The Promise of the Land As Oath in Exodus 32:1–33:3

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The divine promise of land as an oath to the patriarchs has emerged as a central area of pentateuchal study. The land oath texts include Exod 13:5, 11; 32:13; 33:1. In the 1970’s Rendtorff argued that the land oath texts could be identified as Dtr texts, which comprise the first redaction layer that embraces the Pentateuch. In the wake of Rendtorff’s interpretation, the land oath texts have played a significant role within debates regarding the literary composition of Genesis–Deuteronomy. In particular, the oath of the land text in Exod 32:13, and to a certain extent Exod 33:1, are at the heart of debates surrounding the literary composition of Exodus 32 (33:1) and its relationship to the parallel passage in Deut 9–10*. In this article, I will describe the debate surrounding the land oath texts as a group, especially as they have been used to discern literary levels within the Pentateuch. I will then focus primarily on the issue of the relative literary level(s) of Exod 32:13 and 33:1 within their context of Exod 32:1–33:3, and the relationship of Exod 32:13; 33:1 within their context to Deut 9–10*. Finally I will make some observations regarding the function of Exod 32:13; 33:1 within their immediate context and within the book of Exodus as a whole.

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1 Dtr is used here and throughout to refer loosely to any text in Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic style.
2 Rolf Rendtorff, Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch (BZAW 147; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977). The texts he identified are: Gen 50:24; Exod 13:5,11; 32:13; 33:1; Num 11:12; 14:23; 32:11.
3 Deut 9–10* here and throughout refers basically to the description of the events in relation to the mountain in Deut 9:9–21, 25–29; 10:1–5,10–11; see the later discussion.
4 The context of Exod 33:1 will be limited to Exod 32:1–33:3 rather than Exod 32–34. This is on the grounds, as will be argued, that it can at least be said that Exod 33:1–3 represents an expansion of Exod 32:34, without venturing into the very complex debates surrounding the wider context that includes the rest of Exod 33 and 34.
5 The other land oath texts in Exodus, Exod 13:5,11, will be touched on—especially in the survey of the land oath texts as a group. However, a full discussion of these texts lies outside the scope of this article.
The Land Oath Texts and the Formation of the Pentateuch

The land oath texts as a group have been used in identifying redactional levels within the Pentateuch especially in European circles.

Rendtorff (1977) postulated that the land oath texts in Gen 50:24; Exod 13:5,11; 32:13; 33:1; Num 11:12; 14:23; 32:11 represent the first linking of independent tradition complexes (primeval history, patriarchs, exodus, wilderness, and Sinai) within Genesis–Numbers. The land oath texts consist of similar formulations, which are inserted at key points to link the independent traditions together, giving the Pentateuch its basic sequential form. Rendtorff labels these land oath texts as Dtr but does not define the exact relationship between these Dtr texts and those in Deuteronomy–Kings, preferring to speak of a Deuteronomistic school or Deuteronomic-Deuteronomistic circles that were responsible for the shaping of Genesis–Numbers into its sequential form, the composition of Deuteronomy, and the formation of the text up to Kings.6

Dieter Skweres (1979), in examining Deuteronomy’s use of literary sources in the Tetrateuch, refers to the land oath texts in the Pentateuch (Gen 50:24; Exod 13:5,11; 33:1; Num 11:12; 14:23; 32:11; Deut 34:4) as “frühdt” (early dt), that is earlier than texts in Deuteronomy that refer back to them.7

Erhard Blum (1984, 1990), in his earlier work, identifies the land oath texts, especially Exod 32:13; 33:1, with the D redaction in Genesis, which he describes as a Dtr redaction layer in the Tetrateuch that is dependent on Deuteronomy.8 In his later work, the land oath texts, with their reference to the wider Pentateuchal horizon, are seen as part of his KD (D Komposition): these include Exod 32:13 within Exod 32:7–14 and Exod 33:1 within Exod 33, but also Gen 50:24; Exod 13:5,11 within Exod 13:3–16; Num 11:12. Indeed, they figure prominently in his arguments for the existence and coherence of KD, which he perceives as extending from Gen 12 through Exodus and Numbers and as later than, and presupposing, the Deuteronomistic History.9

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9 Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), esp. 35–36, 57–58, 73–75, 81, 102–106. More recently, Blum has changed his opinion with regard to where KD begins, arguing for Exod 3 rather than in Genesis. See, for example, his “Die literarische Verbindung von Erzvatern und Exodus: Ein Gespräch mit neueren Endredaktionshypothesen,” in *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in den jüngsten*