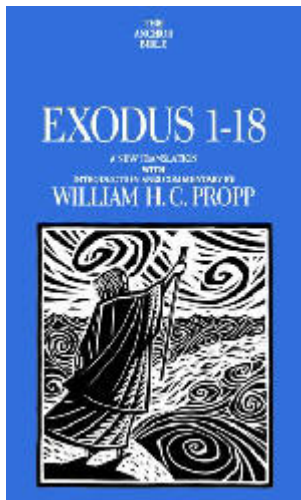


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Propp, William H.C.

Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary

Anchor Bible 2

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Volume: 1

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Studies of the Book of Exodus have occupied a prominent place in pentateuchal scholarship due in large part to the importance of the Exodus theme in the Hebrew Bible and the importance of the figure of Moses in the Pentateuch. The first volume of W. H. C. Propp's new commentary on Exodus in the Anchor Bible series covering chapters 1–18 contributes significantly to these studies in a number of ways.

The current volume is the first of a two-volume commentary on the whole of Exodus and is to be followed by another covering chapters 19–40. Five appendices are to appear in volume two treating issues that have arisen in Exodus studies. Following the Anchor Bible format, each division of the volume begins with the author's own translation of the text of Exodus followed by textual notes, source analysis, redaction analysis, notes, and comment. The translation is based on the author's text-critically reconstructed text and is accompanied by explanatory notes. The translation technique employed by the author seeks to make subtle aspects of the Hebrew text available to the English reader while maintaining a sense of cultural and temporal distance. At times this leads to a very literal rendering of the Hebrew text in what is described as a "hyperliteral" style. Various Hebrew idioms are rendered literally such as "Jacob's *thigh*" (1:5), the "Sea's *lip*" (14:30), and "Yahweh's *nose*" which has grown angry with Moses (4:14). Another example is found in the use of repetition to render the finite verb with infinitive absolute in Hebrew.

In the section entitled “Textual Notes,” text-critical issues pertaining to the text of Exodus receive a substantial discussion with relevant comparisons being made between the MT, the LXX, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and Qumran texts. From the spectrum of possible readings represented within the textual traditions, the author focuses on those held to affect translation and interpretation. For an example, the reader may see the discussion of the varying numbers given in the textual traditions of those who entered Egypt with Jacob in Exod 1:5, Gen 46:27, and Deut 10:22 (pp. 121–23).

Under the rubric “Source Analysis,” the commentary provides a discussion of the text of Exodus in terms of traditional source and redaction critical approaches focusing on the relationship of P, E, and J while noting the presence of deuteronomistic language. In addition, the author holds that the Song of the Sea (15:1b–18) was originally an independent unit and should be considered another source. The author endeavors not only to distinguish P from JE, but also J from E to the extent possible. One significant contribution of the author’s approach is the contention that more E is present in Exodus than J, since other scholarship has assigned most of the non-P material in Exodus to J. For example, Exod 12:1–13:16 is held to be primarily an amalgam of P and another source which is probably E. In line with the view that the sources employed in Exodus were already polished works of art, the author holds that the role of the redactor is best described as that of a scribe who worked with raw materials rather than that of an author or artist.

While a significant portion of the commentary treats text, source and redaction critical aspects of the book of Exodus, the commentary’s main methodological focus evidenced in the notes and comment is a narrative analysis of the text whose principal element is folktale analysis. According to the author, Exodus in many ways follows the plot type of the heroic adventure or fairy tale as described by V. I. Propp. There are significant differences, however, since Exodus has three heroes: Moses, Israel, and Yahweh. Beyond this, the author’s anthropological and cultural approach seeks to understand ancient Israelite social institutions. The author’s interpretation of the “Pesah-Massot as a rite of purification and riddance found in the comment on Exod 12:1–13:16 is representative of this approach. Also, Israel’s migration from Egypt to Canaan may be described in terms of a rite of passage since Israel performs a special blood ritual and leaves Egypt marking its change of status from slavery to freedom. The narrative analysis of the commentary also includes a treatment of the themes in Exodus. The author states that a number of recurrent words and themes serve to unify the book of Exodus. Examples of these include the words *’ēš* (fire), *yād* (hand), *zērôa* (arm), *’ebed* (slave), the root *kbd*, the theme of Yahweh’s *šēm*, and the prominent theme word *yāda* .”

In terms of ANE cultural milieu, the commentary explores a number of important comparisons with ANE literature. The author suggests it is possible to see a general comparison of the Exodus story with the Canaanite Ba(lu) myth. Following the Ba(lu

myth as a prototype, Exodus could be described as a battle between Yaweh and Pharaoh over who will possess Israel. Another example is the discussion concerning the storm god and the sea in the Ancient Near East and their relationship to the narrative of Yahweh's deliverance of Israel at the sea.

The author's treatment of the text's structure is found in the introduction under the heading, "Exodus as Diptych." Following M. S. Smith, the author sees Exodus as having a bipartite structure with the mid-point being the entire Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1–21). The song of the Sea begins with Egypt in the sea and summarizes Exod 1–14. It concludes with Israel camped about Yahweh's mountain sanctum which anticipates the covenant and the construction of the tabernacle. Thus, the Song of the Sea both concludes the first half of Exodus and opens the second half. The breaking of Propp's commentary volumes between Exod 18 and 19, therefore, does not reflect his understanding of the structure of Exodus but is a practical division of the text based on the length of the material. In terms of the subdivisions in the books of Exodus, the author breaks the text for partition at major changes of scene, time or subject. No structural outline is given in the paragraph that describes "Partition." However, the actual units resulting from the partition of Exod 1–18 are shown in the table of contents. Its main sections are as follows:

I. Israel in Egypt	Exod 1:1–11:10
II. Liberation from Egypt	Exod 12:1–15:21
III. Sojourn in the Wilderness	Exod 15:22–18:27

This arrangement raises questions about the relationship of sections I, II, and III to the posited bipartite structure of Exodus as a whole. Beyond this, the text in each main section is further subdivided into sub-units.

Overall this new commentary volume has many strong points while raising several questions. A primary question concerns, the treatment of the macrostructure of the book of Exodus. Structure is viewed as thematic structure and is discussed within each division, and the basic structure of Exodus itself is viewed as bipartite. However, other understandings of the macrostructure of Exodus have emerged in scholarly discussion such as the proposal of the Sinai pericope as a major structural unit extending from Exod 19:1–Num 10:10. These proposals invite comment. Further discussion of the place of Exodus within the macro-structure of the Pentateuch would have been an additional asset to the volume's otherwise multifaceted discussion.

As a minor point, the translation style of the commentary may present difficulty for some readers. The knowledgeable reader of the commentary's translations will immediately "feel" the Hebrew text beneath the hyperliteral English translation style employed by the author. Frequently, this translation style gives a surprising sense of what must have greeted the original hearers. Nevertheless, this aspect may actually be lost on general readers who have not had any exposure to Hebrew. However, such readers will find assistance in the authors explanatory notes.

The primary strength of the first volume of Propp's commentary on Exodus is its drawing together of several important analytical approaches into the orbit of its treatment of Exodus. As described above, the commentary includes a wealth of information within its scope making it a useful volume and a joy to read. Moreover, the sections introducing textual criticism, source analysis and redaction analysis are written in such a way as to be available to the general reader, while at the same time clarifying the author's position on a number of issues. As such, volume one of Propp's commentary on Exodus is a fine addition to the Anchor Bible series and to Exodus studies as a whole.