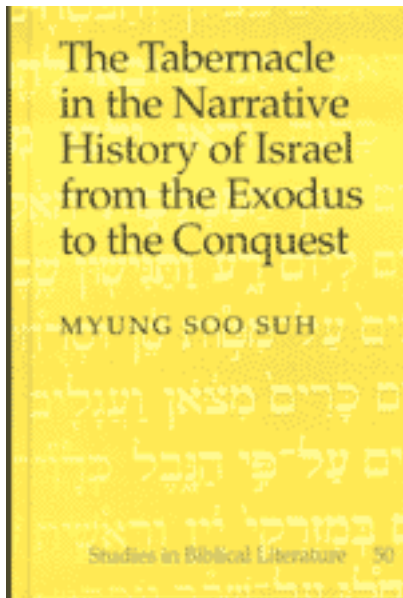


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Suh, Myung Soo

The Tabernacle in the Narrative History of Israel from the Exodus to the Conquest

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The Tabernacle in the Narrative History of Israel from the Exodus to the Conquest represents a revision of Myung Soo Suh's dissertation (University of Sheffield, 1998; under the supervision of David J. A. Clines). Suh argues that the divide between synchronic and diachronic investigations of the text is an artificial one. Instead, he follows Clines's proposal for a "polychromatic reading," which utilizes both in order to interpret the biblical text (4–5). Suh then explains what he intends by "narrative history." It is the story that the present text implies (7). While this story may not qualify as scientific history, it is a representation of history and must not be rejected because it lacks the qualities of scientific history, à la R. G. Collingwood. It is a representation of the past as told through the collective memories of the various authors, redactors, and editors of the Bible (10–11).

Suh uses the storyline from Exodus to Joshua to argue that the tabernacle and the ark served in a dual role as cultic objects and military palladia, just as the nation of Israel served as a cultic and military entity. He argues that the added element of a military palladium is culled from passages outside the limited texts traditionally used in tabernacle studies (Exod 25–31; 35–40). Suh instead argues that, in order to comprehend this dual role of the tabernacle, one must read the tabernacle narratives in the larger context of Exodus through Joshua.

Suh summarizes his conclusions with five arguments (146–48). First, the precious items that the Israelites took from the Egyptians were the spoils of war. Yahweh had defeated the Egyptians, and the Israelites had plundered these treasures in order to demonstrate the victory of Yahweh over the Egyptian gods (33–36).

Second, the tabernacle and more particularly the ark served as palladia during the military campaigns. They represented Yahweh’s presence during the exodus and later during the conquest, further demonstrating Suh’s thesis that the tabernacle served as a military as well as a cultic center. Suh posits that the Israelite camp with the tabernacle in the center may have been styled upon Ramesside military camps (56–60).

Third, the tabernacle functioned as the “treasury of Yahweh.” Yahweh alone was responsible for military victories, so all precious metallic objects taken as spoils were to be placed in the tabernacle. This flows directly into Suh’s discussion of the golden calf. Its placement between the instructions for the tabernacle and its construction argue for its significance in the ongoing narrative and argue against its placement by a later redactor attempting to eviscerate charges against Aaron. Suh argues that the golden calf is an antitype for the ark. The Israelites created a substitute palladium to replace Moses because of his extended absence and thus illegitimately used the gold from the plundering of Egypt for the calf, whereas Yahweh intended these items to be used in the construction of the tabernacle and its accoutrements. Furthermore, after Moses returned and smashed the golden calf, burned it, and sprinkled it in water, he made the Israelites drink it in a similar fashion to the “Sotah woman” of Num 5 (85–90).

Fourth, the tabernacle was the center of Israel’s “cultic-military” leadership complex. Thus the text of Leviticus established and ordered the cultic leadership within Israel. Moreover the ordination narratives in Leviticus served to establish the descendants of Aaron as the locus of cultic authority (98–100). Furthermore, Numbers with its censuses served to order the military leadership of Israel prior to the battles of conquest that followed (100–105).

Fifth, the tabernacle served to maintain the cohesion of the amphictyony during the conquest as recounted in the book of Joshua. Achan’s sin was a violation of both the military and the cultic natures of the tabernacle. By placing the banned items in his tent he was in effect taking credit for the victory over Jericho. Instead, these items belonged in the tent of the true victor, Yahweh. Thus Achan and his family became the objects of a holy war by Israel, for his household was given over to the ban in the same manner as the inhabitants of Jericho previously had been. After Israel cleansed itself of this impurity from within through holy war, the items were then passed through the fire and placed in the treasury of Yahweh (130–32). This final point is concluded with a discussion of the

altar at Geliloth by the Transjordanian tribes. Suh distinguishes this altar from the altar before the golden calf by pointing out that it was not used as a sacrificial altar, nor was it ad hoc; rather, it was built according to the pattern given to Moses on Mount Sinai (133–34).

Suh argues this thesis, that the tabernacle served a cultic-military dual function, quite convincingly. At each juncture a review of the relevant literature indicates the history of interpretation of these five arguments and the warrants that inform them. Whereas Suh argued that one must conduct both a diachronic and synchronic investigation, generally the diachronic work was relegated to secondary importance in favor of synchronic issues. While this is not necessarily a problem, it does become one when it has been argued that one should interact with both at the same level. On an editorial level, the book is replete with typographical errors, especially the Hebrew. When the Hebrew phrases wrap between lines invariably they are backward (e.g., 104). Additionally, when two words are given with a gloss, the glosses are given to the incorrect word (e.g., 106).

Suh's chief deficiency is brevity. While on certain topics Suh gives ample discussion, such as the despoiling of the Egyptians and the golden calf, at other junctures the reader is left wanting more argumentation and discussion of the issue at hand. For instance, Suh argues his thesis by investigating Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Joshua, but no mention is made of how Deuteronomy would fit into this binary structure or the reason that it is excluded. Additionally, the methodological introduction, especially on issues that are central to the book's thesis (e.g., the concept of "narrative history"), is overly brief. Such additions could only strengthen what is an intriguing work.

Suh's *The Tabernacle in the Narrative History of Israel from the Exodus to the Conquest* represents what should be a strong and enduring contribution in tabernacle studies. His dual understanding of the tabernacle's function in cultic and military settings constitutes a suggestive approach to Leviticus and Numbers as well as the individual units within the Hexateuch that relate to the narrative history of the tabernacle.