious Studies in a way that, I hope, pushes forward the boundaries of both fields.

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