

The Song of the Sea and Isaiah: Exodus 15 in Post-monarchic Prophetic Discourse¹

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Yahweh's victory over Pharaoh at the Reed Sea (יַם סוּף), Israel's crossing of the Sea, and Yahweh's bringing the people through the wilderness and into the promised land were, without a doubt, monumental memory sites in the socio-mental landscape of ancient Judah. Throughout the texts that eventually became the Hebrew Bible, memories of the exodus—its wonders and its catastrophes—resound (e.g., Josh 24:5–10; Ps 106; Neh 9:9–21; just to cite a few). It was an overarching (perhaps *the* overarching) framework within which Judean social memory operated.² The exodus from Egypt is the defining moment in Israel's coming

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- 1 After presenting a draft of this essay at the "Thinking of Water" workshop at the University of Alberta in May 2012, I also presented it at the 2012 Canadian Society of Biblical Studies Annual Meeting in Waterloo, Ontario. Many thanks to all who offered comments and critiques at both conferences.
 - 2 Thinking in terms of metanarrative, one of course finds clear interconnections between the exodus and the other major framing event in Judean socio-mnemonic discourse, the exile: the people are cleansed in the wilderness and led back to their homeland, where Yahweh (re)plants the people and (re)establishes his presence in his holy abode. With regard to the literature's historical development, the Babylonian conquest of Judah, destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, and subsequent deportations were probably the most influential agents in forming this metanarrative in Judah's textual corpus. For helpful diachronic discussions of biblical literature, see David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Konrad Schmid, *The Old Testament: A Literary History* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), trans. of *Literaturgeschichte des Alten Testaments* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008). However, in the presentation of Israel's/Judah's story within the Judean corpus of literature, the exodus comes first, and so it *had* to function as the primary framing event in Judean socio-mnemonic discourse. Judean scribes may have imagined the exodus in ways that recalled the exile, but the exodus was (and had to be) primary in their narrational memories. Hence one may speak of the return from exile as a "second exodus" but not the exodus as a "second return from exile." For more on the exile in biblical literature, see, e.g., Robert P. Carroll, "Exile, Restoration, and Colony: Judah in the Persian Empire," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible* (ed. L. G. Perdue; Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 102–16; Adele Berlin, "The Exile: Biblical Ideology and Its Postmodern Ideological Interpretation," in *Literary Constructions of Identity in the Ancient World* (ed. H. Liss and M. Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns,

of age story, and its key human character, Moses, is Israel's lawgiver and preeminent prophet (cf. Deut 34). Not surprisingly, allusions to the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1–21), which commemorates the divine victory over Pharaoh (vv. 1–12, 18, 21) and remembers things to come (vv. 13–17), crop up repeatedly in Judean historiographical discourse—i.e., written discourse concerning Judah's past, present, and future—especially in prophetic books and in Psalms (e.g., Isa 11:15–12:2; Pss 77:12–21).³

In this essay, I explore the Song's role in socio-cultural discourse and memory formation⁴ amongst literati in the late Persian/early Hel-

2010), 341–56; and the essays in Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin, eds., *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and its Historical Contexts* (BZAW 404; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010).

- 3 N.B. I use the phrase “historiographical discourse” in a functional sense, not formal. In other words, Psalm 77, for example, is “historiographical” because it tells us something about how Judeans thought about their past via written discourse. In this case, readers of Psalm 77 would reflect on their present dire situation by remembering Yahweh's past miraculous deeds, specifically how the deity safely brought Israel through the Sea, the mighty waters. To be sure, one still has to deal with generic differences between a poetical text like Psalm 77 and an historiographical narrative like 1–2 Samuel, for instance, but either type of text can function historiographically within socio-cultural discourse.
- 4 I acknowledge that “memory” is a slippery signifier in the present-day academy. Cf. Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *The American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1386–1403 (1388); see also the critique of Kerwin Lee Klein, “On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse,” *Representations* 69 (2000): 127–50. First of all, memory is a cognitive function of the individual human brain. See, e.g., Pascal Boyer, “What Are Memories For? Functions of Recall in Cognition and Culture,” in *Memory in Mind and Culture* (ed. Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3–32; also Francis Landy, “Notes Towards a Poetics of Memory in Ancient Israel,” in *Remembering and Forgetting in Early Second Temple Judah* (ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin; FAT 85; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) 331–45. As I understand it, social memory is a systemic and symbolic *process* by which a community collectively experiences its present and imagines its future in terms of its past. (Of course, individual memory is systemic and symbolic as well.) Within a given social context, this process is intertwined with the construction of social identity, with the employment of the community's shared narratives. See, e.g., James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 87–91 and passim; and the essays in Louis Jonker, ed., *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature: Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Hebrew Bible and Related Texts* (FAT 2/53; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). Among other works that have influenced my thinking on social memory are Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), esp. 3–30, and passim (Geertz does not speak to memory per se, but his work is foundational for understanding systemic socio-cultural symbols); Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24; Barry Schwartz, “Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II,” *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 908–27; idem, “Frame Images: Towards a Semiotics of Collective Memory,”

lenistic period in Judah, roughly the fourth century BCE, a crucial period for the formation of Judean “books” that eventually made their way into the Hebrew Bible.⁵ I hope to work towards a better understanding of how the Song and its tropes functioned in their literary and socio-cultural milieu(x) at this time. The genesis of social memory, that which bridges the gap between individual and collective mnemonic processes, is a shared or public “site of memory” (*lieu de mémoire*)—viz., anything that carries a “symbolic aura,” whether material or non-material in nature, which is widely circulated or experienced within a given community.⁶ One must consider social memory, then, within the “sym-

Semiotica 121 (1998): 1–40; Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

- 5 Historically, I refer to the fourth century, viz., to the close of the Persian period and overlapping advent of Hellenism, because at this time many of the books we know from the Hebrew Bible became extant in their *essentially* final forms amongst the literati of Judah. For discussion of the evidence, see Lester L. Grabbe, “Jewish Historiography and Scripture in the Hellenistic Period,” in *Did Moses Speak Attic? Jewish Historiography and Scripture in the Hellenistic Period* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; JSOTSup 317; ESHM 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 129–55. See also Carr, *Formation*, 221–24, who argues that the pentateuchal books and “prophetic” books (i.e., Joshua–2 Kings as well as Isaiah–Malachi) emerged as authoritative collections amongst literati in the Persian period, with the pentateuchal books (i.e., the emergent “Torah”) being the primary authoritative collection. Cf. Thomas Römer, “How Many Books (*teuchs*): Pentateuch, Hexateuch, Deuteronomistic History, or Enneateuch?” in *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch? Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings* (ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Thomas Römer, and Konrad Schmid; SBLAIL 8; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 25–42 (esp. 37–39). Hence, taking into account important text-critical issues (e.g., Jeremiah), one may use these books as sources for the discourses of the fourth-century milieu. Cf. Ehud Ben Zvi, “The Urban Center of Jerusalem and the Development of the Literature of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Aspects of Urbanism in Antiquity: From Mesopotamia to Crete* (ed. Walter G. Aufrecht, Neil A. Mirau, and Steven W. Gauley; JSOTSup 244; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 194–209; idem, “What is New in Yehud? Some Considerations,” in *Yahwism after the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era* (ed. Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking; STAR 5; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003), 32–48; and see Jon L. Berquist’s recent comments on deuteronomistic literature, “Historiographic Questions for the Deuteronomistic History in the Persian Period,” in *Historiography and Identity (Re)Formulation in Second Temple Historiographical Literature* (ed. Louis Jonker; LHBOTS 534; New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 3–13. Of course, Judean scribes probably restructured and/or expanded some of these texts in the third century (see Carr, *Formation*, 180–203; cf. Schmid, *Old Testament*, 183–209), but, for the most part, the pentateuchal, historical, and prophetic books are scribal products of the fourth-century milieu, i.e., the late Persian/early Hellenistic period. On the archaeology and history of Judah in the fourth century, see, e.g., the essays in *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century BCE* (ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Rainer Albertz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007); also Alexander Fantalkin and Oren Tal, “The Canonization of the Pentateuch: When and Why? (Part I),” *ZAW* 124 (2012): 1–18.
- 6 Cf. Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 13–14.

bolic universe available to the society,"⁷ within the socio-cultural matrix that informs and guides group identity and experience. For the literate community in fourth-century Jerusalem working in and around the temple, written texts were an integral part of this symbolic matrix, just as important as physical space and public ritual, for example, and other social memory sites. Thus, the interconnections between textual memory sites, the discursive "webs of significance"⁸ created within the textual universe, open a gateway into the mnemonic world of the texts' fourth-century literate tradents.⁹

That said, because references to the exodus, to the Sea crossing, and employment of the exodus motif are pervasive in the Hebrew Bible's books, I have limited my study to two major questions: (1) How did the Song's narrative, its story of Yahweh's victory at the Sea and how he guides his people to a holy place, function discursively in fourth-century Judah? And (2) how does discourse in the prophetic book of Isaiah pick up and employ elements of the Song? In other words, how did the Song's narrative work as a major site of memory in ancient Judah, and how does this narrative site operate within Isaianic prophetic discourse? I hope to show that the Song, within its narrative setting in the book of Exodus, has an inherent interest in geographical, temporal, and redemptive liminality. This interest in liminality is evident in passages of Isaianic discourse that explicitly and implicitly refer to the Song and its tropes.¹⁰

7 Confino, "Collective Memory," 1391.

8 Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 5. Cf. *ibid.*, 89 and *passim*.

9 Cf. Jan Assmann's comments on discourse and textuality in *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 15–17, though, unlike Assmann, I am not concerned in this essay with the diachronic development of discourse over time, the "mnemohistory" of discourse. See also Renate Lachmann, "Mnemonic and Intertextual Aspects of Literature," in *Cultural Memory Studies* (ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning; Media and Cultural Memory 8; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 301–10.

10 For a quite different look at the relationship between Exodus 15 and Isaiah, see George Wesley Buchanan, "Isaianic Midrash and the Exodus," in *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition* (ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders; JSNTSup 154; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 89–109.

1. Yahweh, Israel, and the Sea

Much has been said about the Song of the Sea.¹¹ Throughout the previous century, scholarship on the Song has revolved around questions of date, of literary and tradition history, as well as issues related to the Song's poetical and linguistic features. Some argue that the Song, with its West Semitic mythical patterns and apparently archaic poetical grammar, is a product of great antiquity, perhaps even from pre-monarchic days.¹² Others argue the opposite, that it is a late, post-monarchic composition.¹³ And of course there are those who find a middle ground.¹⁴ Some scholars, taking a different route, have focused primarily on the Song's placement in the book of Exodus and its rela-

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- 11 In addition to the standard commentaries on Exodus, see the monographs of Martin L. Brenner, *The Song of the Sea: Ex 15:1–21* (BZAW 195; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991); and Brian D. Russell, *The Song of the Sea: The Date of Composition and Influence of Exodus 15:1–21* (Studies in Biblical Literature 101; New York: Peter Lang, 2007); which contain discussions of previous scholarship.
- 12 E.g., Mark Leuchter, "Eisodus as Exodus: The Song of the Sea (Exod 15) Reconsidered," *Bib* 92 (2011): 321–46, who relies on the influential work of Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 112–44. Cf. also the work of Cross and his colleague David Noel Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997 [originally a Johns Hopkins doctoral dissertation submitted in 1950]), 31–45; also Freedman, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 132–46, 179–227, and *passim*. For discussion and critique of Albrightean ideas of early Hebrew poetry, see Yigal Bloch, "The Prefixed Perfective and the Dating of Early Hebrew Poetry—A Re-Evaluation," *VT* 59 (2009): 34–70. On the related issue of verbal aspect in the Song, see Robert Shreckhise, "The Problem of Finite Verb Translation in Exodus 15:1–18," *JOT* 32 (2008): 287–310.
- 13 E.g., Brenner, *Song of the Sea*, 19, 175–77; Schmid, *Old Testament*, 82–83; cf. *idem*, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (trans. James D. Nogalski; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 221–24, trans. of *Erzähler und Exodus: Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments* (WMANT 81; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999). Schmid places the foundations of the exodus story in the Neo-Assyrian period, but he argues that the Song is a late addition to this story because, in his reading, Exodus 15 presupposes elements of the priestly document, Second Isaiah, and the Psalter. However, in line with Martin Noth (*Exodus: A Commentary* [trans. J. S. Bowden; OTL; London: SCM, 1962], 120–26), Schmid holds on to the possibility that v. 21b, Miriam's refrain, "represents more ancient traditional material on which the composition of Exodus 15 was based" (*Old Testament*, 83).
- 14 E.g., Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Song of the Sea and Salvation History," in *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes* (ed. Stephen L. Cook and S. C. Winter; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 94–113, who submits that vv. 1–12 and 18 constitute a monarchic-era victory hymn, and that deuteronomistic scribes refashioned the hymn by adding vv. 13–17, probably in the post-monarchic period.

relationship with what precedes and follows in the larger narrative context—thus setting aside extended discussions of date, tradition history, etc., or presuming particular, established positions on these issues.¹⁵ My interests in this essay are closely aligned with the latter approach; regarding the text's history, I am sympathetic to those who argue for an early date for its origin,¹⁶ but my main concern is with the socio-mnemonic role of the text in the fourth century BCE and later, the time when Judean scribes in Jerusalem began to codify their literature into substantial collections of texts that eventually became what we know as the Hebrew Bible. With the advent and essential finalization of the pentateuchal books, deuteronomistic literature, prophetic books, Chronicles, etc. in temple-centered Jerusalem, there existed an extensive historiographical discourse that Judean scribes read and consulted time and again, impacting and shaping the literate community's social memory. As already stated, the exodus event and its celebratory exultation in Exodus 15 were central loci in this mnemonic landscape in late Persian/early Hellenistic-period Judah.

So what exactly does the Song say? What kind of story does it tell within this context? The text begins with the Song's *raison d'être*. It is a song with a particularly historical consciousness; it is grounded within and evocative of the monumental story that surrounds it. The opening word in Exod 15:1 (יָאֵן "Then ...") links the text with the dramatic narrative that precedes in ch. 14. The Song formally begins with a proclamation that recalls and highlights the events previously narrated, embedding the Song within this particular mnemonic milieu, inviting its

15 E.g., James W. Watts, *Psalms and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative* (JSOTSup 139; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 41–62; Georg Fischer, "Das Schilfmeerlied Exodus 15 in seinem Kontext," *Bib* 77 (1996): 32–47; David Noel Freedman, "Moses and Miriam: The Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1–18, 21)," in *Realia Dei: Essays in Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Edward F. Campbell* (ed. Prescott H. Williams Jr. and Theodore Hiebert; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 67–83; Mark S. Smith, "The Poetics of Exodus 15 and Its Position in the Book," in *Imagery and Imagination in Biblical Literature: Essays in Honor of Aloysius Fitzgerald, F.S.C.* (ed. Lawrence Boadt and Mark S. Smith; CBQMS 32; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 2001), 23–34.

16 I am inclined to agree with many of Cross's observations regarding the antiquity of the Song (see *Canaanite Myth*, esp. 121–25). I disagree, though, with Cross's notion of objective prosodic analysis (see *Canaanite Myth*, 121); and Bloch, "Prefixed Perfective," 66–67, shows that the so-called *yqtl* forms are extant outside Cross and Freedman's corpus of ancient poetry (*pace* Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, 20; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 125). Evidence in Exodus 15 nonetheless suggests that at least vv. 1–12, 18, 21 could stem from a monarchic-era composition (cf. Dozeman, "Song of the Sea," 94–113).

readers/singers to imagine themselves praising Yahweh on the shore of the Sea:

אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה הזאת ליהוה ויאמרו לאמר
אשירה ליהוה כי גאה גאה סוס ורכבו רמה בים

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to Yahweh, and they said:
“I will sing to Yahweh, for he is highly exalted; horse and its rider he has cast into the Sea.”

The next eleven verses then remember this fantastic victory over Pharaoh and his chariots, moving from introductory praise and identification of the divine (vv. 2–3) to more specific recollections of the divine action and might (vv. 4–12). In v. 13 the focus shifts to the ongoing journey of the deity’s newly redeemed people (עַמּוֹתָי), how he leads them past the terrified inhabitants of Canaan (vv. 13–16a), bringing them to and planting them in the holy dwelling that he has prepared (vv. 16b–17).¹⁷ The Song, minus the brief refrain in v. 21, concludes in v. 18 with a proclamation of Yahweh’s eternal reign.

In its praise and memorialization of the divine, the Song employs and reinforces a number of common tropes: for example, Yahweh as warrior (v. 3; cf. Deut 20:4; 1 Sam 17:47; etc.); the powerful hand/arm of the deity (יָד/זְרוֹעַ/יָמִין) (vv. 6, 12, 16, 17; cf. Isa 62:8; Pss 98:1; 118:15–16; etc.);¹⁸ the enemy paralyzed with fear (vv. 14–16a; cf. Josh 2:9; 5:1; etc.); Yahweh as chief deity (v. 11; cf. Deut 32:8 [LXX]; Pss 29:1; 89:6–8; etc.); and Yahweh as king (v. 18; cf. Judg 8:23; 1 Sam 8:7; Pss 29:10; 93:1; etc.), to cite a few of the more prominent themes in the text.¹⁹ The employment of these tropes is reminiscent of celebratory hymns, e.g., Pss 96–99, which extol the might and kingship of Yahweh, and which celebrate the deity’s devotion to his chosen people.²⁰ However, unlike the hymnic psalms, the Song of the Sea is set within the exodus story itself, the moment of divine redemption for Israel. It is embedded within its own narrational memory. It is the celebratory act that immediately follows Yahweh’s miraculous deliverance of the people at the Sea, and thus it is

17 There is general scholarly consensus regarding the division between vv. 1–12 and 13–18; cf. Smith, “Poetics of Exodus 15,” 26–27, and literature cited there.

18 In Exod 14 there is a pronounced emphasis upon Moses’ hand/arm (יָד) (cf. 14:16, 21, 26, 27), but the Song mentions only Yahweh’s hand/arm (יָד/זְרוֹעַ/יָמִין). In fact, although Moses helps initiate the Song in v. 1, he is present nowhere in the Song itself.

19 See Russell, *Song of the Sea*, passim, for extensive discussions of the various tropes in the Song.

20 Cf. Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 249–53.

the first hymn in the presentation of Israel's story.²¹ The Song, therefore, within Judean memory, functions as the prototypical moment of communal awe and wonder to which all subsequent hymns of Yahweh's divine, redemptive power symbolically refer, whether consciously or unconsciously. One can say the same regarding the Song's relationship with laments like Ps 77, which contrast a present moment of grief or distress with the past moment of divine and national glory at the Sea.²² From a socio-mnemonic perspective, the Song stands as a conspicuous landmark of Judah's salvific relationship with Yahweh. It memorializes the exodus as the primary redemptive event in Israel's past, but it is also an integral part of that past moment, an event in and of itself, which occurs just after the Sea-crossing.

Thus, in considering the Song as a site of memory in fourth-century Judah, one cannot separate it from its narrative context. It is undeniably connected to the story that precedes it.²³ Likewise, it is connected to the stories that follow it. This is especially evident in the details of vv. 13–17, which go beyond what the reader/singer experientially knows at this point in the redemptive story. These verses allude to the arrival of the people in the promised land, to a holy place, a sacred mountain established and possessed by Yahweh, clearly hinting at things to come in the Israelites' journey.

It is here, in the latter part of the Song, that the problematic issue of Hebrew verbal aspect arises. Throughout the Song, there is a curious blend of finite verbal forms. Upon first reading, one finds nothing particularly odd in vv. 1–4: the *yiqtol* forms seem to indicate incomplete, continuous, or future action, while the *qatal* forms indicate completed or past action. For example, v. 1b reads, "Let me/I will sing [*yiqtol* cohortative] to Yahweh, for he is highly exalted [*qatal* stative]; horse and its rider he has cast [*qatal*] into the Sea." In v. 5, however, the expected pattern is disrupted: *תהמת יכסימו ירדו במצולת כמר־אבן* "The deep waters covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone." The verb in v. 5a is a prefixed form (*יכסימו*), and yet its context obviously suggests that it is meant to depict a completed action in the past (cf. vv. 4, 5b). This problem persists in vv. 6–8, as prefixed forms repeatedly seem to indi-

21 Cf. Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 221–22; idem, *Old Testament*, 82–83.

22 See Susan Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition and Israelite Psalmody," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999): 19–46.

23 Cf. Watts, *Psalms and Story*, 45–51, who shows that the semantic and thematic parallels between Exodus 14 and 15 are abundant, even if the plot of the Song seems to be at odds with what precedes; also Fischer, "Das Schilfmeerlied," 37–40. Pace Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 131–32, who overemphasizes that the Song lacks references to the splitting of waters or to the Israelites' crossing on dry ground.

cate completed actions. Observing this grammatical phenomenon in a number of supposedly ancient Hebrew poems, including the Song, and comparing the grammar of these texts to that of Ugaritic poetry, Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman made their influential suggestion that, in these instances, “[t]he *yqtl* form is vari-temporal in usage, expressing past time as well as future time; it often appears (without the conjunction) in consecutive sequence with *qtl* forms, with a past meaning.”²⁴ Drawing from Ugaritic analogies, Cross and Freedman argued that the aspect of the prefixed forms in these ancient poems depends upon the verbal context—in v. 5, for example, one can easily see that *יכִסִּימוּ* is meant to be a completed action in the past (cf. v. 12b), and in v. 9 the words of the enemy are meant to be unfulfilled desires, what the enemy had wanted to do to the Israelites. However, in the Song, one arrives at a *crux interpretum* in vv. 13–17. The verbal sequence in this latter part of the text looks like what one encounters in vv. 5–12, that is, a blend of *qatal* and *yiqtol* forms indicating completed actions in the past (e.g., v. 14a, *שמעו עמים ירגזון* “Peoples heard, they trembled”). Indeed, in their initial study of the Song, Cross and Freedman translated vv. 13–17 in past time.²⁵ But how then is one to understand the Song within its narrative context? Should one imagine that, having crossed the Reed Sea, the people have now entered Yahweh’s holy resting place (*נה קדש*, v. 13), his very own mountain (*הר נחלה*, v. 17)?²⁶

The problem of verbal aspect, then, effects geographical and temporal ambiguities in the Song and its narrative setting. Of course, scholars have proposed various solutions to these difficulties.²⁷ For example, Freedman, throughout his career, maintained that the verbal forms in vv. 13–17 represent completed action, and therefore he had to posit that the Song’s setting is not the Reed Sea. In a 1999 article he writes that the Song includes a description of

the march through the wilderness and the climactic meeting between the people and their God at the holy mountain (vv. 13–17). ... Thus the poem places itself and its performance at Sinai rather than at the sea. According to its own chronology, the poem belongs to the Sinai setting, to which Moses and his followers came only some time after the victory at the sea.²⁸

24 Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, 20.

25 See *ibid.*, 37–38.

26 Cf. the concerns of Childs, *Exodus*, 242.

27 See, e.g., Shreckhise, “Finite Verb Translation,” 287–310.

28 Freedman, “Moses and Miriam,” 71–72; cf. Smith, “Poetics of Exodus 15,” 30–33.

Freedman, however, is left with the issue of narrative setting. If the Song was sung later, at Sinai, then why does one encounter it at this juncture in the story? He submits that “the editor ... ought to have put the poem at a different, later point in the narrative (after 19:2),” but this editor preferred “dramatic power and effect over chronological correctness.”²⁹ For my own part, I am not sure why or if the Song would lose any of its dramatic power in another context. Placing Freedman’s suggestion aside, if one takes the opposite approach and reads the verbs of vv. 13–17 as incomplete, future actions that foreshadow the imminent stop at Sinai and/or the eventual entrance into the promised land, then one is left with the original problem of shifting verbal aspect. That is, if vv. 13–17 are meant to depict future events, then why does this section seem to continue the odd verbal pattern of vv. 5–12? William Propp comments:

What makes reading the Song of the Sea so challenging is that, just as stanzas interpenetrate, so time blurs; events become metaphors for one another. In 15:16, what do the people cross: the Sea, the desert, a river, Canaan? All are possible, and all may be intended. And the goal of Israel’s journey is equally unclear. Throughout the Song, mixed metaphors and ambivalent language provoke multiple interpretations. In such a case, underreading may be more dangerous than overreading.³⁰

The Song’s sense of geographical place and its emplotment in the ongoing exodus narrative are obscured. The ambivalence of the Song’s grammatical aspect causes its lyrics to wander, as it were, between mighty waters and holy mountain, between present enemies and future ones, between crossing over the Sea and crossing into the promised land.

Clearly, the Song’s polyvalent sense of place and time contributed to its saliency as a site of memory in fourth-century Judah, as temple-based Jerusalemite literati maintained and read through their literary repertoire. The prominent symbols and themes in the Song—Yahweh’s awesome might, his conquering of foreign foes, his mastery of creation, wind and water, the redemption of his people and his leading them to a holy place, his eternal reign—are both timely and timeless. The striking images in the Song combined with the geographical and temporal fuzziness within its narrative setting make the Song easily translatable from one socio-cultural milieu to another. This is the stuff of which the best

29 Freedman, “Moses and Miriam,” 72.

30 William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18* (AB 2; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 507.

social memories are made, mnemonic sites that a community can visit over and over, that it can easily pass on from generation to generation.

However, although the Song itself evinces geographical and temporal slippage, its events and its acts of divine redemption are anchored in the Sea. Yahweh's victory over Pharaoh obviously takes place at the Sea, and the people's journey to the deity's mountain—whether past, ongoing, or future—begins at the Sea. The readers'/singers' sense of place may wander from Sea to mountain and back again, but within the Song's narrative Yahweh initiates his actions at the waters of the Sea. At the Reed Sea, Yahweh completes his delivery of Israel: the people are redeemed (לָדָא, v. 13); they are acquired, (re)created (הִקְנֶה, v. 16). My use of the word "delivery" here is an intentional pun. The Israelites are not only dramatically delivered from the hardships of Egyptian bondage and slavery; as they emerge from the Sea they are also metaphorically birthed, delivered as a new nation. Like Moses being drawn from the water to begin a new life, the Israelites pass through the Sea into new life, into an intimate relationship with Yahweh, who will guide them to his resting place. In the Song, then, Yahweh functions literally as the delivering warrior, crushing Pharaoh and his army with the powerful Sea, but he acts symbolically, too, as mother or midwife to Israel, giving birth to a new nation.³¹

The waters of the Sea—the place of divine victory and birth (i.e., creation), and the anchoring point for the Song's narrative—function as a central symbol in the Song. Scholars have often noted and discussed the interplay between Yahweh's victory at the Sea and the ancient Near Eastern Chaoskampf trope, the primordial battle between storm god and sea, the latter often portrayed as monstrous or serpentine (e.g., elements of the Baal Cycle and Enuma Elish; cf. Isa 27:1; Ps 29; etc.).³² Yet here in the Song, as in Genesis 1, there is no battle between Yahweh and the waters. To the contrary, in the Song, Yahweh has complete and utter control over the Sea; it submits to the deity's will, functioning as

31 Cf. Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 27–31, who calls the Song "the Song of the Birth of the Nation" (*ibid.*, 29). In addition to Moses and Israel miraculously emerging from water, one thinks of Jonah, who is cast into the sea where the deep (תְּהוֹמֹת) surrounds him, only to be reborn, so to speak, when he emerges from the belly of the great fish onto dry land (Jon 1:15–2:11). See, e.g., Ehud Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud* (JSOTSup 367; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 137–43, who discusses the metanarrative of death and rebirth in Jonah 1–2 and its appropriation by various communities.

32 For discussion and bibliography, see, e.g., Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 112–44; Dozeman, "Song of the Sea," 101–4; Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 554–59; also F. Stolz, "Sea יָם," in *DDD*, 737–42.

an inanimate tool in his victorious and creative act, not an imposing force with which to fight for supremacy (cf. v. 8).³³ Certainly, elements of the *Chaoskampf* are present in texts of the Hebrew Bible (see more below), and there are some hints of it in the Song, especially in Yahweh's cosmogonical birthing of Israel out of the waters.³⁴ But in the Song, the Sea is simply a passive object in the creative act.³⁵ Here the Sea signifies the place of creation, the mythological origin of new life.

From the Sea, the place of victorious birth, the deity leads his redeemed people to a place of rest, planting them on his mountain (vv. 13, 17).³⁶ Again the reader/singer encounters a highly symbolic site(s) with a complex network of mnemonic associations. The text's aforementioned geographical and temporal ambiguity has inspired a plethora of suggestions with regards to the identity of this locale(s).³⁷ Perhaps, within the book of Exodus, the most obvious immediate referent is Sinai and its vicinity, as Freedman and others have argued.³⁸ Yahweh conquers the enemy, giving Israel new life. Then he brings them through the wilderness to the foot of the holy mountain, to the threshold of his abode, where the redeemed Israel is to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש) (Exod 19:5-6). Thus, the Song, to some extent, memorializes the entire journey from Egypt to Sinai, the crossing of Sea and desert to the deity's place of inhabitation.

33 Cf. J. Richard Middleton, "Created in the Image of a Violent God? The Ethical Problem of the Conquest of Chaos in Biblical Creation Texts," *Int* 58 (2004): 341-55 (343).

34 Cf. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 558-59.

35 Moreover, the Song, again like Genesis 1, lacks a genuinely *cosmic* enemy. The victory over Pharaoh and his army, rather than bringing to mind the trope of *Chaoskampf*, makes one think of the divine warrior who fights earthly battles for his/her chosen human regent (e.g., Assur warring for Sennacherib or Ishtar for Assurbanipal). However, here in the Song, Yahweh is warrior deity *and* king, fighting for his chosen people and bringing them peace. Hence the the terror and paralysis of Canaan's inhabitants.

36 Just as the precise location of these geographical descriptions is ambiguous, so is the relationship between the various descriptions in vv. 13 and 17. E.g., are the resting place (נוה, v. 13) and the mountain (הר, v. 17) one and the same, or do they refer to separate and distinct loci? Are they within the same vicinity, or are they distant stops on the people's journey? Perhaps the ambiguity is intentional; cf. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 569.

37 For surveys and discussion, see Smith, "Poetics of Exodus 15," 30-31; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 562-71; and Russell, *Song of the Sea*, 80-96.

38 E.g., Freedman, "Moses and Miriam," 71-72; Smith, "Poetics of Exodus 15," 30-33; Russell, *Song of the Sea*, 95-96.

Fourth-century Jerusalemite literati singing/reading the Song, therefore, could easily imagine this specific, epic event from Israel's distant past, the formative and foundational moment in the people's long lasting relationship with Yahweh, when the deity officially identified them as his specially chosen group. As discussed above, the Song is immersed in its narratival, historiographical context. At the same time, however, the Song would engender present and future images of Israel's story. In other words, it draws from and contributes to its narratival setting in Exodus, affecting understandings of that particular narrative, but it also transcends this setting, entering into metanarratival discourse. This is where social memory comes to the fore, the cultural framing of the community's present and future in terms and images of its past. In the minds of Judean tradents of the text, Yahweh's resting place, his mountain and sanctuary, would signify at once Sinai, Jerusalem, Zion, and indeed the entire promised land.³⁹ The obscure and polyvalent geographical locale(s), to which Yahweh brings his people in the Song, oscillates between the people's journey from Egypt long ago, their return from Babylon in recent memory, and their future role as the centerpiece and focal point of Yahweh's worldwide dominion. The literal, metaphorical, and temporal distance between Sinai and Zion thus blurs.⁴⁰ In addition to its obvious place in the exodus story, its memory and representation of this seminal event, the Song—with its movement from Sea to mountain, passing through waters of birth into the holy abode—had present and future significance for the community in fourth-century Judah. It memorialized the current (re)establishment of Israel and the temple in Jerusalem; it memorialized, too, Zion's future rise to universal prominence, when all the nations of Yahweh's possession would stream to the deity's holy mountain to receive his instruction (Isa 2:1–4; Mic 4:1–5).

39 If one accepts that the *primary* social location of Judean literati in the fourth century BCE—those codifying and reading Judean collections of literature—was the Jerusalem temple, as I do here, then potential symbolic associations with Gilgal, Shiloh, or the northern kingdom of Israel would be minimal, secondary at best. In my opinion, mnemonic connections with Sinai and Jerusalem/Zion would have occupied most (if not all) of the social memory working in and around the Song.

40 Cf. Smith, "Poetics of Exodus 15," 33, who builds on Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985), 188. See also Levenson's full discussion of the many links between the two holy mountains, *Sinai and Zion*, 187–217.

2. Isaiah, Israel, and the Sea

Having addressed the Song itself, I now move on to the second major line of inquiry in this essay: how did the Song and its tropes function in post-monarchic Judean prophetic discourse? Or more precisely, how does Isaianic discourse employ the Song and its story, its memory, its memorializations? Isaianic discourse is multifaceted and complex, not easily identified with or contained within particular historical timeframes or communities.⁴¹ Ostensibly and superficially, the content of Isaiah, the book, is set in the Neo-Assyrian period, towards the end of Judah's monarchic history, as its opening lines state (cf. Isa 1:1). However, to appropriate the thoughts of the late Robert Carroll, the book appears to be a "palimpsest of multiple discourses," a dialectical and helical text, moving back and forth between various times, places, and communal and individual concerns.⁴² The lengthy and complex text thus operates as a polyvalent site of convergence for social memory; it contains and perpetuates memory on its own, as a distinct book, but it also exchanges ideas with other prophetic texts and with the larger corpus of Judean literature. To be sure, this is true for any book within the Judean collections. Prophetic books, however, present perhaps the most intriguing avenue for exploring social memory along these lines, because of their poetical, often ambiguous and obscure language, and because of their pronounced interest in historiographical concerns, i.e., their fascination with (re)writing things past, present, and future in Judah's/Israel's story.

As I mentioned earlier, references and parallels to the Song, the crossing of the Sea, and the exodus story in general are ubiquitous in the Hebrew Bible as a whole, and the same holds true for the individual book of Isaiah, especially if one considers the interwoven and related motifs of exile. Rather than offering a comprehensive analysis of the

41 Of course, here I refer to the *book* of Isaiah, which probably emerged as a product of the late Persian/early Hellenistic period. Among the innumerable scholarly works on the formation of the book, see the introductory discussion in Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39* (AB 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000), esp. 83–92.

42 Cf. his thoughts on the "city" in the book of Isaiah, in Robert P. Carroll, "City of Chaos, City of Stone, City of Flesh: Urbanscapes in Prophetic Discourses," in *Every City shall be Forsaken: Urbanism and Prophecy in Ancient Israel and the Near East* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak; JSOTSup 330; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 45–61 (esp. 48). See also Francis Landy's introductory thoughts in his "Exile in the Book of Isaiah," in *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and its Historical Contexts* (ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin; BZAW 404; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 241–56.

Song and Isaianic discourse, I focus briefly on a selection of texts in Isaiah, in which there are connections to the Song, its language, and its socio-cultural tropes: viz., Isa 10:5–12:6; 43:1–44:5; 51:9–11; and 63:7–14. Again, the ultimate goal is to explore how the Song and its narrative functioned within prophetic discourse in Judah in the fourth-century and later, as Judean scribes compiled, produced, and read their authoritative collections of literature.

Isaiah 10:5–12:6—famous for the woe oracle against Assyria (10:5–19), and for the enigmatic and utopian description of the “shoot from the stump of Jesse” (חטר מגזע ישי) (11:1–9)—concludes with a series of “in that day” (ביום ההוא) statements (10:20, 27; 11:10, 11; 12:1, 4), which reveal what will happen when Yahweh eventually turns on mighty Assyria and restores the faithful remnant of Israel. In a deeply ironic twist, Yahweh pronounces judgment upon the arrogant king of Assyria (10:12),⁴³ the very king whom Yahweh uses to punish “a godless nation” (גוי חקר), viz., Israel (10:6).⁴⁴ After the punishment of Israel is complete and the tables are turned on Assyria, a portion of Israel will remain nonetheless (10:20–23), a Davidic leader will emerge to gather the scattered remnant (11:10–12), and with the miraculous help of Yahweh

43 Isa 10:13–14, the boastful words of the Assyrian monarch, evince knowledge of actual Assyrian royal propaganda; see, e.g., Peter Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah,” *JAOS* 103 (1983): 719–37 (esp. 725). The text of Isaiah takes up this propaganda in order to assert Yahweh’s supremacy and rulership *over* the powerful Assyrian empire. Hence a sort of divine imperial mimesis, a hybridization of Judahite/Judean culture, in which the chief deity and his people themselves become imperial, universally powerful and preminent. Cf. the image of Yahweh felling the majestic trees of Lebanon in Isa 10:34, which recalls Assyrian “scorched earth tactics.” See, e.g., Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 261–62; and for a detailed discussion of Assyrian siege technics, Jacob L. Wright, “Warfare and Wanton Destruction,” *JBL* 127 (2008): 423–58. The imperialization of Yahweh is also clearly evident in the so-called royal psalms; see, e.g., Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “‘World Dominion’ in Yahweh Kingship Psalms,” *HBT* 23 (2001): 192–210. For more on empire and the prophets, see Ehud Ben Zvi, “The Yehudite Collection of Prophetic Books and Imperial Contexts: Some Observations,” forthcoming.

44 At first this “godless nation” appears to be the northern kingdom (cf. Isa 9:7–20), and Judah seems only to be *threatened* by Assyria (cf. Isa 10:24, which reassures the inhabitants of Zion); see, e.g., Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 252–54, who reads Isa 10:5–14 within the historical context of Judah’s Assyrian crisis at the close of the eighth century BCE. However, read synchronically alongside each other in the late Persian period, Isaiah 10 and 11 blur the boundary between north and south, offering a pan-Israelite perspective in which all Israel receives punishment. One can certainly read ch. 11 as a continuation of 10:33–34—syntax links the two chapters, and 11:1 implies that Yahweh has indeed felled the tree of Judah too. Cf. Willem A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12* (trans. Ulrich Berges; HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2003), 303, who calls chs. 10 and 11 a diptych.

the reconstituted Israel will leave Assyrian bondage (11:15–16), to return home to Zion (12:6).

Within this prophetic text, which contains a narrative structure, there are several obvious connections with the exodus and the events at the Sea (e.g., 10:26; 11:15–12:2). Indeed, Isa 12:2 contains a nearly precise linguistic intertext with Exod 15:2.⁴⁵ Thus, for readers keenly familiar with these texts—as Jerusalemite literati no doubt were—there exists a de facto mnemonic association between the Song (not just the exodus in general) and this prophetic narrative of divine judgment and redemption in Isaiah. Note, too, the repeated references to Mount Zion and Jerusalem (10:12, 24, 32; 12:6) and the mention of Yahweh’s “holy mountain” (הַר קֹדֶשׁ) (11:9). Here in Isaiah, Yahweh seems to dole out his punishment both from Zion/Jerusalem and upon Zion/Jerusalem (cf. 10:12; 10:32–11:1); likewise, the faithful remnant dwells within Zion itself (cf. 10:24; 12:6), but they also stream towards it from afar, towards the just leader who will rise above the nations on the holy mount (cf. 11:9, 10–16).⁴⁶

The temporally and geographically ambiguous Song of the Sea anticipates the journey from Sea to mountain, but also looks back on this journey, as discussed above. This particular text, couched in a prophetic book, looks forward to the full and ideal restoration of Zion in the future, the redemption and return of scattered Israel, while also assuming the inevitable completion of this divine word—thus, in a sense, it looks back too. Fourth-century Judeans, though, like singers of the Song of the Sea, likely imagined themselves wandering between initiation and completion, rejoicing from re-inhabited Zion but at the same time awaiting its full restoration and elevation to glory. Yahweh had indeed extended his hand to redeem and (re)create (קָנָה) Israel (11:11; cf. 11:15; Exod 15:16b–17),⁴⁷ but Judah had yet to regain its former strength and was hardly a benchmark for the surrounding nations.

45 Ps 118:14 also contains a near-quote of this verse.

46 N.B. the mention of Philistia, Edom, and Moab in Isa 11:14, which recalls the fearful nations in Exod 15:14–15. On the fearful nations, see, e.g., Brenner, *Song of the Sea*, 160–74; and compare Russell, *Song of the Sea*, 75–79, 104, and 189 n. 39.

47 Isa 11:11a reads, וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יוֹסִיף אֱדוֹנֵי שְׂנֵית יָדוֹ לִקְנוֹת אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ “On that day the Lord will again stretch out his hand to redeem the remnant of his people.” In its immediate context, this statement recalls Yahweh stretching out his hand (יָד) in anger *against* Israel (cf. Isa 9:11, 17; 10:4); this time, however, he reaches out to redeem the people (cf. Isa 11:15, which explicitly refers to the exodus). Yahweh’s יָד in Isaiah 11 recalls Moses’ outstretched hand/arm (יָד) in Exod 14 and Yahweh’s hand/arm (יָד/זְרוֹעַ/יָמִין) in Exod 15, mentioned above. Especially in the Song of the Sea, Yahweh’s hand both smites the enemy (e.g., Exod 15:6, 12; contra the enemy’s impotent יָד in 15:9), and it establishes a sanctuary for the people (cf. Exod 15:17). Here in Isaiah, as

Isaiah 43:1–44:5 is another narratival, prophetic text that implicitly and explicitly brings to mind the exodus and its Song.⁴⁸ The text begins with a pronouncement of a “second exodus,” a gathering of Yahweh’s people from the corners of the earth (43:1–7).⁴⁹ Repeatedly, Yahweh tells the people, אִל־תִּירָא “Fear not!” (43:1, 5; cf. 44:2), for they are his creation (בָּרָא), whom he has formed (יָצַר) and redeemed (גָּאֵל),⁵⁰ and he will be with them and protect them as they pass through (עָבַר) water and walk through fire (43:2; cf. Exod 15:16b). Apparently imagining a courtroom-like setting,⁵¹ the text then declares Yahweh’s ultimate supremacy as divine victor and deliverer of his people (43:8–13), indeed, his sole existence as divine being: לפני לא־נוֹצַר אֶל וְאַחֲרַי לֹא יִהְיֶה “Before me no god was formed, and after me none shall be” (43:10b). Three divine speeches—marked by the prophetic expression כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה—follow. In the first (43:14–15), Yahweh, the king and creator, promises to visit Babylon, the place of exile.⁵² In the second (43:16–28), the deity announces that he is doing something new (עָשָׂה חֲדָשָׁה) (43:19), something

elsewhere, the divine hand is an agent of punishment, redemption, and (re)creation, an image that harkens back to Yahweh’s initial victorious and redemptive acts in Egypt and at the Reed Sea; cf. Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*, 323.

- 48 Delimiting Isaiah 40–55 into sections and subsections, and interpreting the individual sections with regards to the larger context, is a difficult task, as it is with most prophetic texts. Simply browsing recent commentaries reveals ongoing disagreement over demarcation of the text. See, e.g., Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah* (ed. Peter Machinist; trans. Margaret Kohl; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 143–208; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55* (AB 19A; New York: Doubleday, 2002), 219–38 (esp. 220–21); John Goldingay and David Payne, *Isaiah 40–55* (2 vols.; ICC; London: T & T Clark, 2006), 1.17–21 and 1.253–302; Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40–48* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 288–332. Here I align myself closely with Blenkinsopp’s division of the text, although I have left out 44:6–8, which he sees as a sort of discursive connector, linking up with what precedes and with 44:21–23 (see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 234–38).
- 49 On “second exodus” in Isaiah, see, e.g., Ulrich Berges, “Der zweite Exodus im Jesajabuch: Auszug oder Verwandlung?” in *Das Manna fällt auch heute noch: Festschrift für Erich Zenger* (ed. F.-L. Hossfeld and L. Schwienhorst-Schönberger; Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 77–95; Konrad Schmid, “Neue Schöpfung als Überbietung des neuen Exodus,” in *Schriftgelehrte Traditionsliteratur* (FAT 77; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 185–205; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40–55* (VTSup 139; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 155–203.
- 50 See 43:1, 7, 14–15, 21; 44:2; cf. Exod 15:13, 16b–17. בָּרָא and יָצַר do not occur in the Song of the Sea, but they resonate with the verbal root קָנָה (Exod 15:16b), which combines aspects of creation and redemption. Note also the phrase עַמִּיּוֹ יִצְרֵתִי לִי “a people whom I have formed for myself” (Isa 43:21) and its use of the rare relative pronoun וּ. Nearly identical phraseology occurs in Exod 15:13, 16b, with the verbal roots גָּאֵל and קָנָה, respectively.
- 51 Cf. Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 161–63; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 223–25.
- 52 On the difficulties of reading Isa 43:14, see, e.g., Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 1.293–96.

that recalls the past exodus from Egypt, but that is also circumstantially and consequentially different. Yahweh decries past sins, both forgetting and remembering the people's iniquities, breaking ties with former Israel and yet imagining the redemption of new Israel with old tropes. The third speech (44:1–5) then pictures this renewal, sprouts of new growth thriving on nourishing waters, a new Israel receiving Yahweh's spirit (רוח) (44:3).

In this passage of divine speeches is an interesting blend of recalling and forgetting the past actions of Yahweh and the past actions of the people. As stated, Yahweh repeatedly reminds Israel that he is their redeemer, their maker and creator; he has been with them since birth (44:2), since the time when he triumphantly brought them through the waters of the Sea without harm (43:16–17; cf. 43:2)—the text again memorializes the nation's special relationship with the deity, emphasizing Yahweh's role as birthing and protective parent. And yet, paradoxically, the audience is told, אל־תִּזְכְּרוּ רֵאשִׁיטוֹת וְקִדְמוֹת אֶל־תִּתְּבִנוּ "Do not remember former things, and do not dwell upon things of old!" (43:18). Yahweh is defined in terms of the past, but the people are somehow to forget that past.⁵³ Adding to the paradox, the text imagines Yahweh's new thing—his making of a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert (43:19–20)—by playing with references to the exodus and journey to Canaan, events from long ago: e.g., the new wilderness-road links up with the past Sea-road, and the drying of the Sea is juxtaposed with the watering of the wilderness.⁵⁴ As Yahweh provided then, he will provide now.

Yahweh's speech is not over, though, and the divine words in Isa 43:22–28 again pick up the theological and ideological interplay between remembering and forgetting, between deeds past and present—perhaps with some intentional irony.⁵⁵ After Yahweh levels a series of accusations against Israel, the deity declares that he wipes away the people's transgressions, he remembers (זָכַר) their sins no more (v. 25). Then he abruptly states, הַזְכִּירְנִי נִשְׁפֹּטָה יַחַד סִפְּרָה אֶתָּה לְמַעַן תִּצְדֵּק "Remind me! Let us go to trial together. You yourself present (your case) so that you may be proved right" (v. 26). Yahweh forgets Israel's sins, but, ironical-

53 N.B. the divine speech in this section only actually begins with v. 18. Isa 43:16–17 contains descriptions of Yahweh, introducing the speaker and his past accomplishments. The use of the participles הַזְכִּירְנִי (v. 16) and הַמְּנִיחָה (v. 17) makes this clear.

54 Cf. William H. C. Propp, *Water in the Wilderness: A Biblical Motif and Its Mythological Background* (HSM 40; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 101–2; but see also Tiemeyer, *Comfort of Zion*, 182–84, who downplays connections with the exodus, reading the text as a more general wilderness metaphor.

55 Cf. Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*, 312.

ly it seems, he cannot remember the people's righteousness. Past Israel has become nothing to him; from the very beginning they were a sinful people, and so he has given them up (vv. 27–28). With the removal of their sins they are reduced to nil. If sinfulness was the people's defining characteristic, then the divine forgetting of sins effects a loss of identity and even a cessation of existence for the people. The collocation of לֹא אֶזְכֹּר "I no longer remember" and הִזְכִּירֵנִי "Remind me!" heightens the sense of drama. Yahweh's juridical challenge in v. 26 appears to be ironical and rhetorical; in the divine mind there is no one there to challenge him, no one righteous in Israel.

But the passage continues in Isa 44:1–5, promising new life for Israel, a re-creation of Yahweh's people. Again, the deity announces, אַל תִּירָא "Fear not!" (v. 2), linking this speech with the divine illocutions in 43:1–7. Moreover, in this speech water appears conspicuously as a symbol of birth and creation (vv. 3–4). The metaphorical wordplay on זֶרַע "seed/offspring" is obvious: Yahweh will (re)plant his people (cf. Exod 15:17), and, with a generous outpouring of water, the new Israel will sprout (צִמָּח) from the dry ground (cf. 43:19; Gen 2:5, 9).

As in the Song of the Sea, water functions in Isa 43:1–44:5 as a key symbolic site, a sign of both deliverance and birth. The passage is bookended with images of redemption and creation, both tied to water: Yahweh will protect his people as they pass through dangerous water (43:2), and he will water his new creation with his spirit (רוּחַ) (44:3). Also, the passage hinges on images that recall the miracles at the Sea and in the wilderness: during the exodus long ago, Yahweh brought Israel through the water, crushing the Egyptians with it (43:16–17); now he will provide nourishment for Israel in the wilderness, bringing life-giving water to the desert and to his thirsty people (43:20).

One should note, the image of the holy mountain/Zion/Jerusalem, the ultimate destination of the redeemed people—which is prevalent in the Song and in Isa 10:5–12:6—is absent in Isa 43:1–44:5. There is no geographical transition in the text, no movement between between Sea and mountain, between scattered exile and Zion. However, the tropes of the Sea and the exodus, redemption in the wilderness, and the planting and growth of a new Israel, are clearly present, helping to structure and mnemonically frame Yahweh's speeches. Thus, instead of geographical liminality, Judean readers of Isa 43:1–44:5 experienced redemptive and existential liminality, a movement between human transgression and divine forgiveness, between annihilation and new creation, between forgetting and remembering past deeds and misdeeds, and imagining new life in the future. However, although lacking a sense of definite place or movement towards an ultimate destination,

the text nonetheless imagines a generic wilderness wasteland, inhabited by the seed of Israel, in need of divine watering and nourishment—an image that reflects post-monarchic Judah and Jerusalem, a land that had dealt with major political upheavals, economic stagnation, and, in the late fourth century, Alexander’s conquest and the prospect of Hellenistic socio-cultural hybridization.⁵⁶ Perhaps the destination had been reached, but renewal was incomplete.⁵⁷

I now turn to Isa 51:9–11, which again recalls the Song of the Sea, but which explicitly utilizes West Semitic mythological motifs that have not been overtly present in the texts examined thus far.⁵⁸ Because scholars have discussed the mythological language of this text at length, I will not provide a detailed discussion. I would like only to point out aspects of the Chaoskampf trope, evident in the references to the chaos monster(s), רהב and תנין,⁵⁹ as well as the further interweaving of exodus and creation imagery: e.g., the mighty arm (זרוע) of Yahweh, the drying of the Sea (ים) and the deep (תהום), the crossing over (עבר) of those redeemed (גאל) (vv. 9–10).⁶⁰ Moreover, there is the joyful entrance into Zion, the event to which the passage looks forward (v. 11).

With regards to Chaoskampf and the struggle between Yahweh and Sea, although there is no description of a divine battle, there is

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- 56 It appears that Hellenism did not have widespread influence in Judah until the early third century; cf. Oded Lipschits and Oren Tal, “The Settlement Archaeology of the Province of Judah: A Case Study,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century BCE* (ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Rainer Albertz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 33–52.
- 57 See William S. Morrow, “Comfort for Jerusalem: The Second Isaiah as Counselor to Refugees,” *BTB* 34 (2004): 80–86, who argues that chs. 40–55, in a sixth-century BCE context, attempted to address the community’s “learned helplessness” in the aftermath of catastrophe and exile. By the late Persian period, hopelessness no doubt waned, but the divine redemption promised by these texts was not yet fully realized.
- 58 For recent treatments of Isa 51:9–11, see Jeremy M. Hutton, “Isaiah 51:9–11 and the Rhetorical Appropriation and Subversion of Hostile Theologies,” *JBL* 126 (2007): 271–303; Hendrik Bosman, “Myth, Metaphor, or Memory? The Allusions to Creation and Exodus in Isaiah 51:9–11 as a Theological Response to Suffering during the Exile,” in *Exile and Suffering* (ed. Bob Becking and Dirk Human; OTS 50; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 71–81; and bibliographies therein.
- 59 See, e.g., K. Spronk, “Rahab,” and G. C. Heider, “Tannin,” in *DDD* 684–86 and 834–36, respectively; also John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 88–101 and *passim*.
- 60 Tiemeyer, *Comfort of Zion*, 193–94 (following Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated* [BZAW 341; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005], 292–95), argues that Isa 51:9–11 lacks a creation motif, and that the text imagines only the exodus. However, *pace* Tiemeyer and Watson, the exodus, the victory at the Reed Sea, is an act of creation. See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 330–35, for further comment on the imagery in this text and its parallels.

mention of a supernatural enemy, thus distinguishing this text from Exodus 15 and Genesis 1, discussed above. The fact that Rahab/Tannin is cut into pieces (חצב Hiph.) and pierced through (הלל Poel) suggests a violent interaction between the supernatural beings, even if the enemy stood no chance against Yahweh in the first place (cf. Pharaoh/Egypt in Exodus 14–15).⁶¹ This primordial recollection then moves into a depiction of Yahweh drying up the Sea, redeeming his people. The mythologically loaded image of victory and deliverance at the Sea, carrying symbols of exodus and creation, serves as the preface to the awaited return to Zion. John Day comments, “Rahab is both the monster defeated at creation and Egypt at the time of the Exodus and also, by implication, it may be argued, the thought is extended to Babylon at the time of the prophet himself. The return from exile in Babylon is both a new creation and a new Exodus.”⁶² The text is thus a rich site of memory, a dynamic blend of myth and metaphor that undoubtedly spoke to Judah’s post-monarchic condition.⁶³ If one reads the text in a Neo-Babylonian diaspora setting, perhaps its compositional milieu, as Day does, then the text looks forward to the actual restoration of Jerusalem/Zion after the destruction of 586 BCE.⁶⁴ But if one reads it as part of a socio-mnemonic system in fourth-century Jerusalemite literature, as I do here, then again one finds a text that plays with temporal and redemptive liminality. Isaiah 51:9–11 recognizes (or re-cognizes) the might of Yahweh in his creative and redemptive acts of the distant and near past, including the reestablishment of Jerusalem as a cult center under Persian rule, but it also waits for and looks forward to the day when Zion will reach its divinely promised zenith.

Each of the texts explored thus far evinces hopeful liminality, an image of a people moving toward complete and final redemption, toward a home in the midst of Yahweh’s dwelling. These texts mostly look forward: the people are almost there, almost at Yahweh’s resting place. However, Isa 63:7–14, which memorializes the exodus as part of a lengthy lament (63:7–64:11), emphasizes the negative aspect of this liminality: they are not yet there, still traveling through the wilder-

61 Pace Bosman, “Myth, Metaphor, or Memory?” 77, who states, “...one has to acknowledge the absence of any combat or chaos—in an almost hyperbolic way Yhwh destroys all adversaries...” Absolute victory does not equate to a total lack of combat. Taken on its own, the text says nothing about what happened *before* the slaughtering of Rahab/Tannin; it only tells the reader that Yahweh was indeed victorious.

62 Day, *God’s Conflict*, 92.

63 Cf. Bosman, “Myth, Metaphor, or Memory?” 77–81.

64 Tiemeyer, *Comfort of Zion*, 195, contra Day, posits that the text’s primary setting was not the diaspora.

ness.⁶⁵ Sometimes, a journey can be so long and challenging that the traveler loses sight of the destination—one thinks of a child asking her parents, “Are we there yet?” Here, Judah and Zion/Jerusalem is still a wasteland (64:9–10), and the lament ends with a sobering question for the deity: תחשה ותענונו עד־מאד “Will you be silent and afflict us forever?” (64:11). This prophetic lament, thus, balances the more hopeful messages seen in the texts above. To be sure, Isa 43:1–44:5, with its blatant accusations against Israel, its forgetting and remembering of the people’s sinful past, also brings to mind the negative side of liminal existence; but despite the paradoxical recall of forgotten sins, the overriding message of 43:1–44:5 is one of hope, the joyful knowledge of Yahweh’s new Israel, his watering of the barren desert. The lament of Isa 63:7–64:11 plays devil’s advocate with the forward-looking hope of the passages discussed above and other texts in Isaiah (e.g., Isa 62).⁶⁶

Indeed, the theological rhetoric of the lament in Isa 63:7–64:11, its ideological use of memory and memorialization, contrasts Yahweh’s remembering and forgetting the past in Isa 43:1–44:5. At the outset of the lament, the speaker declares: חסדי יהוה יזכיר תהלת יהוה “The faithful, gracious acts of Yahweh I will memorialize, the praiseworthy deeds of

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- 65 This lament shares much in common with the laments of the Psalter, with one notable difference: it lacks any statement of faith that Yahweh will, in fact, hear the people’s cries and come to their salvation (contra, e.g., Ps 69:34, 36); cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66* (AB 19B; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 258. Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 392, says that this poignant passage is “probably the most powerful psalm of communal lamentation in the Bible.” Perhaps the lack of response from Yahweh, or the lack of any hope that such a response will occur, gives the passage its power.
- 66 One should also consider the relationship between chs. 63–64 and 65–66. Scholars often see chs. 65–66 as a response to the lament. Cf. Christophe Nihan, “Ethnicity and Identity in Isaiah 56–66,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 67–104 (esp. 71–72 and 86–87, with further references). Nihan argues that chs. 65–66 present a view that is even more somber than that of chs. 63–64—the lament presents the *entire* community as Yahweh’s people (cf. 64:8), whereas chs. 65–66 presuppose a division between the servants of Yahweh (i.e., true “Israel”) and the apostates of the community. However, one should keep in mind the generic differences between the lament and chs. 65–66: the former is a human complaint, presumably voiced by a pious speaker, while the latter is Yahweh’s address to the community at large. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 268, following Duhm, comments “[T]hose addressed in 65:1–7, who are practicing ‘pagan’ cults, eating pork, and so on, have little in common with the plaintive penitents on whose behalf the psalm immediately preceding was composed. This would suggest that, though a connection does exist [between chs. 63–64 and 65–66], with chs. 65–66 we are in a quite different situation.” The Jerusalemite literati surely thought of themselves as the lamenting in-group, the ones longing for Yahweh’s presence, as opposed to the out-group receiving Yahweh’s criticisms.

Yahweh" (63:7; cf. Exod 15:11, 13). Yahweh has implored Israel not to remember (Isa 43:18) and has declared that he has forgotten past sins (Isa 43:25), and yet his people insist on commemorating his past acts of deliverance and redemption. Moreover, they insist on remembering their own misdeeds, which caused the divine warrior, the one who originally fought for them at the Sea (cf. Exod 15:3), to turn against them (63:10).

Just as the ultimately hopeful text of 43:1–44:5 hinges on its image of Yahweh bringing the people through mighty waters, so the lament hinges on a similar image:

יזכר ימי־עולם משה עמו איה המעלם מים את רעי צאנו איה השם בקרבו את־רוח קדשו

Then his people remembered the days of old, Moses (the one who drew up from the water). Where is the one who brought them up from the Sea with shepherds of his flock? Where is the one who put in his/its midst his holy roah? (Isa 63:11)

There are multiple ambiguities in this verse, beginning with the main verb, *יזכר* "he remembered." Precisely who is remembering? Is it Yahweh? Moses? The people? Each is a masculine noun that fits grammatically and could potentially function as the subject. "His people" (*עמו*) fits best in the context, although it is odd, syntactically, for the subject to be so distant from the main verb.⁶⁷ One might also struggle to understand the reference to *משה* "Moses" here. The reference, however, carries a dual meaning that expands the semiotic possibilities of the memorialization. Echoing the etymology provided in Exod 2:10, viz. that Moses was drawn up out of the water, the word *משה* conflates the man Moses, the great prophet and hero through whom Yahweh worked, and Yahweh himself, the one who was ultimately responsible for drawing the people up out of the Sea (and thus up out of Egypt).⁶⁸ Yahweh forgets the people's sin and cannot remember any righteousness (cf. Isa 43:22–28), but the people, while remembering Yahweh's past redemp-

67 The general consensus is that the people remembered. Most English translations, therefore, read, "they remembered" or "his people remembered" (e.g., NRSV; NJPS). Cf. Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 385; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 252; also Burkard M. Zapf, *Jesaja 56–66* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2006), 408.

68 The LXX prefers this reading. It states, *καὶ ἐμνήσθη ἡμερῶν αἰωνίων ὁ ἀναβιβάσας ἐκ τῆς γῆς τὸν ποιμένα τῶν προβάτων* "and he remembered the days of eternity, the one who brought up from the land, the shepherd of sheep." The final clause of v. 11 further engenders semiotic ambiguity in the memory: note the placement of Yahweh's "holy roah." Is it set within Moses? the people? the Sea? Is it water-like, nourishing and empowering spirit (cf. Isa 44:3)? or is it the water-splitting blast from the deity's nostrils (cf. Exod 15:8)?

tion, cannot foresee his future new creation. Where is the loyal redeemer now? Where is the one who brought Israel up out of Egypt? Where is the one whose right hand (ימין) and great, glorious arm (זרוע) separated waters and shattered enemies (63:12; cf. Exod 15:5, 12, 16)?

Therefore, the lament of Isa 63:7–64:11—contrary to the divine speeches of Isa 43:1–44:5—does not try to forget Israel’s ugly history, its present state of disarray, and challenges Yahweh to remember his past deeds, to come again as creator and redeemer. Fourth-century Jerusalemite literati had hope, visions of future glory, but the present bitter reality was always in plain sight. Both of these Isaianic passages recount the story of Israel’s ancient beginnings, the people’s victorious birth at the mighty waters of the Sea, in attempts to cope with the liminality of ongoing but not yet complete restoration. One text looks forward, emphasizing new creation, trying to forget hardships past and present; the other looks back, unable to ignore present hardships, nostalgically and tragically reminiscing about the days of old, when Yahweh powerfully acted for and amongst the people, rather than against them.

3. To Conclude

In this essay I have tried to show how the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1–21) might have evoked a sense of geographical, temporal, and redemptive liminality in its late Persian/early Hellenistic-period readers/singers. The text moves between Sea and mountain, wilderness and promised land, birth and maturity, Sinai and Zion, between redemption past, present, and future. Likewise, I have tried to show that, when Isaianic discourse refers to and appropriates the Song and its tropes, the texts evoke similarly liminal states of existence, mostly with hopeful visions (e.g., Isa 10:5–12:6; 43:1–44:5; 51:9–11), but also with pessimistic longing (e.g., Isa 63:7–14). The prophetic discourse in the book of Isaiah builds upon the monumental sites of memory in the Song and its narrative emplotment, forming a complex web of mnemonic associations with the Sea, the salient symbol of victory and birth. To be sure, the memory of the Sea interacts with and depends upon other mnemonic loci in these prophetic texts (e.g., creation motifs).⁶⁹ Indeed, that is how social memory works. The fourth-century Jerusalemite commu-

69 Cf. Schmid, “Neue Schöpfung,” 188–93; also C. L. Crouch, “Adapting the Cosmological Tradition in Isaiah 40–45,” *SJOT* 25 (2011): 260–75, and literature cited there.

nity that produced and read the book of Isaiah (and other prophetic books) saw itself as bearers of the past—the distant, near, and present past—but they also recognized a rupture in their story that set them apart from that past: they were a new Israel, a new thing, on which and through which Yahweh was still working. They remembered and imagined their story with interwoven socio-cultural tropes, including primordial creation, kingship human and divine, exile, and of course Yahweh's life-giving, nation-birthing victory at the Reed Sea. They remembered to forget, to (re)create.⁷⁰

70 I dedicate this essay to my dear friend and teacher, Francis Landy, whose seminars on Isaiah provided the initial inspiration for this study. Francis currently finds himself in the midst of his own exodus, from the frigid prairies to the warm coastlands—i.e., retirement, after a long and distinguished tenure at the University of Alberta. As he settles into his new home by the sea, may his search for the beautiful and enigmatic continue.

