The Influence of the Decalogue on the Shape of Exodus

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Preview

The reminiscences in Deuteronomy attest a corresponding version in Exodus and Numbers that underlies the present edition of these books but diverges from that edition to a significant degree.1 The Decalogue provides a case in point. If one counts carefully, there are some thirty variations between the Decalogue recounted in Deut 5 and the Decalogue recorded in Exod 20. There is even divergence about the name of the location where the Decalogue was revealed: in Deuteronomy, the revelation took place at Horeb (Deut 5:2); in Exodus, at Sinai (Exod 19:1–2). The chief divergence between these two accounts of the content of the Decalogue lies in the reason for keeping the Sabbath: the ‘Horeb Decalogue’ relates it to the ‘Heilsgeschichte’, the narrative of YHWH’s deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Deut 5:15); the ‘Sinai Decalogue’ relates it to creation (Exod 20:11). Which is the more original? Deut 5 explicitly claims to be recalling the Sabbath commandment as it originally stood in Exodus by inserting the cross-reference ‘as the LORD your God commanded you’ (Deut 5:12)2—a cross-reference repeated also for the parents command (Deut 5:16). This claim of accurate reminiscence enables the reconstruction of the prior Horeb version attested by Deuteronomy that underlies the present Sinai edition in Exod 20. The argument of this paper is that this reconstructed Horeb Decalogue not only was present in the underlying version of the Decalogue in Exodus but also exerted more widely a formative influence on the shape of that version as a whole. In the first section of this

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1 For earlier studies, see W. Johnstone, Exodus (S&HBC, 2 vols.), Macon 2014, where fuller discussion of views sometimes categorically stated in this article can be found; Idem, ‘Reading Exodus in Tetratheuch and Pentateuch’, in: T.B. Dozeman et al. (eds), The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation (FIOTL/VTSup, 164), Leiden 2014, 3–26; Idem, review of T.B. Dozeman et al. (eds), The Pentateuch (FAT, 78), Tübingen 2011, in JSSr 59 (2014), 437–40.

2 English translations of the Hebrew Bible are taken from NRSV, except where otherwise noted. Where the numbering of verses diverges (Exod 8; 22), MT is followed.
paper (Part 1), I shall sketch six steps in the argument (every one of which is, of course, disputed in the secondary literature):

1. The reminiscence of the Decalogue revealed at Horeb in Deut 5 attests the presence of the Horeb Decalogue in the earlier version of Exod 20 and enables its reconstruction.
2. The correspondence of key elements in the narrative framework of the Decalogue in Exod 19–20 with the narrative framework of the Horeb Decalogue in Deut 4–5, confirms the presence of the Horeb Decalogue in the underlying version of Exodus.
4. The content of ב confirms the formative influence of the Horeb Decalogue.
5. Exod 24:3–8 confirms that ב, as exposition of the Horeb Decalogue, is the code for the covenant between YHWH and Israel.
6. Exod 34:5–26, part of the narrative of YHWH’s reaffirmation of the covenant, repeats twice over the beginning of the Horeb Decalogue and the ending of ב in order to confirm by merismus3 that the entire terms of the covenant as expressed in the Decalogue and its exposition in ב remain unchanged.

At the end of the paper (Part 2), I shall consider a critique of the account of the influence of the Horeb Decalogue on the shaping of the book of Exodus that I have presented. The Sinai edition of the Decalogue that now stands in Exod 20 affirms that the Decalogue may indeed function as formative influence on the shape of Exodus provided it is interpreted in cosmic terms, as in its most radical change, the motive for observing the Sabbath.

**Part 1: The Formative Influence on Exodus of the Decalogue Attested in the Reminiscences of Deuteronomy**

1. The reminiscence of the Horeb Decalogue in Deut 5 claims, explicitly by its double cross-reference ‘as the LORD your God commanded you’ (Deut 5:22, 16; cf. 4:23), to be recalling a matching Horeb version of the

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3 The figure of speech by which totality is expressed by the citation of opposite extremes: e.g. ‘young and old’ implies the entire population, without exhaustive specification of intervening categories. See n. 29 below.