ISRAEL'S TABERNACLE AS SOCIAL SPACE

by

Mark K. George

Society of Biblical Literature
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1
The Tabernacle

Introduction

For modern scholars and readers, Israel's wilderness tabernacle is not something that merits much attention or time. Commentators dutifully discuss questions of its form, furnishings, materials, and the like but generally keep their discussions of the tabernacle to a minimum, since, as one commentator remarks, the tabernacle narratives "can become wearisome reading," something short of compelling.[1] Minimizing these narratives is a bit of a challenge, however, given that they comprise nearly one-third of the book of Exodus. Beyond commentaries, the tabernacle finds its way into various scholarly debates, such as those involving the question of its historical existence, its relationship (historical and otherwise) to Solomon's Temple and the Second Temple, the date and character of the Priestly source, and the location within the tabernacle complex where particular priestly actions or rituals are said to have taken place. The tabernacle itself, in other words, is of less interest to scholars and readers than how it relates to other historical matters and issues.

Such was not always the case. There are indications in the biblical texts that ancient editors and readers, most especially the Priestly writers and editors, considered the tabernacle to be an object of some importance. The length of the narratives, for example, is remarkable. The tabernacle narratives are unlike any other building text in the Hebrew Bible, because they are both longer and more detailed than them. These narratives consist of 13 chapters, or 457 verses, in two blocks of text in the second half of the book of Exodus.[2] Instructions for the creation and construction of the tabernacle are given in

1. Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 263.

2. There are additional texts in the Pentateuch pertaining to the tabernacle, most notably in Lev 8–9 (the ordination of Aaron and his sons and Aaron's inauguration of the cult) and Num 3–4 (the role of the Levites in transporting the tabernacle). I

Exod 25–31, with their fulfillment (somewhat changed) in Exod 35–40. By contrast, the construction narratives for Israel's temples, both of which figure so prominently in the theology and imagination of the people and the biblical writers, are far shorter. The construction of Solomon's Temple is narrated in less than three chapters in 1 Kings (1 Kgs 5–7), a mere 94 verses.[3] The Second Temple's construction is narrated in parts of six chapters, for a total of (a relatively paltry) 54 verses.[4] It is rather paradoxical that a space with no physical permanence—no foundation, mere curtains for walls, poles to carry certain tabernacle objects—obtained more permanence and presence in the literary traditions of Israel than either temple.

A proliferation of details is another indication that the tabernacle was an important object. Items central to the tabernacle not only are identified in the narratives; they are carefully described.[5] It is not enough to state that a gold-plated ark was constructed and placed in the most holy space of the tabernacle proper.[6] Instead, the ark is described in terms of its building materials (acacia wood overlaid with pure gold), dimensions (2.5 cubits long by

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consider these texts as less central to my argument, because they are predicated on the tabernacle as an existing space.

3. By the NRSV arrangement of these chapters, the construction of Solomon's royal palace in Jerusalem also is narrated in these chapters (1 Kgs 7:1–12), which is why I do not include them in the total verse count. There are a total of 107 verses in these chapters, by the NRSV reckoning. The MT verse count for 1 Kgs 5–7 is 120. In addition to the narratives describing the construction of Solomon's palace (12 verses), there are 13 verses at the beginning of 1 Kgs 5 that narrate the daily provisions for Solomon, the extent of his geographic control, his horses, horsemen, and stalls, his monthly provisions, and his wisdom.

4. Ezra 1:9–11; 2:68–69; 3:1–13; 4:1–5, 24; 5:1–17; 6:3–15. The total is a conservative number because I have omitted from my calculations passages that do not bear directly upon the building of the Second Temple, including Cyrus's decree authorizing the building (Ezra 1:2–4), the letter written to Artaxerxes (4:6–23), and the dedication of the temple (6:16–22). If they were included, the verse total would rise to 82 verses, still less than the length of the tabernacle narratives.

5. Menahem Haran notes that the narratives combine "long-winded description" with a "total omission of various particulars" (*Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985], 150).

6. Throughout this book I use the term *tabernacle* to refer to the entire complex. When I need to distinguish between objects within the tabernacle, I use *tabernacle proper* to refer to the tent inside the court and *tabernacle complex* to refer to the entire space, that is, the tabernacle proper, the surrounding court, and the objects and personnel that are described in the narratives.

1.5 cubits wide by 1.5 cubits high), style (it is footed, standing on four gold rings as its four feet, and has a molding all the way around it), and means of conveyance (there are two acacia wood, pure gold-plated poles, fitted through the four rings for feet, used to carry the ark when it is moved; Exod 25:10–14; 37:1–5). There are details concerning how to assemble certain items, such as how many loops (100 total), of which color (blue), shall be attached to which of the curtains (the outermost curtain of the first and second sets) of the tabernacle's innermost set of curtains, so as to enable these two sets of curtains to be connected into one whole (Exod 26:4–6; 36:11–13). Recipes detail how much of which ingredients are required to make the holy anointing oil and incense, accompanied by a stern warning and prohibition against anyone actually following these recipes to make his or her own batch of holy anointing oil or incense (30:23–38). Men and women alike donate materials for the tabernacle and participate in its construction (e.g., 35:22, 25, 26, 29). Even the enigmatic detail that the bronze basin is made from the bronze mirrors of the women serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting is provided (Exod 38:8).[7] To be sure, the narratives describing Solomon's Temple and the Second Temple provide details about certain aspects of these spaces. There is, for example, additional information about the two cherubim in Solomon's Temple (1 Kgs 6:23–28) and that the dimensions of the Second Temple were included in the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 6:3), but the number and variety of details for these spaces pale in comparison with those of the tabernacle.

A further indication that the tabernacle was an important object for ancient editors and readers is suggested by the narratives' location in the book of Exodus. They interrupt, and are different from, their literary context. The grand drama of Exodus is stopped dead in its tracks. The excitement of the contest between YHWH and Pharaoh, the parting of the Reed Sea, the passage of the Israelites through those parted waters, and the drowning of Pharaoh's armies, is not to be found in the tabernacle narratives. Neither is the poetic lyricism of the Song of the Sea matched in the seemingly mundane prose of the tabernacle descriptions. Furthermore, the book's plot, which has been one of exodus, and therefore movement, stops at this point, changing to one of stasis and instructions.[8] The spectacle of the giving of the Decalogue and Covenant Code to Moses on the mountaintop, followed by their receipt, acceptance, and affirmation by the people, whereby they formally become a

7. The significance of this detail has puzzled interpreters for centuries.

8. Fretheim describes the tabernacle narratives as "non-story," implying that they interrupt "story" (*Exodus*, 263).

people with a God, gives way to the instructions for the tabernacle's construction and the fulfillment of those instructions.[9]

Beyond the interruption to the plot of the book of Exodus, due to its change in pacing and drama, the tabernacle narratives themselves are something of an enigma. YHWH's request for a tabernacle or dwelling place, משכן, among the people at this point in the book of Exodus (25:8; see also 29:45, 46), makes little narrative sense. The people already are in the presence of the deity. The deity is present at the top of Mount Sinai, as evidenced by the clouds and thunder (24:15–18). For the people at the mountain's base, that divine presence appears to be "like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain" (24:17).[10] The people understand themselves to be in the presence of the deity, even if not face to face with him.[11] The deity's understanding of the situation corresponds with that of the people. YHWH commanded Moses to bring the people to Sinai after they left Egypt, a command expressing a desire to have the people come into his presence at his mountain (Exod 3:1, 12). The people can meet the deity directly by approaching the foot of the mountain, which Moses arranges in Exod 19:17: he leads the people out of the camp to the foot of the mountain in order "to meet God" (לקראת האלהים). In other words, the people *already* are in the presence of the deity, and thus there is no clear reason for YHWH's request.

The second reason why YHWH's request is problematic at this point in the narrative is that, while the request expresses a divine desire to be in the very presence of the people, YHWH shows no particular desire to dwell among the people prior to this moment. After the people arrive, the deity repeatedly instructs Moses to warn the people not to encroach on the holy mountain, lest they be killed (Exod 19:12, 21–23). Approaching the deity is dangerous. But perhaps it is equally the case that having the people at the base of the

9. Scholars provide various explanations for the narrative location of the tabernacle texts. For example, Nahum M. Sarna reasons that "preparations are made for the spiritual welfare of the people during their trek through the wilderness on their way to the promised land" because the Sinai revelation is concluded (*Exodus* [JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991], 155). John I. Durham argues that the conclusion of the covenant triggers "an essential theological assumption" that YHWH "has in fact come to take up residence among his people" (*Exodus* [WBC 3; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987], 350). But, as I argue in the next paragraph, one reason why these narratives interrupt the narrative flow of Exodus (and the Pentateuch) is that, at least in some sense, YHWH already dwells among his people, because they are encamped at YHWH's holy mountain.

10. All biblical quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

11. Mount Sinai is God's holy mountain; it is holy ground or space; see Exod 3:5.

mountain is as close to them as YHWH wants to get. Nor do the people, for their part, seem keen about getting much closer to YHWH than the base of the mountain. After all, they experience YHWH's presence as a "devouring fire." The deity's request in Exod 25:8 for a dwelling place among the people thus appears, at best, ironic, and its purpose somewhat less clear than scholars generally argue.

The third reason YHWH's request is problematic is that it comes too early in terms of the larger pentateuchal narrative. The people have only just arrived at Mount Sinai, and YHWH has a good deal more to say to Moses and the people while at the mountain. A more reasonable narrative setting for this request would be just before the people break camp and depart from the mountain (Num 10). This is, after all, where the explanation of the Israelite camp's arrangement around the tabernacle (Num 2) and instructions concerning the Levites' transporting it (Num 3–4), are given. At that point, charged with the instructions for operating the cult and its rituals and readying to leave, it makes narrative sense that the people would want to have the deity present with them in their journey to the promised land. Similarly, it makes sense that, having given the instructions for how the cult and rituals in service to YHWH are to operate, the deity would be willing to enter into the people's midst and travel with them. This is why, in terms of the plot of the Pentateuch, delivering the instructions for the tabernacle and having them fulfilled early in the book of Numbers, just prior to moving from Mount Sinai, would be a more logical place for them. While the people are encamped at the deity's mountain, however, there seems to be no need for the construction of the tabernacle.[12]

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12. The cultic and ritual legislation of Leviticus and Numbers is predicated on there being a tabernacle (or a temple), and so it has been argued that the tabernacle must be built in order for this legislation to make sense (e.g., Baruch J. Schwartz, "The Priestly Account of the Theophany and Lawgiving at Sinai," in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* [ed. Michael V. Fox et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996], 103–34). But such is not necessarily the case. Various solutions are possible. For example, the text could have indicated that instructions for the space wherein these actions were to occur would be given before the people left Sinai. Alternatively, the altar Moses erected at Sinai (Exod 24:4), on which he offered sacrifices after the people agreed to enter into a covenant relationship with YHWH, could have been the focus of rituals taking place at Sinai, with the tabernacle's altar replacing it once the people decamped. Yet another possibility is that the legislation could have been cast in the future tense, as actions to be taken once the instructions for the tabernacle were given and it was constructed (see, e.g., the narratives that describe the priestly attire to be worn *in the future* [Exod 28:29, 20, 35, 38, 41, 42] and the *future*

The Tabernacle as Social Space

Source criticism has provided a number of important and useful answers to these issues. Identification of different sources in the Pentateuch and Sinai pericope (Exod 19–Num 10) has given insight into the history of composition of the Pentateuch and its individual books, identification of its sources, and information about those sources, including their dates, provenance, setting, historical context, theologies, and other matters. There is wide scholarly agreement that the tabernacle narratives themselves are the product of the Priestly writers. The combination of P texts with those from JE created many of the narrative issues and problems mentioned above.

That being said, there are aspects of the tabernacle narratives that have been inadequately addressed by source criticism. For example, why their unusual length? There is an astounding proliferation of details in the narratives. Source critics have explained their length as being the result of different writers, but this explains their origins, not their purpose.[13] Others have argued that the tabernacle is important to the Priestly writers because only from it may the deity deliver the Levitical instructions, but this also fails to explain why they consist of thirteen chapters.[14] Furthermore, if the tabernacle's importance for the Priestly writers derives from it serving as the

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ordination of the priests [Exod 29]). I assume the Priestly writers could have used an appropriate narrative solution to this issue, if they wanted to place the tabernacle narratives at the end of the Sinai materials (see Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Structure of P," *CBQ* 38 [1976]: 275–92, who makes a similar argument about the Priestly writers with regard to creation). Obviously, this is not the solution they chose.

13. Julius Popper and others explained the length of the narratives as the result of the fulfillment section (Exod 35–40) being the work of a different author than the instruction section (Exod 25–31). Brevard S. Childs (*The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974], 529–30) provides a useful discussion of this source-critical argument, which originally was proposed by Popper in 1862. But the opposite argument, with Exod 35–40 being original and 25–31 secondary, also has been made. See, e.g., William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 2A; New York: Doubleday, 2006), 368–69. Victor Avigdor Hurowitz convincingly laid this argument to rest by comparing the tabernacle narratives with ancient Near Eastern building inscriptions and demonstrating that the tabernacle narratives should be interpreted as a literary whole (*I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* [JSOTSup 115; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992]).

14. For such an argument, see, e.g., Schwartz, "The Priestly Account," 116–17. Schwartz notes (113) the widespread scholarly agreement that the tabernacle pericope

appropriate setting for the delivery of those instructions, then the tabernacle itself is of ancillary importance to the instructions.[15] Why provide detailed descriptions of the tabernacle if the chief concern of the Priestly writers is the Levitical instructions? Comparison with the temple narratives demonstrates that extensive details and length were not necessary for describing divine dwellings. Scholars have made various other proposals to explain the narratives' details and length, including that they instruct the reader in what it means to have the presence of God in Israel's camp, that the Priestly writers are obsessed with tabernacle space and its objects, and that the tabernacle is the earthly dwelling of the deity that replaces the divine dwelling.[16] But again, these explanations do not actually explain the details and the role they play in the narratives.

There is a fundamental concern of the tabernacle narratives that source criticism and other historical approaches have inadequately addressed, yet it is one that better explains these inconsistencies. The narratives are concerned about describing the creation of a specific, particular space. Certainly this space is, as scholars have argued, where the deity dwells among the people, the setting from which the deity gives the Levitical instructions (Lev 1:1), and important to the Priestly writers. But such arguments presume the very thing with which the narratives are concerned. First and foremost, the narratives describe the creation of a space, and that fact has received inadequate attention. The Priestly writers describe the way in which a space comes to be: how the project is initiated; the process of construction; its characteristic features, organization, and social meanings. The creation of the tabernacle is the primary concern expressed in these narratives, and it is critical attention to that space that has been overlooked by scholars.

It is important to distinguish here between space and place. Central to the argument of this study is the claim that the Priestly writers describe the creation of a *space* rather than a place, such as Israel's temples. Places are fixed, and if they are structures, then in addition to being located at a specific site, they have things such as foundations, walls, doors, windows, gates, and other such permanent features. The tabernacle does not. It is a space, because it is not fixed to a particular location or site. Instead, it is free to move about

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"has always included the instructions and their execution," with possible later additions. But again, this does not explain the narratives' length.

15. See ibid., 119, 122.

16. For the view that the texts provide information about God within the camp, see Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 320. For the view that the Priestly writers are obsessed with the tabernacle, see Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 149.

within the larger space of creation and the cosmos. In this regard, the tabernacle is like a boat on the ocean, "a floating piece of space, a place without a place."[17] It has its own internal logic and order that operate wherever it goes. That organization gives the tabernacle its particular Israelite identity. It consists of Israel's objects, is staffed by Israelites, is infused with social meanings particular to Israel, and includes Israel's understanding of how to relate to its God and the rest of creation. The tabernacle is, in other words, a space expressing something of the social identity of Israel. The tabernacle *is* Israel in the world.

It is the tabernacle as space that merits analysis and critical examination in and of itself. Undertaking such a critical analysis requires a different approach from that of source criticism or other historical approaches. It also requires the recognition that space is not simply that which already existed.[18] Rather, space is a human project, something societies and social groups produce as they inhabit it. Societies impose themselves on space, shaping and creating their physical world in ways that make sense to them. They give it order and structure. They infuse their spaces with significance and meaning. The critical study and analysis of a society's space provides a means of understanding the society that created, inhabited, and changed it. This study begins from such an understanding of space. As a product of the Priestly writers, tabernacle space encodes and represents their biases, concerns, interests, conflicts, and other anxieties and preferences.

The central argument in this book is that the tabernacle narratives do not simply describe the creation of a divine dwelling and worship space. They do more. The narratives express a social configuration and Priestly understanding of Israelite society, social organization, and Israel's role in the divine creation. In the process of describing the tabernacle and how it is to be fashioned and assembled, the Priestly writers express and encode an idealized social organization in tabernacle space. This understanding of Israel's organization derives from Priestly cosmology, which situates Israel within the larger context of humanity. It results in a privileged position not only for Israel's priests but also for Israel itself. Israel's position is one created and authorized by YHWH. YHWH is the creator God; Israel (collectively) is that God's grateful

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17. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22–27, here 27.

18. As Jon L. Berquist notes, Einstein's theory of relativity did away with the idea that space is independent of the observer, of the human being or of society ("Critical Spatiality and the Construction of the Ancient World," in *'Imagining' Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan* [ed. David M. Gunn and Paula M. McNutt; JSOTSup 359; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002], 14–29). Space is something that involves human beings.

and obedient servant who constructs a divine dwelling for him. In expressing these ideas, the Priestly writers made abundant use of the larger social matrix within which they found themselves. They freely appropriated and acquired ideas, literary forms, stories, dates, calendars, and other social energies from that context and included them in the texts.[19] Their use of these resources combined to give the tabernacle narratives social force and significance in Israel, because those resources were familiar to readers and listeners of them. Illuminating these aspects of the tabernacle narratives, however, requires attention to the social nature of this space.

Assumptions

Several assumptions about the tabernacle narratives, the book of Exodus, and the Pentateuch guide and inform this study. First, I assume that the tabernacle narratives are the product of the Priestly writers, who were working in the exilic period.[20] The date, scope, purpose, character, and many other aspects of the Priestly are debated by scholars, as is widely recognized.[21] I am not fully convinced by the arguments for a preexilic date for the Priestly writing, as argued by Yehezkel Kaufmann, Menahem Haran, Israel Knohl, and others.[22] My skepticism is due, in part, to the reading of tabernacle social space contained herein. The spatial logic of the tabernacle, reinforced by certain symbolic social energies flowing through it, make a date during Israel's monarchy unlikely. I will say more about these arguments and how

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19. By "social energy," I draw on a concept used by Stephen Greenblatt, Elizabethan-period literary theorists, and the Greek rhetorical tradition to describe the ability of cultural artifacts to excite, challenge, dismay, encourage and induce other reactions among members of a society. See chapter 5 for a fuller discussion of this concept.

20. See Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 293–325; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 26, 238. See also Jean-Louis Ska's argument for a date late in the exilic period: *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (trans. Pascale Dominique; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 160–61.

21. See Ska, *Reading the Pentateuch*, 159–60, for an excellent, brief summary (and bibliography) on the three primary scholarly positions concerning the dates of the composition of P.

22. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*; Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (trans. Moshe Greenberg; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

they challenge a premonarchic date at appropriate points in this book. On the other hand, while it is possible the Priestly writers worked in the postexilic period, I am not inclined toward that period, at least not once the Second Temple is rebuilt and operating. The tabernacle presents a different social space and understanding of Israel from that of the Second Temple, one that I think is not easily reconciled with that social space. Thus, I assume these narratives, in largely the form found in the MT, were from the exilic period. While this assumption aligns me with Wellhausen and others who argue for an exilic period date for the Priestly writing, I do not view the Priestly writers as negatively as does Wellhausen. They were neither as self-protective nor myopic as he suggested. This, too, will become clear in later chapters. Finally, given the strong influences of Mesopotamian cultural artifacts and social energies on the tabernacle narratives, the exilic period provides a time period in which I assume those influences on Israelite literature would have been at their most influential.

I assume the Priestly writers had available to them a variety of other sources and materials, both from within Israel and without. These included JE and its account of the events at Mount Sinai, which helped shape the Priestly writers' own story recounting the events from creation into the land.[23] There also were other sources or materials available to them, such as personal experiences, memories, and stories (whether in written or oral form) of the Solomonic temple, upon which they could draw, and their own experiences of Babylonian temples while in exile. Written or oral descriptions of tents in Israel or elsewhere in the ancient Near East (such as Egypt and Mari) may have been among the resources available to them.[24] Given that temples in the ancient Near East were not rarities or limited to Israel and Babylon, it is safe to assume that the Priestly writers' cultural knowledge of temples and other religious spaces was substantial. All this is to say that the Priestly writers did not create the tabernacle narrative *ex nihilo*. Neither do I assume they *necessarily* used older textual (or oral) sources about the tabernacle or similar tent (or tentlike) structures, at least not in some direct, genetic fashion that modern scholars (myself included) can trace with confidence. As I will argue below, cultural products such as the tabernacle narratives are the result of myriad cultural acts of exchange and appropriation. No text emerges in a social or cultural vacuum, as a spontaneous act of creativity and genius. On the contrary, texts arise out of historical, social, and cultural contexts and

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23. Following, most recently, Ska, *Reading the Pentateuch*, 146–47.

24. Benjamin D. Sommer makes a similar point in "Conflicting Constructions of Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle," *BibInt* 9 (2001): 41–63.

thus bear the marks of those contexts, even if direct, genetics links between them are sometimes elusive.

In addition to written and oral sources, I assume the Priestly writers were informed by their experiences and understandings of a range of real social spaces. These included private houses, public buildings, public squares, wilderness, roads and paths, fields, tents, cities, and other spaces of their time. They gained knowledge of these spaces by personal experience or hearing about them from others. The Priestly writers drew upon this knowledge for their description of the tabernacle. They also understood what constituted Israelite and/or Judean space. The result was that they could describe the ways in which Israelite spaces were distinct from those of other societies and social groups.[25]

Any prior material—written, oral, remembered, or observed—the Priestly writers might have had for the tabernacle was appropriated in such a way that it served their ideas, understandings, and purposes. If the Priestly writers had earlier source material describing a tent structure associated with the deity, they adapted, altered, and framed it to conform to their own purposes for the tabernacle.[26] Similarly, if they drew on their memories of the Solomonic temple in their narrative description of the tabernacle, as some scholars argue, then they took only what they needed for their own purposes.[27] No slavish copying of other temples, Israelite or foreign, for example, necessarily must be assumed for the tabernacle narratives, nor is there clear evidence of it.[28]

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25. The ability to describe Israelite/Judean spaces over against Babylon or, later, Persian spaces was a form of nationalism, because such descriptions implicitly asserted that Israelite/Judean space should be different from the space of the dominant political powers. In this way, tabernacle space was contested space, symbolically speaking, because it challenged other understandings of space in the larger social, cultural context.

26. As Sommer notes, the structure of the tabernacle was one found elsewhere in Syro-Palestine during the Bronze and Iron Ages ("Conflicting Constructions," 54–55), and memories of such temples could have been among the materials available to the Priestly writers.

27. Among those who argue that the tabernacle is patterned on the Solomonic temple, see Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies; Scholars Press Reprints and Translations; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 45; J. Philip Hyatt, *Exodus* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 260; see also Martin Noth (*Exodus: A Commentary* [trans. J. S. Bowden; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962], 201), who argues for patterning on the Jerusalem temple, although he is not sure whether that was the Solomonic or Second Temple.

28. In commenting on the many differences between the Solomonic temple and the tabernacle, Michael M. Homan asks, "If P modeled the Tabernacle on the Temple,

The Priestly writers appropriated what they wanted or needed from the other available sources, rejecting the rest of it.

This analysis assumes a relatively late date for the formation of the book of Exodus, wherein the tabernacle narratives are located. I assume the Priestly writers were the ones most directly responsible for the final form of Exodus (and the Pentateuch more generally). The Priestly writers were the last group to give significant shape and form to these texts at the level of composition and arrangement.[29] What followed the work of the Priestly writers was minor editing and transmission.[30] One implication of this assumption is that the placement of the tabernacle narratives in the book of Exodus is understood to be intentional.

I take an agnostic position on the question of the historical existence of the tabernacle. While this has been one of the more contested aspects of the tabernacle narratives over the years, with Julius Wellhausen and others arguing it did not exist and Frank Moore Cross and others arguing it did, the question is not pertinent to this study.[31] What the Priestly writers describe is

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why did he do such a poor job of copying?" (*To Your Tents, O Israel! The Terminology, Function, Form, and Symbolism of Tents in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* [CHANE 12; Leiden: Brill, 2002], 124). This question fits within Homan's larger argument against Wellhausen and others who believe the tabernacle to be a historical fiction. Apart from the question of the historical existence of the tabernacle, and thus of one of Homan's central concerns, I think his (rhetorical?) question rests on an incorrect assumption, that if the tabernacle is a copy of the Solomonic temple, then it would be a "good" copy, whatever "good" might mean (presumably that there would be few if any differences or discrepancies from the pattern of the Solomonic temple). In my view, there is no reason to assume the Priestly writers needed to copy exactly the pattern of the Solomonic temple; echoes and allusions are a reasonable way to make use of that structure in describing the tabernacle's structure, if, indeed, that is what was done.

29. Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 238.

30. I will not take up larger questions of sources and redaction in this book.

31. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 37, 45. (Childs [*The Book of Exodus*, 530] points out that de Wette was even more dismissive of the tabernacle, which he considered to be a myth.) Frank Moore Cross, "The Priestly Tabernacle in the Light of Recent Research," in *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times: Proceedings of the Colloquium in Honor of the Centennial of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Jerusalem 14–16 March 1977* (ed. Avraham Biran; Jerusalem: The Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1981), 169–80; idem, "The Tabernacle: A Study from an Archaeological and Historical Approach," *BASOR* 10 (1947): 45–68. See also Daniel E. Fleming, "Mari's Large Public Tent and the Priestly Tent Sanctuary," *VT* 50 (2000): 484–98; Michael

predicated on their experience and knowledge of the world around them.[32] As Cross and others have shown, material evidence exists for objects similar to the tabernacle and its furnishings, including tents, tent shrines, tents with frames, temples, altars, cherubim, tables, lampstands, and priestly garments.[33] The Priestly writers appropriated such objects in their narratives, but this does not mean the tabernacle itself enjoyed a material existence. Instead, by appropriating them, the Priestly writers gave the narratives *material plausibility*. Whether or not the tabernacle existed in history, it is materially plausible because consistent with other real objects.

Finally, this interpretation of tabernacle social space is based on the MT, not on a reconstructed text or a comparison of textual witnesses to the tabernacle narratives. Analyzing tabernacle social space based on a reconstructed text results in analyzing a social space different from that of the MT tabernacle narratives. Likewise, reading the LXX tabernacle narratives, which differ in significant ways from those of the MT, also is to read a different social space. As Gooding argues, the Greek translator of the tabernacle narratives had his own motives for the major differences in the order of the text (even if those

M. Homan, "The Divine Warrior in His Tent: A Military Model for Yahweh's Tabernacle," *BRev* 16.6 (2000): 22–26, 28–33, 55; idem, *To Your Tents*; Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); idem, "The Desert Tabernacle: Pure Fiction or Plausible Account?" *BRev* 16.6 (2000): 14–21; Beno Rothenberg, *The Egyptian Mining Temple at Timna* (Researches in the Arabah, 1959–1984; vol. 1; London: Institute for Archaeo-Metallurgical Studies, 1988).

32. It may well be that the cultural context within which the Priestly writers were working heightened their awareness of the physical world and their social context. No longer were they in social spaces they had produced, such as Jerusalem or Judah. Rather, they were in Babylon, social spaces quite different from their own. Within that space, they were dominated and subjugated people, and that space reminded them of their social status on a daily basis (see Ps 137). The Priestly effort to describe a uniquely Israelite space, the tabernacle, would have been one way to address the social context within which they found themselves.

33. Scholars have argued that the Priestly writers based their description of the tabernacle on various items, including Solomon's Temple (so Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 45); an early, thirteenth-century B.C.E. description of an elaborate tent (Homan, *To Your Tents*, 5); and Ramesses II's war tent at Qadesh (Kitchen, "Desert Tabernacle," 19; idem, "The Tabernacle—A Bronze Age Artefact," *ErIsr* 24 [1993]: 119*–29*). The Priestly writers' use of such sources is *possible*, but it is not *necessary*. They were part of the store of cultural resources available to the Priestly writers for cultural appropriation or acquisition.

motives did not produce a consistent plan for the tabernacle).[34] These changes produced a distinctive tabernacle social space, because a different way of understanding the tabernacle informed the LXX. In this book, I take the MT of Exod 25–31; 35–40 as the basis for my reading and analysis of tabernacle social space, thereby leaving for another project the reading of tabernacle social space as described in a reconstructed text, the LXX, or other witnesses to Exodus.

The Plan of this Study

The critical analysis of tabernacle social space in this book proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 explains the critical spatial theory informing this project. Most important in this regard is the work of the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre and his three conceptual categories for analyzing space.[35] These categories—spatial practice, conceptual space, and symbolic space—provide the structure for the analysis that follows. On their own, however, they do not constitute the approach to this book. A set of assumptions common to New Historicism are combined with Lefebvre's conceptual categories in the articulation of a spatial poetics. An approach rather than a method, spatial poetics provides a means of critically examining social space as a cultural artifact and project.

Chapter 3 examines tabernacle spatial practice, those social practices whereby the tabernacle is created as a space. Spatial practice is where empirical reality meets society and the practices it employs in order to transform matter into its space(s). Space is a human project realized in the physical world. Therefore, in addition to questions of the physical reality of space, spatial practice is interested in the social mechanisms employed to transform matter into space. These can range from building practices and the materials used to the assemblage of items necessary for the creation of a space. Finally, spatial practice acknowledges that spaces are not simply created by societies but also shape them. Walls, curtains, doors, streets, cliffs, mountains, and other physical realia force human beings to move, look, listen, and act in certain ways. In the process, physical space shapes self-understandings and social identities. The tabernacle's spatial practices are revealed in its various

34. D. W. Gooding, *The Account of the Tabernacle: Translation and Textual Problems of the Greek Exodus* (TS NS 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 100–101.

35. Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (4th ed.; Paris: Anthropos, 2000); English translation of the 2nd edition: *The Production of Space* (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith; Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

inventory lists, detailed descriptions, spatial arrangement, portability, and orientation. They not only enable this space to be created (as a literary object, if not a historical one), but to be re-created again and again.

Chapter 4 analyzes the mental, or conceptual, space of the tabernacle. Conceptual space involves the rational, theoretical systems that give it structure and organization. These involve the ability to identify and describe, divide, classify, and thereby organize the tabernacle. This field of social space is what makes possible tabernacle spatial practices. Systems of organization generally involve taxonomies, based on certain principles of classification derived from relationships between the objects being classified. In general, such relationships are perceived to be natural. Yet what is perceived in one society to be a "natural" relationship may be perceived as "unnatural" in another society. Such disagreements about what is natural are due to the fact that taxonomic systems, and the classificatory principles upon which they rest, are socially based and determined. Analysis of tabernacle conceptual space reveals the social basis for its organization and classification. It is not holiness, as some scholars recently have argued, since holiness describes a "natural" relationship between objects, actions, and persons in the tabernacle's mental space. It lies instead in Priestly cosmology and Priestly interpretations of social structures within the divinely created order.

Chapter 5 examines tabernacle symbolic space. This is where the social energy of space circulates most powerfully, because it is that energy which gives social space its meaning and significance for a society. It is what makes a house a home, a graveyard something other than a park, and a space sacred rather than profane. Symbolic space is the field where a society infuses meaning into space. In the tabernacle, the larger social and cultural context within which the Priestly writers were working becomes especially evident. Of particular note are royal building inscriptions and foundation deposits, which had a long history in the ancient Near East, even by the time the Priestly writers were working on the tabernacle narratives. They acquired the social energy of these traditions for tabernacle symbolic space. This acquisition had numerous benefits for tabernacle social space, from portraying the tabernacle as a royal building project built by the Israelites, to elevating the people's social status, even while they were dominated and oppressed by Babylon. By a series of negotiations and exchanges, foundational myths and stories of Babylon, involving the creation of the cosmos and of Babylon itself, were acquired and reinterpreted by the Priestly writers to give prominence to Israel and Yhwh. The use of such stories and the social energy they possessed gave the tabernacle its own potent social energy.

One other element of the analysis of tabernacle social space in this study should be noted here. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 include the exegesis of a cultural

object or item that may well appear, at first glance, to be unrelated to the tabernacle narratives. These exegeses are undertaken in recognition of the fact that the tabernacle narratives were deeply implicated and connected to the larger culture. The cultural objects engaged are diverse: one is a house sale contract from the seventh century B.C.E., another is the tenth-century B.C.E. Gezer Calendar, and last is a sixth-century B.C.E. letter to Esarhaddon of Assyria concerning one of his building projects. The primary goal in using these objects is to provide a comparative point of reference for the field of tabernacle social space being discussed, as well as to show how that field draws upon larger cultural forces and energies.

The objection could be raised that these objects differ in a fundamental way from the tabernacle, if the tabernacle is assumed to be a literary fiction. That difference lies in these being real objects, whereas the tabernacle is an imaginary one. Implicit in this objection, however, is what Lefebvre terms "the realistic illusion," what I would term the materialist fallacy, which is based on an assumption that material objects are more real than ideas or imagined objects.[36] Yet this is precisely the point at which comparison with other cultural objects demonstrates that the tabernacle narratives are not fanciful or otherworldly. As noted above, the tabernacle has material plausibility because it is comprised of objects similar to a number of real, historical objects. As I argue in chapter 3, tabernacle spatial practice expresses the plausibility of tabernacle social space. That plausibility renders the question of the tabernacle's historical existence irrelevant to this analysis. The Priestly writers had a real, material existence, and they drew upon their experiences of the real world for their descriptions of the tabernacle. Comparison with the house sale contract, the Gezer Calendar, and Esarhaddon's building project are evidence of the tabernacle's material plausibility and therefore the ability to compare "real" and "imagined" objects. The tabernacle may be an imagined space, but this is not to say that it is fanciful or otherworldly.

36. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 29–30; idem, *Production de l'espace*, 38–39.