speaks as His way was prepared in the Old Testament and as He
has been definitively revealed in the Gospel.

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An Administrative Body of Priests and a Consecrated People

<div align="right">—Exod. 19 : 6</div>

R. VANDE WALLE

INTRODUCTION

To give an objective and accurate explanation of a particular
Scripture text is always extremely difficult. The human mind is
no virgin ground, but a living storehouse of varied reminiscences.
It reacts according to reflexes that result from one's back-
ground, education and experience. It projects on to the newly-
received object a whole gamut of associations that are the unavoid-
able consequence of one's social, philosophical and religious out-
look. If it is already so difficult to share the inner thoughts of
someone who is near and dear to us and physically present, what
must it be when we try to fathom the thoughts of sacred writers
who belong to another race, another millennium, another level of
divine revelation and another phase in the economy of Salva-
tion ?   A mastery of Semitic languages, a thorough knowledge of
the historical and social background of the author and a long
familiarity with the original texts of the Bible can, to some extent,
reduce the difficulties.   The exegete is living in a Biblical world
and, when confronted with a particular passage, the words and
phrases evoke associations and provoke reflections which are
akin to those of the hagiographer or his contemporaries.

This Biblical background is especially useful for the interpre-
tation of a text such as Exod. 19 : 5-6, which is not strictly con-
nected nor explained by its context, and contains some words and

expressions that occur rarely, if at all, in other passages of the O.T. Not being one of those expert exegetes myself, I borrowed freely from more experienced authors, surveying the various issues and interpretations, weighing various opinions and selecting what seems most plausible as the *literaire genre*, the *Sitz im Leben* and the original meaning of this important pericope.

R.S.V. OF THE SINAITIC PROLOGUE

Exod. 19:3*a*   And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called him out of the mountain saying:

> 3*b* ' Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob,
>   And tell the *people of Israel* (*beney Israel*):
> 4   You have seen what I did to the Egyptians,
>   And how I bore you on eagles' wings,
>   And brought you to myself.
> 5   Now therefore,
>   IF you will obey my voice,
>   and keep my covenant,
>   YOU shall be my possession among all peoples:
>   for all the earth is mine:
> 6   and YOU shall be to me A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS,
>   AND A HOLY NATION.
> 6*b* These are the words which you shall speak to
>   *the children of Israel.*'

LITERARY CRITICISM

This preamble of the covenant narration is unanimously accepted as a compact unit (vv. 3*b* to 8 or 9); but it is very hard to decide to which of the four traditional sources of the Pentateuch it belongs.

(*a*) *Elohistic ?*   J. Muilenberg remarks that the whole section Exod. 19–24 is predominantly Elohistic ; therefore exceptions require demonstration !

Otto Eissfeldt argues from the specifically religious tone of the allocution: If it belonged to the Yahwistic tradition, one would expect some traces of the nationalistic undertone which is everywhere rampant in this source.

A. Wieser and W. Beyerlin recognize the tendency of the Elohist to systematize historical facts and to indulge in theological reflections.

Others are more hesitant in their decision: they accept an Elohistic original draft (*Grundlage*) which would have been recast by later redactors.

(*b*) *Deuteronomistic ?*   Martin Noth, B. Couroyer (*Jerusalem Bible*), Th. C. Vriezen, Martin Buber and others consider the Sinaitic prologue as Deuteronomistic. They argue from the vocabulary, the style and some typical expressions that are found in

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this passage. Before passing judgement, let us first examine the text more closely:

(1) The poetical style of the introduction, ' Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel ', is not typical of any tradition. On the other hand, such repetitive parallelism is well attested in Ugarit literature.

(2) The expression ' house of Jacob ' referring to the chosen people is frequently used by the Prophets and Psalmists, but it is very rare in the historical books, where it always denotes the ' household of the patriarch Jacob '; e.g. in Gen. 46:27.

(3) The emphatic position of the pronoun in ' as for YOU, YOU have seen . . .' is common in exhortatory allocution. It is found in Deuteronomistic texts as Deut. 29:1 and Joshua 23:3 but also in Exod. 20:22 (E) and in Jer. 44:2.

(4) The phrase ' I bore you on eagles' wings ' recurs as such only in the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:11) but this hymn is an ancient redaction on its own and not typically Deuteronomistic. The verb N—S—' expressing a special protection is found in Deut. 1:31, but also in the Psalms and in Isaiah, e.g. 46:3 f., 63:9, 64:12 f. In the 40th chapter of Isaiah the shepherd ' carries ' the lambs in his bosom (v. 11) and further on, though in a different context, the wings of the eagles are mentioned (v. 31).

(5) The admonitory stipulation ' If you listen to my voice ' is found thrice in Deut. (11:13, 15:5, 28:1) but occurs also in the Prophets, e.g. Zech. 6:15 and in Exod. 23:22 and 15:26. The emphatic infinitive ' shamôga ' is used by Isaiah, Jeremiah, the author of Job and of 1 Sam. 23:10.

(6) The parallel condition, ' and keep my covenant ', occurs only 11 times in the O.T. For instance thrice in the Psalter and only once in Deut.

(7) The word ' segullah ', a peculiar possession (?), constitutes a problem of its own. It occurs eight times in the O.T. In Deuteronomy it is found in only two different contexts: 7:6 and 26:18. Deuteronomy 14:2 is but a word-for-word repetition of 7:6.

(8) *Mamleket Kohanim,* kingdom of priests, is an *hapax legomenon* in the O.T.

(9) A ' holy nation ' (*goiy*) does not as such recur in the O.T. ; the Deut. phrase is ' holy people ' (*gâm qadosh*). Moreover, the idea of election, i.e. a people set apart and consecrated, is quite common in Lev. and in the Prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah.

In conclusion, we can assert with M. Halvoet that the affinity of our text with the Deuteronomistic school does not consist in identical formulae or expressions. Except for the problematic term *segullah* and the phrase *goiy qadosh* (in Deut.: *gâm qadosh*) the affinity is as strong with the Psalmists and the Prophets, and with Isaiah in particular.

On the other hand, there is an obvious similarity of thought. To give but one example, we read in Deut. 26:16—19:

> ' This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances: you shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. You have declared this day concerning the Lord that He is your God and that you will walk in His ways, and keep His statutes and His commandments and His ordinances, and will obey His voice: and the Lord has declared this day concerning you that you are a people of His own possession (*gâm segullah*) as He has promised you ; and that you are to keep all His commandments, that He will set you high above all nations that He has made, in praise, in fame and in honour ; and that you shall be a people holy to the Lord your God (*gâm qadosh*), as He has spoken.'

The verbosity and repetitiousness of the Deuteronomist is in sharp contrast with the astounding sobriety of Exod. 19. Nevertheless this cannot be alleged as a proof that our pericope is post-Deuteronomistic and a secondary addition, as Halvoet would have it. On the contrary, the words ' as He has promised you ' and ' as He has spoken ' seem to imply that the Deuteronomist alludes to the Exodus text. Nowhere else in the O.T. do we find a promise made by Yahweh to consider Israel as his *segullah*. This impression seems to be corroborated by the fact that, in Exod. 19:5*b*, Hebrew grammar would rather require *le-gâm-segullah*, as we have it in the parallel texts. The omission of both the *lamed* and the *gâm* is difficult to explain if the author was familiar with Deut. 26 but not vice versa.

All in all, the literary criticism leaves us still groping in the dark. It does not throw any light on the approximate date of redaction: F. V. Winnet considers the text as a post-exilic addition of a sacerdotal redactor, while H. Wildberger classifies it as predynastic and independent of any of the four classic traditions.

LITERARY GENRE

Obviously we have here a covenant theme which has been adapted for liturgical use:

The allocution is well marked off by an inclusion (*beney Israel* in vv. 3*b* and 6*b*) which is reinforced by the emphatic YOU at the beginning of both v. 4 and v. 6.

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There is a covenant mediator, proclaiming the pact in a direct address and making an urgent appeal to obedience.

There is the typical 'I and Thou' style: although the names and titles of the overlord are not mentioned at the beginning, the first person occurs in some form or other in every single line and the emphatic YOU is quite prominent.

There is the motive of witnessing and the recital of mighty deeds which is intended as an historical prelude. The purpose is to instil in the subject kinglets' trust and gratitude to their overlord.

There is the typical 'And now' (*We gâthah*), as transition from the salvation history to the covenant stipulations.

These stipulations are, also here, couched in the classic conditional style: the obligations in the protasis and the blessings forming a symmetrical apodosis.

The answer of the people, 'All that the Lord has said we shall do !', is the traditional formula of the Ancient Near East used for giving a common pledge.

N.B.: According to G. E. Mendenhall, this type of suzerainty treaty was not used after the twelfth to eleventh centuries B.C. Consequently, the original draft of our text might be the prototype of the various covenant descriptions of the O.T. J. Muilenberg tried to show that the Shechem treaty and the one at Gilgal (Joshua 24 and 1 Sam. 12:6–25) are later elaborations of our Exodus text. The mediatorship of Moses would have been replaced by that of Joshua and Samuel respectively.

The liturgical background has been studied by S. Mowinckel. The *Sitz im Leben* might have been the problematic New Year festival with its enthronement of Yahweh and its renewal of the covenant, or the feast of Pentecost. In either case our preamble fits in as a part of the exhortatory allocution which was made before the solemn reading of the decalogue or some other covenant formula.

The appeal to past experience, the urgent and repeated call to listen to the voice of Yahweh, the emphatic use of the second person, 'But YOU, YOU will be to me a *segullah* among the nations !', are all exhortatory devises.

The poetical parallelism of the introduction, *Beney Israel . . . Beth Yacob,* is frequently used in the Psalms and can help to bring the audience into an atmosphere of festive solemnity.

Finally, the simile of the 'eagles' wings' might have been inspired by the two Cherubim, who protected the Covering of the Ark with their outstretched wings.

Though it is impossible to arrive at an apodictic conclusion, the most plausible working hypothesis is that Exod. 19:3–6 is a liturgical adaptation of a treaty pledge, redacted in view of a covenant feast.

As for the date of redaction, the Hittite form of suzerainty treaty favours an early date. Yet it is also possible that the liturgical adaptation was made long after the pattern had disappeared from the political field. The fact that the term *Berith* occurs in the preamble, although the actual conclusion of the pact is described only in a later chapter (Exod. 24), suggests that the pericope existed as an independent unit before the Elohist redactor inserted it as an introduction to the Sinaitic narration. In this case, one would accept our text as the prototype of Joshua 24 without being obliged to reject the thesis of A. Alt and M. Noth concerning the relatively late insertion of the Sinai tradition into the Pentateuch. The *Sitz im Leben* is probably a covenant feast held at one of the amphictyonic sanctuaries in pre-dynastic times, or a festivity held at Jerusalem after the conquest of that city.

THE PROBLEM OF THE TRIPLE PROMISE

After the double condition, ' if you obey my voice and keep my covenant', there follows an apparently triple promise: ' You shall be to me a SEGULLAH (special possession), a MAMLEKET KOHANIM (kingdom of priests ?), and a GOIY QADOSH (holy nation)'. We are faced with the following dilemma:

Does this special possession (A), this kingdom of priests (B), and this holy nation (C) refer each time to the whole of Israel, leaders and ordinary people combined, i.e. A=B=C ?

Or is this special possession constituted of two separate groups: the administrative body of priests (*mamleket*) and those who are ruled (*goiy*), i.e. A=B+C ?

Before attempting a solution, let us examine each of these three elements:

A—*Segullah*

This term is not derived from a Hebrew root and occurs only eight times in the O.T. In 1 Chron. 29:3, the meaning is obviously David's personal treasure of gold and silver, i.e. the privy purse as opposed to the State treasury. The same interpretation might fit in the context of Koh. 2:8: ' I gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure (*segullah*) of kings and provinces.' But Kittel suggests another reading for the last word (*Hamudoth* instead of *Hammedinoth*). In this case, a better rendering of the second phrase would be ' the treasured courtisans (*segullath*) of kings and cherished women (*hamudoth*)'. This would be a fitting introduction to the following sentence as we read it in the R.S.V.: ' I got many concubines, man's delight.' *Segullah* would then refer to human persons. In other passages of the O.T., *segullah* always refers to selected people, picked men: Mal. 3:17 ; Ps. 135:4 and three passages of Deut. where we read *gâm segullah*, the people of my treasure (?).

From the use of the term in the O.T. we derive mainly the element of putting aside, treasuring, selecting. Other Oriental languages provide us with a variety of roots and of possible connotations ; but the experts are far from unanimous in their interpretations. To quote but one example from the Code of Hammurabi (para. 141, 39 f.):

' If a married woman, who was living with her husband, has made up her mind to leave, has *sikiltam isakkil,* has ruined her home and humiliated her husband, etc. . . .'

The specialists leave us the choice between the following translations of *sikiltam isakkil*: she has embezzled her husband's money, she has gambled with his resources, she has done foolish things, she has cherished a paramour, she has trafficked with her body! Originally the notion of acquiring seems to have been prominent: *Sakalum, siggel.* There was soon added a certain implication of extravagant trafficking and of acting foolishly: the root S-K-L. In the Old Babylonian text, the ' Dialogue of the Faithful Friend ', the association with ' pasturing ' or with ' flock ' is predominant: the Akkadian root *sugullate.* Finally, we have the connotation of devoted service and loyalty to the overlord or to the local divinity: in the documents of the ancient city-states of Mesopotamia and in the title of the king of Alalakh. *Sukallu* is the vizier or delegate of the Mesopotamian ' patesi ', and King Abban of Alalakh is the *Sikiltu* of the God Im.

Applying all this to the context of Exod. 19, we may retain the following connotations of *segullah*:

> (1) Acquisition, as an allusion to Yahweh's intervention during the Exodus.
> (2) Selection, in view of a special office or divine service.
> (3) Attachment, expressing the privileged position of Israel as a nation set apart, cherished and protected by Yahweh.

B—*Mamleket Kohanim*

Mamleket is normally considered to be a less usual constructive case of the substantive *mamlekah,* so that the next word becomes a genitive: a *mamleket* of priests. However, both the Peshita and the Targumim juxtapose the two substantives in a simple enumeration. In fact *mamleket* is obviously in the absolute case followed by a lamed in Mic. 4 : 8: ' . . . the dominion *over* the daughter of Jerusalem '. A study of the various passages where the term *mamleket* occurs reveals the following details:

> (i) In compounds with a personal suffix, *mamleket* refers to the throne, to the territory of the king, or to the royal authority itself. The person to whom the pronominal suffix refers is normally the ruler: ' my or his kingdom '.
> 2 Sam. 3 : 28 is of particular interest for our study: Joab has murdered Abner against the orders of David

and the latter exclaims: 'I and my kingdom (*mamlakthi*) are for ever innocent before the Lord of the blood of Abner!' *Mamleket* means here either the people in general or a particular group of officials who share the responsibility with David, i.e. the court or perhaps the house of David, which is at times referred to as the 'seed of the kingdom'.

(ii) In passages where a determinative noun follows, *mamleket* can refer to the territory of the king, to the duration of his realm, or to his royal authority. The determinative noun indicates those who are in power and not those who are ruled: e.g. 2 Chron. 13:8, 'the royal authority of Yahweh in the hands of David's sons'.

Contrary to the thesis of Cazelles, exceptions are possible: 2 Sam. 24:20 should read 'the royal power *over* Israel shall be established in your hand'. In the O.T., therefore, the fundamental concept of *mamleket* is ruling power, royal authority. It is often restricted to the person of the king but can also be extended to his entourage, i.e. an administrative body of ministers or of counsellors, who share his responsibility. At times it is used as a parallel with 'throne' and, in not a few cases, it refers to the territory. Normally, the determinative noun denotes those who are governing (in our case the priests) and not those who are ruled. But exceptions are possible so that one cannot argue *a priori*, but has to take the context into account.

N.B.: W. Caspari and W. Beyerlin have drawn our attention to the clear distinction existing between *melek* and *mamleket* in the Phoenician inscriptions of Biblos and Sidon:

Melek is the title of the ruler and it is always closely connected with the person and the name of the ruler.

Mamleket is the function or the office (*die Obrigkeit*) which was originally concentrated around the person of the ruling monarch, if not identified with him. Through a slow semantic evolution the abstract noun came to designate a wider field of governing (*Werkungskreise*) and eventually became a collective noun referring to all the officials who assured the continuity of the régime, as well as those entrusted with the service of the gods in the city-temple.

Although these inscriptions belong to the fourth century B.C., they reflect a theocratic ideal which is also found in Israel during the predynastic period: Yahweh was their only King while the administration (*mamleket*) was considered collectively as a body of officials who exercised a vicariate authority. Caspari quotes several Biblical texts in his favour, e.g. 1 Sam. 10:18: 'I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all those who were oppressing you' (*Hammamlakoth hallohazim*). Kingdoms, which oppress people and whose actions are

expressed by a verbal adjective in the masculine gender, are undoubtedly conceived as a body of official persons. Consequently, both Caspari and Beyerlin solve the problem of the triple promise according to the second pattern: the *segullah* is constituted of two separate groups, i.e. the administrative body and the bulk of the people (*die Obrigkeit und die sonstige Einwohner*).

Kohanim—Although the term *kohen* was already known in Ugarit literature of the fourteenth century B.C., it would be presumptuous to attribute to it all the connotations which the concept ' priest ' evokes today. The *kohen* was, during the early period of Israel, a functionary engaged at a fixed salary. His employer had to ' fill his hand ' (Exod. 32:29).

The main function of the *kohen* was originally that of a mediator:

      (i) At the oracle, he communicated the answer of Yahweh manifested to him by the ephod.
     (ii) When there was a message from the Lord, he promulgated and explained it to the people. This function was later on fulfilled by the prophets.
    (iii) At the sanctuary, he offered the sacrifice by placing upon the altar the portion of Yahweh, sprinkling the altar with the sacrificial blood or burning incense.

The etymology of *kohen* is not certain. It is derived either from the Akkadian root *kânu*, to bow and pay one's respect, or from K-W-N, to stand by, to be in attendance, to be the right-hand man. Comparing the two parallel texts, 2 Sam. 8:18 and 1 Chron. 18:17, one notices that, even in the dynastic period, the term still retained, beside the technical meaning of priest—as in the case of *Sadoq* and *Abyathar*—that of high official, right-hand man or prince—as in the case of the two Kohanim who are sons of David. Later on, the non-cultic title became obsolete. When it occurred, it had to be explained: in 1 Kings 4:5 Zabud is called *Kohen-rogeh-hammelek*, i.e. *kohen*, which means ' friend ' of the king.

Mamleket kohanim.—That this expression created a good amount of difficulty for the translators is quite obvious from the variety of its renderings:

      Peshita and Rev. 5:10: kingdom and priests ;
     Jubilee and Rev. 1:6: kingdom, priests ;
      Targum of Jerusalem: kings and priests ;
      Targum Orkelos: kings, priests ;
      LXX and 1 Pet. 2:9: royal priesthood ;
      Vulgate: priestly kingdom.

Grammatically, *mamleket* could be in the absolute case, as in Mic. 4:8. It would then have a collective meaning and constitute with *kohanim* some kind of *hendiaduoin* as ' Kings, yea more: priests, i.e. a holy nation '. In this case, the three elements of Exod. 19:6*a* (kingdom, priests and nation) would have

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· the same extension and each Israelite would be a priest. The danger with this interpretation is that the grammatical basis for it is rather weak: This expression (*mamleket kohanim*) in which *mamleket* would be in the absolute case would be ' strange ', says Paul Jouon. Moreover, the meaning given to ' priests ' is very difficult to establish, because the point of comparison is entirely left to the subjective views of the interpreter:

According to K. Galling and R. B. Y. Scott, priest is used in the sense of sanctified. ' The whole phrase simply designates Israel as worshippers of Yahweh, a positive counterpart of the idea of separation from the worship of other gods expressed in *goiy qadosh* . . . A kingdom is set apart like a priesthood and possessing the priestly status of " a holy nation ".'

Similarly W. Stärk, B. Couroyer and P. Heinisch look for a close parallelism with the idea of sanctity. They stress the duty of a priest to be exemplary in his walk of life.

B. Bäntsch, S. R. Driver and H. Junker emphasize the aspect of free access to Yahweh: the priest goes up to the altar and enters the sanctuary for liturgical services.

M. Buber and H. Wildberger derive the notion of priestly kingdom from the fact that Yahweh was the one and only king in Israel, but they do not explain the underlying metaphor.

G. Beer and others find in our text the first mention of the priesthood of the laity: Israel does not need priestly mediators but is emancipated (*religi os mundig*).

J. B. Bauer works on the opposition between authentic worship and idolatry: the whole nation offers the only acceptable sacrifice and is a mediator between Yahweh and the gentiles. In this context, the same author brings in the passage of Isaiah 61:6: ' You shall be called priests of the Lord . . . ministers of our God. You shall eat the wealth of the nations!' But the point in question is here entirely different: Isaiah refers to the homage, the fat stipends and material help which priests gratuitously receive from the people. The same idea is found in the previous chapter, ' You shall suck the milk of the nations, and shall suck the breast of kings ' (Isa. 60:16).

Solomon Goldman provides us with a dozen pertinent texts and interpretations from various rabbis, but all these only add to the confusion.

Frankly speaking, if we consider *kohanim* as referring to the individual Israelites and as expressing those who are ruled, we find ourselves in a blind alley. On the other hand, the notion *kohen* normally refers to a group of representatives or mediators and not to a whole nation. As we saw before, the determinative noun of *mamleket*—in the construct case—normally expresses

those who are in power. Consequently, *mamleket kohanim* should normally be rendered as 'a governing body of priests', whether it be in a theocratic kingdom or a collective hierocracy. Moreover, the concept of theocracy and priestly administration was far from being unknown in the Ancient Near East:

    (i) In the city-state of Lagash, the *patesi* or *lugal* was only the vicarious ruler of the god Ningirsu. A similar form of government was found in many Sumerian cities as well as among the neighbouring peoples, including the Semites.

   (ii) At the other end of the fertile crescent, the high priests of Thebes were the mouthpiece of the god Amon. Under the twenty-first dynasty—founded in 1085 B.C.—Egypt was governed more by divine oracles than by human decrees; or rather it was the sacerdotal clan that was given a free hand in the interpretation of the will of the city-god Amon.

  (iii) At Ugarit, closer to Palestine, the guilds of priests exercised a considerable political influence over the king (*melek*). According to C. H. Gordon, the two main guilds of priests were the *Kâhinuma* and the *Qâdishuma*. The *Kâhinuma* had royal family connections and belonged to the official circle with the highest income brackets.

    N.B: The same scholar asserts that two similar guilds existed in Palestine, i.e. the *Kohanim* and the *Qedeshim*:

'It is generally assumed that the *qedeshim* and *qedeshoth* were priests and priestesses given to sacred prostitution but ... priests of the same title occur commonly in Canaan ... they seem to be too large a category to be limited to so specialized a function!' The *Kohanim* would be of Levitic stock and they eventually became the elite of the priesthood. The rival guild of the *Qedeshim* was eliminated after a long and bitter struggle full of vicissitudes.

    Some traces of this struggle would be left in the O.T., e.g. 2 Kings 23:20: 'And he (king Josiah) slew all the priests of the high places who were there, upon the altars, and burned the bones of men upon them.' An earlier stage would be described in 1 Sam. 22 where the whole house of Ahimelech, priest of Nob, is exterminated: '... eighty-five persons wearing the ephod were slaughtered and Nob, the stronghold of the *Kohanim*, was sacked ... both men and women, children and sucklings, oxen, asses, and sheep he put to the sword.' Such a punishment is certainly out of proportion with the alleged crime of having given bread and the sword of Goliath to David when Ahimelech still thought him to be on the side of Saul! The accusation was probably only a pretext to get rid of the clan.

Whether one accepts the thesis of the two rival guilds or not, there seems to be no doubt that priests had a certain influence in the administration of Israel. Already at the time of Moses, we find a group of counsellors who are priests : In Exod. 24, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, three *Kohanim,* are mentioned by name and separately from the seventy elders. They are said to have seen Yahweh and to have taken part in the covenant meal and are considered as a group set apart and closely connected with the mediator and law-giver of Israel. *Mamleket kohanim* is therefore best interpreted as a group of priestly administrators, a court of counsellors who assisted, and at times opposed, the royal representative of Yahweh.

C.—*Goïy Qadosh*

Goïy is often considered as synonymous with *gâm.* In fact, the three parallel texts of Deut. have *gâm qadosh* (Deut. 7:6, 14:2 and 26:19). There is, however, a difference in connotations :

(a) *Gâm* essentially denotes kinship: the family or people in the sense of a larger but fundamentally consanguineous body. Normally, *gâm,* and not *goïy,* will be used to denote the relationship between a people and the divinity.

(b) *Goïy* usually connotes administration and more especially monarchy. In co-ordination with *mamleket* one finds practically always *goïy* and not *gâm.*

According to E. A. Speiser, *gâm* corresponds better to the idea of Hebrew society on account of the nomadic background with strong family ties, levirate customs, and the need of personal initiative in social relations. On the other hand, *goïy* fits the political and administrative tendencies of Akkadian societies. Later on, the difference of religion became the all-important factor for the Israelites calling themselves the chosen people (*gâm*) as separate from the nations or gentiles (*goïyim*). Taking this into consideration, we would rather expect to find in our text the formula of Deut.: *gâm qadosh,* a holy people. But the redactor used *goïy* and the only reason for his choice seems to be the co-ordination with the term *mamleket.*

If this special relation to *mamleket* was intended by the author, then both terms should be considered as expressing a complementary distribution of two distinct groups, i.e. the governing body of priests and the rest of the people. This interpretation is suggested by several passages of the O.T. where the same co-ordination *mamlekah-goïy* occurs:

(i) 1 Kings 18:10: King Achab has been searching in vain for the prophet Eliah who caused the rain to stop in Samaria for months on end. 'He would put both the government and the nation under oath that no one has found you ! ' (*'eth hammamlekah we 'eth haggoïy*). The repetition of both the particle *'eth*

and the article indicate that the administrative body is clearly distinguished from the rest of the people.

(ii) Ezek. 37:22: The text refers to the reunion of the Northern and Southern kingdom: ' I will make them a single nation (*goiy*) . . . and one single king (*melek*) shall rule over them. They shall no longer be two nations (*goiyim*) and shall no longer be divided into two ruling powers (*mamlekoth*) ! ' The parallelism, between the positive statement of the first part and the negative repetition of the second, forces us to interpret *mamlekoth* as the ruling powers distinguished from the subjects of the throne.

(iii) Jer. 27:7 f., Isa. 60:11 f., Jer. 18:7 f., 2 Chron. 32:15, and other texts express the same complementary distribution into the ruling body and the bulk of the population.

In Exod. 19:6 *goiy* would therefore designate those who are ruled, the subjects of the *mamleket kohanim*.

Qadosh—The term *qadosh* is misleading if one translates it by ' holy ' and identifies the O.T. concept with the Christian idea of ' sanctity '. The Hebrew *qodesh* was originally connected with worship and used in speaking of the characteristics of persons or things which have been set apart from the field of the profane and have been freed from defilement so as to become worthy of coming into close contact with God. In the parallel texts of Deut., *gâm qadosh* reflects at times slightly different connotations:

(i) A people that is under moral obligation to live up to its status of chosen nation (Deut. 7:6 and 14:2).

(ii) A people that will be protected and treated with special care, provided it keeps its part of the contract (Deut. 26:19).

(iii) A people that is blessed by the Lord as a reward for its observance of the divine stipulations (Deut. 28:9).

Without excluding the other connotations, the text of Exod. 19 reflects rather the third aspect, benediction, and combines thus the idea of being set apart with that of being treasured as a special acquisition, a *segullah*.

CONCLUSION

The pericope Exod. 19:3*b*–6 forms a compact unity which probably existed independently before being used as a preamble to the Sinaitic narration. Its literary genre is that of a Hittite suzerainty treaty, adapted for a liturgical purpose. The original draft might have served as a prototype for the description of the pact at Shechem (Joshua 24). To the double stipulation in characteristic conditional structure, ' If you listen to my voice and observe

my covenant...', corresponds a promise which has apparently three elements: *segullah—mamleket kohanim—goiy qadosh.*

    (1) *Segullah,* a treasured possession, possibly has the following connotations: Yahweh acquired Israel as his peculiar possession by intervening on their behalf at the time of exodus.

        Yahweh will watch over them with special care as a shepherd over his flock.

        They will worship Him and dedicate themselves to His service.

    (2) The other two elements are probably representing two complementary groups of Israel: the ruling body and the subjects. This interpretation is advocated by the symmetry of the passage because in this way there corresponds a double promise to a double stipulation. As a matter of fact, the apodosis has only two verbs for its three elements.

A closer analysis of the text and a study of the various terms has led us to the same conclusion:

    (*a*) *Mamleket kohanim,* the administrative body of priests, is a phrase that might have originated at a time when *kohen* still meant a trusted counsellor, or a right-hand man, who was not necessarily connected with the cult. It is also possible that the expression belongs to a period of theocratic government which consisted of a council of priests presided over either by a ruler—the legate of the divinity—or by one of the members of the group. Later on, when this form of government had become obsolete, or when the term *kohen* had undergone a semantic evolution, the phrase was no longer understood. It was kept in the later elaboration of this particular passage, but did not find its way into other writings of the O.T.

    (*b*) *Goiy qadosh* refers to the bulk of the people who would experience Yahweh's special protection and blessings if they remained faithful to their pledge and dedicated themselves to the service of Yahweh.

The *Sitz im Leben* of the pericope is best conceived as a liturgical feast connected with the renewal of the covenant. Before reading the decalogue or any other text of the sacred treaty, the celebrant (or one of his helpers) was giving a short exhortation. Around the preacher was the group of venerable ' administrators ' (the *mamleket kohanim*), and the congregation of the faithful was gathered in front of the sanctuary (the *goiy qadosh*). Behind the speaker was the Ark of the covenant, protected by the outstretched wings of the Cherubim. The author might have been conscious of this situation when he wrote: ' You see how I bore you on the eagles' wings . . .'

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The first time, the passage might have been delivered in an ancient amphictyonic sanctuary. The administrative body might have been a guild of *kohanim* with political rather than sacerdotal power. Later on, a similar ceremony was held in the temple of Jerusalem. But the phrase *mamleket kohanim* had lost much of its actuality and it is possible that the 'sacred congregation' got but a faint idea of the original meaning of the words. After the exile, when the Hasmonean high priest occupied the throne, the theocratic element must have once more appealed to the crowd.

Finally, when, on that dark Friday afternoon, the Son of Man was dying on the cross, the curtain of the temple was rent into two. The three synoptic Gospels could not pass this over in silence because the believers saw in this fact a symbolic happening: the access to the temple was no longer reserved to the *kohanim* but to all Christians. Peter reinterpreted the passage of Exodus according to this new conception of *mamleket kohanim*: the people of the New Covenant were religiously emancipated (*religios mundig geworden*) and could have a share in the 'royal priesthood'. All Christians could penetrate into the holy of holies, into the open side of the Rock of Salvation, Christ pierced with a lance. They had been accepted as adoptive sons, had become 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people acquired as a peculiar possession' (1 Peter 2:9).

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The Songs of Zion as a Literary Category of the Psalter

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The appellation 'Songs of Zion' draws its origin from Ps. 137:3. To the Israelites who had been led into captivity by Nebukadnezzar the Babylonians made the request: 'Sing to us one of the Songs of Zion,'[1] but they, painfully aware as they were of their presence in a pagan land which by definition was polluted and impure, found it impossible to comply with the wish of their captors. In fact, how could the true believers 'sing Yahweh's song in a foreign land'? From this tiny fragment of tradition, hailing from the bitter days of the exile, we come to know that the ancient Israelites possessed a special collection of songs which they were accustomed to sing when they were living in the holy land, when Solomon's temple was in existence, and which they were also wont to designate as Yahweh's songs. And some of these songs, whose power of attraction and fascination was such as to capture the fancy of the Babylonians, are preserved in the Psalter, and consequently when we speak of the Songs of Zion as a special literary category of the Psalter, we are on safe ground and are but following the wake traced out by a well-known and clearly-defined tradition of the chosen nation.[2] In order to understand fully the meaning of

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[1] H.-J. Kraus is therefore quite right when he interprets the phrase šyr ṣywn as 'Gattungsbezeichnung' (cf. *Psalmen* (Bibl. Kom. XV), Neukirchen, 1960, p. 906. Cf. too H. Gunkel-J. Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, Göttingen, 1933, p. 42).

[2] Which then are šyr ṣywn found in the Psalter? They are Pss. 46, 48, 76 and 87; to this group some exegetes also add Pss. 84 and 122 (e.g. H.-J. Kraus, *op. cit., ibid.* H. Gunkel-J. Begrich, *op. cit., ibid.*), but as these Pss. include some of the formal characteristics of the Pilgrimage Pss., it would be more accurate to assign them to this special category. Numerous studies have of late appeared on the Songs of Zion,