

Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Themes in Biblical Narrative Jewish and Christian Traditions

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Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Edited by

Eric F. Mason
Edmondo F. Lupieri



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Preface and Acknowledgments

On November 14–16, 2012, we (with Alec J. Lucas) convened an international conference at Loyola University Chicago titled “The Reception of Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.” Fourteen papers were presented on that occasion, covering centuries of reflection on the controversial “sin of the golden calf” as interpreted in various ways in the Scriptures and other important texts of the three Abrahamic religions. Those papers constituted the first drafts of most of the chapters in the present book.¹ After the conference we invited three additional scholars to contribute to the volume in order to offer a more complete overview of the religious and cultural impact the golden calf narrative had in the three religious traditions, from their origins through the end of Late Antiquity. This book is the final result of that common endeavor.

The idea for the conference and subsequent volume emerged from conversations at Loyola University Chicago in the Spring 2010 semester. Eric F. Mason was a visiting scholar on sabbatical leave from his institution and was familiar with the dissertation work of Lucas, then a Ph.D. candidate in Loyola’s Department of Theology.² Golden calf traditions in several texts were central to Lucas’s research. He and Mason began to consider the possibilities for a conference exploring the ancient reception of the calf traditions more broadly; they sketched out initial plans for the texts to be examined and the speakers to invite, with the goal of publication in the Themes in Biblical Narrative series from the outset. At this point they engaged Edmondo F. Lupieri, the John Cardinal Cody Endowed Chair in Theology at Loyola; together they brought further clarification to the plans for the conference, and Lupieri administered the financial arrangements that made the conference possible. The event was scheduled over two years in advance so it could coincide with the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Chicago and to accommodate Lucas’s time away in Heidelberg on a Fulbright fellowship. Though Lucas was unable to continue as an editor for this volume due to his subsequent employment outside the academic field, his vital and prolific contributions to the project have been very much appreciated by his colleagues.

1 Clare K. Rothschild’s presentation has been published elsewhere and is not included here. See “Golden Calf Incident in 1 Clement” in her collection titled *New Essays on the Apostolic Fathers* (WUNT 375; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 81–96.

2 The dissertation was later published as Alec J. Lucas, *Evocations of the Calf? Romans 1:18–2:11 and the Substructure of Psalm 106(105)* (BZNW 201; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015).

The organizers sought from the beginning to include contributing scholars both from the region and beyond. Naturally Loyola was very well represented, but scholars from several other Chicago-area institutions also participated, both as speakers and dialogue partners. In particular, members of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research were actively engaged in all aspects of the meeting. Other program participants were from various regions in the United States, and one came from Ethiopia. Several Italian scholars attended; unfortunately, a scheduled speaker from Europe had to withdraw from the conference shortly before it opened. In addition, the conference was planned alongside the seventh annual John Cardinal Cody Lecture, offered by John J. Collins of Yale Divinity School on the topic “What Have We Learned from the Dead Sea Scrolls?”³

The present volume comprises seventeen contributions, which we have arranged following a roughly chronological order according to their contents. The golden calf narrative depicts Israel’s idolatry during the exodus saga and was considered by some ancient writers to be the worst of their sins in the history of their relationship with God. Their own uses of the tradition are diversified and sometimes controversial. Accordingly, the seventeen contributions in this volume reflect that diversity, both in terms of methodology and content. The first chapters discuss the earliest biblical attestations of the legend and their intra-biblical connections. Then we follow subsequent paths of analysis in Jewish, Christian, and qur’anic and Islamic texts and traditions. The ancient interpreters sometimes handle the calf narrative explicitly, sometimes use it implicitly as a conceptual and literary model for a new and different narrative, or sometimes avoid it in contexts where it would have been logical and expected to be utilized. In this way we have not only analyzed the calf tradition’s explicit *Fortleben*, but also its allusions and echoes, and even the silence of some apologetic texts.

The five opening chapters deal with explicit or potential golden calf imagery in Jewish canonical and extracanonical texts. In the first chapter, Robert A. Di Vito argues that Exod 32 and Deut 9:7–10:11 are intertexts, products of inner-biblical interpretation. The second contribution, by Ralph W. Klein, analyzes the so-called “sin” of Jeroboam and concludes that his calves may very well represent an earlier tradition that linked Aaron in a positive way to the golden calf incident. Pauline A. Viviano concludes that the books of Hosea and Jeremiah show no awareness of the Sinai/Horeb calf story, but the golden calves of Jeroboam are alluded to in Hosea. The following chapter, by Richard J.

3 This presentation subsequently was published under the same title in John J. Collins, *Scriptures and Sectarianism: Essays on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (WUNT 332; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 1–16 (reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

Bautch, explores the penitential uses of the golden calf episode in Nehemiah and in Ps 106. Finally, Daniel Assefa and Kelley Coblentz Bautch demonstrate that the worship of the golden calf is indeed narrated—even if obliquely—in the Animal Apocalypse of *1 Enoch*.

Next, three chapters examine Hellenistic Jewish authors for whom the golden calf episode is so embarrassing that it has to be reworked and retold (Philo, by Thomas H. Tobin, S.J.; and Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, by John C. Endres, S.J., with the assistance of Peter Claver Ajer) or even fully omitted (Josephus, by Gregory E. Sterling) in their reconstructions of past Jewish history.

Four chapters are dedicated to direct engagement with or echoes of the golden calf narrative by New Testament authors. Alec J. Lucas identifies five Pauline references to the golden calf incident and argues that Paul reflects a competing tradition found in Wisdom of Solomon. Joel B. Green critically analyzes the significant role of the golden calf memory in Stephen's speech in Acts 7. Eric F. Mason shows how vocabulary and imagery from the calf story in Deut 9 are utilized by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, even if the text lacks any explicit mention of the incident. Similarly, Edmondo F. Lupieri suggests that the golden calf imagery plays a constitutive background role in some of the apocalyptic visions in John's Book of Revelation.

The five concluding chapters follow further developments of the golden calf narrative in subsequent Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. Devorah Schoenfeld studies how the biblical incident becomes a useful tool for midrashic and liturgical reflections about the nature of sin and the possibility for repentance in rabbinic Jewish thought. Wesley E. Dingman analyzes the anti-Jewish use of the golden calf narrative in polemical works by patristic authors as well as its pedagogical (and allegorical) reinterpretation, particularly in the Augustinian tradition. Andrew Radde-Gallwitz focuses on how for Justin Martyr the biblical event becomes the quintessential example of Jewish infidelity and hardness of heart in order to support his argument to demarcate the "Jews" from the "Christians." Pre-Islamic Syriac authors are the subject of Andrew J. Hayes's essay, which shows how for them the biblical narrative is a key text for understanding the church in salvation history and for commending repentance and asceticism, not simply for anti-Jewish polemic. Finally, Michael E. Pregill discusses qur'anic and Islamic interaction with the narrative, arguing that the mysterious "Samaritan" of the calf account in the Qur'an is indeed an epithet for Aaron and showing how post-qur'anic Islamic and Jewish interpretive traditions developed by influencing each other reciprocally.

We are delighted that the manuscript was accepted by Brill to be published in the Themes in Biblical Narrative series, and we benefitted much from the

guidance of series editor Rob Kugler and Brill's Tessa Schild and Ester Lels at numerous points. We also wish to acknowledge the many people who helped us with the conference and the resulting volume. The conference was made possible by generous financial support from the Chicago Society of Biblical Research and various institutions at Loyola, including the Office of the Provost, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Graduate School, the John Cardinal Cody Chair in Theology, and the Department of Theology. Also, Randall Newman from the Department of Theology handled vital logistical arrangements that ensured the conference ran smoothly. Several Loyola Ph.D. students in New Testament and Early Christianity assisted during the conference and especially throughout the long editorial process, including Scott Brevard, Wesley Dingman, Shane Gormley, Jonathan Hatter, Joshua King, and Jef Tripp. Finally and foremost, we are extremely grateful for the participation and the patience of the contributors, without which this book would not have come to light. We have learned much from their scholarly insights and dialogue, and we offer our sincere thanks to each and every one of them.

Eric F. Mason and Edmondo F. Lupieri

Abbreviations

Greek and Latin Authors

Alcinous

Didask.

Didaskalos

Herodotus

Hist.

Histories

Plato

Resp.

Respublica

Tim.

Timaeus

Pliny the Younger

Ep.

Epistulae

Plutarch

Is. Os.

De Iside et Osiride

Mor.

Moralia

Quaest. conv.

Quaestiones convivales

Sept. sap. conv.

Septem sapientium convivium

Tacitus

Hist.

Historiae

Biblical Texts

Abbreviations for biblical texts follow those listed in *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2d ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

Other Second Temple Period Jewish Texts

Apoc. Ab.

Apocalypse of Abraham

As. Mos.

Assumption of Moses

1 En.

1 Enoch

Josephus

<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>
<i>Life</i>	<i>The Life</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
<i>L.A.B.</i>	<i>Liber antiquitatum biblicarum</i> (Pseudo-Philo)
<i>Let. Aris.</i>	<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>

Philo

<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abrahamo</i>
<i>Decal.</i>	<i>De Decalogo</i>
<i>Det.</i>	<i>Quod deterius potiori insidari soleat</i>
<i>Ebr.</i>	<i>De ebrietate</i>
<i>Fug.</i>	<i>De fuga et inuentione</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legum allegoriae</i>
<i>Migr.</i>	<i>De migratione Abrahami</i>
<i>Mos.</i>	<i>De Vita Mosis</i>
<i>Post.</i>	<i>De posteritate Caini</i>
<i>QG</i>	<i>Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesim</i>
<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus</i>
<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
<i>T. Reu.</i>	<i>Testament of Reuben</i>

Other Ancient Christian Texts

<i>Acts Pet. Paul</i>	<i>Acts of Peter and Paul</i>
<i>Acts Pil.</i>	<i>Acts of Pilate</i>

Aphrahat

<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Demonstrations</i>
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<i>Apos. Con. (or AC)</i>	<i>Apostolic Constitutions and Canons</i>
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Athenagoras

<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legatio pro Christianis</i>
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Augustine

<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessions</i>
<i>Enarrat. Ps.</i>	<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i>
<i>Faust.</i>	<i>Contra Faustum Manichaeum</i>
<i>Retract.</i>	<i>Retractationum libri II</i>
<i>Tract. Ev. Jo.</i>	<i>In Evangelium Johannis tractatus</i>
<i>Barn.</i>	<i>Barnabas</i>
<i>1. Clem.</i>	<i>1 Clement</i>

Clement of Alexandria

<i>Paed.</i>	<i>Paedagogus</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromateis</i>
<i>Did. apost.</i>	<i>Didascalía apostolorum</i>

Ephrem

<i>CNis.</i>	<i>Carmina Nisibena</i>
<i>HcJ</i>	<i>Hymni contra Julianum</i>
<i>HdC</i>	<i>Hymni de Crucifixione</i>
<i>HdE</i>	<i>Hymni de Ecclesia</i>
<i>HdF</i>	<i>Hymni de Fide</i>
<i>HdN</i>	<i>Hymni de Nativitate</i>

Eusebius

<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
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Irenaeus

<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Against Heresies</i>
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Jerome

<i>Comm. Zach.</i>	<i>Commentariorum in Zachariam libri III</i>
<i>Jov.</i>	<i>Adversus Jovianum libri II</i>

John Chrysostom

<i>Adv. Jud.</i>	<i>Adversus Judaeos</i>
<i>Hom. Act.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Acta apostolorum</i>
<i>Hom. 1 Cor.</i>	<i>Homiliae in epistolam primam ad Corinthios</i>
<i>Hom. 2 Cor.</i>	<i>Homiliae in epistolam secundam ad Corinthios</i>
<i>Hom. Gen.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Genesim</i>

<i>Hom. Matt.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Matthaëum</i>
<i>Hom. Rom.</i>	<i>Homiliae in epistulam ad Romanos</i>
<i>Laed.</i>	<i>Quod nemo laeditur nisi a se ipso</i>
Justin	
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
<i>LG</i>	<i>Liber Graduum</i>
Minucius Felix	
<i>Oct.</i>	<i>Octavius</i>
Origen	
<i>Cels.</i>	<i>Contra Celsum</i>
<i>Comm. Jo.</i>	<i>Commentarii in evangelium Joannis</i>
<i>Ep. Greg.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Gregorium Thaumaturgum</i>
<i>Sel. Jes. Nav.</i>	<i>Selecta in Jesum Nave</i>
<i>Sel. Num.</i>	<i>Selecta in Numeros</i>
Polycarp	
<i>Pol. Phil.</i>	<i>To the Philippians</i>
Pseudo-Clement	
<i>Hom.</i>	<i>Homiliae</i>
<i>Recog.</i>	<i>Recognitiones</i>
Socrates of Constantinople	
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
Tertullian	
<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologeticus</i>
<i>Marc.</i>	<i>Adversus Marcionem</i>
<i>Scorp.</i>	<i>Scorpiace</i>

Gnostic Texts

<i>Ap. John.</i>	<i>Secret Book of John</i> (NHC II 1)
<i>Auth. Disc.</i>	<i>Authoritative Discourse</i> (NHC VI 3)
<i>Exeg. Soul</i>	<i>Exegesis of the Soul</i> (NHC II 6)

Heracleon

*Fragm.**Fragments***Rabbinic Literature**

<i>ʿAvod. Zar.</i>	<i>Avodah Zarah</i>
<i>b.</i>	Babylonian Talmud
<i>Cant. Rab.</i>	<i>Canticles Rabbah</i>
<i>Deut. Rab.</i>	<i>Deuteronomy Rabbah</i>
<i>Exod. Rab.</i>	<i>Exodus Rabbah</i>
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah
<i>Meg.</i>	<i>Megillah</i>
<i>Midr. Tanḥ.</i>	<i>Midrash Tanḥuma</i>
<i>Ned.</i>	<i>Nedarim</i>
<i>Num. Rab.</i>	<i>Numbers Rabbah</i>
<i>Pesiq. Rab Kah.</i>	<i>Pesiqta of Rab Kahana</i>
<i>Pirqe R. El.</i>	<i>Pirqe Rabbi Eliezar</i>
<i>Roš Haš.</i>	<i>Rosh HaShanah</i>
<i>S. Eli. Zut.</i>	<i>Seder Eliyahu Zuta</i>
<i>S. ʿOlam Rab.</i>	<i>Seder ʿOlam Rabbah</i>
<i>Šabb.</i>	<i>Shabbat</i>
<i>Sanh.</i>	<i>Sanhedrin</i>
<i>Sifre Deut.</i>	<i>Sifre Deuteronomy</i>
<i>Sop.</i>	<i>Soperim</i>
<i>Taʿan.</i>	<i>Taʿanit</i>
<i>Tg. Ps.-J.</i>	<i>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</i>

Secondary Literature

<i>AB</i>	<i>Assyriologische Bibliothek</i>
<i>AB</i>	Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
<i>AGJU</i>	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
<i>AnBib</i>	Analecta biblica
<i>ANEP</i>	<i>Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by James E. Pritchard. 2nd ed. with supplement. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> . Edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson. 10 vols. 1885–1887. Repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994.
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ASE	<i>Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi</i>
Aug	<i>Augustinianum</i>
AYBRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
BA	<i>Biblical Archeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research</i>
BDAG	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Edited by Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and Felix W. Gingrich. 3d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniesium
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CC	Continental Commentaries
CJA	Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium
CurBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
EBR	<i>Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception</i> . Edited by Christine Helmer et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009–.
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentaries
EI	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i> . Edited by M. Th. Houtsma et al. 4 vols. plus supplements. Leiden: Brill, 1913–1938.
EI ²	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition</i> . Edited by P. J. Bearman et al. 12 vols. plus glossaries and indices. Leiden: Brill, 1960–2006.
ESEC	Emory Studies in Early Christianity
FC	Fathers of the Church
FGH	<i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> . Edited by Felix Jacoby. Leiden: Brill, 1954–1964.
FJTC	Flavius Josephus Translation and Commentary
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments

<i>GLAJJ</i>	<i>Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism</i> . Edited with Introductions, Translations and Commentary by Menahem Stern. 3 vols. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974–1984.
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HCS	Hellenistic Culture and Society
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSJ	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Edited by H. G. Liddell, R. Schott, H. S. Jones, and R. McKenzie. 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
<i>NPNF</i> ¹	<i>The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , Series 1. Edited by Philip Schaff. 14 vols. 1886–1889. Repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994.
<i>NPNF</i> ²	<i>The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , Series 2. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 14 vols. 1890–1900. Repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994.
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NTT</i>	<i>Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift</i>
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library

<i>OTP</i>	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. Anchor Bible Reference Library. New York: Doubleday, 1983–1985.
OTS	Old Testament Studies
PG	Patrologia Graeca [= Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca.] Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886.
<i>PGL</i>	<i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> . Edited by G. W. H. Lampe. Oxford: Clarendon, 1961.
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
SBAIL	Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Israel and its Literature
SBLEJL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and its Literature
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SBLSPM	Society of Biblical Literature Studia Philonica Monographs
SBSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SEERI	Saint Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>SVF</i>	<i>Stoicorum veterum fragmenta</i>
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha
TCLA	Texts from Christian Late Antiquity
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976.
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–.
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare

ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft (und die Kunde der ältere Kirche)
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Field Specific Abbreviations

<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
BCE	Before the Common Era
CE	Common Era
Dtr	Deuteronomistic History
D	Deuteronomistic source
E	Elohistic source
ET	English Translation
frag.	fragment
HB	Hebrew Bible
J	Yahwistic source
l./ll.	line/lines
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
P	Priestly source
Q	Qur'an
R	Redactor

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The Calf Episodes in Exodus and Deuteronomy: A Study in Inner-Biblical Interpretation

Robert A. Di Vito

Anyone familiar with Pentateuchal criticism today knows that the old consensus regarding the formation of the Pentateuch, framed as it has been largely in terms of the Documentary Hypothesis (Wellhausen 1899), is fast disappearing, even in this country. Perhaps nowhere is its demise more evident than in the calf episodes in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Indeed, the analysis of the golden calf story in Exod 32 and the calf episode in Deut 9:7–10:11 has become so embroiled in a larger debate about the compositional history of the Pentateuch that the two texts frequently seem to function simply as proxies for the two sides in the conflict of competing compositional theories. All too often theory not only drives the analysis but determines the outcome.

The intention in this chapter, fortunately, is a limited one: certainly not to solve the larger problem of the Pentateuch's formation, but to undertake a literary analysis of the calf episodes in Exodus and Deuteronomy that does not depend, as far as this is possible, upon a particular theory of the Pentateuch's composition. To be sure, there are literary models I am inclined toward; they correspond generally to those that today challenge the classic documentary analysis. Moreover, they regard the Priestly author as the one largely responsible for the grand narrative of the Pentateuch, having combined Genesis's narrative of the ancestors with that of Moses and the exodus.¹ But the texts under discussion here, controverted as they are, will not become a test-case for one of these models, even if they cannot be understood entirely apart from such models or they potentially show the limits of any theory. William Propp's "modest proposal" at the outset of his source analysis of the Sinai narrative comes to mind: he aptly remarks, "My goal here is to show how the text *could* have evolved, not how it *did*" (Propp 2006, 141).

1 For a convenient overview of variants of this general approach, as well as a sampling of critics, see Dozeman and Schmid (2006). Among the critics who are not classical documentarians, see conveniently Van Seters (1999, 77–79), where he lays out in summary fashion his model over against competing views.

The literary critical analysis of Exod 32 and Deut 9:7–10:11 presented here will demonstrate that these two texts are clear-cut examples of intertexts, products of an inner-biblical interpretation that has resulted in their present form. Far from being independent compositions based on oral or other such traditions, they are in fact the product of authors reflecting upon the story in 1 Kgs 12:26–32 of Jeroboam's erection of two golden calves in the sanctuaries of Bethel and Dan, following upon the northern kingdom's split from Judah shortly after Solomon's death. It was this action that was reckoned apostasy by the writer of Kings and the basic reason for the fall of the kingdom to the Assyrians in 722 BCE. And while the account in 1 Kings is probably in some part a fiction born of a later time, it nonetheless led to the interpretation of Exod 32. Subsequently, the latter became itself the primary source of further interpretation in Deut 9:7–10:11.

This argument hinges of course not only upon the results of a literary critical analysis of Exod 32 and Deut 9:7–10:11, but also upon a proper assessment of the direction of dependence between them. To be sure, each text's literary integrity (or lack thereof) and the direction of the dependence are highly controverted issues. However, that there is a relationship of dependence between them is not in doubt due to the motifs, specific language, and phrasing they have in common, most famously the presence in Exod 32 of so-called Deuteronomistic language, especially in vv. 7–14 (Childs 1974, 559). Older analyses working within the framework of the classical Documentary Hypothesis and an early dating of Exod 32 had, of course, attributed this language either to a late Deuteronomistic interpolation or to the work of the redactors originally responsible for combining the Pentateuch's sources (J with E or JE with D). But more recent commentators (including John Van Seters and Thomas Dozeman) have argued for a process of inner-biblical interpretation such as is envisioned here, even if they see this same language as just one indication among others that Exod 32 is literarily dependent upon both the account of 1 Kgs 12:26–32 and Deut 9:7–10:11 (see below).

Important as they are, the literary critical analysis and determination of the direction of dependence are only preliminary to understanding the distinctive treatments of the calf episode in the two sources. In the case of Exodus, its distinct perspective on the calf episode comes to the fore with the investigation of Exodus's understanding and transformation of the Jeroboam episode. That study, in turn, provides the basis for our view of how Deuteronomy engages and "corrects" the interpretation of Exod 32, especially with regard to Moses's appeal for God's mercy upon a stiff-necked people. In the end, at least two points respecting the intent of these texts emerge from this study of their distinctive treatments of the calf episode. First, as others have noted, Deuteronomy

consistently highlights the power of Moses's intercession over against his failure in Exodus. Second, and key to Deuteronomistic theology, what effectively motivates God in this crisis is not any appeal to patriarchal promises and its associated traditions but rather an appeal to the exodus and Israel's election.

Literary Critical Analysis of Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 9:7–10:11

In the face of ever renewed attempts to read the final form of these texts as literarily unified wholes, it is not enough simply to note the problems standing in the way of understanding them as literary units and then seek an ad hoc “work-around” for them (Baden 2012, 12). As Joel Baden has shrewdly observed, “the ability to impose a sort of after-the-fact sense on a problematic text does not lead to the conclusion that the text was intentionally composed in a problematic manner” (Baden 2012, 10). In fact, it is precisely the “obstacles” to understanding narrative coherence that ought to be the starting point for a critical reading of the text. That applies above all to a narrative's consistency in the expression of its central theme or the consistency of its storyline regarding what factually happened. As Baden puts it, who did what, where, when, and how (Baden 2012, 246)? Where claims regarding these questions are blatantly in conflict, critics on either side of an ideological spectrum will typically and quite naturally assume that multiple hands have been at work. Indeed they do so because minimally they presume of an individual author's work some unified perspective and genuine consistency in the assertion of certain types of factual claims. To be sure, other criteria—such as an author's fondness for specific terminology, the presence or absence of certain themes, or the use of a particular style—have their place in literary criticism, but deviation from the norm in these matters does not necessarily make a reading “problematic” or reliably call for a literary solution in the same way that the contradiction of statements of fact or ideological incoherence around a theme does. That is a point underscored by John Van Seters in his brief introduction to the Pentateuch (1999, 27):

A particular text-unit or a larger ‘source’ is the work of a single author only if it manifests a fairly high degree of consistency. Blatant contradiction, therefore, suggests that a second hand is at work. This is especially true if the work is wholly the invention of the author. If the author is using certain traditions or sources for his/her composition, he/she may not be able to eliminate all of the differences between them. But the very idea of authorship demands consistency.

Speculative theories about textual unity notwithstanding, the primary criterion must, in other words, be consistency in the assertion of claims whose contradiction cannot be tolerated under the rubric of singular authorship.

Exodus 32

Although older analyses typically judged its text composite, several recent commentators, even with considerably different views of the Pentateuch's composition, have argued for the substantial unity of Exod 32. Among documentarians, Brevard Childs, for example, cites a lack of appreciation for the literary shaping of the narrative in earlier studies and argues for the presence of only one source, probably J, with two expansions in 32:7–14 (Moses's first intercession) and 32:25–29 (the Levite purge of the Israelite camp). Of these, however, only the second expansion really reflects an independent tradition and is intrusive. To be sure, vv. 7–14 are "saturated with Deuteronomic language (cf. Deut. 9.25ff.)" and even anticipate the discovery of Israel's apostasy by Moses and Joshua in vv. 15–20. Nevertheless, since in Childs's view these verses also are necessary for the transition to Moses's return in v. 15, they show that the expansion in vv. 7–14 had actually "attached to an element within the original story." The supposed contradiction between God informing Moses of Israel's sin (vv. 7–8) and his own discovery subsequently in vv. 15–20 comes simply from "not recognizing the literary nature of the story" and how the "scheme of contrasting scenes often dislocates the chronological sequence of the narrative." That is to say, the supposed contradiction arises only because, as Childs sees it, the author of the story also had on hand an old piece of poetry in v. 18 "which he had to work into his story." The resulting tension between the prose and the poetry sections, then, is only to be expected, and that leaves just the second expansion in vv. 25–29 as an independent tradition introduced into the narrative (Childs 1974, 559). In the same vein, Propp in his massive commentary barely deals with the narrative inconsistencies that generally bother commentators, remarking that, unlike most, he thinks the story "reads quite well." Only the term *העדה* ("testimony"), characteristic of P and R (redactor), bothers him and represents a possible interpolation (Propp 2006, 148–49).² In the end, for Propp, the entire episode is simply a creation of R^J, even if it represents one of his more "unusual feats of editorial legerdemain" (Propp 2006, 150–51).

On the other side of the source debate, John Van Seters and Thomas Dozeman also argue for the text's substantial unity. So, while 32:9–14, 25–29 are "problematic and possible additions," along with vv. 15b–16 and v. 35 (possibly from P), in the end Van Seters concludes that the narrative has been

² All biblical translations are those of the author.

created by one author, with a few glosses, largely on the basis of the account of Jeroboam's calves in 1 Kgs 12:26–32 (Van Seters 1994, 295). It may be, he says, “a narrative of considerable complexity,” but in no way is it “the result of a complex redactional process” (Van Seters 1994, 318). The perceived unevenness in the text stems from the procedures of the Yahwist as a historian, who is subject to the sources he is following and who has a strong etiological interest in accounting for various contemporaneous customs and institutions (Van Seters 1994, 317). So “if the narrative suffers as a story, it gains as a more comprehensive history” (Van Seters 1994, 317). For his part, Dozeman largely concurs, although his argument about the text's unevenness hinges not on the *modus operandi* of the Yahwist as a historian but on seeing Exod 32 as a unified text that combines 1 Kgs 12:26–33 and Deut 9:7–10:11. Over against Deuteronomy's corporate view of guilt, it reinterprets the sin as an individual's responsibility (Dozeman 2009, 697–98).

In all these studies, including the last, the claim for the text's substantial unity depends on ignoring the incoherence in the storyline that results from the inclusion of material that is problematic in a straightforward reading, even as the justifications offered for the originality of this material make more sense as the rationale for later insertions. Accordingly, even apart from the evident Deuteronomistic phrasing (Propp 2006, 148–49), what is glossed over in the inclusion of vv. 7–14 as original, in the name of literariness or an historian's manner of working, is the glaring inconsistency in Yahweh informing Moses of the people's offense (vv. 7–8) only to have Moses subsequently ignorant of what has transpired in his dialogue with Joshua (vv. 17–18)—an inconsistency in the narrative highlighted by his violent rage at seeing the calf (v. 19). And when later in v. 30 Moses expresses uncertainty (אוֹלִי, “perchance”) about the prospects for a successful intercession, clearly he is unaware both of his earlier intervention in vv. 11–13 and of its success in v. 14 (Childs 1974, 559). Not only does he then go on to fail (vv. 31–34), but in v. 35 Yahweh strikes the people with a plague! With the removal of vv. 7–14, however, these problems vanish, even as the narrative continuity remains intact. That is to say, in 31:18 Moses receives from God the two tablets, only to “turn away” in v. 15 and descend from the mountain, carrying the two tablets in his hand. The urgency of the situation that for Van Seters motivates Moses's successful intercession in vv. 11–14 (Van Seters 1994, 314) might well have provided an opportunity for its insertion, given Moses's complete failure in the original narrative; but it cannot explain the inconsistencies in the resulting narrative.

Notwithstanding Dozeman's effort to read v. 20b's reference to Moses forcing the people to drink the contaminated water as an ordeal precipitating the Levite purge in vv. 25–29 (Dozeman 2009, 699–700), for which there is no

evidence (Begg 1985, 229–33, 242–44; Propp 2006, 559–60), 32:25–29 can hardly be original. Although already in v. 20 Moses is in control of the situation, in v. 25 the situation seems once again desperate, with the people running wild. At the same time, the reader is totally unprepared for the introduction of a group, let alone “all the Levites” (v. 26), which had not participated in the worship of the calf (see, e.g., v. 3’s reference to “all the people”; Childs 1974, 571). Indeed, if all the guilty are slaughtered now by the Levites, who is left to punish in vv. 30–35? That the focus of the passage is an etiology for the Levitical claim to priesthood (v. 29), based perhaps on Deut 33:8–11 as Van Seters suggests (1994, 317), only underscores the secondary nature of the insertion.

Aside from these two extensive insertions, vv. 15b–16 and v. 35 are also generally regarded as secondary material, even though they do not occasion the same sort of disruption to the narrative’s continuity. Verses 15b–16, focused on the tablets and their divine origin, seem like a digression even as the occurrence of the word *העדות* (“testimony,” also in 31:18; otherwise P; Noth 1974, 249) suggests a Priestly or post-priestly addition (Propp 2006, 148; Konkel 2011, 180–81). For its part, v. 35 is problematic because, while v. 34 suggests an indefinite postponement of the punishment of the guilty, v. 35 abruptly (Noth 1974, 251) describes an immediate execution of its threat (Van Seters 1999, 295).

Deuteronomy 9:7–10:11

Unlike Exod 32, Deut 9:7–10:11 is not written in the style of a narrative account of the calf episode, but (as Martin Rose and others have pointed out) in the style of a retrospective summary, or review, by Moses after the death of the Horeb generation (Rose 1994, 506–7; Schmitt 2000, 242). That means the chronologically ordered narrative of Exodus here is subordinate to another purpose entirely, one where the text’s meaning is going to develop not so much in linear time as through repetition and recapitulation. This is evident above all in the repeating phrase “forty days and forty nights,” which Norbert Lohfink notes serves to introduce major sections in the text (Lohfink 1963, 214–15). But just to this extent, the absence of strict narrative continuity also makes literary critical analysis that much less straightforward.

Not in doubt, however, is the secondary nature of 10:6–9, consisting of perhaps two additions (vv. 6–7 and 8–9), the itinerary notice highlighting Aaron’s succession as priest by his son Eleazar and the duties of Levites. On account of this focus and, even more, the sudden and intrusive introduction of third-person narration in a context that is otherwise essentially a first-person speech by Moses, these verses are typically excluded from the base stratum. Along with these, commentators also regularly regard as intrusive 9:10 and 10:1–5,

verses that focus on God's inscription of the two tablets and the making of an ark (Aurelius 1988, 14–16; Van Seters 1994, 302; Weinfeld 1991, 418). First, 9:10 seems to be a doublet of 9:11; and, second, the carving of new tablets and the ark's construction in 10:1–5, introduced by the phrase “at that time,” interrupt the connection between Moses's intercession in 9:25–29 and its success in 10:10 (Van Seters 1994, 301). Indeed, as both Erik Aurelius and Moshe Weinfeld have noted, the phrase *בְּעֵת הַהוּא* (“at that time”) may well be an indication of the secondary attachment of 10:1–5 to the preceding verses (Aurelius 1988, 416; Weinfeld 1991, 418), even as it seems obvious that the focus of these verses does not fit with the theme of the unit (at least as stated in 9:7a), viz., Israel's act of provocation in the wilderness. That the inclusion of 10:1–5 may echo the sin-covenant renewal theme that gives shape to Exod 32–34 overall (Childs 1974, 557), or that 10:1–5 may now function after the fact as the immediate response to Moses's prayer in 9:25–29 (Rose 1994, 512), cannot overcome the resulting difficulty that 10:10, without the interruption of the secondary material in 10:6–9, follows very poorly on 10:5. In other words, in 10:5 Moses goes down the mountain only to be on top of the mountain in 10:10! Thus 10:1–5 must be regarded as intrusive. That of course makes 9:10 doubly doubtful, since 9:10 reflects the same concern for the divine origin of the tablets' wording seen in 10:4, with much the same language. It only makes sense to take it too, then, as a doublet (contra Weinfeld 1991, 408–9) and part of the same addition made in 10:1–5 (Aurelius 1988, 45; Van Seters 1994, 302).

Similarly, the list in 9:22–24 of other occasions on which Israel provoked God's wrath is regularly regarded as a later addition. Van Seters (1994, 227), for example, takes it as a late intrusion reflecting the text of J in Exodus (Boorer 1992, 276–79; Dozeman 2009, 694). Not only do these verses seem intrusive into the moves made by Moses to appease God's wrath (his intercession and the destruction of the calf), but in shifting attention to the whole wilderness period they essentially generalize the calf episode and show it to be merely one of numerous instances of rebelliousness (v. 24). Even so, since they substantiate the charge of perennial rebelliousness in vv. 7b–8, to which they are stylistically, linguistically, and thematically similar, if not identical, they also cannot be separated from it. Verses 7b–8 must be part of the same, later redactional stratum. Stylistically, the prepositional phrase *ב* + *toponym* (e.g., “at Horeb,” 9:8; compare 9:22) and the verbal form *היה* + *participle* in 9:7b and 9:22, 24 connect the verses. Shared language (*קִצַּץ*, “to provoke” [9:8, 22]; *מִמֶּרִים הָיִיתָם עִם־יְהוָה*, “you have been rebellious towards the LORD” [9:7b, 24; cf. *וּתְמַרּוּ* in 9:23]; and *לְמַן־הַיּוֹם*, “from the day” [9:7b, 24 *מִיּוֹם*]) further underlines their common origin (Aurelius 1988, 14–15; Weinfeld 1991, 407; Boorer 1992, 279–80). Together

vv. 7b–8 and 22–24 form an *inclusio* and generalizing frame around the basic episode in vv. 9–21* that emphasizes Israel's persistent sinfulness throughout the wilderness period.³

In addition to the preceding, the appeal to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in 9:27a must also be regarded as a secondary insertion. As Van Seters (1994, 309) among others has pointed out, the reference to the patriarchs here occurs atypically without mention of the oath to the fathers (compare Deut 9:5), which is of course found in the parallel text Exod 32:13. (Note that in 9:28 the land has been “promised,” *דבר*, *to the people*.) The point is disputed (Aurelius 1988, 16 n38), but the explicit references in Deut 9:5 and elsewhere in Deuteronomy to the patriarchs in apposition to the “fathers” appear to belong to the book's later redactional layers. What is more, the appeal in 9:27a that Yahweh “remember your servants” is the only instance in Deuteronomy where Yahweh is called upon to remember. In fact, it interrupts the flow of Moses's prayer, focused as it is on Yahweh's redemption of the people from Egypt with a mighty hand and what the people *there* might say if they do not enter the promised land (Van Seters 1994, 309).

Less certain is the character of Deut 9:20, Moses's intercession for Aaron, which commentators typically treat as a gloss belonging to the latest stages of the text's development (Boorer 1992, 277). It looks like a “blind motif,” insofar as it requires the reader to know what Aaron had done in Exod 32 to provoke God's anger; for that reason, Van Seters treats it as secondary (Van Seters 1994, 39). But it need not be, and one suspects its exclusion finally has more to do with Van Seters's arguments for the priority of Deuteronomy's text to Exod 32. All the same, Weinfeld (1991, 411) points to the phrase *בעת ההוא* (“at that time”) as indicative of its secondary insertion; and for Aurelius, in the absence of any mention of Aaron before this in Deuteronomy, the shift in emphasis to Aaron appears suspicious (1988, 418). That this passage, as Christine Hayes suggests, resolves an exegetical difficulty in the account of Exod 32—namely, how Aaron comes out unscathed despite his role in the apostasy—can support either conclusion. Nevertheless, in the end, the verse does read like an afterthought or an effort to “tie up loose ends,” consistent with the passage's overall emphasis on the intercession of Moses.⁴

Excluding the secondary material in Deut 9:7–10:11, this leaves for the basic stratum 9:7a, 9, 11–19, 21, 25–29 (with the exception of 27a); and 10:10–11.

3 An asterisk (*) is used to denote biblical passages in a form preliminary to the received text, such as the putative original literary form of the present text.

4 That a “loose end” needed to be tied up is demonstrated by the insertion of Deut 9:20 into the text of 32:10 in 4QpaleoExod^m (Carr 2001, 115).

Later 9:7b–8, 22–24 were added and 9:10 + 10:1–5 (the latter probably first). Probably later still came the addition of the gloss in 9:20; 10:6–7; 10:8–9; and 9:27a (see Boorer 1992, 272–81).

1 Kings 12:26–32 as Source for Exodus 32 and the Latter's Relation to Deuteronomy 9:7–10:11

From the perspective of the classical Documentary Hypothesis, the relation of Exod 32 to the account in 1 Kgs 12 recounting Jeroboam I's setting up two golden calves at Bethel and Dan has always been problematic, since the sources underlying Exod 32 were thought to antedate considerably the Kings account. Exodus 32 had to be a late, probably Deuteronomic insertion into the main narrative polemicizing against northern religious practices and projected back into Mosaic times (Childs 1974, 560); or it had itself to reflect an independent tradition about a historical incident. In this vein, Childs sees an oral tradition lying behind the story that found literary expression in the J source only to become part of the pre-Deuteronomic redactor's composition of Exodus 32–34 (1974, 561). With the recognition, however, that the non-P material in Exodus is actually much later, a more direct connection between Exod 32 and 1 Kgs 12 is now possible. Obviously, what links them directly above all is the occurrence in both of the exclamation "Here/These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!" (1 Kgs 12:28; Exod 32:4). But there are other links, first noted by Aberbach and Smolar (1967, 129–40, esp. 129–32) and more recently highlighted by Van Seters (1994, 295–301, esp. 299–301), among others, that strengthen the connection between the account in 1 Kgs 12 and Exod 32 even as they are missing in Deut 9:7–10:11. The principal ones are the motif of specifically *golden* calves (1 Kgs 12:28; Exod 32:3–4); the building of an altar and the offering of sacrifices (1 Kgs 12:32; Exod 32:5–6); and finally the proclamation of "a pilgrimage feast" (אֵת; 1 Kgs 12:32; Exod 32:5; Van Seters 1994, 295).

Several factors make clear that the direction of dependence is from 1 Kgs 12 to Exod 32. Chief among them is the ill fit of the exclamation "These are your *gods*, O Israel" (32:4; cf. 32:8) in the Exodus account.⁵ While the plural "gods" makes perfect sense in the context of Jeroboam's installation of two calves (1 Kgs 12:29; Van Seters 1994, 299–300), it represents a problem in Exodus, where repeatedly there is mention of only one calf (e.g., vv. 4, 8, 19; cf. v. 5). That

5 For the possibility that Aaron is the subject of the exclamation, with the LXX^B, see Propp (2006, 541), who adopts the MT only to subsequently refer to the exclamation as Aaron's (551–52).

the exclamation intends an unambiguous reference to the story in Kings seems clear enough, even as the claim it makes about these gods' leading them out of Egypt does not square with what the people have already said in Exod 32:1 about Moses as their leader. The poor fit of the reference to these gods is reinforced, moreover, by two other elements of the narrative firmly anchored in the account of 1 Kgs 12 that do not really suit the context in Exodus. First is Aaron's construction of an altar for sacrifice, which seems odd specifically as a response to a request by the people for gods to lead them. The second is no less strange in the context of Exodus: Aaron's proclamation of a *גזל*, "*pilgrimage festival*" (cf. 1 Kgs 12:32; Van Seters 1994, 299–300). Along with the proclamation of the people in Exod 32:4 ascribing their deliverance from Egypt to the golden calf, these links with the Kings account firmly establish the literary dependence of Exod 32 on at least 1 Kgs 12. At the same time, its dependence on the Deuteronomistic History seems to be even broader, since Exod 32's description of the offense as "a great sin" (32:21, 31; compare "sin" in v. 32 and 1 Kgs 12:30) employs the very phrase (*חטא גדולה*) also found in 2 Kgs 17:21. There Israel's demise is ascribed of course to Jeroboam 1, who "had made them sin *a great sin*" (Aurelius 1988, 49 n28; italics mine).

Van Seters and Dozeman, however, argue for an even broader dependence of Exod 32 by claiming that its narrative, which they regard as substantially a unified account, is a combination of *both* 1 Kgs 12:26–32 *and* Deut 9:7–10:11 (Van Seters 1994, 301–10; Dozeman 2009, 699–700). While certainly the question of their literary dependence deserves a more detailed treatment than can be offered here, that there is a relationship of dependence between Exod 32 and Deut 9:7–10:11 is generally agreed upon and not at issue. Aside from the shared focus on the calf episode and a generally similar depiction, there is also the almost identical wording of Moses's destruction of the calf in Exod 32:20 and Deut 9:21, which has been the subject of a detailed study by Christopher Begg (1985). Consequently, the real issue is the direction of dependence between the two texts.

On this point several lines of argument converge to support the priority of Exod 32, arguments whose validity rests on proven scribal practice in late texts (e.g., the *Temple Scroll* [11Q19]), where the direction of dependence is evident (Carr 2001, 120, 124, 127–28). Among these arguments are: (1) the tendency of Deut 9:7–10:11 to smooth out or correct Exod 32; (2) Deuteronomy's conflation of words or motifs from various sources, including Exod 32; (3) the tendency of Deut 9:7–10:11 to rewrite and amplify theologically its source narrative; and finally (4) the existence of "blind motifs."

From a logical point of view, the combination of the base stratum of Exod 32 with the secondary material of vv. 7–14 makes little sense: after *successfully*

interceding on the people's behalf (vv. 11–14), Moses, surprised by what he finds in camp, in a fit of anger smashes the tablets, thereby declaring the covenant null and void (v. 19). On top of that, after destroying the calf and forcing the people to consume water contaminated by its remains, he then proceeds to intercede once again for the people—but now without success (vv. 30–34). So, Deuteronomy, noting the muddled development, attempts to make it right and in the process subtly “corrects” the picture of Moses as impulsive. Accordingly, it emphasizes the deliberate and public character of Moses's destruction of the tablets (“he casts them with two hands” and “before your eyes,” v. 17), even as his declaration of nullification now quite logically *precedes* his only intercession in the Deuteronomic account, in vv. 18–19a. Even more, having also eliminated any trace of punishment (e.g., Moses's forcing the people to drink the contaminated water, Exod 32:20; the Levites' purge of the camp, 32:25–29), it is success—not failure—that Moses reports after relating his intercessory prayer in vv. 26–29, briefly in v. 19 and conclusively in 10:10. At once Deuteronomy has recast Moses more positively and solved the logical problem introduced by the addition of vv. 7–14 into Exodus's account. To think that the author of Exodus took over the more logical progression of Deuteronomy and purposely muddled it makes no sense.

The tendency of Deut 9:7–10:11 to combine words and motifs from different passages in Exod 32–34 or elsewhere provides a second line of argument for Deuteronomy's dependence upon Exodus. A case in point is Deut 9:21. For Suzanne Boorer (1992, 304, 312), Deut 9:21's dependence upon the depiction of the calf's destruction in the nearly identical Exod 32:20 in large part rests upon the evidence it provides of conflation. Notable in Deut 9:21, for example, is the designation of the calf as “your sin [חַטַּאתְכֶּם] which you made,” which is totally lacking in Exod 32 despite the fact that the word “sin” represents a catchword in Exod 32 and is found there several times (vv. 21 and 30–34). In other words, Deut 9:21 conflates Exod 32:20's neutral designation of the people's object of devotion, a “calf,” with references to the people's “sin” found in Exod 32 outside of v. 20. Given the prominence of the sin motif in Exod 32, this is far more likely than that Exod 32:20 would have failed to take over the theologically loaded “your sin” into its own description of the calf had it been available. Exodus 32:20 must have served as the source of Deut 9:21.

Moses's intercessory prayer in Deut 9:26–29* (without v. 27a), which parallels closely the secondary material of Exod 32:11–13, especially vv. 11–12, provides another example. *Pace* Van Seters (1994, 309, 312), who sees the parallel verses as identical and as such supporting Deut 9:7–10:11's priority, Deut 9:26–29 actually offers two distinct yet complementary motivations for why God should refrain from destroying his people over against Exod 32:12's single motivation.

In Deut 9:26–29, Moses argues that unless God shows restraint the Egyptians will say: (1) that the LORD was *unable* to bring his people to the promised land; and (2) that the LORD hated them. The former motif, concerning God’s ability to lead them into the land, is actually missing in Exod 32:12 and is only to be found in Num 14:16, where it occurs in a similar context. In other words, as Boorer (1992, 304) suggests, Deut 9:28 represents once again a conflation by its author of two independent motifs and found in two distinct contexts, viz., Num 14:16 and Exod 32:12. Thus it must be later than its counterpart in Exod 32:12.

The close verbal correspondence between Exod 32:15–16, 19 and Deut 9:9–10, 17, depicting the tablets Moses had received from God and their destruction, provides further evidence of Deuteronomy’s tendency to conflate, while again drawing upon material secondary in Exod 32 (viz., 15b–16). With Exod 32:15–16, 19, the parallel in Deut 9:9–10, 17 shares the motifs of the two tablets, the divine origin of the writing, and of course Moses’s smashing of the tablets. Yet strikingly, as Driver pointed out long ago (1895, 112), verbally the reception and smashing of the tablets in Deut 9:9–10, 17 echoes content and in part verbatim language drawn primarily from the larger framework of Exod 24 and 32–34. Thus, for example, Deut 9:9 reworks retrospectively God’s command in Exod 24:12 for Moses to come up the mountain and remain there while God gave him “the stone tablets”; it adds to this from 24:18b that Moses was on the mountain “forty days and forty nights.” But it also supplies the fasting motif “bread I did not eat and water I did not drink” that is found in Exod 34:28a (in combination with the “forty days and forty nights” motif). Deuteronomy 9:10a then picks up on the LORD giving Moses the *stone* tablets in Exod 31:18, “written with the finger of God,” the latter phrase plainly corresponding verbatim to what is in Exod 31:18b. Again, that the Deuteronomist conflates motifs and expressions occurring in various places in Exodus, is simply more probable than the idea that Exodus borrowed these only to divide them up.

The third line of argument rests on the tendency of Deut 9:7–10:11 to rewrite and amplify theologically its source narrative. Deuteronomy 9:21, with its parallel in Exod 32:20, is again a prime example on two scores. First, it specifies Exod 32:20’s vague reference to “the water” (המים) as the site where Moses eliminates the calf’s remains to read “the *wadi* [הנחל] coming down the mountain.” This not only accounts for the water’s source but serves the theologically more important goal of setting up and foreshadowing key events in the Deuteronomistic History. One such is the reform effort of Josiah in 2 Kgs 23:12, who casts the *dust* (only in Deut 9:21) of illegitimate altars “into the *wadi* Kidron” (cf. also 1 Kgs 15:13 and 2 Kgs 23:6). Second, in contrast to the neutral phrasing of Exodus, Deut 9:21’s designation of the calf as “your sin,” which the

word order of the verse highlights, both underlines the calf's negative implications and makes explicit the theological significance of the calf for Israel, as indicated above. But, in addition, it also emphatically connects the calf with Jeroboam's calves and their baneful consequences for Israel, insofar as the same term "sin" occurs repeatedly in Kings in reference to his establishment in the northern kingdom of what the southern kingdom could only regard as an illegitimate cult (1 Kgs 12:30; 13:34; 14:16, 22; et passim; Begg 1985, 236–38; 1997, 476).

Finally, the existence of "blind motifs" in Deut 9:7–10:11 adds compelling evidence of the priority of Exod 32, including its secondary material: i.e., elements carried over from the source text requiring knowledge either of the source or of its tradition to be adequately understood (Van Seters 1975, 163). A telling example of this in the basic stratum of Deut 9:7–10:11* occurs in Deut 9:18–19. These verses cause Van Seters enough trouble in his case for the priority of Deuteronomy that he excludes them as secondary, with no explanation of what might have motivated their insertion (1994, 302). What Van Seters finds problematic in Deuteronomy's narrative, which in his view is directly dependent neither upon the account of Jeroboam's apostasy in 1 Kgs 12 nor that of Exod 32, is simply Moses's claim that he "lay prostrate before the LORD *as he had before*" (or "as at the first time," כראשונה). However, there is no prior prostration or intercession in Deut 9 (9:9 speaks only of Moses *staying* [וַיֵּשֶׁב] on the mountain for forty days and nights of fasting), and the difficulty only gets compounded in the next verse when Moses goes on to report, "But the LORD listened to me *also* [גַּם] at that time." Clearly there is an allusion here to another successful intercession before Deut 9:18–19), one that took place prior to Moses's descent down the mountain. But that could only be an allusion to the intercession of Moses in Exod 32:11–14, which the author of Deut 9:7–10:11* evidently knows (Weinfeld 1991, 411). Deuteronomy 9:18–19 has to be dependent upon Exod 32 and *not* the other way around.

As this example demonstrates, Deut 9:7–10:11* depends not only upon the base narrative of Exod 32 but also upon its expansions, in particular the insertion of vv. 7–14, which affirms the success of Moses's intercession. This has led Hans-Christoph Schmitt to conclude that Exod 32:7–14 and Deut 9:7–10:11 presume the same late Deuteronomistic author, insofar as in his estimation the same theological intentions appear in Exod 32:7–14 as are central for Deut 9:7–10:11 (2000, 244). Yet general similarity does not imply identity, as one of Schmitt's own parallels makes clear. Schmitt sees Exod 32:11–14 and Deut 9:26–29 as having an identical view theologically of Moses's intercession. He notes that Moses reminds Yahweh in Exod 32:11b and Deut 9:26 (compare 9:29) that Israel is indeed Yahweh's people, whom he brought out of Egypt, only

to invite Yahweh then to remember his servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Exod 32:13 as he does in Deut 9:27a. Yet as Schmitt admits (2000, 243–44), only Exod 32:13 cites the oath of promise. Aside from the whole question of whether Deut 9:27a is secondary (see above), the omission of the land promise in 9:27b is striking, and doubly so when in its place the author of 9:26–29* uses an altogether different argument, one from Num 14:16 and not Exod 32:11–14, that does not proceed from the invocation of the patriarchs. The intent seems clear and in no way speaks in favor of the assumption that the author of 9:27–28*, which belong to the original stratum in Deuteronomy, is the same author as the one who inserted Exod 32:7–14. On the contrary, it is indicative of the insistence in D literature that the land was promised to the ancestors in Egypt and that the exodus—not God’s promise to the patriarchs—is the beginning of Israel’s story.

Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 9:7–10:11 as Inner-biblical Interpretation

While other arguments can be made for the priority of Exodus, the preceding analysis suffices to establish the direction of dependence between Exod 32 and Deut 9:7–10:11 as well as 1 Kgs 12:26–32. The account in 1 Kgs 12:26–32 is the earliest of the three. It is a narrative, perhaps as Van Seters maintains, “so thoroughly anachronistic and propagandistic” in its “studied violation of the Deuteronomic code” that one can only conclude it is “a complete fabrication” (1994, 297–99). If Van Seters is correct, this would mean, however, that there is no other independent witness to Jeroboam’s setting up of the calves at Bethel and Dan. In turn, only 1 Kgs 12:26–32 and not some historical tradition can serve as the primary source for Exod 32.

This would put the date of Exod 32 in the late exilic period then, or perhaps earlier in that period if one accepts a Josianic dating for the Deuteronomistic History’s first edition. While Konkel in a recent essay has argued specifically for a preexilic narrative stratum in Exod 32 dating to the aftermath of Sennacherib’s campaign against Judah in 701 BCE (2011, 177–79), his argument ultimately proves unconvincing. Konkel seeks to isolate a stratum that shows no Deuteronomistic influence by eliminating the citation of 1 Kgs 12:28 as a disruptive secondary addition along with 32:7–14. All the same, Konkel does not address other elements of Exod 32 that have been identified as links to 1 Kgs 12, such as the *golden* calf, the altar, and the pilgrimage feast. An exilic date for Exod 32 remains, therefore, the best option.

For its part, Deut 9:7–10:11 owes nothing to 1 Kgs 12:26–32, lacking all those elements Exodus derives from the latter. At the same time, its dependence on Exod 32's account is evident, not only upon the base stratum but also its secondary material, such as 32:7–14. That almost certainly makes Deut 9:7–10:11 a very late, probably Persian-period addition to Deuteronomy. Römer notes its lack of integration into the historical reprise in Deut 1–3 (Römer 2007, 171 n13); and, in contrast to the relatively positive portrayal of Israel in the wilderness in Deut 8:1–5, in 9:7–10:11 there seems to be a determined effort to “correct” that positive portrait toward the decidedly negative depiction of the ancestors in JE. The secondary insertion 9:7b–8 + 22–24 intensifies that: Israel has been continuously rebellious from the time it left Egypt.

Exodus 32

From this standpoint, the goal of Exod 32's reworking of 1 Kgs 12:26–32 becomes apparent: what the latter depicts as the singular initiative of Jeroboam “to cause Israel to sin” (1 Kgs 14:16; 15:34; et passim) by systematically violating key aspects of Deuteronomic legislation, beginning with its prohibition of idols (Deut 4:9–24), in Exod 32 is decidedly the initiative of “the people” (הָעָם). They “see” Moses's delay, “assemble against Aaron,” and tell him, “Make for *us* gods!” (v. 1), using the gold of “*all* the people” (כָּל־הָעָם; v. 3). Also, in the MT at least, they are the ones who repeat Jeroboam's declaration (v. 4) and early the next morning even offer the sacrifices (v. 6a). Accordingly, Moses made “the Israelites” without qualification drink the contaminated water (v. 20), and in his intercession of v. 30 it is “the people” again whom he addresses. They have sinned “a great sin,” this being the very phrase used following the demise of the kingdom in 722 BCE by the author of 2 Kgs 17:21 to characterize the apostasy Jeroboam had led them to commit. But here in Exod 32 agency is ascribed directly to the people. Only Aaron, whose part in the base narrative (cf. vv. 22–24) has been essentially a passive one, is differentiated from the group, and in terms now (v. 21) that are reminiscent of Jeroboam's role in the people's guilt in 2 Kgs 17:21.

To be sure, Dozeman takes this interpretation one step further. He argues that what distinguishes Exod 32 from Deut 9:7–10:11 (which in his view pre-dates Exod 32, like 1 Kgs 12:26–32) is the notion of individual responsibility. Deuteronomy, as he sees it, had already introduced the perspective of corporate guilt vis-à-vis 1 Kgs 12:26–32. So Moses's failed intercession in Exod 32:30–34 signals, then, not just that there will be no forgiveness for the people (as there had been none for Jeroboam; 1 Kgs 13:34), but that Moses is *unable* to atone directly for the nation (Dozeman 2009, 698). In other words, what God

rejects is Moses's attempt to mediate for the many, implicit in his request to die if God does not forgive: "Just as the many are not guilty for the few, so also the one cannot atone for the many." God does not allow Moses to represent the nation as a whole and instead legislates a law of individual guilt: "Whoever sins against me I will blot out from my book" (Dozeman 2009, 700). Yet God will not act immediately, but only "on the day of my visitation will I punish them for their sin" (v. 34).

God's response in v. 33, however, is not nearly so all-encompassing a theological response as Dozeman takes it. Certainly Moses continues to mediate in the larger context of Exod 32–34, e.g., in 33:12–17, where he prays for a renewal of God's presence, as Dozeman himself indicates (2009, 727). That said, in the context of 32:30–34 the point is simply that God rejects Moses's request, made in exasperation (compare Elijah's request in 1 Kgs 19:4), that God blot him out from the "book of life" if God will not forgive the people (v. 32). To this idea, in effect, God says "no," because Moses is innocent and as such God will not strike him down. God punishes the guilty (v. 33b). To be sure, the generality of God's statement does not address directly Moses's explicit request for the people's forgiveness (v. 32a); but all the same there is no mistaking the *implicit* threat God's intention to punish the guilty poses in this context to Israel. It is a point underlined by the follow-up: "On the day of my visitation, I will visit upon them their guilt" (v. 34b). Not now but *some* day the punishment will come upon them, and, apparently, there is nothing Israel can do to stop it—the *idem per idem* construction in v. 34b, "On the day of my visitation I will visit them" (Propp 2006, 565), conveys the indeterminacy of the future that ominously hangs over them.

Indeed, what actually requires some explanation here is the unexpected finality of God's rejection even of Mosaic intercession, in the base narrative, and its postponement to an indefinite future (excluding 32:35 as a secondary addition). Certainly this result is not the product of theological speculation, but, if we are correct about an exilic dating for the basic stratum, a woeful lesson learned from the catastrophe of 587 BCE. This would explain then both the delay of punishment in the immediate context and the accompanying rejection of the possibility of forgiveness, insofar as the original stratum of Exod 32 is functioning here as an etiologal narrative for the kingdom of Judah's collapse. Only hindsight could show there was no hope in Moses's intercession, even as only Israel's total and irremediable apostasy could explain the inevitability and totality of Israel's accounting on the day of punishment (v. 34). Although Aurelius (1988, 76) had in mind the fall of the northern kingdom, his conclusion about Exod 32 is fundamentally correct: Jeroboam's golden calf is not the target of a pious polemic in Exod 32 so much as a symbol of failure for

the people. It is a symbol for *all* Israel of a sin that has already demonstrably led to its ruin: the original deadly sin.

Deuteronomy 9:7–10:11

In 1 Kgs 12:26–32 the nation is necessarily implicated in Jeroboam's sin because of the relationship a king bears to his people. Thus, what in that account is Jeroboam's sin Exod 32 in its basic stratum interprets straightforwardly as the people's mortal sin. Moses's intercession is of no avail. That very failure is, however, precisely what the addition of vv. 7–14 counters, particularly by means of Moses's twofold appeal (vv. 12–13) in the face of God's threat to make of Moses a new nation. This time Moses's intercession succeeds (v. 14) and disaster is averted. This is reinforced with the further addition of v. 35 to what has become the second and decidedly anti-climactic intercession of Moses in vv. 31–32. Unsuccessful though the latter may be, whatever threat was implicit in the early stratum's ominous postponement of punishment has its sting removed in v. 35 on a decidedly less menacing note: the LORD struck the people merely with a plague. Israel will yet have a future, in no small part thanks to Moses's invocation of the age-old promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a point that Moses's success later in the larger framework of chaps. 33–34 will underline.

All the same, in Deut 9:7–10:11 the narrative is simply more straightforward: there is only one intercession by Moses (9:18), logically placed after Moses's deliberate smashing of the tablets in v. 17; and of course it is successful, thereby clearing up the glaring inconsistency the insertion of vv. 7–14 created with the failed intercession in the base stratum of Exod 32. In addition, it also proves unambiguously successful, as the account proceeds, in averting all threat of the people's punishment. Still, to be straightforward does not mean to be superficial. Just as Deut 9:7–10:11 theologizes the calf in a way that goes beyond Exod 32 by reducing it to its theological significance for Israel—viz., it is “your sin”—it also theologizes Moses. That is to say, the motif of Moses's mediatorial efforts over forty days and nights, repeated no less than five times, makes Moses's successful mediation the whole story, especially since in other respects Deuteronomy has also reduced the scope of Exod 32's narrative in ways that enhance Moses's power of mediation. In fact, because the entire episode is framed (unlike Exod 32) as a first-person address by Moses, everything is related from his perspective, with his experience and his efforts continually in the foreground. Thereby Moses ceases to be merely a part of the story and, in effect, *becomes* the story (von Rad 1966, 78). Gone are the details of the calf's construction (even what it is made of), the feast proclaimed for Yahweh or the sacrifices offered, and Aaron's unexplained complicity. Indeed, the first

time one encounters the calf in Deut 9:7–10:11 it is merely “a cast image” (מסכה, v. 12). As a consequence, in Deuteronomy the calf episode becomes more an occasion (or platform) for Moses, on which to see him in action and to see him succeed above all as mediator for the people in the context of the covenant’s rejection (Dozeman 2009, 695). This is particularly the case in the early stratum before later redactional efforts in vv. 7b–8 and 22–24 to introduce the motif of Israel’s persistent rebelliousness. The fivefold repetition of the motif of forty days and forty nights alone produces a narrative that has more to say finally about Moses’s mediatorial efforts than the apostasy of the people (Dozeman 2009, 694). God would still listen to Moses’s mediation even after their wholesale apostasy.

That the possibility of forgiveness remains, then, even after the broken tablets, is established by Moses’s powerful intercession in Deut 9:7–10:11. Even without the addition of 10:1–5 concerning the renewal of the tablets and its associated material, this much is clear, and it is, in fact, confirmed by the addition. The theologization of Moses’s experience by focusing on Moses’s mediation, in other words, has a point to make, and it is all about hope for the future. That is to say, in the end it is not just about Moses but about Israel’s God, who after all will listen and whose listening grounds that hope.

This is the point at stake in the prayer that Moses reports in Deut 9:25–29*, the prayer he utters at the time of the intercession referenced in v. 18 but only now reported after the fact. It is a very carefully constructed prayer, one replete (as Weinfeld notes) with liturgical expressions characteristic of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History (cf. Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kgs 8:51; Weinfeld 1991, 414–15) and only in part dependent upon Exod 32:11–13. In many respects its response to Yahweh’s threat to make of Moses a nation stands closer to the argumentation of Num 14:11–17, within the story of Israel’s revolt on the occasion of its first approach to the promised land, than to the Exodus account: it lacks any appeal to the patriarchs and the oath Yahweh swore to them (compare Exod 32:13). This is consistent with the effort in Deut 9:7–10:11 more generally to improve on Exod 32, in this instance because the latter’s appeal never addresses directly Yahweh’s complaint about the people’s stubbornness. As a result, Exod 32:11–13 begs the question of whether or not Yahweh can effectively lead the people to the promised land. That it does so, moreover, becomes clear in the progression of the argument in the so-called JE stratum of Num 14, to which vv. 11–17 belong together with vv. 1a, 2–4, 7b–9, and 18–24 (Levine 1993, 347–48): at the report of the spies, the people grumble against Moses and Aaron (v. 2) and look for new leadership to return them to Egypt (v. 4), while Joshua and Caleb’s pleas make clear that this means rebellion against Yahweh (v. 9). In exasperation (“How long will this people spurn me?” v. 11) Yahweh

then threatens to destroy the people and make of Moses a new nation (v. 12). To this Moses responds by reminding Yahweh that it was by his *power* (בכח) that he brought this people up from Egypt (v. 13), the very power the nations will slander by saying that Yahweh “was incapable of bringing this people into the land he swore to them” (v. 16) if he should destroy them. In effect, Moses argues that Yahweh is greater than the people’s intransigence.

The lapse in Moses’s response in Exod 32:7–13 is best illustrated by comparing its logic to that of Deuteronomy and how each deals with Yahweh’s complaint:

Yahweh’s Claim 1	v. 7	“Go down, for <i>your</i> people have acted corruptly [שחת] whom <i>you</i> brought up [העלית; compare 32:11 הוצאת] from the land of Egypt.” (compare 32:11)
Yahweh’s Claim 2	v. 9	“I have seen this people, and they are a stiff-necked people.” (compare Num 14:11)
	v. 10	“Let me alone ... and I will make of <i>you</i> [Moses] a great nation.” (compare Num 14:12)
Moses’s Reply 1	v. 11	Why anger “against <i>your</i> people whom <i>you</i> brought out [הוצאת] ... with great power [בכח] and a mighty hand?” (compare Num 14:13)
Moses’s Reply 2	v. 12	Egyptian slander: “It was with an evil intention that he brought them out [הוציאם] ...”
	v. 13	“Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by yourself, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants ...’”

Here Moses’s response in v. 11 counters Yahweh’s claim that it was Moses who brought the people up from Egypt and to whom they belong, while Moses’s plea to remember the promise to multiply Abraham’s descendants and give them the promised land in v. 13 superficially responds to Yahweh’s threat to make of Moses a great nation (cf. Gen 12:3) in v. 10. The latter is superficial because it addresses obliquely Yahweh’s exasperation with the people’s stubbornness in v. 9 that underlies v. 10’s threat. In fact, Yahweh’s claim that the people are stubborn goes unchallenged, since, like v. 13, there is nothing in Moses’s reply about potential Egyptian slander in v. 12 to contest directly the substance of Yahweh’s claim. But thereby it also leaves in doubt Yahweh’s ability to lead Israel, a question highlighted by the response of Num 14:11–17 in almost identical circumstances.

The Mosaic response in Deut 9:12–14, 26–29*, however, leaves no such doubts to linger regarding Yahweh’s capacity to lead:

Yahweh's Claim 1	v. 12	"Up, go down quickly from here, for <i>your</i> people have acted corruptly [שחת] whom <i>you</i> have brought out [הוצאת] from Egypt."
Yahweh's Claim 2	v. 13	"I have seen this people, and they are a stiff-necked people." (compare Num 14:11)
	v. 14	"Let me go ... and I will make of you a nation mightier and more numerous than they." (compare Num 14:12, "a nation greater and mightier than they")
Moses's Reply 1	v. 26	"O Lord Yahweh, do not destroy [אל-תשחת] <i>your</i> people and <i>your</i> inheritance [נחלתך] whom <i>you</i> redeemed in your greatness (and) whom <i>you</i> brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand."
Moses's Reply 2	v. 27b	"Disregard the stubbornness of this people and their wickedness and their sin,
	v. 28a	lest the land from which you brought us say, 'because Yahweh was not able to bring them to the land promised to them,
	v. 28b	but hated them, he brought them out to kill them in the wilderness,' (compare Num 14:13–17)
	v. 29	although they are <i>your</i> people and <i>your</i> inheritance whom <i>you</i> brought out with <i>your</i> great power and with <i>your</i> outstretched arm."

Prefaced only by the appeal "Do not destroy your people," v. 26 depicts Moses, just as in Exod 32:11, immediately countering the claim that he brought the people out from Egypt. Here he echoes the very language God used in v. 12, which is itself an almost verbatim repetition of Exod 32:7. More importantly, in vv. 27b–28a he also confronts head-on Yahweh's complaint about the stubbornness of the people. Moses begs Yahweh to disregard their intransigence even as he raises (in the manner of Num 14:13–17) the specter of slander with respect to Yahweh's capacity to lead this people to the promised land. Again, Moses argues in effect, Yahweh is greater than the people's stubbornness, and he expands on the potential slander with the suggestion that their deaths had come about because Yahweh had rejected them (v. 28b). Thereby Deut 9:28b acknowledges its source (Exod 32:12) but also clarifies its slander (Yahweh's "evil intention"). Notwithstanding Boorer's analysis of Deuteronomy's logic (1992, 315–16), which she maintains focuses on averting destruction without making any argument concerning Yahweh's intention to make of Moses

a nation (322), Yahweh's complaint is effectively dealt with, in particular the exasperation expressed in the threat to make a people of Moses. Yahweh must not look weak.

To be sure, Moses's appeal that God "not destroy [אַל-תִּשְׁחַת] your people and your inheritance" leads off the prayer (Weinfeld 1991, 116), but the emphasis does not fall directly on averting Israel's destruction.⁶ Apart from the introductory petition, v. 26a^b substantially parallels the concluding v. 29, and together they create an *inclusio* that essentially frames the prayer and highlights the substantive point in Israel's threatened destruction (Tigay 1996, 103) more emphatically than in Exod 32:7–11, viz. the question of *to whom* Israel belongs. Over against the claim that Israel belongs to Moses and that he brought them out of Egypt, in vv. 26 and 29 Moses emphatically turns God's claim around, adding that they are the people "of *your* [God's] inheritance" whom "*you* redeemed in *your* greatness" (v. 26) and brought out "with a mighty hand" (v. 26, compare v. 29). Israel is Yahweh's inalienable property (cf. 1 Kgs 21:2–4), acquired when *he* freed them from Egypt with a display of power and great might. Yahweh had won them for himself in Egypt, and to Yahweh as victor they henceforth belonged.

Thus, the threatened destruction of the people would only serve to diminish Yahweh in the eyes of potential rivals. This is simply a corollary of ancient Near Eastern kingship, where what makes for majesty and power is finally what a king possesses, including the lands he holds and the subjects he rules. For the people to suffer famine, the nation defeat in battle, or the land pestilence unavoidably leads in the ancient Near East to a loss of royal grandeur and stature in the eyes of the world (see 2 Sam 24:11–15; Porter 1965, 474). It is no different for the divine king Yahweh. What belongs to Yahweh redounds for good or ill to *his* name, and the destruction of Israel could only mean Yahweh's diminishment in the world. With the exodus Yahweh is bound to his people.

The concept of Israel as Yahweh's inheritance in Deut 9:26, 29 readily evokes the mythologoumenon of Deut 32:8–9, according to which the nations are allotted as an "inheritance" among the sons of God in accord with their number (reading in v. 9 with the LXX and 4QDtⁱ), the way a wealthy landowner apports his estate (Lipiński 1998, 330–31). But there is also a key difference. In Deut 9:26–29* (cf. Deut 4:19–20), the foundational event is not some remote time in hoary antiquity but an event in history, the exodus. From this perspective, the omission of the appeal to the patriarchs found in Exod 32:13

6 The language of the prayer is strikingly reminiscent of the titles of several petitions in the Psalter (Pss 57:1; 58:1; 59:1; and 75:1).

not only makes sense in Deut 9:26–29 as more consistent with its focus on Yahweh's power to lead, but also as a deliberate move on the part its author to eliminate a competing account of Israel's origins and identity. It is an account that is at home neither in Deuteronomy nor in Deuteronomistic literature (Ska 2006, 198–99).

Put otherwise, what is at stake in the two accounts of the calf in Exodus and Deuteronomy are two different and opposed traditions of origins. One, evident in Exod 32:7–14, is focused (in Römer's terms) on the election of the patriarchs and the promise of the land for their descendants. The other, here in Deut 9:26–29*, is centered on the election of Israel's unnamed fathers in the exodus and the covenant sworn with them on Horeb (Römer 2007, 127; Schmid 2012, 87). In the first story of origins the promise comes through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Israel's identity is defined genealogically. In the second, Israel's identity is articulated not through a specific genealogy but by acceptance of the covenant Yahweh swore to Israel's ancestors who had been brought out of Egypt. In other words, for the story of origins promoted in Exod 32:13, Israel is constituted by its descent from Abraham even as Yahweh can self-identify to the patriarch as the one “who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as an inheritance” (Gen 15:7); that is where the story begins for Israel in Exod 32:13. As a result, for those who theoretically meet this ethnic qualification by their location and actual presence in the land, the promise of land has in effect been secured by the patriarchs. Those who had remained in the land after 587 BCE could invoke their story to advance their claims, as Ezek 33:24 actually indicates in citing their appeal to Abraham's possession of the land.⁷

Yet for the exilic prophet himself, who denounces these claims with accusations of idol worship and bloodshed (Ezek 33:25–29), the appeal to Abraham will do no good. Another story of origins is foundational for the exiles in Babylon, one in which genealogy is not decisive and possession of the land is not constitutive of Israel's identity. Instead, as Deut 9:26–29* has it, Israel comprises *Yahweh's* inheritance. They are the people Yahweh redeemed from Egypt to be *his* possession and with whom Yahweh had sworn a covenant that would henceforth be the foundation of their relationship.

This covenant sworn with the fathers at the time of exodus from Egypt is not something to be taken for granted. It is, to be sure, a covenant sworn with the fathers, but it is all the same a covenant that every generation needed to

7 On the possibility this text reflects Benjaminite-Judean hostility during the sixth century and, more generally, for the mixed reception Abraham traditions receive in postexilic texts (e.g., Isa 63:7–64:11) vis-à-vis Exodus and the Mosaic covenant, see Bautch 2009, 52–53.

make anew. As Deut 5:3 puts it, “Not with our fathers did Yahweh make this covenant but with us who are all alive today.” Israel was to be forever an exodus people through a choice each generation had to make for itself. All the more important, then, in the face of persistent temptation to choose otherwise, was the reminder the episode of the calf in Deut 9:7–10:11 provided of the mercy shown to Israel in times past as the people of Yahweh’s inheritance. But there would be no appeal for mercy founded upon the recollection of patriarchal promises in the manner of Exod 32:7–14, at least before the late introduction in Deut 9 of v. 27a. In keeping with Deuteronomistic thought more generally, the fundamental theological datum grounding Deuteronomy’s appeal could only be one: Israel’s election in the exodus and its constitution through the Mosaic covenant as the people of Yahweh’s inheritance.

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The “Sin” of Jeroboam

Ralph W. Klein

According to the books of Kings, Jeroboam’s cultic offenses ruined his reign and the reigns of many of his successors, and they were responsible ultimately for Israel’s defeat by the Assyrians (2 Kgs 17:21–23). Jeroboam’s erection of golden calves at Bethel and Dan was interpreted as the making of “other gods” in violation of the First Commandment. These cast images (2 Kgs 17:16) provoked YHWH to anger since they indicated that Jeroboam had thrust YHWH behind his back (1 Kgs 14:7–9).¹ In addition, Jeroboam selected priests who were not descendants of Levi (1 Kgs 13:33).² He also established a fall festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month in distinction from the Festival of Tabernacles in Judah, which took place on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (1 Kgs 12:32).³ These actions are described as the way of Jeroboam, his sin, or his sins, that he caused Israel to commit.⁴ According to Kings, Jeroboam is a polytheist (or at least a dyotheist), and he gave credit to the golden calves for delivering Israel in the Exodus: “Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” (1 Kgs 12:28).⁵ Gomes (2006, 220) concludes: “For the Deuteronomists, Bethel was the sanctuary where YHWH was ‘worshipped

- 1 See also 2 Chr 13:8: “And now, you think that you can withstand the kingdom of YHWH which is in the hand of the sons of David, because you have a great multitude and with you are the calves of god, which Jeroboam made for you as gods.” Translations of the biblical text throughout this chapter are by the author.
- 2 See also 2 Chr 11:14: “For the Levites left their pasture grounds and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem because Jeroboam and his sons had prevented them from serving as priests for YHWH.”
- 3 This date for the fall festival is given in Lev 23:34. Cf. Num 29:12. No specific date for this festival is given in the earlier calendars of Exod 23:16; 34:22; and Deut 16:13–15.
- 4 “The way of Jeroboam”: 1 Kgs 15:34 (Baasha); 1 Kgs 16:2 (Baasha); 1 Kgs 16:19 (Zimri, who ruled seven days); 1 Kgs 16:26 (Omri); 1 Kgs 22:53 (52; Ahaziah). “The sin of Jeroboam”: 1 Kgs 13:34; 1 Kgs 15:26 (Nadab); 1 Kgs 15:34 (Baasha); 1 Kgs 16:19 (Zimri); 2 Kgs 3:3 (Jehoram); 2 Kgs 17:21. “The sins of Jeroboam”: 1 Kgs 14:16; 1 Kgs 15:30 (Nadab); 1 Kgs 16:26 (Omri); 1 Kgs 16:31 (Ahab); 2 Kgs 10:29, 31 (Jehu); 2 Kgs 13:2, 6 (Jehoahaz); 2 Kgs 13:11 (Jehoash); 2 Kgs 14:24 (Jeroboam 11); 2 Kgs 15:9 (Zechariah); 2 Kgs 15:18 (Menahem); 2 Kgs 15:24 (Pekahiah); 2 Kgs 15:28 (Pekah); 2 Kgs 17:22.
- 5 Sweeney (2007, 177) notes that Neh 9:18 refers to only one god in connection with the golden calf. Except for Exod 32:4, 8; 1 Kgs 12:28; and Neh 9:18 (all dealing with the golden calf/calves), all the confessions of the exodus in the Old Testament have YHWH as the subject of the

at the wrong place, at the wrong time, by the wrong priests, and with the wrong iconography.”

Jeroboam and the Deuteronomistic History

Was Jeroboam really an apostate? The natural successor to Solomon as king would have been Rehoboam, Solomon's son, not Jeroboam. When Rehoboam went to Shechem for his coronation, the assembly offered to serve him as king provided that he would lighten the hard service of his father and his heavy yoke (1 Kgs 12:4). Rehoboam consulted with senior and junior advisors, but Rehoboam followed the latter group's advice: "Now, my father laid on you a heavy yoke, and I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions" (1 Kgs 12:11). The ten disgruntled northern tribes then made Jeroboam king (1 Kgs 12:20). While Jeroboam had the support of the ten northern tribes, his new-found political power was a considerable innovation and fragile at best, and one would not expect him in addition to break completely with the ancestral faith and establish an idolatrous royal cult. The Deuteronomistic History is written from a southern, Judean perspective, and is permeated throughout with the dynastic promise to David in 2 Sam 7, the oracle of Nathan, which implicitly makes Jeroboam's kingship illegitimate. Another of the central presuppositions of the Deuteronomistic History is that there is only one legitimate place for sacrificial worship, the temple in Jerusalem. This principle is laid out explicitly in Deut 12 (Gomes 2006, 220). Clearly, this principle had not been in force from the beginning of the monarchy, but it was enforced by the reform of Josiah in the late seventh century, based on the book of the law discovered in the temple during his reign, and identified since the time of Wilhelm DeWette in the early 19th century as an early form of the book of Deuteronomy (Coogan 2011, 352–53). The Deuteronomistic History, therefore, is hardly an impartial witness to the makeup of Jeroboam's cult. It judges Jeroboam's worship sites on the basis of a law that came into force three centuries after his time. Cross (1973, 75) concludes, "Apparently Jeroboam's real sin was in establishing a rival to the central sanctuary in Jerusalem."

sentence. Albertz (1994, 145) suggested that in Jeroboam's context the golden calf commemorated in addition the deliverance of Israel from the oppressive regime of Solomon.

Bethel and the Worship of YHWH

There is even incidental evidence within the books of Kings that the cult at Bethel was not considered heterodox. Elijah (2 Kgs 2:2) and Elisha (2 Kgs 2:23), widely identified as early representatives of the “YHWH alone” movement (Coogan 2011, 304), had close ties with Bethel. Elijah passed through Bethel without negative comment shortly before his fiery chariot ride to heaven. Jehu, who was anointed king by a representative of Elisha, killed both the northern and southern kings as part of his coup and carried out an attack on Baal worship in the northern kingdom that was considered excessive by Hosea. And yet the golden calves were retained by Jehu at Bethel and Dan after his purge of Baal. The Deuteronomistic Historian accuses him of not turning aside from the sins of Jeroboam by his retention of the calves, but one suspects that Jehu considered both Bethel and Dan as legitimate sanctuaries of YHWH (2 Kgs 10:29–31; Gomes 2006, 27; Motzki 1975, 477). According to 2 Kgs 17:28–29, after the destruction of the northern kingdom, a priest was brought back from exile to Bethel, and he taught the new Bethelites how to worship YHWH. Again, it is assumed that the worship at Bethel was Yahwistic (Gomes 2006, 27; Knoppers 1994, 39).

In the mid-eighth century, the prophet Amos was critical of Bethel and other sanctuaries either for no specific reasons, for the formalism of their worship rites, or because their liturgical rites were not marked by a passion for justice (Amos 3:14; 4:4; 5:5–6, 21–24). In his famous confrontation with the priest Amaziah at Bethel, the issue was not whether golden calves were worshiped there, but whether a prophet like Amos could function there when he prophesied that Jeroboam II would die violently in war and that Israel itself would go into exile (Amos 7:11). Amaziah assured Amos that he had no trouble with him being a prophet, as long as he practiced this craft in Judah, but Bethel after all was the king’s sanctuary and it was a temple of the kingdom (Amos 7:12–13). It is hard to believe that if the golden calf at Bethel was considered idolatrous, a prophet like Amos would have been silent about this.

Jeroboam’s Motivation and the Exodus

YHWH is cited as responsible for the exodus from Egypt some sixty-seven times in the Old Testament (Cross 1973, 73–75; Gomes 2006, 28).⁶ As such, it does not seem to be rational politically or theologically for Jeroboam to credit

6 Gomes cites Exod 20:2; Lev 11:45; Deut 6:12; 29:24 MT (29:25 ET); Jer 31:32.

responsibility for the exodus to another god, let alone to other gods: "Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (1 Kgs 12:28).

Jeroboam's actual political dilemma is identified in a quotation attributed to him: "If these people continue to go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of YHWH at Jerusalem, the heart of this people will turn again to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah; they will kill me and return to King Rehoboam of Judah" (1 Kgs 12:27). If Jeroboam's people are likely to want to make pilgrimages to YHWH in Jerusalem, why would he try to prevent such pilgrimages by offering them alien deities at Dan and Bethel?

Scholars have long noted similarities between Jeroboam's cultic innovations in 1 Kgs 12 and the account of the golden calf in Exod 32. Many years ago Aberbach and Smolar (1967, 129–40) identified thirteen similarities between the accounts.⁷ One of the most striking similarities is that the same sentence interpreting the religious character of the gods connected with the golden calf is found both in 1 Kgs 12:28 and Exod 32:4: "Here/These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." The polemic contained in Exod 32 has two targets: the people at the time of Moses *and* especially the adherents of the apostate cult of Jeroboam (or more precisely, the adherents of the cult of Jeroboam as interpreted by the Deuteronomistic History).⁸ Note that Aaron only made one calf, so the plural nature of the Exodus confession clearly points to the cult of Jeroboam (Cross 1973, 74).

The Old Testament describes the manner of God's presence in Israel's worship center circumspectly. In Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, he concedes that the highest heaven could not contain God, much less "this house that I have built." Instead, here and throughout Kings we hear that God's name is there (1 Kgs 8:29). The priestly document in the Pentateuch does not say that God lives (ישב) in the tabernacle, but that God dwells (שבן) there (Klein 1979, 144; Cross 1947, 65–68). Finally, in the holy of holies in Solomon's temple, YHWH sits enthroned, invisibly, on the backs of the cherubim (1 Kgs 8:6–7; 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Sam 4:6; 2 Sam 6:2).⁹ Jeroboam's preparation of a

7 Is it a mere coincidence that Nadab and Abihu, who were killed because they offered unholy fire (Lev 10:1–3), have almost the same names as Jeroboam's children Nadab and Abijah? Nadab and Abijah also died prematurely (1 Kgs 14:17; 15:27). See Cogan 2000, 363.

8 Chung (2010, 206) argues that the Elohist's reason for condemning the calf figure in Exodus was to counter the influence of Baal worship. I find no explicit evidence for this. Albertz (1994, 145, and 311 n60) dates Exod 32 to the exilic period, but holds that it presupposes an earlier north Israelite narrative in which YHWH himself gave the command from Sinai to Aaron to make the golden bull and thus found the national cult of Bethel.

9 This debate about the manner of God's presence was echoed in 16th century Christian arguments about the manner of Christ's presence in the Eucharist among Roman Catholics, Reformed Protestants, and Lutherans.

golden calf at Bethel, then, would seem primarily to be an alternate iconography for the God of Israel: YHWH was enthroned invisibly on a golden calf. In the eighth century BCE we see the non-biblical weather god depicted standing on the back of a bull from the Aramaic kingdom of Arslan Tash (Koenen 2003, 102, Abb. 18) or deities standing on the backs of lions or other animals in *ANEP* (470–74, 486, 500–501, 522, 531, 534, 537).¹⁰ It is not clear why Exod 32 and 1 Kgs 12 chose “calf” instead of “bull” as the animal in Jeroboam’s cult. The primary distinction is that calf is a younger version of the adult bull. The use of calf and bull in parallel lines in the criticism of Jeroboam’s cult in Ps 106:19–20 leads me to understand the two nouns as full synonyms: “They made a calf at Horeb and worshiped a cast image. // They exchanged the glory of God for the image of a bull that eats grass.”

Some scholars claim that Jeroboam represented YHWH as a calf or bull before images of YHWH were outlawed by what most Jews and Protestants refer to as part of the Second Commandment: “You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Exod 20:4//Deut 5:8).¹¹ In any case, there are numerous pictures from the ancient Near East of a deity depicted as a bull, sometimes standing on a pedestal (Koenen 2003, 102–8, Abb. 19–26). We might also mention the bronze bull image discovered by Amihai Mazar in a twelfth-century context in Northern Samaria, in the tribal territory assigned to Manasseh (Mazar 1982, 27–42; 1983, 34–40).¹² And YHWH himself is called “the bull of Jacob” (אֲבִיר יַאֲקֹב) or “the bull of Israel” (אֲבִיר יִשְׂרָאֵל; Gen 49:24; Isa 1:24; 49:26; 60:16).¹³ Whether one understands YHWH as enthroned invisibly on the golden calf, as I prefer, or whether the golden calf represented YHWH himself, it seems likely that Jeroboam’s iconography was meant to put forth YHWH as the God of the exodus in an alternative iconography attractive enough to keep his subjects from making religious pilgrimages

10 Cogan (2000, 358) notes that in the ancient Near East a variety of animals served as stands or pedestals of the gods.

11 Roman Catholics and Lutherans interpret this commandment as part of the prohibition of “other gods.”

12 This bull is seven inches long and five inches high. Mazar leaves the question open whether this bull represented Baal or YHWH.

13 The NRSV translates “the Mighty one of Jacob” or “the Mighty One of Israel.” In Num 23:22; 24:8, God is compared to the horns of the wild ox (רָאֵם). Gomes (2006, 215) asserts: “Since the bull was a Canaanite icon, Jeroboam’s strategy was a shrewd attempt at indigenizing the Yahwistic faith and creating a common identity for both Israelite and Canaanite constituencies within the framework of the central shrine.” I find no evidence to back up this speculation.

to Jerusalem. This makes it very unlikely that Jeroboam was actually thrusting YHWH behind his back (*per contra* 1 Kgs 14:9).

Dan and Bethel

Jeroboam's selection of Dan and Bethel as worship centers also makes sense within a traditional understanding of Yahwism. These two sites are at the northernmost and southernmost points of the northern kingdom.¹⁴ Bethel is well attested as a worship site in earlier Israelite traditions. It is the place where Jacob dreamed of a staircase reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it, and where he vowed that he would build a "house of God" if he returned safely from his Mesopotamian exile (Gen 28:10–22). Jacob carried out that vow in Gen 35:1–7. Bethel was the place where the Israelites gathered during the period of the judges to wage war against the Benjaminites after the outrage at Gibeah (Judg 21). The ark of the covenant of God was at Bethel in those days, and Phinehas the grandson of Aaron ministered before it in Bethel (Judg 20:26–28). Samuel judged Israel each year at Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah (1 Sam 7:16), and he told Saul about three men he would meet going up to God at Bethel (1 Sam 10:3). Dan's links to Israelite tradition are less prominent, although the Danites settled there when they had migrated from the south (Judg 18). While the representation of the deity at Dan is interpreted as an idol (Judg 17:4), the priests who were there were descendants of Jonathan son of Gershom, son of Moses.¹⁵

By selecting an alternate date for the fall festival, Jeroboam expressed continuity with the Festival of Tabernacles observed in the southern kingdom, but he changed it by a month (from the seventh to the eighth month) so that his liturgical calendar would be distinctive.¹⁶ Shemaryahu Talmon had argued that climatological conditions in the north were different enough to justify

14 Bethel (Palestine grid map reference 172148) is located about 10.5 miles north of Jerusalem (map reference 172131). Dan (map reference 211294) is about ninety-four miles northeast of Bethel.

15 The MT makes Gershom the son of "Manasseh," but *BHS* suggests reading "Moses," with a few Hebrew MSS, the LXX, and Vulgate. In many manuscripts the *nun* of Manasseh is raised, indicating the preferred reading "Moses."

16 Gomes (2006, 33–35) notes that according to 1 Kgs 8:2 Solomon put the dedication of the temple in Ethanaim, the seventh month, even though Solomon had finished the temple in the eighth month of the preceding year (1 Kgs 6:38). Gressmann suggests that the seventh month is a correction based on later practice and that Solomon actually placed the dedication of the temple in the eighth month. If anyone should be reprimanded about changing the date of the festival, according to Gomes, it should be Solomon.

postponing a harvest festival for grapes and olives by one month (Talmon 1958, 48–74). This may have been a contributing factor, but in my opinion the main concern of Jeroboam was to have his own liturgical calendar. This alternate festival could find a precedent in Exod 32:5b, where Aaron declares: “Tomorrow shall be a festival to YHWH.”

Jeroboam's Priesthood

Did Jeroboam select priests who were not Levites as both Kings and Chronicles assert? That seems unlikely for the sanctuary at Dan since the book of Judges remembers a priesthood there that had ancestry reaching back to Moses, who after all was a Levite. According to Judg 18:30 that priesthood lasted until “the land went into captivity,” presumably in 722 BCE. For Bethel the evidence about the pedigree of the priests is not so clear. But our recognition that much of the rest of the account in Kings is polemical increases the possibility that the charge that he had a non-Levitical priesthood is also a partisan charge. The Chronicler's testimony is dubious, in part because the Chronicler is dependent on the book of Kings, and in part because the Chronicler insists that the northern kingdom was illegitimate from the beginning and that its cultus was corrupt from the start (Klein 2012, 202–3). The Chronicler, of course, is a passionate advocate for the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and he expresses the hope that remnants of the former northern kingdom would rally to the temple in Jerusalem.

In order to answer the question of the probable pedigree of the priests at Bethel, we need to ask a further question: did Jeroboam have any precedent for proposing an iconography like the golden calf? In his recently-published dissertation, Youn Ho Chung speculates that the destruction of Bethel at the time of the war against the Benjaminites led to its loss of the ark of the covenant and the transfer of the ark to the sanctuary at Shiloh. He thinks that the Aaronide priests at Bethel then replaced the ark with the calf as a pedestal for the invisible YHWH (Chung 2010, 50–58, 204–5).¹⁷ This reconstruction has

17 Chung also follows the hypothesis that there were two editions of the Deuteronomistic History, one prior to the exile and one exilic. Chung believes that in DTR 1 (1 Kgs 12:25–30, 32a; 13:34) and in the Elohist in Exod 32 the calves were bad because they violated the prohibition against other gods (First Commandment), while in DTR 2 (1 Kgs 12:31, 32b, 33, leading to the insertion of 1 Kgs 13) they were criticized because they violated the law forbidding making images of YHWH (see Deut 4:23; 9:9–19, 21, 25–29; 10:1–5, 10 and the Second Commandment). Chung (2010, 208) believes that the prohibition of images emerged in the exilic period. I do not subscribe to the hypothesis of a preexilic edition

some plausibility, but there is no evidence that such a cult image at Bethel existed before the time of Jeroboam.

Much more likely, in my opinion, is that Jeroboam was aware of a tradition from early Israel that linked Aaron in a positive way with the creation of the golden calf. Aaron's reference to the creation of the calf as miraculous in Exod 32:24 harks back to the time when this account was a positive etiology of Jeroboam's cult: "Whoever has gold, take it off"; so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" It is the final form of Exod 32 that is polemicizing against the cultus of Jeroboam, but it is also critical of an old etiology that linked Aaron in a positive way with the golden calf.¹⁸ Did the saying now recorded in Exod 32 and 1 Kgs 12 once read: "Here/This is your God, O Israel," referring to YHWH enthroned invisibly on the golden calf, "who brought you up out of the land of Egypt?" If this reconstruction is correct, the priesthood at Bethel may well go back to Aaron and thus have Levitical ancestry.¹⁹ By having priesthoods at Dan and Bethel that have Moses and Aaron in their pedigree, Jeroboam would have claimed the prestige of the two great priestly houses of Israel for his cultus.

The Deuteronomistic Historian will hear none of this. He records a prophecy after the fact in 1 Kgs 13:2: "O altar, altar, thus says YHWH: 'A son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who offer incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'" That prophecy is fulfilled in 2 Kgs 23:15–16 when Josiah pulled down the altar at Bethel, the high place erected by Jeroboam son of Nebat who

of the Deuteronomistic History, and I also do not believe that the frequent recounting of Jeroboam's sins in the book of Kings can be parceled out in these two levels.

- 18 Dozeman (2009, 688–700) argues that the oldest biblical account of the golden calf is in 1 Kgs 12, with Deut 9–10 coming later. Exodus 32 combines motifs from 1 Kgs 12 and Deut 9–10 and so Exod 32 is the latest of the three accounts. Dozeman does not speculate on what historical reality lay behind the Deuteronomistic description of Jeroboam's cultus. For a critique of Dozeman's reconstruction see the chapter by Di Vito in this volume. Di Vito does not discuss a putative positive tradition about the calf that might lie behind the account in Exod 32.
- 19 Halpern (1976, 31–42) argues that Jeroboam replaced the Aaronide priests with priests who were descendants of Moses (= Mushites). Halpern concedes that the priesthood at Bethel was Aaronide before the division of the kingdom, but he argues that Jeroboam expelled these priests. But as Gomes (2006, 31) points out, "Dtr does not criticize Jeroboam for appointing non-Aaronide priests but for appointing non-Levitical priests." For an extensive bibliography pro and con, see Albertz 1994, 310–11 n59. Albertz calls attention to Josh 24:33, which records a tradition of Eleazar's or Phineas's tomb in Gibeath-Phinehas, and he believes this supports the assumption that there was a local connection between the Aaronides and the hill country of Ephraim. Cross (1973, 199) also affirms that there was an Aaronide priesthood at Bethel.

caused Israel to sin. Josiah also slaughtered on the altars all the priests of the high places who were there and burned human bones on them (2 Kgs 23:20). There are passages in Hosea that criticize the calf at Bethel that probably date before the writing of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic Historian, and Exod 32 also may antedate the Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic voices.²⁰ These are treated by other scholars in this volume.

Given the presuppositions of the Deuteronomistic Historian, it is understandable that he understood Jeroboam as sinner par excellence. Gary Knoppers (1994, 36) calls the historian's account a caricature and notes that his presentation of Jeroboam's cultus as anomalous is itself an anomaly.

From the viewpoint of my reconstruction, Jeroboam's cult seems almost free of all theological blame. For that reason I put the word "sin" in the title of this chapter in quotation marks.

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20 The passages from Hosea include: 4:15, referring to Beth-aven, which may be a polemical name for Bethel; 8:5–6, referring to Samaria's calf; 10:5, indicating that the calf at Beth-aven will have its glory taken away; 12:2–5 (1–4), referring to the Jacob traditions and Bethel; 13:2, referring to people kissing calves. See provisionally Dearman 2010, *ad loc*. Dozeman (2009, 695–98) observes that the central theme in Deut 9:7–10:11 is the mediation of Moses, not the rebellious character of the people or the sin of making the calf. Deuteronomy does not describe the construction of the calf, its theological significance, or the cultic ritual that accompanies it. These chapters report the sin of the whole nation, not solely of the king. Chung (2010, 206) concludes that the basic factor that led the Elohist to condemn the calf image as symbolizing another deity is found in the identification of YHWH with Baal. I find no explicit identification of Jeroboam's cultus with Baal worship, at least prior to the time of Ahab. Also Jehu does not seem to make this connection in 2 Kgs 10:29–31.

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Do the Books of Hosea and Jeremiah Know of a Sinai/Horeb Golden Calf Story?

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Investigators often raise questions about who knew what and when was it known; biblical investigators are no exception. The interplay of oral and written traditions and the retelling and rewriting of stories in the background of the biblical text make determining who knew what and when very difficult questions to answer, but the process of investigation and what is learned from that investigation can be enriching. The books of Hosea and Jeremiah contain multiple indictments of Israel's idolatrous practices, some of which may be read as criticism of Jeroboam's shrines in Dan and Bethel. My purpose here, however, is to investigate whether these books know the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story. As there is no direct statement in either prophet referencing the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story of Exod 32–34 or the version found in Deut 9:7–10:11, I will focus on the vocabulary characteristic of the two versions of the story and then determine whether this vocabulary appears in the prophetic books of Hosea and Jeremiah. If such vocabulary is found, it remains to be seen whether that vocabulary indicates knowledge of the story or points to a golden calf tradition that stands behind the versions in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. It is also possible that neither prophet knew anything about a Sinai/Horeb golden calf narrative.

Before analyzing the vocabulary of the golden calf stories in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy over against that found in the books of Hosea and Jeremiah, a word of caution is in order. Word studies are notoriously fraught with problems. Our knowledge of ancient Hebrew is limited mostly to the Bible, so it is impossible to say whether a word was common or rare, typical or distinctive, in the world behind the text. Moreover, the four biblical texts under consideration have complex histories of formation, the details of which continue to elude even the most careful of investigators.¹ What constitutes

¹ For recent and detailed studies on the history of formation of the book of Exodus, see Dozeman 2009 and Propp 2006, and for an extensive treatment of the golden calf story in Exodus see Houtman 1993–2000, especially 3:605–730. For the composition of the book of Deuteronomy, see Lundbom 2013, 6–20, and Lohfink 1985. For a more literary and theological

Hosea's and Jeremiah's original message and what constitutes editorial additions to that original message? How is the material in a particular prophetic book to be dated, to the time of the prophet or to the time when the book was written? And what about additions to the book itself? Certain answers to these questions are not to be found, and consequently reconstructions remain highly speculative and are based, at least to some extent, on circular argumentation. The same can be said for the composition and dating of the story of the golden calf in the book of Exodus. Was it original to the book or was it inserted? If original, when was it written, and if inserted, when was that done? Is the golden calf story a unified narrative, or is there evidence of later additions to an earlier story? If additions were made, when was that done? The same questions can be raised regarding the book of Deuteronomy, which evidences a complex development from a core of laws that is expanded by a series of additions surrounding that core from the late pre-exilic period through the exilic period and into the post-exilic period. The Deuteronomic version of the golden calf story belongs to these additions, but did these additions come before or after the Exodus version of the story? With respect to the books of Hosea and Jeremiah, did the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story precede or follow the prophetic activity of these prophets? Did either of the two versions of the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story precede or follow the written books of these prophets, and if so, in which edition?

If a proper word study can only be done once the questions raised in the previous paragraph are answered—and my gut feeling is that the issues I have raised remain resolutely irresolvable—then no proper word study can be done. Nevertheless, I justify doing this particular word study because the evidence gained from it shows that the dating of the material found in books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Hosea, and Jeremiah in all their various editions does not really matter because there are few words of the two versions of the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story that make their way into the books of Hosea and Jeremiah or vice versa.

approach see McConville 2002. Noteworthy commentaries on the book of Hosea include Dearman 2010; Stuart 1987; Andersen and Freedman 1980; and Wolff 1974. The end of last century saw a spate of multivolume commentaries on the book of Jeremiah. Included among the most detailed commentaries are McKane 1986–1996; Lundbom 1999–2004; Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard 1991; Keown, Scalise, and Smothers 1995; and Holladay 1986–1989.

The Evidence

I will examine the vocabulary in three areas: the golden calf, various words for idols, and words describing the behavior of the people before the golden calf.

Calf (עגל, עגלה) and Gold (זהב)

The Books of Exodus and Deuteronomy

The masculine of calf, עגל, is found six times in the golden calf narrative of Exodus (32:4, 8, 19, 20, 24, 35) and nowhere else in that book.² The feminine of calf, עגלה, is not found anywhere in the book of Exodus. The calf is certainly made of gold (זהב), for Aaron asks the people for their gold rings (32:2) and receives them (32:3). Later he responds to Moses's inquiry in the delightfully ridiculous statement that he took the gold the people had given him, threw it into the fire, and it came out as "this calf" (v. 24).³ At the end of Exod 32, Moses refers to the people as having sinned by making for themselves "gods of gold" (אלהי זהב, v. 31) contrary to God's express command in Exod 20:23: "You shall not make gods of silver alongside me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold [אלהי זהב]."⁴ It is important to note that the phrase "calves of gold" (עגלי זהב) occurs in 1 Kgs 12:28 and 2 Chr 13:8 in reference to the golden calves of Jeroboam. All other instances of the term זהב in the book of Exodus refer to the making of golden cultic objects or the giving of gold as an offering.

Only twice is the masculine of calf, עגל, found in the book of Deuteronomy (9:16, 21), and both of these occur in reference to the golden calf story, but the calf itself is never described as made of gold.⁵ Later in the book of Deuteronomy "gold" is used in reference to idols (פסילים, 7:25; גלולים, 29:16), but

2 The LXX translates עגל of the golden calf story in both Exodus and Deuteronomy as μόσχος. In Neh 9:18 (LXX 2 Esd 19:18) and Ps 106:19 (LXX 105:19), μόσχος is also used in reference to the golden calf of Sinai/Horeb. With reference to the golden calves of Jeroboam, the LXX uses δάμαλις in 1 Kgs 12:28, 32 (LXX 3 Kgdms 12:28, 32); 2 Kgs 10:29; 17:16 (LXX 4 Kgdms 10:29; 17:16), but μόσχος for Jeroboam's calves in 2 Chr 11:15; 13:8. The MT consistently uses עגל for the calves of Jeroboam as well as the calf of the golden calf story. In addition to עגל, in the LXX μόσχος translates three other Hebrew terms for cattle: שור, פר, בקר; in addition to עגל, δάμαλις translates בקר, פר, and פרה.

3 It is a "delightfully ridiculous statement" unless we are to take it as testimony to a miraculous event as does Brichto (1983, 14).

4 The phrases "gods of gold" (אלהי דהבא, 5:4, 23) and "images of gold" (צלם דהבא, 3:12, 14, 18) are found in the Aramaic section of Daniel.

5 The feminine form of calf appears in Deut 21:3, 4, 6. This passage is about absolving the people of blood guilt after a body is found lying in open country and it is not known who murdered the person. The passage has nothing to do with worship and need not concern us here.

the calf is called an image (מסכה) in Deuteronomy, not an idol. Nevertheless, we see that both the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions are referring to the same incident.⁶

The Book of Hosea

Of the five instances of עגל in the book of Hosea, three are masculine (8:5, 6; 13:2) and two are feminine (10:5, 11).⁷ We can assume that the calf of 8:5 and 6 was made of precious metals, as one reads in v. 4b that the people made idols of silver and gold and vv. 5–6 speak of the rejection and destruction of Samaria's calf.⁸ It should be noted, however, that the term used here for idol is עֶצֶב, not מסכה, the term used in Exod 32. Indeed, עֶצֶב is not attested in the book of Exodus. Nevertheless, מסכה is found in relation to calves in Hos 13:2 and is in parallel to עֶצֶבִים, but the “calves” of 13:2 are of silver. That the calf is said to be “of Samaria” in 8:5–6 need not exclude Bethel, one of the two cities in which Jeroboam I set up golden calves (Drinkard 1993, 208; note that a different Jeroboam is mentioned in Hos 1:1). Calves and Samaria are found together again in 10:5, but here the calves are said to be of בֵּית־אֵוֶן (Beth-aven).⁹ The phrase

6 See McConville (2002, 178–79, 184–92) for a discussion of the similarities and differences between the two versions of the golden calf story. While it is clear that the theological concerns of the authors play a role in shaping their version of the story, it is not certain that the Exodus version was known to the Deuteronomist(s) responsible for Deut 9:7–10:11 or vice versa. Each author may have been working from an earlier oral or written tradition.

7 I will not take “heifer” in Hos 10:11 into consideration because it refers to the people, not to the “heifer” as an idol. My exclusion is consistent with the position taken by Andersen and Freedman (1980, 567), who do not see a connection between “heifer” in Hos 10:11, where the term is used figuratively of the behavior of the people, and Hos 10:5, where the term is used literally. However, Holt (1995, 89) maintains that the description of Israel in Hos 10:11–13a “has a clear connection with an agricultural milieu, both directly and in a cultic sense.” If there is a “cultic sense” in these verses, it has been obscured by the war imagery that dominates 10:9–15.

8 Gold is also mentioned in Hos 2:10 (ET 2:8), but it is not clear whether “made for Baal” means “they made a Baal idol of gold” or “they made an offering of gold to Baal.”

9 Note that “calf” is in the feminine plural in the Hos 10:5 in the MT, which is difficult to explain. The singular masculine is found in the LXX, and many English translations follow the LXX. The plural has been explained as a “plural of majesty” and seen as consistent with Hosea's “use of the plural as the name of a deity” (Andersen and Freedman 1980, 555; see Hos 4:17; 8:4; 13:2; 14:9 for other examples), but in 10:5 and 13:2 the use of the plural may be an implicit pointer to the “calves” of Jeroboam. The use of the feminine has variously been explained: it is meant to express contempt; the calves are young animals and thus their sex is not prominent; the calves are lifeless, man-made things (why this would explain the use of the feminine eludes me); or the feminine is normally associated with abstractions in Hebrew, thus the term “calves” in the feminine is used to represent an “indefinite generality” (Harper 1904, 348). A more recent explanation is that these calves may be intended to be the “female counterpart” of the calf of Samaria of 8:5, 6 (Andersen and Freedman 1980, 555).

is found three times in the book of Hosea (4:15; 5:8; 10:5). Beth-aven literally translates as “House of Wickedness.” Amos had warned that Bethel would become *aven* (5:5), and it may be that Beth-aven is a derogatory reference to Bethel derived from this warning of Amos (Andersen and Freedman 1980, 372). King Jeroboam I stands condemned in the Deuteronomistic History for setting up rival shrines to Jerusalem and for setting up golden calves at these shrines (1 Kgs 12:28, 32; 2 Kgs 10:29; 17:16). Based on the calf made of silver and gold in Hos 8:4–6, the calves of Beth-aven in Hos 10:5, and the association of these calves with Bethel, we can conclude with high probability that Hosea knows of the golden calves of Jeroboam, but it does not follow that he knows of the golden calf of Exod 32–34 or of Deut 9:7–10:11.¹⁰ Instead, it is more likely that Exod 32–34 and Deut 9:7–10:11 know of the golden calves of Jeroboam.¹¹

The Book of Jeremiah

There are four instances of the word עֵגֶל in Jeremiah (34:18, 19; 31:18; 46:21) and two of עֲגֹלָה (46:20; 50:11), but neither word refers to an idol of any kind.¹² Only two of the five references of זָבֵחַ in Jeremiah (4:30; 10:4, 9; 51:7; 52:19) speak of it in relation to the making of idols (10:4, 9), but never is “gold” attached to a calf. Thus we have no evidence that Jeremiah knows of the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story from Exodus and Deuteronomy.

Before speaking of the various words for idols, it is important to say something with respect to golden idols and golden calves. Golden images/idols are mentioned in other prophetic books, but only the book of Hosea has a golden calf.¹³ The worship of the calf at Sinai/Horeb is mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Ps 106:19; Neh 9:18), but calves are identified as “golden” only

10 A recent study of the use of pentateuchal traditions in Hosea does not include any reference to the golden calf story of Exodus or Deuteronomy in Hosea (Boudreau 1993).

11 The connections between the golden calf story (Exod 32:1–6) and Jeroboam's establishment of two cultic centers, each with a golden calf (1 Kgs 12:25–33), are often discussed. See Beyerlin (1961, 144–45) for an earlier consideration of the relationship; Propp (2006, 576) for a more recent listing of the connections; Aberbach and Smolar (1967, 129–40) for the similarities between Aaron and Jeroboam; and Houtman (1993–2000, 3:620–24) for a discussion of various positions regarding the relationship between the golden calf/calves of Exodus and Jeroboam.

12 Jeremiah 34:18–19 refers to a calf cut in two as part of a covenant ceremony. In 31:18; 46:20, 21; and 50:11 the calf is used as a metaphor or simile—it is untrained or fatted, beautiful or frisky—but it is not a possible object of worship.

13 Isa 2:20; 30:22; 31:7; 40:19; 46:6; Ezek 16:17; Hab 2:19. Golden images/idols are mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, but not with great frequency (cf. Pss 115:4; 135:15; Dan 3:12, 14, 18; 5:4).

in Exod 32 and in reference to Jeroboam's calves in 1 Kgs 12:28; 2 Kgs 10:29; and 2 Chr 13:8.¹⁴

Words for Idols (מסכה, נסך, עזבים, פסל/פסיל, גלולים, הבל, יערל)

מסכה is the term used for the golden calf in Exod 32:4, 8 and in Deut 9:12, 16. The same term is used in a command against the making of idols in Exod 34:17 and in a curse upon anyone who casts an image in Deut 27:15. *מסכה* appears only once in Hosea (13:2), and there it is in parallel with *עזבים*. The term *מסכה* is never used in the book of Jeremiah, but a term of the same root with a similar meaning (*נסך*, “molten image”) is used in Jer 10:14//51:17. In these verses *נסך* is parallel with *פסל*. *עזבים* is not found in the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story of Exodus or Deuteronomy, nor indeed anywhere else in these books, but it appears four times in Hosea (4:17; 8:4; 13:2, 14:9) and twice in Jeremiah (44:19; 50:2). In Exodus, *פסל* is found only in 20:4 in a commandment that prohibits the making of idols. In Deuteronomy, *פסל* (4:16, 23, 25; 27:15) and *פסיל* (7:5, 25; 12:3) are used in admonitions against the making of idols, instructions regarding the destruction of idols, and in curses. *פסיל* is used only once in Hosea (11:2), where it is in parallel to “the Baals.” Of the six times *פסל* and *פסיל* are found in Jeremiah, five refer to the idols of Babylon (*פסיל* in 8:19; 50:38; 51:17, 47, 52). The *פסל* of Jer 10:14 is in an oracle (10:12–16) that is virtually identical to that of 51:15–19, but it follows a mockery of the idols of the nations (10:2–10); idols of Babylon are not specifically identified.¹⁵ *גלולים* is not found in either Exodus or Hosea; it appears only once in Deuteronomy (29:16 [ET 29:17]) and once in Jeremiah (50:2). In both cases it refers to the idols of other nations. Another term for idols that is rather frequent in Jeremiah is *הבל* (Jer 2:5 [2x]; 8:19; 10:3, 8; 10:15//51:18; 14:22; 16:19), meaning “nothing” or “emptiness.”¹⁶ *הבל* is not found in Exodus or Hosea. In Deuteronomy, *הבל* is used in the sense of “idols” (32:21) only once, but not in reference to the golden calf story. Also used in reference

14 Parallel to *עגל* in Ps 106:19 is *שור* in v. 20, but this is the only time that a word other than *עגל* is used with reference to the golden calf. The LXX uses *μύσχος* for both *עגל* of v. 19 and *שור* in v. 20 of Ps 106 (LXX 105).

15 See McKane (1986–1996, 21309) for the continuing debate regarding the original context of these oracles.

16 *הבל* is included in the list of characteristic Deuteronomistic phraseology by Weinfeld (1972, 324). In the Deuteronomistic History it is found in Deut 32:21; 1 Kgs 16:13, 26; and 2 Kgs 17:15 [2x]. In Jer 10:15//51:18, *הבלים* is further described as a “work of mockery” (*תעתעים*). I have not included Jer 23:16 for *הבל* because this verse refers not to idols but to the effect of the words of the prophet; they cause the people to “become empty” (*מהבלים*).

to idols in the book of Jeremiah is יעל; it is usually negated: “things that do not profit” (2:8, 11; 16:19).¹⁷ יעל is not found in Exodus, Deuteronomy, or Hosea.

Thus we see that מסכה of the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story of the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy is found only once in the book of Hosea, and a word from the same root (נסך) is used in duplicate verses in the book of Jeremiah. Other words for idols/images used in Hosea and Jeremiah are not found in the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story of Exodus and Deuteronomy. Interestingly, the phrase “other gods” is not found in the Exodus golden calf story.¹⁸ This phrase is found only once in Hosea (3:1), but it is not in association with the worship of calves. The phrase is not found in the version of the golden calf story of Deuteronomy, but it appears frequently in the book of Deuteronomy and in the Deuteronomistic History, often in passages attributed to the Deuteronomistic Historian, such as Judg 2:10ff and 2 Kgs 17.¹⁹ Given the association of the book of Jeremiah and the Deuteronomic school, it is not surprising that the phrase “other gods” is found frequently in Jeremiah.²⁰

Words for the Behavior of the People

(שחת, צחק, פרע, מחולה, קנץ, מרה, בעס, זנה)

Terms drawn from Exod 32 regarding the behavior of the people, such as “make gods” (עשה), “built an altar” (בנה), “brought sacrifices” or “sacrificed” (זבה), and “worshiped” (שחה), are so common and so regularly used that the most one can say is that Exodus, Deuteronomy, Hosea, and Jeremiah share a vocabulary with the rest of the Hebrew Bible concerning the worship of YHWH and that of other gods. Less common vocabulary that describes the people’s behavior in reference to the Sinai/Horeb golden calf of Exodus includes שחת, פרע, צחק,

17 Jeremiah 7:8 refers to “unprofitable” words and 23:32 [2x] refers to the “unprofitable” words of the prophets. In Jer 12:13 יעל refers to the lack of a “profitable” harvest.

18 The phrase is found in Exod 20:3 and 23:13.

19 In Deuteronomy: 5:7; 6:14; 7:4; 8:19; 11:16, 28; 13:3 [ET 2], 7 [ET 6], 14 [ET 13]; 17:3; 18:20; 28:14, 36, 64; 29:25 [ET 26]; 30:17; 31:18, 20. In the Deuteronomistic History: Josh 23:16; 24:2; 16; Judg 2:12; 17, 19; 10:13; 1 Sam 8:8; 26:19; 1 Kgs 9:6, 9; 11:4, 10; 14:9; 2 Kgs 5:17; 17:7, 35, 37, 38; 22:17.

20 Jer 1:16; 7:6, 9, 18; 11:10; 13:10; 16:11, 13; 19:4, 13; 22:9; 25:6; 32:25; 35:15; 44:3, 5, 8, 15. It is agreed that the language of the Deuteronomic school is found in the book of Jeremiah, but whether this language comes from the prophet Jeremiah or the presumed Deuteronomic editors of the book of Jeremiah continues to be a matter of debate. For my purpose it is sufficient to note the correspondence between language characteristic of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic school and that found in the book of Jeremiah. Though there are similarities with respect to vocabulary in the books of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, the golden calf story is never alluded to in Jeremiah. For the classic argument on the presence of Deuteronomic language in the book of Jeremiah, see Thiel (1973; 1981); for a recent summary of the various positions see Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard (1991, xxxv–xxxvi).

and מחולה. In Deuteronomy the terms used for the behavior of the people are קצר, מרה, בעס, and שחת, the latter of which is the only term found in the Sinai/Horeb golden calf stories of both Exodus and Deuteronomy. Even though זנה is not found in the golden calf story, I will consider it because the term is frequently used metaphorically to describe the people's engagement in the worship of other gods.

שחת used in the sense of "acting perversely or corruptly" in making a מסכה is found in Exod 32:7 (Piel) and Deut 9:12 (Piel). The term in the Hiphil is found several times in Deuteronomy, but only twice it refers to "acting corruptly" in the making of an idol (Deut 4:16, 25), and though not explicit in Deut 31:29 [2x], we may assume that the reference to the people "surely acting corruptly" in turning aside from "the way Moses has commanded" has the first commandment in mind. שחת is used in Hos 9:9 (Piel) in an announcement of punishment because the people have "acted perversely" as at Gibeah. This is a reference to intra-tribal warfare that nearly wiped out the tribe of Benjamin in Judg 19–21 in response to the violation of the Levite's concubine and her subsequent death.²¹ The term, in the Hiphil in Jer 6:28, is also used in the context of an announcement of punishment. It is a general statement that the people have "acted corruptly"; there is no specification of the corrupted act. Other uses of the root שחת in Jeremiah carry the meaning of destruction and do not describe the actions of the people.

צחק is often translated "to laugh," and in the Hebrew Bible it occurs in the context of joyous expressions (Janzen 1990, 601).²² It is found in Exod 32:6 and it is often taken in a negative sense of unrestrained sexual behavior (Dozeman 2009, 682), but the word need not carry sexual overtones or point to excess in sexual behavior.²³ It may simply mean that the people were enjoying

21 In Hos 11:9 and 13:9, YHWH is the subject of שחת in the Hiphil. In these instances, it is YHWH who brings about the destruction of the people (13:9) or else YHWH does not allow the people to be destroyed (11:9) even though they have worshiped other gods (Hos 11:1–2).

22 "To laugh" or "laughter" used in a joyful sense may be seen in Gen 17:17; 18:12, 13, 15 [2x]; and 21:6 [2x]. More ambiguous uses of forms from this root with possible negative overtones can be found in Gen 19:14; 39:14, 17; Judg 16:25; and Ezek 23:32. See the following footnote for a more detailed look at the use of צחק in Gen 21:9 and 26:8.

23 In Gen 26:8, Isaac "sports" (צחק) with Rebecca, and it is this "sporting" that leads Abimelech to the conclusion that Isaac and Rebecca are not brother and sister but instead are husband and wife. This is the only time that צחק refers to intimate sexual behavior (cf. Hamilton 1995, 195–96; Wenham 1994, 190). However, Ishmael's "playing" (צחק) in Gen 21:9 has been interpreted as some kind of sexual behavior with or against Isaac, but there is nothing in the story that makes this a compelling interpretation (cf. Westermann 1985, 339; Hamilton 1995, 78; von Rad 1961, 227; Wenham 1994, 82).

themselves after eating their festival meal. The term is not found in the books of Deuteronomy, Hosea, and Jeremiah.

Another term not found in the books of Deuteronomy, Hosea, or Jeremiah is *פרע*, often translated “running wild.”²⁴ It is found in Exod 32:25 and is taken to refer to unrestrained or wild behavior of an erotic nature, but there is no compelling reason to translate it this way. It may simply mean that the people felt “released” from their covenant obligation forbidding the making of an image (Janzen 1990, 604–5).

מחולה, “dance” in Exod 32:19, is also often taken as an indication of an erotic celebration before the golden calf, but again it need not be understood that way. Indeed, BDB lists this passage as the only instance of dance in the context of idolatrous worship (BDB 298). Dance was a part of Israel’s ritual celebrations, as is evidenced in the Psalms (e.g., 30:12 [ET 11]; 31:13 [ET 12]; 150:4). *מחולה* is not found in Deuteronomy, Hosea, and Jeremiah, but Jeremiah does have a word from the same root, *מחול*, in two passages (Jer 31:4, 13), both in the context of rejoicing.

Of the actions of the people there are three terms used in the version of the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story in Deuteronomy that are not found in the Exodus version. These are *קצף*, *מרה*, and *כעס*. Moses reminds the people that they provoked YHWH to wrath (*קצף*, Hiphil) in the wilderness (Deut 9:7), but the offense that he is referring to here is the cowardice of the people in response to the report of those who spied out the land of Canaan. The people feared that they would not be able to defeat the *Anakim* of Canaan in spite of YHWH’s promise that they would conquer the land. Moses also mentions specific places in the wilderness (Taberah, Massah, and Kibroth-hattaavah) where the people provoked YHWH to wrath (*קצף*, Hiphil, 9:22) followed by another reference to the people’s refusal to obey YHWH’s command to conquer and occupy the land of Canaan (9:23). In addition to the use of the Hiphil of *קצף*, in reference to the disobedience of the people regarding the conquest, the Hiphil of *קצף* is used also in reference to the actions of the people with the golden calf, thus making the story of the golden calf another example of the kind of behavior that provokes YHWH to anger. It should be noted that the Hiphil of *מרה* is used of the rebellion of the people in 9:7, 23, 24, thus connecting disobedience in the wilderness (9:23) and the worship of the golden calf (9:7) as acts of rebellion (9:24).²⁵ In the book of Jeremiah the Qal of *מרה* is used twice

24 The noun *פרע* appears in Deut 32:42, but it means “long-haired” and thus need not concern us here.

25 See Lundbom (2013, 364–65) for an extended discussion of the golden calf incident as another instance of Israel’s rebellion in the wilderness.

(Jer 4:17; 5:23), but in neither instance does מרה refer to the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story. The term is used only once in Hosea (14:1 [ET 13:16]), and then it is in reference to the guilt of Samaria for its rebellion (Qal מרה). Though it does not specify what the act of rebellion is, the opening verses of Hos 13 mention the making of a cast image (מסכה) and note that the people sacrifice to and “kiss calves” (עגלים). This is most likely a reference to the calves set up by Jeroboam in 1 Kgs 12. כעס in the Hiphil is another term meaning “to provoke” that is used in the version of the golden calf story of Deuteronomy.²⁶ It is a characteristically Deuteronomistic term (cf. Weinfeld 1972, 340) and is found most frequently in the condemnations of the kings of the North who provoke YHWH by the making and worshiping of idols, involvement in divination practices, and/or continuing in the sin of Jeroboam.²⁷ Kings and people of the South are condemned for the same (2 Kgs 21:6, 15; 22:17; 23:26), but Josiah is praised for removing the shrines and idols that provoke YHWH (2 Kgs 23:19). It is used in Deuteronomy in reference to the making or worship of idols (4:25; 31:29; 32:16, 21 [2x]), and it is explicitly connected with the worship of the golden calf (9:18). In Jeremiah it is also in the context of idol worship (Jer 7:18, 19; 8:19; 11:17; 25:6, 7; 32:29, 30, 32; 44:3, 8), but there is no specific reference to the golden calf story. In Hosea the term is found once (12:15) to characterize the result of Ephraim’s offences, and though the nature of the offence is not specified, the context includes a reference to sacrifice in Gilgal. Thus we see that only in Deuteronomy’s version of the golden calf story is כעס used in reference to the worship of the calf.

Given the frequency of the use of the verb זנה in the context of idolatrous worship, it is surprising that it is absent from Exod 32 and Deut 9. It does show up in Exod 34:15, 16 in a series of commandments. No covenant should be made with the people of the land (v. 15), nor should Hebrew sons marry Canaanite women (v. 16). In both of these prohibitions one reads that the people of the land “prostitute themselves before their gods” (34:15, 16) and also that the Hebrew sons may be led to do the same if they take brides from among the Canaanites (34:16). Nowhere, however, is the term זנה used in reference to the worship of the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story in either Exodus or Deuteronomy. The term abounds in Hosea.²⁸ It dominates ch. 3 of Jeremiah (3:1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9) but is also found in Jer 2:20; 5:7; 13:27. Its absence from the story

26 The Qal of כעס is rarely found in the Hebrew Bible, but it is used once in Deuteronomy in reference to YHWH being provoked by idols (32:21).

27 1 Kgs 14:9, 15; 15:30; 16:2, 7, 13, 26, 33; 21:22; 22:54 [ET 53]; 2 Kgs 17:11, 17.

28 Hos 1:2 [2x]; 2:4, 6 [ET 4], 7 [ET 5]; 3:3, 4:10, 11, 12 [2x], 13, 14 [2x], 15, 18; 5:3, 4; 6:10; 9:1.

of the worship of the golden calf suggests that this event was not taken to be the same as the worship of the fertility gods.

Conclusion

Given the rather few instances of overlapping vocabulary between Exod 32–34 and Deut 9:7–10:11 and the books of Hosea and Jeremiah, we can conclude that those responsible for the two prophetic books were not aware of the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story of Exodus and Deuteronomy. However, the golden calves of Jeroboam are alluded to in Hosea. Though Jeroboam's golden calves may have been pedestals upon which YHWH was enthroned, the Deuteronomistic Historian condemns the actions of Jeroboam as laying the foundation for idolatrous worship in the northern kingdom. The influence of the prophet Hosea on the Deuteronomistic school is taken as a given. Indeed, Rofé concludes that the polemic against Jeroboam's golden calves which were thought of as YHWH's throne and were phenomenologically indistinguishable from the cherubim "is entirely the product of the deuteronomistic school, which it inherited from Hosea 8:4–6; 13:1–2" (Rofé 2002, 10).

Though the worship of the golden calf in Exodus and Deuteronomy is often taken as an example of the erotic worship commonly associated with the fertility cults of Canaan, there is little evidence in the story itself that this is the case. The vocabulary of the two versions of the story need not support such a conclusion.²⁹ It may be that the erotic interpretation given to the behavior of the people in the Sinai/Horeb golden calf story comes not from the story itself, but from a conflation of Hosea's indictment against Israel for its infidelity to YHWH by continuing to worship at the shrines set up by Jeroboam with its golden calves and the prophet's condemnation of Israel for its participation in the Canaanite fertility cults. The references to the golden calves of Jeroboam in Hosea and the interpretation given to the golden calves of Jeroboam by the Deuteronomists may provide the link between the Sinai/Horeb golden calf

29 Janzen (1990, 601–7) highlights the military overtones of the language used in the golden calf story and suggests that what is really at issue is the making of an image of YHWH. The people want some tangible image of YHWH to lead them into the promised land. Brichito (1983, 38–40) argues that the golden calf is a symbol of the warrior deity who led them from the land of Egypt. Fertility is not at issue, nor is the worship of other gods. What is at issue is the violation of the covenant demand: one must not make an idol of YHWH (Exod 20:4). Exodus 32:18 is often used to support an erotic interpretation, but the verse is grammatically problematic. See Houtman (1993–2000, 3:655–56) for various ways that have been proposed to make sense of this verse.

story of Exodus and Deuteronomy and the book of Hosea, but it is unlikely that Hosea knew of a golden calf story set in the wilderness. The dominant concern of the book of Jeremiah is the announcement of punishment because the people persist in their worship of other gods. Idols come into play here, but the people are not accused of making idols of YHWH. Rather they have turned away from YHWH; they have forsaken him and turned to other gods, gods who are “nothing” and gods that “do not profit.”³⁰ The book of Jeremiah shows neither knowledge of the golden calf or calves of the Sinai/Horeb story nor those of Jeroboam’s shrines.

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30 The root שׁוּב is found with great frequency in Jeremiah.

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The Golden Calf in the Historical Recitals of Nehemiah 9 and Psalm 106

Richard J. Bautch

This study takes up the golden calf in Neh 9 and Ps 106, two texts that provide selective yet quite detailed histories of Israel from a relatively late perspective. In his book *Geschichte in den Psalmen*, Johannes Kühlewein (1973, 124) studied these two recitals of history and discovered points of contact, especially with regard to the function of the recitals. In both Neh 9 and Ps 106, Kühlewein observed, the recitations of history recall God's providence in a way that intensifies the people's self-accusation and so supports their subsequent plea for divine mercy. The interplay of providence, penitence, and divine mercy is, in fact, quite striking, and it is through these theological categories that I read Neh 9 and Ps 106, with special attention to the golden calf. Both texts present the episode of the golden calf as a significant moment in Israelite history.

Nehemiah 9:17–19a

In the book of Nehemiah, chapters nine and ten stand out as containing a penitential prayer that is linked to a covenantal agreement. The prayer, in Neh 9, is literarily mixed, with aspects of poetry and prose blended together in a penitential expression. Theologically the prayer exhibits a similar blending or braiding of elements. On the one hand, the Deuteronomic tradition (D) has imprinted upon the prayer a historical pattern of divine grace, human sin, punishment, deliverance, and reconciliation.¹ On the other hand, Priestly and Ezekielian influences are evident, especially through the use of vocabulary from these sources. In the words of Mark Boda (1999, 73), “These ... [Priestly] circles take the Dtr call for justification of God and repentance of the people and express them in practical terms, showing the implication of Dtr theology

¹ Following trends in current scholarship, I will employ the more general term “Deuteronomic” and the abbreviation “D” to refer to the ideology generally associated with the book of Deuteronomy and the other texts and redactions that are regularly associated with Deuteronomy. On occasion, a quoted source will use related designations such as Dtr.

for the *Gattung* of lament.” There is evidence of D and P in Neh 9:17–19a, where the prayer recalls the golden calf at Sinai:

וימאנו לשמע ולא־זכרו נפלא־תִּיד אשר עשית עמהם
 ויקשו את־ערפם ויתנ־ראש לשוב לעבדתם במרים
 ואתה אלוה סליחות חנון ורחום
 ארך־אפים ורב־חסד ולא עזבתם
 אף כ־יעשו להם עגל מסכה
 ויאמרו זה אלהיך אשר העלך ממצרים
 ויעשו נאצות גדלות
 ואתה ברחמך הרבים לא עזבתם במדבר

[Our ancestors] refused to obey,
 and they did not remember the wonders that you performed among
 them;
 they stiffened their necks and appointed a leader to return to their sub-
 jugation in Egypt.
 But you are a forgiving God, gracious and merciful,
 long-suffering and great in steadfast love; so you did not forsake them.
 Even when they had made a molten calf for themselves
 And said, “This is your god who brought you up from Egypt,”
 And had carried out great blasphemies,
 You, by your great mercies, did not forsake them in the wilderness ...
 (author’s translation)

The making of a golden calf is here linked to the people forgetting God, not remembering God’s wonders. The people forget that God is “great, mighty, and awesome,” divine attributes listed later in the prayer in 9:32 and drawn from traditions associated with D (see Jer 32:17–20; Dan 9:4). Here the formula “great, mighty, and awesome” is complemented by God’s forgiveness, grace, and mercy as listed in Neh 9:17. There emerges a portrait of the deity and of the divine-human relationship that reflects the core of D theology.

To fully appreciate the D dimension of the prayer in Neh 9, one may think of the Pentateuch and beyond. The prayer refers to the incident of the golden calf as it is presented in Exod 32. Both texts refer to the idol as a molten calf (עגל מסכה, 32:4a) and include the expression: “This is your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!” (אלה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלך מארץ, 32:4b). Nehemiah’s citation of Exodus is exact except that the author of Neh 9:18 omits the vocative “O Israel” as well as “the land” of Egypt and changes the finite verb from plural to singular.

The base text, Exod 32:4, is part of Exod 32:1–6, a pentateuchal unit that echoes Deut 9 and most exactly parallels 1 Kgs 12:26–32, a polemic against Jeroboam as founder of the northern cults. Aberbach and Smolar (1967, 129–35) have established a link between Exod 32 and 1 Kgs 12 by demonstrating thirteen similarities between the two texts.² Scholars increasingly consider the link between Exod 32 and 1 Kgs 12 as indicative of a larger literary construction, the Enneateuch.³ Many theorize as well a late enneateuchal redaction of the Pentateuch with prominent D language and ideas (Dozeman 2006, 175–89). A consideration of the Enneateuch is warranted because an enneateuchal redaction would be contemporary with Neh 9, a prayer from the fifth or fourth century BCE imbued with D theology. It is in the proximate light of the Enneateuch, of which I will say more in the conclusion, that the reader of Nehemiah 9 may more fully appreciate the prayer's D dimension. For example, Neh 9:18 refers to נַאֲצוֹת גְּדִלוֹת ("great blasphemies"), a word whose nominal form is otherwise attested only in 2 Kgs 19:3, a verse belonging to the Enneateuch.

Nehemiah 9:18 is, however, not exclusively Deuteronomistic in its view of sin at Sinai. First, it attributes the deictic expression "this is your god" to the people rather than their leader, a departure from 1 Kgs 12:28 that is also reflected in Exod 32:4b. More to the point, Neh 9:18 states that the people made the molten calf whereas both Exod 32:4a and 1 Kgs 12:28 agree it was the work of their leaders, Aaron and Jeroboam respectively. The suppression of Aaron's role in the idolatry of Neh 9:18 could represent an attempt to shield the preeminent priest, Aaron, from criticism. In Priestly literature after the exile, Aaron becomes Israel's chief cultic officiant with putative roots to a northern shrine (Blenkinsopp 1998, 34–39).⁴ Nehemiah 9:18 is clearly indebted to D thought and language, but its sympathetic treatment of Aaron may show some deference to a Priestly agenda in 5th-century Yehud as well.

In addition to Neh 9:17–19a, the prayer of Neh 9 contains seven other verses where the author has similarly consolidated the traditions of both D and P while employing each to differing degrees. The prayer appears to be partial to

2 Aberbach and Smolar explain the link between Exod 32 and 1 Kgs 12 as the result of southern Zadokites polemicizing against the rival sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan; specifically, the Zadokites attacked Jeroboam through the figure of Aaron and made the latter primarily responsible for the calf incident (Exod 32:35).

3 The Enneateuch comprises the narrative elements from the book of Genesis to 2 Kings. On the golden calf incident within the Enneateuch, see for example M. Konkel 2011, 169–84.

4 Others (e.g., Cody 1969, 159–64) maintain that P established its connection with Aaron via his southern origins in a town south of Jerusalem as indicated in Josh 21:4, 13, a Priestly interpolation.

D's language and presentation of events in the matters of creation (9:6) and Abraham and exodus (9:9). Yet in all cases the prayer acknowledges P's view of the matter. In other verses, a fusing of the two traditions allows both to be represented significantly at the levels of language and ideas. Examples include the covenant described in 9:8, the ultimately ambivalent view of God's corporeality in 9:13–14, and the connection between lawfulness and life in 9:29. The subjects of these verses are rendered especially complex through the creative use of D and P traditions conjoined. The tradent by and large is inclusive rather than exclusive, and his presentation of the golden calf episode in Neh 9:17–19a exemplifies the braiding of D and P traditions that he favors.

Psalm 106:19–23

Konrad Schmid (2012, 303) describes the intertextuality of Jer 6 with Ps 48 as follows: “No longer does this text [Ps 48] have the air of doxology, but rather one of lamentation.... [A] fundamental transformation has occurred.” One may say the same of Exod 32 with Ps 106, where an impulse to praise the God who delivered the people from slavery in Egypt is attenuated by reports of misdeeds and cries of distress. In Ps 106, the recitation of events from the occupation of the land to the loss of the land reflects a transformation. Here the historical presentations that earlier in the Israelite cult yielded thanksgiving and praise begin to be associated with the people's penitential liturgies. The new emphasis on sin and penitence, however, is not absolute, as Hans-Joachim Kraus (1993, 318) notes: “In the [later] situation of repentance and lament, the old signature of thanksgiving has not been removed.” Walter Beyerlin rightly described the psalm in terms of tension between the imperative to praise God and the inability to do so because of sin. Within this transformational treatment of history, the psalmist refers to the golden calf (106:19–23):

יעשו־עגל בחרב וישתחוו למסכה
וימירו את־כבודם בתבנית שור אכל עשב
שכחו אל מושיעם עשה גדלות במצרים
נפלאות בארץ חם נוראות על־י־סוף
ויאמר להשמידם לולי משה בחירו
עמד בפרץ לפניו להשיב חמתו מהשחית

They made a calf at Horeb and worshiped a cast image.
They exchanged their glory for the image of an ox that eats grass.
They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt,

wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Reed Sea.

Therefore he said he would destroy them—had not Moses, his chosen one,
stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them.

Once again, the people forget the great deeds that God did in Egypt, although the vocabulary is not identical to that of Neh 9:17. God's greatness is amplified through attributes such as wondrous and awesome, and here there is a match to Neh 9:17 (נפלאותֶיךָ) and Neh 9:32 (והנורא). The psalmist appears to adopt and adapt the set of divine attributes found in Neh 9, Jer 32, and Dan 9. In sum, the transformational psalm sets God's great deeds in the context of the people's sin, which prompts God to order their destruction but stay the execution.

Several expressions clarify the psalm's debt to Deuteronomy, beginning with the characteristic name of Horeb, not Sinai, in Ps 106:19. In the following verse, the ox that eats grass appears "in image" (בתבנית), which in Deut 4:17 is a derisive term for idol. Further, in 106:21 the people forget the God who saved them and did great deeds in Egypt. The psalm, like the book of Deuteronomy, "sees forgetfulness of God's mercy and the consequent indifference and ingratitude as the root cause of Israel's rebelliousness," notes Gordon Wenham (2011, 173). Finally, the destruction indicated in 106:23, להשמידם, provides the Deuteronomic signature to the pericope. With destruction expressed thus, the Hebrew (from שמד) again coincides with Deuteronomy (Deut 9:8), and it is repeated by the psalmist in Ps 106:34.

Psalm 106's debt to Deuteronomic thought appears in greater relief with the figure of Moses. Jan-Albert Roetman and Caspar Visser't Hooft (2010, 233–43) argue persuasively that in Ps 106 Moses's legacy is burnished when he unites and assumes the positive interventions of Aaron and Phineas listed in the book of Numbers. Moses's preeminence is equally suggested by his title "elect," bestowed upon him in Ps 106:23. Synonymous with the law of Sinai and its Deuteronomic application, the figure of Moses imparts to Ps 106 a vision of centralized authority and covenantal leadership. Yet Roetman and Visser't Hooft press their argument too far in claiming that the supremacy of Moses is designed to relativize Aaron and Phineas and remove from Ps 106 any Priestly perspective (Roetman and Visser't Hooft 2010, 237). Rather, the text exhibits a clear interest in Priestly issues raised in either the Pentateuch or the book of Ezekiel, and these matters are expressed in characteristically Priestly language.

With respect to Ps 106 generally, Aaron is the holy one of the LORD in 106:16. The title "holy one" is conspicuous in Num 16, the account of the Korahites'

rebellion; the designation of Aaron as the holy one could aim to evoke Priestly polemics of old while staking a claim for Aaronide priests to function as temple personnel in the contemporary context. At the very least, in celebrating Aaron as the LORD’s “holy one,” Ps 106 obscures his complicity in the golden calf incident. This occurs in contrast to the account in Exod 32:2–5, but in a manner parallel to Neh 9:18.

Within the psalm’s account of the golden calf, 106:19–23, there is evidence of Priestly discourse from the book of Ezekiel. First, the prohibition of images that permeates Ezek 20 (Ezek 20:7, 16, 24) plays a leading role in the Horeb passage of Ps 106. Moreover, Ezekiel provides the formula by which Moses “steps in the breach” (Ps 106:23) and turns back God’s “destroying anger.” Frank-Lothar Hossfeld (2003, 259–60) notes: “The appeal is indebted to an Ezekielian formula; ... the usage of the metaphor ‘step in the breach’ for the prophet Moses follows Ezek 13:5.”

To summarize the study thus far, similarities abound between the golden calf incident in Neh 9 and Ps 106. For both texts the point of departure is a Deuteronomic note about the people forgetting God’s great deeds. This and other linguistic features point toward two later writers who esteemed the traditions of D and blended them with Priestly sources, especially Ezekiel. Additionally, with both Neh 9 and Ps 106, the writers embed the incident of the golden calf in a larger historical recital (see table). By exploring next in the third section of this study the recitals of history in Neh 9 and Ps 106, we gain further understanding of the role of the golden calf and its theological function.

The Historical Recitals in Nehemiah 9 and Psalm 106

In Neh 9, the historical recital is bipartite, with Neh 9:6–16 forming the first half and 9:17–31 the second half.⁵ The substantive difference between the

TABLE 4.1 Sequence of events in the historical accounts of Israel

Text	Creation	Patriarchs	Exodus	Wilderness	Taking of the land
Neh 9:6–37	9:6	9:7–8	9:9–11	9:12–21	9:22–31
Ps 106	–	–	106:8–12	106:13–33	106:34–43

5 In their analysis of literary design, scholars increasingly recognize that the five thematic divisions noted in the table do not follow pentateuchal chronology and reflect rather a different

two halves is the introduction of moral failure into the latter. For example, “they and our ancestors acted insolently and stiffened their necks [הִזִּידוּ וִיקְשׁוּן]” (9:16); “they had made a molten calf for themselves ... and carried out great blasphemies [נִאצוֹת גְּדוֹלוֹת]” (9:18); “they were rebellious and revolted against you [וַיִּמְרֹדוּ בְךָ]” (9:26); “[they] sinned against your ordinances [וּבְמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ חָטְאוּ]” (9:29). While the first half of the history never refers to Israelite wrongdoing, such language appears in 9:17–31 for two reasons. First, the second half of the history, especially 9:26–31, is structured according to a sin-punishment-repentance-salvation cycle. In this model, a theological formulation found in Judg 2:11–23 and elsewhere is superimposed on Israelite history: after rebellion, punishment is inevitable.⁶ Thus, the second half of the history has a distinctively penitential tone due to the influence of a source, Judg 2, and the larger Deuteronomic tradition.

Second, the sins of the Israelites begin to be enumerated in 9:17 as a result of the description of Sinai at the center of the historical recital (9:16–17). Structurally, Sinai is a hinge and a moral threshold. After the law has been given, it is possible to transgress its precepts and turn away from God. Sinai thus marks a new era in this and other post-exilic prayers. With the promulgation of the community’s sacred codes and customs, the people enter a new time with new responsibilities. But the promise of this new era is quickly dashed. The prayer in Nehemiah reports that the ancestors insolently disobey the commandments (9:16), seek a return to the slavery of Egypt (9:17), and fashion for themselves a molten calf (9:18). The calf, consequently, reflects the first moral failure in this new era. The people’s plea for a leader and the concomitant fashioning of an idol are the original transgressions of the law. They are, however, also occasions of God’s grace and mercy (9:17). Because God is long-suffering and great in steadfast love, God does not forsake the idolatrous people.

The centrality of Sinai also marks Ps 106. In their analysis of the psalm, Roetman and Visser’t Hooft designate the historical recital as vv. 7–46 to observe that the center or fulcrum is v. 23b, which refers to Moses as the elect within the context of the golden calf episode. They argue that the placement of Moses is intentional, and that the historical recital in Ps 106 is articulated around a central axis, which is represented by the figure of Moses in 106:23b (Roetman and Visser’t Hooft 2010, 237). The recital, in their analysis, comprises six concentric sections, all organized around 106:23 in order to present Moses

underlying principle. As yet there is no consensus as to the structure of the historical recital. While my proposal of a bipartite structure with Sinai as the moral hinge is original, this type of schema has been proposed elsewhere (Throntveit 1992, 104).

6 The formulation of Judg 2:11–23 is easily distinguished from, for example, the priestly compendium of misdeeds in Lev 26:3–45.

as the crucial intercessor asking God not to destroy the people after they fashion a molten calf. Moses “in the breach” is perfectly situated at the center and face-to-face with God. This part of their argument is persuasive. Such literary construction highlights the role of Moses at Sinai and suggests another parallel to Neh 9, where too the center or fulcrum of the historical recital is Sinai. In both texts, Sinai is central and all important in establishing the covenantal law and all that it entails. The dynamic of sin and mercy is also established at Sinai through the episode of the golden calf. It is noteworthy that in Neh 9:17 God alone acts to correct the people’s lawlessness, whereas Ps 106:23 creates a leading role for Moses in the account of sin and forgiveness at Sinai.

Sin and Forgiveness Across Nehemiah 9 and Psalm 106

Finally, employing form-critical analysis, we will consider the prayers’ macro structures with attention to the relationship among the larger parts. In Neh 9 there are two main parts of the prayer, the bipartite historical recital (Neh 9:6–31) and the petition/confession of sin (9:32–37). The litany of moral failure within the historical recital allows the recital to serve as a basis for appealing to God’s mercy and, specifically, as a confession of sins (Neh 9:17–31). The human misdeeds enumerated in Neh 9:17–31 indeed strengthen the self-accusation in Neh 9:33—and so add poignancy to the appeal for mercy that follows. In form-critical terms, the historical recital in Neh 9:6–31 performs a standard function observable in the psalms of communal lament, the statement of motive. “Statement of motive” is an umbrella term for reasons why God should listen to the people and act on their prayer. In the classic formulation, the motive may call to mind the cause of the distress, specified in terms of the people’s righteous innocence or their enemies’ wickedness and hate. In the historical recital of Neh 9:6–31, however, the statement of motive is altered such that the contemporary distress owes directly to the people’s own wickedness and lack of righteous innocence. Since the giving of the law on Sinai, the people have too often lived lawlessly. Beginning with the golden calf incident, they reiterate the regrettable chapters of Israelite history so as to acknowledge their sin and thus press God for a merciful response to their present distress.

A similar structuring may also be observed in Ps 106. Kühlewein notes the fundamental transformation that has taken place in this late psalm: petition is now joined with confession of sin. The confession occurs in v. 6 (“We have sinned like our ancestors; we have done wrong and are guilty”) and is echoed many times throughout, finally in v. 44. With the history of Israel keyed to the confession of sin, the lament here merely resonates in the background. Notes Kühlewein (1973, 124):

The combination of the confession of sins and petition in place of the former [convention]—lament, petition—shows that we are tradition-historically in an already advanced stage. In this, the other parts of the historical recital assume a new function ... they hold up to Yahweh his early conduct, thus strengthening the accusation and supporting the petition.

Kühlewein cogently explains the role of the historical recital within the psalm. The events hold up God's early conduct, thus strengthening the people's self-accusation and supporting their petition for divine succor. Such are the historical grounds upon which the petition for mercy is based. Not surprisingly, Kühlewein considers Psalm 106 to be most comparable with Neh 9:6–37.

Conclusion

This study of the golden calf episode indicates that there are numerous similarities between Neh 9 and Ps 106. Both texts highlight the forgetting of God's marvelous deeds in Egypt and obscure Aaron's role in the idolatry. The two accounts blend traditions that are literary and theological, D and P. Nehemiah 9 and Ps 106 structure their historical recitals similarly to revolve around Sinai/Moses and the golden calf incident. Finally, they are theologically akin: the confession of sin is designed to motivate the Deity to forgive the people. It is plausible that both texts together reflect a comprehensive approach to the questions of communal sin and divine forgiveness after the return from exile. The elements fit well in a post-destruction context, which is clearly the ambit of Neh 9 and, in many commentators' opinion, that of Ps 106 as well. Just as the exile provoked in-depth and thoroughgoing reflections on sin, destruction, and loss, so these texts convey the attempt to come to terms with a dark past. The results are eminently Sinaitic/Mosaic as both texts revalorize the grace of Sinai (Neh 9:17) and the figure of Moses (Ps 106:23) while placing them at the center of what could be a new identity of Israel. The message is clear: the grace of forgiveness is deep in the grain of history and extends far back. That grace was first expressed at Sinai to conclude the episode of the golden calf, and it is extended *de novo* in the postexilic context.

It is intriguing to consider a third literary work that may have paralleled Neh 9 and Ps 106. The emergence of an Enneateuch or an enneateuchal redaction of the Pentateuch at this point in history would complement the literary and theological developments in Neh 9 and Ps 106. If the golden calf described in Exod 32 reflects a late biblical writer sensitive to material in Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy and 1 Kings (see note 3), there are grounds for reading this

material alongside Neh 9 and Ps 106 almost synoptically. Such study could, among other things, heighten the three texts' comparability and establish further their common theological interests.

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Did the Sheep Worship the Golden Calf? The Animal Apocalypse's Reading of Exodus 32

Daniel Assefa and Kelley Coblenz Bautch

How do texts self-consciously interpreting and/or mediating known traditions from the Second Temple period communicate about the incident of the golden calf? Pseudepigraphal texts of this era typically draw on patriarchs and significant heroes of the faith from ancient Israel. This allows the actual authors to address, from the vantage of these spiritual forefathers, the challenges faced by later communities. Given the number of texts attributed to the patriarch Enoch familiar from Gen 5:24, early Enochic literature provides a rich context for investigating this theme. In fact, the Animal Apocalypse, a distinct section of *1 Enoch* or Ethiopic *Enoch*, surveys much of Israel's history and includes the exodus account, but does this allegory intimate the episode involving the golden calf? We shall demonstrate that the Animal Apocalypse expects its audience to read into the narrative the scene from Exod 32, in which the Israelites worship the golden calf and apostatize.

Overview of the Animal Apocalypse

The Animal Apocalypse, chapters 85–90 from the Book of Dreams in *1 Enoch*, is written as an extended historical allegory addressing the era of Adam until the time of the book's composition.¹ The narrative can be divided into three main periods. The first is the period of humanity represented by the bulls (*1 En.* 85:1–89:11), from Adam and Eve up to the birth of Jacob. Much emphasis is given to the account of the fallen angels and the flood. The second is the period of Israel (*1 En.* 89:12–90:19), symbolized by the sheep. It begins with the birth of Jacob and his descent to Egypt with his children and ends with Seleucid domination and an eschatological battle. Except for some nuances the narrative follows closely the history of Israel as presented in what would later become the Hebrew Bible, including all the major events like the exodus, the wandering in

¹ For studies on the Animal Apocalypse, see Dimant 1982a, 1982b, 2001; Boccaccini 1991; Tiller 1993; Nickelsburg 2001; VanderKam 2004; Assefa 2007, 2010; and Olson 2013.

the wilderness, the construction of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting, the entry into the promised land, the institution of the monarchy, the construction of the temple of Solomon, the Babylonian exile, the return from Babylon, the Persian period and the reconstruction of the temple, and the Hellenistic era. One major difference from the "biblical" history of Israel would be the strong criticism against the second temple whereby the sacrifice is contaminated and unacceptable in the eyes of God. The third period is discussed in the epilogue (90:20–42), which covers the resurrection of the dead and the last judgement. This leads into the definitive punishment of the fallen angels, the evil shepherds and Gentiles who made Israel suffer, and the Israelites who were unfaithful to the Lord of Israel; they are all thrown into an abyss of fire. Meanwhile, the righteous Israelites and the good Gentiles, transformed into a new humanity and represented again by white bulls, enter into a New Jerusalem to joyously celebrate a new age in the presence of God, freed from all evil powers. Thus, the story strictly follows a chronological order that parallels largely the narrative of Israel as suggested by the Torah and prophetic writings of the Hebrew Bible. Abel's death comes, for instance, after the introduction of Adam and Eve and before the birth of Seth. Such attention here to the overarching narrative of the Hebrew Bible, especially with careful attention to the order of people and events, stands in sharp contrast to other writings in the Enochic anthology. For example, another booklet of *1 Enoch*, the Parables (chapters 37–71), provides allusions and references to biblical texts that do not reflect the order or context of the latter.

At the same time, Enoch's narration of human history is presented as a revelation and not as an account derived from experience. According to the text, Enoch does not receive information from oral communication, although he does relate information in this manner to his son. Rather, everything he shares derives from what he has seen in a dream (for example, *1 En.* 85:1, 3). He learns about the future, both immediate and remote, and both that of the earth and that of the otherworld.

History thus becomes a subject of revelation throughout the Animal Apocalypse, especially with regard to the future. As mentioned above, this future is multifaceted with distinct events without parallel in the Hebrew Bible. It concludes with an eschatological battle, followed by the triumph of God and God's people. Among the events described are the defeat of the Gentiles (*1 En.* 90:18–19), the judgment of God (*1 En.* 90:20), and the punishment of disobedient angels and apostates (*1 En.* 90:21–27).

The Animal Apocalypse discusses two sets of problematic angels that correspond roughly to the two periods of human history. The first set, familiar as the Watchers from the Book of the Watchers (*1 En.* 1–36), appear as stars

and descend from heaven to initiate some sort of sexual misconduct among humankind, here represented as bulls and cattle (1 *En.* 86). The event and the actions of the stars allow the reader to see them as symbols of the fallen angels. As in other accounts of this tradition (cf. 1 *En.* 10), these angelic beings are imprisoned and held until a later time of judgment (1 *En.* 88:3). The second set of evil angels is represented by shepherds who, after the destruction of the first temple, are allowed to rule over Israel. However, the master of the sheep foresees the shepherds' excessive persecution of the people of God and even appoints a heavenly scribe to oversee and note their misdeeds (1 *En.* 89:59–64).²

Setting the Stage for the Episode of the Golden Calf and the Anger of God

The episode of the golden calf is linked with the first instance of the sheep being blinded, an expression that relates to sin and apostasy (Nickelsburg 2001, 380–81; VanderKam 2004, 282). Prior to this event, the reader learns that the sheep have opened their eyes, a metaphor for spiritual realization and a way for the author to express faithfulness or obedience to God (Nickelsburg 2001, 381). The sheep first have open eyes upon their deliverance from the Pharaoh's army and as they are tended by God in the wilderness (1 *En.* 89:28; cf. Exod 15:25–16:36).³ This period, obliquely described in the Animal Apocalypse, corresponds to the

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- 2 The following points mark some of the peculiarities of the Animal Apocalypse. First, the return from exile does not have the same meaning as the one found in biblical narratives. It is not considered a period of divine mercy and forgiveness. Second, a period dominated by angels is included in Israel's history. Third, the holiness and purity of the tabernacle of the desert and of the temple are extended to the camp and the city of Jerusalem (cf. Dimant 1982b, 187–89). Fourth, God builds a city-temple at the place of the historical Jerusalem and the second temple. The text describes a group that opened its eyes, a movement prepared to welcome the return of God's kingdom. Other Israelites do not seem to agree with these claims (1 *En.* 90:7). Dividing history into periods serves to situate the elect group in a favorable position with regard to God's plan. The end gives meaning to their election and to their mission. The group reads its suffering in the light of the eschatological Jerusalem and the eschatological temple. There will be a decisive judgment against the fallen angels (90:24), the evil angels symbolized by the shepherds (90:25), the antagonizing nations (90:18), and part of Israel (90:26). See Assefa 2010, 321–25.
 - 3 *First Enoch* 89:28 reads: "As for the sheep, they escaped from that water and went out to a desert where there was neither water nor grass; and they began to open their eyes and to see." (All translations of Enochic texts are those of Assefa.) VanderKam (2004, 281) remarks that the Aramaic preserved for the text lacks an equivalent for "they began" and suggests instead a passive rendering for "open"; thus, the Aramaic would suggest that the eyes of the sheep were opened for them.

time when the people experience God's providence, when God provides water and food in the wilderness. Interestingly, the Exodus narrative (which the Animal Apocalypse follows) includes during this wilderness period an account of God making a statute and an ordinance with the people, charging them to heed commandments (Exod 15:25–26). This event, along with the experience of providence, prompts the sheep's eyes to be opened.

After this idyllic scene, the Animal Apocalypse next alludes to the ascent of Moses upon Mount Sinai, the people's fear before the presence of God, and then Moses's return to the summit of Sinai. The sheep are said to have their eyes opened again when they "see" God at the Sinai theophany (1 En. 89:30). After the sheep express fear at the awesome manifestation of God (Exod 20:18–20), their leader (Moses) ascends again to the summit (1 En. 89:30–32). This second ascent presages the act of apostasy, for it is at this point in the narration that the sheep begin to be blinded and they stray from the path shown to them (1 En. 89:32). As a result, God expresses great wrath (1 En. 89:33), reminiscent of the divine anger in Exod 32:9–10.

Evil and Apostasy in 1 Enoch

According to 1 En. 89:32, the flock becomes blind and goes astray while their leader is on the mountain and is not aware of the apostasy. Then in 89:33 one reads that what the flock did angered the master of the flock, that is, the Lord of Israel. At this point, in order to understand what is implied by this story, it is useful to examine its parallel narrative in Exod 32:7–10. There the only incident that made God angry while Moses was on Mount Sinai was the worship of the golden calf. Thus God is angry in both Exod 32:7–10 and in 1 En. 89:33, and in both cases, Moses, on the mountain, did not know that the people had committed a sin. The act of apostasy—implied in the Animal Apocalypse but not described explicitly—seems to represent the golden calf account presented in Exodus. How, though, does this relate to other writings associated with Enoch? In terms of the entire anthology in 1 Enoch, we may notice the presence of several past actions with negative consequences. Some are provoked by otherworldly creatures, and others are committed by human beings upon their fellow humans.

For example, the narrative in the Book of the Watchers (1 En. 1–36, a booklet composed during the third century BCE) underscores the damage caused by the Watchers or fallen angels. Their offspring destroy nature, including humans and non-human creatures. The victims are of the created nature—are of the earth. In the Book of Parables (1 En. 37–71), a later composition likely

dating to the first century BCE or CE, the greatest harm to humanity is caused by the mighty kings who oppress the righteous. The key transgression in the Astronomical Book (*1 En.* 72–82), written during the third century BCE if not earlier, is the deviation of the stars or the luminaries from their proper courses, causing disruptions to natural seasons and adversely affecting proper worship. The chief evil in the Epistle of Enoch (*1 En.* 92–105), written during the second century BCE or a bit later, is the oppression and damage caused by the rich who make the righteous poor suffer. The core iniquities in the Animal Apocalypse, our text for consideration, include the transgression of wicked angels, the unfaithfulness of Israel, and the nations' unjust domination of Israel.

It would seem that in the Animal Apocalypse, the initial moment where Israel as a people goes astray is in fact the golden calf episode. Earlier in the narration, the reader learns about the fratricide (*1 En.* 85:4) and about the descent of the angels that leads to numerous problems for humankind (*1 En.* 87–88).⁴ Are the descendants of Noah's sons (*1 En.* 89:9–10) to blame for sinful humanity? Or, do the angels who descend set bad examples somehow for the people of Israel?⁵ Since both of these stories come long before the emergence of Israel in the exodus tradition, it is unlikely that either is intended when the sheep become blind in the Animal Apocalypse. Rather, the first time the sheep become blind is when their leader, the sheep which represents Moses, is on Mount Sinai (*1 En.* 89:32). The first allusion to being blinded indicates that the sin is more than incidental. Instead, the sin could have symbolic value. That is, in terms of all the sins that follow—also symbolized by the image of blindness—the first occurrence is probably an emblematic transgression.

In spite of these sins, the Animal Apocalypse suggests that there are elements within the present age that work to ameliorate evil. The flood, for example, is an instrument that disrupts corruption and bloodshed (*1 En.* 89:1–8). Enoch's ascent in order to see the course of human history is also a positive response to the challenges of the present age (*1 En.* 87:3). The last judgement, presaged by those keeping track of misdeeds, likewise preserves a positive outcome for the righteous to be saved by God. Other booklets within the Enochic anthology offer comparable resolutions to the question of evil, referring especially to the flood (which, given the antediluvian context of the patriarch

4 For another view on the sources of sin and evil in the Animal Apocalypse, see Nickelsburg (2001, 355–56), who suggests that sin in the Animal Apocalypse is expressed as violence or apostasy.

5 It is noteworthy that the Animal Apocalypse makes clear that the sin of Cain precedes that of the angels. That is, the text brings human culpability back to the fore.

Enoch, lends itself well to these primeval events) and the judgment at the end of the current era which extends to both otherworldly and human beings.

The Question of Worship

The sin of the golden calf involves worship of an entity that is not God, an act considered idolatry. How do the writings associated with Enoch respond to the topics of polytheism and idolatry? The Book of the Watchers seems to blame polytheistic practice on the rebellious angels. In *1 En.* 19:1, the spirits of these angels assume many forms and lead humans astray, provoking them to sacrifice to demons as to gods. In addition to the allusion to the golden calf in the Animal Apocalypse, another place in the Enochic texts where worship of idols is denounced in like manner is *1 En.* 99:7. In this section from the Epistle of Enoch, those who fashion and worship idols are condemned: those who worship such objects will be destroyed together with their handiwork (*1 En.* 99:9). Interestingly, while *1 En.* 99:7 condemns various kinds of idolatry, like the worship of stone and images of gold or silver as well as demons, v. 8 explains the causes of the sin through the metaphors of “madness of heart” and of “blindness.” Worship of idols is implicit in the Animal Apocalypse and explicit in the Epistle (*1 En.* 99:7). Blindness as a symbol of idolatry is explicit in both sections.⁶ Whether there is an influence from one passage on the other or a common external source for that imagery needs further inquiry.

One may, however, look at the matter from another perspective. The episode of the golden calf may be placed on the same level as all other transgressions of Israel. In other words, perhaps it may be considered no worse than any other sin. Be that as it may, one ought to remember that, according to the Animal Apocalypse, God was extremely angry after the episode (*1 En.* 89:33). This shows that the sin is grave.

If idolatry is to be avoided in worship, the goal then is to worship God, an end available to all peoples from the perspective of the Enochic writings. To return to the Book of the Watchers and an earlier tradition associated with Enoch, a time will come when all human beings shall be righteous and all the nations shall serve, bless, and worship God (*1 En.* 10:21). That implies also a time when corruption and sin will be brought to an end, an affirmation that is eschatological.⁷ The Book of Parables, a later composition, also shares the

⁶ See Nickelsburg 2001, 493; cf. also 380–81 and 491–92.

⁷ However, the golden calf is not eschatological. It is about sin committed before Israel reached even the promised land.

perspective of universal worship. According to *1 En.* 48:5, "all those who dwell in the dry land" will fall down and worship the Son of Man, the light of nations, the hope of those who grieve. Similarly, according to *1 En.* 62:9, mighty kings will fall down and worship God (or the Son of Man?), an act implying defeat, recognition, and submission. The mighty kings were in the first place depicted as arrogant people of power. Here a reversal is anticipated (cf. also *1 En.* 63:1). As in these Enochic booklets, the same sentiment appears at the end of the Animal Apocalypse (*1 En.* 90:30) when all the nations will bow before Israel and subsequently rejoice with God in the New Jerusalem.

A Tentative Explanation for an Opaque Reference to the Golden Calf

The fact that the Animal Apocalypse is not explicit with regard to the episode of the golden calf may be understood as a lack of interest or even an intentional dismissal of the motif. Thus, one may ask the following question: "If the sheep worshiped the golden calf, why did the author not communicate it explicitly?" Why is the author silent? Could it not be a purposeful omission in view of avoiding some uneasiness? Or, would there be an intention to affirm that the incident itself is not that important? If that is the case, why does the text still claim that the people have been blinded? One must address whether the very slight allusion implies a deliberate action, a literary necessity, or a lack of interest on the part of the author of the Animal Apocalypse.

What if the Sheep Did Not Worship the Golden Calf?

If the sheep did not worship the golden calf, what did the sheep (Israelites) then do to warrant the description of being blind? For what transgression would they be responsible? Even if the meaning of the sheep being blind is not clear toward the end of the Animal Apocalypse, it is quite obvious for most of the sections of the narratives. That is, it is possible to associate each reference of the sheep being blind with transgressions familiar from the history of Israel. For example, the discussion of going astray in *1 En.* 89:51–52 seems to reflect Israel's sin of persecuting the prophets, and the blindness of *1 En.* 89:54 represents the transgressions that precede the exile to Babylon. We shall see below that there are several occasions of the flock's blindness in the Animal Apocalypse. The real issue is to determine which event of transgression from Israelite history the text references. What would be the biblical parallel for an allegorical story of ancient Israel in which a chief sheep goes up to a mountain to be with his master while the flock becomes blind and goes astray

causing the anger of God? Besides, the reader of the Animal Apocalypse knows that the event is taking place after God's manifestation on Mount Sinai and Moses' construction of the tabernacle. In other words, it is not about finding parallel stories in any part of the Bible. The event takes place while Israel is in the wilderness.

The Rule of the Allegory

Even if the author were explicit, we would expect respect somehow for the allegorical frame of the work. We may ask: "How can sheep worship a calf?" How would the allegory refer to the calf? Would it be absurd or impossible to describe the incident within the literary "logic" of the Animal Apocalypse? In the allegory, angels are symbolized by human beings and the latter by animals, but we have no character that represents an animal. It is therefore difficult to imagine the character that would represent the golden calf. Admittedly there are some exceptions to the rule of allegory in the Animal Apocalypse: heaven (1 En. 86:1), the earth (85:3), the flood (89:2–9), and Enoch (passim) are not symbolized by anything. The earth simply is called the earth and the same is true for the flood. A strict application of the rule presumably would have depicted Enoch as a white bull, like Noah.

Given that heaven, the earth, the flood, and Enoch are not described allegorically, the golden calf in principle could be presented in a non-allegorical way; it could have been among the exceptions. We would suggest, however, that a literal description of the golden calf could confuse the animal imagery of this apocalypse, since bulls represent human beings. Such a presentation could be read as Israel (the sheep) worshiping humanity or a great figure like Noah. In such a case, the misunderstanding with regard to the code of the text surely could be expected.⁸

An Apology

First Enoch 89:32 simply says that the sheep went astray, without illustrating the major transgression and breaking of the first commandment announced in Exod 20:2–3. An attempt to bypass the disconcerting episode might be understandable if the author manifests uneasiness with regard to the apostasy. A desire to cover up a grave sin of Israel is, however, difficult to affirm. The

8 Besides the problem of misperceptions which a mixture of symbols could cause, one might also question the capacity of the sheep to prostrate themselves in order to worship or to mold a statue. This would not be a problem within the logic of the Animal Apocalypse, however, given that (according to the allegory) sheep can repair a house (the second temple, 1 En. 89:72–73), take a sword (1 En. 90:19), or talk (1 En. 89:18, in this case Moses and Aaron).

silence vis-à-vis the episode of the golden calf might allow such a hypothesis, but only as one proposition among others. The hypothesis of an apology would be stronger if the guilt of Israel were minimized consistently in all the sections of the Animal Apocalypse. The Animal Apocalypse does not seem, however, to omit the transgressions of the sheep in the other episodes. There does not seem to be any intentional diminishing of Israel's transgression. Descriptions of the sheep that are blind or that have gone astray appear several times in the text.⁹

The Purpose of the Animal Apocalypse

The context and the purpose of the Animal Apocalypse will matter in our interpretation of the very subtle allusion to the golden calf. If the Animal Apocalypse is militant and pro-Maccabean, one would understand the episode of the golden calf to be an embarrassment. If, on the other hand, the booklet is focused on the sin of Israel and its need of conversion, reference to the golden calf would not constitute much of a problem for the author.

A Pro-Nations Position?

Would this lucid presentation of Israel's transgression in the Animal Apocalypse be motivated by a bias toward Gentiles? In other words, did the author have the intention of exaggerating the sins of Israel, propelled by a special sympathy for the Gentiles? If it were the case, we would hardly understand the author's distress and cry of intercession for the sheep which are punished by God. These emotions explain plainly that the author is sad about what was happening to Israel. The author suffers together with the Israelites and asks God to forgive them and to stop the punishment.

An Exclusion of Torah?

Would the lack of an explicit description of the golden calf episode in the Animal Apocalypse be connected with the omission of the giving of the tablets at Sinai? The very fact that the sheep are blinded or that they have gone astray indicates that there is transgression, an abandonment of a right path and hence the existence of a body of rules or code of conduct.¹⁰ If we conclude

9 ¹ *Enoch* 89:32, 33, 41, 54, 74; 90:7, 26.

10 While some have suggested that the Animal Apocalypse downplays Moses and the giving of the torah, the present authors observe the significance of Moses in the booklet—he is one of a few characters in it who undergoes a transformation in the allegory from beast to human (1 *En.* 89:38), a change intended to signal status and praise—and also that the highly selective allegory need not have included more explicit references to the scene at

that the covenant and instructions (torah) given to Moses are totally ignored in the booklet, what would then be the reference for the sin of Israel? Can we speak in the first place of the sin of Israel? If, on the other hand, we were to affirm that the Animal Apocalypse is referring to human weakness in general, then it would not refer to the blindness of the sheep in particular, but to that of all the animals.

A Gap or a Literary Device?

The absence of a description of the golden calf episode can also be interpreted in terms of a voluntary gap in the text on the part of the author of the Animal Apocalypse. To explore the possibility, one would attempt to discern the meaning or significance of such a gap. Why would the author leave this gap? Does the gap communicate a lack of interest? Does it mean that, for the author, the detail—here the golden calf account—is not important? For comparison, we may look at some other characters or events that are not well represented in the Animal Apocalypse. For example, the creation of Adam and Eve is elliptic. The Animal Apocalypse merely tells the reader that a bull and a heifer came out from the earth, and there is no reference to God's involvement. If such a silence or opaque depiction does not lead to a particular theological interpretation, the same might be proposed for the lack of explicit mention of the golden calf.

Once we admit that the Animal Apocalypse alludes to the episode of the golden calf, it would be interesting to see whether Moses, who intercedes for Israel in Exod 32:30–32, prays on behalf of the flock. In the Animal Apocalypse there is, however, no explicit reference to Moses's intercession for the people who have gone astray. Moses instead punishes those who erred (1 En. 89:35) and builds the tabernacle (1 En. 89:36). On the other hand, another figure does intercede for Israel, as we shall see below.

Intercessions on Behalf of the People of God

Regarding sin and intercession, there are parallels between Enoch in the Animal Apocalypse and Moses in the Bible. Moses, as just mentioned above, intercedes for Israel when it worshiped the golden calf (Exod 32:30–32); likewise,

Sinai. Moreover, inasmuch as many commentators tend to date the Animal Apocalypse to the time of Judas Maccabeus, it is unlikely that the Maccabees and their allies (as depicted in works like 1 Maccabees) were anti-torah.

Enoch intercedes for the Israelites who are handed over to wild animals. This is presented in a rather paradoxical manner, for though Enoch cries, God refuses to listen to him and even seems to rejoice in the suffering of the sheep. One reads in *1 En.* 89:57–58:

And I started crying out with all my strength, and calling the master of the flock, and indicating to him the flock's situation, how they were being eaten up by all the wild animals. But he kept quiet, even though he saw them, and rejoiced that they were eaten up and swallowed up and taken away, and he abandoned them into the hands of all the animals as food.

Besides intercession, Enoch weeps for the sheep that are suffering: "And each one [shepherd] was killing and destroyed more than he was allowed to do, and I began to cry and to lament a lot on account of those sheep" (*1 En.* 89:69). This seems to hint at the perspective that God is not listening to Israel or that the punishment is exaggerated. Similarly, Enoch intercedes for the fallen angels in the Book of the Watchers. In the Animal Apocalypse, Enoch does not intercede at the time of the episode of the golden calf, but rather at the time of the Babylonian exile (*1 En.* 89:54–57). After the destruction of Jerusalem, there is also an angelic figure, appointed by God, keeping track of the shepherds who overstep their authority in punishing Israel; this figure is also an intercessor (*1 En.* 89:61–64, 68–72). In connection with the golden calf, Aaron—far from interceding for Israel like Moses—is presented as a weak figure in Exodus. The question would then be to know Aaron's place in the Animal Apocalypse.

Aaron has a prominent role in the episode of the golden calf in Exod 32. Nevertheless he is absent in the Animal Apocalypse when the Israelites go astray and Moses is on Mount Sinai, and it is intriguing that he is not mentioned here. According to Exod 32, Aaron plays an important role because he is directly or indirectly connected with the formation of the golden calf. One may ask why he is not mentioned in this allusion to the golden calf episode in the Animal Apocalypse. Aaron does, in fact, appear three times in the Animal Apocalypse, as will be discussed below.

Why not mention Aaron in the episode of the golden calf in the Animal Apocalypse? Would the omission be an attempt to vindicate him? Why does not the text simply say "that sheep that accompanied the sheep that went down to the wolves ... went astray or became blind by closing its eyes"? The fact that it does not say anything like this might support the hypothesis that the author sought to exculpate Aaron. Given that the episode itself is not described, though, one might not expect an explicit reference to Aaron. If Aaron

were not at all mentioned in the other parts of the Animal Apocalypse, the idea that the golden calf episode is omitted would get somehow some support or justification.

As noted earlier, however, there are three occasions in which Aaron is mentioned. The first occurs when Aaron meets Moses and they go to Egypt in order to free the Israelites ("and another sheep met him and accompanied him; and they went together into the assembly of those wolves," 1 En. 89:18).

The second is at the theophany on Mount Sinai, when the people are terrified at the time of the giving of the instructions or torah in Exod 20 (cf. 1 En. 89:31, "And all of them were fearful and trembling because of him, and they cried out towards that sheep and towards the other sheep that was among them, 'We cannot stand before our master nor can we look at him.'"). The fact that the people are imploring Moses and Aaron together might indicate a desire to give a positive image to Aaron in the narrative.

The third and last occasion is when Aaron's death is attested. One reads in 1 En. 89:37, "And I watched until that sheep which had accompanied the sheep which led the flock, fell asleep." It is interesting that Moses is defined as the one who led Israel while Aaron is depicted as the one who accompanied the leader of Israel ("the sheep which had accompanied that sheep which led the flock"). Without these roles attributed to Moses and to Aaron in the narrative, it would be difficult to avoid confusion and to know the identity of the sheep in 1 En. 89:18 or 37.

According to the *Andemta*, the traditional Ethiopian commentary on Exodus, Aaron was expecting the return of Moses before the Israelites gave the gold for the making of the calf. The point is to show that Aaron was not supporting the people's worship of the golden calf.

The Animal Apocalypse is very critical of the second temple (1 En. 89:73; cf. Nickelsburg 2001, 394–95). Would a critical stance toward the temple also require a depreciation of the priesthood? One response would be that the Animal Apocalypse is not interested in priesthood or the temple and does not make a distinction between the two. Nevertheless, one could also imagine an author who makes a distinction between clergy he deems appropriate (including Aaron?) and corrupted clergy with contaminated offerings. To be critical of the second temple does not necessarily imply that the author is critical of Aaron. In fact, Nickelsburg observes that the sin of apostasy is related to apostasy from the appointed cult. Cult is emphasized through references to cultic structures (the tabernacle in 1 En. 89:36 and Solomon's temple in 1 En. 89:50, 54, 66), and Nickelsburg suggests that abandonment of the sanctuary or corruption of the cult lies at the heart of Israelite sin from the perspective of the Animal Apocalypse (2001, 355–56).

Conclusion

The Animal Apocalypse likely presents the sheep (representing Israel) worshipping the golden calf, even if the allegory is not explicit. The allusion to a grave sin, which caused the anger of the master of the sheep in the Animal Apocalypse, would not refer to anything else but to the episode of the golden calf. An author who purposely removes such a grave incident does not undermine objectivity by also affirming that God was angry for what was done by the people. Therefore to infer a purposeful denial or censorship of the golden calf episode would be to go beyond the textual evidence, no matter the difficulty of knowing for sure why the author was so discreet or elliptical.

On the other hand, anyone familiar with the story, even as an oral tradition, would easily fill the gap when told that God became angry over something that occurred while Moses was on Mount Sinai. What else would one imagine, if not the golden calf episode? If the author had the intention of diverting the reader's attention from this episode, he would have simply referred to the incident of Mount Sinai without reference to the divine anger. Further, the author could have mentioned the notion of the sheep being blinded later, in reference to another occasion.

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Philo of Alexandria's Interpretations of the Episode of the Golden Calf

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Philo of Alexandria has two very different interpretations of the episode of the Israelites making and worshipping a golden calf, an episode found as narrated in Exod 32 and Deut 9:8–21. The first interpretation, a “rewriting” of the episode, is found primarily in Philo’s treatise on the life of Moses (*Mos.* 2.159–173, 270–274) with several much shorter references in *Spec.* 1.79; 3.124–127. The second, allegorical interpretation is found primarily in *Ebr.* 65–71, 95–110, 121–126 and *Post.* 158–166, but again with shorter references in *Fug.* 90–92 and *Sacr.* 130.¹

These two groups of texts contain not simply two different interpretations of the episode of the golden calf but really two different kinds of interpretations. The interpretations in *Mos.* 2.159–173, 270–274, and related texts are closely connected to Philo’s larger Exposition of the Law.² The interpretations in *Ebr.* 65–71, 95–110, 121–126, and *Post.* 158–166 and related texts belong to another of Philo’s large exegetical series, the Allegorical Commentary.³

Broadly speaking, the Exposition of the Law probably originally consisted of twelve treatises, divided into three sections: (1) on creation; (2) interpretations of the historical figures of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the second and third

1 There is very little written on Philo’s interpretation of this episode. L. H. Feldman has recently written on the texts from *De vita Mosi*s (Feldman 2005), especially in comparison with Josephus, Pseudo-Philo, and rabbinic material. The purpose of this present chapter is (1) to take into consideration also the material from the Allegorical Commentary, and (2) to offer what I think is a more nuanced interpretation of what Philo was about when he interpreted this episode in both the Exposition of the Law and the Allegorical Commentary.

2 Everyone agrees that *Spec.* 1.79; 3.124–127 is part of the Exposition of the Law. The specific relationship of *Mos.* 1–2 to the larger Exposition of the Law is unclear and disputed. Some think that it should be placed immediately after the treatise *De Iosepho*. Others would place it at the very beginning of the collection. Finally, it has also been suggested that it belongs at the beginning of the Philonic corpus as a whole. On the variety of positions, see Schenck 2005, 18–19, 26–27. Whatever its proper place in Philo’s corpus, however, virtually everyone agrees that its mode of interpretation is closely related to the other treatises of the Exposition of the Law.

3 There are no interpretations of the episode in Philo’s third large commentary series, the *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim et Exodum*. The *Quaestiones* extend only to Exod 28:34.

of these treatises are now lost), and Joseph; and (3) interpretations of legal material organized around the Ten Commandments. These interpretations are often a “rewriting” of the biblical texts rather than an explicit verse-by-verse interpretation (Zahn 2012, 171–88).

The second series of treatises, the Allegorical Commentary, is both much more complex and at the same time simpler. It is simpler in the sense that the texts directly interpreted in the Allegorical Commentary cover only Gen 2:1–41:24. But in virtually every other respect, the treatises of the Allegorical Commentary are significantly more complex. First, these allegorical interpretations are for the most part explicit interpretations, sometimes verse by verse, of biblical texts. Second, in the process of interpreting the texts from Gen 2:1–41:24, Philo also interprets an array of secondary texts from all the books of the Pentateuch. These interpretations of secondary texts are often as extensive and complex as, and sometimes more than, the interpretations of the primary ones. Finally, the type of allegory that dominates these treatises is an allegory of the soul. While there is a great deal of variety in Philo’s allegorical interpretations, what remains constant is the attempt to interpret the events of the external world described in the biblical text in terms of the conflicts within the human *soul* and its striving toward virtue and wisdom or in its corruption by vice (Tobin 1983, 145). The meaning of the text is internalized so as to refer to aspects of the individual human being, particularly mind, sense-perception, and body. Sometimes this involves the rejection of the literal meaning of the text, but often this is done by accepting both a literal and an allegorical meaning of the passage. For purposes of clarity, I will concentrate my analysis on *Mos.* 2.159–173 from the Exposition of the Law and on *Ebr.* 65–71 from the Allegorical Commentary.

De vita Mosis 2.159–173 in the Exposition of the Law

With this in mind, we can now turn first to Philo’s interpretations of the episode of the golden calf in his Exposition of the Law in *Mos.* 2.159–173.⁴ This passage occurs in the second treatise of the *De vita Mosis*. In this second treatise Philo treats Moses under three headings, as legislator (*Mos.* 2.1–65), priest (*Mos.* 2.66–186), and prophet (*Mos.* 2.187–292). This comes after the first treatise, which deals with Moses as king. Philo’s treatment of the episode of the golden calf in *Mos.* 2.159–173 comes in the section of the treatise dealing with Moses as a priest. After discussing Moses as a priest, the tabernacle, the priests’

4 For an interpretation of this passage see also Feldman 2005, 245–64.

vestments, and the appointment and initiation of the high priest (Aaron) and the priests (Aaron's sons), Philo then moves on to the narrative of the golden calf, which for him provides an explanation and justification for the appointment of the Levites to the priesthood as temple attendants (νεώκοροι).⁵ As is common in his Exposition of the Law, Philo interprets the episode of the golden calf not by a running commentary on the passage but by a "rewriting" of the narrative. In doing this Philo adds and omits elements in the narrative in Exod 32 as well as significantly reinterprets particular elements in the episode as he rewrites it.

Philo begins (*Mos.* 2.159–160) and ends (*Mos.* 2.173) his rewriting of the episode by pointing to what in his view is the purpose of the narrative. Because of the piety shown (εὐσεβοῦντος) by such a populous nation as Israel and the elaborate and frequent nature of their sacrifices, a large number of temple attendants (νεώκοροι) were necessary. But the way in which Moses chose these temple attendants was unusual. Moses selected one of the twelve tribes of Israel (Levi) to serve as temple attendants, and he did this on the basis of a deed of theirs that was greatly pleasing to God. At the end of his rewriting of the episode, after the Levites have killed about three thousand of their fellow Israelites at Moses's command, Philo explains that it was right for those who had voluntarily (ἐκούσιον) taken up arms for the honor of God to be rewarded with the priesthood (ιεροσύνην; *Mos.* 2.173).

Philo then turns to his rewriting of the narrative itself. The narrative takes place in four scenes. In the first scene (*Mos.* 2.161–162), Moses went up onto a nearby mountain and privately communed (ιδιάζοντος) with God for several days. Those who were not stable in their natures (οἱ μὴ βέβαιοι τὰς φύσεις) used Moses's absence as an excuse to rush into impiety (ἀσέβειαν). As if anarchy (ἀναρχίας) had broken out, they forgot the reverence they owed to God, the One Who Is, and became zealous for the fictions (πλασμάτων) of the Egyptians. In particular, they fashioned a golden bull (ταῦρον) in imitation of the Apis bull sacred to the Egyptians, and then they sacrificed and offered hymns to it. In *Mos.* 2.159–173 Philo always refers to a golden "bull" rather than a "calf" (μόσχος). This more readily connects it with Egyptian theriolatry, the worship of the Apis bull. Then those who were not stable in their natures, overcome by strong drink and revelry, succumbed to the intoxication of wine and folly (ἀφροσύνης), unaware that both justice (δίκης) and the punishments (τιμωριῶν) they deserved were awaiting them.

5 The second treatment (*Mos.* 2.270–274), which in many respects is a reprise of the first, comes under the heading of Moses as a prophet.

There are a number of significant differences between the way Philo begins the narrative and the way it is told in Exod 32:1–6. The most obvious difference is that in Exod 32:1–6, the high priest Aaron, Moses’s brother, was pressed by “the people” (ὁ λαός) to fashion the golden calf. He acceded to their demands, collected the jewelry of the Israelite women, melted the jewelry into a golden calf, and proclaimed to the people that “these are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” and that the next day there would be a feast.⁶ In Philo’s narration, however, Aaron’s scandalous conduct plays no role at all, either here or later in *Mos.* 2.169//Exod 32:21–24. Less obvious, but no less significant, are the ways in which Philo begins to parse responsibility for the episode.⁷ In Philo’s telling of the episode, the initiators of this act of theriolatry were those Israelites who were not stable in their natures (*Mos.* 2.161). They also seem to be the ones who actually fashioned the golden bull and began to worship it and offer it sacrifices (*Mos.* 2.162). This is in contrast to the narrative in Exod 32:1–6, where it was the “people” (λαός) as a whole who initiated this act; and, although Aaron fashioned the golden calf, it was the people, we are told, who participated in its worship (Exod 32:1, 3, 6; cf. 32:2). In addition, Philo describes the motivation and ethical characteristics of those who were of unstable natures and worshiped the golden bull quite differently from how the “people’s” motivation was described in Exod 32:1. In Exodus the people approached Aaron to fashion gods (θεούς) for them because Moses had been up on the mountain for some time and they did not know what had become of him. Philo, however, explains this in ways that are much more at home in Greek philosophical ethics. Those who were not stable in their natures (οἱ μὴ βέβαιοι τὰς φύσεις), as if this were an excuse for anarchy (ἀναρχίας), rushed into acts of impiety (ἀσεβείαν). In fashioning the golden bull, they forgot the reverence they owed to the One Who Is (τὸ ὄν) and became zealots for Egyptian fictions. Their subsequent drunkenness was an act of intemperance (ἄφροσύνης), and they were mindless of watchful justice (δίκης) and the deserved punishments (τιμωριῶν) that awaited them. The portrait that emerges is one in which a specific group of Israelites, those with unstable natures rather than the whole people, initiate these acts of vice: impiety, theriolatry, and intemperance. As we shall see from subsequent sections, the multitude of Israel eventually participates in these acts, but it is important to keep in mind that the multitude did not initiate them. This kind of parsing of responsibility is basically absent

6 In the LXX of Exod 32:4, Aaron utters the exclamation of these being Israel’s gods. In the Hebrew text, it is the people who do so.

7 This parsing of responsibility is crucial to understanding what Philo is about in *Mos.* 2.159–173. It is something that Feldman does not pay enough attention to.

from Exod 32. Exodus 32 uses “the people” (ὁ λαός) seventeen times, and so the people as a whole are primary actors in the narrative. But Philo uses the term (in its Attic form ὁ λεώς) only once, in *Mos.* 2.165.

The second scene changes to God and Moses on the mountain. Again, Philo retells this part of the episode in significantly different ways from Exod 32:7–14, and he does so in ways that are consonant with what he did with the previous section. Exodus 32:7–14 is essentially a direct dialogue between God and Moses. In this dialogue, God told Moses that because of what the people (ὁ λαός) had done in fashioning and worshiping the golden calf, he would destroy them in his wrath and make from Moses a great nation (ἔθνος μέγα). Moses for his part, however, pleaded with God not to destroy the people he had led out of Egypt lest the Egyptians claim that the destruction of the Israelites was actually God's intention all along. Rather, he asked God to remember the oaths he had sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob concerning them and their descendants. As a result of Moses's pleading, God was propitiated concerning the evil he said he would do to his people.

In Philo's rewriting of the narrative in *Mos.* 2.163–166, the shouting in the camp reaches the top of the mountain and is heard by Moses, who is still in the midst of communing privately with God. Moses, who is both beloved of God (θεοφιλῆς) and a lover of human beings (φιλόανθρωπος), is now torn, wishing neither to break off his communing with God nor willing to overlook the misery of the multitude (τοῦ πλήθους) that has arisen through anarchy (ἀναρχίας). In this state of being torn between these two alternatives he receives a divine message (θεσπίζεται) to go quickly down the mountain because the “people” (ὁ λεώς) have run after lawlessness (ἀνομίαν), fashioning a god in the likeness of a bull, worshiping it, and forgetting the piety (εὐσέβειαν) they had previously learned. In obedience to this message Moses now sets out to descend the mountain and return to the camp. But this is not before he plays the role of mediator (μεσίτης) and reconciler (διαλλακτής) and pleads with God to forgive the people their sins. When his prayers as protector (κηδεμών) and intercessor (παραιτητής) are heard by the Ruler (ἡγεμόνα), he returns to the camp, both rejoicing that God has heard his prayers and dejected at the transgression of the multitude.

Philo's rewriting of this section seems to serve several purposes. First, the obviously anthropomorphic features of God in Exod 32 are removed. There is now no direct dialogue between God and Moses. Rather, Moses is alone (ιδιάζοντος) with God; a divine message is communicated (θεσπίζεται) to him. He then prays and makes supplications to God, and as a result God accepts his prayers on behalf of the multitude and pardons (συγγνώναι) them. Nor does God express the same anger in Philo as he does in Exod 32:8, 10, where

he threatens to destroy the people. Second, the actions of the “multitude” (τὸ πλῆθος) are recast into the familiar categories of virtue and vice of Greco-Roman philosophical ethics. As multitudes are wont to do, this multitude has given in to their passions (παθῶν), particularly intemperance (ἀκρασίας). They have given in to worshipping a god who is no god, thus forgetting all the influences to piety (εὐσεβείαν) that they had seen and heard. Third, it is important to note Philo’s use of the term “multitude” (τὸ πλῆθος) itself. He uses it twice in this section (*Mos.* 2.163, 166) and twice again in the next section (2.167, 169), and he seems to use it in preference to “people” (ὁ λαός) as a whole. It is again part of his parsing of responsibility in this episode. If *Mos.* 2.161–162 concentrated on those who were not stable in their natures and who initiated the building and worshipping of the golden bull, *Mos.* 2.163–166 highlights a different and distinct group, the multitude. While it is certainly subject to the miseries of anarchy, the passions (especially that of intemperance), and the effects of impiety in worshipping a god that is not god, this group nevertheless elicits on the one hand Moses’s compassion and, on the other hand, God’s forgiveness through Moses’s prayers. In this way the “multitude” is distinguished from those who were not stable in their natures and who were the initiators of the act of theriolatry and, as we shall see, from the consequences experienced by those initiators.

The third scene takes place after Moses has returned to the Israelite camp at the foot of the mountain. Here Philo passes over almost entirely the text of Exod 21:15–24. He mentions nothing of how Moses came down from the mountain with the tablets of the law, or how, when he saw what the people had done, he shattered the tablets, burned and ground up the golden calf, scattered it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it. Likewise, and probably more significantly, Philo mentions nothing of Moses’s dialogue with Aaron about Aaron’s scandalous conduct. Rather, Philo expands significantly on Exod 32:19a, 25, verses that describe Moses’s seeing what the Israelites have done and his response to it (*Mos.* 2.167–169). Again, Philo describes the conduct of the multitude (τοῦ πλῆθους) in terms that reflect Greek philosophical ethics. The multitude has exchanged such great truth (ἀληθείας) for a correspondingly great lie (ψεῦδος). But Moses’s response to this situation is that of a true philosopher and ruler. He distinguishes (διαγνῶναι). He sees that the disease has not touched all. Not all are incurable (ἀνιάτως ἔχοντας). Some surely are incurable, but others have remained healthy. Yet still others have sinned but now have repented (ἀμαρτόντες μετανοοῦσι). In order to sort out these different groups, Moses proclaims: “If anyone is for the Lord, let him come to me,” that is, according to Philo, “if anyone thinks that nothing made by human hands, nor any created things, are gods, but that there is one God only, the Ruler of

the universe, let him come to me" (*Mos.* 2.168; adapted from LCL). Those, of course, who had rebelliously (ἀφηνιάζοντες) become devoted (ἐξηλωκέναι) to the golden bull, this Egyptian folly (τῦφον), ignored his call; others did not join him perhaps out of fear (φόβῳ), fear either of the vengeance of Moses himself or of the onslaught of the multitude (τοῦ πλήθους), for "the many" (οἱ πολλοί) attack those who do not share their folly. The primary emphasis obviously of this section in Philo is on Moses, a true philosopher and ruler, sorting out the different levels of moral responsibility of different groups in this episode of the golden bull. This sorting out also serves as the basis for the proper apportioning of punishment that is to follow in the next section.

In the fourth and final scene Philo describes the conduct of the tribe of Levi. Here Philo expands on and significantly rewrites Exod 32:27–28. In these verses the tribe of Levi came to Moses, and he told them what they were to do, to gird on their swords, then go up and down through the camp and kill their brother, their neighbor, and the one nearest to them. They did as Moses had commanded them and killed that day three thousand men from the people (λαοῦ). Philo, however, in *Mos.* 2.170–172 is much more concerned about characterization and motivation, of the Levites and of those whom they kill, as well as about the effects of the Levites' actions on the rest. The Levites rush to Moses's side with the keenness of a soul intent on practicing piety (εὐσέβειαν). Philo then explains Moses's command to them as a kind of test to see whether their alacrity is only bodily or whether it is also that of the understanding (διανοίαις). Moses then commands them to gird on their swords and kill those whose deeds are worthy of a thousand deaths, who have deserted the true God and fashioned false gods from corruptible and created things and given them the name of the incorruptible and uncreated. The readiness of the Levites all but anticipates Moses's command to them, for almost from the moment they saw the crime of idolatry they were hostile to its perpetrators. And so they kill up to three thousand of those closest to them. Given the way in which Philo has rewritten the narrative thus far, it seems clear that those whom the Levites kill are those who were not stable in their natures and had initiated the construction and worshiping of the golden bull (*Mos.* 2.161), that is, those who were incurable (*Mos.* 2.167) and were worthy of a thousand deaths (*Mos.* 2.171). The crowd (ἡ πληθὺς) of the other Israelites saw the bodies of the three thousand killed; on the one hand they felt pity, but on the other hand they were properly admonished/corrected (νουθετεῖται) by the fear (φόβῳ) they felt in the face of the killers.

In the conclusion of the passage in Philo, he expands on Exod 32:29 (the description of the consecration and conferral of a blessing on the Levites). In *Mos.* 2.173, Philo describes how they are rewarded for their heroic deed in

which they voluntarily (ἐκούσιον) took up arms in defense of the honor of God. Because of this they are rewarded with the priesthood (ιεροσύνην). This last section in Philo harkens back to the beginning in *Mos.* 2.159–160, where Philo informed readers that the Levites received their priesthood as a prize and a reward for their heroic conduct before he tells the narrative.

If we stand back from the details of Philo's rewriting of this episode, three features emerge as prominent. First, the explicit goal of Philo in his rewriting of the episode is to explain the origins of the Levitical priesthood (*Mos.* 2.159, 173). But, second, he also uses this episode to enhance his portrait of Moses as a philosopher-ruler who, in his wisdom and judgment, is equal and even superior to the best of Greco-Roman rulers. Third and finally, he rewrites the episode in such a way as to parse more clearly and in a more nuanced way the moral responsibility of different groups in the episode. In doing this he distinguishes the three thousand who were primarily responsible for initiating this theriolatry and, because incurable, were executed by the Levites from the multitude of the Israelites who were capable of being brought to their senses by the actions of Moses. He does this all in terms of Greco-Roman ethical and social discourse, and so it would be understandable in his Alexandrian context.

There are two further questions that should be briefly mentioned. The first concerns Philo's lack of any mention of the scandalous conduct of Moses's brother Aaron in this episode. It has been suggested that Aaron is being referred to in *Ebr.* 95–96, 108–109, 124–126, but the references are too general to make this suggestion likely. While Philo always sees Aaron as second to Moses, he never actually portrays him negatively. This basically positive portrait of Aaron may very well account for Philo's omission of Aaron from his interpretation here. But it is possible that it may be a bit more complicated than that. Philo's immediate purpose is to use this episode to describe the origins of the Levites. It would hardly have been helpful at the same time to narrate the most scandalous act of the first of the Israelite priests. It would also have distracted readers from Philo's highlighting of the character of Moses as a philosopher-king. A second question concerns the textual basis for Philo's parsing out of different layers of responsibility for the act. There is a puzzling detail in the text that calls for explanation. The Levites kill three thousand of their fellow Israelites, leaving the rest of the Israelites unharmed. Yet the Israelites as a whole worshiped the bull/calf. So why were they not also killed? This calls for an explanation. It is this textual puzzle that provides an opening for Philo, and it is this explanation that Philo provides in his rewriting of the story. Some were killed and some were not because some were more liable to blame than others. Moses, as the good philosopher-king he was, was able to discern the difference and act accordingly.

De ebrietate 65–71 in the Allegorical Commentary

Let us turn now to *Ebr.* 65–71, which is an example of the second type of interpretation of the episode of the golden calf found in Philo, an allegorical interpretation. Before we look at the passage itself, we need to make several preliminary remarks. First, the treatise *De ebrietate* deals with a passage from the narrative of Noah in Gen 9:20–29, specifically the words: “And he [Noah] drank some of the wine and became drunk” (Gen 9:21). Philo uses these words as the reason to discuss how Moses interpreted them as a symbol of five different things. The first of them is that wine is used as a symbol for “folly” or “foolish talking” (*Ebr.* 11–153).⁸ The chief cause of this folly is a lack of susceptibility to education. This lack of susceptibility is rooted in disobedience to parents. This in turn leads to a discussion of various combinations of obedience to “parents,” which are understood allegorically as “right reason” (ὁ ὁρθὸς λόγος), the father, and “custom” (συνήθεια), the mother. This passage (*Ebr.* 65–71) comes at the beginning of the discussion of those who obey the “father,” right reason rather than the “mother,” custom.

Second, like most of Philo's other allegorical interpretations, *Ebr.* 65–71 is an explicit interpretation of particular biblical verses. While Philo clearly has in mind the whole of Exod 32 in *Ebr.* 65–71, he actually interprets closely only Exod 32:27–28, 29. Third, Philo normally offers a reason why he is moving from an interpretation of the text at a literal level to an allegorical interpretation. Philo first identifies something in the text, something implausible or inappropriate or scandalous, that serves as a clue that there is another, deeper level at which the text is functioning. Once this implausibility is noted and once the bridge has been created to an allegorical interpretation, Philo can then move to an allegorical interpretation of the passage as a whole. We shall shortly see how Philo does this in *Ebr.* 65–71. It is important to keep in mind that for the most part, although not always, Philo maintains the validity of both levels of interpretation. This sets him apart from Greco-Roman allegorical interpreters of Homer (Tobin 1983, 154–61).

Given the allegorical character of *Ebr.* 65–71, its structure and argument differ significantly from that of *Mos.* 2.159–173. Philo begins in *Ebr.* 65 by singling out those who despise things connected with the “mother,” that is custom (συνήθεια), but cling to things connected with the “father,” that is right reason (ὁ ὁρθὸς λόγος). Right reason had deemed them worthy of the highest honor,

8 The other four are: (2) insensibility (*Ebr.* 154–205); (3) greediness (*Ebr.* 205–224); (4) cheerfulness and gladness; and (5) nakedness. In the treatise as it has come down to us, he treats only the first three.

the priesthood. In this way Philo connects the narrative of how the Levites' deed merited the priesthood with one of the larger themes of the treatise, the contrast and the choice between right reason and custom. He then goes on to remark that, if we examine in detail the deed for which the Levites gained the priesthood, we shall probably incur the scorn of those who are deceived by the semblances that lie before their eyes and do not recognize the realities that are unseen and hidden in shadows. This marks Philo's initial intimation that the proper interpretation of the narrative in Exod 32 is more complex than it appears on the surface.

In *Ebr.* 66, Philo then describes what is "most paradoxical" (τὸ παραδοξότατον) about the narrative in Exod 32. Those who are entrusted with the worship in the temple in all its aspects and who, along with their ancestors, should therefore be free of taint or contact with pollution of any sort, certainly voluntary (ἐχουσίῳ) but also even involuntary (ἀχουσίῳ), are in fact those who commit homicides and fratricides, and who are the "slayers of the bodies which are nearest and dearest to them [τῶν οἰκειοτάτων καὶ φιλάτων σωμάτων αὐτόχειρες]." It is this "most paradoxical" aspect of the narrative that Philo then uses as the clue that will lead him to the allegorical interpretation of the narrative.

In *Ebr.* 67, Philo quotes the text of Exod 32:27–28, 29, whose wording provided the details for his interpretations. Moses commands the Levites each to kill his "brother" (τὸν ἀδελφόν), his "neighbor" (τὸν πλησίον), and "the one nearest to him" (τὸν ἔγγιστα). The Levites obey Moses, and on that day up to three thousand men were killed. Moses then praises the Levites for what they have done and promises them that a blessing (εὐλογίαν) will be given to them. The blessing, of course, is the priesthood. Philo's quotation of Exod 32:27–28, 29 is virtually verbatim. This often quite exact quotation of the biblical lemma is Philo's common practice in his allegorical interpretations. The reason for this is that both Philo's justification for moving from the literal to the allegorical level of interpretation as well as his allegorical interpretation of the text itself often come from observations about certain details (seemingly odd or objectionable) in the text.

At the beginning of *Ebr.* 68, Philo then asks the question, "What should be said?" (τί οὖν λεκτέον). This phrase appears most in Philo's Allegorical Commentary. He uses it to introduce, as he does here in *Ebr.* 68, the justification for moving to the allegorical level of interpretation. Other examples can be found in *Leg.* 1.105; 2.21; 3.188, 206; *Det.* 82; and *Migr.* 178. In this section he does this by cleverly using the contrast between custom (συνήθεια) and right reason (ὀρθὸς λόγος) that plays such an important role in this treatise as a whole. The action of the Levites is condemned by those who are bound by common human customs (κοινοῖς ἀνθρώπων ἔθεσιν), and their accuser is their mother

“custom” (συνήθειαν). But they are actually acquitted by “nature” (φύσεως), relying as they do on “right reason” (ὀρθῶ λόγῳ), their father, as an ally.

But this contrast is not only between those bound by custom and those who follow right reason in their deeds. It is also a contrast of interpretations, between those who properly understand the significance of the passage in Exod 32 at the allegorical level and those who do not and so stay at the literal level, taking the passage as referring to events in the external world. In *Ebr.* 69, Philo then moves to the allegorical level of interpreting the passage. He argues that the passage is not really, as some suppose (ὥσπερ νομίζουσιν τινες), about the killing of actual human beings, that is, rational animals composed of body and soul. Rather, the passage is about the Levites cutting away from their “understanding” (διανοίας) all that is near and dear to the “flesh” (σαρκί). Notice here how the character of the interpretation changes. In keeping with Philo’s broader allegory of the soul, the meaning of the passage is now internalized, to refer not to events in the external world but to realities in the individual human being. It befits (εὐπρεπές) someone who is devoted to the only truly wise being (τοῦ μόνου σοφοῦ) to become alienated from the world of becoming and to treat it as an enemy. The initial clue pointing to this level of interpretation was, as we saw, that in this passage the blessing of the priesthood at first seems to have been given, most paradoxically, to those who had killed their brother, their neighbor, and the one nearest to them (*Ebr.* 67–68).

But Philo also uses details of the passage in Exod 32:27–28, 29 to support the fittingness of his allegorical interpretations in *Ebr.* 70–71a. This is something he regularly does in his Allegorical Commentary. It is important to remember that the fittingness Philo often has in mind is the capacity of the interpretation to make appropriate sense within the larger allegorical web he uses. In this case, he points to the fittingness of the Levites killing “brother,” “neighbor,” and the “one nearest.” They are to kill their “brother,” not another human being but the soul’s “brother,” the body, the other half in the combination of soul and body. They are to sever the “passion-loving” (φιλοπαθές) and “mortal” (θνητόν) element from the “virtue-loving” (φιλαρέτου) and “divine” (θείου) element. Likewise, they are to kill their “neighbor” (τὸν πλησίον), again not another human being, but the “senses” (αἰσθήσεων). The chorus or band of the senses is both “of the same household” (οἰκεῖος) as the soul (and in that sense “neighbor”) and yet really its enemy. By being overwhelmed by sensible objects (αἰσθητοῖς) through the senses, the soul is prevented from looking upward to contemplate the intelligible (νοητάς) and divine (θεοειδεῖς) natures. These three elements (the understanding, the senses, and the body) are three basic and constant elements of Philo’s allegory of the soul. Because of this Philo probably saw no reason to offer an elaborate justification for his allegorical

interpretation of these three elements in this particular passage. They are also commonplaces within the broader Greco-Roman philosophical discourse of the period (Svebakken 2012, 40–65).

Finally, they are to kill the “one nearest” (τὸν ἔγγιστα). Philo here offers both a more elaborate justification for his interpretation as well as a more elaborate interpretation. That which is “nearest” the understanding (διάνοια) is the “uttered word” (ὁ κατὰ προφορὰν λόγος). This uttered word is what by means of specious, probable, and persuasive arguments implants in the understanding false opinions (δόξας ψευδεῖς) for the destruction of the understanding’s most precious possession, the truth (ἀληθείας). Here Philo is making use of the Stoic notion of the “uttered word” (ὁ λόγος προφορικός). The Stoics regularly distinguished between the “interior word” (ὁ λόγος ἐνδιάθετος), that is, thought, and the “uttered word,” that is, speech.⁹ Philo then goes on in his allegorical interpretation to use this as an occasion to describe further this “uttered word” in ethically negative terms as a “sophist” (σοφιστήν), and the killing of this sophistical uttered word is achieved by condemning it to silence, which is the death of speech.

Philo then concludes his interpretation in *Ebr.* 71 by describing the results of these various kinds of “killing.” The mind (νοῦς) will no longer be side-tracked, but rather will be freed from the pleasures (ἡδονῶν) of the body, the “brother,” and from the enchantments of the senses, the “neighbor” at its gates (ἀνχιθύρους), and finally from the sophistries of the “one nearest” to the mind, that is, speech. Thus freed, the mind will now be able to devote itself unhampered to all things intelligible (νοητοῖς ἄπασιν).

Three larger observations are in order about Philo’s allegorical interpretation of this passage. The first takes its start from Philo’s interpretation of the “one nearest.” As noted above, in his interpretation of the “one nearest” Philo has made use of the Stoic distinction between the interior word and the uttered word. Yet his characterization of the uttered word as closely connected with the specious and with false opinions and sophistry is rather un-Stoic. This negative characterization is much more in keeping with the Platonic and then Middle-Platonic contrast between truth, which is located in the intelligible realm, and opinion, which is rooted in the material, sense-perceptible world. Philo has taken this Stoic distinction and placed it within a larger Middle-Platonically oriented conception of the human soul. In such a conception the senses (αἰσθήσεις) are set over against the rational part (νοῦς/διάνοια) of the

9 For examples see Galen and Sextus Empiricus in *SVF* 2.135, 233; and Plutarch, in *Moralia* 777B–C, 973A. In neither Galen, Sextus Empiricus, nor Plutarch does the term have an ethically negative meaning.

soul, and they often oppose, as they do in this interpretation of Philo, the rational part of the soul and its efforts to turn in contemplation to the intelligible world (Plato, *Tim.* 42 A–B; Alcinous, *Didask.* 16.2 [172.2–19]).

The second larger observation is that the allegorical interpretation in *Ebr.* 65–71, like *Mos.* 2.159–173, can also be seen as an example of “rewritten scriptures.” But it is such in a very different way. The interpretation of Exod 32 in *Mos.* 159–173 was not an explicit, detailed interpretation of the text itself, but a significant “rewriting” of the narrative in which the characters, the plot, and the themes were significantly reconfigured. Yet the rewritten narrative was still a narrative, was still about characters, etc., in the external world. But the interpretation in *Ebr.* 65–71 was at the same time both a quite explicit and detailed interpretation of a portion of the text and an interpretation that completely recast the text ultimately as a narrative about the life, especially the interior life, of each individual.

The third larger observation that needs to be made about Philo's allegorical interpretation of the episode of the golden calf has to do with the significance of how such an allegorical interpretation represents an interiorization of the meaning of the text. I have made that point earlier in the chapter. But what I want to emphasize now is how this interiorization is also a kind of individualization of the meaning of the text. The text and its interpretation now concern the moral or ethical life of the individual. On the one hand, Philo could claim that such an interpretation expanded the relevance of the text. But, on the other hand, this very individualization of the text also raises the question of how the text maintains its relevance for defining a people, or what its role is in the formation and maintenance of the identity of the Jewish community as a whole. In this kind of allegorical interpretation we begin to understand the rationale of Philo's rather characteristic concern to maintain, however uneasily, the validity of both the literal and the allegorical levels of interpreting the texts of the Jewish Scriptures. Philo offers his most explicit and detailed justification for this in *Migr.* 89–93. In this passage he condemns those who would desert the observance of the Mosaic law based on a literal interpretation. Philo does not disagree with allegorical interpretations of the law but rather with the claim that the allegorical interpretations allow one to ignore observance based on the literal interpretations. The reason Philo wants to maintain the value of both types of interpretation is clearly that without observance based on the literal interpretations there would be no way to maintain Judaism as a community. Judaism would be reduced to a series of isolated individuals. It is important to realize that Philo does this against the usual practice of Greco-Roman allegorical interpreters whose justification of their allegorical interpretations entailed the rejection of the literal level of interpretation (Tobin 1983, 154–62).

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When Silence Is Golden: The Omission of the Golden Calf Story in Josephus

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Even a casual reader who has picked up Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* and read through a section of the work is puzzled by the promise made in the preface: "My account will set out the precise details of our Scriptures by running through them in their proper order. I have promised that I would do this throughout my work by neither adding nor omitting anything" (*Ant.* 1.17; all translations are my own). The Jewish historian repeated the same claim at least three times in the narrative (*Ant.* 4.196; 10.218; 14.1; cf. also 2.347; 9.208, 214) and concluded his *magnum opus* with an affirmation that he had kept his word (*Ant.* 20.260–261). Josephus clearly used this as a *topos* since, in the course of the narrative, he explicitly tells us that he rearranged Moses's scattered treatments thematically (*Ant.* 4.197) and omitted specific items (*Ant.* 3.94; 9.242). He also added a great deal to the biblical text, most notably the last part of his work that includes books 12–20. The tension between the claim and the reality has set off an extended debate that in recent years has focused on the background of the claim (Feldman 1998a, 37–46; 1998b, 539–43). In my judgment it is important to remember that Josephus made the claim for his "translation" immediately after he held out the LXX as a model for his work. If we allow Josephus's use of the same claim in his later narrations of the origins of the LXX to serve as our guide (*Ant.* 12.108–109; *Ag. Ap.* 1.42), the statement is a claim for the reliability of his "translation" of his ancestral Scriptures (Sterling 1992, 252–55, esp. 254–55).

One of the most interesting aspects of the tension between the claim to trustworthiness and the actual narrative of Josephus is that he does not use omission as a consistent tool to avoid embarrassing stories or details. Josephus is creative enough in his retelling of the text that he tends to rewrite rather than omit difficulties. One of the most notable exceptions to this is his omission of the golden calf episode narrated in Exod 32 (see also Deut 9:8–21). John Henry Thackeray called the omission of this story "the glaring exception" to Josephus's standard practice of rewriting difficult texts (*Josephus* 1926–1965, 3:363 n. c). The issue is why? Why not simply rewrite it as he did other texts? Previous explanations have tended to focus on individual elements in this

complex story and have paradoxically omitted what may have been the most important concern for Josephus. I propose to take up four possible reasons for the omission. The first of these is the technique for omission—a point that has been neglected in previous studies—and the last three address specific motifs. We will take up the first in part one and the latter three in part two.

Literary Compression

It is important to recognize that the omission of the golden calf story by Josephus is part of a larger literary pattern in the historian's handling of the Sinai pericope. It is well known that the Sinai pericope in Exodus is complicated in several ways. One of them is the number of theophanies that occur, a direct result of the conflation of epic and priestly source materials (Beyerlin 1965; Propp 2006, 141–54). The biblical text has Moses ascend (עלה in the MT and ἀναβαίνω in the LXX) and descend (ירד in the MT and καταβαίνω in the LXX) from Mount Sinai multiple times. If we set aside a source-critical analysis—since Josephus would not have recognized the distinction between epic, priestly, and Deuteronomistic traditions—and only include theophanies that explicitly mention ascents and descents, there are five. The first theophany is the famous “eagles’ wings” passage in which God gave Moses instructions for the people to prepare for the divine descent on Mount Sinai on the third day (Exod 19:3–14, esp. 3 and 14). The second theophany took place during the LORD’s descent on the third day when he summoned Moses to come up onto the mountain and warned him to keep the people away, but to bring Aaron with him (Exod 19:20–25, esp. 20 and 25). The third is when Moses took Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders up with him and they had a vision of God (Exod 24:1–11, esp. 9). This ascent is expanded when Moses took Joshua further up onto the mount (Exod 24:12–32:15, esp. 24:15 and 32:15) for forty days and nights (Exod 24:18). It is possible to count this expansion as the fourth theophany rather than an extension of the third. This requires the reader to assume a descent following 24:11 (Houtman 2000, 3:296), although there is no notice of a descent until Moses received the Ten Commandments. The decision is not easy. I have opted to follow the explicit signals in the text and to consider 24:12 and following an expansion of the earlier ascent rather than a separate ascent. It was while the people were waiting for Moses to return from this ascent that the golden calf episode occurred (Exod 32:1–15). The fourth is when Moses went back up to God to intercede for the people on the day following the Levites’ killing of the 3,000 (Exod 32:30–34, esp. 30 [עלה] and 31

[שוב]). There is no explicit reference to the descent, but the narrative continues with events below and explicitly refers to the next ascent. The fifth and final ascent and descent is when Moses returned to Mount Sinai alone for another forty days and nights (Exod 34:28) to bring back a second set of stone tablets (Exod 34:1–29, esp. 4 and 29). The frequency of Moses's ascents and descents is enough to make a modern reader wonder whether he was in athletic training!

Josephus recognized the complexities of the biblical narrative and collapsed these five ascents and descents into two. He brought the first two together (Exod 19:3–14 and 19:20–25) by having Moses give instructions to the Israelites to come near the mountain (the content of the first theophany) before he ascended (*Ant.* 3.75). He thus omitted the structure of the first theophany but preserved its content. He was not content with this single move: he also brought the ascent of the second theophany forward in time by having Moses go up on the mountain on the first of the three days (in contrast to the biblical text when he went up on the third day; *Ant.* 3.76–82). The historian might have done this to compensate for the absence of the first ascent and descent or simply to have Moses away for a longer period of time and make his appearance on the third day even more dramatic. Josephus followed the descent of the second biblical theophany by saying that Moses came down on the third day after God had made the divine presence known on Mount Sinai to all of the people (*Ant.* 3.75–83). He expressly mentioned the three-day period of the second theophany of Exodus twice to make the connection with the second theophany unambiguous (*Ant.* 3.78, 79).

The restructurings of the third, fourth, and fifth biblical ascents and descents are also complicated. Josephus omitted the first part of the third ascent/descent that narrated the theophany experienced by Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders (Exod 24:1–11). Perhaps he felt that this theophany would take away from the uniqueness of Moses. He then combined the remainder of the third, the fourth, and the fifth ascents and descents by narrating a single forty-day period (Exod 24:18 in the third and 34:28 in the fifth; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.95 and 99). In this case he combined the continued ascent of the third biblical theophany that begins in Exod 24:12 with the descent of the fifth theophany that referred to Moses's abstinence from food or water (Exod 34:28 and Josephus, *Ant.* 3.99; cf. also 3.95). Josephus made it clear that these were all the ascents and descents that occurred: he tells us twice in the subsequent narrative that there were no more ascents onto the mountain (*Ant.* 3.212, 222).

Josephus thus had two theophanies instead of five: the first endured for three days and the second for forty. The narrative is structurally simpler than the biblical narrative and more condensed.

Problematic Motifs

This leads us to ask whether Josephus omitted Exod 32 as a literary strategy to simplify and reduce a large section of a complicated narrative or whether there were specific elements within the story that led him to collapse the third, fourth, and fifth ascents and descents. We will consider three major options. In order to regard an element problematic, there must be some evidence from elsewhere in Josephus or from other Jewish sources that the element in question is a concern.

The Golden Calf

The first of these is perhaps the most obvious: the text is a blatant example of idolatry. The people demanded that Aaron give them “gods” (plural) and then engaged in wild amusement in their celebrations. The term that I have translated “wild amusement” is more provocative than explicit in both Hebrew (צחק) and Greek (παίζω)—but perhaps that is the point. The text is reluctant to spell out the specifics of the celebrations, but suggestive enough to incite our imaginations as readers to envision the outrageous (Exod 32:1–6, esp. 2 and 6). At least Paul appears to have read it this way when he juxtaposed a citation from Exod 32:6 with a summary of Num 25:1–9 in a list of three activities that characterized ancient Israel but should not characterize the Corinthians (1 Cor 10:7–8).

There are, however, many examples of idolatrous behavior in the biblical text and in Josephus’s retelling of it, e.g., Rachel’s theft of the ancestral deities (Gen 31:1–55//*Ant.* 1.309–24). Why omit this example? One of the charges leveled against Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds was that they worshiped an ass, more specifically the golden head of an ass. There are seven extant accounts of this charge. The accounts vary in a number of specifics including the details of what the Jews worshiped: some accounts claim that it was an ass (Apion in Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.80 [GLAJJ §170 {1:409–10}]; Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 670d–e [GLAJJ §258 {1:550–62, esp. 551–52, 556, 559} and *Is. Os.* 363c–d [GLAJJ §259 {1:563}]; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.3.2; 5.4.2 [GLAJJ §281 {2:17–63, esp. 18, 25, 36 and 18, 25, 37}]); some thought that it was the golden head of an ass (Mnaseas in Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.112–114 [GLAJJ §28 {1:99–101}]; Apion in Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.80 [GLAJJ §170 {1:409–10}]; and Suda s.v. “Damocritus” [GLAJJ §247 {1:531}]); and others suggested that it was a marble statue of Moses seated upon an ass (Diodorus Siculus 34/35.1.1–5, esp. 3 [GLAJJ §63 {1:181–85, esp. 182–84}]). The complexities of the origin and development of the tradition has spawned extended debate (Bickerman 1976–1986, 2:225–55; Bar-Kochva 1996, 310–26; Schäfer 1997, 55–62; Barclay 2007, 350–52). For our purposes it is enough to

note the claims about the “golden head.” The first to make this claim was Mnaseas, an early second-century BCE author, who claimed that during a war between the Jews and the Idumeans, an Idumean named Zabidos sneaked into the temple and stole “the golden head of the ass” that the Jews venerated (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.114 [GLAJJ §28 {1:99–101}]). Apion, a political opponent of Philo of Alexandria with whom Josephus also later sparred through a literary medium, claimed that “in the sanctuary the Jews set up the head of an ass and worshipped the ass” (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.80 [GLAJJ §170 {1:409–10}]). This appears to be a conflated account that drew upon the tradition that the Jews worshiped both an ass and an ass’s head unless we accept Samuel Naber’s emendation and read a neuter pronoun (*id*) instead of the masculine (*eum*), in which case the last part of the phrase would be rendered “and worshipped it” since head is neuter in Latin and ass is masculine (Naber 1888–1896, 6:254). Either way, Josephus went on to refute Apion, in part, with an *ad hominem* argument claiming that Apion had the mind of an ass to make such a claim (*Ag. Ap.* 2.80–88, esp. 85). The final witness to this tradition is the first-century CE historian Damocritus, who simply stated that the Jews worship “an asinine golden head” (Suda s.v. “Damocritus” [GLAJJ §247 {1:531}]).

The scurrilous reference to a golden ass’s head in these traditions was enough to lead Thackeray to suggest that this was the reason why Josephus omitted the episode (Josephus 1926–1965, 3:362–63 n. c). Others have seconded Thackeray (Smolar and Aberbach 1968, 92; Feldman 2007, 141). I must confess that it was my initial reaction when I first read the *Jewish Antiquities* and noticed the absence of the story.

There are, however, two points that give me pause about this explanation. The first is that the biblical story of the golden calf in the Exodus story has an unmistakable connection to the Deuteronomistic account of Jeroboam at the time when the northern kingdom broke with the southern kingdom. The Deuteronomist says: “The king deliberated and made two golden calves and said to the people, ‘You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt’” (1 Kgs 12:28 in both MT and LXX). The connection between the two texts is made explicit through the echo of the words of Aaron to the people. In Exodus he said: “These are your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt” (Exod 32:4). The two statements have only the slightest variation: MT shifts the initial pronoun to an adverb from “these” (אֵלֶּה in Exod 32:4) to “here” (הֵנָּה in 1 Kgs 12:28); the LXX substitutes a synonym for calf by changing μόσχος (Exod 32:4) to δάμαλις (3 Kgdms 12:28). There is a long-standing debate over whether the story behind the Exodus version was earlier than the version in the Deuteronomistic history (Childs 1974, 559–61) or was influenced by the Deuteronomist

(Van Seters 1994, 290–318). The most impressive piece of evidence is the use of the plural “gods” in 1 Kgs 12:28 that makes sense for two calves, but not as much in Exod 32:4 where there is a single calf. Fortunately, we do not have to settle the tradition history question (Propp 2006, 544–78). The importance of recognizing the connection between the two stories for our purposes is that Josephus had no qualms about rehearsing the account of Jeroboam’s calves (*Ant.* 8.225–229). While he castigates Jeroboam (Feldman 1998b, 230–41, esp. 234–37), he still says that Jeroboam “made two golden calves” (*Ant.* 8.226). It does not make sense to argue that Josephus worried about the association of a golden calf and a golden ass’s head in the Exodus account, but not in the later Deuteronomistic account. The second point is that Philo, who lived in the land known for its anti-Jewish slander and was an opponent of Apion, did not hesitate to retell the story repeatedly (*Mos.* 2.161–173, 270–274; see also *Sacr.* 130; *Post.* 158–167; *Ebr.* 95, 124; *Fug.* 90; *Spec.* 1.79; 3.125; Feldman 2007, 140–56). One might counter that Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities* were addressed *ad extra* while Philo’s treatises were addressed *ad intra*, except for the fact that Philo retold the story twice in *The Life of Moses* which may well have been addressed *ad extra*, or at least had an external audience in mind (Goodenough 1933, 106–25; Niehoff 2011, 170–77). These two factors suggest to me that Josephus’s motive in omitting the story must lay elsewhere or at least include other factors.

Aaron and the Levites

The second factor to consider is the role of Aaron, whose career reaches a nadir in this story. According to the biblical account, Aaron immediately complied with the request of the people to make them “gods” by casting a golden calf with the gold jewelry that the people supplied. He then announced that “these are your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt” and appointed a day to celebrate (Exod 32:1–6). When Moses returned from the mount and challenged him, Aaron minimized his own culpability by implying that the people compelled him. Under duress he threw their gold jewelry into a fire and poof, out came the golden calf (Exod 32:21–24)! The biblical narrator made sure that readers saw through the rationalization by twice stating explicitly that Aaron was culpable (Exod 32:25, 35). The first of these occurs as the initial frame for Moses’s call to stand with the LORD. The Levites responded and put a violent end to the idolatrous partying (Exod 32:25–29). The second was an explanation for the plague that God sent to punish those that escaped the Levites (Exod 32:35). The biblical text makes it clear that this was not Aaron’s finest hour.

Ancient readers saw this and reacted. Philo of Alexandria never mentioned Aaron in his multiple retellings of the story. When he referred to the creator of

the golden bull—Philo equated the calf with the cult of Apis—he attributed it to a class of a person who is “disobedient and faction-loving” (*Ebr.* 95). The Alexandrian apparently thought silence was the better part of virtue. Pseudo-Philo had a different solution. He made at least two major changes to the biblical text that mitigated Aaron’s embarrassing role. When the people first asked Aaron to make them gods, he protested by pleading with the people to be patient and assured them that Moses would return with laws. He only yielded when it became clear that he was in mortal danger if he failed to comply (*L.A.B.* 12:2–3). What was the basis for menacing threats? It was probably based on Aaron’s later exchange with Moses when he said: “you know the people; they are inclined to evil” (Exod 32:22 in MT *ידעת את העם כי ברע הוא* and in LXX *σὺ γὰρ οἶδας τὸ ὄρημα τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου*). Pseudo-Philo appears to have used Aaron’s statement to Moses as a warrant for the depiction of the Israelites’ hostile threats if Aaron did not comply. This suggestion is strengthened by the second and related change: Pseudo-Philo dropped the entire exchange between Moses and Aaron when Moses came down and pointedly asked Aaron what he had done in his absence (Exod 32:21–24; Begg 1996, 577–94). The exclusion of Moses’s rebuke and the use of Aaron’s generalizing comment about the evil character of the people as a specific narrative component exonerated Aaron. The rabbis made very similar moves. They argued that the second episode when Moses accused Aaron could be read but not translated (*m. Meg.* 4:10; Feldman 1998a, 72–73; 2000, 255). They often handled the first episode much like Pseudo-Philo, e.g., *Exodus Rabbah* reworked the story by claiming that Aaron put the people off for as long as possible and only yielded when forced to do so (41:7; cf. also *m. Sanh.* 7a). All of these accounts suggest that ancient readers found Aaron’s role problematic.

It is likely that this also bothered Josephus, who wrote glowingly of Aaron in other texts (*Ant.* 3.188–192; see also 4.28–34, 54–58, 63–66; Feldman 1998b, 55–73, esp. 59–62). The later historian was proud of his own priestly ancestry (*Life* 1–2; see also *J. W.* 1.3; 3.352; *Ant.* 15.419; *Life* 198; *Ag. Ap.* 1.54). He claimed that he was a member of one of the twenty-four priestly families (*Life* 1–2; see Mason 2001, 3–7). It was probably also on this basis that he considered himself uniquely qualified to write the *Jewish Antiquities*. We should remember that his Middle Eastern counterparts were also priests: Berossus in Babylon (*FGH* 680 T 2) and Manetho in Egypt (*FGH* 609 TT 1 [?], 11a, b). His standing as a priest was a matter of personal and professional pride. He was also sensitive to the role of the Levites and the long-standing tension between the Aaronids and the Levites (Propp 2006, 567–74). So, for example, when a group of Levite singers persuaded Herod Agrippa II to permit them to wear linen robes and appear on equal footing with the priests, Josephus protested: “All these things were

contrary to our ancestral laws. When these have been violated, it was not possible for us to escape punishment" (*Ant.* 20.217–220, esp. 220; see Feldman 2007, 153). It seems likely that Josephus, like Philo, preferred to omit Aaron's role in this story (Smolar and Aberbach 1968, 92–93; Feldman 2000, 255), although as we have seen from Philo, this is not an adequate reason to explain the absence of the entire episode.

The Broken Tablets

There is at least one other factor that needs to be considered that has not received the attention that it merits. One of the most problematic of all stories in the biblical text occurs in this section: Moses's angry shattering of the two tablets of stone that contained the Ten Words. The biblical narrative says that when Moses returned from the mount he carried the stone tablets: "The tablets were the work of God, the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets" (Exod 32:16; see also 31:18). This is unique; the second set was engraved by Moses, not God (Exod 34:28). In spite of the fact that God engraved the stones, when Moses saw the golden calf he became so enraged that he threw the tablets down and broke them (Exod 32:19).

Ancient Jewish authors were sensitive to this act of Moses. Philo of Alexandria omitted this part of the story. Pseudo-Philo claimed that when Moses came down from the mount and looked at the tablets, the writing had disappeared. It was only then that he shattered the tablets (*L.A.B.* 12:5).

Josephus apparently shared this sensitivity. The historian followed the biblical text in claiming that God wrote the Ten Words (*Ant.* 3.101). He handled the tablets in the collapse of the three biblical narratives as follows. When Moses came down from the mountain the first time (the second theophany in the biblical narrative), he did not carry the tablets. God spoke from Sinai: "All heard a voice from on high coming to all so that none of the ten words that Moses left written on the two tablets escaped them." Josephus added: "It is not lawful for us to state those openly by the letter [οὐς οὐ θεμιτόν ἐστιν ἡμῖν λέγειν φανερώς πρὸς λέξιν], but we will indicate their general thrust" (*Ant.* 3.90). Josephus has made the words on the tablets sacrosanct. He used the same prohibition for disclosing the Tetragrammaton (*Ant.* 2.275–276, οὐ μοι θεμιτόν εἰπεῖν). When Moses descended the second time (the fifth time in the biblical narrative), he carried the tablets. After explaining the tabernacle to the people, Moses "showed them the two tablets having the ten words written on them, five on each, and the hand of God was responsible for the writing" (*Ant.* 3.101). Like Philo, Josephus could not bring himself to say that Moses angrily destroyed what God had personally written (*Ant.* 3.138; 4.304; 8.104)! He never narrated the story. It was too critical of Moses and of the proper respect for the tablets

with the sacred words that were entrusted first to him as the lawgiver and then to the ark of the covenant.

Conclusions

We may now return to our initial question: why did Josephus omit the episode of the golden calf? The story fell within the larger frame of his collapsing of the third, fourth, and fifth theophanies. Just as Josephus omitted parts of the first two theophanies when he collapsed them into a single account, so he omitted parts of the third, fourth, and fifth theophanies when he collapsed them into a single account. However, there are elements that suggest that Josephus may have been concerned about more than a simplification and shortening of the text. At least his omission of some material agrees with the sensitivities that his compatriots displayed to some of the issues. It does not appear that the idolatry of the text—even the connection between the material substance of the idol and the scurrilous anti-Jewish charge that the Jews worshiped the golden head of an ass—played a determinative role. It may have been a factor, but alone it is insufficient to explain the omission of the story. The negative portrayal of Aaron was probably a more important factor, but even here other Jews found ways of mitigating Aaron's culpability. The one factor that—in my opinion—was anathema to Josephus was Moses's shattering of the two tablets. This was beyond the pale. Yet he could have simply omitted this and included a great deal of the rest of the story as Philo of Alexandria had. I do not think that we can attribute the omission of the story of the golden calf in Josephus to a single factor. Josephus elected to reduce the number of ascents and descents from five to two. This must be a factor. He needed to select the episodes that he would narrate and those he would omit. The multiple problems posed by this story led Josephus to choose the simple way out. It was one occasion when Josephus thought that silence was golden.

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Leaders without Blemish: Pseudo-Philo's Retelling of the Biblical Golden Calf Story

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with the assistance of Peter Claver Ajer

At the 1980 centennial celebration of the Society of Biblical Literature, the Pseudepigrapha group sponsored a number of papers addressing the topic “Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism” (Collins and Nickelsburg 1980). In his paper concerning leaders in Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (*L.A.B.*, or *Biblical Antiquities*), George Nickelsburg comments that in this book “Moses is the greatest of Israel's leaders” and that the author devotes more text to him (*L.A.B.* 10–19) than to any others (Nickelsburg 1980, 53). The author of *L.A.B.* achieved this by means of two significant additions, one of which occurred in the golden calf incident in *L.A.B.* 12: “Moses' intercession for Israel is expanded into a lengthy prayer that God would not exterminate his ‘vineyard’” (*L.A.B.* 12:8–9; cf. Exod 32:31–32; Nickelsburg 1980, 53). Since that time other scholars have examined this text in some detail and commented at length on various editorial touches that point to Moses's leadership qualities (Murphy 1988, 277; Murphy 2000, 68–73; Begg 1996; Fisk 1998; Fisk 2001, 136–90). In this chapter I will synthesize many of their observations and propose the example of leadership that is suggested by the retelling of the golden calf story.

L.A.B. was written in Hebrew in Palestine prior to 100 CE (Murphy 1988, 285; Harrington 1985, 300), and its rewriting of biblical narratives often invites comparison with Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*. In the cases of *L.A.B.* and *Jewish Antiquities*, we can presume that many members of the audience knew well the story from Exod 32 and would have its main points and sequence in their memory. In this chapter I will demonstrate that Pseudo-Philo's rewriting of this story utilizes both omissions and additions to construct a portrait of leadership that eventually emerges from this particular retelling of the story of the golden calf. Pseudo-Philo's retelling of the golden calf story (Exod 32:1–35) manifests a vision of the kind of leaders, especially Moses and Aaron, who served Israel at critical points in the life of the people. The writer sometimes rearranges the whole order of events, but he often omits substantial narrative elements in the biblical story (Exod 32:11–14 and 21–30) or, conversely, makes significant additions; these changes alter the audience's perception of what is occurring.

I will proceed by describing the successive narrative units in the story and commenting on the effects of the authorial rewriting in each one, concluding with an assessment of the overall picture of leadership created in *L.A.B.* 12.

At the Mountain: Moses and Aaron versus the Impatient People (Exodus 32:1; *L.A.B.* 12:1)

L.A.B. describes the transition from Moses's theophanic experience of God on Mount Sinai quite differently than does Exodus, where his delay immediately causes the people to worry about what has happened to him (Exod 32:1). They assemble around Aaron to demand that he fashion gods for them, for they do not know what has happened to Moses, who brought them up from Egypt. *L.A.B.* characterizes the scene very differently, having Moses descend from the mountain "bathed with invisible light" (*L.A.B.* 12:1).¹ In Exodus this view of Moses occurs only after the entire incident of the golden calf has concluded (Exod 34:29–35). Transposing this brief report invites an important question: why begin the narrative in a different way than the biblical account? Indeed, some critics have argued that this scene's location at the end of Exod 34 makes little sense and have suggested that it would make more sense to begin with it "attached to [Exod] 31:18" (Childs 1974, 617). Jacobson notes that this transposition "is ... not unique to LAB.... It is found e.g. at *Deut. Rab.* 3,12; also at *Pal[aea] Hist[orica]* p. 242" (Jacobson 1996, 1:482–83). He also notes that when *L.A.B.* transferred this view of Moses to a position before the golden calf incident, problems were created, i.e. "the fluidity of his narrative suffers." Still, it seems that *L.A.B.* enhances the characterization of Moses by beginning with this report of the "invisible light where the light of the sun and moon are" (*L.A.B.* 12:1; Jacobson 1996, 1:482–83).

So extraordinary is Moses that the light surrounding his face surpasses even the brightness of the moon and the sun! So brilliantly does this light shine that the sons of Israel do not recognize Moses when he descends from the mountain. This light motif certainly intrigued Jewish interpreters of the Exodus tradition, including the author of *L.A.B.*, and Perrot, Bogaert, and Harrington review a wealth of ancient literature related to the light covering the face of Moses in other texts including the LXX and Targumim, *Sifre Numbers*, and 2 Cor 3:7 (Pseudo-Philon 1976, 2:114).

¹ All translations of *L.A.B.* are taken from Harrington 1985 (*OTP*), and quotations of the Latin text are from Pseudo-Philon 1976.

Moses also is totally unaware of the fact that the “invisible light” surrounds his face, just as in the biblical scene in Exod 34:29. In *L.A.B.* the sons of Israel do recognize him later, “when he spoke,” so it seems that aural perception assisted this visual recognition. To assist the audience to grasp this notion, *L.A.B.* compares this delayed recognition of Moses to the story of Joseph and his eleven brothers in Egypt, where he recognized them, but not they him. Fisk examines *L.A.B.*’s linkage of Israelites not recognizing Moses’s transfigured face with the case of Joseph’s brothers who were scheming against him, and he claims that “Pseudo-Philo implicitly casts the Israelites as the moral equivalents of Joseph’s scheming brothers” (Fisk 2001, 140). So this comparison with the Joseph story enables the author to devise for Moses a more positive, righteous characterization, enhanced by comparison with the personal qualities of Joseph. Presumably it adds to the aura of Moses descending from the mountain of revelation.

Even more intriguing is the next detail, that “when Moses realized that his face had become glorious, he made a veil for himself with which to cover his face” (*L.A.B.* 12:1d). Jacobson thinks that the Jews’ failure “to recognize Moses on his descent is unique to LAB.” He develops this exegesis of *L.A.B.* from his observation of the “verbs in the biblical narrative: they saw, they hesitated, he called, they approached. Thus the Jews were fearful when they saw Moses, but reassured upon hearing his voice. It is not hard to understand LAB taking this to suggest that because of Moses’ changed appearance the Jews did not recognize him, but they did recognize his voice when he called to them” (Jacobson 1996, 1:483).

We may assume that the author of *L.A.B.* also wished to invoke a comparison with the divine glory, which appeared later in the biblical text. He alludes to “the divine radiance” of Moses, who is here pictured as “Israel’s conduit to God, which the people feared they had lost” (Tigay 2004, 191). So the stage opens with a highly revered protagonist, a great example of a leader in Israel. In view of this Moses figure, what reason could the people bring forward as an excuse to seek out another avenue of divine presence?

Why Did the People Want a Golden Calf? (Exodus 32:1; *L.A.B.* 12:2)

The next event in *L.A.B.* follows: the people approach Aaron and ask him to make gods for them to serve (*L.A.B.* 12:2). How to explain it? *L.A.B.* quickly informs the audience that the “heart of the people was corrupted” (*L.A.B.* 12:2), intimating that whatever they do next, especially their gathering around Aaron, will not benefit the people. With several biblical texts in mind, the author of

L.A.B. states: “and they gathered together to Aaron, saying: ‘Make gods for us whom we may serve, as the other nations have’” (*L.A.B.* 12:2). This mention of the “other nations” suggests that the author may be recalling two biblical texts in particular: the “torah of the king” in Deut 17:14 (where the Vulgate reads *sicut habent omnes ... nationes*), as well as the people’s demand for a king from the prophet Samuel in 2 Sam 8:5, where the Vulgate reads *sicut et universae habent nationes*; Jacobson 1996, 1:484). In both cases, the Latin of the Vulgate closely resembles the wording in *L.A.B.*, suggesting that Jerome’s translation echoes a text similar to that of *L.A.B.* In each of these biblical allusions, Israel goes astray when it desires royal leadership, like all the surrounding nations. The people should, rather, pursue their true leader, the God of Moses.

But *L.A.B.* offers a possible excuse for the people, for they seem to worry whether Moses their leader and mediator with God will ever return. In fact, when they say Moses “has been taken away from us” (*L.A.B.* 12:2a), it seems they may fear that he has died, as suggested in two midrashic parallels: *Targ. Ps.-J. ad Exod 32:1* and *b. Shabbat 89a* (Jacobson 1996, 1:484). Even if they act out of fear, this narrator describes the situation as troubling, because “while he was on the mountain, the heart of the people was corrupted” (*L.A.B.* 12:2a). This corruption, occurring while Moses was absent from them, demonstrates the dangers of the times when a leader is absent. The biblical basis of this narrative never mentions the corruption of the people until all the actions (of the people’s sin) have been presented (cf. Exod 32:1–7, especially in v. 7). The biblical author invites the readers to hear the events and then to consider the assessment, while *L.A.B.* first characterizes the people and then arranges the story to manifest the implications of the corrupt nature of the people.

In *L.A.B.* this detail affords an opportunity to enhance Aaron’s character over that of the biblical presentation; here he tries to persuade the people not to make gods for themselves, arguing that if they are patient, then “Moses will come, and he will bring judgment near to us and will illumine the law for us and will explain from his own mouth the Law of God and set up rules for our race” (*L.A.B.* 12:2b). Contrary to his performance in Exod 32, Aaron here exhibits characteristics of a strong leader: he tries to dissuade the multitude from their ill-conceived demands when they seek for assurances of divine presence when Moses is absent. But what are the people seeking? Aaron provides the answer in *L.A.B.*: Moses will bring judgment, illumination of the law, rules for their race. He will “explain from his own mouth the Law of God” (*L.A.B.* 12:2b). Aaron’s words indicate the author’s contemporary view of Moses, as judge, teacher of the torah of God, and legislator for the people. Aaron’s words to Israel enhance the portrait of Moses as a leader with multiple roles.

Yet Aaron's attempt to lead the people did not succeed, for the people "did not heed to him" (*L.A.B.* 12:3a). *L.A.B.* interprets this rejection by the people as another fulfillment of God's previous word at the tower of Babel: "So that the word spoken in the time when the people sinned by building the tower might be fulfilled, when God said: 'And now unless I stop, everything they will propose to do they will dare, and even worse'" (*L.A.B.* 12:3b). Two comments need to be offered here. First, the "people" who did not heed to Aaron's words in v. 3 seem, from the context, to be the Israelites. Second, the disobedient people in Gen 11:6 are not of the family of Abraham, but rather from among the nations. Comparing Israel's request for gods with the plans of the peoples at Babylon actually heightens the culpability of the people here: "Israel's request for gods has become her attempt to overturn the very monotheism that set her apart from the sinful nations God had dispersed at Babel" (Fisk 2001, 151). With this Babel linkage, Israel's wrongdoing is heightened, and this fact raises the stakes for the leader, Aaron, who is trying to counsel patience and adherence to the God of Israel.

The Work of Making the Calf: Who Did It? (Exodus 32:2–6; *L.A.B.* 12:3)

After trying to convince the people to exercise patience, Aaron fears the strength of the people, so he directs the sons of Israel to collect earrings from their wives. Then they cast them into fire, where "they were fashioned into shape, and out came a molten calf" (*L.A.B.* 12:3b). *L.A.B.* transforms the active role of Aaron in Exodus to that of a passive onlooker: Aaron's three actions in Exod 32:4 ("took ... fashioned ... made it into a golden calf") are all attributed to the people in *L.A.B.* 12:3b: "And each man asked his wife and they [the wives] gave them immediately. And they [the men?] cast them into the fire and they [the earrings] were fashioned into shape, and out came a molten calf."

L.A.B. offers a reason for Aaron's cooperation with the wishes of the people: he was "fearful because the people were very strong" (*L.A.B.* 12:3c). James Kugel muses that this notion of Aaron's fear might provide an exegetical solution to an oddity in the Hebrew text of Exod 32:5. It begins, "Now when Aaron saw" (וַיִּרְא אַהֲרֹן), but the Hebrew text lacks a direct object. (Most English translations insert one, as does the Vulgate.) A Jewish writer might have noticed the anomaly and considered its root as the verb "to fear" rather than "to see," which has the same consonants but different pointing (Kugel 1998, 718). Whether the change derived from this exegetical issue in the Hebrew text or not, Aaron's

fear suggests that he operated under considerable duress, as if preparing a case to exculpate him with the proviso in *L.A.B.* 12:7: “And if anyone had it in his will and mind that the calf be made, his tongue was cut off; but if he had been forced by fear to consent, his face shone.” Acting out of fear lessens the culpability; one commentator describes this as “a ‘laxist’ attitude toward those who apostatize under compulsion” (Murphy 1988, 277). Perhaps the writer did suggest a distinct strain of mercy and compassion in Israel’s God, who will conclude this narrative with the words: “Behold, I have been made merciful according to your words” (*L.A.B.* 12:10a).

God Reacts to the Golden Calf and its Worship (Exodus 32:7–14; *L.A.B.* 12:4)

Whereas Exodus describes a picture of rebellion, retelling all the details of the golden calf and its worship by the people, *L.A.B.* turns to passionate divine questioning about his promises to the people and their lack of response. In the process, *L.A.B.* omits mention of the most vivid details of the people’s corruption and idolatrous actions. *L.A.B.* omits the proclamation “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!” (Exod 32:8b). *L.A.B.*, in fact, consistently fails to mention the motif that God brought the people up from the land of Egypt (Exod 32:1b, 4b, 7, 8b, 11b, 23). He also passes over the dialogical exchange between the Lord and Moses, where God complains that the people are obstinate. Absent is any reference to God’s anger burning “that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation” (Exod 32:10b). Then Moses remonstrates with the Lord: how can God sustain such anger against the people he rescued from Egypt? Recall his promise of descendants to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (*L.A.B.* 12:11–13). Even God’s change of mind (almost his repentance) has vanished; *L.A.B.* completely omits the statement that the Lord “changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people” (Exod 32:14, NRSV).

The Lord questions Moses about the gratitude of the people: “Are the promises that I promised to your fathers when I said to them, ‘To your seed I will give the land in which you dwell’—are they at an end?” (*L.A.B.* 12:4b). The allusion to all the promises to Abraham which have already been fulfilled adds to the pathos of God’s questioning: has it all come to its end? The people Israel have not even entered the land, but they have forsaken God, even though they possess the law (*L.A.B.* 12:4b). God seems to take comfort in the ironic remark that they had not yet entered the land, for if they had already entered the land “even greater iniquities would have been done” (*L.A.B.* 12:4c).

God's surprising purpose in these events is about to emerge. God will forsake the people in response to their forsaking him. The goal is not to destroy them, but rather "to make peace with them so that a house may be built for me among them, a house that will be destroyed because they will sin against me" (*L.A.B.* 12:4d). This author echoes part of the Deuteronomic patterning of sin and suffering en route to the establishment of peace (Deuteronomic "rest," e.g., from their enemies) with them. In good Deuteronomic fashion, *L.A.B.* connects peace with the temple of the Davidic monarchy: "A house may be built for me among them, a house that will be destroyed, because they will sin against me" (*L.A.B.* 12:4d). This language alludes to Israel's sins, to God's response, and to the surprising notion that in all these God maintains control or direction of all the events. In the long view the narrator invites his Jewish audience to reflect on the Davidic kingdom with its temple, which will be destroyed (by the Babylonians) because of their sin against God. According to Jacobson, *L.A.B.* intends to demonstrate that the entire history of promise and sin, of success and defeat, of temple construction and its destruction are all part of the divine plan (Jacobson 1996, 1:244). What was proclaimed to those Jews living in exile could also be addressed to first-century Jews, who would be wondering about their own future as a people: all their experience is part of God's plan, so they should exercise patience.

L.A.B. has tempered the stark message in Exod 32:7–14. Here is an excellent example of divine anger softened, demonstrated by the rhetoric and dialogue of this prayer in Exod 32:7–14 (Balentine 1993, 135–39). *L.A.B.* omits this lively exchange, and its theological grappling with issues of justice and divine compassion, in order to keep the focus on the Israelites' turning toward the golden calf and on Moses's actions. In *L.A.B.* God does not threaten to destroy the people. Those who patiently attend to its message will trust in the ultimate outcome of God's message. Through this interchange between God and Moses, later generations should be able to grasp the divine promises and the response expected of them.

God's characterization, with a penchant towards mercy in *L.A.B.*, is subtly enhanced when this author alters the divine condemnation of the people in Exod 32:9–10 by omitting this speech. Instead, rather than burning anger and destruction of the people, God's words in *L.A.B.* 12:4d offer hope: "I will turn again and make peace with them so that a house may be built for me among them." The view of God has been altered, and the mitigation of guilt for those acting out of fear plays a very important role in the characterization of Aaron as a leader: it is surely an excellent way to elevate the profile of this leader of the Israelites.

Moses Goes Down to the People and Destroys their Golden Calf
(Exodus 32:15–30; *L.A.B.* 12:5–7)

Moses is nothing if not an obedient leader! Moses obeyed God's command to "hurry away from here" (*L.A.B.* 12:4); in the following verse he "hurried down and saw the calf" (*L.A.B.* 12:5). When he looked at the tablets "and saw that the writing was gone," he hastened to break them (*L.A.B.* 12:5b; Kugel 1998, 719–20). Murphy interprets the absence of the letters, a feature of God's writing of the text, as an attempt to remove any possibility that sacrilege would be committed if Moses breaks tablets inscribed by God as a sign of the covenant (Murphy 1993, 72). Note also the unusual metaphor describing his lack of strength for breaking the stone tablets: Moses's opened hands are compared to a woman in childbirth with her firstborn; her "hands are upon her chest and she has no strength to help herself bring forth" (*L.A.B.* 12:5c). Commentators deal with the specific image of a woman in labor in various ways, but M. T. DesCamp's study of female characters in Pseudo-Philo (e.g., as authoritative mothers, teachers, revealers, or redeemers) suggests that this type of image was plausible (DesCamp 2007, 331). Could *L.A.B.* be using a metaphor of Moses as "nursing mother"? Jacobson rejects the notion, especially any connection with Num 11:12, but DesCamp uses cognitive metaphor theory to suggest that once a visual image (e.g., laboring female, mother of Israel) "has been presented to the mind, it is available ... whether or not it has been affirmed" (DesCamp 2007, 331). Murphy's suggestion proves intriguing: Moses's "pain is caused by the disruption of a process through which he was to bring Israel to birth through the giving of Torah" (Murphy 1993, 72).

Moses's bitterness, however, delays him only an hour, and presumably he remembers God's promise to turn again (be reconciled) to them, even after they sin (*L.A.B.* 12:4; DesCamp 2007, 332). So Moses rose "and broke the calf and cast it into the water and made the people drink of it" (*L.A.B.* 12:7a). This writer has completely toned down the dramatic events in Exodus, and he also omits Moses's complaint to Aaron that he has brought great sin upon the people by fashioning the calf for them at their request (*L.A.B.* 12:21). All the discussion about Aaron's complicity, which would detract from his ability to be a leader, has disappeared. The author replaced it with a simple remark about the intentionality of the actors in the event: for one who participated willingly "his tongue was cut off," but if one was "forced by fear to consent, his face shone" (*L.A.B.* 12:7). Aaron, as we heard, acted out of fear (*L.A.B.* 12:3b), so it is quite possible that God will turn to him again and "make peace with him" (*L.A.B.* 12:4d). *L.A.B.* has effectively removed any blemish in Aaron's character.

L.A.B. completely omits Exod 32:21–30, where Moses interrogates Aaron about his role in the golden calf episode; Aaron's subsequent explanation and claim of innocence involves a retelling of the entire incident, which lays blame on the people Israel. Thus Moses's challenges to the Israelites to show their allegiance to him are omitted in *L.A.B.*, as are the actions of the Levites who surrounded him (Exod 32:26) and were called into battle to slay those who did not stand with Moses (Exod 32:27–28). Even Moses's intention to go up to the Lord, hoping that he could make atonement for their sin (Exod 32:30), has disappeared. One wonders whether this author deliberately omitted these details which reflect badly on Aaron, but there must be more: the violent action of the Levites who defend the Lord by slaying those who were unfaithful has not entered into this retelling of the golden calf story.

Moses Ascends the Mountain Again and Prays to the Lord (Exodus 32:31–32; *L.A.B.* 12:8–9)

Exodus continues its narration of this crisis, wherein Moses ascends the mountain to act as a mediator for the people. Moses again demonstrates leadership ability by praying for the people who have sinned with a straightforward and direct request that God forgive them, but if not, that God blot him out of “the book” God has written (Exod 32:32). Then God directs Moses “to lead the people” and sends his angel before him, but finally the LORD smites many of the people because of their idolatrous activity with the calf, “the one that Aaron made” (Exod 32:34–35). The biblical text comprises a tight, connected narrative.

The author of *L.A.B.* 12:8–9 paints a very different version of this scene in which Moses utters a prayer to God. *L.A.B.* transforms a succinct prayer (“but now, if you will, forgive their sin,” Exod 32:32a) into an elaborate prayer (*L.A.B.* 12:8–9). Moses addresses the Lord as the One who has planted his vineyard (cf. Isa 5 and Ps 80) and stretched out its roots “to the highest seat” (Jacobson 1996, 1:496). If God in anger dries up its shoots, that vine will experience no cooling. A second time Moses addresses God as “he who is all light” and who has beautified his house with precious gems, perfumes, and spices. Focusing again on the vine, Moses reminds God of the consequences of inaction: “If you do not have mercy on your vine, all things, Lord, have been done in vain, and you will not have anyone to glorify you” (*L.A.B.* 12:9c). Moreover, if the Lord imagines that he can solve the problem by letting this vine be destroyed and then planting another to replace it, Moses warns God that no one

would trust a god who would do this. Instead, Moses implores him to let his anger be restrained from the vine and thus “do not let your anger be in vain” (*L.A.B.* 12:9f). The leader pleads persuasively with God using images from Israel’s tradition, thus enhancing the self-identity of the people by reminding God, and the audience, of their “history” with God. His praying serves to enhance his characterization as a leader who intercedes with God.

In the Exodus narrative, which *L.A.B.* has been rewriting, another clue to the connection between prayer and leadership may be detected. God commanded Moses, “Go now, *lead* the people where I told you” (Exod 32:34a). If *L.A.B.* had faithfully reproduced the biblical narrative, this command to Moses to “lead the people” would have appeared at about the same point as the prayer of Moses that this author composed. In addition, the verb נָחַם has an intriguing lexical usage in Exodus: the other three appearances of this verb (Exod 13:17, 21; 15:13) all have the LORD as their subject, and each case refers to the leading of the Hebrew people safely out of the dangers of Egypt. When God orders Moses to “lead” the people in Exod 32:34, he connects Moses to the same saving actions previously attributed to divine acts. In *L.A.B.* that great, saving act of God now has been subtly transformed into a prayer of Moses.

One final aspect of this prayer of Moses deserves comment, the request for God to have mercy “on your vine,” i.e., on the people Israel: “If you do not have mercy on your vine” (*si ergo non misertus fueris vinee tue*; *L.A.B.* 12:9). In this prayer, Moses’s strongest proof of leadership comes from his begging God to be merciful on Israel. This observation corresponds to a similar focus in the other prayer attributed to Moses in *L.A.B.* 19:8–9. He asks in his farewell prayer at Mount Abarim: “May your mercy [*misericordia*] with your people and your pity [*miseratio*] with your heritage, Lord, be established; and may your long-suffering [*longanimitas tua*] in your place be upon the chosen race because you have loved them before all others” (*L.A.B.* 19:8). Moses recalls his life work: as a shepherd who led God’s flock in the wilderness, to Mount Horeb, where God gave the law and statutes (implying entry into the covenant). God had sent Moses to his people and freed them from the Egyptians, so Moses accomplishes God’s work. Then Moses raises the issue of sin and the people’s need for forgiveness, realizing that none is born without sin. To our point, however, Moses pleads: “Unless your patience [*longanimitas*] abides, how would your heritage be established, if you were not merciful to them [*si non misertus fueris eis*]?” (*L.A.B.* 19:9). Two prayers of Moses highlight two metaphors for Israel, the vine in *L.A.B.* 12 and the flock in *L.A.B.* 19. Each depends on careful tending, and Moses petitions God for mercy and long-suffering. When Moses, the leader, prays and begs, urges, and persuades God towards acts of mercy (*misereor*, *misericordia*), he most clearly fulfills his role as leader. That type of

prayer and that quality of a leader appealing to God typifies the hopes of the writer of *L.A.B.*

God's Response: Affected by Moses's Words, God Orders Moses to Rewrite the Commandments (*L.A.B.* 12:10)

The denouement in *L.A.B.* differs completely from the disastrous conclusion to the golden calf incident in Exod 32:35, where God smites the people because of their actions with the golden calf Aaron had made. *L.A.B.* focuses on divine lenience for Aaron and mercy for the people. In *L.A.B.* Aaron gives in to the people's desire for a golden calf out of fear, and he learns that God will manifest some "lenience to those forced to commit the act [of idolatry]" (Murphy 1998, 72). Even more significant is Moses's prayer for God's vine, that he will have mercy on it and restrain his anger from it. Then God makes the remarkable statement: "I have been made merciful according to your words [*misericors factus sum iuxta sermones tuos*]" (*L.A.B.* 12:10). Not always noted is the fact that *L.A.B.* seems to recall another incident in the Torah where Moses pleads for the people and God finally turns back from his angry intent (Num 14:20); Jacobson notes several midrashic references to this same event that testify to the strength of its memory (*Deut. Rab.* 3:15; *Pirke R. El.* 46 [end]; Jacobson 1996, 1:504). Finally, God tells Moses to cut two stone tablets from the same source as the first two and "rewrite on them the commandments that were on the first ones" (*L.A.B.* 12:10). Moses's prayer here, like similar prayer texts in the Torah, demonstrates effective leadership: he leads God into a deeper place of mercy than had been his wont before. No matter what, Moses's actions demonstrate that one (a leader, especially) can enter into a dialogical relationship with God, one that might be expected to affect God also: "I have been made merciful [*misericors factus sum*]."

Conclusions

The narrative concludes in a way quite surprising to those well-acquainted with the biblical version of the story. Because of Aaron's hesitation and his fear of the people, he enjoys a chance for atonement. Even more than that, Moses demonstrates a peculiar kind of leadership that began when he descended from the mountain with his face bathed in invisible light because of his encounter with the Divine. Aaron is a major actor in the golden calf scenes, until the Lord told Moses he would forsake the people, although he would later

turn again and make peace with them so that a “house” could be constructed among them. Moses breaks the calf and grinds it up into dust to put his people through an ordeal, but then he ascends to the mountain and addresses a beautifully persuasive prayer to God to be merciful.

L.A.B. enhances their leadership stance, chiefly that of Moses, by omitting much of the vivid action in the biblical story, especially Aaron’s actions and anything that discredits the people. Instead, *L.A.B.* creates speeches and prayers that elicit the lenient and merciful character of God. While we cannot delineate with any certainty the socio-religious background of Pseudo-Philo, we recognize the leaders in the story not by their military expertise or zeal (as in Exod 32:27–29) but by their ability to focus attention on God’s ways (especially Aaron), and to address God in clear and persuasive prayer (especially Moses). Employing the notion of forgiveness for those with right intentions, this author turns a possible blemish on Aaron into the hope of leniency. Through Moses’s prayer Pseudo-Philo emphasizes the constant search for mercy for God’s people. By this characterization of Moses and Aaron, *L.A.B.* alters the course of this narrative from destruction to a renewed experience of God’s mercy. This change may lead to an invitation to renewed life in the covenant, with the commandments reinscribed on the two stone tablets. Such a portrayal of the golden calf narrative would prove suitable in many times of crisis for Israel, but it could carry particular poignancy during the decades after the fall of Jerusalem to Rome and offer a message of hope for God’s mercy and compassion.

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Paul and the Calf: Texts, Tendencies, and Traditions

Alec J. Lucas

The Pauline epistles represent well-trodden terrain within the New Testament. Often the ruts left by one's scholarly predecessors are so deep and varied that one of perennial challenges of Pauline scholarship is to survey the secondary literature, while, at the same time, maintaining proper focus on the primary source: the Pauline text itself. Given this state of affairs, one would expect the secondary literature on the golden calf incident in Paul to be voluminous and that one's first challenge would be to sort through it all. This, however, proves not to be the case. The paucity of scholarly reflection on the golden calf incident in Paul may be illustrated with reference to the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Although this dictionary includes entries such as, "Curse, Accursed, Anathema," "Lawsuit," and "Postal Service," there is no entry whatsoever entitled "Golden Calf" (Hawthorne and Martin 1993). Similarly, in the New Testament section of his *Anchor Bible Dictionary* entry on the golden calf, John R. Spencer does not mention Paul; he only discusses the reference to the calf in Stephen's speech in Acts 7:39–42 (1992, 2:1066–67). In fact, the sole secondary source I have found is a 1990 article by Terrance Callan, entitled "Paul and the Golden Calf." Yet, a cursory reading of this article shows that Callan is not so much concerned with the golden calf incident itself as he is with utilizing Pauline references to this event to illustrate the apostle's critical stance toward non-Christian Israel.¹

Admittedly, this emerging portrait of the golden calf texts in Paul as virtually unexplored terrain changes dramatically if one considers the secondary literature devoted not to the golden calf, in general, but to the particular passages in which references to this event occur. Thus, for example, Scott J. Hafemann discusses the golden calf incident at length in his monograph on 2 Cor 3:7–18, a passage that is suffused with references to Exod 34:29–35 (Hafemann 1995; see also Hafemann 1996, 287–99). Nonetheless, the lack of scholarly reflection on the golden calf texts in Paul, considered as whole, means that basic synthetic questions have yet to be asked, much less answered. First, which texts constitute Pauline references to the golden calf? Second, should Paul's calf texts be located within broader first-century cultural tendencies, such as the tendency

¹ Callan is responding to the work of Gaston (1987) and Gager (1983).

to confuse Jews with theriolatrous Egyptians? Third, do Paul's letters show any evidence of engaging competing golden calf traditions? The purpose of this chapter is to answer, albeit provisionally, these three questions concerning calf texts, cultural tendencies, and competing traditions. At the end, I shall attempt to bring together all three questions in a reading of Rom 1:18–2:11.

Calf Texts

We begin with calf texts. Narrowly construed, one could argue that Paul does not mention the golden calf at all, as the Greek term for "calf" (μόσχος), or one of its cognates, does not appear in his letters. Yet, if one's definition is broadened to include the textual complexes that recount the golden calf incident and its aftermath, namely Exod 32–34, Deut 9–10, and Ps 106 (LXX 105):19–23, then Paul certainly mentions the event. According to Callan, Paul refers to the golden calf incident at least four times: "Two of these references focus on the incident as an instance of Israel's idolatry (1 Cor 10:1–22; Rom 1:23); the other two focus on its implications for understanding the Sinai covenant (2 Cor 3:7–18; Gal 3:19–4:11)" (1980, 2). The first three Pauline passages identified by Callan are widely recognized as including a citation of or an allusion to the golden calf incident. First Corinthians 10:1–22 is part of a long and complicated argument concerning the propriety of consuming food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8:1–11:1; see esp. Mitchell 1991, 126–49, 237–58). In 1 Cor 10:7a Paul cautions the Corinthians not to be idolaters, just as some of the Israelites were; in v. 7b Paul then cites Exod 32:6 to substantiate the latter charge: ἐκάθισεν ὁ λαὸς φαγεῖν καὶ πίνειν καὶ ἀνέστησαν παίζειν ("The people sat to eat and drink and stood to play").² In Exodus, this verse is presented as a syncretistic covenant meal, one that ironically parallels the earlier such meal in Exod 24:11. Exodus 32:6 turns out to be the high point of the incident because Moses is subsequently warned about Israel's calf construction and worship in the camp (Exod 32:7–14). In 1 Cor 10:7b, the references to idolatrous eating and drinking anticipate Paul's ensuing discussion of the incompatibility of participating in the Lord's table and cup while also participating in the cup and table of demons (1 Cor 10:14–22).

Romans 1:23 is a structurally significant verse in what appears to be standard Hellenistic Jewish polemic against Gentile idolatry and immorality (Rom 1:18–32; cf. Wis 13–15; *Let. Aris.* 128–71; *Sib. Or.* 3.8–45; Philo, *Decal.* 52–81). The first

² This is my own rendering of the Greek text. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

part of Rom 1:23 alludes to the golden calf incident as recounted in Ps 106 (LXX 105):19–23, especially v. 20.³ This passage itself is an allusion to the account of the calf in Exod 32–34 (cf. Exod 32:2–3; 33:5–6; Ps 106 [LXX 105]:19–20).⁴ The evocation of the calf in Ps 106 (LXX 105):20 is clear: καὶ ἠλλάξαντο τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν ἐν ὁμοιώματι μόσχου ἔσθοντος χόρτον (“and they changed their glory for the likeness of a calf that eats grass”). Paul’s evocation, καὶ ἠλλάξαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου θεοῦ ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνης φθαρτοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πετεινῶν καὶ τετραπόδων καὶ ἑρπετῶν (“and they changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of a corruptible human being and of birds and of four-footed animals and of serpents”), is more subtle because he omits the part of the verse concerning the calf itself and substitutes in its place human and animal imagery drawn from Gen 1:20–27, a text, deriving from Israel’s creation account, that witnesses to a time prior to ethnic divisions and thus includes *Gentiles* within its scope.⁵ The resultant conflation, through omission and substitution, initially commends an ironic application of Ps 106 (LXX 105):20 to Gentile idolatry. Nonetheless, the foundation is also thereby laid for Paul’s later application of Ps 106 (LXX 105) to a Jewish interlocutor. This is a point to which I shall return.

The third text identified by Callan has been mentioned briefly already. Paul’s discussion of the greater glory of the new covenant occurs in 2 Cor 3:7–18. This passage, in which two references to Exod 34:29–35 occur (vv. 7, 13), should probably be understood, as Hafemann has argued, in the context of the second giving of the law following the golden calf incident.⁶ As for Callan’s fourth text, Gal 3:19–4:11, the connection with the calf is tenuous at best. Discussing the phrase ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου (“by the hand of a mediator”) in Gal 3:19b, Callan first establishes, on the basis of extrabiblical parallels (cf. Philo, *Mos.* 2.166; *As. Mos.* 1.14; 3.12), that the term μεσίτης (“mediator”) refers to Moses and he then argues that the whole phrase recalls the Hebrew expression בִּיד־מֹשֶׁה (“by the hand of Moses”) in Exod 34:29 (1980, 555, 561). Aware that “[t]he LXX does not

3 The objection of Wasserman (2008, 119–20 n2) that “Ps 106 discusses the Israelites’ glory, not God’s glory,” as in Rom 1:23, was answered by Cranfield (1975, 1109), who states: “Paul uses δόξα here differently from the way in which it is used in the psalm-verse ... but the substantial meaning is much the same, since what is meant by Israel’s glory is God Himself.”

4 In addition to Ps 106 (LXX 105):20, Jer 2:11 and Deut 4:15–18 have also been associated with Rom 1:23, but the parallels with the latter two texts are less substantial.

5 This is not to imply that Rom 1:23, in particular, or Rom 1:18–32, in general, concern Adam, as suggested by many. See, e.g., Hooker (1960 and 1966) and Dunn (1998, 90–93).

6 Besides the previously mentioned works by Hafemann, see also Hays 1989, 122–53; Belleville 1991; Wright 1991, 175–92; Hickling 1996; Grindheim 2001; and Watson 2004, 273–313. Note that in both Rom 1:23 and 2 Cor 3:7–18 the motif of glory, or rather loss of glory, is prominent.

translate *byd* with *en cheiri* in Exod 34:29” but rather “gives *epi tōn cheirōn*,” Callan proposes that “if Paul is alluding to Exod 34:29 here, he is thinking of the Hebrew text” (1980, 561–62). Even if this supposition is granted, one wonders how Paul’s largely Gentile audience members, who lacked knowledge of Hebrew, not to mention access to Paul’s psyche, could have discerned this allusion to Exod 34:29.⁷

A more plausible and commonly discussed candidate for a fourth golden calf text in Paul is the beginning of Rom 9. In v. 3 Paul recounts his habit of praying that he himself would be accursed, cut off from Christ for the sake of his Israelite kindred. As James D. G. Dunn (1988, 2:532) observes:

Despite the lack of any verbal parallel it is more than likely that Paul has in mind the similar offer of Moses in Exod 32:32. As Moses recoiled in horror at the possibility of the Lord’s people being rejected so soon after the covenant had been ratified (Exod 24:3–8), so Paul recoils in anguish at the equivalent insensitivity and perverseness of his own generation in failing to recognize God’s fulfillment of the covenant in Jesus the Messiah. As Moses was willing to stake all on God’s faithfulness to the covenant so recently given by God’s grace, so Paul stakes his all on God’s continued faithfulness to his covenanted people.

The reference to Moses and citation of Exod 33:19b, ἐλέησω ὃν ἄν ἐλεῶ καὶ οἰκτιρήσω ὃν ἄν οἰκτίρω (“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion”), in Rom 9:15, though in defense of election, confirms that Paul had the broader context of the Exodus calf account in mind. Indeed, Brian J. Abasciano goes so far as to argue that “Exodus 32–34 supplies important background informing Paul’s rhetoric” throughout Rom 9–11 (2005, 144).

Cultural Tendencies

Confusing Jews and Egyptians

With four Pauline calf texts now identified, two in Corinthians (1 Cor 10:7; 2 Cor 3:7–18) and two in Romans (1:23; 9:3), I turn to discuss three cultural tendencies with which these references may be associated, especially the one in Rom 1:23. The first is the tendency to confuse Jews with Egyptians. As John M.

7 For a discussion of the role of the audience in discerning Pauline allusions, see Lucas 2015, 37–43.

G. Barclay observes, “A broad range of evidence suggests that it was commonly believed in the Hellenistic–Roman era that the Judaeans,” or Jews, “were originally of Egyptian stock” (2004, 114). This belief was based on several factors. One is that ancient ethnographic models traced Judean origins to Egypt (*Ag. Ap.* 1.227–253, 288–292, 304–311; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.2–3; Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 31 [363c–d]; Diodorus Siculus 1.28, 55). Another is that Jews and Egyptians both practiced circumcision and abstained from certain foods, including pork (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.137–142; Philo, *Spec.* 1.2; *QG* 3.47; Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.37–38, 104; Diodorus Siculus 1.28; 3.32). The understanding behind these shared practices, however, was significantly different: whereas Egyptian food taboos reflected reverence for animals, Jewish abstention did not (cf. *Let. Aris.* 144; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5). A final factor is the circulation of a libel that Jews kept and worshiped the head of a golden ass, which Antiochus Epiphanes supposedly discovered when he entered the inner sanctuary of the temple. Josephus vehemently refutes Apion’s version of this libel in *Ag. Ap.* 2.80–88, presumably because Apion had spread his version in Rome while serving as the head of an Alexandrian delegation opposed to Jewish rights in 40 CE (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.257–259).⁸ In combination with the shared customs of circumcision and aversion to pork as well as certain ethnographic models of origin, the golden ass libel fostered confusion within the Roman Empire about the distinction between Jews and Egyptians.

Such confusion is reflected in Plutarch’s *Table Talk* (4.5.1–3 [669e–671c]), a dialogue in which Plutarch appears as a character along with his friends.⁹ *Table Talk* 4.5 begins with Callistratus picking up on an earlier anecdote from Lamprias (*Table Talk* 4.4.4 [669c]), Plutarch’s brother. Callistratus asks, “What do you think of the assertion that it is precisely the most proper type of meat that the Jews avoid eating?” Expressing hearty agreement, Polycrates poses a related query, “[D]o they [Jews] abstain from eating pork by reason of some special respect [τιμῇ τινι] for hogs or from abhorrence of the creature?” In Polycrates’s opinion, Jewish accounts sound like myth and he wonders whether “they have some serious reasons which they do not publish.” Responding to the query, Callistratus says:

My impression ... is that the beast enjoys a certain respect [τινα τιμὴν] among that folk; granted that he is ugly and dirty, still he is no more

8 See also *Ag. Ap.* 2.112–120; Diodorus Siculus 34/35.1–5; and Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 4.5.2 (670d–e). For scholarly attempts to trace the origin of the golden ass libel, see Bickerman 1980; Bar-Kochva 1996; and Barclay 2007, 350–52.

9 On *Quaest. conv.* 4.5 (669e–671c), see *GLAJJ* 1:545–46. On the date of Plutarch’s *Quaestiones convivales*, probably early second century CE, see *GLAJJ* 1:545 n2. All translations of Plutarch are from the LCL.

absurd in appearance or crude in disposition than dung-beetle, field-mouse, crocodile, or cat, each of which is treated as sacred [ἄγιωτάτοις] by a different group of Egyptian priests.

Callistratus's response continues. He suggests that "the pig is honoured [τιμᾶσθαι] for a good reason," namely its agricultural contributions. The pig was "the first to cut the soil with its projecting snout, thus producing a furrow and teaching man the function of a ploughshare"; and, for the Egyptians, who "cultivate the soft soil of their low-lying areas" and thus "have no use for ploughing at all," pigs inculcated the art of sowing, through overturning Nile-soaked earth with their hooves to plant seeds in the ground. Then, following comparison with and discussion of Egyptian theriolatrous practice, such as "deification" (ἐκθειάζω) of the field-mouse, Callistratus concludes his remarks with this observation:

Perhaps it is consistent that they [Jews] should *revere* [σέβεισθαι] *the pig who taught them sowing and plowing*, inasmuch as *they honour* [τιμῶσιν] *the ass who first led them to a spring of water*. Otherwise, so help me, someone will say that the Jews abstain from the hare because they can't stomach anything so filthy and unclean. (italics mine)

The imputation of Egyptian rationales to Jewish praxis is evident throughout these remarks by Callistratus. Two observations are especially important. First, abstention from pork is taken as an indication that Jews revere the animal.¹⁰ Second, attributing reverence for a certain animal to that animal's utility, such as the pig's agricultural contributions, is one of the ways Egyptians justified theriolatry (cf. Diodorus Siculus, 1.87.1–89.3; Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 74–75 [380f–382a]). It is only natural, then, that Callistratus would assume the same holds true for Jews. Moreover, Diodorus Siculus's explanation of Egyptian reverence for the cow along these lines proves significant. As his first example to illustrate the same utilitarian justification of theriolatry, Diodorus says, "The cow [τὴν ... θήλειαν βοῦν] ... bears workers and *ploughs* the lighter soil" (1.87.2, LCL [italics mine]). The association of *ploughing* with both the pig, by Plutarch (via Callistratus), and the cow, by Diodorus, implies a certain degree of fluidity in theriolatrous rationales. This fluidity suggests that stories about adoration of a calf idol from Israel's own Scriptures, once in circulation, could reinforce, if not become conflated with, libels about Jewish ass-worship.

10 See also the reference to Jewish worship of the pig (*Judaeus licet et porcinum numen adoret*) in Petronius, frag. 37. Cf. GLAJJ 1:444.

Jewish Disdain for Egyptian Theriolatry

This leads me to the second and third cultural tendencies with which Paul's calf texts may be associated. In an attempt to dispel the confusion between Jews and Egyptians, especially concerning the rationale for food taboos, Jews singled out the Egyptian practice of worshipping "irrational animals" for particular disdain and correspondingly presented various apologetic interpretations of the golden calf (Wis 15:18–19; *Let. Aris.* 138; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.224b–225; Philo, *Decal.* 76–80). Both of these tendencies are found in the Wisdom of Solomon.¹¹ As has often been noted, Wis 11–19 utilizes pentateuchal material from the plague accounts and wilderness wanderings to construct seven contrasts between God's merciful provision for the Israelites and his punishment of the Egyptians. Included among these seven contrasts are two excursuses, the second of which is Wis 13:1–15:19. This text critiques aberrant forms of worship and takes the following concentric form:¹²

- A (Greco-Roman) Deification of Divine Works (13:1–9)
- B Human-made Idols: The Carpenter and Wood (13:10–19)
- C Reflection on God's Saving Providence at Sea (14:1–8)
- D Idolatry: Punishment, Etiology and Consequences,
Punishment (14:9–31)
- C' Reflection on God's Mercy (15:1–6)
- B' Human-made Idols: The Potter and Clay (15:7–13)
- A' (Egyptian) Idolatry and Theriolatry (15:14–19)

Although the concentric structure draws attention to the central section (14:9–31), there is also progression throughout, which highlights the comparative wickedness of Egyptian worship in relation to the veneration of divine and human works (13:1–9; 13:10–19; 15:7–13). Two aspects of the text reflect such progression. The designations that commence each section indicate progression: μάταιος ("vain") for nature worship (13:1); ταλαίπωρος ("wretched") for idolatry (13:10); and ἀφρονέστατος ("most foolish") for the Egyptians (15:14).¹³ More subtly, idolatry, the worship of human art, is worse than nature veneration, the worship of divine art, a contrast underscored by several parallels in vocabulary.¹⁴ The Egyptians, in turn, are the most foolish because they are guilty

11 The interpretation of Wis 13–15 that follows draws upon Lucas 2011.

12 Although based on my own analysis, this outline is indebted to Kolarcik 1997, 446, and, in turn, to Gilbert 1973, 245–57.

13 So, e.g., Winston 1979, 248–49.

14 (1) Divine vs. human ἔργ-: τοῖς ἔργοις (13:1); ὁ γενεσιουργός (13:5); τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ (13:7) vs. ἔργα χειρῶν and χειρὸς ἔργον (13:10); ἐργασίας (13:12, 19); (2) Divine vs. human τεχν-:

of both idolatry (15:14–17) and theriolatry (15:18–19). The section on Egyptian idolatry, carefully crafted so as to recall the indictments of the carpenter and potter (13:10–19; 15:7–13), suggests that all of the vitriol heaped on idolaters thus far holds for the Egyptians as well.¹⁵ In addition, however, the Egyptians also worship animals, even the most hateful among the animals (the most hateful because they are more “mindless” [ἄνοια] than the rest), animals so appalling that they have escaped the praise and blessing of God (15:18–19), a God who is earlier said to love and not detest all of his creation (11:24–25).¹⁶

Apologetic Interpretation of the Golden Calf

Embedded in the critique of aberrant forms of worship is an apologetic interpretation of the golden calf incident in Wis 15:1–6. This portion of the text is comprised of two parts, vv. 1–3, and vv. 4–6.¹⁷ Beginning with the latter, the author, identifying himself with Israel for the second time (cf. 15:1, 4; cf. also 12:6; 18:6), denies that “we Israelites” have been misled by the “intention of evil-art” (κακότεχνος ἐπίνοια), that is idolatry, or the fruitless toil of painters, a variegated image arousing desire only in fools who would long after an inanimate icon. This denial in vv. 4–5 and the subsequent denunciation of idolaters in v. 6 is composed of vocabulary and imagery dispersed throughout Wis 13–15, with ἐπίνοια serving as the most conspicuous example (cf. Wis 14:12).¹⁸ The effect is

τεχνίτην (13:1) vs. τέχνης (13:10); τεχνησάμενος (13:11); (3) Divine vs. human κατασκευάζειν: ὁ κατασκευάσας (13:4) vs. κατεσκεύασεν (13:11).

15 In relation to the carpenter: ἐποίησεν in 15:16 recalls ποιήσας (13:15; cf. also 14:8, 15); ἐργάζεται recalls ἐργασίας (13:12, 19; cf. also 14:8, 20); 15:15b is reminiscent of 13:16–19, especially περὶ δὲ ὁδοιπορίας τὸ μηδὲ βιάσει χρησθαι δυνάμενον (13:18c) vs. οἱ πόδες αὐτῶν ἀργοὶ πρὸς ἐπίβασιν (15:15b); and the living-person/dead-idol irony of 15:17 is paralleled in 13:10, 17, 18 (cf. 14:15, 29). In relation to the potter: ἔπλασεν and πλάσαι in 15:16 recall πλάσσει, ἀνεπλάσματο (15:7); πλάσσει (15:8, 9; cf. also χαλκοπλάστας in 15:9); πλάσαντα (15:11); and the phrase τὸ πνεῦμα δεδανεισμένος in 15:16 is reminiscent of τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπαιτηθεὶς χρέος in 15:8.

16 On this tension between Wis 11:24–25; 15:18–19, see Kolarcik 1997, 570.

17 The passage as a whole is bound together by ἡμῶν (v. 1) and ἡμᾶς (v. 4). Verses 1–3 are united by: σύ (v. 1), σοί (2x, v. 2); ἀμάρτωμεν, ἀμαρτησόμεθα (v. 2); εἰδότες (2x, v. 2), εἰδέναι (v. 3); κράτος (vv. 2–3). Verses 4–6 are united by: κακότεχνος (v. 4), κακῶν (v. 6); εἶδος (vv. 4–5); ποθεῖ (v. 5), ποθοῦντες (v. 6). In terms of relation to what precedes and follows, *mot-crochets* include: ἀμαρτανόντων (14:31), ἀμάρτωμεν, ἀμαρτησόμεθα (15:2); and ἡμῶν (15:1), ἡμᾶς (15:4), ἡμῶν (15:7), although the latter is not restricted to Israel as are the former two. Cf. Gilbert 1973, 193–96, 198.

18 The other examples of vocabulary include: πλανᾶω (13:6; 14:22; 15:4); ἄνθρωπος (13:1, 10, 13; 14:5, 11, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21; 15:4, 16 [2x]); κακ- (14:22, 27, 29, 30; 15:4, 6, 8, 12, 18); τεχν- (13:1, 10, 11; 14:2, 4, 18, 19; 15:4); χροᾶ (13:14) and χρώμα (15:4); ὄψις (13:7; 14:17 [2x]; 15:5, 19); ἄφρων (14:11; 15:5, 14); ὀρεξίς (14:2; 15:5); νεκρός (13:10, 18; 14:15; 15:5, 17); εἰκῶν (13:13, 16; 14:15, 17; 15:5); ἄξιος (13:15; 15:6); ἐλπὶς (13:10; 14:6; 15:6, 10); δρᾶω (14:10; 15:6); σεβ- (14:20; 15:6, 17, 18). For thematic parallels, see: 13:14 vs. 15:4; 14:18–21 vs. 15:5.

to disassociate Israel from the idolatry, immorality, and judgment that is the subject of the excursus.¹⁹

David Winston attempts to mitigate the significance of this disassociation. He states, “The writer is thinking of his own period” (1979, 282), and he then cites texts such as Jdt 8:18: “For never in our generation, nor in these present days, has there been any tribe or family or people or town of ours that worships gods made with hands, as was done in days gone by” (NRSV). The problem with this parallel, in particular, is that Jdt 8:18 refers to Israel’s past problems with idolatry, even acknowledging in the next verse, “That was why our ancestors were handed over to the sword and to pillage, and so they suffered a great catastrophe before our enemies” (Jdt 8:19, NRSV). Given Israel’s repeated dalliances with idolatry chronicled in biblical and extrabiblical writings and the historically oriented nature of Wisdom’s account, one may be excused for thinking that the author of Wisdom is being less than forthright.

Yet, such a judgment proves premature in light of the allusions that precede in Wis 15:1–3. The text begins with an address to ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν (“our God”), who is χρηστός καὶ ἀληθής, μακρόθυμος καὶ ἐλέει διοικῶν τὰ πάντα (“kind and true, patient and [the one] governing all things with mercy”). This address recalls the divine attributes revealed in the aftermath of the golden calf incident (cf. ἐλεῆμων/πολυέλεος/ἔλεος, μακρόθυμος, ἀληθινός in Exod 34:6–7).²⁰ The author then states in Wis 15:2: καὶ γὰρ ἐὰν ἀμάρτωμεν, σοὶ ἐσμεν, εἰδότες σου τὸ κράτος· οὐχ ἀμαρτησόμεθα δέ, εἰδότες ὅτι σοὶ λελογίσμεθα (“for even if we sin, we are yours, since we know your power; but we will not sin, since we know that we are reckoned to you”). In view of the evocation of Exod 34:6–7 and the prior use of the verb ἀμαρτάνω (“sin”) in Wis 14:31, these references to sin imply idolatry, specifically the golden calf incident (cf. Gilbert 1973, 181; Kolarcik 1997, 562).

Corroboration for discerning an allusion to the golden calf is found in the expression σοὶ ἐσμεν of Wis 15:2. This expression recalls the nearly identical phrase that concludes Exod 34:9 (so also Gilbert 1973, 181–82; Winston 1979,

19 Cf. Wis 14:11; 15:15. These two verses explicitly associate idolatry with the Gentiles and thus, implicitly, not with Israel.

20 The parallels between Wis 15:1 and Exod 34:6–7 are often noted: Winston 1979, 281; Larcher 1985, 3:847–48; Kolarcik 1997, 561; Engel 1998, 233; Scarpit 1999, 3:152. Gilbert (1973, 174–88), however, goes further, arguing that the renewal of the covenant in the aftermath of the golden calf incident is presupposed in Wis 15:1–2. This interpretation is similar to the one I propose, although mine was developed independently. More recently, Barclay (2010, 90–91) has also discussed the echoes of Exod 34 in Wis 15:1–2, suggesting that “*Wisdom of Solomon* has read the references to divine goodness and mercy in Exodus 34 without reference to their context as the aftermath to the Golden Calf apostasy.” Cf. Linebaugh 2011, 222.

281; Engel 1998, 234; Barclay 2010, 90). In this verse Moses prays for the Lord to accompany his λαός ... σκληροτράχηλος (“stiff-necked people”), a characterization associated with the golden calf (cf. Exod 33:3, 5; 34:9; cf. also Neh 9:16, 17 [2 Esd 19:16, 17]). Ideally, the Lord’s accompaniment will transform Israel, taking away their ἀμαρτία (“sin”) and ἀνομία (“lawlessness”) so that ἐσόμεθα σοί (“we will be yours”). Although Moses’s prayer never receives an explicit answer, it is followed by the Lord’s assurance that he will go with Israel, an assurance that in Exodus leads to the reinscription of the covenant tablets and resolution of the golden calf crisis. The confident declaration in Wis 15:2 that “we will not sin” and the subsequent denial of complicity in contemporary idolatry suggests that the author of Wisdom regarded Moses’s prayer for Israelite transformation as having received a positive answer. Israel’s “stiff-necked” nature, her “sin” and “lawlessness,” had been removed. In other words, Wis 15:1–6 reflects an implicit interpretation of the golden calf incident as recounted in Exod 32–34, one that, like Wisdom’s hermeneutic throughout the seven contrasts of chs. 11–19, minimizes Israel’s sin.

Competing Traditions: A Reading of Romans 1:18–2:11

What has not been sufficiently observed is that Wis 15:1, itself part of an allusion to the golden calf incident, is precisely the verse cited alongside Rom 2:4 in service of a subversive reading of the relationship between Wis 13:1–15:19 and Rom 1:18–2:11. Often cast in the form of endorsing a literary relationship between these texts, the basic idea of this subversive reading is that in Rom 1:18–32 Paul essentially mimics the excoriation of Gentile idolatry and immorality in Wis 13–14, only to oppose Wis 15:1–6 beginning in Rom 2:1.²¹ What is important for my purposes is that a strong case can be made that the golden calf incident plays a rhetorical role in Paul’s argument in Rom 2, even apart from the proposed connection with Wisdom. Once that proposed connection is taken into account, however, we have intriguing evidence that Paul is here engaging the competing golden calf tradition found in Wis 15:1–6.

With this thought in mind, I commence a reading of Rom 1:18–2:11 in which I attempt to bring together all three questions I have asked about calf texts, cultural tendencies, and competing traditions.²² In Rom 1:18–32, Paul appears

21 This was first noted by Lietzmann 1906, 12. For reviews of scholarship on the relation between Wis 13–15 and Rom 2:1–11, see Lucas 2010, 69–70 n2, 80–81; and Lucas 2015, 13–16.

22 The reading that follows draws on Lucas 2012. See also Lucas 2015.

to employ standard Hellenistic Jewish polemic against Gentile idolatry and immorality like that found in Wis 13–15. Romans 1:18a announces God’s heavenly wrath against all impiety and unrighteousness, and then 1:18b–21 provides the basis for this heavenly wrath: human suppression of the truth about God that is manifest in creation. With that basis established, Rom 1:22–32, the indictment proper, consists of a sin-retribution sequence that finds expression in a triadic interplay between (μετ)ήλλαξαν (“they [ex]changed,” vv. 23, 25, 26b) and παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός (“God gave them over,” vv. 24, 26a, 28), yielding the following structure:²³

a1: vv. 22–23

b1a2: vv. 24–25

b2a3: vv. 26–27

b3: vv. 28–32

The verb ἀλλάσσω (as opposed to μεταλλάσσω in vv. 25, 26b) distinguishes section *a1* (vv. 22–23) as the initial idolatrous “change.” This idolatrous act is recapitulated in *a2* (v. 25).²⁴ More immediately, however, the initial idolatrous change in *a1* gives rise to the first “handing-over” in *b1* (v. 24). This first handing-over to desires that lead to dishonorable bodily treatment (ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις ... τοῦ ἀτιμάζεσθαι, “to the desires ... to dishonor”) finds a parallel in the second handing-over in *b2* “to dishonoring passions” (εἰς πάθη ἀτιμίας). In other words, just as *a2* recapitulates *a1*, so also *b2* recapitulates *b1*. Based upon this pattern, one would expect *a3* to recapitulate *a1* and *a2*. Instead, however, the handing-over of *b2* and the exchange of *a3* merge into one another and clarify the precise nature of these dishonorable desires: same sex acts among both women and men. With the final “giving-over” of Rom 1:28–32 (*b3*), Paul shifts the focus from dishonorable desires and their outcome, sexual immorality, to undiscerning minds (ἁδόκιμον νοῦν) and their outcome, improper actions (ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα, v. 28). These improper actions are then detailed in a vice list (vv. 29–31; cf. Wis 14:22–26).

23 The wordplays associated with the textual division of Klostermann (1933), namely δόξαν–ἀτιμάζεσθαι for vv. 22–24; μετήλλαξαν–μετήλλαξαν for vv. 25–27; and οὐκ ἔδοκίμασαν–ἁδόκιμον for vv. 28–31, have led scholars to focus on the structural significance of παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός and to neglect its interplay with (μετ)ήλλαξαν. See Jeremias 1954; Dupont 1955, 392–93 n3; Huby 1957, 93; Schulz 1958, 166–67; Leenhardt 1961, 66 n. †; Cranfield 1975, 1105, 106 n1, 119 n4; and Käsemann 1980, 44.

24 As Cranfield (1975, 1123) observes: “μετήλλαξαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ ψεύδει repeats the general sense of v. 23, μετήλλαξαν corresponding to ἤλλαξαν, τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ θεοῦ to τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ, and ἐν τῷ ψεύδει to ἐν ὁμοιώματι, κ.τ.λ.”

Romans 1:32, the final verse in the polemic against idolatry and immorality, prepares for the impending transition to indicting an unidentified Jewish interlocutor. Paul refers to persons who not only “practice such things,” in spite of their knowledge of the righteous requirement of God, but also, while “doing the same,” commend other “practitioners” of vice. By drawing attention to cavalier disregard for God, Paul aims to elicit a judgmental response in the implied audience of such polemic, Hellenistic Jews (whether Christ-followers or not and including proselytes) who place their own sin in a different category than Gentiles. The emphasis on “doing the same” and “practicing such things” associates these actions with Rom 1:28b and thus, in turn, with the sin-retribution sequence expressed in the “(ex)change”/“giving-over” pattern.

Beginning in Rom 2:1, however, Paul exploits the moral outrage that he has just provoked. From the preceding excoriation of idolatry and immorality, Paul draws the conclusion (διδό) that his interlocutor is also “without excuse” (ἀναπολόγητος; cf. Rom 1:20) because he condemns others for actions that he himself commits. Although the Jewish identity of the interlocutor does not become explicit until v. 17, it is already implicit here, as suggested both by the turn upon the implied audience of such polemic and by the subversive manner in which Paul engages traditional Jewish viewpoints.²⁵ In contrast to the belief expressed in Wis 15:1–2, “But you, our God, are kind and true [and] patient” (Σὺ δέ, ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν, χρηστός καὶ ἀληθής, μακρόθυμος), such that “even if we sin, we are yours” (καὶ ... ἐὰν ἁμαρτωμεν, σοὶ ἐσμεν), Paul asks the interlocutor in Rom 2:4 if he despises the “kindness” (χρηστότης) and “patience” (μακροθυμία) of God, unaware that God’s “kindness” (χρηστός) leads to “repentance” (μετάνοια). Paul’s question may, in fact, be a sarcastic attempt to expose yet further hypocrisy, since Wis 11:23; 12:10, 19, with particular attention to Gentiles, acknowledge the importance of repentance if God is to overlook sin.

Whether or not Paul’s question is sarcastic along these lines, the repeated stress on the interlocutor “doing” or “practicing” “the same” as well as “such things” in Rom 2:1–4 provides a clear link with 1:28b, 32 and, in turn, inferentially incorporates him into the preceding sin-retribution sequence. The *Jewish* interlocutor, in other words, is being indicted for actions that have their origin in the idolatrous “change” of Rom 1:23, itself an allusion to the golden calf incident. Once the Jewish interlocutor has been inferentially incorporated into the preceding sin-retribution sequence, the application of Ps 106 (LXX 105):20 loses its ironic overtones.

25 Besides the example about to be discussed, cf. also Rom 2:3, 5; Tob 4:8–10; Pss. Sol. 9:5; 15:8.

Romans 2:5–11 then continues to allude to the golden calf incident.²⁶ In fact, Paul may have wished to call to mind elements of an interpretive tradition that provided a rationale for the Lord's desire, expressed twice in Ps 106 (LXX 105):23 and deriving from Deuteronomy (9:8, 14, 19, 20, 25, 26; 10:10), to ἐξολεθρεύω ("destroy") Israel because of the calf. This interpretive tradition, if it existed, focused on the hermeneutical significance of three verses: Deut 9:27b; 10:16, 17. In Deut 9:27b, Moses intercedes for Israel by asking the Lord not to "look upon the hardness [σκληρότητα] of this people and their impious actions [ἀσεβήματα] and sins." The attribution of ἀσεβήματα to Israel is pivotal, as it *both* explains why the Lord desired to destroy Israel *and* equates Israel's conduct with that of the Gentile inhabitants of the land, whose impending "destruction" (ἐξολεθρεύω) for "impiety" (ἀσέβεια) in Deut 9:1–6 prompts the Deuteronomic rehearsal of the golden calf, spanning Deut 9:7–10:11.²⁷ In the midst of the paraenesis that follows (10:12–22), Deut 10:16 returns to Israel's hardened character, providing the antidote for this problem: "Circumcise your hard-heart [σκληροκαρδίαν] and stiffen your neck no longer [οὐ σκληρυνεῖτε ἔτι]." The statement of divine impartiality that comes next in Deut 10:17, "For the Lord your God ... does not wonder [θαυμάζει] at a person and by no means takes a bribe," especially in light of the preceding comparison between Gentile and Jewish impiety, serves as a warning that failure to circumcise one's hardened heart would lead to judgment, perhaps even destruction.

In Rom 2:5–11, Paul evokes all three of these verses from Deuteronomy (9:27b; 10:16, 17), as well as the idea implicit in their association, equitable judgment or judgment according to works. The likelihood that Paul may have drawn on an interpretive tradition is enhanced by parallels in Philo and Sirach. Beginning with Rom 2:5, Paul's characterization of the interlocutor as possessing a σκληρότητα ... καὶ ἀμετανόητον καρδίαν ("hard ... and unrepentant heart") conflates Deut 9:27b and 10:16. This conflation is initially discernible because the specific term σκληρότης ("hardness") occurs only here in the NT and, besides Deut 9:27b, just three other times in the LXX, none of which have relevance to the Pauline context (cf. 2 Sam 22:6; Isa 4:6; 28:27). Moreover, although the σκληρ- ("hard-") root in verbal form often appears with καρδία ("heart") in the OT (e.g., Exod 4:21; 7:3, 22, etc.), the association of one of its nominal

26 For an application of interpretive methodology to Rom 2:5–11, see Lucas 2014.

27 Paul employs Deut 9:1–6 later in Romans. As Wagner (2003, 161–62) observes, the opening words of the personified "Righteousness from Faith," μὴ ἐλπίης ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου, in Rom 10:6b "are generally recognized as a quotation of Deuteronomy 8:17/9:4, with the latter text" as the most probable "source of Paul's quotation due to the (metaleptically suppressed) catchword 'righteousness' (δικαιοσύνη) in 9:4–6."

forms with καρδία, whether in the compound σκληροκαρδία (“hard-heart”) or as two separate nouns, occurs only four times: Deut 10:16; Eccl 7:25; Sir 16:10; and Jer 4:4, the latter two of which refer back to Deut 10:16. Thus both the use of σκληρότης and its association with καρδία in Rom 2:5 point to a conflation of Deut 9:27b; 10:16.²⁸ Crucial corroboration for this proposed conflation of Deut 9:27b and 10:16 is found in Philo, *Spec.* 1.304–305, an interpretation of Deut 10:16 that applies this verse to unruly persons, who, διὰ σκληρότητα τρόπων ἀφηνιασταί, σκιρτῶντες αὐθαδῶς καὶ ἀπαυχενίζοντες (“on account of hardness of ways, refuse the rein, leaping stubbornly and flailing their heads about”). The phrase σκληρότητα τρόπων (“hardness of ways”) recalls Moses’s characterization of Israel in Deut 9:27b.²⁹ That Philo intended just such a connection is suggested by the term ἀφηνιαστής (“refusing the rein”), a cognate of which (ἀφηνιάζω, “refuse to obey the rein”) is utilized in *Mos.* 2.169 to depict the Israelites overcome by idolatry during the golden calf incident.³⁰ Thus, similar to Paul in Rom 2:5, Philo alludes to the golden calf incident by combining the term σκληρότης from Deut 9:27b with commentary on Deut 10:16.

Were Paul’s characterization of the interlocutor in Rom 2:5 the only indication that he had Deut 9:1–10:22 in mind, then it would prove suggestive at best. Yet, as it turns out, Rom 2:6–11 reinforces the allusion. This Pauline text, especially in vv. 7–10, takes an elaborate chiasmic form. The emphasis on equitable judgment, or judgment according to works, in v. 6 is balanced by an emphasis on impartial judgment in v. 11. In between, vv. 7–10 mirror one another in two respects (Achte-meier 1990, 83 n32). First, the order of punishment–reward in vv. 7–8 is reversed in vv. 9–10. Second, whereas both vv. 7–8 focus on what a person does and then the results of that action, whether reward or punishment, vv. 9–10 begin with the result before relating the associated action, whether that which leads to punishment or reward. Accordingly, the chiasmic form of Rom 2:6–11 may be represented as follows:

28 As for the adjective ἀμετανόητος, Paul apparently equates failure to circumcise one’s hard-heart, in accordance with Deut 10:16, with an unrepentant heart, likely because the theme of repentance carries over from Rom 2:4.

29 Moses’s characterization, however, applied to *all* of Israel, while Philo seems only to be talking about the rebellious *among* Israel.

30 On Philo’s various retellings of the golden calf incident, see Feldman 2005 and the chapter by Tobin in this volume.

TABLE 9.1 Chiasm on equitable judgment, reward, and punishment in Romans 2:6–11

A Equitable Judgment		ὃς ἀποδώσει ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ· (v. 6)	“Who will repay each person according to his works.” (v. 6)
B Reward	Action	τοῖς μὲν καθ’ ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν ζητοῦσιν (v. 7a)	“to those who by perseverance of good work seek glory and honor and incorruptibility,” (v. 7a)
	Result	ζωὴν αἰώνιον, (v. 7b)	“eternal life,” (v. 7b)
C Punishment	Action	τοῖς δὲ ἐξ ἐριθείας καὶ ἀπειθοῦσιν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πειθομένοις δὲ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ (v. 8a)	“to those who from selfish ambition and disobedience to the truth but obedience to unrighteousness,” (v. 8a)
	Result	ὀργὴ καὶ θυμός. (v. 8b)	“wrath and fury.” (v. 8b)
C' Punishment	Result	θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία (v. 9a)	“Affliction and distress” (v. 9a)
	Action	ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου τοῦ κατεργαζομένου τὸ κακόν, (v. 9b)	“upon every soul of a person who does evil,” (v. 9b)
B' Reward	Jew and Greek	Ἰουδαίου τε πρῶτον καὶ “Ἕλληνος” (v. 9c)	“of the Jew first and of the Greek,” (v. 9c)
	Result	δόξα δὲ καὶ τιμὴ καὶ εἰρήνη (v. 10a)	“glory and honor and peace” (v. 10a)
	Action	παντὶ τῷ ἐργαζομένῳ τὸ ἀγαθόν, (v. 10b)	“to everyone who does good,” (v. 10b)
A' Impartial Judgment	Jew and Greek	Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ “Ἕλληνι” (v. 10c)	“to the Jew first and to the Greek.” (v. 10c)
		οὐ γάρ ἐστιν προσωποληψία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ. (v. 11)	“For there is no partiality with God.” (v. 11)

Given that Rom 2:6–11 continues to indict the Jewish interlocutor, a continuation corroborated by the intrusive statements concerning Jewish priority in punishment as well as reward, and that Paul’s characterization of this interlocutor in Rom 2:5 seems to conflate Deut 9:27b and 10:16, an association also found in Philo, one ought to be at least attentive to other signs that Paul subsequently

evokes Deut 9:1–10:22.³¹ There are at least two further signs to this effect. First, the specific term employed by Paul for “partiality” (προσωποληψία) in Rom 2:11 and its cognates occur only in the NT and early Christian literature, but the notion of divine impartiality, as noted, is found in Deut 10:17.³² Scholars regularly cite this verse in relation to Rom 2:11 (see, e.g., Tobin 2004, 111), even if few discern the connection with Paul’s earlier characterization of the interlocutor in v. 5.³³

The second sign that Paul subsequently evokes the Deuteronomic account of the calf relates to his emphasis on equitable judgment in Rom 2:6, which is in chiasmic parallel with the declaration of divine impartiality in Rom 2:11. Even if influenced in wording by Ps 62:12 (LXX 61:13) and Prov 24:12, Paul’s emphasis on equitable judgment here may be regarded as an inference drawn from the juxtaposition of Gentile and Jewish sin in Deut 9:1–10:22. One finds just such an inference in Sir 16:9–14, a text that shares with Rom 2:6–11 formal, conceptual, and intertextual similarities. Beginning in 16:9–10, Sirach compares the Lord’s merciless dispossession and destruction of the sinful Gentile inhabitants of the land to the treatment of the exodus generation of Israelites, numbering six hundred thousand (cf. Exod 12:37; Num 11:27; Sir 46:8), “who were aligned with their hard-heart [σκληροκαρδία].” The annihilation of the former implies the annihilation of the latter. Although the exodus generation was condemned to die in the wilderness due to the Kadesh Barnea rebellion (cf. Num 13:1–14:35; Deut 1:19–46), not the golden calf incident, the very comparison between the Gentile inhabitants of the land and the exodus generation recalls Deut 9:1–10:22 in general, just as the reference to their σκληροκαρδία (“hard-heart”) evokes Deut 10:16 in particular. Moreover, the focus upon Gentile and Israelite *destruction* may derive from a contextual reading of Deut 9:27b in relation to Deut 9:1–6.

Whether or not the last suggestion regarding a contextual reading is valid, the allusion to Deut 9:1–10:22 continues in v. 11a. Sirach speculates, “Even if there was one stiff-necked [σκληροτράχηλος] person, it would be a wonder [θαυμαστόν] if this person went unpunished.” The term σκληροτράχηλος

31 That Rom 2:6–11 continues to indict the Jewish interlocutor is supported by Jüngel’s observation concerning the relationship between v. 6 and v. 5: “V. 6 ist seinerseits von V. 5 abhängig, der die Rede vom eschatologischen Gericht Gottes negativ motiviert” (1963, 70).

32 For the use of προσωποληψία and its cognates in the NT and early Christian literature, cf. Acts 10:34; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25; Jas 2:1, 9; 1 Pet 1:17; 1 Clem. 1:3; Barn. 4:12; Pol. Phil. 6:1. Cf. also Matt 22:16; Mark 12:14; Luke 20:21.

33 An exception is Dunn (1988, 1:89), who, regarding Romans, states: “The movement of thought from 2:5–11 is in effect Paul’s elaboration of Deut 10:16–17.”

(“stiff-necked”), especially associated with the golden calf incident (cf. p. 119 above), occurs in Deut 9:6, 13, with the former occurrence initiating the Deuteronomic rehearsal of the calf and the latter being employed emphatically to characterize the people. Combined with the preceding context, a virtually decisive indication that “stiff-necked” in Sir 16:11 alludes to Deuteronomy, not Exodus, is the reference to θαυμαστός in relation to punishment. As seen in the quotation of Deut 10:17 above (cf. p. 122), the cognate verb θαυμάζω is a key term utilized in this verse to articulate divine impartiality.³⁴ Sirach thus appears to be employing a wordplay to express the Lord’s commitment to applying his impartiality to those with a “hard-heart” or “stiff-neck” *among his own people, even if just one*. What follows next in Sir 16:11b–12a is a brief meditation on contrasting divine attributes, especially mercy and wrath, which then gives way in vv. 12b–14 to the following twofold assurance of equitable judgment, resulting in either punishment or reward:

TABLE 9.2 Chiasm on equitable judgment, punishment, and reward in Sirach 16:12b–14

A	Equitable Judgment	ἄνδρα κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ κρινεῖ. (v. 12b)	“He [the Lord] will judge a person according to his works.” (v. 12b)
B	Punishment	οὐκ ἐκφεύξεται ἐν ἀρπάγματι ἀμαρτωλός, (v. 13a)	“A sinner will not escape with [his] plunder,” (v. 13a)
C	Reward	καὶ οὐ μὴ καθυστερήσει ὑπομονὴ εὐσεβοῦς. (v. 13b)	“and by no means will the perseverance of the pious fall short.” (v. 13b)
C'	Reward	πάση ἐλεημοσύνῃ ποιήσει τόπον, (v. 14a)	“For every act of mercy he will make a place,” (v. 14a)
[B']	Punishment	Not present]	
A'	Equitable Judgment	ἕκαστος κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ εὐρήσει. (v. 14b)	“each will find according to his works” (v. 14b)

34 This intertextual relationship between Deut 10:17 and Sir 16:11 is not present in the respective Hebrew texts. Although θαυμαστός accurately renders the term תַּמָּה in the Hebrew version of Sirach (Beentjes 1997, 45), this term does not appear in MT Deut 10:17. Instead, one finds the verb נִשְׁׁׁ, which is translated in LXX Deut 10:17, according to sense, with θαυμάζω.

The structure is not quite chiasmic because a second statement about punishment (B') is missing. Nonetheless, the formal resemblance to Rom 2:6–11 is striking and there is even some shared vocabulary.³⁵ Furthermore, when Rom 2:5–11 and Sir 16:9–14 are compared conceptually, both texts emphasize impartial judgment (even if Sirach does so through a wordplay), equitable judgment, and punishment as well as reward. These comparisons are also part of a juxtaposition of Gentile and Jewish sin. In view, then, of these formal and conceptual similarities, it is surely significant that the intertextual hints of Deut 10:16, 17 in Rom 2:5–11 are more clearly expressed in Sir 16:9–14. And perhaps a contextual reading of Deut 9:27b is also reflected in the latter text, even as the former seems to evoke this same verse. These formal, conceptual, and intertextual similarities between Rom 2:5–11 and Sir 16:9–14, however, should not be taken to suggest that Paul was alluding to or making use of the latter. Rather, they, along with the parallel association in Philo, *Spec.* 1.304–305, are better understood as indications of an interpretive tradition, one rooted in an application of Deut 9:27b; 10:16, 17 to Jewish sin, especially compared to that of the Gentiles, upon which all three texts were drawing.

Romans 1:18–2:11 may be plausibly read, at least in part, as an implicit critique of the interpretation of the calf presented in Wis 15:1–6. In Rom 1:18–32 Paul essentially mimics the argument of Wis 13–14, only to turn on the Jewish author of Wis 15:1–6 and his apologetic interpretation that Moses's prayer in Exod 34:6–9 for the Lord to remove Israel's stiff-necked nature had been answered. This Pauline opposition is suggested not only by the parallels between Wis 15:1 and Rom 2:4 but also by the manner in which Paul subsequently evokes the Deuteronomic account of the calf in Rom 2:5–11. Why turn to Deuteronomy? First, because the association of both Jews and Gentiles with impiety in this text fits his overall argument up to Rom 3:20. Second, in relation to Wisdom, because its apologetic interpretation of Moses's prayer cannot be sustained in light of this Deuteronomic account, which, intertwined with its rehearsal of the calf, chronicles Israel's repeated rebellions in the wilderness due to Israel's still stiff-necked nature.

Conclusion

If this reading of Rom 1:18–2:11 proves persuasive, then, to return to answering the three questions with which I began: We have a fifth calf text in Paul, Rom 2:5–11, which alludes to Deut 9–10. We have corroboration for locating

35 ὁργή: Sir 16:6, 11 [2x]; Rom 2:5 [2x], 8; ὑπομονή: Sir 16:13; Rom 2:7.

these five calf texts within broader first-century cultural tendencies, including confusion between Jews and theriolatrous Egyptian as well as Jewish attempts to dispel such confusion. Lastly, we have evidence, in at least one instance, that Paul engages a competing golden calf tradition.

Much work remains to be done on Paul's engagement with golden calf traditions, however. It would be profitable to study all five of the Pauline calf texts in isolation as well as in relation to one another to see what could be learned. For example, consider my claim that in Rom 2:3–4 Paul shows awareness of and opposition to the interpretation of the golden calf incident in Wis 15:1–2. Consider also my related claim that Paul then tries to subvert that interpretation for its overreliance on Exod 32–34 by evoking Deut 9–10 in Rom 2:5–11. If these claims are valid, or at least plausible, then it is interesting to note that Paul's allusions to the golden calf incident in Rom 9:3, 15 (cf. Exod 32:32; 33:19) may also be related to Wisdom. As far back as 1892, Eduard Grafe argued that Rom 9:19–23 reflects Paul's literary dependence on Wis 11:22; 12:8–22; 15:7 (Grafe 1892, 264–70; cf. Sanday and Headlam 1895, 267–69). Does Rom 9 represent subsequent engagement on the part of Paul with Wisdom concerning the calf? If so, what precisely is the relationship to his combative approach in Rom 2:1–11? Does Rom 9 represent a more conciliatory approach? Consideration of questions like these would require forging ahead on the largely unexplored terrain of Paul and the calf. That, in turn, could lead to fresh insights while at the same time allowing other scholars a chance to take up the topic from a more advanced starting point.

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“They Made a Calf”: Idolatry and Temple in Acts 7

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Within the narrative of Luke-Acts, the (golden) calf is mentioned only once, in Stephen’s famed speech in Acts 7, where it plays a pivotal role in Stephen’s recounting of Israel’s story.¹ In this chapter, I will argue that Stephen uses the calf episode in a programmatic way to counter the charges brought against him and, indeed, to redirect those charges on to those who sit in judgment over him. This will require that I attend to the nature of the indictments on the basis of which Stephen is brought before the Jerusalem council and then to the overall development of his speech. I will then be in a position to urge that Stephen uses the calf incident to speak to both charges, the one concerning his position vis-à-vis Moses and the law and the other concerning “this holy place,” the temple (Acts 6:13).

Stephen Indicted

In his twofold introduction of Stephen, Luke presents him as someone who is “endowed by the Spirit with exceptional wisdom” and “with exceptional faith” (Acts 6:3, 5) and who is “endowed with grace and power”—a missional leader who “was performing great wonders and signs among the people” (6:8). Luke thus characterizes Stephen in ways that are reminiscent of both the apostles and of Jesus himself (e.g., Acts 2:22, 43; 4:30; 5:12). Moreover, with this phrasing we may hear echoes of the exodus story (e.g., Exod 7:3; Deut 6:22; 26:8; Ps 135:9) in anticipation of that key section of Stephen’s speech devoted to Moses (7:17–44), wherein we read that Moses had “performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and for forty years in the wilderness” (7:36). Additionally, according to Luke, as Stephen stood before the Jerusalem council, his face was like that of an angel’s (6:15), a description that recalls the portrait of Moses in Exod 34:29–35 (cf. 2 Cor 3:13) and that envelops Stephen in

¹ Especially since the publication of Parsons and Pervo 1993, the unity of Luke and Acts has been subjected to scrutiny from a variety of angles. For critical surveys of literature, see P. E. Spencer 2007 and Bird 2007. I defend the narrative unity of Luke-Acts most recently in Green 2011.

an almost incomparable divine endorsement. Contrasting sharply with these positive credentials is the opposition Stephen experiences—first from his own people, so to speak, Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem synagogues (6:9), and then from the Jerusalem elite and “the people” (6:12), who are responsible for delivering him to the Jerusalem council. Luke heightens the developing drama, first, by recounting how rapidly the opposition against Stephen is mobilized; and second, by having others report the substance of Stephen’s persistent message sans any direct speech from Stephen himself. On this latter point, we simply have no basis for judging firsthand the content of Stephen’s words until he is finally asked to address his accusers in Acts 7. It is important that we not forget what we do know, however, namely, that Luke has thus far endorsed Stephen with impressive *bona fides*.

The charges brought against Stephen are represented in different ways three times: “We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God” (6:11); “This fellow speaks against the holy place and the law” (6:13); “We have heard him saying that this Jesus the Nazarene will demolish this place and amend the customary practices that Moses handed down to us” (6:14).² It is easy enough to trace the connection between Moses and the law in Luke-Acts, and Stephen Wilson has demonstrated further the correspondence between the law and “the customary practices Moses handed down to us” (e.g., Wilson 1983, 3–11). Overall, Luke’s narrative is positively inclined toward maintaining Moses’s law (e.g., Luke 2:22–23; 16:29–30; cf. Jervell 1996, 54–61), though the reference to Moses may recall for the reader even more directly the association of Moses and Jesus, the prophet like Moses, in Acts 3:22–26 (cf. 7:37). In Second Temple period Judaism, blasphemy against God might include blasphemy against the temple (see Bock 1994, 184–90); accordingly, the association between God and the temple in the charges against Stephen is also warranted. That is, given the correlation between Moses, the law, and “the customary practices Moses handed down to us”; and between God, “the holy place,” and “this place,” we should understand that the charges against Stephen reduce to two: he speaks against the law and against the temple (*pace* Fitzmyer 1998, 354–61). Insofar as Stephen is a representative of Jesus’s witnesses in their relationship to these mainstays of Jewish theology, identity, and practice, these charges and Stephen’s response to them are crucial. The stakes are high, since they have to do with the basic question of what constitutes faithfulness to Israel’s God. With the high priest’s question “Are these things so?” (7:1), the stage is set for Stephen’s speech, the longest address recounted in the entire Lukan narrative.

2 Translations are those of the author.

Stephen's response takes the form of a selective retelling of Israel's history, a strategy that takes seriously the rhetorical power of narrative (cf., e.g., Phelan 1996; Smith 2009). Fashioned around three prominent figures (Abraham, 7:2–8; Joseph, 7:9–16; and Moses, 7:17–44), from beginning to end Stephen's narrative emphasizes the geographical reach of God's presence and activity (cf., e.g., Scott 1974, 93; F. S. Spencer 2004, 80–91; Thompson 2011, 164–72). The word *γῆ* appears ten times in Stephen's speech (58 in Luke-Acts as a whole), and Stephen's speech locates God's activity in the land of Israel, to be sure (e.g., εἰς τὴν γῆν ταύτην εἰς ἣν ὑμεῖς νῦν κατοικεῖτε, 7:4; cf. 7:7, 11–12, 45–50), but also in Mesopotamia (7:2–3), Haran (7:4), Egypt (7:6, 9–11, 12–13, 15, 17–28, 35–36), Shechem (7:16), Midian (7:29–34), and the wilderness (7:36–44). Among these uses, the most interesting for our purposes may be the phrase *γῆ ἁγία* in 7:33, which recalls the charge against Stephen in 6:13: κατὰ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου [τούτου], and thus which identifies more than one “place” as “holy” (cf. Sterling 1999, 213). Also of special interest is 7:49, where, in a citation of Isa 66:1, God refers to the “land” (*γῆ*) as “a footstool for my feet” and counters the notion that God's presence can be restricted to a single “place” (*τόπος*). Naming “heaven” as God's throne, Stephen situates his geographical lesson within the even more expansive geographical perspective with respect to which the narrative of Acts has been unfolding since Jesus's ascension in 1:9–11. In this perspective, the divine plan and its actualization are determined from a heavenly, not earthbound, vantage point, so that heaven becomes the reality that structures and maps the life of Jesus's followers (see Green 2013). For all of these reasons, any attempt to corral God and God's purpose within the confined space of a particular place, a particular land, would be rendered theologically problematic.

The Role of the Calf

Against this backdrop, we may now inquire into the role the (golden) calf plays in Stephen's speech. In doing so, we must keep under the spotlight the two questions Stephen has been called to address—concerning Moses and the law, and concerning the temple. As we would expect, the calf is introduced in that part of Stephen's speech concerned with Moses, the longest subsection of the speech.

Like Luke's presentation of Stephen in 6:5, 8–15, so Stephen's presentation of Moses is a study in contrasts. God has the highest regard for Moses (*ἦν ἀστέιος τῷ θεῷ*, 7:20). Moses was wise and powerful (7:22), defended the oppressed as God's instrument (7:24–25), and sought peace among his kin (7:26). God

visited Moses, spoke to him, and commissioned him as leader and liberator (7:30–35; cf. 5:30–31). Performing wonders and signs, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt (7:36). Stephen even goes so far as to identify Moses's law as “living words” (ὅς ἐδέξατο λόγια ζῶντα δοῦναι ἡμῖν, 7:38), thus recognizing the divine origin of the law, emphasized again in 7:53, together with its dynamic and ongoing significance for God's people. Among his own people, though, Moses was misunderstood, rebuffed (ἀπωθέομαι), and disowned (ἀρνέομαι; 7:25–27, 35). In fact, Stephen says, “Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him, but pushed him aside [ἀπωθέομαι] and, in their hearts, returned to Egypt” (7:39).

At this juncture, Stephen makes a series of affirmations, all of which serve his larger purpose of claiming that he is not the one who rejected Moses but “they” are—with “they” identified as the ancient Israelites and those, like the Jerusalem council before whom he now speaks, who align themselves with the ancient Israelites. In fact, on this point Stephen's account departs from the account in Exod 32 in a significant way, for he names “our ancestors,” and not Aaron, as the party responsible for the fabrication of the calf. The Israelites thus demonstrate their repudiation of Moses and their allegiance to life in Egypt in these ways: they made a calf, they offered a sacrifice to it, and they celebrated their own handiwork (7:41). In other words, pushing Moses aside was tantamount to pushing God aside, trading the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (7:32) for an idol (7:41). Along the way, Stephen quotes Exod 32:1 (in Acts 7:40, with only minor changes), thus demonstrating his indebtedness to the account in Exodus. It is not too much of a stretch, then, to see that Stephen's speech has the effect of recapitulating the division between those who are on God's side and those who oppose God recounted in Exod 32:25–35. To this end, Stephen even repeats in Acts 7:51 the characterization of “the people” found in Exod 33:3, 5; 34:9—that they are “stiff-necked”—but now with reference not to “the people” but to their leaders. Here, of course, the change in Stephen's rhetoric is damning, as he moves away from referring to “our ancestors” (7:2, 11, 12, 15, 19, 38, 44, 45) and refers instead to “your ancestors” (7:51, 52)—“yours” because “you,” the Jerusalem council, pattern “your” allegiances and behaviors after them. We find that in Stephen's hands the calf is wielded rhetorically as the very embodiment, the most obvious demonstration, and the ultimate proof of Israel's rejection of Moses. Abrogation of Moses and the law is realized in the turn to idolatry. There is a sense in which all history-writing is contemporary, and this is clearly the case with Stephen, whose narration of Israel's history emphasizes the present in which the past has culminated. He thus summarizes, “You received the law through the agency of angels, but you have not kept it” (7:53).

As Luke has presented it, Stephen's interest in the calf incident extends further, to include the temple. With this claim, however, we enter contested territory, for Luke's attitude toward the temple (see McKeever 1999, 2–11; more recently, e.g., Taylor 1999; Head 2004; Walton 2004; Beale 2008; Thompson 2011, 145–73) and the question of how Stephen's speech factors into Luke's overall approach to the temple have been variously assessed. Regarding Stephen's speech, two alternative viewpoints are championed. The first is that Stephen is not so much criticizing the temple as he is affirming God's transcendence of the temple (e.g., Sylva 1987; Walton 2004, 138–43; Rhodes 2009; Smith 2009, 107–10). A corresponding cadre of readers supports the view that Stephen has set himself over against the temple *per se* (e.g., Scharlemann 1968; Barrett 1991; Penner 2004, 308–18; Pervo 2009, 191–93; Matthews 2010, 68–71). The debate swirls around a standard set of issues, namely, attitudes toward the temple in Luke's narrative more broadly, the fact that the charges brought against Stephen are put forward by "false witnesses" (Acts 6:13), Stephen's claim that David (who asked if he might find a dwelling place for Jacob's house) "found favor with God" (7:46), the significance of the coordinating conjunction *δέ* (usually translated as an adversative) in 7:47, the common-sense observation that the tabernacle in the wilderness like the temple in Jerusalem would have been "made by human hands," and the recognition that an emphasis on God's transcendence is found already at the (first) temple's dedication (1 Kgs 8:15–53). Although these options are typically cast as mutually exclusive, this may not be the best approach.

That the temple is cast in a negative light seems inescapable, given the label Stephen gives it in 7:48, that it is "made with human hands" (*χειροποίητος*). On this point, Stephen seems to go out of his way to contrast the divine origins of the "tent (or tabernacle) of testimony," concerning which God gave directions and for which God provided the pattern (7:44). The counterclaim one reads among some contemporary scholars (e.g., Walton 2004, 140), that the tent, too, was human-made, is simply beside the point. This is because it overlooks the septuagintal use of *χειροποίητος* as an epithet for "idol"; things made with human hands are not necessarily idols, but things labeled as such are idols indeed—as is made clear in Lev 26:1, 30; Jdt 8:18; Wis 14:8; Isa 2:18; 10:11; 19:1; 21:9; 31:7; 46:6; Dan 5:4, 23; 6:28 LXX; Bel 1:5 (cf. *ἔργα χειρῶν*: Deut 4:28; 27:15; 2 Kgs 19:18; 2 Chron 32:19; Pss 115:4; 135:15; Isa 2:8; 37:19; Wis 13:10; Ep Jer 1:51). This pattern of usage warrants a strong bias toward identifying the idolatrous character of the temple. Luke makes the point with even more potency through his adjacent reference to the calf, certainly an idol (*εἰδωλον*), as "the works of their hands" (*ἔργα χειρῶν*) in 7:41—a reference that anticipates and provides an influential backdrop for the immediately subsequent characterization of

Solomon’s temple as having been “made with human hands” (χειροποίητος). The one idol led to exile (7:42–43), and, in Luke’s narrative, the other will lead to destruction: “no stone left on another” (Luke 21:6; cf. 19:44). With the one, the fabrication of an idol leads to a prophetic critique of idolatry in 7:39–43 (citing Amos); with the other, the identification of the temple as idolatrous leads to a prophetic critique of idolatry in 7:48–50 (citing Isaiah). Though not as proximate, the further use of χειροποίητος in Acts 17:24–29 is also germane. Following the example of Stephen standing before the Jerusalem council, Paul now stands before the Athenian council and articulates a sharp contrast between the universal God and human-made (χειροποίητος), idolatrous shrines.

Acts 7:50, 48	Acts 17:24
οὐχὶ ἡ χεὶρ μου ἐποίησεν ταῦτα πάντα; οὐχὶ ὁ ὕψιστος ἐν χειροποιήτοις κατοικεῖ	ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ

It is difficult, then, not to agree with Richard Pervo’s conclusion: “By inference, innuendo, and insinuation, the temple of Solomon (and its successors) is drawn into the belly of the calf” (Pervo 2009, 189).

The chief problem that confronts this negative assessment of the temple in Acts 7 is its reductive understanding of “the temple,” as though the temple were simply a thing that could be classified as intrinsically good or bad, or somewhere on a continuum between these two poles. That this is a reductive assessment is transparent already within the Lukan narrative as a whole, where we find enough ambiguity to question any facile categorization of Luke’s attitude toward the temple in positive or negative terms. It is also apparent when we take seriously perspectives on *spatiality* that move beyond older notions of geography or architecture and account for space as it is interpreted and lived. From this vantage point, just as Herod’s temple underwent seemingly unending brick-and-mortar construction with something like a street address on an ancient city map, so also it underwent constant cultural construction in relation to the various populations that related to it. In this latter sense, the temple of which Luke’s narrative speaks is the site of powerful interpretive forces, grounded in its status as sacred space—divine abode, nexus between human and divine, and inviolable territory (for these categories, see Knipe 1988, 107–12). Luke’s own narrative affirms the significance of the temple in these terms (cf., e.g., Luke 1:8–23; 2:22–24, 36–38; 24:53; Acts 2:46–47; 3:1; 21:26; 22:17; 24:18),

with the result that, at whatever juncture we encounter the temple in his narrative, we must ask whose interests are being served in and by the temple. After all, the temple can just as easily serve as the domain of startling abuse (e.g., Luke 19:46; 20:45–21:4) as it can be the locus of exemplary piety (Luke 2:25–27, 36–37). Luke can affirm the importance of the temple as sacred space without validating the temple ideology of every group that occupies or relates to it. And he can embrace the sacred character of the temple without drawing from it the conventional corollaries. Generally speaking, the temple's vertical axis (God-human) authorizes a horizontal one, concerned with human affairs, so that the temple is the focal point for ordering the world. But what kind of world order? The temple can serve for Luke as a place to meet God and to hear God's voice without the temple's sanctioning thereby a social order concerned with demarcating who is in, who has authority, or who has elevated status—the very social order promoted by and among the Jerusalem elite in Luke's narrative (see Green 1994; more generally, Elliott 1991). The question is: who wields the temple's socio-religious power, and to what end?

Earlier, in the Third Gospel, Jesus brings his message of divine renewal and disclosure of God's kingdom to the temple courts (Luke 19:45–48). His aim is restorative, to reclaim the temple for its legitimate use as a center of prayer and revelation concerning God's restorative purpose. Such an aim has both negative and positive sides, however. This is because actions and words aimed at restoration carry with them a judgment, implied or transparent, regarding the illegitimacy of those who presently oversee the affairs of the temple and shape its politics. Beginning with his entry into the temple in Luke 19:45–46, then throughout Luke 20–21, Jesus delegitimizes those whose authority is bound up with the temple and who use the temple system to tyrannize and oppress society's marginal and vulnerable. His efforts at reform and message of divine salvation rebuffed by the temple elite, he goes on to pronounce the destruction of the temple itself.

In the same way, Jesus's witnesses locate their ministry in the temple courts (Acts 2–5, especially 2:46; 3:1; 5:20–21, 25, 42), which leads to their being arrested and silenced, twice. Called before the Jerusalem council, Peter and John twice introduce contrasts between God's activity and the activity of the Jerusalem leadership (Acts 4:10–11; 5:30–32) and between God's aims and authority and the aims and authority of the Jerusalem leadership (4:19–20; 5:29). At the second hearing, ironically, Gamaliel warned his colleagues on the Jerusalem council against positioning themselves against God (5:38–39). Accordingly, Stephen's appearance before the council is the third in the series, and here the recurring question surfaces again: whose aims and activities are aligned with God's purpose? Building on his interpretation of the calf incident,

Stephen's historical narrative reaches its climax as it casts the Jerusalem leadership as idolaters and the temple they hold in their clutches as the center of idolatry. Having rejected the prophet-like-Moses, Jesus, they had turned to idolatry. Accordingly, not the temple per se, but the temple-as-constructed-by-the-Jerusalem-elite is idolatrous, for it seeks to conscript to its own localized ends the God whose "hand made all these things," both heaven and earth (7:49–50).

Conclusion

Luke's narrative refers to the calf incident only once, in Stephen's speech in Acts 7. Stephen has been brought up on two charges, with both introduced into the story by false witnesses. Stephen counters these charges through a selective retelling of Israel's history, a retelling that reaches its highpoint in Stephen's reference to the people's fabrication of a calf. In Stephen's hands, this incident becomes the basis for denying both charges, since it proves (1) that Israel's ancestors and those who follow them have rejected Moses and the law in favor of idolatry and (2) that references to the temple cannot be taken uncritically as references to God, since God is bigger than the temple. Stephen can speak against the temple while at the same time aligning himself with God's purpose.

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Traces of the Golden Calf in the Epistle to the Hebrews

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The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is steeped in the Jewish biblical tradition, and he makes much use of stories and characters from the Pentateuch in his “letter of exhortation” (Heb 13:22). Jesus is declared superior to Moses in one of the book’s several prominent comparisons (3:1–6). Levitical matters of the priesthood and sacrificial system are discussed very frequently, and the Day of Atonement ritual is a key motif for understanding Jesus’s self-sacrifice. Jesus is shown to fulfill the duties of a Levitical priest in 5:1–10, a passage that speaks very positively of priestly tasks like dealing gently with sinners and interceding on their behalf, yet later in ch. 7 the author argues that Jesus’s priesthood instead is superior to that of the Levitical line, establishing this by means of a creative argument involving two other characters from the Pentateuch, Abraham and Melchizedek. Many of the heroes of faith from Heb 11 are Pentateuchal characters: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. Indeed, the structure of the list itself gets hazy after the characters from the Pentateuch are covered. Esau (12:16) and Cain (by implication in 11:4; 12:24) are negative examples, and the unfaithful of the wilderness generation (3:7–4:13) stand as the primary example of apostasy. Even if sometimes the author of Hebrews uses texts from elsewhere in the Jewish Scriptures to discuss events or figures from the Pentateuch rather than from the books of the Pentateuch themselves (e.g., his primary use of Ps 95 to discuss the wilderness generation in Heb 3:7–4:13), still this reflects the importance of the Pentateuch for the author’s thought and the paradigmatic nature of these characters and events.

Given the subject of this volume, however, this list of Pentateuchal elements in Hebrews highlights *implicitly* what is missing *explicitly* from this book, direct discussion of the golden calf episode. Aaron is the central named figure in the calf story, but despite all the talk of priestly duties, lineages, and sacrifices in Hebrews, he is mentioned in the letter only twice, and in neither case does one detect negative assessment of his priestly activities. In Heb 5:1–6 the author discusses how one becomes a priest and asserts that this only happens when one is called by God “just as Aaron was” (5:4), and God extends this call to Jesus in the words of Ps 110 (LXX 109):4, “You are a priest forever, according

to the order of Melchizedek" (5:6).¹ Later in Heb 7:11, one finds the phrase "order of Aaron" as an alternate designation for the Levitical priesthood. Now Jesus is contrasted with Levitical priests and is instead identified as a priest in the "order of Melchizedek" (as anticipated already in 5:6), but still Aaron is a respectable figure. The author declares Jesus as superior to Aaron and his successors for several reasons (including, somewhat surprisingly in light of 5:4–6, a contrast between Jesus's priestly appointment by oath and the Levitical accession by genealogy in 7:20–22), but the worst thing implied about Levitical priests is that they are mortal and must offer sacrifices for their own sins. There is no indictment of Aaron for the golden calf incident nor any direct mention of the episode.²

Golden Calf Traditions and Hebrews

Proposals for Minor Golden Calf Allusions in Hebrews

Viewed in the broader context of Second Temple period Jewish and early Christian literature as addressed in the other chapters of this volume, the lack of explicit discussion of this paradigmatic example of idolatrous unfaithfulness in Hebrews might seem surprising in light of our author's strong emphases on faithfulness and apostasy. It is fair to consider, however, if and how elements of the golden calf narrative have been utilized in more subtle ways by the author of Hebrews. Indeed, reputable scholars have proposed numerous points of contact between Hebrews and the golden calf accounts in Exod 32–34 and Deut 9–10.³ Personally, though, most strike me as entirely too broad or generic to be of significance. For example, the statement in Heb 9:4 that the ark of the covenant contained the two tablets implies nothing about the author's possible appropriation of the golden calf story itself. Hebrews 12:23 speaks of the "firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" and Exod 32:32–33 has a

1 This quotation is paired with that of Ps 2:7 in Heb 5:5, a verse already applied to the Son in Heb 1:5. This combination in Heb 5:5–6 functions to affirm that God has made both decrees (sonship and priesthood) to the same figure.

2 The word μόσχος ("calf") appears only twice in Hebrews, in 9:12 (where Jesus's blood is contrasted with that of sacrificial animals) and 9:19 (where Moses's covenant inauguration rites are described).

3 I have collected the examples that follow in this paragraph from numerous major commentaries on Hebrews that have appeared in recent decades. I list these examples here to illustrate the range of suggestions, but I do not give citations for the proposals lest it appear that I am criticizing the scholars who mention them. This is especially the case since the goal of a biblical commentator quite often is to be comprehensive in terms of listing the possibilities without personally affirming every link suggested.

divine book, but these are very common images in apocalyptic thought. Some have suggested that the call to “go outside the camp” in Heb 13:13 relates to Exod 33:7–11, but Harold W. Attridge (1989, 399 n119) rightly observes that “the tradition that the tabernacle was outside the camp ... is of marginal significance here.”⁴ Exodus 32:26 might also be mentioned in this context, as Moses stands near the gate of the camp and summons those who will stand for the Lord to take vengeance on those running wild, but if this is the intended referent in Hebrews (which exalts Jesus over the Levites) it would be ironic for this book since in Exodus it is the *Levites* who heed Moses’s call. Moses sees God’s glory in the aftermath of the golden calf incident in Exod 34:6 (cf. 33:18), but that would seem to have no connection with either Hebrews’ discussion of the Son reflecting God’s glory in 1:3 (which is indebted to Wisdom traditions instead) or the mention of Jesus being worthy of more glory than Moses in 3:3 (in a passage grounded in God’s defense of Moses against Aaron and Miriam in Num 12:7–8). A more likely connection might be found in the statement in Heb 11:27 about Moses seeing the “unseen one”; perhaps this is an allusion to Exod 33:18 and 34:6, but if so the exegetical significance of the connection is very small. Ἐκκλησία is a word far too common to demand that its use in Heb 2:12 is indebted to Deut 9:10, especially since Hebrews finds the term in a citation of Ps 22:22 (LXX 21:23). God swore by his own self to the patriarchs according to Exod 32:13, but in Hebrews the immediate discussion concerns his oath to Abraham, so the more direct reference would seem to be to Gen 22:16 LXX instead (but compare Lane 1991, 1:151).

One other possibility should be mentioned here in light of the importance elsewhere in this volume of the term χειροποίητος, which was used in several ancient texts (including some in the Septuagint) to describe idols.⁵ The author of Hebrews gives much attention in chs. 8–9 to the differences between the earthly sanctuary “made by [human] hands” (χειροποίητος, 9:24; cf. 9:11) and the heavenly or “true” one (ἀληθινός, 8:2; 9:24). This comparison (which likely reflects aspects of both apocalyptic Jewish and Middle Platonic thought; see further Mason 2012) appears as part of the author’s larger program of presenting Jesus’s priesthood as superior to that of the Levitical priests. Unlike the latter, who repeatedly offer animal sacrifices in an earthly (but admittedly divinely authorized, 8:5) copy of the heavenly sanctuary, Jesus offers himself in

4 See a different assessment in Lane 1991, 2:542–44. DeSilva (2000, 502) finds the link very important, but for reasons vaguely related to golden calf imagery: “They are leaving the profane (the temporary and shakable world) behind and moving toward the sacred (entering the rest of God and their heavenly city, 13:14).”

5 See Lohse 1974 and especially the chapters in this volume by Joel B. Green, Alec J. Lucas, Edmondo Lupieri, and Thomas H. Tobin.

a fully efficacious and final sacrifice and presents his blood in the tent “that the Lord ... has set up” (8:2). The author of Hebrews clearly views the heavenly sanctuary as superior, but he does not polemicize against the earthly one as illicit. As such, nothing in Hebrews implies that this author considers the earthly sanctuary to be idolatrous like the golden calf.⁶

Broader Proposals for Exodus Golden Calf Traditions and Hebrews

Other more overarching connections have been proposed, including two recent suggestions that the Exodus account of the golden calf story looms large for the argument of Hebrews. Gabriella Gelardini (2005, 2007, and 2011) argues that Hebrews is an example of the *petichta* form of synagogue homily, perhaps originally delivered to Jewish slaves in Rome who had been captured in the second Jewish War. The homily would be preceded by the reading (and paraphrase) of a text from the Pentateuch, drawn from an established lectionary-like reading cycle that determined the passage for a particular Sabbath but still allowed some room for flexibility on the precise parameters of the text read. Gelardini argues that reconstructions of the ancient three-year reading cycle she deems most likely for the NT era indicate that Exod 31:18–32:35 and Jer 31 (LXX 38):31–34 would have been read for a sabbath falling between the fast days of Tammuz 17 and Av 9 (Tisha be-Av). Tammuz 17 is associated in some Jewish traditions with the destruction of the first set of commandment tablets by Moses and later the destruction of the first temple. Av 9 is connected with God’s judgment after the negative report of the spies at Kadesh-barnea, the destruction of the first temple, the destruction of the second temple, and the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt. Gelardini notes that “both fast days, and particularly Av 9 (Tisha be-Av), mark the lowest point in the liturgical calendar, and they are shadow images of its highest point on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement)” (2011, 142).⁷ Her assertion, then is that the author of Hebrews drew on all these texts and interrelated themes (including the Day of Atonement) in order to produce this homily.

Gelardini’s proposal is complex, and any attempt to summarize it is almost certainly an oversimplification. That said, in large part her argument hinges on whether she can identify the Pentateuchal citation in Hebrews that pairs with the later discussion of Jer 31. She finds this in Heb 4:4, where one reads, “For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows, ‘And God rested

6 Compare especially the discussion of Acts 7 elsewhere in this volume by Green, who connects the discussion of the golden calf and the Jerusalem temple in Stephen’s sermon.

7 Compare the discussion of the golden calf story and Jewish liturgy in the chapter in this volume by Deborah Schoenfeld.

on the seventh day from all his works” (NRSV). Most scholars assume this to be a citation of Gen 2:2, but Gelardini offers Exod 31:17b instead, the phrase immediately before the beginning of her proposed Pentateuchal *sidrah* text Exod 31:18–32:25. Admittedly the text claimed by Gelardini is a remembrance of God’s rest after six days of creative work, here discussed in the context of the Sinai command for sabbath observance. The wording of the text in Hebrews, however, matches the Septuagint of Gen 2:2 almost exactly (apart from the insertion of the name of God in Hebrews) whereas the lexical similarities with Exod 31:17b are not strong.⁸

If Gelardini’s approach is correct, then the story of the golden calf from Exodus is absolutely foundational for understanding Hebrews. Her explanation is extremely creative and conversant with ancient Jewish homiletical practices. Yet critical responses to her proposal have included questions about the source of this seventh-day rest citation, the broader lectionary reconstruction, and the relative insignificance of the frequent citations of Ps 110 in her schema.

Another scholar has also argued recently for the influence of the Exodus golden calf account on Hebrews’ thought. In the words of King L. She, “Put simply, Exod 31:18–34:35 is the controlling text to reveal his [i.e., the author of Hebrews’] understanding of apostasy and covenant. The passage also provides a hermeneutical lens for interpreting the work and person of Yahweh as Christ in Hebrews” (2011, 27–28).⁹ Unfortunately She does not provide adequate supporting argumentation for his assertion about the importance of this Exodus passage for Hebrews, as his subsequent discussion of the linkage consists chiefly of a claim that Gelardini’s dissertation “has demonstrated the presence of an intertextual link between Exod 31:18–34:35 and Hebrews” along with observations about the importance of Exod 32–34 for the Pentateuch and the Old Testament story as a whole (She 2011, 28–33, esp. 28). She deduces that the author of Hebrews surely was strongly influenced by the Exodus golden calf account but does not offer any passages in Hebrews that prove a clear link. Instead, the connection is left to the realm of theological inference and depends largely on the assumption that the audience of Hebrews consists of Jewish Christians who commit “idolatry” through syncretized worship (2011, 30). She’s thesis has not found widespread support.

8 Cf. Kibbe 2016, 114 n5, and especially the thorough discussion in Steyn 2011, 196–204.

9 Note that She understands “Yahweh” as the exalted name given to the Son in Heb 1:4.

Deuteronomy Golden Calf Traditions and Hebrews

Yet other scholars have argued that one might find traces of golden calf traditions in Hebrews that are indebted not to Exodus but to Deuteronomy.¹⁰ Two passages in Hebrews offer substantive possibilities.

Hebrews 3:7–4:13

The first of these is Heb 3:7–4:13, where Israel's wilderness generation provides the primary negative example of faithlessness in the book. After the brief comparison of Jesus and Moses in Heb 3:1–6, the author cites Ps 95 (LXX 94):7–11 and credits the quotation to the Holy Spirit:

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors put me to the test, though they had seen my works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and I said, "They always go astray in their hearts, and they have not known my ways." As in my anger I swore, "They will not enter my rest."

HEB 3:7–11, NRSV

The author of Hebrews then does two major things with this passage. First, he utilizes the opening emphasis on "today, if you hear his voice" to exhort his audience to be certain not to follow the faithless example of the wilderness generation (3:12–19). Second, he redefines the meaning of "rest" by interpreting the idea in light of God's rest on the seventh day from all of his works (Gen 2:2 LXX in Heb 4:4). Rest no longer refers simply to settlement in the land of Canaan (Heb 4:8) but instead becomes the ultimate, heavenly, eschatological goal for God's faithful people.

The author has cited Ps 95, but the broader story of judgment after the cautious report of the spies in Num 13–14 seems also to be assumed in the background, sometimes with ideas adapted or supplemented by allusions to other

10 The importance of Deuteronomy overall for Hebrews has received particular attention in recent years; see especially Allen 2008; Steyn 2007; and Kibbe 2016. Note the assessment of Steyn (2007, 152): "Along with Romans, Mark, Matthew, and Luke-Acts, Hebrews is identified as one of the New Testament books that quoted the most from Deuteronomy.... But all of the (suggested) Deuteronomy quotations in Hebrews are short and fragmentary when compared to the same author's quotations from the Psalms and the Prophets." These are factors that help explain the lack of attention in earlier scholarship to the importance of Deuteronomy for Hebrews (Steyn 2007, 164). Kibbe (2016, 134–35) observes: "Hebrews leans more heavily on Deuteronomy than on Exodus. This may be due to several factors, but the simplest is probably that Hebrews is interested in exhorting his audience to 'enter in' rather than 'exit out.'"

texts with related themes.¹¹ The Hebrew version of the psalm references traditional events of disobedience with mention of the place names Meribah and Massah (Ps 95:8), though of course these names also have symbolic meanings of “testing” and “quarreling” beginning with their first appearance in Exod 17:1–7.¹² Those *interpreted* meanings are the thrust of the Septuagint translation and also are vital for the author of Hebrews. Indeed, Craig R. Koester (2006, 264) notes that “the LXX enhances the incident’s exemplary quality by translating rather than transliterating the place-names, so that ... the psalm refers to the ‘rebellion’ and ‘testing’ that characterized the whole wilderness period.”¹³ The Massah and Meribah events appear much earlier in the Pentateuchal narrative than the story of the spies, even before the giving of the law at Sinai, but the psalmist has collapsed these episodes as related expressions of disobedience. The author of Hebrews recognizes this. Ostensibly the “rest” mentioned in the psalm is the successful conquest of Canaan. Even though the author of Hebrews will subsequently reinterpret the meaning of this “rest,” he knows the traditional interpretation and utilizes it in his argumentation; he uses the base-level interpretation of settlement of Canaan and the broad context of Num 13–14 by mentioning Joshua later in his elaboration (4:8) in order to clarify that ultimately he intends a different notion of rest. Also, if the correct translation of the latter part of Heb 4:2 is something like the NRSV’s “they were not united by faith with those who listened,” Hebrews *may* be distinguishing those who fell in the wilderness from the faithful (but here unnamed) Joshua and Caleb.¹⁴ (The author may also have in mind those in his own audience; the wilderness generation had seen God’s works according to 3:9, much like he and they had experienced God’s signs, wonders, various miracles, and gifts of “holy spirit” according to 2:4.)

The author of Hebrews can also be creative with his text. Mention of the forty years in the psalm implies the judgment after the negative report of the spies, but Hebrews recasts those four decades in the quotation to define a lengthy period during which the wilderness generation saw and experienced God’s works. In 3:17 the author shows that he knows the traditional understanding

11 Most scholars agree on the importance of Num 13–14 for this passage. See comments below about Allen’s approach to Hebrews’ use of Deuteronomy and Numbers.

12 On Massah and Meribah traditions, see Propp 1992.

13 Alternately, Thiessen (2007, 357 n17) suggests that the LXX translator was aware that this psalm was used in a festival liturgy and translated in order to fit this usage.

14 Admittedly the Greek wording is ambiguous, and some translate the entire phrase very differently (e.g., as “it [the word] was not joined by faith to the hearers” [Johnson 2006, 123]).

of the forty years, but his creative adaptation in the quotation itself highlights even more the long-term nature of their rebellious response.

The golden calf episode certainly is not mentioned here explicitly, but overtones from this story may be present. One possible place concerns the discussion of rest. The author of Hebrews draws the “rest” language from the psalm quotation, but one should also note God’s promise to provide rest in Exod 33:14 when Moses intercedes for the people after the golden calf incident. Such a connection should be suggested only cautiously, however, because the “rest” in Exod 33:14 is promised to *Moses* in the singular, not to the community as a whole.

More fruitful links to the golden calf story in Hebrews may be found to the version of the story in Deuteronomy. Here I am indebted largely to the work of David M. Allen. Admittedly golden calf traditions are not a major emphasis in his monograph on Hebrews’ use of Deuteronomy (2008), but several of his observations are suggestive for the present study. Golden calf traditions do receive more attention in another publication by Allen (2007) focused on the influence of Deuteronomy specifically on Heb 3:7–4:11, but even there he is more concerned to argue that Hebrews has drawn certain elements from Deuteronomy rather than from Numbers.

Deuteronomy presents a remembrance of the golden calf story as part of Moses’s admonition to Israel before the people cross the Jordan; the calf account is the centerpiece in Moses’s reminder about past episodes of disobedience, providing opportunities to recall briefly also the transgressions at Massah and the report of the spies at Kadesh-barnea, both of which we have seen already in some form in Hebrews’ use of Ps 95. Furthermore, Allen notes that scholars of the Psalms widely recognize the strong influence of Deuteronomy on Ps 95 itself; he observes that the psalm in its entirety “exhibits a demonstrable paraenetic focus and blessing/curse dialectic akin to that which pervades the book of Deuteronomy” (2007, 132). Elsewhere Allen writes, “When considered as a unity, Psalm 95 sets out a quasi-Deuteronomistic choice before assembled Israel. They are summoned to worship before YHWH (95:1–7c), but are warned of the consequences of abusing or disdaining that summons (95:7d–11)” (2007, 135).

Even if mediated by Ps 95, this passage in Hebrews demonstrates influence from Deuteronomy and its version of the golden calf event.¹⁵ Allen, here following Simon John DeVries, notes that Deuteronomy (9:7–8 in the golden calf passage, but also elsewhere), Ps 95, and the author of Hebrews all call for an

15 See Kibbe 2016, 125–27 for discussion of which LXX text is primary for the author of Hebrews.

immediate, present response of faithfulness from their audience despite the disobedience of a long-passed earlier generation, though admittedly the Greek work translated “today” (σήμερον) in the psalm and Hebrews does not appear in Deut 9 (Allen 2007, 140). Both the Israel of Deuteronomy and the audience of Hebrews are addressed in such a way that, according to Allen, “divisions of time are blurred. Their past, future and present are so intertwined that they should not act faithlessly ‘today’ lest they fail to enter the divine rest that lies before them” (2007, 140). Also, he notes that this places the new generation in continuity with the forefathers in all three texts (2007, 140). For Hebrews this can also take a positive form when the author recites the list of the faithful in Heb 11. Similarly, Allen notes that “rest” (κατάπαυσις) is a common theme in Deuteronomy (and also Joshua), there connected with entrance into the land as in the psalm, whereas this motif is absent from Numbers. Admittedly “rest” language does not appear in Deuteronomy’s golden calf passage, but compare Deut 12:8–9 (“for you have not yet come into the rest [κατάπαυσιν] and the possession that the LORD your God is giving you”; Allen 2007, 141–43). Likewise, Allen argues that the language of provocation or rebellion (παραπικραίνω) used in the psalm and picked up by the author of Hebrews is more at home in Deuteronomy than Numbers (2007, 144–47).

Allen’s most striking point for the influence of Deuteronomy’s golden calf passage on Hebrews concerns discussion of another term for disobedience or rebelliousness, ἀπειθέω, that appears in Heb 3:18 but is absent from the psalm citation.¹⁶ As he notes, the idea of faithfulness (πίστις) is key in Heb 3:1–6, where Moses and Jesus are compared and Jesus is deemed superior because he is faithful “over,” not just “in,” God’s house, and the author uses ἀπιστία when he unpacks the implications of the psalm quotation and discusses unfaithfulness (3:12, 19). The use of the word ἀπειθέω in 3:18, however, is not anticipated elsewhere in the context or quotation. Allen notes that this term appears once in Num 14:43, and he downplays its significance for Hebrews’ usage, commenting that it “pertains to the events *after* the rebellion, and not necessarily to the rebellion itself” (2007, 147, emphasis his). I find this partly but not fully correct; the context indeed is of future military failure, but that is to be the consequence of the disobedience related to the negative report of the spies. Still, though, Allen observes that ἀπειθέω is much more common in Deuteronomy, including its discussion of the golden calf event, and that Deuteronomy (rather than Numbers) more likely influences the word choice

¹⁶ The psalm instead uses πειρασμός (“test,” “trial”) and πειράζω (“to try” or “to tempt,” understood here in the sense of wearing on God’s patience) to describe the rebellion. This is retained in the psalm quotation in Heb 3:9.

in Hebrews. In Deut 9:7, immediately before the narration of the calf story, one reads that Israel has “been rebellious [ἀπειθοῦντες] against the LORD from the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place.” Similarly, in Deut 9:23–24, just after Moses has destroyed the calf, one reads that Israel “rebelled [ἠπειθήσατε] against the command of the LORD your God” and has “been rebellious [ἀπειθοῦντες] against the LORD as long as he has known you.” Interestingly, between these comments one also reads that Israel was “neither trusting [οὐκ ἐπιστεύσατε] him nor obeying [οὐκ εἰσακούσατε] him.” The key terms here are from πιστεύω and εἰσακούω, and words related to both are key in Hebrews’ unpacking of the psalm citation.¹⁷ Allen (2007, 147–48) concludes that three correspondences are found here: in both Deuteronomy and Hebrews the rebellion is against God’s word, terms for disobedience and lack of faith are linked, and the offending behavior results from not obeying or hearing God. I find this a convincing case for the influence of Deuteronomy and not just Numbers on Ps 95 and its interpretation in Hebrews, and some of the correspondences indeed are from Deuteronomy’s discussion of the golden calf episode. The resonance with the golden calf tradition is quite subtle but does indeed appear to be present.

Hebrews 12:18–29

The other passage in Hebrews with potential golden calf connections is Heb 12:18–29. Here one finds a contrast between the “destinations” of Mt. Sinai and of Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. The description of Mt. Sinai is brief and reflects influences from various theophany scenes including Exod 19–20 and Deut 4–5. The author of Hebrews writes,

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”)

HEB 12:18–21, NRSV

One widely-acknowledged link to a golden calf passage is found in Heb 12:21, where Moses is quoted as saying “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling”

¹⁷ Hebrews and Ps 95 use forms of ακούω without the εἰς- prefix. These appear in the psalm citation in Heb 3:7, 15; 4:7 and in the interpretation in Heb 3:16; 4:2. See above on ἀπιστία in Hebrews.

(Attridge 1989, 371; NRSV “I tremble with fear”). The reference is to Deut 9:19, which describes Moses’s fear with the Greek ἔκφοβός εἰμι, though Attridge (1989, 374) notes that the author of Hebrews adds the reference to “trembling” (ἐντρομος). That term is used in Acts 7:32 for Moses at the burning bush (but not in the LXX of Exod 3:6) and also appears together with ἔκφοβος in an unrelated context in 1 Macc 13:2.¹⁸ Both Hebrews and Deuteronomy situate the statement in the context of a mountain ablaze (Deut 9:15; Heb 12:18), but whereas in Hebrews Moses is said to be fearful of the mountain scene itself, in Deuteronomy he is fearful that God will destroy Israel because of the golden calf (Allen 2008, 65). One might argue that Hebrews’ use of Deut 9:19 and Moses’s fear says less about intentions to invoke the golden calf scene *per se* than an attempt to pile up fearsome imagery to heighten the impact of the scene. Peter T. O’Brien (2010, 482; following Allen 2008, 65–66) finds more significance, however, stating: “By linking the two theophanies the author has given ‘the Sinai narrative its full parameters’ and recalled ‘the entire old covenant dispensation,’ demonstrating ‘Sinai’s inherent inability to deal with sin in the face of divine judgment.’”

The potential significance of golden calf traditions for this Hebrews passage is increased by the references to fire. The Deuteronomy golden calf account and its remembrance of the Decalogue theophany in Deut 5 include numerous references to fire. Oddly, while naturally fire is mentioned in Exodus when discussing the formation and destruction of the calf, and smoke is referenced several times in the Exodus account of the Decalogue theophany, fire is mentioned only once in the theophany description, in Exod 19:18 where one reads that “the LORD had descended on it [Mt. Sinai] in fire.” Hebrews describes “blazing fire” at Sinai in 12:18.

A few verses later in Heb 12:29 the author writes that “our God is a consuming fire.” God is described as such in Exod 24:17 but also in Deut 4:24 and 9:3; the Hebrew is the same in all three passages (אשׁ אכלת), but the LXX of the two Deuteronomy passages fits Hebrews’ wording more closely (ὁ θεος ... πῦρ

18 The people have fear (without the *ex-* prefix) at the Sinai theophany in Exod 20:18 LXX. Johnson (2006, 330) notes that ἔκφοβος appears in judgment contexts in Heb 10:27 and 10:31. Some scholars point to the connection of the language of fear and trembling in *b. Šabb.* 88b, where Moses is said to fear the angels of Sinai, but see the critique of this approach in Kibbe 2016, 200–201, along with a lengthy bibliography of scholars who find here a reference to Deut 9:19. Note also Kibbe’s caution against reading “fear” as negative in Hebrews since the author elsewhere (e.g., 4:1; cf. 12:28) calls upon his audience to display fear or reverence (2016, 190–91).

καταναλίσκον).¹⁹ In Deut 9:3, shortly before Deuteronomy's discussion of the golden calf, this statement concerns God's promise to act on behalf of Israel when the people cross the Jordan River to begin the conquest. Interestingly, Deut 4:24 might provide a better narrative parallel, as there Moses warns Israel not to forget the covenant and embrace idolatry after it has crossed the Jordan. If, however, we may assume that the author of Hebrews has evoked golden calf imagery with his mention of Moses's *fear* at Mt. Sinai, then it also seems reasonable that this final statement about God as consuming *fire* recalls Deut 4's warnings about covenant and covenant breaking (and thus ultimately points to the subsequent idolatry of the golden calf). This is especially the case since this statement concludes the author's exhortation that began in Heb 12:25 with a call not to refuse God who speaks, punctuated with a "how much more" warning about the judgment on those who rejected God when speaking from earth—and the even more dire situation of those who reject God who speaks from heaven. (This resonates with the earlier discussion of Heb 3:7–4:13.) Also, one should remember that the repetition of the language in Deut 4:24 and 9:3 is itself intentional. Allen (2008, 65) argues that the author of Hebrews does indeed evoke implicitly the golden calf incident here. In addition, he links this passage with the warnings of Heb 10:26–31 against those who sin willfully despite having knowledge of the truth, which he finds similar to Moses's condemnation of Israel in Deut 9:16: "Then I saw that you had indeed sinned against the LORD your God, by casting for yourselves an image of a calf; you had been quick to turn from the way that the LORD had commanded you" (NRSV). Though one might find that correspondence vague, still the thrust of his conclusion is valid. It is therefore probable that the author has consciously evoked a golden calf context in Heb 12:18–29, even if it is not the overriding motif.

My conclusion here is cautious, but Michael Kibbe (2016, 201–12) has recently offered an intriguing and much more fulsome explanation for why the author of Hebrews incorporates the reference to Moses's trembling (Deut 9:19) in Heb 12:21.²⁰ According to Kibbe, very few scholars have raised the question of why Hebrews has utilized this calf-related language in a description of Sinai that otherwise seems indebted to accounts of the people's earlier call for Moses to mediate between them and the fearsome God in Exod 19–20 and Deut 4–5. Kibbe argues that Hebrews' combination of these traditions melds

19 See Attridge 1989, 383. Allen (2008, 66–68) and Steyn (2007, 163) note the verbal similarities with both Deuteronomy texts; Kibbe (2016, 199 n72) argues for Deut 4:24 as the more likely source.

20 For Kibbe (2016, 203), "The golden calf plays a lesser role in Hebrews than it does in Deuteronomy; in fact, Heb 12:21 contains the only allusion to that event in the whole letter."

themes of Moses as the covenant mediator and Israel's subsequent disobedience; in the process it effectively fosters a modified version of the kind of "Mosaic discourse" (as developed by Hindy Najman in several publications, including Najman 2003 and 2010) present from Deuteronomy through various texts in Second Temple Jewish literature. The major thrust is that Hebrews does so to present Jesus (not Moses) as the ultimate covenant mediator: the letter's audience must not prove unfaithful to Jesus's message like the ancients who requested a mediator with God but then so quickly violated the Sinai pact with their idolatrous behavior. For Hebrews, Moses now trembles in fear *alongside* the people, whereas Jesus is the true mediator who can facilitate a direct encounter with God.

Closing Reflections

If we may conclude that Hebrews utilizes language from Deuteronomy's golden calf account in two key passages in the epistle, the next step admittedly is a speculative one, asking why the author has done so in such a muted way rather than utilizing the story more explicitly. The author certainly has no hesitation to highlight examples of unfaithfulness from Israel's history, though he consistently finds examples of faithfulness there too. We have noted above the role of Aaron in Hebrews and the absence of any critique of his priestly acts. Could the author of Hebrews have determined that any explicit discussion of the golden calf episode would detract from his presentation of the superiority of Jesus's priesthood over that of Aaron's descendants because it would force him to criticize Aaron in a way not conducive for his argument?

Furthermore, perhaps the author's use of the unfaithfulness and subsequent judgment at the time of the spies rather than the golden calf incident better fits the pastoral situation at hand. He addresses friends who have been faithful in the past but after the passing of time now are floundering; his urgent plea is that faithfulness must continue or else they might reach a point at which faith may not be renewed. Certainly some Israelites meet their end in the wake of the golden calf incident in the Pentateuch, but the people as a group move on toward their wilderness journeys with entrance into Canaan still the expected result. In contrast, God's judgment at the time of the spies is more stark and final—even if death does not come immediately, it is certain for virtually everyone, and the wilderness generation lives out the rest of its days with the assured fate of falling short of God's intended destination.²¹

21 As noted earlier, Hebrews does not specify Joshua and Caleb as exceptions to the punishment of exclusion from Canaan, though some interpreters infer that from Heb 4:2.

Moses can mediate for mercy after the golden calf incident and the majority of the people get another chance, but there is no such pardon for the unfaithful decision of accepting the negative report of the spies. God's judgment is final and irrevocable, and likewise Hebrews argues that one who falls away from faithfulness to Christ cannot be restored (6:4–6).

We can only speculate about the author's intentions and omissions, but we can observe that allusions to and one short quotation from the golden calf episode in Hebrews serve to highlight discussions of disobedience or heighten the fearsome aura in passages intended to call the audience to faithful commitment. Thus this pastorally-minded author sprinkles traces of the golden calf in two key passages with hope that his audience will not later have to taste God's bitter judgment.

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A Beast and a Woman in the Desert, or the Sin of Israel: A Typological Reflection

Edmondo Lupieri

Creative reappropriation of what we now call authoritative religious traditions was widespread in Second Temple Judaism and left a wealth of evidence in a large number of Hellenistic Jewish works, both canonical and noncanonical texts (Weissenberg, Pakkala, and Marttila 2011). Although determining how self-conscious the various authors were of the fact that they were actually re-writing Scripture is no easy task, the phenomenon appears in various manifestations. It may be seen, for example, in the rewriting of salvation history or of some of its key episodes, in the actualization of prophecies in the *pesharim* of Qumran, and in the writings of the early followers of Jesus.¹ Halachic exegesis of biblical passages as well as the explicit correction, or even denial, of older traditions (especially prophetic or apocalyptic ones) also comprise a part of this phenomenon.²

In the general process of reappropriation of authoritative traditions, the (golden) calf incident was an object of attention for Second Temple Jewish thinkers because it offered an answer to the question: what was *the* sin that the Jews committed to deserve God's punishment(s)?³ After 70 CE, this question

- 1 Examples of the first of these range from the Enochic literature and *Jubilees* to Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*. Entire books of the Bible are "actualized" in Qumran (e.g., the whole text of Habakkuk in 1QpHab). Among the early followers of Jesus a similar technique is quite common, though we can find it usually restricted to single verses or short passages (e.g., the adaptation of Joel 3:1–5 in Acts 2:16–21).
- 2 "Halachic exegesis" is a subtle way of adapting old ideas or texts, and especially old rules, to new situations on the basis of shared keywords found in diverse contexts. These are sufficient, in rabbinic and subsequent literature, to work as a conceptually meaningful string (e.g., the apparently simple words, "you will not carry"). When one finds similar strings of words, one can expect an exegetical reformulation of an older rule. See Jassen 2011 and Lupieri 2011. For an example of exegetical correction, see, e.g., the sentence containing "your brother Daniel" in 4 *Ezra* 12:11–12. See also how the author of Dan 9 moves from the seventy years of Jeremiah, explicitly quoted, to develop his own seventy weeks of years (Grabbe 1987). For an example of exegetical denial, see, e.g., "not as Moses said" in *Ap. John* 13:18–20; 22:22–24; 23:1–3; 29:7. Apparently this was a literary device to strengthen group identity (see Creech 2017).
- 3 Psalm 106 (LXX 105) lists seven sins committed by the Jews before entering the land, the (golden) calf incident being the fourth and central one. The sin of Judah and his brothers,

became a sort of Jewish obsession because it was tightly connected to the personal identity of whomever wanted to consider himself or herself a Jew.⁴ Some even found the narrative of the (golden) calf to be a particularly suitable answer because one of the results of the idolatry committed by the people and Aaron in the desert, the breaking of the tablets of the law by Moses, dramatically disrupted their covenant with God. In their writing, the rabbis show an awareness of this disruption, as do the church fathers.⁵ The tradition is lively and well attested for centuries. For example, in his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, Aquinas quotes Jerome's statement that the Jews used to fast in sad memory of the sinful behavior of their ancestors in the desert.⁶ As usual, Jerome is correct—fasting and sadness on the presumed anniversary of the breaking of the tablets are present both in the Mishnah and in the Talmud.⁷

In post-talmudic traditions (which probably date from the eighth century CE) we also find that observant Jews were expected to fast in sad memory of the writing of the Septuagint. Interestingly, the act of translating the Bible into Greek is compared to the idolatrous making of the calf: "It happened once that

when they sold Joseph (see esp. Gen 37:26–27), was an important, different option. According to *Jub.* 34:18–19, the ritual of Yom Kippur was established to counter the negative effects of that unpardoned patriarchal sin. Pseudo-Philo's *L.A.B.* connects the two sins literally and compares Moses and Joseph. See Endres in this volume, and, in general, Smolar and Aberbach 1968.

- 4 See how post-70 "Ezra" discusses with the angel of God during practically the whole of *4 Ezra*.
- 5 That this was a key issue in anti-Jewish Christian polemics is apparent at least since the *Didascalia Apostolorum*. See the contributions by Pregill, Sterling, and Dingman in this volume.
- 6 *Commentary on the Sentences*, Book IV, Dist. 15, *Quaestio* 3 (*Concerning Fasting*), Art. 3, Response to the fourth objection: "To the fourth point we must say that according to Jerome, the Jews had special reasons to observe those fasting days. Indeed, in July, which is the fourth month from April (and April is first in their calendar), they used to fast because in that month, on the seventh day of the month, Moses, coming down from the mountain, smashed the tablets of the law on account of the sin of the molten calf and [because] in that same month the walls of Jerusalem were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar" (author's translation; for the Latin, see the 1947 Moos edition, 4.718). Jerome writes, "The fast of the fourth month, which is called 'Julius' [July] by the Latins, on the seventeenth day of that month, [the Jews] believe [to be the day] when Moses, coming down from Mount Sinai, threw down and smashed the tablets of the law; and also according to Jeremiah the walls of the city were destroyed for the first time [on that day]" (*Comm. Zach.* 2.8.18–19, 530–534 [author's translation; for the Latin, see the 1964 Adriaen edition, 820]).
- 7 *m. Ta'an.* 4, 6; *b. Ta'an.* 28b. For Jewish and particularly rabbinic reflections on the (golden) calf incident, see Schoenfeld in this volume, who shows that while Christian authors stress their opinion that God did not pardon the sin of the Jews, Jewish interpreters stress the mercy of God and his willingness to pardon his people.

five elders wrote the Torah for King Ptolemy in Greek and that day was a hard one for Israel as the day on which the calf was made, since possibly the Torah was not translated with due accuracy.”⁸

The trend we are detecting is that transgression of any covenant with God becomes analogous or at least comparable to the making of the calf. Another likely example of this analogy is in a passage from Greek Jeremiah when compared to the Hebrew. In Jer 34:18 MT, YHWH says: “The men who violated my covenant ... I will make [like] the calf which they cut in two, between whose two parts they passed” (NAB 1970 modified). That is, the people, who had recently made a covenant of renewal with God, would similarly be destroyed and torn into pieces, massacred and devoured by birds and beasts, or taken into exile because they reneged on it (34:16, 19–21). Here the punishment is a kind of *contrapasso* for the sin. The precise legal function of the covenant-making ritual was to stipulate that whoever broke the pact would be broken into two, just like the sacrificial animals.⁹ Hebrew Jeremiah, then, refers to a sacrificed, covenant-making calf, not to the (golden) calf of Exodus.¹⁰ The calf is a sacrifice, not an idol to which sacrifices are offered.

In the parallel LXX account (Jer 41:18), though, a literal translation of the Greek reads, “I [i.e., YHWH] will give those men who transgressed ... [to be like] the calf they made in order to work for [or ‘serve’] him.” The phrase “the calf they made” (τὸν μόσχον ὃν ἐποίησαν) is identical to Exod 32:20 LXX. The “covenant” made at the time of Jeremiah thus becomes implicitly analogous to the (more famous) covenant made at the time of Moses. In so doing, Greek Jeremiah keeps the basic idea of a *contrapasso* punishment, but connects the fact that the covenant-breaking Jews will be devoured by birds and beasts to the destiny of the (golden) calf, which Moses ordered the Jews to ingest after it had been “ground to powder” (Exod 32:20 NRSV).¹¹

8 *Soferim* 1.7. Translation from Emmanuel Tov (2005, 386), adapted using Corrado Martone’s (2012, 32) Italian translation. Note that Tov, like many others, feels the need to add the word “golden,” which is not in the text, to “calf.” Martone, however, translates the passage more literally, indicating that “golden” (“d’oro”) is not in the Hebrew by placing it in parenthesis.

9 This may explain the punishment of the unfaithful servant in Luke 12:46//Matt 24:51: “[The lord of that slave] will cut him into two.” If the unfaithful servant in the parable represents the Jewish authorities, this explains the unusual cruelty of the punishment: whoever breaks the covenant will be split into two (and “his part” will be among the “unbelievers” [Luke] or the “hypocrites” [Matthew]). See Friedrichsen 2001.

10 The Hebrew text of this verse does not survive in copies of Jeremiah from Qumran (see Ulrich 2010, 578).

11 Not so in Deut 9:1, where the golden dust is thrown into a stream.

In addition to making the calf, breaking the tablets of the law, and grinding the idol into powder, at least one other element of the scriptural narrative was subjected to further reflections: the ambiguous—if not sinful—behavior of Aaron. I suspect Aaron's failure in the desert might have played some role in originating mistrust of the priestly class among some sectarian Jews, as well as among some of the followers of Jesus. All this is hypothetical, but an explicit critique of Aaron, possibly echoing Jewish anti-priestly polemical attitudes strengthened after 70 CE, surfaces in Pseudo-Clement. In his interpretation of Jewish and Christian history of salvation, the author constructs a *syzygia*, the opposite poles of which are the negative figure of Aaron and the positive figure of Moses.¹² On the other side, we have patristic interpretations that excuse the high priest: Aaron did not really sin because by taking away the golden earrings of the women and girls, he taught them modesty. Indeed, jewels are devilish instruments of idolatry.¹³

From all this, we can conclude that reflections on various elements of the (golden) calf narrative were quite common and became attested as a *locus communis* in Jewish and Christian contexts.¹⁴ Towards the end of the first century CE, the narrative would have been accessible to the author of Revelation in different Jewish scriptural texts and traditions, especially in the books that would become canonical in the following centuries.¹⁵ Given John's extended rewriting of those scriptural books, even without explicit quotations, it is not

12 *Hom.* 2.16 (cf. 33 and 52). The text shows strong anti-priestly sentiments when it stresses that Jesus, with the water of baptism, came to extinguish the fire of sacrifices that the high priest had lit (*Recog.* 2.48). The word *syzygia*, which originally designated a yoke of animals and which is commonly used in gnostic texts to describe a pair of spiritual entities emanated together in the divine world, here means a pair of two opposed figures in the history of salvation.

13 That jewelry is created under the teaching of Azazel, the chief of the fallen angels, is already stated in *1 En.* 8:1. In the canonical Bible, criticism of ornaments comes as early as Isa 3:18–23 and will be stressed, at least on a symbolical level, in Rev 17:4 (under the influence of Ezek 16:10–13). For this kind of patristic condemnation of Aaron, see Dingman in this volume. Sometimes the old technique of excusing Aaron is simply a loud silence on the (golden) calf incident. See, e.g., Sirach's reconstruction of the whole history of salvation. In Sir 45, where the figures of Moses (vv. 1–5), Aaron (vv. 6–22), and Phinehas (vv. 23–26) are exalted, in spite of the length of the passage dedicated to Aaron, no mention is made of the (golden) calf or of Aaron's behavior. See also Sterling in this volume for Josephus's similar solution. Some Jewish traditions appear to take a different interpretive way: Aaron used the gold of the *men*, not of women (see Schoenfeld in this volume). See also Smolar and Aberbach 1968.

14 For its presence in the Qur'an and in Islamic traditions, see Pregill in this volume.

15 For the reworking of the tradition in Nehemiah and Ps 106, see Bautch in this volume; for its possible echoes in *1 Enoch*, see the contribution by Assefa and Coblentz Bautch.

unthinkable that he also reused and adapted images and ideas derived from the scriptural narrative about the (golden) calf.¹⁶

The Calf and God, or the Calf as God

The animal we are talking about is not properly a cow, bull, ox, or steer, but a calf, a μόσχος in the Greek of the Septuagint (Exod 32:4). It is not so clear why this specific terminology was chosen, and not the more typical ταῦρος (“bull” or “ox”), or the still more generic βοῦς (“head of cattle”). The existing Hellenistic tradition of describing the god Apis from Egyptian theriolatry as a μόσχος, though, may have influenced the Jewish translators.¹⁷ In Hellenistic Jewish traditions, however, we also find that the calf (μόσχος, Ezek 1:10 LXX; the MT has שׁוֹר, “ox”) is one of the four “living beings” or “animals” (MT חַיִּיּוֹת; LXX ζῴα), which significantly are not described as “beasts” (θηρία), even if they are composite. This somehow divine Jewish “animal” or “living being” can be interpreted from a double perspective. From below, it is (one of) the highest possible angelic figure(s). From above, it is (one of) the first manifestation(s) of God.¹⁸

It is significant for our discussion that in pre-modern texts the calf is not usually described as “golden,” even though it is made of gold. Instead, when a

16 The whole text of Revelation is a sort of collage of allusions and echoes, if not always of explicit quotations, of scriptural texts, both biblical and non-biblical. For the reuse of Daniel, see, e.g., the case discussed in n. 30; for 1 *Enoch*, see, e. g., the reinterpretation of 1 *En.* 100:3 in Rev 14:20, and comments in Lupieri 2006, 232. For definitions of the terms “quotation,” “allusion,” and “echo,” see Hays 1989.

17 Herodotus says that Apis, the god (θεός) of the Egyptians, is a calf (μόσχος; *Hist.* 3.27–28). Philo qualifies the golden calf (ὁ χρυσοῦς μόσχος) as the cultic image of the Egyptians (τὸ Αἰγυπτίων ἀφιδρυμα; *Post.* 158) or as the Egyptians’ delusion (τὸν Αἰγυπτιακὸν τῦφον; *Fug.* 90). Elsewhere, however, Philo refers both to the golden calf and to the Egyptian god as a ταῦρος (in different contexts: *Mos.* 2.162, 270; see Tobin in this volume). Philo appears not to use the name Apis. A direct connection between the (golden) calf and Apis is attested in polemical texts like Pseudo-Clement, *Recog.* 1.35, where the attention to its “head” is possibly to be connected with the legend that a golden ass’s head was worshiped in the temple of Jerusalem (see Sterling in this volume; see also the passage of Augustine quoted in n. 43 and discussed by Dingman in this volume).

18 In Revelation, John describes the “four living beings [ζῴα],” including “the second ... similar to a calf” (ὁμοιον μόσχῳ) in 4:6–7. The tetramorphic manifestation of God, possibly connected with the Tetragrammaton, was later notoriously Christianized by Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.11.8) to represent the four Gospels, and the calf, often understood as a bull or ox, became the spiritual symbol of the Gospel of Luke because of its priestly and sacrificial dimensions.

descriptor is present, it is mostly “molten” or “cast.”¹⁹ The importance of melting gold to cast an idol is explicable from Herodotus’s narrative (*Hist.* 2.172) about the “golden washbasin” of the Egyptian king Amasis (i.e., Pharaoh Ahmose II, 570–526 BCE). Briefly, Amasis owned a massive gold vase, which had been put to base uses during banquets (as a basin for washing guests’ feet but also for vomiting and urinating) before he decided to have it broken, melted, and cast into an idol that was subsequently considered a god and the object of a specific cult. Herodotus’s story was well known and was eventually employed in Christian polemical attacks against idolatry.²⁰ Its usefulness in these contexts is understandable. Christian apologists (and their Jewish colleagues) usually avoided mentioning the narrative of the (golden) calf in anti-pagan apologetics so as not to remind adversaries of their own idolatries. It was easier and handier to employ Amasis’s molten idol than the biblical molten calf.

Finally, even if today we regularly refer to the idol made by the Israelites in the desert as “the golden calf” (and not as “the molten calf”), the fact that the idol was cast was a key element in the narratives because being cast, obviously by humans, makes the idol definitely χειροποίητος, that is, “made by (human) hands.”²¹ This is a characteristic of all idols, as objects of idolatry, and is opposed to anything ἀχειροποίητος, that is, “not made by (human) hands.” The idea, thanks also to the use of χειροποίητος, appears in Stephen’s emblematic speech in Acts 7. He charges the temple of Jerusalem with being merely a human production shortly after reminding his audience of their ancestors’ sin with the calf: “They made the calf [ἐμοσχοποίησαν] ... and felt joy [εὐφραίνοντο] in the works of their hands [ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν] ... But the Most High does not dwell in the works of hands [ἐν χειροποιήτοις]” (7:41, 48).²² According to the radical position personified by Stephen in Acts, the earthly temple of Solomon (or, at least, the one rebuilt by Herod) is like the calf and

19 See Exodus 32 and Deut 9, as well as Neh 9:18. Aquinas, quoted in n. 6, uses *conflatilis* (“cast”), because this is the adjective used by the Vulgate for the calf (as in Exod 32) and, in general, for the idols (as in Exod 34:17 and Lev 19:4).

20 The story exists in various versions and is alluded to also by Plutarch, *Sept. sap. conv.* 6. For Christian usage, see for example Athenagoras, *Leg.* 26.5, and Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 22.3.

21 It was normally accepted that being cast in gold made the god or idol more desirable to humans. (For Philo, *Spec.* 1.21, see Tobin’s contribution in this volume; see also *Apoc. Ab.* 6:7, where a god is “more venerable ... because he is made of gold.”) This element, though, is secondary in our discussions.

22 The coinage of the verb μοσχοποιεῖν, “to make a calf,” demonstrates the importance and diffusion of the idea. We would not have the verb “to google” if there were no use of Google.

like the temples of the Gentiles in Athens.²³ The very use of the terminology typically and largely employed in anti-idolatry polemical discussions (like ἄ/χειροποίητος and derived terms) strongly connects our passage to that polemical context.²⁴ Once again, as we saw above with the writing of the Septuagint and with Greek Jeremiah, elements of Jewish religious life deemed improper could be compared to the making of the calf and consequently be directly or indirectly connected to the sin of idolatry.

Worshipping an Image of a Beast

Revelation repeatedly mentions the image (εἰκών) of the beast (13:14–15).²⁵ It is comparable to the image of the calf as an object of worship.²⁶ In Revelation, what is improperly worshiped is not a ζῷον, an “animal” or “living being” associated with life and God, but a θηρίον, a “beast” associated with death and Satan, an association probably due to John’s use of Daniel.²⁷ Thanks also to the quasi-universal theriolatry described in Revelation, the beast is for John a spiritual reality far removed from any of the four animals or living beings who stand by God.²⁸ John’s beast, that is, the one coming out of the sea (13:1), has another peculiar aspect: it is not simply a calf or an eagle, but a conglomeration of all the beastly features of the four empires of Daniel.²⁹

23 These are the words of Paul in Acts 17:24: “The God ... who is lord of heaven and earth does not live in temples made by (human) hands [ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς].” For the criticism of idolatry in these two passages of Acts, see the contribution by Green in this volume. For similar positions in Hebrews, see Heb 3:7–19 (which mentions the rebellion in the desert, derived from Ps 95 [LXX 94]:7–11); 5:1–10; 7:18; 8:5; 9:1–12 (with the opposition between the “worldly temple” and the “greater and more perfect tent, not made by [human] hands”); and 9:23–28. See Mason’s discussion in this volume.

24 For which see esp. Wis 13:10 and 15:16 with Ps 115:4 MT (LXX 113:12); see Clark 1973, 93–94; Gilbert 1973, 81–83 and *passim*.

25 Cf. 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4.

26 For the use of “image” for the calf, see Ps 106:20 MT (LXX 105:20 uses ὁμοίωμα μόσχου, “similitude of a calf”; cf. Ezek 1:5 LXX).

27 See n. 29 and Lupieri 2006, 201–2.

28 Something similar also happens in the almost contemporary 4 Ezra 11–12. Traditionally, the lion and the eagle are two of the four ζῷα close to God, but in 4 Ezra the eagle becomes the image of the imperial enemy, while the lion remains a positive (messianic) figure. For the positive dimension of the lion in Revelation, although explained as a lamb, see Rev 5:5–6.

29 The first beast described by John in Rev 13:1–2 is a conflation of the major elements of the four beasts of Dan 7. “Ten horns,” “seven heads,” “leopard,” “bear,” and “lion” all come from Dan 7. The seven heads are the sum of the four heads of the third beast in Dan 7:6 and the heads of the remaining three beasts. For lack of better terminology, composite

A second beast comes out of the earth (Rev 13:11) and has strong priestly and prophetic attributes. Like the pseudo-prophet, this beast enjoys perverted religious qualities and organizes the cult for the “image” of the first beast. The exegetical hypothesis I accept for Revelation is that the sin of Aaron becomes the sin of the entire Jewish priesthood and its religious life, inasmuch as the “pseudo-Jews” of Revelation failed to recognize that Jesus is the exalted figure his true followers are “witnessing” (Rev 2:9; 3:9).³⁰ That is, like Aaron in the desert, Jewish religious authorities have spiritually betrayed their function; consequently, whatever they do degenerates into the organization of an idolatrous cult of a beast, in this case “*the beast*.” Therefore, they collectively act not as legitimate prophets, but as a pseudo-prophet. In this construct, Jewish religiosity that does not accept Jesus as the Messiah becomes in all of its priestly and cultic life *a beast* trying to convince all of humanity to adore *the beast*. In this way Israel, sinning because of its non-belief in the Messiah, becomes spiritually pagan, adopting the very nature of paganism and fully betraying its intended function in the history of salvation as planned by God. John thus opens wide the door for Christian supersessionism.³¹

Sex in the Desert?

The orgiastic, or at least explicitly sexual, dimension of Greco-Roman forms of religiosity, both public and mystery related, was well known and must have had an impact on the way believers in Jesus and the other Jews looked at the

monsters and figures that appear in apocalyptic literature reporting visions are now called “angelomorphic” entities. (For the concept and its usefulness in scholarly discussions, see Stuckenbruck 1995 and Gieschen 1998, esp. 27–28.)

30 For the μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ as testimony *of* and *to* Jesus, see esp. Rev 1:9 and 2:13. That the second beast should represent the degeneration of the Jewish priesthood, was already defended in the past (Corsini 1980, 355–58; 2002, 259–71). It could also be representative of adversaries of John from among the early followers of Jesus (Tripaldi 2012). This second hypothesis does not exclude the first one and is not impossible, since, according to John, there are also among the self-styled followers of Jesus pseudo-prophets like Jezebel, and their sin is likewise idolatry, as proven by the consumption of εἰδωλόθυτα (Lupieri 2015, 303–5). If this reasoning (according to which the second beast is a Jewish or/and a Jewish-Christian reality) holds water, then “the earth” out of which the second beast comes (γῆ in Rev 13:11) may be interpreted and translated as “the land (of Israel).”

31 By the end of the first century CE, this was by no means an isolated case among the followers of Jesus; in other texts, though, the “substitution” of the old by the new religious reality was depicted in a more conciliatory tone, as seen, as an example, with the stress of Acts 6:7 on the large number of priests joining the Jesus movement in Jerusalem (a scenario difficult to imagine in the context of Revelation or even Matthew).

religion of the majority around them.³² Famously, Paul in Rom 1:22–27 directly connects idolatry and sexual immorality (Barton 2007; MacDonald 2007).

The sin in the desert with the (golden) calf also had some kind of “sexual” dimension already in Exodus since the text of the biblical narrative can be understood as describing an orgiastic, idolatrous form of cult.³³ The sexual dimension of the sin was so “obvious” that it became quite normal in later rabbinic interpretations.³⁴ It was destined for constant artistic reproduction, especially in post-medieval Western iconographic renditions of the biblical narrative. At least since the Renaissance, imagery depicting immoral sexual licentiousness occupies the foreground in scores of paintings, while the calf in some cases is relegated to the background.³⁵

Even if the “breathless form of a dead image [εἰκὼν]” is the object of “desire” (expressed with the verb ποθέω) in Wis 15:4–5, the above-mentioned traditions expect the sexual activity to be among idolatrous humans, in our case among the sinning Jews, and not directly between humans and the idol (or the divine entity represented by it). Nevertheless, pagan Hellenistic narratives of gods and goddesses having sex with humans were extremely common and well known, even among people of low culture. One did not need to study Homer

32 For the public sexual dimension of Greek religiosity, it is sufficient to mention the Phallophorai in Athens and elsewhere (Keuls 1985) and the ithyphallic herms at almost every crossroad. For the mysteries, as late as 391 CE, Theophilus of Alexandria's publicly ridicule of secret pagan ritual objects bearing clear sexual meaning caused popular riots and clashes between pagans and Christians in the context of the destruction of the Serapeum and other pagan religious sites in the city. It is worth noticing that on that occasion precious idols and pagan ritual objects were molten into vases and utensils to be used by the church in Alexandria (Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 16).

33 Exodus 32:5–6 seems to imply an orgiastic dimension of the festival (and Paul interpreted it precisely in terms of ἐπιθυμία, possibly on the basis of Ps 105:14 LXX, in 1 Cor 10:7–8). See the discussions by Viviano and Sterling in this volume. The connection of idolatry with πορνεία is traditional: classical OT texts, e.g., are Exod 34:15–16; Num 25:1–2; 1 Kgs 11:1–10; Wis 14:12; see also *T. Reu.* 4:6–7; Ps.-Philo, *L.A.B.* 18:13–14. In the NT, e.g., Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Rom 2:22; Col 3:5; 1 Pet 4:3; and finally Rev 2:14, 20; 9:20–21.

34 See Schoenfeld in this volume.

35 See especially the depictions of the scene by van Leyden (*The Adoration of the Golden Calf*, ca. 1530; www.artbible.info/images/aanbidding_goudenkalft_grt.jpg), Tintoretto (*The Worship of the Golden Calf*, ca. 1560; www.artsy.net/artwork/jacopo-tintoretto-the-worship-of-the-golden-calf), Pynas (*The Adoration of the Golden Calf*, early 17th century; www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/paintings/the-adoration-of-the-golden-calf-122686/), Lorrain (*The Adoration of the Golden Calf*, 1660; www.artfund.org/supporting-museums/art-weve-helped-buy/artwork/4658/the-adoration-of-the-golden-calf-claude-lorraine), and Steen (*The Worship of the Golden Calf*, ca. 1673–77; uploads7.wikiart.org/images/jan-steen/worship-of-golden-calf-1677.jpg), up to Emil Nolde's *Dance around the Golden Calf* (1910; www.wikiart.org/en/emil-nolde/dance-around-the-golden-calf-1910).

and Hesiod to be aware of the intense sex lives of pagan deities; one merely had to look in virtually any temple in any town or city. Therefore, the idea that sexual activity between humans and gods was possible and that it had actually taken place in the mythical past was traditionally accepted and believed by most non-Jews.

Furthermore, the Jews had a very similar mythological complex in their own scriptural traditions. The so-called sin of the angels (or Watchers), developed especially in the books of Enoch, functioned as an alternative to the sin of Adam, which appears mostly in the book of Genesis. In their rebellion against God and his laws, the sinning angels of *1 Enoch* wanted to have sex with women “in order to defile themselves with their impurity.”³⁶ Other passages simply state that the angels (the “sons of God”) wanted to have sex with women (the “daughters of man”) because these “were beautiful” (Gen 6:2; *1 En.* 6:1–2). Whatever the motivation, in this narrative we find superior spiritual entities craving sex with inferior, fleshly human creatures. The analogy with pagan lore becomes even stronger when we think that it was quite normal among the Jews (and the early followers of Jesus) to consider the pagans’ gods to be devils, fallen angels, or their offspring.

Revelation shares in the mythological-scriptural background of the Enochic traditions. An example of this is the depiction of one-third of the heavenly host of stars being thrown down to the earth by the red dragon (Rev 12:4).³⁷

36 Emphasis mine. While the Ethiopic of *1 En.* 10:11 says: “Make known to ... the ones ... who fornicated [or “united”] with the women, that they will die [or “corrupt”] with them in all their defilement” (Isaac in *OTP* 1:18), the Greek by Syncellus says that the angels had sex with the women “in order to get contaminated through them with their impurity” (τοῦ μιανθῆναι ἐν αὐταῖς ἐν ἀκαθαρσίᾳ αὐτῶν; Charles 1912, Appendix 1, 286), which seems supported by the Aramaic fragment of 4Q202, col. iv: “Tel[l] Shem[ihaza]h and a[l]l his [friends] who associated with [women to be defiled by them in their uncleanness that] their sons ...” (transl. García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1997, 407). Apparently, the Ethiopic misunderstood the original.

37 In the Jewish apocalyptic context, stars are spiritual and angelomorphic entities, and, especially in the case of the seven planets of antiquity (which include the sun and the moon), negative. The seven planets, as *protocists* (the entities which God created first), were also the first to rebel against God’s will. They were not only possibly the major gods and goddesses of the Hellenistic pantheon, but, since the sun and the moon serve as the foundation for the way humans calculate time on earth, they were also responsible for the irregularity of the 365-1/4-day solar calendar and its incompatibility with the 354-day lunar calendar. They were thus clear signs of the disorder that their rebellion had introduced into God’s creation. All this was not really a symbolic way of thinking, but a way of developing a scientific explanation for natural phenomena (Lupieri 1990, 385–96; 2006, 26–29, 192–93). Also in the classical, non-Jewish world of antiquity, the spiritual or divine nature of the celestial bodies was generally recognized and only a few philosophers dared to deny it. They were therefore accused of atheism, as demonstrated already by the

The dragon is for John both Satan and the snake responsible for the ancestral sin of the first humans (Rev 12:9).³⁸ If the sinful angels wanted to defile themselves with women, the holy ones did not. Similarly, sinful men were expected to live a disorderly sexual life, while the “one hundred forty-four thousands ... who have not defiled themselves with women” (Rev 14:1–4) are the “immaculate” army (14:5) of the Lamb, the holy human counterparts of the fallen angels (Yarbro Collins 1987, 89).³⁹ Theirs is the correct male human behavioral response to the sin of the angels. They not only refuse sexual relationships with the angels, but also conduct an irreprehensible, immaculate life, avoiding sexual contact with female humans.

The importance of this mythological framework among groups of early followers of Jesus may be the origin of the explanation of the sin of the Sodomites (Gen 19) that we find in Jude 7. I think that Jude implies that the sinful Sodomites correctly understood the angelic, non-human nature of Lot's guests and so wanted to have sex with them, but they wrongly presupposed that those aliens visiting humans on earth must be rebellious angels or possibly pagan gods. Hypothetically, Jude could have written that the Sodomites went after “the same kind of flesh” (ὁμῆ σάρξ) or after “similar flesh” (ὁμοία σάρξ), but he did not. Instead, he wrote that they went after “ἑτέρα σάρξ” (“a different flesh”), that is, flesh different from theirs since it was not human.⁴⁰ Therefore, their sin is idolatry, from which the 144 chiliads of Revelation are fully exempt.

persecution of Anaxagoras (Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives* 2.9, 12), an accusation which would lead to capital punishment under Roman law, as shown in the *Acta Alexandrinorum* (Musurillo 1954).

- 38 The fact that John identifies the dragon who takes down “the third part of the stars of heaven” with the “ancient serpent” means that he is bringing together the Enochic tradition of the sin of the fallen angels/stars with the one in Genesis, of the sin of humans, caused by the serpent, interpreted as a fallen angel (in a way similar to 1 En. 69:6 [Book of the Similitudes] and *Apoc. Ab.* 13–14 and 23–24 [which may be later]; see also Lupieri 2006, 23).
- 39 In later centuries, Christians came to believe that the passage supported encratism and monasticism, lifestyles thought to be able to make humans similar to the holy angels of God. Probably here a “thousand,” or *chiliad*, is a thousand-man unit of an army (and therefore should be used as plural).
- 40 It is tragically ironic that this passage became a scriptural weapon for the condemnation of homosexuality while the text thunders against something that could not be more *heterosexual*. That angels can have not only bodies (e.g., 1 En. 69:5), but also “flesh,” is more or less vividly implied in 1 En. 86:4 and possibly stated at 15:4. That there is a “spiritual flesh,” as opposed to the “flesh of the world,” is explicitly stated by the *Coptic Apocalypse of Elijah* 5:32, a passage from which a small Greek fragment preserves, among other words, the expression του κοσμου (Pistelli 1912). According to Paul, “bodies” are different and can also be “spiritual” (1 Cor 15:40, 44), but not so “flesh,” which (as well as “blood”)

In summary, in the cultural and literary contexts we are studying, illicit sexual activity as the result of idolatry presents itself at two different levels. It may occur among humans, or else it may happen between humans and evil spiritual entities, which can be pagan gods or fallen, sinful, rebellious angels, at times understood to be stars.

The patriarchal perspective of the Bible and of Jewish religiosity in late antiquity, as well as early Christianity, increasingly conceived of Israel as a female.⁴¹ Israel was thus the bride of her divine husband and lord. Consequently, Israel's idolatry, when read through the lens of the sexual fidelity expected of a wife to her husband, became synonymous with betrayal, adultery, and prostitution. This is why most biblical prophets accused Israel as a whole, or especially Jerusalem and Samaria during the time of the divided kingdoms, of harlotry and explained military defeats, and even their exiles, as punishment for their idolatrous, adulterous behavior.⁴²

Since Israel's idolatry is considered an illicit sexual relationship with some pagan god and since it is quite normal, in Hellenistic Jewish polemical texts, to consider the idols to be the pagans' gods (not just images), it is also logical to expect that ideas would develop according to which the sin in the desert involved some sort of sexual relation with the calf, considered to be a pagan (Egyptian) idol or god.⁴³ And this interpretation does indeed appear in Jewish

is incompatible with the "kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:50) and with the "spirit" (Rom 8:49; Gal 5:17; cf. John 3:6).

41 Traditionally, there are occurrences when "Israel" as a noun is used to define the people acting as a woman (as an example, as a prostitute in Hos 4:15), but when the nation or the people was conceived as a male entity, this was the son (often rebellious and in need of discipline) of his celestial, divine, and sovereign father. For the importance of the sonship of Israel and of his masculinity, see Schmitt 2004.

42 See, e.g., Ezek 22–23 and Jer 2:20. There is a literary and conceptual continuity from the prophetic texts to the apocalypses of the late first-century, like 4 *Ezra* and Revelation, in which Jerusalem, possibly representing Israel as a whole, is a woman, being a bride, a mother, or a prostitute.

43 See the discussions of Philo, *Decal.* 66–76 (on idolatry) and *Spec.* 1.21. Over time, the (golden) calf was believed to be a magical device or to be inhabited by a devilish entity who could make it "low" (see texts and discussions in Pregill's contribution in this volume). I wonder if this interpretation could derive from Ps 106:20, according to which the idol is similar to a calf which "eats grass," as stressed by Augustine (*Conf.* 7.9.15; see Dingman in this volume). In any case, Egyptian sorcery must have been considered capable of producing a lowing golden calf, since it could produce barking golden dogs: "The Egyptians employed sorcery to make golden dogs who would bark if anyone were to come there ... Moses silenced them ..." (*Exod. Rab.* 20:19 in Schwartz 2004, 262). For a medieval impressive demonic-astral interpretation of the entity animating the calf, see the twelfth-century nave capital n. 56 of the Basilica of Saint Mary Magdalene in Vézelay (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vézelay_Nef_Chapiteau_230608_17.jpg; see cover of the book).

traditions. The condemnation for “kissing calves” (plural, as an allusion to the idolatrous sin at the time of Jeroboam and his calves) in Hos 13:2 is reused as “kissing the calf” (singular) in a context describing the “water test” expecting the traveler of the Merkabah in the “sixth palace.”⁴⁴ The unworthy one is accused by the angelic guardians of being “of the seed of those who kissed the calf” (*Hekhalot Rabbati* § 259 [Davila 2013, 143–44]).⁴⁵

A Woman and a Beast in the Desert

The imagery we have in Rev 17 is the result of a growth process, a conflation in which different images, mostly of scriptural origin, have been added to other images and ideas. First, the sin of the fallen angels had strong sexual connotations. Second, pagan gods could easily be identified with fallen angels, especially since such gods were in fact identified with astral or planetary realities. Therefore idolatry, as a human response to the sinful attention of a spiritual entity (an angel or god), was usually represented as a sexual relationship with that entity. In the case of Israel, when considered a feminine reality, this idolatrous sexual relationship constitutes adultery and prostitution. Since each god is present among humans in its idol, in the case of theriolatry, that idol would be the image of a *θηρίον*, that is, a beast. The narrative of the sin of the Jews in the desert at the time of the (golden) calf became a narrative of a sin *with* the (golden) calf. This sin was potentially a form of prostitution by Israel with a beast in the desert. My thesis, then, is that the representation of that sin is one of the constitutive elements of the image of the prostitute and the beast in the desert of Revelation.

Exegetes usually accept that in Revelation there is an antitypical analogy between the beast and the prostitute, on the one hand, and the lamb and the bride, on the other.⁴⁶ The parallelism is very strong: The spiritual pole of each couple is represented by a non-human figure with animalistic features. While the degenerated, satanic spiritual reality is a composite *beast* (*θηρίον*), the divine hero is the slaughtered lamb, Jesus Christ, who *is* also the lion, as we saw

44 Regarding Hos 13:2, see the contribution by Klein in this volume.

45 For the interpretation, see also Scholem 1995, 53.

46 Since the lamb is Jesus Christ, we can say that already in Revelation Jesus not only has a “woman,” understood as “his wife” (the Greek *γυνή* of Rev 21:9, which corresponds exactly to the Coptic *hime/shime*), but explicitly a “spouse” (in Greek *νύμφη*, Rev 21:2, 9; 22:17), a fact for which there was no need to wait for what may or (more probably) may not be a fragment of a previously-unknown Coptic gospel. As usual, it all depends on the context and the interpretation. See the discussion by Creech, forthcoming.

above, and therefore not a beast, but an *animal*, maybe one or *the* living being (ζῷον). The human pole, on the negative side, is a woman, degenerated as a prostitute, described as “the prostitute, the great one” (17:1). On the positive side, the human element, when paired with the lion-lamb, is still a woman, but this time she is “the bride” (21:9). That the relationship between the two poles of each pair has a nuptial or conjugal dimension, at least at a symbolical or mystical level, is also accepted.⁴⁷ This interpretive dimension reached its apotheosis in twentieth-century psychoanalytical reading of Revelation.⁴⁸ Other more traditional exegetes have already responded, not without irony, to those speculations.⁴⁹ What is important for us is to stress the presence of a sexual dimension in the interpretation of Rev 17 and in its history because this seems to be a key element also in the evolution of the interpretation of the imagery of the (golden) calf incident.

All this makes much more sense if the woman-prostitute in Revelation, as usual in Jewish prophetic language, represents a Jewish reality (be she Jerusalem, or Israel as a kingdom, or the people as nation), and much less sense,

47 John does not use the word, but each of the two couples would constitute a spiritual pair which could be called in Greek a *syzygia*. For the sexual dimension of the relationship between the members of each pair, see Thompson 1990, 82, 90. Since the slaughtered lamb is Jesus Christ, his spouse, the new Jerusalem coming from above, is usually explained as a corporate representative of the believers, that spiritual reality that we would call the church (for the spousal relationship between Christ and the church already in Pauline traditions, see the famous passage of Eph 5:21–33 and cf. Col 1:18).

48 It emerges particularly in the position held by Hartmut Raguse in his criticism of Eugen Drewermann (Raguse 1993), the former being a Protestant Freudian psychoanalyst and theologian and the latter being a basically Jungian psychoanalyst and ex-Catholic priest (and now also former Catholic). Raguse starts from Thompson's assertion that the relationship is sexual (see preceding footnote) and, also on the basis of the reflections of two French psychoanalysts and exegetes, declares that the relationships are sexual, but not genital. The relationship between the lamb and the bride cannot be genital because of the oedipal complex of the author, while the one between the beast and the prostitute is perverted and therefore “anal.” There is also an explanation of paradise as a womb and hell as intestines and other related discussions, but I will spare the reader. Interestingly, at a certain point Raguse admits that the text does not contain the imagery, but it nevertheless allows this interpretation.

49 The criticism against the absence of scholarly and historical criticism in such literature has been variously expressed (see even the sympathetic reaction in Lüdemann 1992). Personally, I think we can say that John of Patmos may well have had his own oedipal problems, but the interpretations I read seem to me to be projections upon the text of the personal sexual problems of the psychoanalysts.

or none at all, if she is a Roman one.⁵⁰ If indeed the “woman” in Revelation refers throughout the whole book to the same reality, we can trace for her a complex but linear trajectory. First, she descends from the old heaven to the old earth and to the desert (12:1–6). Then she stays in the desert, where her mystery as “Babylon, the great” is revealed (17:3–5) so that she can be at the same time the great city where their Lord was crucified and whose spiritual (not historical) meaning is Egypt and Sodom (11:8). Lastly, she descends anew from a new heaven to a new earth (21:2, 9–10). The trajectory is one of election, betrayal, fall, physical corruption and destruction, followed by redemption and salvation at a new, spiritual level. Originally pregnant with the son of the promise, the woman becomes the companion of the beast only to be destroyed by her own lovers, who are her real enemies. She then reappears as the spouse of the lamb. Through his salvific death, Christ effects the destruction of the satanic armies, the institution of the millennium, and the second, final destruction of the forces of evil, so that the now eschatological Jerusalem can descend to earth, finally “ready” for the wedding (21:2).

This mental frame appears to be successful through time. In the second Christian century, this imagery of fall, prostitution, and redemption developed into a cosmic scene typical of the major gnostic systems, with a clear role played by the gnostic Savior. Possibly an ancient root for it can be identified in the (canonical) gospel traditions, where the fleshly Jesus saves at least one fallen woman. According to Luke 7:36–50, Jesus pardons a “sinner,” often understood by ancient exegetes to be a prostitute, while, according to what is now John 8:3–11, he saves an adulteress from stoning.⁵¹ The pattern of a divine or spiritual entity saving the fallen spiritual element, represented by a female figure, reappears now in different contexts. Simon, in the Simonian gnosis, saves Helen, a prostitute in a brothel of Tyre, and makes her his companion on earth.

50 The hypothesis that the prostitute has a Jewish nature is accepted by a minority of scholars, including myself (see Lupieri 2006, 248–81). This position has been strongly argued in recent Italian scholarship (Arcari 2008; 2012) and is partially accepted in the most recent, and in my opinion quite brilliant, Italian commentary on Revelation (Tripaldi 2012). It is meaningful for this thesis that when the prostitute is present in the text, the second beast, the one coming from the earth (or the land, see above n. 29), is absent, and vice-versa (as already noted by Corsini, 1980, 358). The prostitute and the second beast (or the “pseudo-prophet”) do indeed carry out a very similar narrative function in their relationship with *the beast*: idolatry is apostasy and prostitution.

51 For the possible repentance of “prostitutes,” even if connected to the preaching of John the Baptist, see Matt 21:31–32.

Similarly, in Christian Gnosticism, the heavenly Christ saves the fallen Sophia and restores her as his companion in a pleromatic *syzygia*.⁵²

The (Golden) Calf Narrative as a Model for Revelation?

We started from the sin of the angels and the (golden) calf imagery and ended up with a full-blown Christian-gnostic myth. The images involved here travel and develop through centuries, passing from one text to another and even from one religion to another. They can be trans-textual and trans-religious because they are probably pretextual. I do not want to use the word “archetypal” in a strict technical sense, but we are handling something that is connected to the deepest levels of our minds.⁵³ During its centuries-old life and afterlife, the scriptural imagery related to the (golden) calf incident became a generative and constitutive element of a broader imagery, expressions of which, at a certain point in its development, seem to appear also in Revelation. First of all, given the notoriety of the narrative, the sinful worship of a beast in a culturally Jewish context could barely have been understood as not referring to it. I can hardly envisage John constructing his narrative about the worship of the beast without conceptually depending upon the scriptural tradition. Furthermore, given the progressive sexualization of the (golden) calf narrative, it seems to me that the powerful picture of the beast and the woman in the desert can definitely be better understood in its immediate literary context if we presuppose that underlying the Johannine narrative is also the (golden) calf incident. This does not mean yet that John is reworking echoes reverberating from earlier scriptural traditions in a “scholarly” way, that is, working with the scroll of Exodus on one side and his own notes on the other. Rather, his frequent allusions to scriptural texts and his immersion in Jewish apocalyptic traditions explain in the best possible way the resurfacing of themes, details, and structural elements from those texts and traditions into John’s visionary writing.

52 Regarding the Simonian narrative, see Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.23.2–3; for the assimilation of the fallen divine entity to a prostitute in the Valentinian tradition, see Heracleon, *Fragm.* 18; *Exeg. Soul* 128–29; *Auth. Disc.* 24.6–10 (Simonetti 1993, 400).

53 This ideal complex of fall and restoration seems to be widespread, at least in Judeo-Christian cultural tradition. In a specific biblical context, this may be one of the reasons why tradition had to make Mary Magdalene into a repentant prostitute, an identity she cannot abandon, at least in popular belief, despite all textual evidence to the contrary. Perhaps we all need the model of a prostitute who repents and is saved so that we too can hope to be saved after our own falls (Setterholm 2017).

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“A Good Argument to Penitents”: Sin and Forgiveness in Midrashic Interpretations of the Golden Calf

Devorah Schoenfeld

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi further said: The Israelites made the [golden] calf only in order to place a good argument in the mouth of the penitents, as it is said, O that they had such a heart as this always, to fear Me and keep all My commandments etc.

b. 'Abod. Zar. 4b, SONCINO TRANS. [MISHCON]

...

[God] was saying to them, “Everything you did is forgiven, but the calf is the worst of all.”

*Sifre Deut. 1:9 on DEUT 1:1*¹

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In midrashic interpretation, the story of the idol that the Israelites made in the shape of a calf is one of the central locations for thinking about sin, its reasons and motivations, and the process of forgiveness that emerges from it. The related narrative in Exod 32 is one of the most powerful and elaborate stories of sin and forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible, and the continuation of the story in Exod 34:9 is in fact the first time the word root “forgiveness” (סלח) appears. Chronologically following immediately after the revelation on Mount Sinai, the story describes the Israelites sinning by constructing a calf. But after the sin there is a renewal of human-divine intimacy in which a new set of tablets is inscribed, God makes a new covenant with the Israelites, and Moses asks for and receives an unprecedented vision of God (Exod 33:13–23). In midrash and in liturgy this story functions as a paradigm for how forgiveness is possible

¹ Unless noted, all translations are by the author.

even for the worst offenses, and how the Torah contains within it mechanisms for restoring the covenant after it was broken. Midrashic thinkers debate and discuss some of the most challenging questions on the nature of how sin arises and how repentance and forgiveness are possible: Is it better to understand the sin or to condemn it? Is divine forgiveness something for which humans have the right to ask? If so, why? Is God's relationship with Israel able to survive any level of betrayal? The midrashic writers think through these questions thanks to a series of imagined dialogues, with one set of answers played out liturgically through the rituals of Yom Kippur and the minor fasts.

Sins Terrible and Comprehensible: Is It Better to Condemn the Sin or Understand It?

Since for the rabbis the story of the calf is one that ends in forgiveness, the rabbinic descriptions of the sins that the Israelites perpetrated during the calf incident become a way of reassuring the people that even the worst sins can be forgiven. *Sifre Deuteronomy* 1:1 states this explicitly. It reads the descriptions of the journeys of the Israelites in Deuteronomy as a metaphoric description of their deeds, with *די זהב* ("Di-Zahav," literally "of gold") referring to the sin of the calf, which was made of gold, and as a way of saying that the sin of the Israelites had been forgiven even though it was the worst sin they had committed (*Sifre Deut.* 1:9). *Exodus Rabbah*, dating from approximately the tenth century (Strack and Stemberger 1992, 309), emphasizes repentance and forgiveness in its elaboration and interpretation of the story. While only one chapter (42) is devoted to descriptions of the sin, two chapters (43 and 44) are devoted to a wide variety of conversations that Moses could have had with God to cajole, beg, or argue God into forgiving the Israelites. Three chapters (45–47) are devoted to forgiveness and reconciliation. The structure of *Midrash Tanhuma*, which developed between 400 and 900 CE (Strack and Stemberger 1992, 302), is slightly different. It is organized into sermons, but each of the four sermons that deal with the sin of the calf (*Tanhuma Ki Tissa* 19–22) begins with criticism of the Israelites for their sin and ends with some sort of forgiveness or exoneration. These are then followed by two sermons (*Tanhuma Ki Tissa* 23–24) that are entirely about Moses's prayer for forgiveness and its efficacy.

Some rabbinic and medieval commentaries exaggerate the sin to include not only idolatry, but also murder and orgiastic sexual immorality. The linguistic hook for these interpretations is the word *לִצְחַק*, which means "to laugh," "play," or "jest" in *Exod* 32:6, *וַיֵּשְׁבוּ הָעָם לֵאכֹל וּשְׁתוּ וַיִּקְמוּ לַצְחָק* ("the people sat to eat and drink and arose to jest"). The midrash connects it to *Gen* 39:14, where

the word appears in a sexual context, and to 2 Sam 2:14, in which the word לשחק, which sounds similar but is from a different root, appears to refer to murderous violence:

ולא עבודת כוכבים עשו בלבד, אלא גילוי עריות ושפיכות דמים, ואין שחוק האמור כאן, אלא עבודת כוכבים וגילוי עריות ושפיכות דמים. ומנין לשחוק שהוא שפיכות דמים? שנאמר (שמואל ב ב): יקומו נא הנערים וישחקו לפנינו. וגילוי עריות מנין? שנאמר (בראשית לט): בא אלי העבר העברי לצחק בי וגו'. ולא היה שם גדול מחור והרגו אותי, זו שיטת אבא הדורש.²

They did not only commit idolatry, they also committed sexual immorality and murder, the 'schok' [laughter] described here is sexual immorality and murder. Where do we learn that 'schok' means murder? As it is said: "Let the lads arise and play [לשחק] before us" (2 Sam 2:14). And sexual immorality? As it is said, "The Hebrew slave came to me to laugh [לצחק] at me." (Gen 39:14) And there was no one there greater than Hur and they killed him, this is the approach of Abba HaDoresh.

Exod. Rab. 42:1

The midrash here draws on 2 Sam 2:14, when Abner and Yoav are calling on their soldiers to kill each other, and they ask them to play, using the root לשחק, which is similar to the root לצחק, which is used to describe the Israelites frolicking before the golden calf. Similarly, in Gen 39:17, when Potiphar's wife is accusing Joseph of sexual assault, she says that he came לצחק with her. Drawing on these linguistic parallels, it describes the Israelites as not only committing idolatry but engaging in an orgiastic frenzy of sin.³

Who was killed in this frenzy of murder? Since Hur was mentioned as one of Moses's closest companions in Exod 17:10–12 and never appears after this story, one rabbinic interpretation concludes that he was the victim here:

א"ר בנימין בר יפת א"ר אלעזר ראה חור שזבוח לפניו אמר אי לא שמענא להו השתא עבדו לי כדעבדו בחור ומיקיים בי (איכה ב, כ) אם יהרג במקדש ה' כהן ונביא ולא הויא להו תקנתא לעולם מוטב דליעבדו לעגל אפשר הויא להו תקנתא בתשובה.

² The Hebrew text of *Exodus Rabbah* and *Numbers Rabbah* used in this chapter is from Mirkin 1998.

³ In *b. Sanh. 74a*, the conclusion is reached that one may transgress any prohibition in order to save a life, with three exceptions: idolatry, murder, and sexual immorality. So the choice of these three sins in particular seems to indicate that the Israelites were sinning with all the worst possible sins.

R. Benjamin b. Japhet says, reporting R. Eleazar: He [Aaron] saw Hur lying slain before him and said [to himself]: If I do not obey them, they will now do unto me as they did unto Hur, and so will be fulfilled [the fear of] the prophet, Shall the Priest and the Prophet be slain in the Sanctuary of God? and they will never find forgiveness. Better let them worship the [golden] calf, for which offence they may yet find forgiveness through repentance.⁴

b. Sanh. 7a, SONCINO TRANS. [SHACHTER]

Another early midrash, *Pesiqta of Rab Kahana*, describes the sins of the Israelites at the golden calf as so grave that they deserved to be decapitated (2:1).

Although the midrashic trends so far have emphasized the horror of the sin—idolatry, murder, orgies—there are also midrashic and medieval commentaries that work to make the sin comprehensible, to explain why it is something that a reasonable person might have done under the circumstances. In *Exod. Rab.* 43:9, Moses describes the Israelites as young, only recently taken out of Egypt, and therefore not aware of the consequences of their actions. One major midrashic trend is to explain that the golden calf was not intended to be a replacement for God but rather to be a replacement for Moses. The textual hint for this is that in *Exod* 32:1, the Israelites begin to make the calf upon seeing that Moses is late to return, and their stated reason for making the calf is that they did not know what had become of him. Many medieval commentaries follow this approach. The eleventh to twelfth-century commentator Abraham Ibn Ezra, in his comment on *Exod* 32:1, explains that there is biblical precedent for Moses being called אֱלֹהִים (God) in *Exod* 7:1, "Behold I have made you as a God [אֱלֹהִים] to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet." Ibn Ezra also suggests that the calf may have been intended as a replacement for the angel that led the Israelites for the first stage of their journey. He draws on astrological reasons for why a calf (or bull) would be an appropriate symbol for that angel (Goetschel 1990, 139).

The twelfth-century French commentator Bekhor Shor explains Aaron's possible logic in making the calf: the Israelites were seeking a leader in place of Moses, and Aaron thought that if he were to appoint a reasonable candidate like Caleb or Nachshon (two leaders of the tribe of Judah) as the leader, they might not agree to give power back to Moses on his return. If Aaron himself were to take leadership, it might cause jealousy between him and his brother. A calf would simply sit there, inert, until Moses's return and was, therefore,

4 The word "golden" is not in the original and is added by the translator.

a way of appointing an interim leader without (as Aaron thought) doing any harm.⁵

Many later Jewish commentators went in a different direction, explaining how the Israelites might have imagined the calf as a way of serving God. The eleventh and twelfth-century Spanish theologian Judah Halevi explained that the Israelites were looking for an image that would inspire them, and they made the calf in exactly the same spirit that they would later build the altar and the cherubim (*Kuzari*, 1.97). The sin was simply that they worshiped God in a way of their own choosing rather than in a way in which they had been commanded—even if, in principle, it is difficult to imagine why a calf would be prohibited and cherubim commanded.⁶ Their intentions were correct, only their actions were mistaken.⁷ Idolatry, in this interpretation, is less about the object of worship than its method.⁸ The tabernacle, like the calf, is a ritual object that was created by the Israelites as a way of connecting with God. Like the calf, its construction required the Israelites to donate gold.

Rabbinic commentators were also struck by the similarity between the calf and the tabernacle, both physical signs of something sacred and objects of ritual devotion. *Sifre on Deuteronomy* 1:1 sees the tabernacle as a way that God gave the Israelites to correct the sin of the calf: “Let the gold of the tabernacle atone for the gold of the calf” (*Sifre Deut.* 1:10). *Sifre* reads this as a sign of divine abundance and mercy, that there was enough gold for the tabernacle even after gold had been used for the calf. Here again the impulse to create a calf may have been in part a correct one; the problem was simply in channeling this impulse in the correct direction.

For the thirteenth-century Spanish philosopher and exegete Nahmanides, who draws on the kabbalistic approach, the sin was in isolating one aspect of God to worship. In kabbalistic theology, God is represented by a system of *sefirot*, or spheres, each representing a different divine attribute. Since the calf, or the ox, appears on the left of the divine chariot in Ezekiel’s vision,

5 For the Hebrew text, see Nevo 2000, 169.

6 The idea that the calf was intended to represent God may be true to the historical reality of the Jeroboam’s golden calves. See Chung 2010, 11.

7 The *Kuzari* is a work of theology in the form of a fictional dialogue between a rabbi and a Khazar king. In the beginning of the dialogue the king is described as a virtuous, pious follower of the Khazar religion, who receives one night a vision telling him that his intentions are correct but not his actions. Through the dialogue the Khazar king comes to convert to Judaism, take on Jewish practices and forms of worship, and bring his actions more in line with his pious intentions. The description of the Israelites worshipping the calf is thus entirely in line with the king’s own experience.

8 For a discussion of this approach to understanding idolatry in Jewish thought, see Halbertal and Margalit 1992, 186–90.

Nachmanides sees it as representing justice, since the Divine attribute of Justice is the left-hand attribute in kabbalistic symbolism. According to Nahmanides on Exod 32:1, Aaron may have mistakenly thought that the divine attribute of justice was the particular attribute that the Israelites needed, and that was his error (Chavel 1973, 551). The problem, for Nahmanides, is that representation of divinity can at best represent only one aspect of it, and therefore it runs the risk of confusing one aspect of divine reality for all of it (Halbertal and Margalit 1992, 190–97).

But perhaps the most generous interpretation of the motivation of the sin of the Israelites is that it was on purpose, as a way to demonstrate to future generations the possibility of repentance in the future:

וא"ר יהושע בן לוי לא עשו ישראל את העגל אלא ליתן פתחון פה לבעלי תשובה שנאמר (דברים ה, כה) מי יתן והיה לבבם זה להם ליראה אותי כל הימים וגו'.

R. Joshua b. Levi further said: The Israelites made the [golden] calf only in order to place a good argument in the mouth of the penitents, as it is said, O that they had such a heart as this always, to fear Me and keep all My commandments etc.

*b. 'Abod. Zar. 4b, SONCINO TRANS.*⁹

The verse from Deuteronomy here operates as a proof text that the Israelites were fully virtuous, and that therefore their intentions could only have been good. It concludes that what the Israelites were doing by making the calf so soon after revelation was testing the possibility of repentance and making sure that it would be available to them and their descendants. Here what seems to be a sin is in fact a virtue. Rather than sinning to rebel against God, they were sinning to make the point that sin and repentance are part of the process of torah observance and that their descendants should never despair if they find themselves unable to keep the torah completely. This interpretation imagines the Israelites as collaborating with God in a performance of sin and repentance. The Israelites sinned so that it could be written about, and so that their descendants could learn from it.

Despite the strong emphasis on repentance and forgiveness in midrashim on the calf story, there are a few voices that suggest that complete forgiveness is never fully possible. In *b. Sanh. 102a*, Rabbi Isaac says that "no retribution whatsoever comes upon the world which does not contain a slight fraction of the first calf" (Soncino trans. [Freedman]). In other words, when sin is

⁹ The biblical text under discussion is numbered in BHS as Deut 5:29 (26).

punished at any point there is some part of the punishment for that sin which is also for the sin of the calf. Similarly, Rav Assi in *Exod. Rab.* 43:2 states that there is no generation that does not receive a tiny amount of the punishment for the sin of the calf. This opinion is both preceded and followed by other statements that describe the reconciliation that was achieved between God and the Israelites after the sin of the calf. Rav Assi's is the minority opinion, but still it is recorded.

These differing approaches represent an ongoing conversation about how best to understand the nature of sin. For many of the rabbinic and medieval commentators, the important point to make was that the sin was horrific and unjustifiable but nevertheless could be forgiven. For other rabbinic and medieval commentators, it is important to understand how the sin came about and why a reasonable person could have been led to commit that particular sin at that particular time.

A Countertrend: Exoneration

Whereas the approaches discussed earlier sought to condemn or rationalize the calf incident, a third trend reduces the number of people responsible for the sin. This tradition has had an impact on Jewish observance and liturgy by noting that it was exclusively men and not women who sinned during the story of the calf. *Numbers Rabbah* 21:10 notes that in *Exod* 32:2 Aaron asks people to take golden rings from their wives, sons, and daughters and bring them to him. In the following verse it states that people took rings from themselves. It concludes from this that when men asked their wives and children for their rings, the women (and, presumably, children) refused. *Numbers Rabbah* relates this story in the context of the story of the daughters of Zelophechad and their complaint against unjust inheritance laws, which it presents as part of a pattern of women in that generation acting correctly when men would not:

אותו הדור היו הנשים גודרות, מה שאנשים פורצים, שכן את מוצא שאמר להן אהרן (שמות לב): פרקו נזמי הזהב אשר באנזי נשיכם ולא רצו הנשים ומיחו בבעליהן, שנאמר: ויתפרקו כל העם את נזמי הזהב וגו' והנשים לא נשתתפו עימיהן במעשה העגל.

In that generation women maintained the boundaries that men violated, as you see that Aaron said to them, "Take the gold rings from the ears of your wives" and the women were not willing and opposed their

husbands, as it is said "They took the golden rings from their own ears" and the women did not participate in making the calf.

Num. Rab. 21:10

This idea also appears in *Tanḥuma, Ki Tissa* 19, which adds the idea that Aaron intentionally asked the men to bring gold from their wives because he knew that the women had shown faith at the parting of the Red Sea and therefore would not be led into idolatry.¹⁰ The eighth or ninth-century midrashic collection *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* (Strack and Stemberger 1992, 329) adds to this a conversation in which the women rebuke the men, shaming them for making an idol that has no power to save (*Pirke R. El.* 45). It bases on this story the origin of the custom that women (and not men) celebrate Rosh Chodesh, the first day of the month, as a holiday and on it do no work.¹¹ This custom was still practiced in the Middle Ages in both Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities (see *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim* 417) and in some communities is still practiced today. It is also the source for the contemporary practice of women's prayer groups that meet on Rosh Chodesh.¹² This midrash also explains how it is that in Exod 35:22, after the story of the calf, there are still rings left to donate to build the tabernacle; that verse emphasizes that women came first to donate (and the men came along with them), so the women donated the rings used to build the tabernacle.

There are also midrashic trends that displace the responsibility of the sin onto non-Israelites. *Tanḥuma, Ki Tissa* 19 suggests that the primary responsibility for the sin of the calf belonged to the Egyptian magicians who had accompanied the Israelites. They caused the calf to come to life, which was within their magical abilities. This is evident from Exod 7:12, in which Egyptian magicians were able to turn a rod into a snake, and by doing so they deceived the people into thinking that it was a god.¹³

10 Medieval commentator Ibn Ezra, who has little patience for midrash, thinks that this is ridiculous, that it is impossible to imagine that all the women would have had the power to resist their husbands. See Ibn Ezra on Exod 32:1.

11 The source for the prohibition of work on Rosh Chodesh is in *b. Meg.* 22b, where it seems to apply to men and women equally. Medieval commentators Rashi and Tosafot explain that it only applies to women.

12 One high-profile group that does so is Women of the Wall, which meets monthly to pray at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. For their explanation of how their group relates to the traditional practices around Rosh Chodesh, see <http://womenofthewall.org.il/rosh-chodesh/what-is-rosh-chodesh/>.

13 The role of a non-Israelite magician in bringing the calf to life has parallels in the qur'anic retelling of the story. See the chapter by Pregill in this volume.

The strongest of these kinds of approaches of exoneration shifts the blame on to the **ערב רב**, or the “mixed multitude” that came out of Egypt along with the Israelites (Exod 12:38). These may have been non-Israelite slaves who followed other religions but were eager to take the opportunity to escape to freedom:

לך רד כי שחת עמך – העם אין כתיב כאן אלא עמך. אמר משה: רבון העולם! מנין הם עמי? אמר לו הקב"ה: עמך הם. שעד שהיו במצרים אמרתי לך (שמות ז): והוצאתי את צבאותי את עמי, אמרתי לך שלא לערב בהם ערב רב. אתה שהיית עניו וכשר, אמרת לי: לעולם מקבלים השבים, ואני הייתי יודע מה הם עתידין לעשות, אמרתי לך: לא! ועשיתי רצונך, והם הם שעשו את העגל, שהיו עובדים עבודת כוכבים, והם עשו אותו וגרמו לעמי לחטא. ראה מה כתיב: אלה אלהינו אין כתיב כאן, אלא אלה אלהיך, שהגרים שעלו עם משה, הם עשאוהו, ואמרו לישראל: אלה אלהיך. לך רד כי שחת עמך.

“Go down for your people have sinned.” It is not written “the people,” but rather “your people.” Moses said, “Why are they my people?” The Holy One said, “They are your people, because when they were in Egypt I said, ‘Bring out My hosts, My people’ (Exod 7:4), and I said not to mix with them a mixed multitude. You who were humble and righteous said to Me that one should always receive penitents, and I knew what they would one day do, and I said to you no. But I did what you wanted, and they are the ones who made the calf, since they were idol worshipers and they made this and caused My people to sin.” Look at what is written: it does not say “This is our God,” but rather “This is your God,” for the foreigners who came with Moses made it and said to Israel “This is your God.” That is why the Holy One said to Moses, “Go down for your people have sinned.”

Exod. Rab. 42:6

The midrash here notes two things: first, that God in speaking to Moses in Exod 32:7 calls the people “your people,” and second, that in Exod 32:4 the people, after Aaron has made the calf, call out “this is your God” rather than “our God.” It concludes from this that the people who made the calf were followers of non-Israelite religion who made a statue in accordance with their own practices and were asking the Israelites to worship it. Moses is portrayed as acting with greater tolerance and mercy even than God, in that while God did not want these followers of a foreign religion to accompany the Israelites, Moses was willing to accept them, and therefore they are called Moses’s people. The possibility for forgiveness is here expanded beyond (as if to say) even what God is able to imagine, that Moses is willing and able to intercede and gain

forgiveness, not only for Israelites, but for people of foreign religions who induce Israelites into idol worship.¹⁴

The approach of exoneration may have its roots in response to some of the Christian anti-Jewish polemical approaches to the calf discussed elsewhere in this volume.¹⁵ Anti-Jewish supersessionist approaches to the calf story were quite common in early Christian exegesis. The calf was seen as evidence that the Jews had broken their covenant with God at the very moment of inception (Smolar and Aberbach 1968, 91).¹⁶ The trope of exoneration tends to be more prominent in texts written after 200 CE, while texts from the Tannaitic period (up to 200 CE) tend more to emphasize the gravity of the sin and the ongoing possibility of repentance (Mandelbaum 1990, 207).

So in midrashic approaches to the sin of the calf, there are some approaches that emphasize the horror of it or the extremity of the sin that was committed, while others try to make the sin comprehensible or mitigate the sin by exonerating all or part of the people from responsibility. These three approaches all have different purposes. The approaches that emphasize how badly the Israelites sinned show how much can be forgiven, while the approaches that try to make the sin comprehensible are concerned with the psychological explanation for sin. The approaches that exonerate are concerned with showing that the Israelites were really not as bad as they seemed.

"They Have Made You a Helper": Moses Argues with God

Exodus Rabbah 42 and 43 contain a rich collection of imagined dialogues in which Moses argues with God to convince God to forgive the people. These narratives provide a series of arguments for the idea that any sin is forgivable

14 In biblical terms, inducing Israelites into idolatry is one of the worst things that anyone can do. See, for example, Num 25:1–3 and Deut 13:1–5.

15 See, for example, the chapters by Lupieri and Dingman. The chapter by Pregill on the calf in the Qur'an and in early Islam demonstrates the importance of the calf story in Islamic anti-Jewish polemics, and it is possible that some of the later midrashic interpretations may be responding to this as well.

16 For an overview of supersessionist and anti-Jewish polemical interpretations of the calf story, see Smolar and Aberbach 1968, 97–101. Magid (2005, 650–53) argues that the 16th century Kabbalist Hayim Vital's radical re-reading of the calf story from the point of view of the *'erev rav*, or mixed multitude, grew out of these polemical and counter-polemical approaches to reading the *'erev rav* as non-Jewish fellow travelers as a way of making the case for the reintegration of *conversos*, or Jews converted to Christianity, back into the Jewish community.

and that the relationship between God and the Israelites can ultimately be mended.

According to Exod 32, even before Moses came down from the mountain he already began to intercede with God on his people's behalf, asking God to remember his relationship with the people's ancestors. *Exodus Rabbah* 41:1 expands this by adding a conversation in which Moses asks God to remember the intimacy of receiving the torah and the exodus, and also by having Moses (as is characteristic of him) refuse to leave until he intercedes on the people's behalf. *Exodus Rabbah* 42:2 closely reads the text to find a suggestion of a possibility that God perhaps even invited this kind of intercession:

הַתְּחִיל הַקֶּבֶ"ה לִיתֵן לְמֹשֶׁה שְׁבִילִים שִׁיבֶקֶשׁ עֲלֵיהֶם רַחֲמִים. מִנֵּינָ? אָמַר ר' יוֹחָנָן: לְמַעַלָּה כְּתוּב: לֶךְ דָּד. וְאַחֵר כֵּךְ הוּא אוֹמֵר: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה רֵאיוֹתִי אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה. וְאֵין אֲמִירָה אֲלֵא לְשׁוֹן דָּד, כְּאָדָם שֵׁישׁ בִּלְבוֹ עַל חֲבֵרוֹ וְהוּא מִבְּקֵשׁ לְהִתְפַּיֵּס לוֹ, וְהוּא אוֹמֵר לוֹ: אֲמֹר לִי מָה עָשִׂיתִי לָךְ, שָׁכַן עִשִׂיתִי? כִּיּוֹן שִׁשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה מִן הַקֶּבֶ"ה דְּבָרִים רַכִּים, הַתְּחִיל מִבְּקֵשׁ עֲלֵיהֶם רַחֲמִים, שְׁנֹאמַר: וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה וּגו'.

The Holy One began to give Moses opportunities to ask for mercy for them. Rabbi Yochanan said, it is written above "go down" and after that is written "God said to Moses, 'I have seen the people.'" "Said" indicates gentle speech, like when a person has feelings in his heart for a friend and wants to be appeased with him and says to him, "Tell me what I did to you, that you did this to me?" When Moses heard gentle speech from the Holy One he immediately began to ask for mercy for them, as it is said, "And Moses began ..."

Exod. Rab. 42:2

Rabbi Yochanan here notices the disconnect in Exod 32:7 and 9—first God orders Moses to go down, then God begins a conversation with Moses. He concludes from this that God was inviting Moses into a conversation. The parable gives the stunning suggestion that God was eager to talk to the Israelites like one friend to another after a quarrel to find out what had gone wrong, even to the point of being willing to accept some responsibility.

Exodus Rabbah 42:9 continues:

וְעַתָּה הִנֵּחָה לִי וַיַּחַר אֲפִי בָהֶם וְאָכְלָם וְכִי מֹשֶׁה הָיָה תּוֹפֵשׁ בַּהֲקֵב"ה שֶׁהוּא אוֹמֵר הִנֵּחָה לִי? אֲלֵא, לְמָה הַדָּבָר דּוּמָה? לְמַלְךְ, שִׁכְעַס עַל בְּנוֹ וְהִכְנִיסוֹ לְקִיטוֹן וּמִתְחִיל לִבְקֵשׁ לְהַכּוֹתוֹ, וְהָיָה הַמֶּלֶךְ מִצַּעֵק מִן הַקִּיטוֹן: הִנֵּחָה לִי שֶׁאֲכַנּוּ, וְהָיָה פִּדְיוֹן עוֹמֵד בַּחוּץ. אָמַר הַפִּדְיוֹן: הַמֶּלֶךְ וּבְנוֹ לִפְנֵים בְּקִיטוֹן, לְמָה הוּא אוֹמֵר הִנֵּחָה לִי? אֲלֵא מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהַמֶּלֶךְ מִבְּקֵשׁ שֶׁאֵלֶךְ וְאִפְּיִסְנוֹ עַל בְּנוֹ, לְכַךְ הוּא מִצַּעֵק הִנֵּחָה לִי! כֵּךְ אָמַר הַקֶּבֶ"ה

למשה: ועתה הניחה לי. אמר משה: מפני שהקב"ה רוצה שאפייס על ישראל, לפיכך הוא אומר: ועתה הניחה לי. מיד, התחיל: לבקש עליהם רחמים. הוי, ויחל משה את פני ה' אלהיו.

"And now let Me alone and my wrath will blaze forth against them and consume them." And was Moses holding on to the Holy One that God should say "let Me alone"? Rather, this is like a king who was angry with his son and went into a rage and wanted to hit him, and shouted out in his rage, "let me alone so that I can hit him," and there was a teacher standing outside. The teacher said, "The king and his son are inside in a rage, why is he asking me to leave him alone? The king must want me to go inside and appease him about his son, and that is why he is asking me to leave him alone." Thus God said to Moses, "And now leave Me alone," and Moses said, "God wants to be appeased about Israel, and therefore is saying "and now leave Me alone." Immediately, he began to ask God for mercy, that is, "and Moses began to beseech God."

Here it asks a logical question: Why would God need to ask Moses to leave him alone? Would Moses have the power to prevent God from destroying anyone that God wished to destroy? The parable with which it answers this question suggests that God, in asking Moses to leave him alone, was really asking him to do the opposite, to not let him alone. The opportunity for repentance exists even (as if it were) when God is too enraged to allow it. The description of God as an angry, potentially abusive father is striking for its willingness to anthropomorphize divine anger and even see God as seeking human help in managing it.

Both of these parables place God in a position of accepting some responsibility for the breakdown in relations between God and Israel, but the two stories have very different implications in their imagining of the relationship between God and Moses and the role of Moses in asking for forgiveness. In the first story, God is a kind, generous friend who wants to reconcile and leaves an opening for reconciliation for his friend to discover. In the second parable, God seems overtaken by his anger, almost out of control. What sets in motion the possibility for forgiveness is a sense of (as if it were) God's conflicted feelings, that even in God's outburst of anger he drops an almost subconscious hint of wanting to be stopped. Moses, in the second parable, is not a friend but a teacher, and his role is to teach parent—that is, God—and child alike.

In these imagined conversations between God and Moses, the midrash plays out the possibility that sin is the manifestation of a broken human-divine relationship, and that when it is broken it is because both parties had a role

in breaking it. In some of these midrashim, Moses even goes so far as to give God part of the blame for the sin of the Israelites. One linguistic hook for this is the change in pronouns: in Exod 32:7 God calls them “your people,” and in Exod 32:14 God repents of the harm he had planned to do to “his people.” God calling them “your” (i.e., Moses’s) people can be read as God disclaiming responsibility for the people and their actions, but if so then God calling them “his people” would imply accepting that responsibility.

מיד אמר לו הקב"ה: רד! ירידה היא לך. אמר לו: למה? ששחת עמך! אמר לו משה: עכשיו אתה קורא אותם עמי, אינן אלא עמך! שוב מחרון אפך והנחם על הרעה לעמך. אמר רבי שמעון בן יוחאי: לא זו משה מתפלה, עד שקראן הקב"ה עמו, שנאמר: וינחם ה' על הרעה אשר דבר לעשות לעמו.

Immediately God said to him: “Go down!” In other words, it is a descent for you. [That is, you fallen.] He said to Him: Why? [God answered] “Because your people have corrupted themselves!” Moses said to Him, “Now you call them my people, but they are Your people! Turn back from Your wrath and repent from wronging Your people.” Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, Moses did not budge from his prayer until God called them His people, as it is said, “And God repented from the wrong that He had spoken to do to His people” (Exod 32:14).

Exod. Rab. 41:7

Exodus Rabbah follows this up by God even accepting some responsibility for the wrong that the people had done:

אמר הקב"ה למשה: בעוה"ז, ע"י שהיה בהם יצה"ר, עושין עבודת כוכבים, אבל לעתיד לבא אני עוקר מהם יצר הרע, ונותן להם לב בשר, כמה דאת אמר (יחזקאל ל): והסירותי את לב האבן מבשרכם ונתתי לכם לב בשר.

God said to Moses: “In this world, because they have an evil inclination they worship idols, but in the future I will uproot the evil inclination from them and give them a heart of flesh, as it is said, ‘And I will take from them a heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh’” (Ezek 36:26).

Exod. Rab. 41:7

The people would not have sinned had not God created in them the desire to sin, Moses argues. Therefore, how can God hold them responsible? This passage looks forward to a future in which it is not the people who repent but God, by changing the nature of people so they no longer desire to commit idolatry.

Similarly, in *Exod* 43:7 Moses calls God to account for enslaving the Israelites in Egypt, which is where they would have learned to worship idols, and compares it to a man who forces his son to work in a perfume shop frequented by harlots and is surprised when he sins. In *b. Sanh.* 102a Moses blames God for giving Israelites such an abundance of gold that they could even make idols out of it.

The breaking of the tablets is sometimes understood as part of Moses's argument for God to exonerate Israel. *Exodus Rabbah* 43:1 explains it in a parable: someone sent his friend to deliver a marriage contract to a young woman, and when the friend arrived at the woman's home he saw she was with another man. The friend then tore up the contract so that the woman would not be an adulteress. Similarly, Moses was delivering to the Israelites the tablets on which were written the commandments, including the one not to worship idols. When Moses broke the tablets, he prevented the Israelites from receiving the commandments so that they could not be judged as having transgressed them.¹⁷

Other imagined dialogues between Moses and God deal with the question of how forgiveness can be achieved. One dialogue uses the legal mechanism of annulment of vows to imagine God asking Moses to annul his vow to punish anyone who sacrifices to idols (see *Exod* 22:19). This midrash imagines God standing before Moses, with Moses taking the role of the scholar to annul the divine vow to punish sinners by using the authority given to scholars to annul vows. Now forgiveness is understood as the annulment of a vow by the aggrieved party to punish the harm that was done. One can see a parallel here both to the *Kol Nidrei* prayer, which begins the Yom Kippur service by annulling vows of the congregants, and to the custom of annulling vows before Rosh Hashana.¹⁸

Alternatively, in other dialogues Moses argues for forgiveness by calling on God to think about the past and the future of God's relationship with Israel. In *Exod. Rab.* 43:9, Moses compares the Israelites to a new vineyard; it will inevitably produce inferior wine but is still worth investing in because of the good wine that it will produce on maturity.

In *Exod. Rab.* 43:6, Moses directly critiques God's anger, even turning God into a straight man in a joke:

¹⁷ The same parable also appears in *Pirque R. El.* 2:3 and other places.

¹⁸ Although it is no longer widely practiced, the custom of annulling vows before Rosh Hashana is older, as it is mentioned in the Talmud (*b. Ned.* 23b). *Kol Nidrei* seems to be post-talmudic, as it is first mentioned in the ninth century by Rav Natronai Gaon (*Responsa* 1:185).

ורבי נחמיה אמר: בשעה שעשו ישראל אותו מעשה, עמד לו משה מפייס את האלהים. אמר: רבון העולם! עשו לך סיוע ואתה כועס עליהם! העגל הזה שעשו, יהיה מסייעך, אתה מזריח את החמה, והוא הלבנה. אתה הכוכבים, והוא המזלות. אתה מוריד את הטל, והוא משיב רוחות. אתה מוריד גשמים, והוא מגדל צמחים. אמר הקב"ה: משה! אף אתה טועה כמותם, והלא אין בו ממש? אמר לו: א"כ למה אתה כועס על בניך?!

Rabbi Nehemiah said: At the time that the Israelites did that deed, Moses got up to appease God and said, "Lord of the universe! Why are You angry at them for making You a helper? This calf that they made will help You, You will cause the sun to shine, it will cause the moon to shine, You the stars, it the constellations. You will cause the dew to fall, it will cause the plants to grow." The Holy One said, "Moses! You are erring like them, it is nothing real." Moses said to him, "If so, why are You angry at your children?"

Moses is able to talk God down from being angry by pointing out the irrationality of that anger: either the calf has power, in which case that power could be used for the good, or it has no power, in which case it is not able to do harm.

Argument with God is a prominent trope in Jewish tradition, and there are examples from the biblical period through the present. In the Bible, Abraham argues with God to save Sodom if there are ten righteous people, and Job argues with God to stop the suffering that God is unjustly inflicting on him. Moses is unusual in the Bible in that he repeatedly argues with God successfully. See, for example, Num 11:11–15; 14:13–19. Moses's arguments here show that repentance and forgiveness can be understood not merely as something that God gives, but as something that people can ask for—and can even argue that they are entitled to by right.

The Yom Kippur Liturgy and the Thirteen Attributes: The Story of the Calf as a Paradigm of Repentance

According to tradition, the day on which Moses returned with the second set of tablets, indicating forgiveness for the sin of the calf, was the tenth of Tishrei, the day on which Yom Kippur is celebrated (Rashi on Deut 9:18; *S. Eli. Zut.* 4.181; *S. 'Olam Rab.* 6.).¹⁹ Its practices include a lengthy liturgy of confession of sins

19 See Guggenheimer, 1998, 74 for a detailed analysis of the calculations involved in determining this date. The *Seder Olam* is an early rabbinic work of chronology from approximately the second or third century (see Strack and Stemberger 1992, 326).

that is repeated twelve times during the holiday. Before the holiday begins, congregants are encouraged to apologize and make amends to each other and to anyone whom they have sinned against and to ask for forgiveness. They are also to forgive anyone who sins against them. A central part of the Yom Kippur liturgy is the recitation of the Thirteen Divine Attributes revealed by God to Moses in Exod 34:6–7. The recitation of these attributes, along with prayers for forgiveness, is called *Selichot* (prayers for forgiveness). Since at least the thirteenth century there has been a widespread Jewish custom to recite them daily in the weeks leading up to Yom Kippur, as well as many times on Yom Kippur itself. According to Sephardic tradition, *Selichot* begins on the first of Elul, which would be the day (forty days before Yom Kippur) on which, according to the above calculation, Moses ascended the mountain for the second time (Elbogen 1993, 181).

The list of the Thirteen Attributes is among the earliest liturgical texts of the Jewish tradition. Variations of it appear in a prayer by Moses in Exod 14:18; in Joel's exhortation to repentance in Joel 2:13; in prayers for forgiveness in Ps 103:8 and for protection in Ps 86:15; and in praise in Ps 145:8.²⁰ In *b. Rosh HaShanah* 17b this list of attributes is described as a prayer that God taught to Moses, explaining that God gave these attributes as part of a covenant so that whenever the people recited these attributes in the future they would be forgiven.

The day on which Moses saw the calf and broke the tablets is also a fast day, albeit one of much lesser significance. This is the Seventeenth of Tammuz, which is observed as a fast day because it was the day on which the walls of Jerusalem were breached by the conquering Babylonian armies.²¹ Part of the story of the golden calf (Exod 32:11–14; 34:1–10) is read liturgically during both morning and afternoon prayers on all minor fast days (the fast of Esther, the Seventeenth of Tammuz, the fast of Gedaliah, and the Tenth of Tevet), as well as on the afternoon service of the Ninth of Av. Three verses in particular are recited aloud by the congregation: Exod 32:12 ("Turn from your wrath and repent from doing wrong to your people"); 34:6 ("The LORD! The LORD! Merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abundant in grace and truth"); and 34:9 ("And forgive us our wrongdoing and our sins and make us your inheritance"). The emphasis on these three verses draws out the theme of repentance and forgiveness in these stories. The calf narrative is thus connected liturgically

20 The prayer also appears in less positive contexts: Jonah quotes it in his anger at God for forgiving Nineveh in Jonah 4:2–3, and Nahum quotes it against Nineveh in a way that suggests that the possibility of repentance has passed in Nah 1:3.

21 *Seder Olam Rabbah* chapter 6 (Guggenheimer 1998, 74).

to all the different fasts of the Jewish year and to the cycle of repentance and forgiveness that runs through these fast days.

The story of the calf, then, functions in both liturgy and exegesis as a way of thinking through the question of repentance. The midrash does not come to conclusive answers: Is it more important to minimize the sin and show that the Israelites were righteous even when they appeared to be sinning, or to show that sin is possible even among the very righteous? Is it more useful to emphasize the horror of the sin to show that even the worst of sins can be forgiven, or to explain it to show that even seemingly horrific sins have explanations that can make sense to those who commit them? Does God bear a role in the responsibility for sin? In either case, the story of the calf stands as a reminder that while sin may be inevitable, forgiveness is always possible. This narrative of sin and forgiveness is reflected in the liturgy of both Yom Kippur and the cycle of minor fasts. In both midrash and liturgy, then, the story of the calf is a way of thinking through the mechanism of forgiveness.

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Anti-Judaism and Pedagogy: Greek and Latin Patristic Interpretations of the Calf Incident

Wesley Dingman

The patristic appropriation of the golden calf incident is paradoxical. On the one hand, some Christian authors employ the golden calf to argue that the Jews have an essentially defective character: unlike Christians, they are simply unable to obey God. Their initial repudiation of Moses and ongoing rejection of Jesus bookend a history of apostasy. This first, dominant interpretation of the calf incident sees a relationship of discontinuity between Jews and Christians. It is often virulently anti-Jewish and may be regarded as a staple of Christian *adversus Judaeos* literature. On the other hand, other authors use the story to warn Christians. Like the ancient Hebrews, Christians have received salvation and benefited from God's mercy. Nevertheless, they may still lose what they have gained if they lapse into apostasy. They must therefore learn from the Hebrews' sin with the calf so as to avoid their fate. This second, subsidiary interpretation sees a relationship of continuity between Jews and Christians such that the former can teach the latter. For this reason, it may be considered pedagogical. This chapter examines the growth and development of these two parallel yet intertwined interpretations of the calf incident in the second through fifth centuries by selected Greek and Latin patristic writers.

First Witnesses: 1 *Clement*, the *Epistle of Barnabas* and Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*

The three earliest surviving extrabiblical Christian references to the calf incident are from 1 *Clement*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*. *First Clement*, a letter from the Roman church to the Corinthian church, may be the oldest of the three, although probably not by much.¹ The latter two are roughly contemporaneous. Justin (ca. 100–ca. 165 CE) was an adult convert to Christianity from pagan philosophy. His *Dialogue*, probably written in Rome, is the stylized account of his debate with the eponymous

¹ For the dating of 1 *Clement*, see Welborn 1984.

Jew, Trypho. According to Eusebius, this debate took place in Ephesus (*Hist. eccl.* 4.18.6) shortly after the Bar Kokhba revolt (ca. 135; see *Dial.* 1.3). The *Epistle of Barnabas* is an anonymous work that Clement of Alexandria erroneously attributes to Paul's one-time companion, Barnabas (see, e.g., *Strom.* 2.6). Because the epistle mentions the destruction of Herod's temple (*Barn.* 16:3) and was cited by Clement of Alexandria ca. 200 (Paget 1994, 9), the work must date between 70–200 CE. Since the author anticipates that the Jews' enemies will rebuild on the site of the ruins (16:3–4), *Barnabas* may have been penned before ca. 135, the year when Hadrian had a pagan temple erected on the site (Kraft 1965, 42–43).²

Justin brings up the calf incident as a response to Trypho's observation that Christians do not observe the law of Moses (*Dial.* 10.2). Trypho is puzzled that while Christians suppose themselves to be better than others, they do not live in a manner that distinguishes them from others (10.3). His particular concern is Christians' nonobservance of the Sabbath, Jewish festivals, and circumcision. Trypho is surprised: "You [Christians] place your hope in a crucified man, and still expect to receive favors from God when you disregard his commandments" (10.3).³

Justin explains Christians' nonobservance by claiming that they know the real reason why God imposed the law of Moses on the Jews: it was because of their sinfulness and hardness of heart (*Dial.* 18.2), qualities made especially evident at "the time of Moses, when your [Trypho's] people showed itself wicked and ungrateful to God by molding a golden calf as an idol in the desert" (19.5).⁴ For Justin, this act demonstrated the Jews' interminable predilection for idolatry (see 46.6; 67.8). But God, rather than abandon them, chose instead to accommodate (ἀρμολόγησεν) his laws to their sinful tendencies. He commanded them to offer sacrifices so that they would not offer them to idols (19.6). Thus for Justin the incident of the calf is the proximate cause for God establishing the Jewish sacrificial cult. The dietary laws are a similar accommodation (20.1), as are the other ritual commandments (46.5). But Christians, Justin argues,

2 J. Carleton Paget questions the usefulness of *Barn.* 16:3–4 for dating the epistle to Hadrian's reign (1994, 17–30); nevertheless, he sees the absence of references to the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–136 CE) as evidence that it was written before this event (1994, 9). If he is correct, then *Barnabas* is probably older than Justin's *Dialogue*. (Paget in fact considers a date during the reign of Nerva [96–98] to be "almost probable" [1994, 28].) Another interpretation of 16:3–4 sees the rebuilt temple as referring spiritually to the Christian community (Scorza Barcellona 1975, 60–61). If this one is correct, then the passage does not aid the dating of the epistle.

3 Translations of *Dialogue* are from Falls in Justin Martyr 2003.

4 Note that the Greek text does not contain the word "golden" but uses instead the Greek verb μολοποιέω, "make a calf."

do not suffer from the Jews' sinful tendencies and so do not need to observe such laws.⁵

First Clement offers a pedagogical interpretation of the calf incident. It is distinctive, as will become evident, in two ways. First, rather than the more typical focus on the Hebrews' sin, it draws attention to Moses's exemplary leadership qualities. Second, instead of the usual wholesale contrast between sinful Hebrews (or Jews) and righteous Christians, it compares a righteous Moses to sinful and rebellious Christian anti-leaders. The letter seeks to heal the division (στάσις), schism (σχίσμα), and discord (ἔρις; see, e.g., 1:1; 46:9; 51:1; 54:2; 57:1; 63:1) that these "reckless and arrogant persons" (1:1) had caused by deposing some of the community's legitimate leaders (πρεσβύτεροι), including, it seems, the bishop (ἐπισκοπή; 44:1–6).⁶ The solution is for the community to restore the deposed leaders and submit to them. The offenders, however, are to consider maturely their wayward actions, accept their fault, and voluntarily leave the community. For the author, such an action would emulate Moses's response to the Hebrews' sin with the calf: he willingly offered to lose his own place in God's people in order to ensure its survival. *First Clement* calls this bold intervention "mighty love" and "unsurpassable perfection" (53:5). Similarly, the offenders may yet prove themselves "noble" and "compassionate" (54:1) by relinquishing their place in the community for the sake of its wellbeing.

The author of *Barnabas* brings up the calf incident in chs. 4 and 14. In ch. 4 the author quickly turns from the positive example of Moses's forty-day fast on the mountain to the Hebrews' sin with the calf and its consequences. Moses had just received the tablets of the law when God informed him, "Your people, whom you led out of Egypt, have broken the law [ἡνόμησεν]" (4:8; see also Exod 32:7 LXX). Their sin was idolatry (v. 8), a transgression of the first two commandments of the Decalogue. When Moses heard this, he immediately "understood" (συνῆκεν, v. 8) and threw the tablets of the covenant on the ground, smashing them. Chapter 14 revisits the incident. The description is essentially the same but with a few added details. It defends God against the potential accusation that he had acted unfaithfully by withholding the covenant (Rhodes 2004, 68); God had in fact "given the covenant that he swore to the fathers he would give to the people" (v. 1a) and Moses had indeed received it (v. 4). *Barnabas* emphasizes that the Hebrews failed to receive the covenant not because of God but rather because "they were not worthy [ἄξιοι] to receive it because of their sins" (v. 1b). It also clarifies what Moses had "understood"

5 See also the more detailed discussion of Justin Martyr's use of the calf incident in Radde-Gallwitz's chapter in this volume.

6 Translations of *1 Clement* and *Barnabas* are from Holmes 2007.

(συνῆκεν, v. 3; see 4:3): the Hebrews had “once again [πάλιν] ... made cast images for themselves” (v. 3).⁷

Barnabas's retelling of the calf incident differs in important ways from the biblical narrative. First, God's and Moses's responses to the incident are both revised considerably. In the biblical account, God's anger is emphasized; he says to Moses, “Now leave me be, and because I am angry with rage [θυμῶθεις ὀργῇ] toward them, I will destroy them and will make you into a great nation” (Exod 32:10 LXX, author's translation; see also vv. 11, 12). Moses intercedes and placates God's wrath (vv. 11–14). But when Moses reaches the camp, he too becomes angry like God: “And as Moses was nearing the camp, he saw the calf and the dancers, and having become enraged with wrath [ὀργισθεὶς θυμῷ], he threw the two tablets from his hands and shattered them” (v. 19). *Barnabas* omits entirely God's anger and alters Moses's reaction. Moses does not become angry; rather, he “understands” (συνῆκεν, 4:8; 14:3). This verb subtly redefines Moses's subsequent destruction of the tablets. It is no longer a spontaneous expression of wrath but his thoughtful response to God's words. Second, and more significantly, *Barnabas* amplifies the consequences of the Hebrews' sins. When Moses threw down the tablets, not only were they broken, but also the covenant itself was “lost” (4:6) and “was shattered” (4:8). Indeed, the Hebrews lost their covenant “completely” (εἰς τέλος, 4:6) when Moses had just (ἤδη) received it.

Barnabas ignores God's wrath, eliminates Moses's own anger, and absolutizes the consequences of the Hebrews' sin. Why? Consideration of the wider context reveals that the author has important paraenetic goals. Chapter 4 begins with a warning to followers of Jesus about the danger of sin. They are exhorted to “avoid ... absolutely all the works of lawlessness,” to “hate the deception of the present age” (v. 1), and not to “associate with sinners and evil people” (v. 2). While these warnings may be understood generally, the use of the calf as an illustration strongly suggests that the author has in mind the particular sin of idolatry. Indeed, there are several verbal affinities between the exhortation and the retelling of the calf incident. The verb used to denote the Hebrews' idolatry is ἀνομέω. Generically it means “be lawless, sin” (BDAG 85) or “act lawlessly” (LSJ 146), but in this context its association with idolatry gives it the connotation “commit idolatry.” The noun that corresponds to ἀνομέω is ἀνομία, which is used in v. 1 in the expression τὰ ἔργα τῆς ἀνομίας. The correspondence suggests

7 *Barnabas* does not specify when they had done this before and the biblical account does not support the claim; however, the notion that the Hebrews practiced idolatry during their Egyptian enslavement is found in the Old Testament (see, e.g., Josh 24:14; Ezek 20:7).

that ἀνομία refers specifically to idolatry.⁸ The Hebrews' idolatry caused them to lose their covenant (διαθήκη) forever (vv. 6, 8); followers of Jesus are commanded: "Do not continue to pile up your sins while claiming, 'Our covenant [διαθήκη] remains valid'" (v. 6). And while the Hebrews were not worthy of the covenant because of their sins (τάς ἁμαρτίας, plural; 14:1) and followers of Jesus are not to pile up their own "sins" (ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις, also plural; 4:6), only one actual sin, idolatry, is mentioned in these contexts. Finally, just as Moses understood (συνήκεν, 4:6; 14:3) that the appropriate consequence for idolatry is the loss of the covenant, so too followers of Jesus "ought ... to understand" (συνιέναι ... ὀφείλετε, 4:6) the same thing. *Barnabas's* interpretation of the calf indicates that followers of Jesus, should they fall back into idolatry, can lose their covenant just as finally as he supposes that the Hebrews lost theirs.⁹

Anti-Judaism and the Calf

Irenaeus

Irenaeus (ca. 130–ca. 200) was the second-century bishop of Lyon. Little is known about his life.¹⁰ He came from the eastern Roman empire (possibly Smyrna), was acquainted with Polycarp (ca. 69–ca. 155), was bishop in the 180s, and wrote *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* and the massive *Against All Heresies*. His interpretation of the calf (*Haer.* 4.15.1) is similar to Justin's but part of a different project: demonstrating to Gnostics that the

8 The association of lawlessness and idolatry is not unprecedented. Philo uses ἀνομία to describe idol-making, specifically in reference to the calf (*Mos.* 2.165). Paul similarly employs the word in a constellation of imagery that includes idolatry (2 Cor 6:14–16).

9 James N. Rhodes has shown that *Barnabas*, read in its entirety, reveals that the Jews' covenant relationship with God is more complex than the reflection on the calf incident in these passages seems to indicate. The claim that Israel irrevocably lost the covenant at Sinai stands in tension with "various data in the epistle" which "suggest that Israel's covenant relationship with God remains intact until the coming of Jesus" (2004, 174). This tension may be resolved, in part, by attending to *Barnabas's* paraenetic intent. Its exhortation against idolatry is in fact well-served by a distortion of the consequences of the Hebrews' sin with the calf. This is especially true since the biblical narrative itself shows the subsequent reestablishment of the covenant. The author of *Barnabas* may hold that if Christians read the calf incident in a certain way, they might seek to justify participation in idolatrous Greco-Roman religious practices, by asserting—spuriously according to the author—that God would forgive them and welcome them back. The author attempts to shut the door on such an interpretation by portraying the consequences of the sin at Sinai as more extreme than the biblical narrative itself indicates.

10 For an introduction to his life, see Parvis 2012, 13–24.

God of the Old Testament is, in fact, the only God, the Father of Jesus Christ, and good.

Irenaeus begins book 4, ch. 15 of *Against All Heresies* with the claims that the Decalogue is nothing more than the natural law that God had implanted in humanity “from the beginning” and that it is comprehensive and incumbent on all humans: “If any one does not observe [it], he has no salvation.”¹¹ But at Mount Sinai, the Hebrews were privileged to receive the commandments on stones engraved by God himself. Irenaeus asserts that this act of special revelation was to constitute the entirety of the Jewish law—God would “demand nothing more of them”—warranting his assertion by quoting Deut 5:22, “These are all the words which the Lord spake to the whole assembly of the sons of Israel on the mount, and He added no more.” The advantage of God’s explicit revelation of his will was the elimination of uncertainty so that those “who are willing to follow him might keep these commandments.”

But the Hebrews were not willing. Instead of following God’s law, Irenaeus remarks that “they turned themselves to make a calf, and had gone back in their minds to Egypt, desiring to be slaves instead of free-men” (*Haer.* 4.15.1). While Exodus does not make it clear whether the Hebrews actually knew the content of the Decalogue when they made the calf, there is no doubt that they had already pledged their total allegiance to YHWH (Exod 19:3–8; 24:1–8).¹² For his own argument, Irenaeus works primarily from Deut 5, which clarifies that the Hebrews had in fact heard the commandments (v. 5) and which, at least at first glance, seems to indicate that the stone tablets were given immediately (v. 22).¹³ Thus from his vantage point, the Hebrews wantonly disregarded God’s precepts and fell into idolatry.

God punished them by imposing the Mosaic law on them. For Irenaeus, this imposition has two implications. First, it demonstrates God’s munificence. God does not reject the Hebrews but gives the “unruly” desert generation “a law very suitable [to their condition]” (*Haer.* 4.14.2). Second, it reveals the Jews’ essentially slavish nature. “They were placed for the future in a state of servitude suited to their wish,—[a slavery] which did not indeed cut them off from

11 The notion that the Decalogue is an expression of the natural law finds precedence in Philo (see Rogers 2012, 87–91). Translations of *Against All Heresies* here and following are from ANF 1:479–80.

12 The Ten Commandments are recorded in Exod 20:1–17, but it is unclear in the narrative if the Hebrews actually heard the words at that time (vv. 18–21; see also 19:16–25).

13 Only in Deut 9:11 does Moses clarify that he received the tablets after forty days on the mountain.

God, but subjected them to the yoke of bondage" (*Haer.* 4.15.1).¹⁴ The law was "adapted to their condition of servitude" (*Haer.* 4.15.1). Irenaeus grounds his argument in Scripture, quoting Ezek 20:24–25, "And their eyes were after the desire of their heart; and I gave them statutes that were not good, and judgments in which they shall not live" (*Haer.* 4.15.1), and relying heavily on Stephen's speech in Acts 7, which he quotes at length (vv. 38–43).

Origen

Origen (ca. 185–ca. 254) was a major third-century Christian theologian and also one of the few about whom much is known (Cross 2005, 1200–1202). Born in Alexandria to Christian parents, he received a Christian education but also studied pagan philosophy (including Middle Platonism) and literature. He had diverse interests, including textual criticism, exegesis, theology, and spirituality. He eventually became the head of the Alexandrian catechetical school.

Origen's most significant reflection on the calf is found in *Contra Celsum*, a "classic defense of the Christian faith against the educated attack of a second-century Platonizing rhetorician" (Heine 2010, 83). He wrote it late in his career, and it may in fact be his final work (Heine 2010, 219–20). Regarding Celsus, little is known today; indeed, not even Origen appears to have known much about him (Chadwick 1979, xxiv). Celsus's principal importance lies in his work *Alēthēs Logos* (*True Discourse*), which has not survived independently, but Origen preserves much of it with lengthy quotations in *Contra Celsum* (Chadwick 1979, xxii).

Celsus himself claims to have appropriated a portion of his attack on Christianity from Jewish objections that he personifies as a Jew making remarks to Jesus himself (*Cels.* 1.28).¹⁵ One such instance occurs in *Cels.* 2.75. The Jew queries, "What God that comes among men is disbelieved, and that when he appears to those who were waiting for him? Or why ever is he not recognized by people who had been long expecting him?"¹⁶ Celsus's Jew has in mind Jesus's rejection by his own people, the vast majority of whom did not recognize him as the Messiah, let alone as God incarnate. Origen's response is to argue that it is precisely this rejection that is to be expected from the Jews

14 In the Latin translation (the Greek is no longer extant), "yoke of bondage" is *servitutis jugum* (Rousseau 1965). *Barnabas* uses a similar expression, ζυγός ἀνάγκης ("yoke of compulsion"), for the cultic law (2:6).

15 At times, however, "Celsus' Jew" (as Origen calls him [see, e.g., 1.51]) appears to address Christians instead of Jesus (e.g., 1.58).

16 Translations of *Contra Celsum* are from Chadwick 1979. Both questions are quotes from *Alēthēs Logos* (see Bader 1940, 82).

because disbelief has been their hallmark from the beginning: “[It] is enough for anyone who wants an explanation of the Jews’ disbelief in Jesus, that it was consistent with the behaviour of the people from the beginning as described in scripture” (*Cels.* 2.75). Here Origen is referring in particular to the calf incident:

According to the law of Moses God is recorded to have been most clearly present with the Hebrews not only by the signs and wonders in Egypt, and, what is more, by the way through the Red Sea and the pillar of fire and the cloud of light, but also when the Decalogue was proclaimed to the whole nation. Yet He was disbelieved by the people who knew Him. For if they had believed Him whom they had seen and heard, they would not have prepared a calf.... Nor would they have said to one another about the calf, “These are thy gods, Israel, which led thee out of the land of Egypt.” Consider also whether it is not characteristic of the same people that ... at the time of the miraculous advent of Jesus they should not have been convinced by his words, which were spoken with authority, and by the miracles which he did in the sight of all the people.

Cels. 2.74

Origen goes on to marvel that the Jews disbelieved at the beginning of two covenants, the first brought by Moses and the second by Jesus (*Cels.* 2.75).¹⁷ In this way Origen transforms Celsus’s argument about the Jews’ rejection of Jesus into an argument in favor of his divinity.¹⁸

17 It should be noted that notwithstanding this passage, Origen’s views of Jews are polyvalent and not always negative (see Blowers 1988, 96–116).

18 Origen also brings up the calf in *Cels.* 1.4. This passage echoes Irenaeus’s position that the Ten Commandments are intended for all humanity and in fact reflect the “moral principles” that “God has implanted in the souls of all men ... that every man might be without excuse at the divine judgment” (1.4). Making the calf was only a futile attempt to sweep away God’s eternal commandments. Here Origen’s concern is to maintain the permanence of God’s commandments, not to absolutize the Hebrews’ faithlessness. Other passages in Origen referring to the calf include *Ep. Greg.* 3, where idolatry is associated with Egypt (Origen 1998, 191–92; note that some question whether the letter was actually addressed to Gregory Thaumaturgus [Slusser 1998, 36–37]); *Comm. Jo.* 10.77, where Origen mentions that God called the Israelites the “people of Moses” (as opposed to “his own” people) when they sinned (Heine 1989); *Sel. Num.* (PG 12:576c), where he remarks that God punished those aged twenty and older who had made the calf; and *Sel. Jes. Nav.* (PG 8:821c), where he recounts Moses’s intercession on behalf of the Hebrews after they made the calf.

Didascalia apostolorum and the Apostolic Constitutions

The *Didascalia apostolorum* is an early Christian pseudepigraphal work on church order, putatively written by the twelve apostles. Originally composed in Greek and probably in Syria in the third century, it survives complete only in a Syriac translation alongside significant fragments in Latin (Cross 2005, 482). It was the source for chs. 1–6 of a similar Greek pseudepigraphon, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which dates from the fourth century (ca. 350–380) and which likewise probably originates from Syria (Cross 2005, 91). Both works evidence Syriac Christianity's complex relationship with Judaism and in particular with the law of Moses. Although their evaluations of the law are not identical (Lenk 2010, 185–86; Fonrobert 2001, 496), the calf incident plays an important role in each.

Chapter 2 of the *Didascalia* contains a series of exhortations. Among them is the negative injunction to “avoid all books of the heathens.”¹⁹ Instead believers are to read “the word of God,” that is, the Bible, selecting a book according to their interests. For tales, they should select “the Book of the Kings”; for wisdom, “the prophets”; for songs, “the psalms of David”; for the origin of the world, “the Genesis of the great Moses”; for law, “the Book of Exodus of the Lord God.” The author then pauses; a caveat is in order: they *might* read Deuteronomy, but it constitutes a special case. Readers are to be discerning: “Although you read the second legislation, recognize this alone that you know and glorify God who has redeemed us from all these bonds. And this shall be set before your eyes that you may discern and know what in the Law is the Law, and what are the bonds that are in the second legislation.” The difference is this: “The first Law is that which the Lord God spoke before the people had made the calf and served idols, that is the ten sayings and the judgements. And after they have served idols, He rightly set upon them the bonds, as they deserved.” Christians are only to observe the former and not the latter because “our Savior came for no other reason than to fulfil the Law, and to loosen us from the bonds of the second legislation.” Christians who do not heed this warning bind themselves “with the bonds of heavy burdens which may not be loosed.”

The *Didascalia*, agreeing with Justin's *Dialogue*, affirms the validity of the Ten Commandments and rejects the rest of the Mosaic law. The *Didascalia*'s view, however, is hardened against observance. Whereas Justin concedes that Christians might observe the law and not risk their salvation so long as they do not impose it on others (Justin, *Dial.* 47.1), *Didascalia* 2 expressly forbids observance: “Extremely abstain from the commands and prohibitions that are therein so that you may not lead yourself astray.” Because the law is not just an accommodation of the Jews' idolatrous tendency (Justin, *Dial.* 19.6) but a

19 Translations of *Didascalia* are from Vööbus 1979.

punishment imposed by God on the Jews from which Christians have been set free, Christians who observe the law put their salvation at risk.

Nevertheless, the relationship between Judaism and the Christianity of the *Didascalia* is more complex than its interpretation of the calf may at first indicate. John G. Gager reports that “the orthodox [Christian] view which the document repeatedly claims to represent must be seen as orthodox in a quite particular sense; that is, this Syrian orthodoxy presupposes both an open dialogue between Jews and Christians and a significant degree of Jewish influence on Christian belief and practice” (1985, 125–26). Miriam S. Taylor notes that “the *Didascalia* does not undertake a simple and straightforward rejection of everything Jewish” (1995, 37). For example, the *Didascalia* preserves the traditional date of Passover, 14 Nisan (*Did. apost.* 21). Therefore, she suggests that the “contrast between the old and the new dispensations [in *Did. apost.* 2] should be understood in theoretical rather than practical terms” (Taylor 1995, 39). That is, the need to properly subordinate the cultic commandments within the framework of the Christian faith is more important than the issue of actual observance or nonobservance (Taylor 1995, 39–40).

The calf serves a very similar function in the *Apostolic Constitutions*. It appropriates in 1.6 the warning found in *Did. apost.* 2 but with significant modifications. For instance, the term for Scripture is not “the word of God” (*Did. apost.* 2) but “the law of God” (*Apos. Con.* 1.6; Lenk 2010, 51). This change illustrates the *Constitutions*’ more extensive, nuanced, and ambiguous understanding of God’s law:

When you read the law, keep away from those that you recognize having been brought into it from the outside (ἐπείσαστα), though not all of them, only those of the *deuterosis*.²⁰ Read those only for the sake of history, for the sake of your knowledge of them, and to glorify God that He has delivered you from such great and so many bonds. Let it be known to you which is natural law (νόμος φυσικός) and which has those rules of the *deuterosis*, those brought in from the outside which were given in the wilderness to the makers of the calf.

Apos. Con. 1.6²¹

20 “*Deuterosis* is variously translated as ‘second law’ or ‘second legislation.’ This category seems to include biblical ritual law which the author of *Didascalia* believes no longer applies since Christ” (Lenk 2010, 12 n18).

21 No complete, recent English translation of the *Apostolic Constitutions* exists. Unless otherwise noted, the relevant passages quoted here have been translated by Marcie E. Lenk in her 2010 Harvard University dissertation and are based on James Donaldson’s translation in *ANF* 7:391–505.

As in the *Didascalia*, making the calf results in God imposing legislative bonds on the Hebrews as punishment. But Marcie E. Lenk has shown that the phrase “not all of them, only those of the *deuterosis*” indicates that the *Constitutions* see the scriptural embodiment of the natural law (a term that the *Didascalia* does not use) as embracing more than the Ten Commandments. She argues that

where the author of the *Didascalia* has a long discourse about the rejected *deuterosis*, the compiler of *AC* adds positive language regarding the continuing obligation of natural law (*Didascalia* 26; *AC* 6.24.1–6.25.2). No distinction is made between the authority of the *Decalogue* and the authority of later commandments (*AC* 3.8.2), though many are interpreted typologically. For example, tithes are to be given not to priests in the Jerusalem Temple, but to bishops (*AC* 2.25.1–15), and laws concerning kings (1 Sam. 8) are applied to bishops (*AC* 2.34.1–6). Other laws from Leviticus and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible are interpreted literally and remain obligatory, such as the rejection of donations from a sinner (Leviticus 19:6; *AC* 4.10.1–4) or the prohibition against sexual intercourse when a woman is menstruating (Leviticus 18:19; *AC* 6.28.8).

LENK 2010, 190

Most surprising, however, may be the positive valuation of the Sabbath: “Throughout the eight books of the *Apostolic Constitutions* we find positive references to the Sabbath despite *Didascalia*’s rejection of Sabbath ‘idleness’ as one of the laws from which Christ ‘has set you loose’ (*Didascalia* 9)” (Lenk 2010, 191; see also van Unnik 1983, 32).²²

Their different views of the law notwithstanding, the *Didascalia* and the *Constitutions* both have negative views of Jews.²³ For example, *Did. apost.* 13 holds the Jews of its own time accountable for Jesus’s execution. Moreover,

²² That Sabbath observance is one of the Ten Commandments is a significant but, arguably, poorly met challenge for the author of the *Didascalia*. Willem C. van Unnik’s analysis of its argument against its observance shows that “it excels ... in producing confusion. Texts are strung together without any inner logic or cohesion” (1983, 14). He concludes that “the author was moved to write [against the Sabbath] by the need to combat current practices rather than by a fondness for theorising” (19).

²³ Taylor’s claim that in the *Didascalia* “the Jews are referred to compassionately as brethren” (1995, 39) is an oversimplification. Christians are to refer to Jews as brethren because Isaiah commands, “Call them brethren, those who hate and reject you” (*Did. apost.* 21; Isa 66:5 LXX). The same chapter paraphrases Matt 5:44, “Pray for your enemies” (Matthew has, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”; see also Luke 6:27–28) in reference to the Jews. Such prayer is, however, for the Jews’ repentance. Gentile Christians

God's people are in his church; the Jews stand rejected: "It [the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple] demonstrates that God had abandoned the people of the Jews and the temple, and has come to the church of the gentiles" (*Did. apost.* 23). The *Constitutions'* denigration of the Jews is even stronger (Lenk 2010, 35). For example, the calf is mentioned again in 5.12 where the Jews' idolatry is ascribed to "the perverseness of their temper" (Lenk 2010, 37), and 6.20 similarly condemns the Jewish cultic and ritual law as bonds imposed by God because of their ingratitude.²⁴

The Acts of Pilate and the Acts of Peter and Paul

Christians also found ways to co-opt pagans into their denigration of Jews' supposedly essentially defective character. Two apocryphal works put Christian interpretations of the calf into the mouths of Gentiles. The *Acts of Pilate* imaginatively elaborates the New Testament accounts of the trial of Jesus.²⁵ As in the gospels, Pilate finds Jesus faultless (*Acts Pil.* 3.1; 4.1; cf. Mark 15:6–14// Matt 27:15–23, Luke 23:18–23; John 18:38b; 19:4, 6b, 12a). But the Jewish leaders want him killed. Some Jews, however, weep, leading Pilate to remark, "Not all the multitude wishes him to die" (*Acts Pil.* 4.5).²⁶ The leaders deny this: "For this purpose has the whole multitude of us come, that he should die" (4.5). Between this exchange and Jesus's ultimate condemnation (9.4), a series of witnesses, including Nicodemus, testify to Jesus's ministry of healing (chs. 5–8). Their testimony reinforces Pilate's intuition that the Jews seek to kill Jesus because he performed good works (2.6). As in the gospels, Pilate offers to free either the murderer Barabbas or Jesus (9.1). But the Jews cry out for Jesus's crucifixion.

are also to pray for the Jews' conversion because their disobedience made it possible for the Gentiles to be received by Jesus (*Did. apost.* 21).

- 24 Even here the *Constitutions* proffer a striking interpretation; offering sacrifices to God is not inherently wrong: "Abel,... Noah and Abraham, and those that succeeded, without being required, but only moved of themselves by the law of nature, did offer sacrifice to God out of a grateful mind" (6.20 [*ANF* 7:459]). The Jews, however, did not desire to offer sacrifices to God, but rather to idols. As a result, God punished them by transforming the permissibility of offering sacrifices ("if thou makest [an altar]") into an obligation ("make an altar") (*Apos. Con.* 6.20).
- 25 The origin and textual history of the *Acts of Pilate*, which is preserved in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, is complex (see Scheidweiler 1991, 501–4). According to the prevailing view, it was composed to counteract a pagan "Acts of Pilate" produced under Maximinus II early in the fourth century; however, it uses sources, including the canonical gospels, that are obviously much older. The work goes to great lengths to show Pilate's piety and even portrays his wife as a Judeophile (*Acts Pil.* 2.1).
- 26 Translations of *Acts of Pilate* are from *Acts of Pilate* 1991.

And Pilate was angry and said to the Jews: "Your nation is always seditious and in rebellion against your benefactors.... As I have heard, your God brought you out of Egypt out of hard slavery, and led you safe through the sea as if it had been dry land, and in the wilderness nourished you and gave you manna and quails, and gave you water to drink from a rock, and gave you the law. And despite all this you provoked the anger of your God: you wanted a molten calf and angered your God." (9.2)

Pilate is not portrayed as a Christian in the *Acts of Pilate*. Nevertheless, he expresses a traditional Christian anti-Jewish sentiment.

The second work, the *Acts of Peter and Paul* (also known as Pseudo-Marcellus), places the same patristic sentiment in the mouths of first-generation pagan converts to the Christian faith.²⁷ In the work, Jews in Rome, when they hear that Paul has appealed to Caesar (cf. Acts 25:10–12), first ask Nero to order Paul's immediate execution so as to prevent his arrival in Rome (*Acts Pet. Paul* 3).²⁸ Nero complies (4), but Paul arrives anyway. The Jews then strangely beg Paul to denounce Peter for his practice of teaching Gentiles and undermining the observance of the Mosaic law (22). Paul demurs, saying that he will oppose Peter only if what he teaches is wrong (23). But when they meet, their touching encounter makes it clear that Paul has no intention of confronting Peter: "And seeing each other, they [Peter and Paul] wept for joy; and long embracing each other, they bedewed each other with tears" (24 [*ANF* 8:479]). The next day, Jewish Christians confront Gentile believers. Gentiles, they say, "are no great thing in [their] lineage," but Jews "are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, the friends of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, with whom God spake, to whom He showed His own mysteries and His great wonders" (27 [*ANF* 8:479]). The Gentiles' response points out in typical patristic fashion Jewish obduracy, which contrasts with the Gentiles' own willingness to embrace the truth:

27 No recent English translation of this work exists; according to Baldwin, it was considered "unworthy of inclusion in *NTA* [*New Testament Apocrypha*]" (2005, 37 n44). *New Testament Apocrypha* does, however, have an introduction (Santos Otero 1991, 440–42). The document dates to between the second and fourth centuries (Santos Otero 1991, 440). Originally written in Greek, it was widely distributed and translated into Latin, Armenian, Coptic, Georgian, Old Slavonic, Irish, and Arabic (Santos Otero 1991, 440). The most readily available English translation remains that of Alexander Walker (*ANF* 8:477–485), first published in 1890; it is used here. A major concern of the work is to emphasize the close relationship between Peter and Paul, whom the document even calls brothers (*Acts Pet. Paul* 5).

28 Section numbers are from Tischendorf's edition (1851, 1–39); they are absent in the *ANF* translation.

We [Gentiles], when we heard the truth, straightway followed it, having abandoned our errors. But you, both knowing the mighty deeds of your fathers, and seeing the signs of the prophets, and having received the law, and gone through the sea with dry feet, and seen your enemies sunk in its depths, and the pillar of fire by night and of cloud by day shining upon you, and manna having been given to you out of heaven, and water flowing to you out of a rock,—after all these things you fashioned to yourselves the idol of a calf, and worshipped the graven image. But we, having seen none of the signs, believe to be a Saviour the God whom you have forsaken in unbelief.

Acts Pet. Paul 27 [ANF 8:479]

Using the calf incident to undercut any Jewish claims to superiority, the Gentile believers clearly employ stock anti-Jewish polemics. What is surprising, however, is that it is directed specifically at “Jewish Christians” (τῶν Ἰουδαίων Χριστιανῶν; see 21 [Tischendorf 1851, 9]). Up to this point in the work, there is nothing to indicate that Jews are members of the Roman church, and the tenor of the work prior to section 26 appears to exclude this possibility. But in sections 26–27, the conflict is clearly intra-ecclesial. “Paul,” who does not directly delegitimize the Jews’ assertions, quiets the conflict by summarizing teachings from Romans and Galatians (*Acts Pet. Paul* 29; cf. Rom 2:11–12; Gal 3:28).

John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom (347–407) frequently inveighed against the Jews when he was a presbyter in Antioch.²⁹ His vitriol is so extreme that James Parkes even assessed his eight sermons, the so-called *Adversus Judaeos*, as “the most horrible and violent denunciations of Judaism to be found in the writings of a Christian theologian” (Parkes 1969, 153).³⁰ More disturbingly, these sermons

29 For an introduction to John’s life, see Mayer and Allen 2000, 3–52.

30 For a modern translation, see that of Harkins (John Chrysostom 1979), which is followed here. No critical Greek edition exists; the most accessible Greek text remains Migne’s (PG 48:843–942). The title *Adversus Judaeos* is not to be attributed to Chrysostom; the preacher directs his words to Christians (see, e.g., *Adv. Jud.* 1.1.5), so Harkins’s title *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians* is more adequate. As for his own language, Chrysostom eschews the use of the noun “Judaizer” (Ἰουδαϊστής) and instead uses various forms of the verb “Judaize” (ἰουδαῖζω). See, e.g., *Adv. Jud.* 1.4; 6.7; 8.4 (PG 48:849; 916; 934). Regarding Chrysostom’s “venom,” Parkes attributes it to “the friendly relations the Christian congregation maintained with the Jews, and to the influences which the Jews exercised on their thinking and actions” (1969, 153). Chrysostom considered these relations to be a grave threat to Christian orthodoxy and so sought “to cure those [Christians] who are sick with the Judaizing disease” (*Adv. Jud.* 1.1.5).

against Judaizers (that is, Christians who participate in Jewish festivals or who keep other Jewish observances), which came to be widely circulated not only in Greek but also in Latin and Syriac translations, became “a factor in forming [anti-Jewish] Christian attitudes in times and places far removed from ancient Antioch” (Wilken 1983, 161–62).³¹

Chrysostom’s use of the calf in his anti-Jewish polemic adds little to the Christian portrayal of Jews as essentially faithless and ungrateful. But the tone of his invective is remarkable. For example, in Rom 11:7, Paul claims that most Jews (“Israel”) did not accept Jesus because they “were hardened.” Commenting on this verse, Chrysostom remarks that Paul’s words need no further clarification: “Do these things then still require any interpreting? Are they not plain even to those ever so senseless? ... For at what time have [the Jews] ever been so open to attacks? At what time such an easy prey?” (*Hom. Rom.* 19.1 [*NPNF*¹ 11:487]). Nevertheless, Chrysostom indulges in a gratuitous attack on the Jews for their sins. He begins with the calf: “God freed thee speedily from that bondage, and that though thou wert irreligious, and wentest a whoring with the most baneful whoredom. Thou wast freed from Egypt, and thou didst worship the calf” (19.1 [*NPNF*¹ 11:487]). In *Adv. Jud.* 5.4.4, Chrysostom ascribes this irreligiosity to willful arrogance and obstinacy:

They immediately forgot what God had done for them, they ascribed his kindness to demons and reckoned that his blessings had come from them. Even when the sea was divided for them, as they went forth from Egypt, and while other wonderful things were happening to them, they forgot the God who was performing these miracles and attributed them to others who were not gods. For they said to Aaron: “Make for us gods who will be our leaders.”³²

Unlike others, Chrysostom does not use the calf to explain the Mosaic law as an ongoing burden imposed on the Jews because of sin; he does, however, contemporize the consequences of the Jews’ ancient sin in a different way.³³ It is

31 Stephen T. Katz asserts that the lasting historical significance of Chrysostom’s anti-Judaism is the result, in part, of the dramatically changed political landscape of the fourth-century Mediterranean world. That is, the legalization of Christianity politicized what had previously been a squabble between two religious minorities and enabled the Church to “[make] real its scornful commentary on Judaism” (1991, 52–53).

32 As noted above, translations of *Adversus Judaeos* are those of Harkins (John Chrysostom 1979).

33 Chrysostom’s response to a (hypothetical) Jew’s question about the cultic law, “Why, then, did God impose these prescriptions if he did not wish them observed?” is, “If he [God] wished them observed, why, then, did he destroy your city?” (*Adv. Jud.* 4.6.1).

one important reason why “the temple will never be rebuilt” (*Adv. Jud.* 5.4.1) and why the “Jews have been living for so long a time outside of Jerusalem” (*Adv. Jud.* 6.2.5–6).

Like other patristic authors, Chrysostom uses the calf incident to prefigure the Jews’ ultimate expression of faithlessness: their rejection of Jesus. This is one of his major points in *Hom. Act.* 17. This sermon examines a portion of Stephen’s speech (Acts 7:35–53). Chrysostom both recognizes its invective (Stephen “has assailed [the Jews] violently with the word” [καταφορικῶς τῷ λόγῳ κέχρηται, PG 60:137]) and amplifies it, mentioning the calf not once but three times. In one instance he writes,

“And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifices unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands” [Acts 7:41]: for which they ought to have hid their faces. What wonder that ye [Jews] know not Christ, seeing ye knew not Moses, and God Who was manifested by such wonders?

*NPNF*¹ 11:108

The “wonders” Chrysostom refers to include those performed by both Moses and Christ, a point he makes very explicit in *Hom. 2 Cor.* 21.4: “The Jews saw so many marvels happen before their eyes, yet straightway worshipped a calf. Again they saw Christ casting out demons, yet called him one that had a demon” (*NPNF*¹ 12:378; see also *Hom. Matt.* 12.2 [*NPNF*¹ 10:76]).³⁴ The rejection of Christ is, moreover, an even greater provocation of God: “He is much more provoked to anger now, because of the Jews’ mad rage against Christ, than he was when they worshipped the calf” (*Adv. Jud.* 6.4.5). Indeed, their “rage” is why God abandoned them (*Adv. Jud.* 6.4.4).

One relatively innovative use of the calf episode occurs in Chrysostom’s eighth homily on Matthew. Commenting on the claim in Matt 2:15 that Jesus’s flight to Egypt and subsequent return to Palestine fulfilled Hos 11:1, “out of Egypt I called my son,” he responds to a Jewish objection that these words refer not to Jesus but to the Jews by invoking what he calls “a law of prophecy”: “In many cases much that is spoken of one set of persons is fulfilled in another” (*Hom. Matt.* 8.5 [*NPNF*¹ 10:53]).³⁵ Chrysostom then asks, “For which may be called the truer son of God, he that worships a calf, and is joined to Baalpeor,

34 In this same text, Chrysostom further maligns the Jews by associating them with Marcion’s and Mani’s abuse of Paul’s writings.

35 The significance of the collective identification of the Hebrews specifically as “God’s son” in the Torah (see Schmitt 2004), Israel’s founding narrative, helps contextualize Jewish objections to the application of Hos 11:1 to Jesus, a single individual.

and sacrifices his sons to devils? Or He that is a Son by nature, and honors Him that begat Him? So that, except this man had come, the prophecy would not have received its due fulfillment" (8.5). What is distinctive about this use of the calf incident is the unusual comparison of the Jews to Jesus; it is more normal, as we have seen, to compare the Jews to Christians.

Pedagogy and the Calf

Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 215) was an important early Christian intellectual. While his biography remains obscure, it is known that he converted to Christianity as an adult from a pagan family (Osborn 2006, 289). He had a strong background in Greek philosophy and used it to refute the pagan charge that Christianity was "a religion for the ignorant" (Cross 2005, 367). His work represents an early synthesis of Christianity and Greek philosophy, especially Middle Platonism, to which he was very sympathetic (Spanneut 2003, 798). As for Jews and Judaism, W. Barnes Tatum has shown that Clement remarkably "not only generally lacks anti-Judaic or anti-Semitic sentiment but, within limits, discloses strong philo-Judaic or philo-Semitic tendencies" (Tatum 1993, 121–22; see also Paget 2010, 91–101). Indeed, Clement's synthesis is deeply indebted to Philo of Alexandria, whom he frequently used as a source (Hoek 1988, 210).

Clement's pedagogical use of the golden calf also demonstrates his philo-Judaism.³⁶ In the *Paedagogus*, Clement considers how God effects human moral transformation. He posits that "the Lord calls mankind to salvation by using progressively every kind of treatment" (*Paed.* 1.10.91).³⁷ Specifically, he uses one of "three possible methods of giving advice" (1.10.90). These methods are temporal: God draws humans' attention to what has happened in the past, to what is happening in the present, or to what will happen in the future. Incidental examples of the first counsel are "the punishments the Jews met with after they had worshiped the golden calf, or when they had committed fornication, or after similar misdeeds" (1.10.90). Later, in book 2, Clement uses the golden calf to counsel against the dangers of wealth. Not only is wealth unable to save, but it also easily leads to idolatry. He laments, "How fortunate

36 Interestingly, Clement does refer to the calf as "golden." (See *Paed.* 1.10.90, where he uses the adjective χρυσοῦς, and 2.12.126, where he uses the verb χρυσοχοῦν; for the Greek, see Harl et al. 1960–1970.) Here, too, Clement is likely dependent on Philo, who sometimes refers to the calf (μόσχος, or "bull," ταῦρος) as "golden" (χρυσοῦς). See, e.g., *Post.* 158; *Fug.* 90; *Mos.* 2.162, 270; for the Greek, see Borgen, Fuglseth, and Skarsten 2005.

37 Translations of *Paedagogus* are by Wood in Clement of Alexandria 1954.

the Hebrews of old would have been if they had taken hold of the ornaments of their women and thrown them away.... As it was, they fashioned them into a golden calf and made an idol of the calf" (2.12.126). Clement finally elaborates the pedagogical import of this event: the Hebrews "derived no benefit either from their art or from their plan, but only provided our women a striking lesson on the advantage of laying ornaments aside" (2.12.126).

While Clement does not specify in the *Paedagogus* how exactly God punished the Hebrews for their sin with the calf, in *Strom.* 2.15 he does offer an explanation of what God intended to accomplish with punishment. The passage is a long discussion about sin and its consequences that culminates in the hope of forgiveness for sinners. Yet forgiveness is more than expunging guilt or avoiding punishment; rather, "the Lord shows us to our faces that our falls from grace and discordant acts are under our own control. He offers ways of healing [τρόπους θεραπειάς] appropriate to our different passions" (*Strom.* 2.15.69).³⁸ Clement then asks a rhetorical question to illustrate his point, "Does not God, after [granting] forbearance [συγγνώμη] to Cain, suitably introduce not long afterwards Enoch, who repented [μετανοήσαντα], [thus] revealing that forbearance is disposed by nature to engender repentance [μετάνοια]? Forbearance is constituted not for release [ἄφεσις] [from penalty] but for healing [ἰασις]" (2.15.70; author's translation).³⁹ He then adds the calf as another illustration of this principle: "The same applies to the making of the calf in the time of Aaron" (2.15.70). Clement does not explain exactly what he means. But in light of his view of repentance, punishment, and forgiveness, namely that "God punishes the disobedient inasmuch as punishment is for the good and profit of him who

38 Unless otherwise noted, translations of *Stromata* are by Ferguson in Clement of Alexandria 1991. For a critical edition of the Greek text, see Clement of Alexandria 1985.

39 I have offered my own translation in this case because both John Ferguson's (Clement of Alexandria 1991, 205) and William Wilson's (*ANF* 2:363) translations are sufficiently in error to obscure Clement's point. Συγγνώμη means "forbearance, leniency, mercy" or "forgiveness, pardon" (PGL 1266). In this context, the former is preferable in light of Clement's dependence on Philo, who uses Cain and Enoch to argue that God intends for his mercy to lead to repentance, that is, moral improvement. When Cain sinned, Philo argues, God introduced sinners to "amnesty," "patience," and "mercy" (*QG* 1.76 LCL). Their purpose, however, was not realized until Enoch became the first human to repent. (Philo infers Enoch's repentance from Gen 5:22, which he quotes, "Enoch was pleasing to God, after he begot Methuselah, two hundred years" [*QG* 1.82; cp. the LXX, εὐηρέστησεν δὲ Ἐνὼχ τῷ θεῷ μετὰ τὸ γεννησάι αὐτὸν τὸν Μαθουσαλα διακόσια ἔτη]; for him the preposition μετὰ shows that prior to Methuselah's birth Enoch had not been pleasing to God.) Thus the story of Enoch "defines repentance, not mocking or in any way reproaching those who appear to have sinned" (*QG* 1.82). That is, God is not toying with sinners by forgoing, for a time, punishment, but rather is offering hope so that they can change, like Enoch, "from the worse life to the better" (*Abr.* 17; see also *QG* 1.85).

is punished" (Karavites 1999, 69; see also Horn 2006, 164–69), he must believe that God's punishment for the calf led to the Hebrews' repentance and the reestablishment of their covenant.⁴⁰

Tertullian

Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 225), a well-educated Roman North African and an adult convert to Christianity from paganism, uses the calf in two places.⁴¹ Both are part of larger responses to gnostic challenges to proto-orthodox Christianity. They are thus constrained by the material to which they respond. In both instances Tertullian leverages the calf incident typologically to make pedagogical points of contemporary relevance. In the first text, *Marc.* 2.26, Tertullian defends God against Marcion's accusation that Moses is more just than God because whereas God responds wrathfully to Israel's sin with the calf, Moses reacts mercifully:

God made himself little even in the midst of his fierce anger, when in his wrath against the people because of the consecration of the (golden) calf he demanded of his servant Moses, *Let me alone, and I will wax hot in wrath and destroy them, and I will make thee into a great nation.* On this you are in the habit of insisting that Moses was a better person than his own God—deprecating, yes and even forbidding, his wrath: for he says, *Thou shalt not do this: or else destroy me along with them.*⁴²

Tertullian rejects Marcion's interpretation by giving his own. First, in this episode Moses prefigures Christ, the one who truly "intercedes with the Father" and who offers "his own soul for the saving of the people."⁴³ Second, the episode reveals "how much is permitted to one who has faith, and is a prophet, in the presence of God."⁴⁴ Tertullian thus interprets God's anger as merely apparent: God's response was meant to elicit Moses's righteous intercession on Israel's behalf.

40 This view may be contrasted with that of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, where making the calf caused the Hebrews to lose the covenant "forever."

41 For an introduction to Tertullian's life, see Dunn 2004, 1–36.

42 Translations of *Adversus Marcionem* are from Evans in Tertullian 1972. Note that "golden" is not in the Latin text (Tertullian 1972, 1:158).

43 Tertullian's response is not, however, without anti-Jewish sentiment: "Greatly to be pitied are you, as well as the Israelites, for not realizing that in the person of Moses there is a prefiguring of Christ" (*Marc.* 2.26).

44 For a similar laudatory appraisal of Moses's intercession, see my remarks on 1 *Clement* above. See also Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 105.19 (see below).

The second text uses the calf to support an argument about the value of martyrdom. Tertullian, who famously authored the phrase “*semen est sanguis Christianorum*” (*Apol.* 50.13), is “demonstrably and undeniably a supporter of martyrdom” (Moss 2013, 104). *Scorpiace*, or *Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting*, is his refutation of the Valentinian view that martyrdom was unnecessary. It is important for understanding Tertullian's own views on the subject (Moss 2013, 110). His outlook closely fits his Roman context, which is well illustrated by Pliny's letter to Trajan. Pliny reports that he exonerates alleged Christians who willingly curse Christ and participate in civic piety by invoking the Roman gods and offering prayers, incense, and wine to the emperor's image. But he condemns to death those who refuse, noting that none who are really Christians can be forced to do these things (*Ep.* 10.96). Execution is the outcome of refusing to participate in idolatry.

Tertullian adopts this outlook but expands it by making the positive case that martyrdom is also the will of God. He does this by examining God's response to idolatry. He brings forward two propositions: First, it is fitting for God to proscribe idolatry by disallowing his name and honor to be given to an idol (*Scorp.* 3.1). Second, it is God's prerogative to punish those who abandon this proscription because “it would have been a pointless institution if [the teaching] had not been intended to be observed, and it would have been in vain that [God] wanted it to be observed if there was no wish to avenge [its abandonment]” (*Scorp.* 3.1).⁴⁵ These presuppositions are not merely theoretical; the calf incident proves that God enforces his proscription against idolatry. While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the law,

the people ... sought to produce gods for themselves that they should rather have destroyed. Aaron is pressured and orders that their women's earrings be melted together in the fire.... The fire of wisdom poured out the likeness of a bull calf, taunting them [with] having their heart where their treasure also is, [which was] certainly in Egypt, which also consecrates [the likeness] of a certain cow.

Scorp. 3.2–3⁴⁶

45 Translations of *Scorpiace* are from Dunn 2004.

46 Tertullian's version of the calf incident differs from the biblical narrative. In Exod 32:4, Aaron himself makes the calf, but Tertullian ascribes the bovine form of the idol to the “fire of wisdom.” Tertullian thus minimizes Aaron's culpability in a way that parallels rabbinic interpretations (see Smolar and Aberbach 1968, 109–11).

By making an idol, they transgressed God's prohibition and suffered a severe punishment: three thousand people were slaughtered. The entire episode then becomes a stake in Tertullian's larger argument: since God commands his people to worship him exclusively, and since he severely punishes those who transgress, and since martyrdom may be the result of obedience, then logically God must will martyrdom.

Jerome

Jerome (ca. 345–420) provides another pedagogical interpretation of the calf episode. In the fourth century, a Roman Christian monk named Jovinian (died ca. 405) wrote a treatise (now lost) against the widely held view that asceticism benefited those who practiced it. His views caused considerable controversy. In the early 390s two synods, one in Rome under Pope Siricius and another in Milan under Ambrose, condemned Jovinian, and an imperial edict in 398 condemned him to flogging and banishment (Hunter 2007, 16, 20, 243). Jerome, a well-known “champion of chastity” (Kelly 1975, 179–94) and a rigorous ascetic, was also asked to respond.⁴⁷ He produced a two-book treatise, *Adversus Jovinianum*, which today constitutes our primary source for Jovinian's life and teaching.⁴⁸ In 1.3, he summarizes Jovinian's four main points: (1) virginity is not superior to marriage; (2) the devil cannot overthrow those who “with full assurance of faith have been born again in baptism” (*NPNF*² 6:348); (3) fasting is not superior to eating with thanksgiving; and (4) “there is one reward in the kingdom of heaven for all who have kept their baptismal vow” (*NPNF*² 6:348). Each point in its own way attacked the belief that traditional ascetic practices “merited for the Christian a higher or better reward in heaven” (Hunter 2007, 1). Jerome judges Jovinian's views to be both self-serving and self-contradictory. On the one hand, Jovinian had abandoned his practice of asceticism: “he has exchanged his dirty tunic, bare feet, common bread, and drink of water, for a snowy dress, sleek skin, honey-wine and dainty dishes” (*Jov.* 1.40 [*NPNF*² 6:378]); he therefore needs to justify his indulgence. On the other hand, Jerome points out that Jovinian had not married and still considered himself a monk.

47 Jerome maintained that the preservation of chastity required fasting because there was “physiological connection between eating and sexual desire” such that indulgence in food easily led to sexual arousal (Shaw 1988, 99). Jerome's advocacy for extreme asceticism landed him in controversy, especially when his convert Blesilla starved herself to death in 384 (Shaw 1988, 107).

48 Other sources include letters by Pope Siricius and Ambrose (see Hunter 2007, 15–24). Augustine also responded to Jovinian's teaching with *The Good of Marriage*. (He does not mention Jovinian in the treatise, but he does name Jovinian's teaching as his reason for writing it in *Retract.* 2.48.1.)

If Jovinian is so sure that virginity and marriage are equal, Jerome argues, then he ought to get married himself (*Jov.* 1.40).

In book 2 Jerome argues in favor of the practices of food abstinence and fasting. He grounds his argument in the dangers that arise from food, which he finds not only in Scripture but also in pagan history. For example, in ch. 9 he notes that Crates the Theban rejected food that might have tempted him. Greek philosophers likewise taught the value of abstinence (chs. 12–14). Turning to Scripture, he points out that the original command was about abstinence: “Adam received a command in paradise to abstain from one tree though he might eat the other fruit” (*Jov.* 2.15; see Gen 2:16–17).⁴⁹ Abstinence was thus a part of the original created order: “The blessedness of paradise could not be consecrated without abstinence from food” (*Jov.* 2.15).

It is here that Jerome gives the calf incident a surprising pedagogical interpretation that makes the Hebrews’ idolatry the result of self-indulgence. He contrasts Moses’s forty-day fast on the mountain (Exod 34:28)—proof that “man does not live on bread alone” (*Jov.* 2.15)—to the Hebrews’ gluttony. Lacking self-control, they “longed for the flesh of Egypt, and the melons and garlic” (*Jov.* 2.15). They repine what they have lost: “We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt for nought; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic; but now our soul is dried away: we have nought save this manna to look to” (*Jov.* 2.15; see also Num 11:5–6). The Hebrews “despised angels’ food” (*Jov.* 2.15). Jerome then inverts the biblical narrative. Making the calf does not lead to festive eating and drinking; instead, eating and drinking lead to idolatry: “The people that ate and drank and rose up to play fashioned a golden calf” (*Jov.* 2.15; note that “golden” is in the Latin text [PL 23:306c]). This is, moreover, an inevitable outcome. After all, Jerome argues, had God not warned the Hebrews, “Beware, lest when thou hast eaten and drunk ... thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God” (*Jov.* 2.15, quoting Deut 8:12–14)? Moses then breaks the tablets not because of the Hebrews’ idolatry but because “he knew that drunkards cannot hear the word of God” (*Jov.* 2.15). Consequently, the calf incident helps demonstrate the virtue of fasting for Christians.

John Chrysostom

We have already seen that Chrysostom often used the calf text as part of his anti-Jewish polemic, but on occasion he could also use the calf pedagogically. In *Hom. Gen.* 1.7 he makes an argument similar to Jerome’s about the necessity of fasting: Moses was able to receive the law “after keeping his fast for forty days,”

49 This and all subsequent translations of *Jov.* 2.15 in this section are from *NPNF*² 6:398–99.

but when he saw the Israelites' sin, "he threw down and smashed [the tablets], thinking it was preposterous that an indulgent and sinful people should receive laws of the Lord's own making" (trans. Hill in John Chrysostom 1986). Similarly, his sermon on 1 Cor 9:24–10:12 (*Hom. 1 Cor. 23*), following Paul's pedagogical lead, informs Christians that "luxury and gluttony" are "the parent" of idolatry (*NPNF*¹ 12:134) and cautions them that should they fall into idolatry their punishment will be even more severe than Israel's (*NPNF*¹ 12:135).

Another pedagogical use comes from his treatise *No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself*. Chrysostom composed it during one of his exiles and sent it to a friend, the deaconess Olympias, to respond to her fear that his exile might have harmed him. It had not, he assured her. His reasoning, which closely follows that of Plato in book 10 of the *Republic*, is that external actions against a person cannot cause harm because sin, which humans allow themselves to commit against themselves, is what destroys their virtue and harms their nature (Osborn 1976, 120). He sees in the calf incident a prominent example of self-harm. The Hebrews abandoned God and instead "worshipped a calf, and paid reverence to the head of a bull" (*Laed.* 13 [*NPNF*¹ 9:281]).⁵⁰ Their apostasy is aggravated, Chrysostom contends, when it is seen in light of God's actions on their behalf in Egypt and the desert. But it is made even more terrible by its volitional nature: idolatry, which elsewhere is attributed to an essential deficit in Jewish nature, is here ascribed to the Hebrews' free choice—a choice made "even when the memorials of God's benefits in Egypt were fresh in their minds" (*Laed.* 13 [*NPNF*¹ 9:281]).

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine (354–430) provides a remarkably innovative pedagogical interpretation of the golden calf incident. His fullest exposition is found in his response to Faustus, a fourth-century Manichean bishop, about whom little is known (and only through Augustine). Faustus was the author of an anti-Catholic apology for Manicheism, probably written between 386 and 390, titled the *Capitula*. The work responded to Catholic objections to the Manichean faith while also targeting Christian doctrines, especially the inspiration of the Old Testament.⁵¹ Augustine had known Faustus personally; he had aided Augustine's conversion

50 The notion that the Hebrews worshiped "the head of a bull" (βόος κεφαλὴν [see the Greek text in John Chrysostom 1964]) in the desert may be a development of the libel that when Antiochus Epiphanes entered the temple in Jerusalem he discovered that the Jews worshiped the head of a golden ass (*asini caput ... ex auro* [Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.80]). See the discussion by Lucas in this volume.

51 Manicheism, like similar gnostic faiths, held that the god of the Old Testament was a tyrant. See Lieu 1985, 38, 106.

to Christianity by being unable to answer Augustine's questions intelligently. Augustine later wrote a response to the *Capitula, Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, in the last decade of the fourth or the first decade of the fifth century.⁵²

Part of Faustus's attack on the Old Testament includes the charge that Moses commanded and did many cruel things (*Faust.* 22.92). Faustus has in mind particularly Moses's command to the Levites to go through the camp and kill indiscriminately (*Faust.* 22.92; see Exod 32:27). Augustine speeds through a dodgy response that allegorizes the event: "It is easy to understand that the killing of those people signifies the destruction of the sort of vices because of which they fell into that idolatry" (*Faust.* 22.92; see also 22.79).⁵³ He then quickly arrives at what really piques his interest: Moses's strange response to the calf incident. Why, he asks, did Moses grind up the calf, cast it into water, and make the Hebrews drink it?⁵⁴

He offers a fascinating allegorical interpretation. The calf "signified ... the whole society of gentiles devoted to idolatry" (22.93). It is made out of gold "because the sacrifices of idolatry seem to have been instituted by supposedly wise men." It is in the form of calf because the calf is associated with the devil. The destruction of the body of the calf signifies the Gentiles' renunciation of idolatry when they believe in Jesus. It is "ground up" (*comminuitur*), that is, it is "brought low" (*humiliatur*) by "the word of truth" (for the Latin, see Zycha 1891). Scattering the dust into water represents the Gentiles' baptism, and being drunk by the Israelites—who are here identified with Jewish gospel preachers—indicates their reincorporation into the body of Christ.⁵⁵ The event's "wonderful treasures," which Augustine is sure that study and examination make clear, "speak of Christ" (*Faust.* 22.94).

Augustine's allegory is therefore a pedagogical tool, but its sophistication far exceeds Clement's or Jerome's: the calf does not warn Christians away from idolatry; rather, it prefigures salvation history. As a result, "the prophetic significance of the Bible's report of this incident, [Augustine] insists, lies less with Israel's condemnation because of idol worship and more with the gentile nations' redemption, through Israel, ... from idol worship" (Fredriksen 2008, 249).

But not everyone agrees with Fredriksen's positive assessment of Augustine's use of the calf. Leivy Smolar and Moshe Aberbach assert on the basis of *Enarrat.*

52 For background on *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, see Coyle 1999, 355–56 and Teske in Augustine 2007, 9–11.

53 Translations of *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* are by Teske in Augustine 2007.

54 For a discussion of this, see Fredriksen 2008, 248–50. See also Dermer and Riley 2013, 153–55, who echo, but do not cite, Fredriksen.

55 The Jewish gospel preachers whom Augustine has in mind are the apostles, all of whom were Jews (Fredriksen 2008, 249).

Ps. 34.2.15 (on Ps 34:25c Vg.), 61.9 (on Ps 61:5 Vg.), and 73.16 (on Ps 73:14 Vg.) that “Augustine actually allegorized the punishment of the Israelites into an eternal damnation” (1968, 100–101).⁵⁶ A number of scholars have repeated this assertion. Gregory K. Beale claims that Augustine interprets the calf incident as “a kind of ungodly sacrament such that ‘in the same manner as men confessing Christ become the body of Christ, the worshipers of the devil-calf became the body of the devil’ [(*Enarrat. Ps.* 73.16)]” (2008, 153). Aaron Wildavsky reports that Augustine “saw the pulverizing and drinking of the Golden Calf as a sinful sacrament whereby those who worshiped the Calf were in analogy to the Christian Eucharist, spiritually transmuted into the body of this devil” (2005, 123). And according to Kalman P. Bland, “Augustine ... taught that the Jews had been transformed into satanized bodies during the episode of the golden calf” (2000, 123).

These views significantly contradict Fredriksen’s conclusion. According to her, Augustine, relative to his predecessors, “emerges as an idiosyncratic and innovative thinker whose tone when speaking of Jews and Judaism is exceptionally mild and whose estimate of the Jewish role in history is surprisingly positive” (1995, 299); his “vision of the Jews as a living witness to Christian truth was both original and, compared with his attitude toward pagans and non-Catholic Christians, uncharacteristically tolerant” (1995, 299).

To my mind, careful examination of these texts (primary and secondary) shows that these scholars (other than Fredriksen) have misunderstood Augustine. The *Enarrationes in Psalmos* texts are in fact very closely related to *Faust.* 22.93.⁵⁷ In *Enarrat. Ps.* 73.16, Augustine begins, as in *Faustus*, by defending Moses’s actions: “inflamed with zeal for God he [Moses] was determined to visit such temporal punishments upon them as would scare them away from

56 The chapter numbers of *Enarrat. Ps.* are not consistent across editions (in Latin or English). Sometimes they are changed to reflect the modern numbering of the Psalms, based on the MT; sometimes they retain the numbers of corresponding Psalms in the Vulgate. The chapter numbers given above reflect the numbering of the Works of Saint Augustine edition (Augustine 2000–2004). Section numbers, however, typically are correct. Note, however, that the section numbering of the *NPNF* edition (series 1, vol. 8), which is an abridgement of the earlier *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, 6 vols. (Augustine 1847–1857), is incorrect. Smolar and Aberbach cite “*Exposition on Ps.* 62:5; 74:13” and “*Second Discourse on Ps.* 34:25–26” (1968, 101), apparently not realizing that the former is not an independent work but a part of the latter. Their numbering reflects the *NPNF* edition.

57 Because Augustine spent decades composing his explanations of the psalms, beginning shortly after his ordination to the priesthood, it is not possible to determine which of these texts is his first reflection of this sort on the calf incident (see Fiedrowicz 2000, 15–16).

the risk of eternal death.”⁵⁸ He again argues that Moses’s subsequent actions of burning the calf, grinding it into powder, mixing it with water, and making the Israelites drink it “established a great sacred sign [*magnum sacramentum*].” But “what does this procedure suggest?” Augustine asks. In light of the confusion surrounding the meaning of these texts, his answer is worth quoting at length:

Surely that the worshipers of the devil had become his body, as Christ’s faithful become so truly his body that to them it can be said, *You are Christ’s body, and his limbs* (1 Cor 12:27). Now the body of the devil had to be consumed, and this needed to be done by Israelites, for it was from the people of Israel that the apostles sprang, and the primitive Church. Moreover, Peter was given a command with regard to the Gentiles, *Slaughter and eat* (Acts 10:13). What did *slaughter and eat* mean? Slay what they are, and turn them into what you are. So in the one story we have *Slaughter and eat*; in the other, “Pound it into pieces and make them drink”; but both point to the same sacred mystery. It was necessary, absolutely necessary, that what had been the devil’s body should be transformed by faith into the body of Christ. This is how the devil is consumed, as he loses his members.

Enarrat. Ps. 73.16

The “worshipers of the devil,” as the extended context makes clear, are not the Hebrews but the Gentiles. Augustine’s logic is simply the opposite of the modern platitude that “you are what you eat”; for him, what you eat *becomes* what you are (cf. *Faust.* 22.93, which also cites Acts 10:13).⁵⁹ Thus the Hebrews, by consuming the calf, symbolically incorporate the Gentiles into God’s people.

58 All translations of *Enarrationes in Psalmos* are by Boulding in Augustine 2000–2004. For the Latin, see the edition of Dekkers and Fraipont in Augustine 1956.

59 If we assume that Augustine’s reasoning is not inconsistent in this passage, then we must conclude that he is not thinking of the Eucharist (which he does not mention [*pace* Wildavsky 2005, 123]). That is, Christians are Christ’s body because they are taken up into Christ, not because they consume Christ’s flesh in the Eucharist. This assumption is confirmed by his scriptural reference (1 Cor 12:27; see also vv. 12–13 and esp. *Faust.* 22.93, which uses terminology found in these verses) and by his next illustration where “the same mystery is hinted at in another story about Moses and a snake” (*Enarrat. Ps.* 73.16; Latin, *hoc figuratum est et in serpente Moysi* [Zycha 1891]). Aaron’s staff, which Moses had transformed into a “snake” or a “dragon,” consumes the Egyptian magicians’ staffs, also transformed into “dragons” (see Exod 7:8–12). The Egyptians’ dragons are “the devil’s body” and their consumption represents his destruction “by the Gentiles who have come to believe” (*Enarrat. Ps.* 73.16).

This same principle is at work in his use of the calf incident in *Enarrat. Ps.* 34.2.15, where he exhorts Christians “to swallow the whole body of pagans,” meaning to convert them to faith, and in 61.9 where he also states that “the calf’s head is a great mystery [*caput vituli, magnum sacramentum*],” where the destruction and consumption of the calf’s head represents the incorporation of converted non-believers into Israel.⁶⁰ Augustine’s use of the calf in *Enarrationes in Psalmos* is therefore not what some have claimed it to be.⁶¹ In fact, the texts support Michael Signer’s thesis that Augustine maintained a “witness doctrine” which “asserts that through the Jewish people salvation came to the pagans who recognized Christ” (1999, 472).

However, in a latter non-allegorical discussion of the calf (*Enarrat. Ps.* 105.19–21), Augustine does condemn the Israelites’ sinful behavior. Yet even here he eschews the typical anti-Jewish vitriol present in other Christian literature.⁶² He carefully contextualizes the event in a way that ensures that it both remains in the past and does not characterize all Israelites. He interprets *Ps* 105 Vg. (MT 106) in conjunction with *Ps* 104 Vg. (MT 105; *Enarrat. Ps.* 105.2). In *Enarrat. Ps.* 104.34 he explains that “there certainly were some [true children of Abraham] in the Israelite people, as Paul clearly shows, for he declares that *God was not pleased with all of them* (1 Cor 10:5). If God was not pleased with all of them, there evidently were some among them with whom he was pleased.” Augustine carries this insight over into *Enarrat. Ps.* 105.2, where axiomatically “God’s people is presented in a favorable light in the persons of his chosen ones, with whom no fault is found”; these chosen ones are “Israelites with whom God was well pleased.” But *Ps* 106, he emphasizes, focuses on “rebellious troublemakers among God’s people.” But importantly, they “have been

60 Boulding’s translation of *Enarrat. Ps.* 61.9 omits this sentence. I have translated *sacramentum* as “mystery,” referring to a religious mystery in need of interpretation, in order to differentiate it from the technical use of the term “sacrament,” meaning “efficacious signs of grace ... by which divine life is dispensed” (*Catechism* 1997, sec. 1131).

61 It appears that Augustine has the same interpretation in mind in *Conf.* 7.9.15 when he speaks of his own conversion from the pagan Gentiles, although his use of the allegory is more allusive (both passages link the calf to Paul’s description of idolatry in Rom 1:21–23).

62 In one instance Augustine does employ an interpretation of the calf that is analogous to Justin’s. In *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.19, Augustine considers the observance of the law by Jews of his own time to be “servile” and contrasts it with Christian’s own “spiritual” observance. For example, Jews “observe the sabbath day in a servile fashion, as an occasion for self-indulgence and getting drunk,” but “the Christian observes the sabbath in a spiritual way, by abstaining from ... sin.” Such carnal observance, Augustine argues, suits the Jews because their inability to remember God’s wonders requires them to “be held ... by material, flesh-linked promises” so that they not “perish utterly and slide away to idols” (translations from Hill in Augustine 2009). Augustine’s comments come as part of an exhortation to Christians to obey the Ten Commandments.

converted and are praying for pardon.” Thus their sins, including the calf incident, must be seen from the standpoint of penance and forgiveness (indeed, the psalm is “an invitation to a confession of sins” [*Enarrat. Ps.* 105.2]). In addition, Augustine emphasizes Moses’s decisive intervention. As God’s “chosen one,” he averts God’s wrath and so “proves how powerful with God is the intercession of the saints” (*Enarrat. Ps.* 105.19; cf. Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.26 [see above]). Moses’s mercy-eliciting actions therefore open the possibility of repentance for the Hebrews and provide an example for Christian intercessory prayer.

Conclusion

We have traced in this chapter the two primary trajectories of Christian interpretation of the calf incident. I have categorized them as “anti-Jewish” or “pedagogical” based on what I perceive to be the major thrust of the texts. Anti-Jewish texts emphasize *discontinuity* between Christians and Jews. They are polemical from the outset, and with the passing of time they become increasingly so. Here the calf is said to reveal something about the basic nature of Jews: they are inherently apostate; they are idolaters; they are ungrateful; their rejection of Jesus culminates their sin with the calf. Pejoratives are easily multiplied, and additional elaboration is not necessary. Yet even with these texts we must recognize pedagogical intent. Yes, Justin explains to a Jew why Christians need not observe the law. But the *Dialogue* was written for Christians, some of whom kept torah and may have even encouraged other Christ followers to do the same. His rhetoric is not as inflammatory as Chrysostom’s, but he still opposes Judaizing Christians. Chrysostom produced among the most vitriolic indictments of Jewishness, yet he similarly wrote to Christians with a pedagogical intent. He wanted to teach believers not to “Judaize.” In fact, we must conclude that all of the anti-Jewish texts examined in the first section are at some level, and some more than others, pedagogical.

The texts in the second set are, as I have argued, more pedagogical than polemical. They leverage the calf incident to warn Christians about the danger of wealth, to reveal the importance of intercessory prayer, to support arguments that martyrdom is God’s will, to teach Christians the value of fasting and abstinence, and, amazingly, to prefigure allegorically salvation history. What is striking here is the emphasis on *continuity*. Christians are not so dissimilar from their forebears that they will inevitably avoid committing their sins. Still, pedagogy does not eliminate the anti-Jewish edge. The pedagogical texts assume a Christian supersessionism that treats the Hebrews as a literary-historical construct far removed from contemporary Jews whom most of these

early Christian writers still see as culpably mired in the wrong side of salvation history. Finally, by way of conclusion, what remains most remarkable about these early Christian interpretations of the calf incident is the paradoxical relationship that Christians claim to have, whether implicitly or, indeed, quite explicitly, with the Jews. Jews are both positive and negative foils for understanding Christian faith and praxis. They are the same and different. Christians are nothing like them and exactly like them.

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Justin Martyr and the Golden Calf: Ethnic Argumentation in the New Israel

Andrew Radde-Gallwitz

In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr uses the episode of the golden calf to mark the difference between Christianity and Judaism. Justin was a Gentile from Flavia Neapolis (modern Nablus) in Palestine. Born to pagan parents around 100 CE, he became a philosopher, studying with multiple teachers before encountering (perhaps in Neapolis) a Platonist.¹ While Platonism “added wings” to Justin’s mind, he ultimately encountered an old man who explained that the sure and useful philosophy was contained not in Plato’s writings, but in the books of the prophets who had more adequately done the work of philosophy, which is to talk about God and the soul. They had also foretold God’s Christ. Justin became a Christian philosopher, continuing to wear the philosopher’s garb (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.11). He travelled to Rome, perhaps twice. Tradition, including the *Acts of Justin and His Companions*, holds that he was a teacher there in his upstairs apartment near the otherwise-unknown Timiotinian Bath until his martyrdom in 165 or 166. Although he wrote many more, only three written works survived, two if one views the *First Apology* and *Second Apology* as originally a single work.² He addressed both apologies to the Emperor Hadrian.

The *Dialogue with Trypho* is later than the *Apologies*.³ Here, Justin reports a debate between himself and a Jew named Trypho, who identifies himself as a “Hebrew of the circumcision” and as a refugee of the recent war (i.e., the Bar Kokhba War) now living in Corinth (*Dial.* 1.3).⁴ Certain of Trypho’s coreligionists also take part. The debate lasted for two days and is set perhaps in Ephesus,

1 The question turns on whether “our city” in *Dial.* 2.6 is Justin’s hometown or the city in which the dialogue is dramatically set, which is either Ephesus (so Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.18) or Palestinian Caesarea, as is the position of Bagatti (1979), Hamann (1995), and Halton and Slusser (Justin Martyr 2003, xii and 3 n1).

2 See the list of works at Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.18, to which we must add the anti-Marcionite work cited by Irenaeus.

3 Justin refers to the earlier *Apology* at *Dial.* 120.6.

4 Unless otherwise noted, translations of *Dialogue with Trypho* are those of Falls in Justin Martyr 2003.

shortly before Justin was to sail.⁵ In the *Dialogue*, Justin shows himself to be conversant with Jewish and Jewish-Christian exegesis, as the groundbreaking work of Oskar Skarsaune has detailed (1987).

Following Thomas Falls, we can divide the *Dialogue* into five sections:

- (1) Introduction (1–8), in which Justin, after describing his own education and eventual conversion to Christianity, sets the limits of the debate;
- (2) *Part I* (9–47), which explains why Christians do not observe Mosaic Law;
- (3) *Part II* (48–108), which produces arguments to show that Christ is the true Messiah;
- (4) *Part III* (109–141), which draws the logical conclusion that Christians are the true heirs of the divine promises;
- (5) Conclusion (142).

JUSTIN MARTYR 2003, xv–xvi

Scholars disagree about the work's intended audience, with some suggesting pagan Gentiles, others specifying Gentiles leaning towards Judaism, others saying Jews, and still others favoring the view (which seems to me most likely) that Justin aims to "reinforce a Christian readership in its belief that it had superseded the Mosaic Law and supplanted Judaism as the New Israel" (Halton and Slusser in Justin Martyr 2003, xiii). Yet, we should not assume clear boundaries between Christianity and Judaism. Jon Nilson has suggested that "Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* is addressed primarily to a non-Christian Gentile audience at Rome which is very favorably disposed towards Judaism and Christianity, yet is unable to adequately distinguish the one from the other" (Nilson 1977, 539). Confronted with such a situation, Justin saw it as his task to mark this boundary indelibly. The occasional bitterness of Justin's tone can perhaps be explained by his report that Jewish hostility toward Christians is worse than that of the other nations. Justin alleges that Jews from Jerusalem have spread rumors throughout the Roman world about Christians, including the slander that Christianity is a "godless heresy" (ἀίρεσιν ἄθεον, *Dial.* 17.1); they

5 That the discussion occurs over two days is shown by the numerous references to a previous day and by Justin's repetition of scriptural proofs so that those who joined Trypho anew on the second day would hear them. At *Dial.* 80.3, Justin (the character) points forward to his "future" writing of the *Dialogue*. For Justin's expected voyage, see the work's conclusion (*Dial.* 142). Rome is not mentioned as the destination. It is probably best to view the voyage for its literary purpose of ending the dialogue after two days—in Marcovich's phrase, "the sea-trip is a convenient subterfuge" (Marcovich 1997, 5)—rather than to use it as autobiographical evidence of a move by Justin (back to) Rome.

are matched in their hostility by their zealous proselytes.⁶ In order to mark a clear division, Justin argues in the language of ethnicity, constructing both Judaism and Christianity as contrasting peoples. He is aided in this endeavor not only by the tradition of Greek nationalist historiography and Jewish responses, but also by the text of the Greek Bible itself. In particular, Justin draws heavily on the prophetic literature, with its language of an expected “new covenant” and a “new people.” After citing Isa 2:5–6, Justin proclaims, “So, we must conclude that there were two seeds of Judah, and two races [δύο γένη], as there are two houses of Jacob: the one born of flesh and blood, the other of faith and the Spirit” (*Dial.* 135.6; cf. *Dial.* 44.1). One of these, symbolized by Leah, is “your people and the Synagogue”; the other, symbolized by Rachel, is “our Church”; as Jacob, Christ “still labors on behalf of these and of his servants in both” (*Dial.* 134.3). As a race born of faith and the Spirit, Christianity is paradoxically both a peculiar ethnicity and implicitly universal in its scope.

To justify this ethnic assertion, Justin elaborates a narrative of the ancestry of these two nations.⁷ Here the golden calf enters the picture. Justin Martyr mentions the calf five times in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, twice in the same section. Justin invokes the story in sections where he is dealing with the following questions: Why was the law given? Which translation conveys the proper text of the Scriptures? How should Ps 21 LXX be interpreted? Who is the true Israel? I will take each point in turn. Yet, there is a thread connecting Justin’s various arguments. The sacrifices that the nascent nation of Israel offered to the calf function in Justin’s telling as a kind of originary sin for this people.⁸ This sin introduced a mutation that affected not only the original generation but also the entire succession, making them in Justin’s prophetic declamation “a hard-hearted, stupid, blind, and lame people” (λαὸς σκληροκάρδιος καὶ ἀσύνετος καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ χωλὸς, *Dial.* 27.4; translation adapted from Falls; cf. Jer 4:22). Juxtaposed to this ethnicity is “another people” (λαὸς ἕτερος), the Christians (*Dial.* 119.3; cf. 136.1).⁹ Since they are not marked by this tragic mutation and are

6 Elsewhere Justin alleges Jewish responsibility for Gentile persecution of Christians (*Dial.* 16.4; 96.2), general Jewish hatred of Christians (*Dial.* 136.2), and cursing of Christians (*Dial.* 93.4). On proselytes, see *Dial.* 122.2.

7 On ethnic argumentation in early Christianity, see Buell 2005.

8 The sacrifices to the calf were only one such sin among many. Justin asserts elsewhere (*Dial.* 19.6; 27.2; 46.6; 73.6; 133.1) that the exemplary sin of Israel was to “sacrifice your children to the demons,” an allusion to Ps 105:37 LXX.

9 In *Dial.* 119–125, this λαὸς is the Christians, not the Gentiles, as the superscript heading in Slusser’s edition suggests. At *Dial.* 135.6, γένος rather than λαὸς is used to contrast Judaism and Christianity.

indeed “enlightened by Jesus” (*Dial.* 122.1), Christians are able to see the true point of Jewish law and ritual.

Law

The first passage deals with the law and contains Justin’s lengthiest reflections on the golden calf episode. In the context, Justin is answering Trypho, who had asked why Christians do not observe Jewish law. According to Justin, Christians have an insight that explains their non-observance: “We too would observe this circumcision of the flesh, the Sabbaths, and, in sum, all the feasts, if we did not know why they were enjoined upon you, namely, because of your transgressions and hardness of heart” (*Dial.* 18.2). To justify this, Justin provides a litany of Israel’s transgressions, within which the golden calf plays a prominent role. Justin explains Mosaic ritual and dietary law *in toto* as a concession for sin and obstinacy. Justin frequently repeats the allegation of Jewish “hardness of heart” (σκληροκαρδία). It clearly derives from Jesus’s saying about divorce, as preserved in Matt 19:8. Yet, as Rodney Werline shows, “In Justin, this logion applies not to divorce, but to the ritual practices of the Torah” (1999, 89).

In addition to ritual law, Justin recognizes something like a “law of nature” in Mosaic law, though this is not his term for it. God reveals this law to all nations. It forbids adultery, fornication, murder, and the like. Positively, it inculcates the virtue of justice, which has a double object, God and one’s fellow human beings. It is summed up in Jesus’s double love commandment (*Dial.* 93). The “eternal and natural acts of justice and piety,” as Justin calls the natural laws, are required of all, including of course those who observe torah. Justin makes this point in particular when discussing Christians who choose to observe torah (they choose to do so, Justin assumes, because of their “weakness of will,” an interesting couplet to Jewish “hardness of heart,” *Dial.* 47.2). Perhaps Justin has the Decalogue in mind here as the Mosaic embodiment of the natural law. At one point, however, he claims that it is only when the new covenant is given that the distinction would be made clear between the “precepts and actions God knows to be eternal and fit for every nationality” and the “precepts he issued as suited only to the hardness of your people’s hearts (as he proclaimed by his prophets)” (*Dial.* 67.10). This implies that it is Jesus and perhaps the apostles who make this clear. Justin might have in mind, again, Jesus’s charge of the hard-heartedness of Israel, as well as Paul’s reading of the Old Testament in Romans.

Apart from the natural law, which is upheld in the new covenant, the remainder of the Mosaic law is for Jews. For Christians, its value lies exclusively

in its typological relation to Christ and the church. To obey the precepts is for Jews only. This obedience serves two purposes. First, it keeps them from the idolatry and the wickedness to which they are prone, though here they habitually fail, in Justin's view. Second, obedience, in particular to the commandment to circumcise, marks the Jews off as distinct, which allows them to be punished for their crimes against the prophets, Christ, and Christ's followers. Justin believes this vengeance is being delivered with the Emperor Hadrian's punitive measures forbidding Jews from entering Aelia (*Dial.* 16.3; 92.2–3).

Now, the calf. The calf is one of the chief proofs of Jewish idolatry. In the following passage, note the anachronism of Justin's ethnic reasoning. The guilty party is not ancient Israel or the Hebrews, but the Jewish people (λαός):

Circumcision, therefore, is necessary only for you, in order that, as Hosea, one of the twelve prophets, says, *the people* [ὁ λαός] *should not be a people, and the nation* [τὸ ἔθνος] *not a nation* (Hos 1:9). Furthermore, all the aforementioned men [Abel, Enoch, Lot, Noah, and Melchizedek] were just and pleasing in the sight of God, yet they kept no Sabbaths. The same can be said of Abraham and his descendants down to the time of Moses, when your people [ὁ λαὸς ὑμῶν] showed itself wicked and ungrateful to God by molding a calf as an idol in the desert [ἐν τῷ ἐρήμῳ μοσχοποιήσας]. Therefore, God, adapting his laws to that people, ordered you also to offer sacrifices as if to his name, to save you from idolatry, but you did not obey even then, for you did not hesitate to sacrifice your children to the demons.

Dial. 19.5–6; adapted from Falls

The ethnic language is evident and troubling: circumcision entails the birth of a λαός and an ἔθνος destined to become “not a people.” “Your people” (that is, Trypho's people) originates with Moses. This nation was born with an act of law-giving. The calf accounts in particular for the sacrificial legislation, which the people failed to keep. It also provides evidence of ingratitude. Justin reiterates this point shortly after, quoting from Deut 32: “... after you had eaten the manna in the desert and had seen all the miracles God wrought for your sake, you did not hesitate to make and adore the golden calf [μόσχον τὸν χρύσειον ποιήσαντες προσεκυνεῖτε]. With good reason, therefore, does God repeatedly [ἅει] say of you, *Foolish children, in whom there is no faith* (Deut 32:20)” (*Dial.* 20.4).

For Justin, the building and the worship of the golden calf were done as it were by a timeless people who are as guilty now as then. Their idolatry taints

their founding, constitutional moment and reveals their obstinate ingratitude to God. Jewish ritual law is remedial and punitive. As Judith Lieu puts it,

The Jews are fundamentally hard-hearted towards all that God asks and promises; they are idolaters, and they are murderers of the righteous. The Law was given to control their leaning towards idolatry, exemplified above all in the incident of the golden calf but an enduring characteristic even after (*Dial.* 19.5; 20.4; 132.1 etc.): frequency of repetition alone serves to justify a charge which could be maintained only on biblical and not on contemporary evidence. Thus it is Christians who have turned from idolatry, not converts to Judaism, who are joining an inherently idolatrous people (*Dial.* 46.6–7).

LIEU 1996, 145

Text

Justin mentions the golden calf in three other sections of the *Dialogue*. In the first of these, he is arguing with Trypho about the text of the prophetic writings. Justin claims that the Jews have mutilated the text so as to remove any reference that might point to Jesus as the promised Messiah. The dispute arises because of discrepancies among the various Greek versions of the Bible. Justin accepts one of these, the Septuagint. Somewhat conspiratorially, Justin maintains that the others were produced by Jewish elders in pursuit of a doctrinal agenda. He is perhaps thinking of the versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. For Justin, the ideological character of these translations is shown not only in the specific textual changes, some of which are benign (e.g., *Dial.* 131.1), but also in their reception: specifically, in the widespread refusal of Jews to recognize the Septuagint, relying only on the other translations. Christians read this translation, whereas Jews read those translations. They in some sense have different Bibles. Justin here displays none of Origen's Hexaplic tolerance of the various versions. And yet the entire *Dialogue*, with its lengthy quotations and exegetical arguments, would make no sense unless there were another sense in which Justin and Trypho share the same Bible. As Justin says, the prophecies of Christ "are contained in your Scriptures, or rather not yours, but ours. For we believe and obey them, whereas you, though you read them, do not grasp their spirit" (*Dial.* 29.2). In this quote, the question is *ownership* of the Scriptures, not their *composition*. But as we dig deeper, we see that the composition of the text—which words appear on the page—is at stake as well.

It is an issue, in Justin's mind, because of the many changes to the text made by Jewish elders. In most of Justin's examples, he simply juxtaposes the Septuagintal text with their version.¹⁰ One example carries him quite beyond the Septuagint. Justin believes the elders omitted sections of Isaiah that described the prophet being cut in two with a saw. The story comes to Justin via the *Ascension of Isaiah* (*Dial.* 120.5).¹¹ Justin simply assumes that this episode, which for him prefigures Christ dividing the Jewish nation in two, was originally in Scripture.

The calf appears awkwardly in the following exchange between Trypho and Justin, which concludes the argument over the text:

"Only God knows," remarked Trypho, "whether or not the leaders of the people have deleted portions of the Scriptures as you say. But such an assertion seems incredible."

"Yes," I agreed, "it does seem incredible. For it is more dreadful than the erecting of the golden calf [μολοχοποιΐας] (which they made while still satiated with the manna that fell to earth), and more revolting than the *sacrifice of their children to demons* (Ps 105:37), or *the slaughter of the prophets* (1 Kg 19:10; Rom 11:3)."

Dial. 73.5–6

Here, the calf episode forms part of a rhetorical comparison: the deletion of references to Christ is worse than the very worst. Tampering with the accepted text of the Scriptures is associated with idolatry, an exchange of the copy for the real thing.

Psalm 21 LXX

The fourth appearance of the golden calf comes in a lengthy section in which Justin offers a Christological interpretation of Ps 21 LXX (*Dial.* 97.3). Justin prefaces this section with these words:

10 Note that Justin refers to the status of the text in synagogues in *Dial.* 72.3. The access he must have received to Jewish copies of the Scriptures in synagogues conflicts with his portrait of Jewish hostility to Christians. He minimizes any hint of his own dependence upon Jewish teachers. See Lieu 1996, 109.

11 Hebrews 11:37 could also lie in the background. The discussion of Isaiah's death is from the second day; Justin's longer list of alleged emendations comes at the end of the *Dialogue's* first day, at *Dial.* 68–73. The section ends with a textual lacuna.

I would like to quote the whole psalm, that you may hear how [Jesus] reveres his Father and how he refers all things to him, as when he prays to be freed by him from this death; at the same time pointing out in the psalm what sort of men his enemies were, and proving that he indeed became a man who was capable of suffering.

Dial. 98.1

For Justin, the psalm simultaneously confirms Jesus's piety and Jewish hostility to the pious one. The calf appears when Justin comments on vv. 11b–12a, which read, "You are my God; do not depart from me." Justin now explains what David, mystically foreshadowing Jesus, meant. These words, Justin argues,

teach us to put all our trust in God, the Creator of all things, and to seek aid and salvation from him alone and not to imagine, as other men do, that we can attain salvation by means of birth, or wealth, or power, or wisdom. This is precisely your practice, for you once made a calf and always appeared ungrateful, and murderers of the just, and inflated with pride because of your birth.

Dial. 102.6; adapted from Falls

The calf-directed idolatry is clearly not integral to the argument, nor is murdering the just; those are merely stock sins thrown in to amplify the message. The central point is to contrast Jesus's trust in God alone for his salvation with the Jewish presumption that God will favor them because of their birth, which is understood here as pride. The contrast between a sort of birthright covenant and one rooted in faith is one of the central motifs of Justin's ethnic argumentation. Yet, it sits oddly with what we have seen thus far. Often in Roman ethnography, there was a sharp contrast between two kinds of nations: those rooted simply in nature, whose ethnicity is passed on simply by birth, and those rooted in a constitution, whose ethnicity is passed on through tradition, that is, the intergenerational adherence to a way of life (Geary 2002, 42). Justin often treats the Jews as an example of the second kind of people, a people rooted in a constitutional act, albeit, in Justin's mind, a tainted act.¹² Here, this kind of ethnogenesis blends with or perhaps is replaced by the other

12 Cp. Celsus: "Now the Jews became an individual nation, and made laws according to the custom of their country; and they maintain these laws among themselves at the present day, and observe a worship which may be very peculiar but is at least traditional. In this respect they behave like the rest of mankind, because each nation follows its traditional customs ..." (Origen, *Cels.* 5.25; translation of Chadwick in Origen 1953, 283). As Aaron Johnson (2006, 8–9) notes, "This passage exhibits well the combination of the notions of

kind. The Jews become in their own eyes a people, God's chosen people, simply by the biological process of birth, and not by keeping a way of life. Again, recall Justin's contrast quoted earlier: "two houses of Jacob: the one born of flesh and blood, the other of faith and the Spirit" (*Dial.* 135.6).

New Israel

We can now turn briefly to the final instance in which Justin mentions the golden calf. Here Justin is arguing that Jesus is the true heir of Jacob/Israel, and consequently that Jesus's followers are the new Israel. One of the motifs in the section is to contrast Christian fidelity with Jewish infidelity. He provokes Trypho and his friends: "Now you, if you will confess the truth, must admit that we are more faithful to God than you are" (*Dial.* 131.2). If they need proof, Justin juxtaposes Christian endurance in persecution with a litany of Jewish faults that he finds in the Old Testament, including of course the calf. Their faults are doubly incomprehensible, since God performed mighty works in their sight and generously provided for them: "And besides all this, you still constructed the golden calf, and you were eager to fornicate with the daughters of aliens and to worship idols" (*Dial.* 132.1).

Conclusion

In sum, then, for Justin the building and worship of the golden calf are always specifically *Jewish* sins. They are not necessarily the worst of the sins of this people. After all, they have changed the Scriptures, killed the prophets and Jesus, and continue to persecute Christians. But the sins associated with the calf are particularly iconic, serving to fix Jewish identity in a timeless past from which it cannot break free, unless Jews become true followers of Abraham by adopting faith in God's anointed one.

I want to close by looking briefly at Justin's other people, the Christians. At one point, the typically quiescent Trypho puts a perceptive question to Justin, which shows the messiness of the Christian "nation." Trypho asks about believers in Christ who continue to observe commandments of Mosaic law. Will they be saved? Justin's response goes as follows: "In my opinion, Trypho,' I replied, 'I say such a man will be saved, unless he exerts every effort to influence other

nationhood, racial ancestry, customs, and piety into a single integrated cluster of ideas that was so typical of the ancient world."

men (I have in mind the Gentiles whom Christ circumcised from all error) to practice the same rites as himself, informing that they cannot be saved unless they do so. You yourself did this at the opening of our discussion, when you said that I would not be saved unless I kept the Mosaic precepts” (*Dial.* 47.1). After prodding from Trypho, Justin admits that his tolerance is not practiced by all Christians. Notice that we have, then, torah-observant Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians who refuse to eat meals with them, and Gentile Christians who accept them. Justin belongs to the last group. He accepts torah-observant Jewish Christians, provided that they, like everyone else, observe “the eternal and natural acts of justice and piety” (i.e., they keep natural law) in addition to their practice of the precepts of Moses’s law. If so, Justin urges, “we Christians should receive them and associate with them in every way as kinsmen and brethren.” Intolerance can also go in the other direction. Justin mentions torah-observant Christians who will not recognize non-torah-observant Christians; of these, Justin does not approve. Not all torah-observing Christians are Jews. Some, Justin mentions, are Gentiles who have professed faith in Christ and yet have also been “induced” to follow the Mosaic law. As for them, Justin avers, they will “probably be saved” (*Dial.* 47.3).

Justin sharply distinguishes all the aforementioned groups from once-Christians who have renounced Christ to follow the law. He also distinguishes them from those who follow the law but never believe in Christ, especially those who curse Christians ritually. The lines separating any of these groups are permeable. The Christian nation includes believers of four possible types: Jewish Christians who do not observe the torah, torah-observant Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians who do not observe the torah, and torah-observant Gentile Christians. What concerns Justin more is not whether or not one follows the Mosaic law, but one’s attitude towards others. Justin draws the line with those—Jewish and Gentile—who will not recognize others because of their observance or non-observance. Mutual recognition among believers is for Justin the indispensable factor in Christian ethnogenesis, an openness that contrasts with the intransigence Justin sees in Trypho’s people. If this is true, then Justin’s worry within the church is not with boundary-crossing Jewish Christians, but with those too keen on enforcing boundaries, specifically those who would cut off either Jewish Christians or Gentiles like himself. To defend his inclusive vision, however, Justin had to erect a different barrier—not between types of Christians, but between two peoples, Jewish and Christian, synagogue and church. For Justin, the one is mired in its smug self-satisfaction, the other represents the true heirs of the promises, with its own inspired teachers who have given insight into the law’s purpose and the people’s failures.

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The Incident of the Golden Calf in Pre-Islamic Syriac Authors

Andrew J. Hayes

The ancient Israelites' apostasy with the calf, recorded in Exod 32 and recalled in numerous other passages in the Scriptures (Deut 9:7–21; Ezek 16:1–63; 23:1–49; Ps 106:19; see also Hos 1–4; Num 5:11–31), proved remarkably versatile and seminal in the hands of major early Syriac authors. It was of course *de rigueur* in connection with polemics against Jewish theological positions and ritual practices. But in that respect, especially regarding the elemental themes of the polemic, there is little to distinguish Syriac authors from their Greek and Latin contemporaries. Yet Syriac interpretations form a spectrum from directly anti-Jewish polemic, to broader treatments of salvation history in which such polemics usually remain latent, to some in which anti-Jewish arguments can scarcely be discerned. Within this spectrum, especially at the beginning, the calf story belongs firmly within the salvation historical themes typical of early Syriac tradition: the People and the Peoples, the church as royal bride, and the heart's bridal chamber as the ascetical ideal (Murray, 2004, 41–68; Brock 1992, 115–30).¹ The interwoven ascetical and ecclesial imagery, especially in characteristic poetic form, reveals the distinctive profile of early Syriac Christianity's vision of this episode, with its stark contrasts between the height of divine mercy and the depth of human sin. It was a paradox Syriac poets especially could hardly resist exploring. Toward the end, interpretations turn more noticeably to polemical concerns that express the emerging identities of distinct confessional communities in the Syrian Orient. Throughout, the calf remains a source for the Syriac tradition's distinctive conception and articulation of church life and ascetical experience.

To illustrate this spectrum, the present account furnishes a brief overview of references to the incident and their overall thematic use before turning to examine more closely those texts and authors that illustrate principal aspects: (1) Aphrahat, (2) Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh, (3) salvation-historical

¹ In early Syriac authors, it is common to refer to the Jewish people and the Gentiles, especially in juxtaposition, using the single words *'ammâ* (People/Nation) and *'ammê* (Peoples/Nations), respectively. For an account of this usage, see Murray 2004, 41–68.

interpretations after Ephrem, (4) the calf in the spirituality of Philoxenus, and (5) the calf in intra-Christian polemics, especially the Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries.² The anti-Jewish polemics of Aphrahat and Ephrem have received several detailed treatments in their own right, but as I hope to show, the story of the calf, while very often linked to such polemics, is not exclusive to them, and a broader reading of the tradition proves worthwhile (see Neusner 1971, 169; Shepardson 2008; Narinskaya 2010; Lizorkin 2012).³

Overview

Syriac literature first appears in the second century when, most notably, the task of translating the Old Testament into Syriac began, but the first major works of Syriac literature surviving under the name of a particular author appear in the first part of the fourth century (Brock 2004, 161–64). In any case, other than a single passing reference in the third-century *Acts of Judas Thomas*, the story of the calf makes no appearance in the earliest stratum of Syriac literature (Wright 1871, 1:198). Aphrahat (d. 345) and Ephrem (ca. 306–373) thus provide the logical starting point. In the major works stretching from these two authors up until Sahdona and Isho'yahb III (both of the Church of the East) in the middle of the seventh century, more than seventy references to the calf incident can be found. Doubtless, many more remain to be discovered, especially in the unpublished works of Isaac of Antioch and Jacob of Serugh, leading poets of the fifth to the sixth centuries.⁴ A sense of proportion is necessary. In the works of those authors that have been edited, ten of the references belong to Aphrahat, more than thirty to Ephrem alone, and at least six short treatments, together with an entire *mêmrâ* devoted to the topic, belong to Jacob of Serugh. References in other major authors are much more sparse. One can say, therefore, that the Syriac interpretative tradition belongs chiefly to Aphrahat, to Ephrem, and to Jacob as Ephrem's literary heir.

2 The Syriac tradition also preserves a large body of translation literature, liturgical texts, and anthology literature, such as exegetical catenae and patristic florilegia. The sheer breadth of these corpora makes impractical their inclusion in the present study, which focuses only on the early period's principal authors or major anonymous works. Pseudo-Ephrem has also been left to one side.

3 Shepardson (2008, 23–24 n7) gives a fairly thorough bibliography.

4 The calf story appears only once that I can find in the corpus of Narsai, the third major fifth-century Syriac poet, even in places where Narsai treats anti-Jewish themes or the historical career of Moses. The state of publication of fifth century Syriac poetry, however, makes it unwise to draw a definite conclusion from this fact.

One may distinguish brief allusions or short treatments consisting of a few lines of prose, or a few cola of a poem, from longer treatments in which the author focuses directly or repeatedly on the story. As is typical for Syriac literature, many of these treatments, short or long, are poetic, though there are some prose treatises that devote space to the story's interpretation, including a prose commentary by Ephrem and another by Isho'dad of Merv (Tonneau 1955; Van den Eynde 1958).

The briefer treatments number more than fifty, many of which reflect classical themes of Christian critique directed at Jewish thought and practice (Bori 1990; Smolar and Aberbach 1968). These include the charge of carnality in the form of gluttony, drunkenness, and sexual lust; the inveterate tendency of the Jews toward idolatry; and the temporary character of the Jewish ceremonial law (especially circumcision and sabbath observance) which many Christians saw embodied in the so-called *deuterosis*: the second giving of the law (Bori 1990, 14–17, 28–53; Lindqvist 2008, 104–5, 107).⁵ According to this notion, the burdensome demands of the ceremonial law were embodied in the second set of tablets Moses brought down. At the same time the shattering of the first tablets foretold the ultimate rejection of the Jewish people in favor of the Church (Simon 1986, 88–91). Often enough, however, the incident serves simply to illustrate either God's mercy or the evil of idolatry generally. Table 16.1 summarizes the short treatments and their thematic diversity. The extensive treatments take up similar themes, often with more developed ecclesial and ascetic images in poetic guise. Table 16.2 offers a summary of the lengthier interpretations.

Aphrahat: the Power of Prayer between Moses and Christ

Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*, illustrations of major Christian doctrines and practices, contain several references to the calf worship. His interpretations are of two sorts: some focus on the value of prayer, and others address the *deuterosis* from a salvation-historical perspective.

In the case of the former, the idolatry itself frequently proves less important to Aphrahat than Moses's intercession which it occasioned. This prayer, in which he "gave himself over for the sake of his people and wished to be blotted out from the book of life," shows both the excellence of love and the practically

5 As Lindqvist notes, the Jewish tradition sees the *deuterosis* as an act of mercy, a point with which Jacob of Serugh and Ephrem both agree.

limitless efficacy of prayer (Parisot 1894, *Dem.* 2.17; cf. *Dem.* 10.2).⁶ Among many other accomplishments, Moses's prayer "turned back the anger of God from his people, crushed the calf of sin, brought down the tablets from the mountain, and made his face resplendent" (*Dem.* 4.7).

At the same time, Aphrahat also enlists the support of the calf incident to illustrate the People and Peoples theme. Thus, he sees the sin of the calf as the underlying reason for Jewish dietary laws, which curb the "leaven of the Egyptians," the "mindset of paganism" (*re'yanâ d-ḥanpûtâ*, *Dem.* 15.4). Subsequently, he amplifies the point by relating these dietary laws to the ten commandments and to the repetition of the lawgiving at Sinai:

The just and righteous judgments which he set down before them are the ten holy commandments that he inscribed with his own hands and gave them to Moses for him to teach them. And when they had made the calf and went astray after it, then he gave them "commandments and judgments that are not pleasing."

Dem. 15.8, quoting Ezek 20:25; see LIZORKIN 2012, 161

Aphrahat proceeds to illustrate with various aspects of Jewish ritual purity laws, and he asserts the People's continued sinfulness: "Rather, they were filling up all their days with sins, and they could not be made righteous by the law" (*Dem.* 15.8). Indeed, the People falls into the larger pattern of sin, described as "all the impurity of Adam" (*Dem.* 15.8). On Aphrahat's fairly negative reading, these laws seem more a punishment than a therapy. Ephrem and Jacob will differ with him in this regard.

The rejection of the People in favor of the Peoples appears most clearly in *Dem.* 16, in which the sin of the calf stands among a number of classic prophetic texts employing the imagery of adultery and fornication (e.g., Ezek 23:4; Hos 2:2ff.). Aphrahat adds that "Because the time of the peoples had not arrived and their savior was another, Moses did not want to be the savior and teacher of the People from the Peoples who would be greater than the People of Israel" (*Dem.* 16.4). Moses, in his humility, gives way to Christ, the ultimate savior and teacher—and for *this* reason, he intercedes with God to spare the People. Thus, even Moses's intercession, which was for the People, occurred and was effective for the sake of Christ and the Peoples. This seems likely to

6 In this, and all subsequent cases, references to a Syriac source should be understood to point to the Syriac text of the edition noted at the first appearance of that source. References employ the section numbers of the edition, if available, or else the page numbers. All translations are mine.

explain why Aphrahat's wording reflects the *second* of Moses's two intercessions on the People's behalf (the first is described in vv. 11–14, and the second is described in vv. 31–35). For Aphrahat, Moses's second intercession was only a temporary stay of punishment, since in the course of it God promised, "whoever has sinned against me I will blot out" (note the *future* tense; *Dem.* 16.4). Unlike Ephrem and Jacob, Aphrahat does not here develop the adultery imagery present in the prophetic texts he cites.

Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh: Adultery and Divine Pedagogy

After Aphrahat, in addition to commending prayer and fasting, two other major dimensions emerge out of the People and Peoples theme. First, Ephrem and Jacob both present the apostasy as an act of adultery that foretells, without definitively establishing, the People's rejection or "divorce" by God. The same imagery is used to meditate on mercy, prayer, and the challenge of spiritual immaturity. Second, our authors present the instructive role of divine law in salvation history and its periodization from Adam's fall to the crucifixion. Texts that take up this latter perspective, while remaining critical of the Jews, are more likely to excuse historical Israel on the basis of immaturity, or to obscure its guilt. This second aspect sometimes seems to entail an emphasis on prayer and fasting too, insofar as Jacob (and others) treat the divine law as a form of temporary ascetical training—contrasted with the false asceticism or ritualism of the Pharisees. A third aspect developing from the salvation historical view of divine pedagogy deserves mention: the temporary character of the Jewish ceremonial law. While certainly a point in Ephrem, he never seems to use the calf for this purpose (Beck 1961b, 3.89–418). Others do, however, such as Jacob and Isaac of Antioch.

Each development seems to have its own source. The first flows from classic prophetic passages from Hosea and Ezekiel that treat the covenant with Israel in marital terms, and from the water of testing that Moses gave the Israelites (see Num 5:11–21). The second development stems from realizing that a larger drama is playing out in a tension between divine instruction and demonic temptation, perhaps helped by Jewish tradition, which pointed to the demonic instigation of the idolatry (Smolar and Aberbach 1968, 112–13; Bori 1990, 22–25).⁷ Jacob develops this motif especially, which helps to explain why he

7 Bori's contention, that the tradition of demonic instigation is relatively unimportant for Christian authors, needs some nuance in the case of Ephrem and Jacob. Jacob certainly devotes substantial attention to this aspect.

focuses more than Ephrem on the triumph of divine mercy in prayer and fasting. The agency of celestial actors eclipses that of the terrestrial.

The calf episode plays other minor roles for Ephrem and Jacob, depending on the occasion. Ephrem brings it up many times simply as a prominent biblical example of idolatry, demonically inspired, which he can use, for example, to criticize Julian the Apostate, to commend the value of chastity, or to associate with other targets of his criticism, such as pagan Greek rationalism (Beck 1957b, *HcJ* 1.17; Beck 1959, *HdN* 14.19; Beck 1955, *HdF* 87.4). Ephrem's prose commentary on Exodus presents several classic points. He criticizes the congregation's plea of Moses's long absence as a pretense, and strives to free Aaron from blame by claiming that he acted out of fear. He sees God's threat to destroy Israel as mercifully giving Moses the chance to avert the calamity. The waters of testing, according to Ephrem, revealed which Israelites had participated in the idolatry willingly, and which out of fear. His commentary text breaks off after describing the massacre by the Levites (Tonneau 1955, *ad loc.*). Similar details appear also in Jacob's writings (notably Jacob's unpublished *mêmra* devoted to the subject, on which, see below; see also Albert 1976, 2.238, 4.53).

Adulterous Infidelity

Ephrem treats the incident as a case of adultery on several occasions (e.g., *HdN* 14.19 and *HdF* 14.6), but among the classic passages is the first part of *HdC* 1, where he begins by presenting the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem as a bridal procession "greater ... than the procession that had been held [before] for the Daughter of Sarah when she went forth from Egypt" (Beck 1964a, *HdC* 1.1). Yet, "she was especially galled by his modesty/since like her mother she was accustomed to adultery" (*HdC* 1.3). Thus, as Ephrem imagines it, "the retort of her mother was in her mouth/who made the calf by her wiles/for she was constrained by her secret love for him" (*HdC* 1.4). Moreover the "Daughter of Zion" also has Potiphar's wife to whom to look for an example of deceit: "That daughter, marked with the features of her mother ... seized her betrothed as if he were a stranger/and chased the bridegroom as if he were an adulterer./She cried after him, accusing him like the mistress after Joseph" (*HdC* 1.5). The Jews of Jesus's day, here presented collectively as a seductive prostitute that seeks to "overcome" (*tezke*) the purity of her lovers, finds herself forced to pretend that she does not know Jesus, insofar as she cannot bear his chastity. This suggests to Ephrem that the synagogue's asceticism was insincere, as he elaborates a polarity between simple faith and devious infidelity. A similar perspective animates his recurrent references to the episode in his *Sermo de Domino Nostro*, where he takes up the comparison between the inveterate paganism of the Israelites and its contemporary manifestation in Simon the Pharisee's disbelief,

contrasted with the repentance of the sinful woman (Beck 1966, §6, 17 and 43). The reference to the sinful woman recalls the theme of fornication, nor could a critique of pharisaic ascetical practices have been far from Ephrem's mind.

Jacob, Ephrem's more irenic spiritual disciple, continues the tradition, re-focused on the heart's bridal chamber rather than the synagogue's ultimate rejection, though without abandoning the latter point:

You did not retain that one whom you betrothed in the region of Sinai.
Come, betrother of the soul decorated with the beauties of your songs.
The Congregation, the People whom you loved, committed adultery
with the calf.

Lord, may silence not enter my thinking and fornicate with it.
May your story be the husband of my word, as well as its support,
and may it have intercourse with it [*neštawtap*] that it in turn might give
the fruits of glory.

BEDJAN 1905, 1:4⁸

In this case, the calf incident inspires him to develop the marital metaphor illustrating the contemplative reading of the Scripture to which he aspires.

Elsewhere, in *Homily 9 on Moses, On the Adultery of the Congregation*, Jacob takes up in contemplative fashion the entire exodus narrative retrospectively from the vantage point of the calf.⁹ He is especially struck by how Moses's "hands of flesh" can hold back the one that angelic "arms of flame" cannot contain (ll. 600–601). Jacob sees God willingly allowing an excuse, freely allowing himself to be "bridled" by his merciful love (ll. 581–583). He even shows himself willing to excuse Israel on the basis of immaturity; when he does so, he abandons the image of the impudent girl and adopts that of the child or infant:

He sounds the alarm to his child [*yalûdâ*], even while threatening him,
and he was giving room for him to flee without being struck.

ll. 576–577; cf. BEDJAN 1905, 1:23

⁸ Note that references to Bedjan's editions refer to volume and page numbers.

⁹ No edition of this text has yet been published. Seven mss. in all are known to me. All citations are based on the line numbers of my draft edition which takes the twelfth-century Mardin Syr. Orth. 130 (ff. 17r–24v) as its base. The manuscript was obtained in digital format from the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library. Parts of the present chapter are reworked excerpts from a paper I gave at the XVIIth International Conference on Patristic Studies at Oxford in August 2015, entitled "A First Look at the Manuscripts and Themes of Jacob of Serugh's Metrical Homily 'On the Adultery of the Congregation.'"

This was so that the “child [*talyâ*] might hear and quake with fear because of his sin.” The child’s opportunity to escape comes about insofar as God’s merciful threat instills fear and repentance (ll. 584–585).

The reason for the mercy brings Jacob back, like Aphrahat, to the success of Moses’s intercession. After all, God “hastened to the daughter, the church, to open the door for her to enter, that the lover of calves might go out and leave” (ll. 658–659). That God did not actually do so, Jacob attributes to two reasons. One was simply divine patience. God “was patient that perchance the harlot might become repentant” (l. 661). Indeed, Jacob even describes God himself excusing the synagogue on the grounds that “Lust [*regtâ*] captured her and she could not see clearly what was happening to her./For the love of the Evil One weighs down the intellect [*mawqar hawnâ*] of him who has that love” (ll. 546–547). This view is consistent with Jacob’s image of the childlike Israel. On the other hand, Jacob, like Ephrem, sees the synagogue’s rejection postponed for the sake of the patriarchs. Thus Jacob, unlike Aphrahat, focuses on Moses’s *first* intercession for the people (Exod 32:11–14), which was predicated on God’s fidelity to Israel’s ancestors. Moses, he says, “took three names, like a censer, that he might enter before him, that with the fragrance of the righteous [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob], he might prove pleasing” (l. 678). Ultimately, Jacob sees the synagogue’s opportunity for mercy as temporary. Nevertheless, his position suggests the importance of spiritual maturation on her part (but see Beck 1964b, *CNis* 62.21; noted by Shepardson 2008, 48).

The Broader View: Divine Pedagogy versus Idolatry

Sometimes Ephrem steps back from the theme of adultery to contemplate the bigger picture, including the temporary character of the ceremonial law and the unity of the covenants. A case in point is *HdE* 43–44, where Ephrem says that the “hidden finger of God wrote on the tablets ... It placed on that People / the bridles of the commandments, because he had rebelled with paganism” (Beck 1960, *HdE* 43.1). The image of adultery gives way to that of animal husbandry and agriculture. Ephrem even compares the tablets to fields and the law written on them to early and late harvests, and it is clear that his ultimate point is that they share the same root (*HdE* 43.3; cf. 44.24). In this context, breaking the first tablets was actually merciful, insofar as it bandaged the broken People by instilling contrition (*HdE* 43.6). For Ephrem the pair of tablets, described each as “spouse” (*bat zawgâ*) of the other, foreshadows the two covenants, which he insists are ultimately harmonious. “The graven tablets and the secret tablets” have “one and the same proclamation.” Indeed, “their copies are equivalent [*šwên*] and their truth is one [*ḥad*]” (*HdE* 43.10). Divine pedagogy is coherent, but seeing its logic requires some insight.

Hence Ephrem discovers further “mysteries” (*râzê*) in the episode. For the second tablet is also a sign of good things, not of the onerous ceremonial law alone. He even speculates further by comparing the first tablet, broken by the calf, to Eve, the “rib” broken at the instigation of the serpent, and he sees in the giving of the second tablet a type of the embodiment of Christ (*HdE* 44.17–18 and 44.20). Ephrem concludes *HdE* 44 with the imagery of the two congregations, the synagogue and the church, the People and the Peoples, and he sees the permanent rejection of the synagogue, in favor of the church, forecast in the broken former tablet.

And since the congregation had been corrupted there by the calf,
he corrupted and broke the tablets in order to teach her that she was
rejected.

HdE 44.23

Yet, she remains “until the times are complete ... lest he should defraud the righteous who were within her, and lest he should cover over the mysteries which he was depicting in her” (*HdE* 44.23–24). The calf story, with its pair of tablets, is thus a multivalent paradox: a presage of both good and evil, mercy and sin, even a forecast of Christ’s resurrection who put on a body anew as the law was embodied a second time in the stone tablets (*HdE* 44.26). It is hardly the final word, only a miniature version of a drama yet to be played out, though Ephrem of course is certain how it ends.

Another striking case of Ephrem’s broader, more contemplative perspective is *CNis* 14. Its principal topic is the growth and establishment of Christianity in Nisibis, which he presents in stylized terms. When he borrows the image of the earring on a voluntary slave (Exod 21:6; par. Deut 15:17) to explain the Nisibene congregation’s fidelity to Christ, the same image calls to his mind the incident of the calf, constructed out of the earrings that had been God’s bridal present to the synagogue. In an interesting play on the metaphor of a sexual liaison, Ephrem personifies Death as the calf’s father, and the fire as his mother. Ephrem’s penchant for personifying salvation historical characters, such as Death or Sheol, an extension of his symbolic habit of thought, extends also to the calf. The unwitting Israelite congregation is the victim of this destructive demonic trio:

Fire, [like a mother,] bore for Death a son, and Death itself feeds on
corpses.

But the son of Death has surpassed Death itself, and has fed upon the
souls of humankind:

the calf left its hay alone, since the minds of the people had become its food.

BECK 1961a, *CNis* 14.7¹⁰

Ephrem treats the calf almost as a sort of soul-sucking incubus, but its frightening depredations are turned back by the cross, which is paradoxically the offspring of the “former deadly tree,” presumably the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Eden:

Grace, [like a mother,] bore a son to the former deadly tree.
Behold the cross, the offspring of the tree which attacked its father!
The tree became the source of death but the cross became the source of life.

CNis 14.8

Ephrem goes on to contrast the cross which distributes blessings to creation with the calf which sets fire among the People. The calf incident thus becomes a miniature staging of the cosmic, creation-wide battle over death in which the cross ultimately proves victorious. That Ephrem sees the calf incident as a reprise of the fall of humanity is clear from the symbolic terms in which he couches the whole. The calf attacks not just the souls of the Jews but the souls of people in general, as a sort of intensification of Death, a personified archetypal sin. Ephrem hardly excuses the People, but sees in them a kind of paradigm of humankind under idolatry. The real victory belongs to the cross, which is implicitly the hidden reason for the Nisibene congregation's spiritual maturation (in contrast to the immature congregation at Sinai). Ultimately, therefore, Ephrem's broader reflections on the calf in the context of divine pedagogy focus on what it teaches about the church's growth.

Much like Ephrem, Jacob too takes the calf episode back to creation and sees in the *deuterosis* an act of mercy that foreshadows Christ's recreation of Adam and Eve, to whom Jacob compares the broken tablets. Thus he writes, “The sin of the world broke the beautiful tablets/and the mercy of the Father preserved the law with his covenant./From that point on, he showed his compassion by way of symbols” (Alwan 1989, 1.113–115). Jacob explains what he means by this compassion when he alludes to the calf:

10 In personifying the fire, Ephrem probably has in mind Exod 32:24, in which Aaron blames the fire for producing the calf.

The two tablets, so to speak, were Eve and Adam.

...

But on account of the snake, just like that calf in the encampment,
... they were corrupted.

ALWAN 1989, 1.123–126

Yet, “just as these tablets were renewed by the hands of Moses,/So also the Son of God renewed Eve and Adam” (1.131–132). Much as for Ephrem, the victory of the calf is only a temporary defeat for the course of salvation history, whose ultimate success is foreshadowed, even if paradoxically, in this most heinous of crimes. It is almost as if Exod 32 serves as a dark protoevangelium, and responsibility for the broken tablets shifts from the People to “the sin of the world” (*pace* Bori 1990, 77). Elsewhere, in connection with creation and the calf story, Jacob argues that the Sabbath’s purpose was rather like a curfew: mandatory study time to instruct adolescent Israel’s ignorance of the true God (Albert 1976, 3.109–112).

The Calf in Salvation History: Interpretations after Ephrem

Several authors beside Jacob take up the calf incident after Ephrem, though none with the frequency or depth they do. In the fifth century, John of Apamea, Isaac of Antioch, and the anonymous *Book of Steps* (*Liber Graduum*) put the calf episode to some sort of ascetical purpose or at least address the question of what rule of conduct Christians ought to follow. For John and Isaac, the calf story reveals divine pedagogy in the face of persistent idolatry. The *Liber Graduum*, however, stands somewhat apart. Arguably, it too is concerned largely with establishing the rules of Christian conduct, but in terms of the calf, its author focuses principally on Moses’s intercessory prayer understood in a uniquely typological way foreshadowing the new law.

John of Apamea: Explaining Israel’s Election

The corpus of John of Apamea, a fifth century ascetic, is both large and rich in spiritual teaching (Hansbury 2013, vii–xi; Strothmann 1972, 1–4, translation volume). Nevertheless, the incident of the calf appears only once in his works, in the fourth dialogue with Thomasios, in the context of questions regarding God’s guidance of salvation history: his various *mdabbrānwātā* or “economies” (Strothmann 1972, 35–59, Syriac volume). John explains how the divine economy tolerates minor evils and harmful things for humanity’s instruction and maturation. He sees a pattern in which special privileges are for the sake of the

whole, a pattern applicable also to the People, which was chosen to preserve and disseminate the knowledge of God in a world awash with idolatry: “For the sake of the instruction [*yûlpānâ*] of the Peoples, [the People] was chosen” (Strothmann 1972, 40–41, 46). The outward signs of Israel’s election and God’s miraculous providence, in contrast to the hidden economy of God in created things, make God’s existence and sovereignty clear to all but the most obtuse. John presents his instruction in terms of an inner-outer polarity: rendering explicit what is implicit (Strothmann 1972, 45–46). Yet, the worship of the calf was a significant wrinkle in this process of explication:

They set up the image of the error that was in them before the exterior sight by fashioning the calf.... Nevertheless, God by his mercy, for the sake of the instruction of the Peoples, became the pardoner of their crime. And although by a just judgment, they deserved that anger should come against them, examine also the reason for their pardon: that he did not pardon them for their own sake.

STROTHMANN 1972, 47

According to John, the People whose outward signs should have pointed to the inward truth of God’s existence and sovereignty fell prey to the inward tendency to idolatry. Instead of making interior divine knowledge explicit, they made explicit the opposite: they displayed idolatry “before the exterior sight.” John emphasizes God’s mercy, but for the sake of the whole. In this way he denies the People’s claim to a permanent special status and God’s unique love.

Isaac of Antioch: The Calf and the Institution of the Sabbath

Isaac too presents the incident of the calf within an ascetical context: a metrical homily on admonition and reproof. Many homilies with such titles are attributed to Isaac (Matthews 2003, 56–76). As for Isaac himself, his identity is famously obscure, and many works under the name remain unedited (Brock 1997, 41–42; Matthews 2003, 52). In the case of *Homily 27 On Admonition and Rebuke*, in which the calf story features, the theme of divine instruction appears. Where John’s perspective was universalizing, however, Isaac’s is narrowly focused on critiquing the Sabbath. He points out: “In a few words we have learned the perfection of the law:/whatever is hateful to you, never do to your neighbor” (Bedjan 1903, 345). For Isaac, keeping the Sabbath is misguided because “the Maker distinguished for them the Sabbath for their training and instruction [*l-mardûteh wa-l-yûlpāneh*],” necessary because the People was “immature [*šbar*] ... as regards knowledge of God” (Bedjan 1903, 346). The Israelite experience in the desert warns against foolish celebration and

gluttony. At “the festival of the calf” that “People ... were serving sin openly after eating and drinking” (Bedjan 1903, 346–347). Isaac leaves unclear whether the idolatry leads to the gluttony or whether gluttony gives occasion for latent idolatry to manifest itself. Clearly Isaac’s main concern is to prevent his audience from taking the example of the Sabbath rest as a pretense for immoderate partying, apparently on Sundays and vigils (*ḥadbšabbê w-ʿrûbâtâ*). To do so, he takes up the same tradition that the Sabbath (and indeed the entire Mosaic law) was meant for instruction. In Isaac’s mind, the calf incident serves to suggest how necessary that instruction was.

The Liber Graduum: Moses’s Intercession Not Quite Perfect

The *Liber Graduum* is a diverse, yet unified collection of ascetical *mêmrê*, perhaps of the fifth century, whose most salient characteristic is an interpretation of the Christian life that divides it into two levels or steps: the Upright and the Perfect (Smith 2014, 72–96). This distinction, it has been noted, “is traced back by the *Book of Steps* to the very origin of humanity. Adam, created in perfection, by failing to keep God’s commandments fell from that state, and uprightness was sanctioned until the coming of Christ, who would manifest in himself the true nature of Adam and perfection” (Argárate 2014, 156). As a result, the text’s community, and indeed salvation history, is structured by a distinction “between major and minor commandments” (Argárate 2014, 156).

Thus, it makes sense that the calf-worship at Sinai plays a role in articulating this distinction, especially since there already existed a tradition of linking the calf sin to the sin of Adam and of using it to explain temporary commandments. In this connection, the author values Moses’s intercession as an instance of the love for sinners characteristic of the Perfect. In one passage, the author explains that when Moses desired to be blotted out with the sinful People, “[his] stature grew since he counted himself with the sinners who were sinning constantly” (Kmosko 1926, 21.12). Elsewhere, the author comments more extensively on this same episode: “Moses did for the sinners just as he wanted that the righteous should do for him if he had sinned. You can see how the righteous were eager for perfection” (*LG* 9.5). But, as the author points out, it was not yet time for perfection: “In another passage, the Lord demoted Moses below the level of justice, when he said to him: command the Levites to lay waste their brothers and their fathers because they worshiped the calf” (*LG* 9.5). The author commends Moses’s prayer because of its wistful tension toward future perfection, despite the darker aspect of the episode manifested in the slaughter by the Levites. This permits the author of the *Liber Graduum* to condemn implicitly this period of salvation history as a temporary toleration of sin, instead of taking the law of Moses as a temporary remedy for the sin of

idolatry, as other Syriac authors do. Note Moses's entanglement in the sinfulness of the world. Other Syriac writers tend to treat his likeness to Christ as actual rather than aspirational.

Philoxenus: The Calf Episode in the *Discourses*, a Spirituality of Maturation

In writers of the sixth century and beyond, especially among those writers of the Church of the East, with the exception of Sahdona, references to the calf incident diminish in frequency and originality. Nevertheless, the *Discourses* of Philoxenus in the sixth century attest to the continued vitality of this episode in the Syriac ascetical tradition. Philoxenus refers to the incident four times in his discourses. Generally, he uses it to warn against the evils of gluttony, eating food with lust (*regtâ*), which leads to other sins. Indeed, Philoxenus sees this lust as the archetypal sin, the "first lust" (*regtâ qadmaytâ*), which caused the fall in the garden, and several other infamous sins recorded in Genesis. Thus, when "they arose from the table of lust and worshiped the dead calf," it was merely one illustration among many (Budge 1894, 1:458). Here, as elsewhere, Philoxenus inclined not to single out the Jews but rather to see the problem as a universal one (De Halleux 1977, 123).¹¹ His attitude toward the Jewish dietary laws as a sort of instructive fasting is thus positive as well (Budge 1894, 1:447). Like Ephrem's *Sermo de Domino Nostro*, however, he does relate the calf to the New Testament's criticism of hypocritical fasting and tithing on the part of the Pharisees (Budge 1894, 1:459).

Other authors have seen a kind of spiritual immaturity on the part of the People in the desert, but Philoxenus uses the calf story to illustrate the *value* of simplicity and childlikeness. In his fourth discourse, the calf, and especially the "sign of the calf" revealed the difference between those who had been raised in the desert in simplicity, and those who had been born in Egypt and accustomed to its gluttonous (and idolatrous) ways. As he puts it,

When Moses descended from the mountain and saw the confusion of the People, he knew that this incitement did not come from all of them, but he filed the calf with a file and scattered its dust over the water, and when the People drank from it, the waters became testers of their thoughts, and those in whose thoughts the calf was first conceived such that they

¹¹ In this case, Philoxenus explicitly emphasizes that the problem of idolatry was universal: even Judaism could not escape idolatry.

became the advocates of this evil deed—of these it is written that in them the sign of the calf appeared.

BUDGE 1894, 1:89¹²

The fact that not all were slain causes Philoxenus to suppose that those Israelites born in the desert were free from the idolatrous customs of their parents. He distinguishes between the righteous Israelites who embody the desert simplicity he commends and the ignorant and lustful Israelites (innately Egyptian) who exemplify the dangers of the vices he castigates. Philoxenus's close reading of the calf story leads to a very different account of salvation history: no longer is it a case of a rejected People tolerated for the sake of the Messiah and the righteous patriarchs, but a People of mixed righteousness, in fact two distinct communities, who illustrate for us the dangers of gluttony and idolatry as well as the virtues of the ascetic.

The Calf in Intra-Christian Polemics: Beyond the Arian Controversy

For the most part, Syriac authors used the calf incident to commend ascetical practices or a particular view of the sequence of salvation history. Insofar as the sin of the calf was an archetypal sin and error, however, authors would find in it illustrations of the sins and errors they were inclined to see in their opponents. As Shepardson has shown, Ephrem's anti-Judaism was directed at contemporary opponents within the Arian controversy (Shepardson 2008, 159–61). Polemical uses of the calf incident in Syriac authors likewise moved beyond both anti-Judaism and Arianism.

For Philoxenus, the loyalty of the Levites toward God and Moses, faced with strife against their own brethren, serves as a model in contemporary doctrinal struggle among Christian brethren. For Philoxenus, adherents of Nestorius and of Chalcedon (that is, crypto-Nestorianism) were little better than idolaters since in his view by separating Christ into two natures they effectively worshiped a mere man as if he were God (De Halleux 1963, 11–12). It is no surprise, therefore, that Philoxenus turns to the Levites' fidelity: "For this reason, they were honored," he says, "and he received the gift of the high priesthood, and this as well: that through service, they would be firmly joined to God in every age, so that for this same reason, Levi was named after preeminence in the knowledge of God" (De Halleux 1963, 91).

12 See the recent excellent translation by Kitchen (2013), which I found helpful for clarifying the meaning of the Syriac text.

On the other side of the Christological divide, the East Syrian writer Barhadbeshabba exploits the motif of the calf-worship's Egyptian origins to take aim at Cyril of Alexandria. In his supplemental discourse included with his *Cause of the Session of the Schools*, he offers a brief story of the heroes of the Church of the East, with the calf as their foil:

On this path our blessed teachers walked, Master Narsai, Mar Abraham, and Mar John. At Edessa, they embarked upon the labor of teaching, and they completed the course of their vocation at the city of Nisibis. When Urhay committed adultery and fornication with the calf, which the Demon of Egypt had fashioned and sent, and was established there, the congregation and its teachers migrated and arrived at Nisibis. And it grew, increased, and sent forth tendrils and roots.... Bit by bit it grew and abounded in leaves and fruits.

SCHER 1907, 400; see also BECKER 2006, 98–112¹³

The imagery of the calf worship as adulterous infidelity appears alongside the tradition of demonic instigation, but now it serves to demonize, quite literally, Cyril of Alexandria. At the same time, the succession of orthodox teachers takes up the mantle of the faithful Israelites, using the image of the vine, which the Scriptures had used to depict God's People (Ps 80:8–14).

Throughout the Syriac tradition, the calf has consistently served to illustrate an author's particular view of salvation history. Likewise, Barhadbeshabba creatively incorporates the text into his retelling of the story of salvation as a series of divine "schools." Insofar as it sums up in a unique way the pedagogical theme noticeable especially since Isaac, it is a fitting text with which to conclude the present survey. According to Barhadbeshabba, God "created a great school of complete philosophy in the time of the Blessed Moses ... when he had brought the Israelites out of Egypt and brought them to the mountain of Sinai" (Scher 1907, 356). For Barhadbeshabba, both God's love and God's foreknowledge appear in his actions for Israel. Indeed, the purpose of the stone tablets was so that the Israelites could not, in their stubbornness, tear up the divine instruction. Ironically, Moses breaks the tablets anyway. Barhadbeshabba describes the scene this way:

13 Becker presents this author's text as the culmination of the pedagogical model for Christianity, though I would prefer to say the pedagogical model of the *church*. That is, the church herself is interpreted as a sort of school.

When he came to the school and saw that a mute teacher was sitting, of whom all were pretending to inquire and were making sport of falsehood in the place of truth, ... [Moses] pulled down that new teacher with rough straps, and he cast it down from its throne, and he stripped its body with a file, and scattered its dust on the surface of the waters and gave it to its shamefaced students to drink. He delivered a great speech in the school and said: whoever is on the Lord's side, let him come to me, and then all the prominent brethren, the sons of Levi were gathered to him, who, as it seems, did not bow their head to Error. He commanded them to take, each man, his sword, and to turn aside at every door in the encampment.... And because they fulfilled the commandment of Moses, he said to them: you have sanctified your hands for the Lord. And everyone in whom appeared the signs of that debt of the calf as a result of the drinking of the waters, they killed.

SCHER 1907, 357

Ultimately, however, Barhadbeshabba looks to their ignorance for an excuse: "[Moses] prayed to their teacher to persuade him to be reconciled with his disciples and disregard their sin since they were children [*šabrê*]" (Scher 1907, 358). In the process of accepting Moses's intercession, God bestows divine light upon him and "made him teacher in his place" since "he himself refused to teach these maniacs." Barhadbeshabba then describes how Moses "wrote for them new commandments, more numerous and subtle than those" (Scher 1907, 358). In Barhadbeshabba, the tradition of including the calf incident in reflection on divine pedagogy reaches a certain climax, now somewhat remote from Jewish thought and practice. Instead, it plays a role in the larger attempt of the East Syrian church to understand itself and its distinctive confession as the fruit of a well-planned process in salvation history.

Conclusion

From Aphrahat in the fourth century to Sahdona in the seventh, the episode of the Israelites' apostasy with the calf and the paradigmatic paradox of sin and mercy that it represents inspired a diverse array of readings. These were, however, unified to a great degree by the Syriac tradition's common stock of ecclesial and ascetical imagery, expressed above all in poetry but evident even in prose: typical polarities such as the harlot and the bride, the People and the Peoples, demonic deceit and divine knowledge, the hidden and the revealed, or the calf and the cross. For our Syriac authors, the calf continued to be, much

as it was for the ancient Israelites, a powerful moment of trial that could reveal the hidden thoughts of the heart, and the hidden progress of the church, and thus open them both up for prayerful and penitential consideration before the hidden wisdom of divine providence. The details focused on could vary, though Moses’s merciful intercession, demonic temptation, and the massacre by the Levites were among the most frequent. Commending prayer and fasting is common to the tradition from the beginning, and it remained so. The imagery of adultery and divorce belongs principally to Ephrem and Jacob. Nevertheless, as time goes on, one finds even this aspect turning more and more toward asceticism, and toward the merciful gift of divine laws as crucial to God’s larger plan for instructing and training mankind. This last aspect, at least in extra-liturgical ascetical texts, eventually predominates. Thus, while Syriac anti-Jewish polemics typically and harshly blame ancient and contemporary Jews for the apostasy, this other theme often finds occasion to excuse or at least defocus them, whenever historical Israel still serves as a model for the church or the individual Christian. Mercy and pedagogy prove more important to the progress of salvation history itself, to explaining the pattern of sin, and to capturing that tension toward the perfect law and spiritual growth that lies at the heart of the ascetical experience. To put it simply and symbolically, perhaps the repentant sinful woman was more significant than the adulteress.

TABLE 16.1 Summary of brief references to the story of the Golden Calf.
References to passages use the section divisions of the edition cited in the text, or if these are lacking or unsuitable, the page numbers of the same edition.

Author and text	Passage	Motif or biblical detail(s) addressed
<i>Acts of Judas Thomas</i>	p. 198	the demonic instigation of idolatry
<i>Aphrahat, Demonstrations</i>	2.17	the intercession of Moses
	3.3	the intercession of Moses (following from fasting and his transfiguration)
	4.7	the intercession of Moses
	4.12	the intercession of Moses
	7.15	the repentance of Aaron
	8.9	the inveterate Israelite proclivity toward idolatry explains why Moses’s grave was hidden from them
	10.2	the intercession of Moses
	15.4	the inveterate Israelite proclivity toward idolatry

TABLE 16.1 Summary of brief references to the story of the Golden Calf (*cont.*)

Author and text	Passage	Motif or biblical detail(s) addressed
Ephrem, <i>Carmina Nisibena</i>	15.8	the second giving of the law
	16.3	the second giving of the law
	11.21	the blameworthy amusement (<i>šē'yā</i>)
	27.9	idolatry as adultery
	39.15	the massacre by the Levites (compared to other examples of death)
	43.1	implied reference to the inveterate Israelite proclivity toward idolatry
	53.13	the demonic instigation of paganism (Satan boasts of his victory over Aaron in a precedence dispute with Death)
E., <i>Hymni contra Julianum</i>	1.17	the demonic instigation of paganism
E., <i>Hymni de Nativitate</i>	14.19	idolatry as adultery contrasted with the chastity of Moses
E., <i>Hymni de Virginitate</i> (Beck 1962)	44.15	idolatry contrasted with the sweetening of the water in the desert
	49.4	idolatry contrasted with the repentance of the Ninevites
E., <i>Hymni contra Haereses</i> (Beck 1957a)	21.7	the calf's beautiful outward appearance
E., <i>Hymni de Fide</i>	14.6	idolatry as adultery; the breaking of the tablets
	61.10	the inveterate Israelite proclivity toward idolatry
	87.4	idolatry mentioned among several other sins
E., <i>Commentary on the Diatessaron</i> (Leloir 1966)	7.13	worship of the calf as spiritual food (contrast with Elijah)
	8.2	the intercession of Moses
	11.8	the inveterate Israelite proclivity toward idolatry
	14.27	the intercession of Moses
	20.29, 35	the rejection of the Jews, in connection with the crucifixion

TABLE 16.1 Summary of brief references to the story of the Golden Calf (*cont.*)

Author and text	Passage	Motif or biblical detail(s) addressed
E., <i>Hymnen auf Abraham Kidunaya</i> (Beck 1972) ^a	3.10	the intercession of Moses (principally with reference to Joshua, however.)
pseudo-Ephrem, <i>Hymnen auf Julianos Saba</i>	20.16–17	the intercession of Moses
<i>Liber Graduum</i>	7.19	the singing and dancing; idolatry as adultery; the massacre by the Levites
	9.5	the intercession of Moses
	21.12	the intercession of Moses
Syriac <i>Didascalia</i> (Vööbus 1979)	chapter 2	the second giving of the law
Isaac of Antioch, <i>Second Homily against the Jews</i>	line 90	the second giving of the law
Jacob of Serugh, <i>Homily 2 on the Descent of the Most High on Sinai</i>	1.4–5	idolatry as adultery, applied to spiritual contemplation
	1.23	idolatry as adultery
J., <i>Homilies against the Jews</i>	2.238	the inveterate Israelite proclivity toward idolatry
	4.53	the inveterate Israelite proclivity toward idolatry
	4.77	the inveterate Israelite proclivity toward idolatry
	4.291	the swift punishment against the idolatry
	5.183–185	the mercy of God despite the gravity of the sin
Philoxenus of Mabbugh, <i>Discourses</i>	1:89–90	the waters of testing and the massacre by the Levites
	1:197	the massacre by the Levites (one among a list of punishments)
	1:405	the gluttony and drunkenness of the Israelites
	1:452	the gluttony and drunkenness of the Israelites

TABLE 16.1 Summary of brief references to the story of the Golden Calf (*cont.*)

Author and text	Passage	Motif or biblical detail(s) addressed
Ph., <i>Letter to the Monks of Tel'eda</i> (Guidi 1886)	p. 1	the intercession of Moses
Ph., <i>Commentary on the Johannine Prologue</i>	p. 123	the universal proclivity of the human race to idolatry
Ph., <i>Letter to the Monks of Senoun</i>	pp. 91–92	the massacre by the Levites
Narsai, <i>Homily 31 Against the Jews</i> (Mingana 1905)	p. 308	the mercy of God despite the gravity of the sin
Barhadbeshabba, <i>Supplemental Discourse</i> (appended to his work, <i>The Cause of the Sessions of the Schools</i>)	p. 400	the demonic instigation of paganism (compared to Cyril of Alexandria's doctrine)
Shubhalmaran, <i>Book of Gifts</i> (Lane 2004)	1.15.2	the idolatry itself
Sahdona, <i>Book of Perfection</i> (De Halleux 1960)	1.4.3.34	Moses the perfect contemplative; the calf as the sin of the worldly.
(De Halleux 1961)	2.6.24	idolatry as adultery (the calf not explicitly mentioned)
	2.7.32	the gluttony of the Israelites
	2.9.67	the intercession of Moses, as an example of love
Sa., <i>Letter 4</i> (De Halleux 1965b)	§117	the intercession of Moses for the sin of Aaron
Isho'yahb III, <i>Letter 4 Ad Clericos Nisibenos</i> (Duval 1905) ^b	p. 226	the massacre by the Levites

a Not all accept the authenticity of these compositions.

b Note that I have only had access to the Latin translation.

TABLE 16.2 List of longer treatments of the Golden Calf
(If no stanzas or lines are specified, then the reference is to the entire poem.)

Author and Text	Passage(s) or poem(s)	Principal theme(s)
Ephrem, <i>Hymni de Resurrectione</i>	3	the idolatry as adultery; the synagogue's pattern of rejection: like mother, like daughter; the universality of the church of the Peoples
<i>Hymni de Crucifixione</i>	1	the idolatry as adultery; the synagogue's pattern of rejection: like mother, like daughter; further emphasis on the synagogue's devious tendencies
<i>Hymni de Ieiunio</i>	10.3–5	the gluttony of the Israelites, in contrastive polarity with Moses's fast; the demonic instigation of the calf worship; Moses's sword revealing the hidden "goring" by the calf.
<i>Hymni contra Haereses</i>	43.10–13	The contrast between Moses's destruction of the calf and Jesus's healing of the blind man—the OT is not the work of an evil god; <i>aporiae</i> arising from the Marcionite view of the canon.
<i>Carmina Nisibena</i>	14.5–10	The growth of the church of Nisibis compared to the upbringing of Israel in the desert; typological comparison with the tree of knowledge of good and evil, reversed by the cross of Christ
<i>Hymni de Ecclesia</i>	43–44	an extended meditation on the breaking of the tablets: the rejection of the People; the temporary character of sabbath observance and circumcision
<i>Sermo de Domino Nostro</i>	6.4–5; 17.4; 18.1; 43.3	the synagogue's pattern of rejection: like mother, like daughter, first to explain the crucifixion, and then to focus on the contrast between the Pharisee and the sinful woman
<i>Commentary on Exodus</i>	ad loc.	No excuse for the sin in the presence of God's gifts; Aaron's actions to mitigate the gravity of the People's sin; the waters of testing

TABLE 16.2 List of longer treatments of the Golden Calf (*cont.*)

Author and Text	Passage(s) or poem(s)	Principal theme(s)
Pseudo-Ephrem, <i>Sermones in Hebdomadam Sanctam</i> (Beck 1979) ^a	6.273–378	No excuse for the sin in the presence of God's gifts; the request for Barabbas echoing the request for the calf.
Isaac of Antioch, <i>Homily 27 on Admonition and Reproof</i>	pp. 346–47	the misreading of the sabbath rest by contemporary Jews; the sabbath rest for the sake of instruction in the divine law, not for idleness or merriment.
John of Apamea, <i>Discourses with Thomasios 4</i>	pp. 47–48	The People chosen, and ultimately forgiven their idolatry with the calf, for the sake of instructing the Peoples in the knowledge of God.
Jacob of Serugh, <i>Homily 9 on Moses, on the Adultery of the Congregation</i>	entire	idolatry as adultery, partially excused because of the People's immaturity; demonically instigated lust and divine mercy while waiting for the church; the intercession of Moses
J. <i>Homily 1 on Creation</i>	lines 105–144	the second giving of the law as an act of mercy
J. <i>Homily 3 Against the Jews</i>	lines 1–120	interpretation of God's "rest" after the creation; the sabbath rest as a kind of curfew for the instruction of the Israelites' immaturity
Isho'dad of Merv, <i>Commentary on Exodus</i>	ad loc.	the Egyptian origins of calf worship; Aaron's attempt to put off the Israelites; the self-creation of the calf; the water of testing; defense of Aaron.
Barhadbeshabba, <i>Cause of the Sessions of the Schools</i>	p. 358	the camp as a school, and the idolatry interpreted paradoxically as listening to the calf, a teacher who cannot speak; the immaturity of the Israelites.

a I mention also pseudo-Ephrem's *Mêmra* 3.418–447, for Palm Sunday (Beck 1970), which I have been unable to access for this survey. But see Botha 2013, 21–33.

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“A Calf, a Body that Lows”: The Golden Calf from Late Antiquity to Classical Islam

Michael E. Pregill

This paper aims to address the topic of the golden calf in Islam, locating the distinctively Islamic approach to the story within the broader history of interpretation of this famous—or notorious—biblical episode.¹ Including such a treatment in a volume like this seems quite natural; what Muslim exegetes have to say about the golden calf and its place in Israel's history is just as noteworthy as what Jewish and Christian exegetes say about it. The crucial difference, of course, is that their foundational text is typically not Exod 32 but rather the qur'anic versions of the story, especially that found in the twentieth *sūrah*, Ṭa-Ha.² Thus, to discuss the golden calf in Islam, we must first examine the portrayal of the episode in the Qur'an as well as in Islamic literature, since classical, medieval, and modern Muslim understandings of the calf episode are quite incomprehensible without knowing how the Qur'an presents it. This in turn requires that we also come to terms with how the Qur'an engaged its own scriptural predecessors and precursors. The history of interpretation always seems to involve the excavation of layers upon layers of exegetical activity; the way the Qur'an builds upon its late antique precursors is directly analogous to the way the narratives of the canonical Hebrew Bible built upon earlier strata of biblical tradition that circulated orally in ancient Israel, which in turn were built upon still earlier precursors from Ugarit and other ancient Near Eastern cultures.

1 This paper is a concise summary of some of the major conclusions of my forthcoming monograph, which discusses the qur'anic versions of the calf narrative, their background in late antique elaborations on biblical narratives and themes, and the development of the episode in later Islamic and Jewish exegesis.

2 My use of “typically” here is deliberate; while most elaborations upon the calf episode found in Islamic sources are built upon qur'anic foundations, some approach the qur'anic story with clear knowledge of the biblical precursor as well, and a few particularly early treatments actually seem to focus more upon the biblical story than its subsequent qur'anic analogues (cf., e.g., al-Ya'qūbī 1969, 1.36–37; *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* 1957, 2.283; and al-Mas'ūdī 1965–1966, 1.61–62, all third/ninth- or fourth/tenth-century sources that seem to give greater weight to the Exodus account than to anything from the Qur'an or *tafsīr*). I follow standard practice in Islamic Studies by listing dates in accordance with both the Muslim and Western calendars.

All that said, it is important to note from the outset that we must not elide the differences between the Qur'an and the tradition too rapidly by treating the Qur'an primarily as part of Islamic literature, or conversely, by seeing the Muslim exegetes as simply unpacking and clarifying levels of meaning that were already present, though latent, in Scripture. To posit a seamless and organic continuity between the Qur'an as foundational text and the later tradition is fallacious, similar to seeing the pentateuchal traditions and early Jewish interpretations of those traditions as basically the same, or claiming that the most authoritative and informative understanding of the Gospels is to be found among their patristic commentators. The Qur'an and the later interpretive tradition—especially the commentary literature proper, known as *tafsīr*—are quite recognizably different in milieu, background, and presumed audience.

In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam alike, the initial composition or revelation of scriptural materials accompanies (or even triggers) complex processes of communogenesis. But over the course of centuries (in the case of the manifold Judaisms of the Second Temple and late antique periods) or decades (in the case of the Jesus movement or the primitive Islamic community), the gradual articulation of what became each community's mature understanding (or multiple understandings) of what it meant to be a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim necessitated the revision, and eventual effacement, of what the tradition had been in its formative period. While each tradition of course asserts that its interpretation of its Scripture is the original one, this is seldom if ever really the case.

Discussions of the evolution of biblical themes in Western monotheistic tradition in conference panels and workshops, or in volumes like this one, often tend implicitly or explicitly to locate biblical and Jewish and Christian exegetical traditions on one side of the balance (the pre-Islamic material) and the Qur'an and *tafsīr* on the other (the post-Islamic material). There is a certain logic to locating the Qur'an and the *tafsīr* together, since both the Qur'an and classical Islamic exegetical material are in Arabic; further, relative to materials from the Bible, or Second Temple or rabbinic Judaism, or early Christianity, both the Qur'an and the *tafsīr* are demonstrably late. Moreover, until fairly recently, Western specialists in the Qur'an tended to treat *tafsīr* as a more or less dependable source for getting at the native meaning of the text. (This is a presumption that is quite well established in Western scholarship; somewhat strangely, the first medieval European ecclesiastical authorities who attempted to engage Islam directly actually relied upon Muslim commentators and informants in their study and translation of the qur'anic text even as they denounced the Scripture, the Prophet, and the Muslim faithful alike

as hopelessly corrupt and wallowing in error.) But relying on the tradition to recover a contextual—that is to say, historical-critical—understanding of the Qur'an is an enterprise doomed to failure: it forces the Qur'an out of its original context and into a much later conceptual and cultural world, while at the same time giving extremely short shrift to the immense creativity and ingenuity the classical commentators brought to the endeavor of interpreting the text for their particular time and place.

There was no Islam when the Qur'an was revealed; the Qur'an is not about Islam as it later comes to be constructed, using the Qur'an as one, but only one, of its constituent elements; and the Qur'an does not come from a Muslim milieu. Its *exegesis* obviously comes from a Muslim milieu, but when it was revealed, it was revealed in a late antique milieu in which Christianity (or rather, various forms of Christianity) was the dominant organized religion. Thus, to discern the Qur'an's meaning in its original context, we must decipher its message relative to its late antique subtexts. This in turn necessitates that we dislodge it from the towering edifice of centuries of Muslim exegesis—although that exegesis is itself absolutely worthy of scholarly investigation.³ We need to redress the balance: the Qur'an belongs on the side of the ledger where we put pre-Islamic material, late antique biblical and Jewish and Christian traditions; the *tafsīr*, the classic Muslim exegesis of the Qur'an, belongs on the other side.⁴ In short, speaking about the Qur'an and Islam in such a way as to gloss over the sharp differences between them really does justice to neither.

The golden calf episode is a stark example of why these distinctions matter. It demonstrates the rather dramatic gap between the Qur'an's original meaning—that is, its meaning in its revelatory context in Arabia in Late

3 This is not to say that *tafsīr* has no probative value for achieving a contextually and historically sound reading of the Qur'an, only that it must be used judiciously and discerningly; cf. Hamza 2013.

4 Scholars' hesitation to redraw these boundaries stems in part from a naturalization of the perspective of Islamic tradition, which approaches the Qur'an as an "Islamic" document; it is perhaps also informed by a perception of the Bible as an intrinsic, even inalienable, part of the Judeo-Christian heritage, while the Qur'an is seen as essentially "other" and wholly alien in its cultural orientation and presuppositions. However, just as the New Testament is now increasingly recognized to be a Jewish document—that is, a Christian canonization of literary materials generated by a movement that took Jewish ideas for granted and addressed many recognizably Jewish concerns in the formation of a new community—it might be helpful for contemporary scholars to consider viewing the Qur'an in a similar way. While it is misleading to characterize the Qur'an as a Jewish or Christian document per se, it is readily recognizable as an Islamic canonization of literary materials generated by a movement that took both Jewish and Christian ideas for granted and addressed many recognizably Jewish and Christian concerns in the formation of a new community.

Antiquity, defined by its allusion to and reworking of older scriptural materials—and its revision by Muslim exegetes and traditionists living several decades and centuries after the Arab conquests and the establishment of an Islamic empire, the caliphate. While it is absurd to suggest that classical commentators could not or did not interpret the Qur'an "correctly," it was inevitable that they would seek to construct scriptural meanings appropriate for their time, context, and cultural presuppositions. Naturally these were radically different from those of the Prophet's original followers, the first audience of the Qur'an.

The Qur'anic Episode in Islamic Tradition

The golden calf story is related in three places in the Qur'an, in Q Baqarah 2:51–54, A'rāf 7:148–153, and Ta-Ha 20:83–97, with occasional brief allusions to it elsewhere; in each of these cases, the narrative is embedded in much longer and theologically freighted excurses on Israel and its history. The main version of the story—possibly the original presupposed by the others—is that found in Sūrat Ta-Ha, in the context of what seems to be the closest thing to a fully developed recollection of the story of Moses to be found in the Qur'an. Overall, the amount of attention the Qur'an pays to the episode is noteworthy: verse for verse, there is probably about as much material on the golden calf in the Qur'an as there is in the canonical Hebrew Bible. The calf therefore appears to be as significant in the Qur'an's understanding of Israel and its history as it is in either the Jewish or the Christian Bible. Moreover, it generated substantial interest among later Muslim commentators, traditionists, and chroniclers, so much so that it is probably fair to say that the calf story is actually even more central to the Muslim understanding of salvation history and the fate of Israel than it is in either postbiblical Jewish or Christian tradition.

There are noteworthy exceptions here, however. In some Syriac Christian sources of Late Antiquity, in particular the *Didascalia apostolorum*, Ephrem, and Aphrahat, the golden calf episode is likewise understood to be utterly central to salvation history, specifically because it signaled the ultimate disconfirmation of the Jews.⁵ This interpretation of the episode is found already in patristic tradition, as early as the *Epistle of Barnabas* and more fully developed by authors such as Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian; but the calf takes on a special prominence in Syriac (or Syrian) sources of the third and fourth century

5 See discussions of these texts in the chapters by Wesley Dingman and Andrew J. Hayes in this volume.

in particular. The analogous interest in the narrative found in the Qur'an and later Islamic tradition can hardly be coincidental: the Qur'an's understanding of the episode is likely to have been informed in some way by Christian polemic, as was its general perception of Jews and the status of Israel. Moreover, Muslim exegetes' engagement with the story is informed not only by a desire to contextualize and develop qur'anic ideas about idolatry (the calf naturally attracting interest as the main example of Israel's idolatry found in the canonical Scripture) but also by the larger attempt by Muslim spokesmen to appropriate and rearticulate Christian anti-Judaism for their own ends. In short, the calf's importance in Islamic tradition is partially exegetical and partially theological, and the theological strands in particular hearken back to clear precedents in late antique Syriac Christianity.⁶

Rather than start by addressing the content and background of the qur'anic accounts themselves, let us work backwards by describing what Muslim readers have traditionally seen when they look at this story. For Muslim exegetes, the calf story stands as an indictment of the perversity of Israel, and thus, by implication, their contemporary descendants, the Jews. God covenanted with the Israelites and gave them ample providential blessings, redeeming them from slavery in Egypt and caring for them in the wilderness. Nevertheless, while their prophet Moses was away receiving the torah on Sinai, they went astray and worshiped an idol, a calf constructed from their gathered golden ornaments. In its broad outlines, this story is similar to that recounted in the book of Exodus; moreover, Christian and Muslim exegetes would agree on the basic message here, namely that it demonstrates the ingratitude of Israel for God's beneficence and their seemingly innate predisposition to sin and disobey—and thus ultimately proves that they are undeserving of divine favor.⁷

Notably, the three main qur'anic passages on the calf communicate somewhat different messages, largely due to their drawing on different aspects of the story as it is known from the canonical precursor in Exod 32. While the versions of *Sūrat Ṭa-Ha* and *Sūrat al-A'rāf* focus on the relationship between Moses and Aaron in particular and the circumstances surrounding the making of the calf while Moses was away on Sinai, the shorter portrayal of the episode in *Sūrat al-Baqarah* places the sin of the people in the foreground, emphasizing the need for them to express their sincere repentance for their transgression through a violent act of atonement:

6 On the qur'anic and Islamic rehearsal of classic Christian anti-Jewish tropes, see chapter 4 of Nirenberg 2013.

7 On qur'anic notions of covenant, see Gwynne 2014, 1–24; on the basic contours of qur'anic and Islamic understandings of the Exodus, see Pregill 2014.

When we appointed a meeting of forty nights with Moses, then it was that you took the calf as a god in his absence, and did wrong. But we pardoned you afterwards, so that you would perhaps be grateful. And we gave Moses the Book and the Criterion, so that you would perhaps be guided. Then Moses said to his people, "O people, you have wronged yourselves by taking the calf as a god, so turn in repentance to your Creator, then slay yourselves; that would be better for you with your Creator." He then accepted your repentance, for truly he is the one who accepts repentance, the most merciful.

*Q Baqarah 2:51–54*⁸

At its core, this passage is clearly an allusion to the Levitical election in Exod 32:25–29—especially insofar that exegetes generally recognize that Moses's command to the Israelites to "slay yourselves" (*aqtulū anfusakum*) to secure forgiveness for their act clearly means that some of them (presumably the innocent) should slay the others (presumably the guilty).⁹

The question of atonement through bloodshed aside, this version of the episode is thematically linked to other qur'anic stories about sin and forgiveness such as those of Adam and David, although Muslim discussions of the calf incident tend to emphasize Israel's sinfulness much more than the element of atonement or forgiveness. Noteworthy in this connection is the fact that all of the qur'anic versions omit a major aspect of the biblical narrative, namely Moses's successful intercession for the people; as other contributions to this volume have shown, for some Jewish exegetes of antiquity such as Pseudo-Philo, Moses's intercession was in fact the central event of the episode. In contrast, in the eyes of both the Qur'an and later Muslim exegetes, the idea of

8 All translations from the Qur'an and other primary sources here are mine. The narrative voice here is that of the Deity, addressing Israel directly through the Qur'an—a message implicitly understood by the tradition to be delivered by Muhammad to Jewish interlocutors.

9 The exegetes never countenance the possibility that Moses's words are actually a command to the Israelites to commit suicide; rather, they generally recognize that this is a command issued to the people as a collective, the intent being for the Israelites to slay one another. The interpretation of who it is that is doing the killing, who it is that is killed, and for what reason eventually becomes a major barometer of exegetes' attitudes towards questions of political and communal identity, especially regarding the legitimacy of violence in the resolution of disputes over leadership; see Pregill 2010. Some Sunni exegetes became so uncomfortable with the implications of Moses's apparent sanction of a violent purge of sinners from the community—a perspective embraced by exegetes of more sectarian leanings—that they proposed a wholly figurative interpretation of the command to "slay yourselves," reading it as an injunction to adopt a posture of self-abnegating contrition (i.e., "slay your pride" or the like).

divine vacillation is problematic, and so the whole theme of God resolving to destroy the people and then changing his mind must be omitted.

Moreover, Muslim exegetes tend to understand the killing prescribed here less as a means of overcoming the breach introduced into the relationship between God and Israel by the making of the calf and more as a simple punishment, especially since they generally see this sin as annulling God's covenant with them. The conclusion the exegetes draw about the significance of the sin of the calf is that God made the Jews a weak, subjugated people as a consequence of their idolatry *despite* their obedience to the command to "slay yourselves": "Whoever escaped from the killing, God cursed them and then imposed upon them disgrace and miserable degradation" (Muqātil 1979–1989, 1.107; cf. 2.265 *ad* Q A'rāf 7:152). This is tantamount to—and perhaps on some level inspired by—the classic Christian supersessionist reading of the event as signaling Israel's disconfirmation as the chosen people, with the added nuance, typical of Islamic supersessionism, of drawing a direct connection between Israel's loss of divine favor and the humiliation of being a powerless people subjected to the rule of others.

This is not to say that Muslim exegetes do not bring some unique—that is, unprecedented—concerns to their interpretation of the episode. Pages upon pages in the *tafsīr* are devoted to two major questions that come up in connection with the episode. First, how was it that the calf was animated, and what was the nature of its transitory—or illusory—life? Second, who was the "Samaritan" (al-Sāmirī), and why did he create the calf and bring it to life, and how was this accomplished? The reader who is only familiar with the canonical precursor in Exod 32, or with Jewish and Christian elaborations on the story, no doubt finds these questions incomprehensible, if not disconcerting; but they are by no means peripheral to our discussion here. The animation of the calf and the role of the Samaritan are in fact the main subjects explored by commentators on the qur'anic calf narrative. To make sense of this, we must understand how they approached the Sūrah 20 version of the episode in particular. The exegetes' response to specific textual problems in the obscure verses of this chapter had a decisive, even transformative, impact on the Muslim understanding of Israel's sin on the whole.

As it is usually understood, responsibility for the making of the golden calf in the Sūrah 20 version of the story seems to have shifted from Aaron, the maker of the calf in the biblical precursor in Exodus, to a mysterious personage called al-Sāmirī, the "Samaritan" (see Table 17.1). In v. 85, God notifies Moses that "we have put your people on trial in your absence, and the Samaritan has led them astray"; this is the first reference to the character in the Qur'an, who appears only in this episode, and is only mentioned three times here (vv. 85, 87, 95).

TABLE 17.1 Q Ṭa-Ha 20:83–97 according to its traditional interpretation

(83) [God said:] “What has caused you to hurry away from your people, O Moses?”	وَمَا عَجَلْتَ عَنْ قَوْمِكَ يَا مُوسَىٰ
(84) [Moses] replied: “They are right behind me; I have hurried ahead to you to do your bidding, Lord!”	قَالَ هُمْ أُولَاءِ عَلَىٰ أَثَرِي وَعَجِلْتُ إِلَيْكَ رَبِّ لِتَرْضَىٰ
(85) [God] said: “We have put your people on trial in your absence, and the Samaritan has led them astray.”	قَالَ فَإِنَّا قَدْ فَتَنَّا قَوْمَكَ مِنْ بَعْدِكَ وَأَضَلَّهُمُ السَّامِرِيُّ
(86) Then Moses returned to his people, angry and sorrowful, and he said: “O people, didn’t your Lord make you a solid promise? Did the time of covenant take too long for you, or did you wish to incur your Lord’s anger, so that you violated your covenant with me?”	فَرَجَعَ مُوسَىٰ إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ غَضْبَانَ أَسِفًا قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَلَمْ يَعِدْكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ وَعَدًّا حَسَنًا أَفَطَالَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْعَهْدُ أَمْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ يَحِلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَأَخْلَفْتُمْ مَوْعِدِي
(87) They replied: “We did not break our promise to you of our own will; rather, we were made to carry the burden of the [golden] ornaments that belonged to the [Egyptian] people, which we threw [into the fire], for thus did the Samaritan suggest ...”	قَالُوا مَا أَخْلَفْنَا مَوْعِدَكَ بِمَلِكِنَا وَلَكِنَّا حَمَلْنَا أَوْزَارًا مِنْ زِينَةِ الْقَوْمِ فَقَذَفْنَاهَا فَكَذَلِكَ أَلْقَى السَّامِرِيُّ
(88) Then he brought forth a lowing image of a calf. And they said: “This is your god and the god of Moses [whom] he has forgotten ...”	فَأَخْرَجَ لَهُمْ عِجْلًا جَسَدًا لَهُ خُورٌ فَقَالُوا هَذَا إِلَهُكُمْ وَإِلَهُ مُوسَىٰ فَنَسِيَ
(89) Did they not see that it could not reply to them, nor had any power to harm or benefit them?	أَفَلَا يَرَوْنَ أَنَّهُ لَا يُرْجِعُ إِلَيْهِمْ قَوْلًا وَلَا يَمْلِكُ لَهُمْ ضَرًّا وَلَا نَفْعًا
(90) Aaron had said to them beforehand: “O people, you are surely only being tested with it; it is al-Rahmān who is really your Lord, so follow me and obey my command.”	وَلَقَدْ قَالَ لَهُمْ هَارُونُ مِنْ قَبْلُ يَا قَوْمِ إِنَّمَا فُتِنْتُمْ بِهِ وَإِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ فَاتَّبِعُونِي وَأَطِيعُوا أَمْرِي

TABLE 17.1 Q Ṭa-Ha 20:83–97 according to its traditional interpretation (*cont.*)

(91) But they replied: “So long as Moses does not return to us, we will not cease our devotion to it.”

قَالُوا لَنْ نَبْرَحَ عَلَيْهِ عَاكِفِينَ حَتَّى يَرْجِعَ إِلَيْنَا
مُوسَى

(92–93) [Moses] said: “O Aaron, when you saw that they had gone astray, what hindered you from following me? Did you not disobey my command?”

قَالَ يَا هَارُونُ مَا مَنَعَكَ إِذْ رَأَيْتَهُمْ ضَلُّوا أَلَّا
تَتَّبِعَنِ أَفَعَصَيْتَ أَمْرِي

(94) [Aaron cried:] “O son of my mother, do not pull me by my beard or my hair! I was really afraid that you would say, ‘You have introduced division among the Israelites, and did not pay heed to my command.’”

قَالَ يَا ابْنَ أُمِّى لَا تَأْخُذْ بِلِحْيَتِي وَلَا بِرَأْسِي إِنِّى
خَشِيتُ أَنْ تَقُولَ فَرَّقْتَ بَيْنَ بَنِي إِسْرَآئِيلَ
وَلَمْ تَرْقُبْ قَوْلِي

(95) [Turning to the Samaritan, Moses] asked: “So, what do you have to say for yourself, O Samaritan?”

قَالَ فَمَا خَطْبُكَ يَا سَامِرِيُّ

(96) He said: “I perceived that which they did not [i.e., an angel]. I picked up a handful [of dust] from the track of the [angelic] messenger and threw it in; I imagined this to be best.”

قَالَ بَصُرْتُ بِمَا لَمْ يَبْصُرُوا بِهِ فَقَبَضْتُ قَبْضَةً
مِّنْ أَثَرِ الرَّسُولِ فَنَبَذْتُهَا وَكَذَلِكَ سَوَّلَتْ لِي نَفْسِي

(97) [Moses] said: “Begone! All your life you are [cursed] to say: ‘Do not touch me [for I am an exile].’ A threat hangs over you which you will not be able to escape. Look at your god to whom you are so devoted: verily, we shall burn it up, dispersing it into the sea as ashes.”

قَالَ فَادْهَبْ فَإِنَّ لَكَ فِي الْحَيَاةِ أَنْ تَقُولَ
لَا مِسَاسَ وَإِنَّ لَكَ مَوْعِدًا لَّنْ تَخْلَفَنَّهُ وَانْظُرْ
إِلَى إِلَهِكَ الَّذِي ظَلْتَ عَلَيْهِ عَاكِفًا لَّنُحَرِّقَنَّهُ ثُمَّ
لَنَنْسِفَنَّهُ فِي الْيَمِّ نَسْفًا

Moses then rushes down from the mountain, accosts Aaron, and, as in Exodus, receives a weak excuse from him about why he let the people commit this act: “I was really afraid that you would say, ‘You have introduced division among the Israelites, and did not pay heed to my command’” (v. 94). That is, Aaron feared that by intervening he would cause schism among the people, and that

Moses would find this worse than letting them indulge in idolatry temporarily. (In the parallel narrative in Sūrah 7, Aaron's excuse is rather that his life was in jeopardy because the people did not respect his leadership and would have killed him for opposing their plans to venerate the calf.)

Then, abruptly, Moses seems to turn to the Samaritan, who has not been mentioned at all in the narrative since God's oblique reference to him in v. 85 at the beginning of the story. In response to Moses's curt question, "So, what do you have to say for yourself, O Samaritan?" the previously invisible Samaritan confesses that, "I perceived that which they did not. I picked up a handful from the track of the messenger and threw it in; I imagined this to be best." This action resulted in the creation of a calf described in peculiar terms: *'ijl jasad lahu khuwārun*, "a lowing image of a calf" (literally "a calf, a body that lows"). The commentators almost universally agree that what is going on here is that al-Sāmīrī, a member of the Israelite "clan" of the Samaritans (*Sāmīrah*), was either a malevolent interloper among the Israelites or else a treacherous follower of Moses. For some undisclosed reason, he made the calf and, usurping leadership of the people from Aaron, commanded the credulous or desperate people to worship it.

Although commentators differ as to why and how this came to be, the reference to "a calf, a body that lows" is usually taken to indicate that, having made a calf of gold, the Samaritan induced it to imitate life in some way, especially by lowing like a real cow. Equally ubiquitous is the explanation of the "handful from the track of the messenger," which is usually glossed as a reference to the appearance of Gabriel among the Israelites when they crossed the Red Sea after escaping from Egypt; at that time, he rode upon a horse that was so imbued with divine potency that everything it touched came to life.¹⁰ Even taking just a bit of the earth it had trodden, the "track of the messenger," the Samaritan was able to induce the calf to low like a real cow or even to animate it, at least temporarily. After his confession, Moses pronounces what is universally understood as a curse upon him: *fa-dhhab fa-inna laka fī'l-ḥayāt an taqūla*

10 Notably, although Gabriel is invoked by name in three places in the Qur'an, he is not mentioned in connection with the crossing of the Red Sea (depicted at Q Baqarah 2:50, immediately preceding the version of the calf narrative found in that *sūrah*); in point of fact, he is never depicted in a narrative context anywhere in the Qur'an at all. Nevertheless, the exegetes and historians commonly relate narratives about how Gabriel appeared on his angelic steed at that time, usually describing how he led the pursuing Egyptians to their death by drawing them between the parted halves of the sea, where they drowned when the sea returned to its former state after the Israelites passed through to the other side (both Exodus and the Qur'an claim that Pharaoh and his people were drowned, though neither mentions Gabriel as the one responsible; cf. Exod 14:27–28; Q 17:103; 28:40; 43:55).

lā misāsa wa-inna laka maw'īdan lan tukhlafahu—as one popular translation has it, “begone, all your life you are cursed to say ‘Do not touch me’; a threat hangs over you that you will not be able to escape” (Ali 1988 *ad* Q Ṭa-Ha 20:97). It is important to note that the word “curse” does not actually occur here, and “threat” is a bit of a stretch for *maw'īd*, which literally means “appointment” or “obligation.”

Although the calf is described in the same obscure terms in the Sūrah 7 version of the story as well, strangely, al-Sāmīrī is totally missing from this account. Instead, we only see the interaction between Moses, Aaron, and the people here, as in the biblical version:

In his absence, the people of Moses made a lowing image of a calf from their ornaments. Did they not see it could not speak to them, nor guide them on the way? They took it in worship and became wrongdoers. When [the people] repented of their actions and saw that they had gone astray, they said, “If our Lord does not show mercy to us and forgive us, surely we will be among the losers!”

When Moses returned to his people, angry and regretful, he said, “What evil you have wrought against me in my absence! Did you wish to hasten your Lord’s judgment upon yourselves?” And he threw the tablets, and grabbed his brother by the hair of his head and pulled him towards him, but [Aaron] said, “O son of my mother! The people perceived me as weak, and were on the verge of slaying me; so do not count me among the enemies, nor place me with the wrongdoers....” [Moses then] said, “O Lord, forgive me and my brother, and accommodate us in your mercy, for you are the most merciful of all....”

Q A'rāf 7:148–151

The Samaritan’s absence here is generally of no concern to the traditional exegetes; rather than sensing some discrepancy, they merely read this version in Sūrah 7 as an abbreviation of the longer one in Sūrah 20; this is supported by the traditional chronology that is assigned to the Qur’an, insofar as Q 20 was purportedly revealed first, then Q 7, then Q 2.¹¹ The shorter, later narratives

11 The traditional scheme of the chronology of the revelation of the qur’anic *sūrahs* has come to be held as suspect by some contemporary scholars. There are many signs that it was not assembled on an objective basis, but rather was generated as an aid to exegesis of individual *sūrahs* by assigning obscure passages to particular “occasions of revelation,” as the tradition terms them. Other scholars still find the scheme generally vindicable, especially as placed on a supposedly more “scientific” basis by Theodor Nöldeke (d. 1930). I will not wade into this controversy here; I only wish to observe that the proposed sequential

are thus seen as alluding to and presupposing the first one; they are not acknowledged as different "versions" per se, especially given that the traditional commentators shy away from any idea of inconsistency in the Qur'an. In turn, Western scholars have had a variety of reactions to the perceived contradiction here, but their answers to the problem have generally been unsatisfactory. One approach has been to see the Sūrah 20 account as fundamentally garbled, with the attribution of the making of the calf not to Aaron but to another party as due to Muhammad's confusion, while the later version in Sūrah 7 represents a rectification of the earlier error that generated the references to the Samaritan.

Again, the questions of greatest concern to the traditional exegetes are what exactly happened when the Samaritan brought the calf to life, or made it seem to be alive, and where he had come from. The earliest exegetes seem to have naturally assumed that "al-Sāmīrī" is a *nisbah*, a tribal or ethnic appellation, and thus concluded that Sāmīrah was the name of an Israelite clan; later speculation that he was actually an outsider was perhaps prompted by the difficulty involved in accepting that an Israelite under Moses's prophetic guidance had not only succumbed to idolatry but actually orchestrated the affair, a problem rendered more acute by some early speculation that this individual was actually a kinsman of Moses (cf. Ibn Qutaybah 1960, 43–44).

Strangely, it is not until the fifth/eleventh century that some commentators draw a connection between the name al-Sāmīrī and the Samaritan community found in Nablus and other centers in Palestine under Muslim rule in the Middle Ages. The seeming lack of awareness of the ethnographic reality of a Samaritan community in the *tafsīr* tradition for centuries is particularly strange given that scholars have commonly held that the qur'anic depiction of a Samaritan as responsible for the sin of the golden calf must represent an appropriation of some rabbinic tradition of apology on behalf of Aaron that asserts exactly this, though no trace of any such tradition in pre-Islamic Jewish lore has ever come to light.¹² The evidence of the Qur'an itself is no help in this regard, insofar as the only indication of knowledge of Samaritans is the occurrence of the name al-Sāmīrī in this very passage.

development from Q 20 to 7 to 2 is quite plausible as regards the narrative evolution of representations of the calf narrative in the Qur'an.

- 12 The claim that any aspect of the qur'anic portrayal of biblical characters and themes that deviates from what is literally found in the Bible must be of Jewish origin has a long pedigree in Western engagements with Islam. Ludovico Marracci's Latin Qur'an of 1698 seems to have been particularly influential in this regard; Marracci regularly denounces anything he perceives as peculiar or irregular in the Qur'an as talmudic fables, Jewish frivolities, and the like.

The physical nature of this seemingly animate calf became a point of even greater controversy because the oldest tradition of interpretation seems to have held that the Samaritan had actually transformed the golden calf into an animal of flesh and blood.¹³ There was subsequently a reaction against this among rationalist commentators who were bothered by the story's seeming attribution of a miracle to the Samaritan, obviously a malefactor, because of the thorny issue of the *muʿjizāt*, evidentiary miracles that function to validate prophecy. Evidentiary miracles were problematic for the tradition because it seems that early Muslim spokesmen were often challenged by Jewish and Christian interlocutors to produce some proof that Muhammad had worked miracles as a demonstration of his divine warrant; this eventually generated the doctrine that the revelation of the Qurʾan itself had constituted such proof.¹⁴ While the earliest exegetes were unconcerned with the idea of the Samaritan's wonderworking, by the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, some commentators shied away from this approach to the story, asserting instead that the calf's animation was only an illusion, that it was a kind of robot or automaton that only appeared to be alive, or a clever contraption that made a sound when the wind blew through it but could not in any way be mistaken for a living, flesh-and-blood creature.

While the rationalist approach to Scripture and tradition embraced by the Muʿtazilah, the school that promoted this desupernaturalized view of the calf, eventually came to be seen by many Sunnis as problematic, their exegesis of this and many other passages in the Qurʾan was highly influential. The interpretation of the calf episode in many classic commentaries—especially that of Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923), the exemplar of classical Sunni qurʾanic exegesis—must be understood in the light of the Muʿtazilite critique of early claims that the calf was alive.¹⁵ That said, by the high Middle Ages exegetical

13 The claim of the organic nature of the calf hinges on the term *jasad*, the precise meaning of which is difficult to determine. While *jasad* appears to mean “image” or “likeness” in the qurʾanic lexicon (cf. 21:8 and 38:34), it may also be taken as meaning “body,” which facilitated the interpretation of the calf as having been transformed into a living, flesh and blood animal here. The discussion of the term in lexicographic sources is clearly inflected by the theological and exegetical concerns surrounding its usage in the Qurʾan.

14 The development of ideas about the proofs of prophecy, especially through ongoing dialogue between spokesmen of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities over the course of centuries in the early and medieval Islamic periods, has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Cf. Griffith 1979; Stroumsa 1985; and Pregill 2011a.

15 Cf., e.g., the tradition cited by al-Ṭabarī *ad* Q Baqarah 2:51 attributed to the Companion ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās (d. ca. 68/687) that portrays the calf as having been magically generated by the Samaritan's use of the “handful of the track of the messenger” but asserts that its lowing was due only to the passage of wind through its body (al-Ṭabarī 1954–1969,

priorities shifted once again, and authenticating Muhammad's prophetic status (and diminishing seeming challenges and competition to it) was no longer as pressing a task as it had been previously. That being the case, many commentators no longer felt it necessary to avoid asserting that the calf had actually been brought to life, and they casually acknowledged the difference of opinion among the early exegetes on whether the calf was actually made of flesh and blood or rather had been mechanical in nature.

The Problem of Jewish "Influence" on the Qur'anic Episode

Differences in opinion over the nature of the animate calf and the Samaritan's origins notwithstanding, Muslim exegesis of the qur'anic episode are remarkably stable over the course of the tradition's development from early Islamic up to modern times. Further, since the emergence of modern scholarship on the Qur'an in the European academy with the work of Abraham Geiger and his contemporaries in the nineteenth century, Western scholars have been in almost total agreement with the tradition in understanding the qur'anic story to mean what the tradition has said it means. Thus, in the common scholarly view, the qur'anic narrative differs from that of the Bible in two major ways: it asserts that the Israelites worshiped the calf because it appeared to be alive, and it blames the making of the idol on the mysterious "Samaritan" rather than Aaron. The historical reasons for the Qur'an's major departures from the understanding of the episode in Exodus are unclear, but have often been the subject of scholarly conjecture.

The general conformity of Western scholars' interpretation of the calf episode to that promoted in *tafsīr* requires some explanation. Western scholars' acceptance of the traditional interpretation in this case is typical of a pervasive reliance on Muslim commentary in the Anglo-European scholarly tradition. This reliance dates back almost to the very beginning of Western Christian reception of the Scripture (cf. Burman 2007), and many if not most of the oldest European translations of and commentaries on the Qur'an are heavily

2.63–64, no. 918). Such traditions clearly emerged as a compromise position on the nature of the calf, preserving some role for supernaturalism in the episode and explaining how the calf emitted its characteristic *khuwār* or lowing sound, while simultaneously denying that the Samaritan had actually worked a miracle. Though al-Ṭabarī cites a number of different traditions on the calf, representing a spectrum of interpretive possibilities, this is clearly the one he favors. The claim that the calf was flesh and blood is conspicuously absent from his work, as it is from a number of other Qur'an commentaries from the later second/eighth through the fourth/tenth century.

dependent on classical Muslim exegesis. The aligning of Western scholarship with *tafsīr* has meant that scholars have generally seen qur'anic narrative through a lens imposed by the hegemonic discourse of traditional interpretation, adopting and adapting a fundamentally Muslim frame for thinking about Islam's origins. In concrete terms, this means in particular that the reading of the Qur'an has until recently almost always been anchored in conventional accounts of the life of Muhammad that emphasize the exceptional (and obviously inspired) nature of the text; this is at the expense of recognizing the Qur'an as an expression of late antique religious, cultural, and political tendencies.

The reliance on the interpretive frame imposed by Muslim tradition—a hermeneutic guided by hagiographic, prophetological, and apologetic imperatives—is perhaps most evident in scholars' perennial interest in uncovering the Jewish sources of the Qur'an, insofar as the *sīrah* (the traditional biography of Muhammad) posits extensive contacts between Muhammad and the Jews during his community's formative period. With the emergence of more objective and less polemical scholarship on Islam in post-Enlightenment Europe, the work of Abraham Geiger in particular exerted a tremendous impact on Western attitudes, encouraging a view of Islam not as a deviant, heretical form of Christianity, as the medieval tradition often asserted, but rather as a sibling tradition to Christianity—both of the younger traditions having been decisively shaped by reliance on Judaism in their formative years (Lassner 1999; Heschel 2001). Geiger's understanding of the Qur'an as essentially derived from rabbinic sources in his massively influential 1833 thesis *Was hat Mohamed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (*What did Muhammad borrow from Judaism?*), translated into English simply as *Judaism and Islām* in 1898, determined the basic approach of Western scholars to qur'anic narrative for well over a century.¹⁶ Geiger sought to investigate the possible roots of the Qur'an in late ancient Judaism as a means of fostering an appreciation for the commonalities between the faiths, a self-evidently laudable goal. However, Geiger's approach had the unfortunate effect of reinforcing traditional claims that much of the Qur'an was produced during Muhammad's direct interactions with the Jews of Medina, which has sometimes encouraged the misleading conclusion that the Qur'an was essentially plagiarized.

16 Notably, Marracci's annotated translation of the Qur'an—particularly his copious quotations from the *tafsīr*—was used extensively by Geiger. Geiger's special contribution to the emergence of the modern discipline of qur'anic studies was thus not positing Jewish "influence" on the Qur'an per se—a theme he clearly derived from his predecessors—but rather drawing on his proficiency with rabbinic sources—a proficiency his Christian predecessors lacked—in attempting to substantiate that claim in a serious way.

The Qur'an's representation of Israel and its history, especially its interpretation and retelling of biblical stories, has perennially been seen, by and large, as copied from midrashic precedents, a view that has usually inspired various biased attempts to excavate the Jewish sources of the Qur'an that assume a total lack of originality—or even basic comprehension—in its flawed and derivative appropriations of those stories (cf. Pregill 2007). This one-dimensional, frequently polemical approach has largely been rejected by responsible scholars today, but the blatantly reductionist attitude adopted by much of the older scholarship on the Qur'an has discouraged new investigations into its connections to the literary materials of older monotheistic communities that preceded the rise of Islam until fairly recently. That is, the inadequate and unsophisticated way previous generations of scholars approached the question of Islamic origins, along with the desire to avoid offending committed Muslims with frank discussions of the tradition's possible relationship to its precursors, has generally had a retarding effect on qur'anic studies as a whole (cf. Reynolds 2011).

The thesis—or rather assumption—that the Qur'an is heavily dependent upon rabbinic sources generally appears to be confirmed by its coincidence with midrashic tradition at numerous points. To some degree, it is natural to expect such coincidence; Jewish narrative traditions circulated widely in Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an's thoroughgoing concern with Jews and Judaism does at various junctures seem to be informed by knowledge of traditions that are authentically preserved in rabbinic literature. However, two methodological problems emerge here.

First, due to Geiger's titanic impact on modern scholarship on the Qur'an, the Jewish matrix of early Islam has received much more attention than other aspects of the literary, cultural, and religious horizon that informed its vision. While dialogue with some form of Christianity (sometimes posited to have been a heterodox "Jewish Christianity") has always been acknowledged as having some impact on the Qur'an, scholars have long prioritized the purported Jewish precursors to the Qur'an's understanding of Israel and its history in particular. But the Qur'an's engagement with biblical themes, ideas, and symbols need not be understood as narrowly or exclusively—or even primarily—Jewish in origin and orientation. Recently a number of scholars have shed light on the impact the traditions of biblical interpretation associated with varieties of Near Eastern Christianity may have exerted on the Qur'an instead (cf., e.g., El-Badawi 2014).

Second, while striking points of similarity can certainly be seen between the Qur'an and midrashic tradition, a certain ahistorical view of the midrash as representing the ancient, timeless legacy of the sages of the tannaitic and

amoraic periods (that is, the first through fifth centuries) has encouraged a monolithic conception of the midrash as uniformly pre-Islamic as well as quintessentially Jewish. While for decades scholars have recognized that the midrashic tradition and other aspects of classical rabbinic Judaism were profoundly shaped by engagement with Christianity, a corresponding recognition that some major midrashic sources were redacted after the rise of Islam and thus contain traditions that were not only addressing Muslim claims but actually informed by some knowledge of the early Islamic tradition has been slow in coming.

However, this is particularly critical in the case before us; here and elsewhere, what appear to be midrashic precursors to material in the Qur'an itself are actually Jewish responses to Muslim exegesis of the Qur'an that emerged significantly after the rise of Islam. That is, Muslim approaches to the stories of the prophets and patriarchs in the Qur'an gradually came to inform Jewish understandings of corresponding material in the Bible; these understandings were eventually textualized and preserved in compendious collections of rabbinic lore alongside much older—and indisputably pre-Islamic—material. This encyclopedism lent an impression of antiquity to traditions that emerged quite late in the rabbinic tradition's development, at a time when it was permeable to claims and ideas circulating in a Near Eastern world dominated by Islam after the seventh and eighth centuries.

While traditions on the golden calf episode in older (i.e., indisputably pre-Islamic) midrashic collections do exhibit a particular tendency towards apologetic in their representation of the role of Aaron in the affair, they do not go so far as to seek to exonerate Aaron completely by attributing the making of the calf entirely to another party; nor is the calf ever really understood as animate the way it is in Muslim exegetical traditions. In some pre-Islamic rabbinic traditions, outside malefactors may get involved: one from *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* asserts that the Egyptian sorcerers who dueled with Moses at Pharaoh's court had followed the Israelites out of Egypt, and that they used enchantments to make the golden calf shudder before the credulous people. Another tradition, this one found in the Babylonian Talmud, depicts Satan using an illusion to try to convince the Israelites that Moses had died while he was away on the mountain so that they would turn to the calf as their savior (*Cant. Rab.* 1.9.3; *b. Šabb.* 89a).

Building on this, three midrashic sources portray one or another malefactor making the calf seem to come to life through supernatural means: in *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer*, the printed (which is to say later) version of *Midrash Tanhuma*, and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, Satan, the Egyptian sorcerers, or other nefarious individuals seek to lead Israel astray by making the calf dance or low before

the people (*Pirque R. El.* 45; *Midrash Tanhuma*, *Ki-tissa* 19; *Tg. Ps.-J. ad Exod* 32:19, 24). Anyone familiar with rabbinic literature will recognize that these are suspiciously late sources; nevertheless, since the work of Geiger in the 1830s, almost every scholar who has discussed the sources of the qur'anic calf narrative has pointed to such parallels—especially that in *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer*—as precursors to, and thus the proximate sources of, the qur'anic story (cf., e.g., Geiger 1898, 131–32).

While there is a clear logic informing the development of attitudes towards Aaron's role in the episode in rabbinic sources—moving from candid admission of guilt to attempts to provide excuses for his actions to minimizing his role as much as possible by shifting blame onto others—the trajectory of this development is not one that is wholly insulated from an external context. The move from candor to evasion among Jewish commentators on the episode was clearly stimulated by Christian attempts to polemicize against Jews on the basis of the story. Similarly, the move from portraying the mitigating circumstances for Aaron's making of the calf to placing almost exclusive emphasis on the involvement of outsiders was in no small part due to the prevalence of an understanding of the episode among Muslim commentators in which Aaron was almost totally exonerated, with the making and animation of the calf attributed to al-Sāmirī, the Samaritan, instead. Thus, the accounts of *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer*, the later *Tanhuma*, and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* are clearly "post-Islamic"; they reflect the appropriation of a new conception of the story among Muslim exegetes by Jewish exegetes who apparently perceived the trope of the animation of the calf by an outsider as totally congruous with their understanding of the episode, especially since their own tradition's approach was already heading in this direction.

The story of the golden calf is not alone in this regard. Time and again we see distinctive developments in the interpretation of major biblical stories in these late midrashim; almost innumerable examples can be found in Ginzburg's encyclopedic *Legends of the Jews*, in which the author famously lumped together exegetical traditions from Second Temple, rabbinic, and medieval sources without any regard for their chronological development or periodization. Scholarship in this area of research is still in its infancy, but even casual comparison of developments in later Jewish sources with parallel developments in Muslim exegesis of corresponding stories from the Qur'an in Islam's formative period demonstrates many points of similarity between the two traditions.

No doubt some of the overlap may be attributed to coincidence, but some of it must be attributable to convergence as well. This is especially likely given the enormous impact of Islamic civilization in the Near Eastern-Mediterranean

oikoumene on Jewish culture during the gaonic period, when many of the normative sources of rabbinic Judaism (not least of all the Babylonian Talmud) were redacted and transmitted from centers of Jewish culture in the east throughout the Diaspora, including to Europe. Jews were no more passive receptacles for the influx of Islamic “influences” than Muslims were for Jewish “influences”; rather, both communities were equal partners in an ongoing dialogue in which the legacy of ancient Israel, canonized in Scripture, was perennially contested, each community seeking to demonstrate that it was the exclusive heir to Israel’s covenantal, prophetic, and messianic heritage (cf. Newby 2000).

This dynamic is entirely familiar to students of late antique exegetical discourse. In an earlier era, we see Jewish and Christian interpreters of Scripture involved in similar processes that are simultaneously symbiotic and competitive. The earlier dialectic of Jewish-Christian relations made a significant contribution to the formation of the Qur’an itself; the process would be repeated again after the establishment of the caliphal empire, but this time the Jews’ main interlocutors were Muslims, and the products of their mutual engagement were the mature traditions of medieval Islam and Judaism, each definitively shaped through encounter with the other.

The Qur’anic Episode in its Late Antique Context

A few Western scholars have expressed skepticism about the meaning of the qur’anic golden calf narrative as it has been understood by the Islamic exegetical tradition (e.g., Hawting 2001; Rippin 1995). The interpretation of al-Sāmīrī as a Samaritan interloper is questionable, given the total absence of any other reference to the Samaritans in the Qur’an, to say nothing of Muslims’ generally minimal knowledge of this community during the first several centuries of the tradition’s development. Moreover, many scholars have sought to discover the conjectured midrashic precursor to the Qur’an’s portrayal of a Samaritan as the architect of the calf episode, assuming that such a portrayal must have originated as a Jewish polemic against Samaritans. However, no such precursor has ever been discovered, or rather recovered, though its existence was taken for granted by scholars for a number of decades.

Even more problematic is the total absence of any reference to Gabriel’s involvement in the episode in the Qur’an, which provides a crucial basis for the interpretation of the key phrase “I picked up a handful from the track of the messenger and threw it in” (20:96), the Samaritan’s explanation of how the

idol was created and transformed from gathered gold ornaments into "a calf, a body that lows." Further, although the animation of the calf would seem to be a major aspect of the narrative, it is puzzling that such a major plot development should be communicated in that narrative through a single obscure phrase. Moreover, as noted previously, why this phrase should recur in the version of the narrative in *Sūrat al-A'raf*, presumably signaling the calf's magical creation and animation there as well, while *al-Sāmirī* is totally omitted from that version, has long perplexed scholars.

In examining the qur'anic narratives on the golden calf, particularly that of *Sūrah 20*, in the context of the development of the qur'anic corpus itself as well as in the history of the episode's interpretation both in pre-Islamic Late Antiquity and the Islamic commentary tradition, we may come to a rather different understanding of the Qur'an's portrayal of the episode. I would argue that the narrative in *Q Ṭa-Ha 20:83–97* is neither a radically new reinterpretation of the episode, nor particularly indebted either to midrashic precursors or to some other imaginative retelling of the story in circulation in Late Antiquity. Rather, the *Sūrah 20* version of the story is actually much closer to the biblical account of *Exod 32*, albeit with a few unique flourishes. This is not to say that Muslim exegetes *misunderstood* the story; rather, I would argue that they deliberately exploited the obscure, allusive language utilized in this passage in order to fundamentally reshape its meaning for their own purposes.

Although scholars of the Qur'an have sometimes discerned a perceptible gap between the scriptural meanings promoted in the *tafsīr* and those that seem indigenous to the text itself, this disjunction has all too often been represented as due to the shortcomings of the exegetes, as if they could not attain an objective perspective on the Qur'an but were rather constrained by their own narrow biases and theological agendas. I prefer to construe this gap in a more positive way, to the credit of the commentators: it is not so much that they could not read Scripture "correctly," but rather that they made deliberate exegetical choices that established their particular mastery of Scripture in producing a nexus of textual meanings congruous with their unique priorities and insights.

Although the term has been problematized in various ways, it is perhaps helpful to characterize the account of *Sūrat Ṭa-Ha* as "rewritten torah" in Arabic: like the Jewish and Christian works of the Second Temple and late antique periods that are often designated by this term, the qur'anic story engages with and reconstructs a narrative similar to that found in the canonical precursor in the Bible (here specifically *Exodus*), but it remains faithful to both the main narrative contours and the thematic emphases of the original, while

also actively reconstruing the story for its own particular theological purposes.¹⁷ Notably, while largely based upon a careful and deliberate restructuring and rescripting of Exod 32, the Sūrah 20 version also alludes to other biblical passages pertinent to the calf episode, incorporating those allusions alongside renditions of portions of the Exodus narrative into Arabic (see Table 17.2).

Like the precursor narrative in Exodus, the qur'anic story is essentially about a crisis of leadership—specifically, what happens when prophetic authority is wrongfully delegated to surrogates. The main narrative undercurrent here is that although Aaron was designated the helper of Moses (cf. Q Furqān 25:35) and his representative in his absence (cf. Q A'rāf 7:142), he was clearly his brother's subordinate, and could not provide the guidance to the people his brother, a real prophet, could. Thus, in the absence of Moses, left to his own devices—or rather to make decisions based on his own fallible judgment—Aaron allowed the people to go astray after an idol.

This subtext helps us clarify the meaning of the key phrase *qabaḍtu qabḍatan min athar al-rasūl fa-nabadhtuhā*, “I picked up a handful from the track of the messenger and threw it in” (Q 20:96). As is occasionally noted by the classical commentators themselves, this phrase does not necessarily refer to a physical “taking” and “throwing” of dust or dirt from the literal footprint of a messenger, angelic or otherwise. Rather, *qabaḍtu qabḍatan*, “taking a handful,” is an idiom meaning “to sample, to do something for a little while.” Similarly, *nabadha* can convey the metaphorical sense of *rejecting* as well as a literal “throwing.” Thus, in al-Sāmīrī's apology before Moses, his statement really means, “I followed the path of the messenger for a while, then rejected it”—meaning, al-Sāmīrī initially followed Moses's *example*, then abandoned it and went his own way. This phrase makes little sense if it is associated with an individual who had no obligation to follow Moses's guidance, but it makes perfect sense as a thin alibi that might be given by Aaron in attempting to explain his gratuitous dereliction of duty.

That is, this “Samaritan” al-Sāmīrī is not a mysterious third party who intervenes between Moses and Aaron in the episode; he actually *is* Aaron, whom we can readily recognize as the main architect of the episode based on the precedent of the canonical precursor from the Bible. The use of the appellation al-Sāmīrī, I argue, is not meant to cast blame for the calf on the Samaritans. Rather, it suggests that the story is providing an etiology for the form of calf

17 Pace the recent judgment of Griffith 2013, who asserts that while a general familiarity with biblical themes, concepts, and narratives suffuses the Qur'an, there is very little evidence of direct familiarity with the text of the Bible as we know it: “[t]he Bible is at the same time everywhere and nowhere in the Arabic Qur'an” (2).

TABLE 17.2 Q Ṭa-Ha 20:83–97 according to its biblical subtexts

SECTION 1: God confronts Moses on the Mount (Q 20:83–85 = revision of Exod 32:7–8 with allusion to biblical traditions on Samaria)

(83) [God said:] "What has caused you to hurry away from your people, O Moses?"

(Exod 32:7–8) And the Lord said to Moses: "Get down from here, for the people you brought forth from Egypt have become corrupt ... they have made themselves an image of a calf, and worshiped it and offered it sacrifices ..."

(84) [Moses] replied: "They are faithfully following my example while I have hurried ahead to you to do your bidding, Lord!"

(85) [God] said: "We have tempted your people in your absence, and the Samaritan has led them astray."

(Hos 8:5–6) **Your calf, O Samaria, is rejected ... the calf of Samaria shall be utterly shattered.**
(2 Kgs 17:21) Jeroboam drew Israel away from following the Lord, and **caused them to sin a great sin ...**

TRANSITION: Moses returns and confronts the people (Q 20:86)

(86) Then Moses returned to his people, angry and sorrowful, and he said: "O people, didn't your Lord make you a fair deal? Did the time of covenant take too long for you, or did you wish to provoke your Lord's anger by shirking the duty you accepted through me?"

SECTION 2: recollection of the making of the Calf (Q 20:87–91 = rearrangement and paraphrase of Exod 32:1–5 with underlying allusion to Ps 106:20–21)

(87) They replied: "We did not shirk the duty we accepted through you willingly; rather, **we were made to carry the burden of the [golden] ornaments that belonged to the [Egyptian] people, which we threw [into the fire], for thus did the Samaritan suggest ...**"

(Exod 32:2–3) Then Aaron replied to them: "Remove the golden earrings of your wives, sons, and daughters, and bring them to me." **Then all the people removed their own golden earrings straightaway and brought them to Aaron.**

TABLE 17.2 Q Ṭa-Ha 20:83–97 according to its biblical subtexts (*cont.*)

(88a) He brought forth an image of a calf, [an animal] that lows ...	(Exod 32:4a) He took [the gold] from their hands and fashioned it with a tool and made of it an image of a calf ... (Ps 106:20) They exchanged their glory for an image of an ox , [an animal] that eats grass ...
(88b) ... and they said: “This is your god and the god of Moses,” and they forgot [their true God] ...	(Exod 32:4b) ... and they said: “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt ...” (Ps 106:21) They forgot God their savior, who did great things in Egypt.
(89) Did they not see that it could not reply to them, nor had any power to harm or benefit them?	
(90) Aaron had said to them beforehand: “O people, although you may be tempted by it, in fact, your Lord is al-Raḥmān , so follow me and obey my command.”	(Exod 32:5) When Aaron saw ... he built an altar and said, “Tomorrow is a festival for the LORD ...”
(91) But they replied: “We will only remain devoted to it until Moses returns to us.”	(Exod 32:1) Then the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain; and they gathered against Aaron and said: “Up, make us gods to go before us, for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what’s become of him. ”
SECTION 3: Moses confronts Aaron/al-Sāmirī (Q 20:92–97 = rearrangement and rescripting of Exod 32:20–24)	
(92–93) [Moses] said: “O Aaron, when you saw that they had gone astray, what hindered you from following me? Did you not disobey my command?”	(Exod 32:21–24) Then Moses said to Aaron: “What did this people do to you, that you brought upon them such great sin?” And Aaron replied: “Let not your wrath blaze forth, my lord; you know that the people are

TABLE 17.2 Q Ṭa-Ha 20:83–97 according to its biblical subtexts (*cont.*)

(94) [Aaron cried:] "O son of my mother, do not pull me by my beard or my hair! I was really afraid that you would say, 'You have introduced division among the Israelites, and did not pay heed to my command.'"

(95) Then Moses asked: "So, why did you do it, O Samaritan?"

(96) He said: "I did realize, unlike them, that this would all end up badly. I took hold of the prophet's example for a while [i.e., your example, Moses], but then I rejected it—my way seemed better at the time!"

(97) [Moses] said: "Go! For the rest of your life you are to say: 'Do not touch me [for I am holy].' You now have a duty you will not be able to shirk. Look at your god to whom you are so devoted: verily, **we shall burn it up, dispersing it into the sea as ashes.**"

ever bent on evil. They said to me: 'Make us gods to go before us, for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what's become of him.' Then I said to them: 'Whoever has gold, remove it straightaway and give it to me.' Then I threw it in the fire, and out came this calf!"

(Exod 32:20) And he took the calf that they made, **and burned it in the fire, and ground it until it became powder, and strewed it upon the surface of the water;** and then he made the Israelites drink it.

worship that would later prevail in Israel by blaming the making of the calf on Aaron, the watchman of the people while Moses was away—in Arabic, *samīr* or *sāmīr*. The *sāmīr*, or as he is called here *al-sāmīrī* (a relative adjective that suggests the same meaning), succumbs to pressure from the people and leads them astray by making them a calf; this is why, according to the Qur'an, the people of Israel who would later on come to worship calves according to the biblical account were called *Samaria*—after Israel's watchman, Aaron, the *sāmīr* al-*Sāmīrī*, who was the first to introduce the Israelites to this worship.

We can now understand why it is only in the Sūrah 20 version of the narrative that al-*Sāmīrī* is held responsible for the making of the calf; he is Aaron, upon whom responsibility for the making of the calf falls in the Sūrah 7 version. It is not that the author of the Qur'an erred in blaming the affair on a Samaritan in the former and subsequently corrected this error in the latter. Rather, the latter portrayal of the episode is an abbreviation of the former; instead of making the same oblique point in the Sūrat al-A'rāf version that he

originally made by previously calling Aaron al-Sāmirī, the author simply cut to the chase and conveyed the details of the narrative in a more streamlined way.

In this respect, we can see that Aaron seems to have been assimilated to some degree to Jeroboam. Thus, v. 85 about al-Sāmirī—that is, the *Samaritan*, not the Samaritan—leading the people astray distinctly echoes biblical verses like 2 Kgs 17:21, which says that Jeroboam caused Israel to sin a great sin. The author of the qur’anic account seems to have drawn an intertextual connection between the Exodus narrative and another biblical passage pertinent to the calf story. A few scholars have recognized the potential connection between Jeroboam and al-Sāmirī, but not that the name al-Sāmirī provides a crucial narrative link between Jeroboam and Aaron. Further, when the possible connection to Jeroboam has been evoked, this is usually done to assert that the narrative of Sūrat Ṭa-Ha is a hopelessly garbled pastiche of biblical passages—often phrased in very crude terms as Muhammad’s befuddled confusion of authentic traditions about the golden calf that his well-intentioned Jewish tutors sought to convey to him.¹⁸

Nor is this the only allusion to a biblical subtext of import in the qur’anic story. If the maker of the calf is not a Samaritan interloper, and he is no longer throwing a handful of magic dust into the pile of golden ornaments to create an animate golden calf, how do we explain that semblance of life—genuine or illusory—that so concerned the traditional exegetes? I would argue that the exegetes exploited the linguistic ambiguity of the key phrase *ʿjl.jasad lahu khuwārūn* in explaining it as “a calf, a body that lows,” i.e., a lowing image of a calf. This phrase makes more sense if we interpret it not as a lowing image of a calf at all, but rather as *an image of a lowing calf*—that the lowing it possesses (*lahu khuwārūn*) is a generic quality of the type of animal depicted and not a specific quality of the object created. The odd structure of the phrase is apparently due to its nature as a kind of scriptural calque, as it is modeled on a psalmic reference to the calf as *tavnūt shôr ʾōkēl ʿēsev* (Ps 106:20)—“an image of an ox eating grass,” or, more literally, “an image, an ox, eater of grass”—where it is the ox, and not the image, that is a grass-eater.

As Neuwirth has shown, many passages in the Qur’an appear to be echoes of the psalter and other liturgically significant passages from Scripture like the *Shmaʿ* (2010; 2014, 81–95). These passages are often conspicuous because

18 For classic expressions of this “confusion” approach to the formulation of the different qur’anic calf narratives, see St. Clair Tisdall 1905, 112–13; Yahuda 1948, 287. However, compare these with the entirely different approach of Neuwirth 2006, who sees the differences between the versions as reflecting an organic progression through changing narrative priorities in response to the growth of the qur’anic community.

of their awkward phrasing or ungrammatical nature, in large part due to their deliberate mimicking of Hebrew linguistic structures. It is the idiosyncratic phrasing of the psalmic reference to the calf as "an image of an ox eating grass" that explains the equally idiosyncratic phrasing of the subsequent reference to the calf made by the "Samaritan" Aaron as "a calf, a body that lows." This seems especially likely given that v. 88 continues with a reference to the people *forgetting*, i.e., forgetting their true God—a seeming allusion to the very next verse of the psalmic subtext: "They forgot God their savior who did great things in Egypt" (Ps 106:21).¹⁹

So far, we have seen that the version of the calf narrative in the midrash that supposedly supplies us with the proximate source of the qur'anic versions is in fact derived from and mirrors the version of the story in the *tafsīr*, and thus could not have provided the template for the qur'anic story itself. Moreover, the story as it is presented in the *tafsīr* is significantly different from that of the Qur'an, which is much closer to the Exodus story in the Pentateuch, though it also contains a number of intertextual glosses and allusions to other biblical passages.²⁰ However, though it is not, as has so often been alleged, simply copied from rabbinic traditions on the episode, it would be misleading to conclude that the Qur'an is totally isolated from the wider cultural and religious context in its engagement with the canonical precursor.

Contemporary scholars of the Qur'an are currently developing a new paradigm in which we no longer see the content of this Scripture as being essentially plagiarized, determined by Jewish and Christian vectors of influence that

19 The traditional commentators are divided over who it is exactly that is the subject of *fa-nasiya* here, but they tend to read this as al-Sāmīrī claiming that Moses forgot that his god is actually the calf when he abandoned the Israelites to go up to Mount Sinai. The verb is singular, but could as easily refer to the people (*qawm Mūsā*, a collective masculine singular noun) as it could to Moses. Note that in the same chapter, Adam's sin is described as caused by his forgetting (v. 115); shortly after, the Qur'an speaks of the fate of the wrongdoer who forgets God's signs and so will be resurrected blind at the Last Judgment (v. 126). Forgetting thus stands as a recurring symbol of human waywardness: it is the fatal flaw of Adam, the main cause of Israel's downfall as a covenanted people, and the characteristic sin of those who disregard God's commands and thus earn divine wrath in the hereafter.

20 The second point makes the first point almost logically inevitable. That is, if the Qur'an essentially follows the broad narrative outline of Exod 32 while the *tafsīr* uniformly presents the novel themes of the outside interloper and the animate calf, it would be difficult to explain why the Qur'an lacks these elements if they were found in full-fledged form in genuinely pre-Islamic midrash. Apart from the fact that they only appear in conspicuously late midrashic sources, we would almost have to posit that the Jewish traditions that reflect a similar approach to the narrative *must* be late to account for the fact that this important development seems to have skipped over the Qur'an completely and is not reflected there at all.

were alien or foreign to its predominantly pagan environment. Rather, we now tend to see the Qur'an as having been carefully composed in an environment that was deeply saturated with the monotheistic scripturalist culture that prevailed throughout the late antique Near East. Further, more and more scholars are paying attention to Syriac Christian tradition as furnishing the closest parallels to the claims, concepts, and language deployed in the Qur'an.

It should be emphasized again that this new approach, which informs many of the most cutting-edge studies of the last several years, has abandoned the claim that the qur'anic author is directly appropriating sources that were largely novel in the environment. Rather, by uncovering parallels and precursors, especially in Syriac sources, this allows us to reconstruct the larger literary, cultural, and religious horizons that *both* the author and the audience would have taken for granted. For the case at hand, the most germane precursor is the aforementioned *Didascalia apostolorum*, originally composed in Greek somewhere in the ambit of Antioch in the mid-third century CE; the work circulated widely in a Syriac translation for centuries, and large parts of the text were incorporated into another influential document, the *Apostolic Constitutions*.

The sin of the calf is absolutely central to the *Didascalia's* argument about the supersession of Judaism by Christianity; in particular, it posits that the yoke of the "Second Legislation" (*teryān nāmūsā*, i.e., *deutérōsis*, which actually encompasses all law beyond the Decalogue) was imposed on Israel because of that sin. As Zellentin has argued quite convincingly, the Qur'an not only seems to exhibit a general familiarity with the *Didascalia*, both its general arguments and specific legal prescriptions from it; rather, in certain passages, the Qur'an actually seems to appropriate particular arguments from that text for its own purposes (Zellentin 2013). Thus, a passage in Q Nisā' 4 not only alludes to the calf episode, but does so in the specific context of describing how the Jews accepted the covenant but then fell into disbelief and worshiped the calf, with the subsequent imposition of punitive restrictions on Israel being a direct response to this sin. This passage is extremely similar to a parallel passage from the *Didascalia* that makes essentially the same argument:

Then the Israelites took the calf in worship after all the signs had come to them, though we forgave them for that; we gave Moses indisputable authority, and we raised Mount Sinai above them as token of their covenant.... And we took from them an awesome covenant. Then on account of their breaking their covenant, and their disbelief in the signs of God, and their killing the prophets on dishonest pretext, and for admitting their hearts are uncircumcised, God has set a seal on them for their disbelief; only a few of them really believe. Also for their disbelief when

they spoke their great slander about Mary, and for when they said "We have killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God ..." For the wrongdoing of those who were formerly guided, we forbade them some of the good things that were formerly licit for them—for example, because they derailed many who were formerly on the path of God....

Q Nisā' 4:153–157, 160

Jesus said, "I have not come to abrogate the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them." The Law is permanent, but the Second Legislation is temporary and impermanent. The Law is the Ten Commandments and the statutes, to which Jesus bore witness ... But when the people denied God ... who set up the law for them in the mount—it was he they denied and said: "We have no God to go before us"; and they made them a molten calf and worshiped it and sacrificed to a graven image. Therefore the Lord became angry, and in the heat of his anger—yet with the mercy of his goodness—he bound them with the Second Legislation, and laid heavy burdens upon them and a hard yoke upon their neck.

Did. apost. 26:242–245

The Qur'an's unique contribution here, however, is the link it establishes between the role of Aaron on the one hand and the concept of the Jewish law as a punitive imposition upon Israel on the other: this is the concept that underlies the oft-misunderstood judgment imposed on al-Sāmirī in *Q Ṭa-Ha* 20:97, traditionally read as "All your life you are [cursed] to say: 'Do not touch me [for I am an exile]'. A threat hangs over you which you will not be able to escape." This is hardly a curse of exile imposed on the Samaritan, as the Muslim commentary tradition holds; it is barely a curse at all. Rather, I would argue it is a qur'anic etiology for the origins of the Israelite priesthood, the critical phrase *lā misāsa*—"no touching"—having a clear connotation of holiness and ritual purity elsewhere in the Qur'an.²¹ Having overstepped his bounds and failed as a surrogate leader in Moses's absence, the role of Aaron, the inventor of "Samaritan" worship, is now clearly delineated. He is the priestly counterpart to the prophet, responsible for the sacrificial regime now imposed on Israel as a penalty for leading them astray: "For the rest of your life you are to say: 'Do not touch me [for I am holy]'. You now have a duty you will not be able to shirk."

21 Cf. *Q Āl 'Imrān* 3:47, in reference to Mary's virginity, and *Q Wāqī'ah* 56:79, in reference to the Qur'an itself, a "protected book" that none but the pure may touch.

Conclusion

The obvious question that still needs to be addressed here is what Muslim exegetes gained by so radically reconstructing the calf story as it was previously known. If the qur'anic calf episode can be read in such a way that its links to biblical tradition become quite obvious, why did Muslim exegetes simply not go with that, endeavoring instead to create a wholly new story? One possible answer is that an early, rudimentary version of what eventually evolved into the doctrine of *ʿiṣmah*, prophetic infallibility, motivated exegetes to obscure Aaron's involvement in the making of the calf through transforming the epithet al-Sāmīrī, the Samaritan, into a completely new character in the drama: al-Sāmīrī the *Samaritan*. Muslim exegetes were unconcerned about Aaron's status as a priestly progenitor, as he is understood elsewhere in the Qur'an—a matter of great significance to both Jewish and Christian exegetes in Late Antiquity. However, they were deeply concerned with Aaron's role as a prophetic predecessor to Muhammad himself.

The Qur'an tends to flatten the distinction between prophets per se and other Israelite figures of significance such as kings and patriarchs who were not technically prophets, but who nevertheless communed with God and both received and conveyed divine guidance. While the Sūrah 20 story in particular draws a distinction between Moses's status as prophetic leader and Aaron's lack of such status, the later tradition forced all of the notable figures from Israel's past into a more or less singular mold as the elite chosen by God to guide humanity—the only significant distinction being between those who were mere warners and those who were emissaries, *anbiyā'* (sing. *nabī*) and *rusul* (sing. *rasūl*), the latter being entrusted with conveying Scripture while the former were not.²² All of these figures were seen as precursors to Muhammad, and thus his status became intimately tied up with theirs; this meant that over time all of these chosen figures were understood as equally protected from sin and thus infallible (*maʿṣūm*).²³ The possibility of any prophet actually going

22 Aaron is explicitly called *nabī* in Q Maryam 19:53, but even here he is subordinated to Moses, which again is the overarching point made by the Q 20 version of the calf story.

23 The Qur'an is already moving in this direction, but it is important to distinguish the subtle and evasive way it approaches narratives about the sins of prophets from the formal articulation of the actual doctrine of *ʿiṣmah* in classical Islamic theology. It is noteworthy that the three individuals in the Qur'an who are described as *khalīfah*, representatives of God or other prophets, are all famously associated with major sins: Adam (2:30), Aaron (7:142), and David (38:26), which perhaps suggests some tragic link between delegated authority and human failings. Of the three, only the sin of Adam is depicted in a direct and straightforward way, while the Qur'an is much more circumspect about the transgressions of the

so astray as to lead his people into idolatry was unthinkable to exegetes conditioned by such concerns, which encouraged the deliberate attempt to obscure Aaron's role in the calf affair.²⁴

The creation of a new personage responsible for the making of the calf, the mysterious "Samaritan," functioned well to dissociate Aaron from Israel's sin. Even more than this, however, there was a particular benefit gained by taking an ambiguous qur'anic account with a clear biblical antecedent and transmuting it into something altogether new. Muslim exegetes could therefore exercise a kind of interpretive agency or sovereignty over their Scripture, forcing a distinction between their Qur'an, the final and perfect revelation, and the older, corrupted Scriptures of Jews and Christians. Dissociating Aaron from al-Sāmīrī made the qur'anic story of the golden calf different and unique—and altogether *truer*, insofar as Muslim commentators would have found it difficult to accept that true revelation could possibly indict a prophet of so heinous a crime as idolatry.

A parallel may be drawn with the long exegetical controversy over which of Abraham's sons had been honored by being chosen as the one to be sacrificed at God's command. Scholars are still divided about whether it is Isaac or Ishmael who is presupposed as the victim in the highly ambiguous narrative at Q Ṣāffāt 37:100–111, but as Firestone has demonstrated, early Muslim commentators actually read the qur'anic story through the lens of Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible, where it is Isaac who is unambiguously indicated. Over time, the mainstream of opinion among the Muslim commentators shifted from Isaac to Ishmael—the obvious logic being that it would naturally have been Ishmael, ancestor of the Arabs in general and the tribe of Quraysh in particular, including Muhammad himself, whom God would have favored with the distinction of being selected as the sacrifice (Firestone 1989).

It has long been observed that every nascent religious community must distance itself from what came before in the process of its formation and maturation. In the emergence of classical Islam, exegesis of the Qur'an—and in particular, distinguishing its message from that of previous revelations—both reflected and facilitated larger processes of social and religious distinction that brought the fledgling community out of the shadow of their monotheist predecessors and allowed them to assert their own unique identity. It is this

other two. On the qur'anic and Islamic portrayals of the Bathsheba affair, see Pregill 2011b and Muhammad 2014.

24 Even the possibility that Muhammad might merely have participated in idolatrous rites before his prophetic call was eventually deemed unthinkable by the community, though it was apparently countenanced early on. See Kister 1970.

larger context that provides the necessary background for us to understand the imperatives that turned qur'anic exegetes away from an understanding of *al-sāmirī* as an epithet for Aaron in the golden calf narrative of Sūrat Ṭa-Ha towards an alternative that proved to be more palatable to the nascent tradition, leading them to construct the Samaritan as a separate personage upon whom the blame for the sin of the calf could more easily be cast.

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