

A visual Journey into the Bible

Moses

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Introduction

The Book of Genesis and the four following books of the Bible form the Pentateuch, the fivefold scroll. These books are the Torah, the religious law of Israel.

Genesis is the story of the creation of the universe. The book tells the lives of the first patriarchs, the ancestors Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Genesis ends with the settlement of the Hebrews in Egypt after a famine in Canaan. The four books called Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are all dedicated to the life of Moses. After the first generations of peaceful co-existence with the Hebrews, the Egyptian Pharaohs came to fear Israel as a menace to their state. The Pharaohs oppressed the Hebrews then. Moses led Israel out of the oppression in Egypt. Whereas only one book bundles the lives of the first ancestors, four books recall the life of Moses. The main reason is that Moses gave the religious law to the people of Israel and most of the texts of the four books enumerate, explain and repeat in other sentences the rules by which the Hebrew community was to live for the next centuries.

Moses has been shown in films and novels as the powerful leader of the people that left Egypt for Canaan. After their successful escape from Egypt the Hebrews passed many hardships and won many battles against the most powerful states of the region. Moses is depicted as a towering character, a war hero and general, leading his people and his warriors. But the Bible does not describe him as a genius leader. Moses is merely an intermediate, the mediator of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Yahweh was the God of one people. The Bible cites the existence of other gods for other peoples. But Yahweh told that he was to be the God of the Hebrews and the Hebrews could have only one God, Yahweh. All other gods would be idols for Israel. There is no demand in the Bible for the conversion of other religions to the religion of Yahweh, but whenever the Hebrews encountered other Gods on a territory they could control, they would have to smash the idols. Yahweh was all-powerful, but he remained the God of one people, of Israel, of the people with the name given by God to the descendants of Jacob.

The Book of Exodus tells of the flight of the Israelites from Egypt under the direction of Moses. It tells about the re-affirmation of the covenant between Israel and Yahweh and about the gift of the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue. The tablets of stone on which the law was inscribed by the finger of God were given on Mount Sinai. Exodus ends with the instructions on the building of the sanctuary and of its ministers. The ministers will be Moses' brother Aaron and Aaron's sons.

Leviticus is a book of the law and the rules. It talks primarily of the investiture of the priests of Israel. Exodus says explicitly that Moses was born a Levi, from a father and mother both of the tribe of Levi. The Levites are appointed to function as the tribe of priests in Leviticus. The first priests will be Aaron and his sons, then the whole tribe of Levi. The Levites will be the guardians of the law of holiness. These were the orders that Yahweh gave to Moses. Leviticus is thus the book of the installation of the Levites as the priests of Israel. The book adds rules to the law, but not to the story of the life of Moses.

The Book of Numbers starts with the census of the whole community of Israelites, their clans and families. We feel the beginning of an organisation, the firm establishment of the formal tissue of a society. The census officials are called and named in the Book of Numbers. Then the census itself is enumerated. After the census the book contains various other rules of the law, the installation of the feast of Passover as a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt and the final departure to Canaan away from Yahweh's mountain. The Book of Numbers furthermore tells how Moses gave the laws concerning sacrifices and again about the powers of the Levite priests. The last part of Numbers recalls the passage of the desert and the travels of Israel from Kadesh to Moab. Finally, the Israelites fight a war against the Midianites and the people arrive at the borders of Canaan.

The book of Deuteronomy is an addition to the three other books of Moses, that is to Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Deuteronomy is a copy of the basic but now complete law of Israel, probably written in a later period than the other books of the Pentateuch. It contains two discourses of Moses as introduction, in which Moses recounts the travels of Israel. Then follows the Deuteronomic code, the rules of law and customs to be kept in the country that Yahweh gave to the Israelites. Deuteronomy ends with a third discourse of Moses and a tale of his last actions and death.

The four books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy form a unity by the figure of Moses, the mediator. Exodus talks of Moses leading Israel out of Egypt. Leviticus tells of Moses providing the investiture of the priests and the Levites. Numbers recalls the census organised by Moses, while Deuteronomy are discourses of Moses providing for a clear text of the law of Israel and finally the book gives an account of Moses' last actions and of his death. Four books of the Bible are on Moses alone. Moses' importance was in his function as a mediator of Yahweh at a moment when the numbers of the Hebrews had grown to the point where a religious and secular organisation was needed. The Hebrews had been fertile in Egypt. They had profited from an easy life without major famines or deprivations. Until the persecutions began they had grown rapidly in numbers. Too rapidly.

One understands from the Bible that the attitude of the Egyptians towards the Hebrews had become a dilemma. On the one hand the Egyptians sensed that the Hebrews could become a danger for the Egyptian nature, for Egyptian religion and Egyptian conceptions of society. On the other hand the Egyptians needed the Hebrews as artisans and architects and they needed their intellect. The only solution out of the dilemma that the Egyptians could think of was to keep the Hebrews but to reduce their number. That meant harsh persecution. No people can accept having its children killed. Israel needed to leave. Moses was the one to propose that indeed the Israelites should do so. But he did not take up the actual management of the Exodus. The towering, forceful chiefs were Aaron and Joshua. Moses himself pleaded with Yahweh to have others talk and lead, for he found himself to weakly endowed with these qualities. The image that most comes to mind when one reflects on Moses is that of a teacher, of a wise man, of the leader, of the strategist, of a priest who proposes and who finds solutions and inspires courage.

Moses needed again and again to repeat his messages and his advice, even though they were the commands of Yahweh. The ancestors had known Yahweh and so did Moses. But one feels that in the first books of the Bible Yahweh is still only one of the many possible gods of the tribe of Hebrew shepherds, even though he was the god of Abraham. At Deuteronomy however, the concept of one exclusive God, Yahweh, for all Israel is well established. And Yahweh is now explained in the Bible as a form of the verb 'to be'. Yahweh is the being. All the being, the one being. This statement was and is terrible. It decided and revealed Yahweh as the being of the universe. It was a terrible statement because it did away for all people with all other beliefs and gods. And Yahweh told Moses on Mount Sinai finally that the whole world was his, he was the one and only God. Here lay the grain of one religion only for mankind.

The Hebrews had multiplied in Egypt to become a people. As long as they lived in Egypt they abided by their own religion but had to live by the law of the land. When they departed they became first outlaws, then men of a tribe without a law. The society of Israel as counted in the census of the Book of Numbers was in need for a proper law. Moses provided this with the Decalogue.

A believer in the religious message will accept that Yahweh helped Israel to leave Egypt and that Yahweh handed over the divine law. The religious law was also the secular law. There was no difference between the two. Israel had only one law and that was the Law of Moses. The strongest possible bond was thus forged between religion and state since the law of the people was a religious law. This strong bond between religion and state lasted for centuries and not just for the Hebrews. Christianity aimed for the same bonds. Only from the late eighteenth century, from the Enlightenment period on, do we see the bonds between the state and religious law weaken thoroughly. The Enlightenment ideas were slow in the making and we find embryos of Enlightenment concepts in the centuries before, but until then the rules that were defined in the law of Moses not only shaped Jewish history but also European society. Many European kings justified their reign in divine foundation. The Popes crowned kings and emperors and thereby enforced these beliefs. The Popes could give and take away this support and European history is a long tale of strive of the secular monarchs for self-justification of their divine power instead of that power needing to be dispensed by the Church. But the reigns always were founded in the belief of a divine basis.

Non-believers and agnostics will explain the giving of the law of Israel by stating the evidence. Moses led a large community out of Egypt. He was the thinker, the teacher, and the philosopher of the Hebrews. Moses and probably as much his council, his family of the tribe of Levi, saw the necessity to define the rules by which the community was to live since they had fled from the laws of Egypt. The Book of Exodus even tells before the handing over of the Ten Commandments how Jethro the Arab told Moses that the people needed judges and rules. It was thus a non-Israelite, Jethro, who first saw the

practical necessity and the urgency for the community to have a law. Further on, Exodus also stated that Moses had written down the words of Yahweh. Such a statement can be in contradiction to other assertions of Exodus that the stone tablets were written with the finger of God. On the simple and crude beginnings of the Decalogue of Moses and on bribes of rules of immediate interest for the community such rules of purity, was built a basic law. The leaders of the Exodus agreed upon this law and accepted it as a new nation's basis for living together. This law was added to. This law was refined over the ages until it was clarified in Deuteronomy. The law formed the community, and kept it together as much as the religion.

Believers and non-believers can not prove the truth of the divine origin of the Law of Israel with any scientific explanation. There is no plausible explanation for even if we give us over to the tales of the witnesses and authors of the Bible, these probably were Levites or priests and thus convinced of the religious origins of the state.

The archaeological evidence of the Hebrews' residence in Egypt is very scarce. Very few evidences have been found so far. But the Egyptian space is vast. Evidence has been found of a town in the Eastern Nile Delta called Pir-Rameses or 'City of Rameses', built for a Pharaoh with that name and Exodus tells that the Israelites indeed left from this town. But practically no remains have been found of the settlement of the Hebrews. A few signs have been discovered of very ancient Hebrew settlement in the Sinai desert, signs of the Mosaic tablets, but all this gives little hard proof of the existence of Moses and of the stay of the Israelites in Egypt.

Let us hear however the words of the witnesses as recalled in the historic account of Israel, the Bible. The Hebrews wrote their history in the Bible and the authors say that Yahweh wrote the Law with his own finger. So in the four books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy the real hero is Yahweh and the real towering presence is not that of Moses but of Yahweh writing the Law with his own finger.

Painters were more pragmatic than this theological program. They were in search for narration, for images to show. They wanted to please with images so that those images would be bought. And the stories of Moses were among the best known overall, so that the pictures were already familiar to the viewers. The artists were humans living in the social context of a community with its fashions and the painters had to conform to these if they were not so great as to be able to create the fashions themselves. The abstract concepts of law could not be shown in images. But the painters could show the scenes of the life of Moses and through those pictures somehow bring something of the epic of the four books to the spectators. Like the storytellers of yore the artists borrowed certain themes and illustrated these in their own ways. Only the greatest artists looked deeper and tried to perpetuate the epic meaning of a people in the making and the spiritual union between the mediator Moses and the God Yahweh. Sometimes a painter would take up a theme and then following artists would continue and expand this theme in an attempt to compare skills and visions. In this way only a limited number of themes of the life of Moses can be found and then various paintings of these same themes.

In the following pages we will go through these themes and show some of the most remarkable pictures on the grandest figure of the Old Testament.

Moses saved from the Waters

Moses saved from the Waters

Paolo Caliari called Il Veronese (1528-1588). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Lyon. Around 1581.

A new Pharaoh came in Egypt, who had heard nothing of Joseph and how the Hebrews had come to the land. He found that the Israelites had grown more numerous and stronger than the Egyptians so that they had become a danger for the state. He tried to diminish the children of Israel by appealing to the Hebrew midwives to kill the male new-borns. The scheme did not work out, so finally Pharaoh gave the command to his own people to throw every newborn boy of Israel into the river but to let the girls live.

A woman of the tribe of Levi, who had married a man of Levi, conceived and hid her boy. When she could hide him no longer, she put him in a papyrus basket that she had coated with bitumen and pitch and she laid the basket among the reeds at the river's edge. The boy's sister looked from a distance.

Pharaoh's daughter bathed in the river and she noticed the basket among the reeds. She knew it was a Hebrew boy, but she felt sorry for it. She told one of her maids to take the child away and to nurse it. When the child grew up, Pharaoh's daughter took the boy to her, treated him like a son and called him Moses because she drew him out of the waters.^{G38}

Paolo Veronese was not the first artist to make a painting on the theme of 'Moses saved from the waters of the Nile'. But his picture was best known and copied many times. We show a work of his that is currently in the Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon. Veronese made other pictures of this theme. These are now in the Prado of Madrid and in the Gemäldegalerie of Dresden.

Paolo Caliari was born in Verona and hence called Veronese but he was one of the major artists of Venice in the sixteenth century. Venice was still very wealthy then. Though the political power of the republic dwindled, trade was still very profitable and the previously accumulated capital continued to create surplus value. The Venetians poured some of their considerable income back into the embellishment of their town. The presence of the Venetians in the Mediterranean was diminishing but the magnificence of the town and its court of nobles was still remarkable and contributed now to its reputation of grandeur. Veronese painted for the Venetian courts of wealthy families that by their richness had become noble names. Paolo Veronese was with Jacopo Tintoretto the prime decorator of Venice. His courtly manners, his abilities to enhance the illusion of ever more grandeur pleased enormously. More than any other painter Veronese came to impersonate the splendour of Venice.

Paolo Veronese's 'Moses saved from the Waters' is one of the finest examples of his art. Veronese did not paint the picture in his usual style of grand monuments and scenes filled with tens of figures. His subject did not permit such scenes. Veronese made a more intimate image, but one in which still the magnificence of a Venetian court was made very obvious. He was over fifty years old and maybe he had a longing for less grand but more sophisticated pictures. Therefore Veronese's Moses scene is not set in a palace but as the story of the Bible tells, on the banks of a river. Of course, such a river scene could appeal to the Venetians who lived off the water. This was a very Venetian theme. Only the name already of Veronese's picture must have appealed to the Venetians, who had found their lagoon and the mound in the Adriatic as Moses' basket among the reeds. And Veronese set the scene in a Venetian court, not in Egypt.

The scene shows exactly the moment when a courtly lady finds the baby. The daughter of the noble house stands in all the splendour of her wealthy robes. She wears a white dress that catches all the light. She forms the central part of the theme and she is the focus of first attention but she stands somewhat to the left. In order to balance the scene Veronese painted a guard in a reclining poise on the right. Behind the lady he painted two slender trees and the two high double lines of these trees are also symmetrically

answered by the lines of another tree on the right and by the lance of the guard. This brings symmetrical order and balance of lines in the picture.

The white and brightly-lit gold-embroidered robe of the lady continues onto the baby Moses. The servant that puts Moses in a yellow cloth has her head exactly at the intersection of the diagonals. If one looks well one sees that Moses lays protectively in the middle of the lower triangle formed by the intersection of the diagonals. This play of diagonals is delicately suggested by the pictorial elements of the picture. Thus the slanting positions of the lady and of the guard follow the directions of the diagonal lines. And below in the picture one distinguishes also the triangle that starts at the head of the servant that holds the cloth in which Moses is gently lowered. The sides of that triangle are formed by the pink coloured robes of the courtier lady that actually holds Moses and by the dwarf of the right. A black triangle of ground opens up also in this way in the lower part of the frame, forming the foundation around which the picture is built. Finally, the standing figures are situated in the two side triangles of the frame. Veronese used the strong lines of the frame and the surfaces created by these lines to base his figures in. He applied also a rich palette of strong but warm hues and even in the coloured areas one can discern symmetries around the intersection of the diagonals.

Besides the strong structure, what strikes in the picture of 'Moses saved from the Waters' is the richness of the court scene. All figures are richly clad in brocades, in silk and in multi-coloured dresses. The ladies wear jewels and pearls. Hair is made up elaborately. This court is dedicated to grace and outward elegance. The court has time for building the elegance. Even the lances of the guards have decorative knots and seem more to be ceremonial devices than weapons. The lady of the house is accompanied by guards, by various maidservants, among whom a black girl, and by dwarfs. These are also signs of wealth. Only the very rich could afford the extravagance of exotism. The dwarf and the black servant hold hunting dogs and puppies, details that must have pleased the Venetian viewers. The standing guard on the right also looks over his shoulder, to Moses' sister who hides barely, close to the river. Details to be discovered always please viewers.

There is natural movement in the picture and all the skill of Veronese in composition is clear. Thus all eyes of the figures follow the diagonal that starts down right and goes upwards to the left upper corner, but the brightly-lit face of the lady holds our gaze. All eyes of the figures of the scene go to her face, in tense expectation because all depends on her. From her decision will depend whether the baby will be cared for or thrown back into the river. One servant on the left is already pleading and we know the happy outcome.

'Moses saved from the Waters' shows all the mature skill and splendour of Veronese's art. This was art for the rich, made by a rich man who was confident in a society of opulence. Veronese made a masterpiece of courtly grace. But of course the picture was a scene far from the grand epic meaning of the Bible. Veronese merely used the theme of Moses to create a picture that was easily recognisable by his viewers and that was an exercise in his masterly skills of structured composition and harmony of colours. The narrative that the viewers knew, the whole setting of the tale in the epic story of the Exodus stimulated the imagination far beyond the mere image. Veronese's art could be admired respectfully, but the viewers situated the picture in a much wider perspective. Veronese understood very well this potential of images of Bible stories whose content enhanced his own art. He made at least three pictures of this scene, refining his compositions and his rich views. Other painters followed his example so that we have now a whole series of pictures copied after this masterpiece of Venetian elegance.

Other paintings:

Josabeth exposing Moses to the Nile. Pierre Patel (1614-1676). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1660.
Moses saved from the Waters. Charles de la Fosse (1636-1716). The Louvre – Paris. Around 1701.
The Finding of Moses. Bartholomeus Breenbergh (1599/1600-1657). The National Gallery – London.
Moses saved from the Waters. Johann Liss (1595-1631). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lille.
Moses saved from the Waters. Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). The National Gallery of Art – Washington.

Moses saved from the Waters. Bonifacio de' Pitati (1487-1533). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

Moses saved from the Waters. Nicolas Grassi (1682-1748). Casa Rezzonico. Egidio Martini Collection. Venice.

The Exposition of Moses. Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). The Wallace Collection. – London.

The Finding of Moses. Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. National Gallery of Scotland – Edinburgh. Ca.1730.

The Finding of Moses. Paolo Caliari called Il Veronese (1528-1588). Museo del Prado – Madrid. Ca. 1580.

Moses saved from the Waters. Paolo Caliari called Il Veronese (1528-1588). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1582.

The Finding of Moses. Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639). Museo del Prado – Madrid. Ca.1630-1633.

Landscape. The Finding of Moses. Claude Gellée called Le Lorrain (1600-1682). Museo del Prado – Madrid. Ca.1637-1639.

Moses saved from the Waters. Niccolò dell'Abate. Musée du Louvre – Paris.

Moses saved from the Waters. Nicolas Poussin. Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1638 and 1648.

The Finding of Moses. Stefano Cerrotto (active around 1530). Picture Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts. Vienna. Around 1550/1560.

The Finding of Moses. Luigi Garzi (1638-1721). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

Moses rescued from the Waters. Luigi Gentile (Louis Cousin) (1604/1607-1667). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

Moses saved from the Waters. Jean-Jacques Lagrenée called the Younger (1739-1821). Musée Magnin. Dijon. Ca. 1780-1785.

Pharaoh's Daughter and her Handmaids with Moses in the reed Basket. Jan de Braij (1627-1697). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

The Daughter of Pharaoh receives Moses saved from the Waters
Francesco Cairo (1607-1665). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1645.

The Ordeal of the Fire

Moses submitted to the Ordeal of the Fire

Giorgione (Ca. 1480-1510). Gallerie degli Uffizi – Florence.

Moses stayed at the court of Pharaoh. One day, Pharaoh placed the crown of Egypt jokingly on the young boy's head. But Moses immediately threw it to the ground and he trampled on it. The courtiers of Pharaoh saw this as an omen that Moses would later overthrow Pharaoh. The courtiers proposed a test for Moses to prove the innocence of the boy and to find out whether he was a magician or not. They brought two plates to him, one containing red cherries and the other red burning coals. An angel of God guided Moses and God made Moses choose the coals. Moses put a coal in his mouth and was burned. By doing that he proved to be innocent of any intent to treason.

Part of this legend was written in Josephus' 'Jewish Antiquities'; part is later Hebrew legend. The cherries may be red rubies in alternate versions.^{G41} The legend does not come from the Bible. It may have been devised to explain the words of Moses to God when Moses implored Yahweh to choose someone else to lead the Israelites, someone who could speak well and better than he did. The story of Exodus implied for medieval scholars that Moses had a speech deficiency, not that he feared the charge and responsibility. The legend then explained that he burned his mouth while still very young. The legend is unique and Giorgione's picture is very probably the only one existing on this theme.

'Moses submitted to the Ordeal of the Fire' and a second panel of the same dimensions that must have hung or stood together, 'The Judgement of Salomon', are attributed to Giorgione. There are often difficulties of attribution of works to this artist. His students worked at pictures of the same kind and Giorgione was so strong an example that many of his students copied him frequently or worked completely in his way. Giorgione was in reality called Giorgione Barbarelli or Giorgio da Castelfranco since he was born in Castelfranco. Giorgione was a painter of Venice and he really imposed his style on generations of Venetian artists. He was probably a student of Giovanni Bellini, but he did not paint at all like his master. Giorgione introduced the warm brown-ochre tones in his pictures and taught these to his own most promising student, Tiziano Vecellio. Giorgione left the traditional Catholic themes from the New Testament for either entirely secular scenes or for themes from the Old Testament. He took Bellini's clear visions further and bathed his scenes in a diffuse, darker tone to come to poetic images of mystery and harmony with nature.

In 'Moses submitted to the Ordeal of the Fire', Giorgione showed the scene of the legend almost literally. On the left side, Pharaoh is seated on a throne. The throne is built like a stone altar and we see the antique bas-relief of ancient Roman monuments. Pharaoh's courtiers and counsellors have gathered around the king. Pharaoh's daughter holds a small nude child Moses and two courtiers present the dishes with the cherries (or rubies) and with the incandescent coals. An older courtier, the ceremony master, intently follows the scene. Behind, on the right, we find ambassadors of different countries, dressed in great variety. A Hebrew rabbi points out to Pharaoh that Moses is innocent because the child is picking the red coals. Pharaoh and his courtiers are dressed in the oriental way, maybe as Giorgione had seen Muslim and even Egyptian merchants in Venice, though not as real Egyptians were dressed in around 2000 BC.

The picture is divided in two parts. In the lower part Giorgione built a lively scene of figures. His figures are moving, talking, confronting the viewer or standing with their back to the viewer, looking sideways and upwards. Still, there is a static dignity to the scene. Above the figures Giorgione painted a landscape in rather dark tones. He was a great master in depicting nature and so testify the marvellously drawn trees and their foliage on the left. The right part of the background contains a view of a town of the Veneto and maybe a hill referring to Horeb, the mountain of God as were called several mountains where God spoke to Moses. Giorgione's painting is very typical of this master who had a great influence on Venetian art. His colours are very warm and splendidly varied. Giorgione took in the figures all the shades of yellow, brown, red, ochre, to a spare contrast of black and white. Light comes from the left, illuminates the main figures and then diffuses away into the darkness of the wood. But

the light returns higher up, against the walls and tower of the city. Giorgione was inventing the contrasts between light and dark and he applied these in the forefront scene as well as in the background. He gave the ambassadors slightly darker colours to keep attention on the main action, the child Moses and the two young courtiers who are dressed almost equally. Giorgione painted the wood in low, dark tones, as woods naturally are but he brought minute detail and realism in the foliage. Figures and nature are harmoniously together. Giovanni Bellini's interest was on the personages of his scenes; nature was a mere background even though finely detailed. Giorgione put his figures inside nature and therefore the colours of nature have to be the colours of the actors too. And yet, Giorgione knew how to compose a picture so that the extraordinary character of the legend was preserved. He also had a hang for mysterious and unusual scenes. His choice of a strange legend on Moses, though well known in the Middle Ages, testifies to this feature of his character. Other pictures proved it further.

Giorgione had a fine feeling for composition. To the right of 'Moses and the Ordeal by Fire' he thus painted a few slender, high young trees in order to take the viewer's eyes to the town against the hill and then to the tender wisps of cloud in the sky. The light on the town also makes the viewer look with interest at this detail.

The scene with the young child Moses is very vivacious although it remains a static scene. The image is intimate by its setting in a clearance of the forest. The picture 'Moses submitted to the Ordeal by Fire' is thus a picture to contemplate and ponder on. With its twin panel it was an ideal decoration for the interior of a Venetian palace. But it was a decoration that invited to reflection in moments of leisure when the people of the house had time to direct their thoughts to the Bible, away from the worldly worries of investments and trade. These were still centuries in which society cared about spirituality and in which considerable funds were devoted to pictures like this 'Moses submitted to the Ordeal of the Fire'.

Other Paintings

Moses tramples on Pharaoh's Crown. Vincenz Joseph Fischer (1719-1810). Picture Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts. Vienna. 1760.

Moses and the Daughters of Jethro

Moses and the Daughters of Jethro.

Rosso Fiorentino (1495-1540). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence.

When Moses was grown up, he knew he was not an Egyptian but a Hebrew. One day, while he was watching the forced labour of the Israelites, he saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew. Moses killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. But the matter came to light and Pharaoh tried to put Moses to death.

Moses then fled from Pharaoh and he fled into Midianite, that is Arab, territory. There Moses saw seven girls coming to draw water from a well. Some shepherds came and drove the girls away, but Moses sprang to their help. He even watered their flock. When the girls returned to their father, called in Exodus first Reuel and then Jethro, their father told his seven daughters to call Moses in and to give him to eat. Moses agreed to stay.^{G38}

Jethro gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. She gave birth to a son, whom Moses named Gershom. Moses looked after the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian.

In Rosso Fiorentino's picture Moses is a terrifying wild man. Moses has appeared among a group of strong shepherds and his volcanic energy of a berserk is wreaking havoc. A terrible force has taken power over him. This is not a gentle assertion of a gentleman entreating the intruders to leave. And there is fierce resistance. Moses grasps, hits, and delivers blows with his fists. He tears at limbs, throws his opponents hard on the ground. All faces are wrought with terror and anger. Hair stands savagely upright as of wild animals. Movement is intense.

Rosso Fiorentino showed an unusual Moses of power unleashed in a fraction of time. In order to enhance the violence of the erupting Moses, he painted a chaos of interlinked nude figures. All the figures around Moses are in different positions. One is lying with the front of his body to the air, another falls inanimate to the ground so that the powerful muscles of his back are exposed and a third cries out lying on his side. Other men are fighting. Among them and in the centre is the slaying Moses. A fighter runs to the battle with upheaved cloak. Moses' cloak also is only just tied to his waist, the pieces of cloth whirl around him. Here are antique boxers of Greece clashing into each other.

Rosso painted his whole scene in the colours of flesh, as flesh is the main theme of this picture. It is a very tactile picture, a violent ode to nudity. Nude are even the girls that have come to water their sheep. Yet, in this outburst of energy there is structure since the frame is fixed and its dimensions force discipline. Moses is in the centre; the other bodies are around him in an encircling movement. The bodies are situated symmetrically around his centre and when, like the man on the top left who is joining the scene, the symmetry is broken, another element is added such as in this case the girl on the upper right. To the right stands Zipporah and her sisters, the daughters of Jethro, the priest of Midian.

Rosso Fiorentino showed nude bodies so much that his picture is a study of male anatomy in all positions. Rosso painted young men in the full force of their age. They all have powerful muscles. Rosso uses colour to show the tense muscles and light throws shadows on the bodies. These shadows subtly delineate the muscles by the delicate shading of the masses in the same yellow-brown-ochre colour of flesh. This was an old technique of showing volume, denoted by the name of 'chiaroscuro' by the Italian painters. The bodies are areas of colour and the lines of the drawing are absent. Zipporah also is all colours, whereby she appears out of light shades.

This artist made a painting that was the anti-theses to everything that was Florentine. Rosso's figures are built of colour instead of lines. His figures are caught in an instance of violent movement whereas the Florentines preferred static dignity of peerless beauty. Rosso's bodies are nude but violently nude with strong, contorted muscles whereas the Florentines preferred idealised, graceful, intellectual men.

The masses of torsos are intertwined, in confusing linked lines and we know how the rational Florentines preferred orderliness and fixed geometry of triangles and verticals. Rosso gave preponderance to the diagonals and to slanting lines as is necessary to give an impression of movement. The diagonal that goes from the lower right to the upper left holds Moses. The other diagonal goes over the back of a fallen man to Zipporah. Finally, Rosso did not shy away from painting the men's genitals, which also the Florentine Renaissance painters were often reluctant to depict. Rosso Fiorentino added one last detail different from the pictures before him. All faces of the men are deformed, angry and determined in their rage, bewildered, and in tension as animals' faces. The faces also follow the first named diagonal only.

The faces in Rosso Fiorentino's painting of 'Moses defending the Daughters of Jethro' are really the faces of madmen, weird and wild. Rosso had already been remarked in Florence for his strange faces. With this aspect also he shocked the Florentines. He had made for instance an altarpiece for Florence's Ognissanti Church. This was a scene of the Virgin Mary with saints around her. According to Giorgio Vasari, Leonardo Buonaseo who commissioned the picture was not at all pleased because the saints resembled demons.^{G46} Rosso had a hang for the bizarre and fantastic, even though he could paint marvellously inspired portraits of peerless figures of beauty, as other of his works prove.

The 'Moses defending the Daughters of Jethro' is a painting that contains in all the chaos of its movement also strong structure. Rosso formed a pyramid and triangle in Moses, standing with wide open legs towards the base of the frame Zipporah thrones above all the movement like the statue of a Venus, in a moment of surprise but apparently transfixed at the sudden violence.

Rosso Fiorentino was in fact Giovanni Battista di Jacopo di Guasparre but he had flowing red hair so he was called the 'Red One' or Rosso. He was born in Florence, but he passed most of his life outside his native town so he was called Fiorentino, the one from Florence. He was a student of Andrea del Sarto, the quiet proficient worker of Florence who painted all in delicacy and beauty. The seed of a new art had touched Rosso.

Rosso had seen in 1505 Michelangelo's cartoons of a fresco destined for the Great Hall of Florence's Signoria, called the 'The Bathers'. Michelangelo had proposed to the Lords of Florence to paint this fresco in a contest with Leonardo da Vinci. The Signoria before had asked Leonardo to make a scene of the Battle of Anghiari in the Great Hall, on one of the walls. Michelangelo and Leonardo were not on the best of terms then. The two artists were competitors too and Michelangelo might have been piqued at the honour give by his beloved Florentines to Leonardo da Vinci. Michelangelo asked for the opposing wall. The Signoria accepted. Michelangelo thus had an idea for another battle between the Florentines and the Pisans, the Battle of Cascina. When his cartoons were finished in 1505 Michelangelo exhibited them in the Dyers' Hall. Many painters came to see it, among whom the young Raphael and Andrea del Sarto. It must have exerted a very strong influence also on Rosso, for it showed a scene in which the nude Florentine soldiers were bathing on a hot summer day in the Arno River before the battle. It must also have been a very dynamic scene for Michelangelo chose to depict the moment when Donati called out to Captain Malatesta that the Pisans were attacking by surprise.

Michelangelo never realised his fresco in the Great Hall. A catastrophe happened to Leonardo's 'Battle of Anghiari. Leonardo had once more experimented. He had discovered a new procedure in fresco technique, in which he used a wax but also in which he had to warm up the paint so that it took in the lime. But Leonardo had to warm up too much below for the heath to reach the top of the fresco, so the wax melted. The paint drooped from the wall.^{G28} Seeing so much artists' misery, Michelangelo refused to continue with his own design.

But Michelangelo had exhibited his cartoons and that was enough to create a new style. He had followers such as Rosso Fiorentino. Together with other new elements created by Jacopo Pontormo, this new style is now called Mannerism.

Rosso Fiorentino left Florence in 1523. He went to Rome. Vasari tells in his 'Lives of the Artists' that he had not much success in Florence. No wonder when one sees how much he painted in every mode that was alien to the Florentines. Vasari also told that Rosso painted a 'Moses slaying the Egyptians', a more appropriate title than our 'Moses defending the Daughters of Jethro', for a Florentine called Giovanni Bandini. Still, the work may have been made in Rome the same year, even if it was delivered to Florence and afterwards landed in the Medici collection.

Giorgio Vasari told that Rosso also did not make much good work in Rome. Rosso Fiorentino did not work for long in Rome. He might have stayed longer but he had a bad experience in Rome that shook him terribly. The year 1526 was the year when the German hireling soldiers of Emperor Charles V sacked Rome. Some artists like Il Parmigianino were spared, but Rosso was not treated well. While the Pope and many of his court like Benvenuto Cellini hid in the Castle Sant'Angelo, Rosso was taken prisoner by the Germans and treated very badly. He did not want to stay in Rome after that and started on a long travel without real aim in the north of Italy. Vasari tells that he went to Perugia, then to Borgo San Sepolcro, to Arezzo and finally to Venice. In Venice he stayed with the writer Pietro Aretino. He made a drawing for Aretino and apparently the two, who had equally courtier's blood in them, could well agree. Vasari tells that Rosso made a drawing of 'Mars asleep with Venus' for Aretino and we know how flattered Pietro Aretino could be with gifts of art. It may have been Aretino who pointed out King Francis I of France to Rosso. Aretino knew well Francis and had received already gifts from the king. Rosso left for France.

King Francis was building a new castle near Paris. This was the Palace of Fontainebleau, the architect of which was the Frenchman Gilles Le Breton. Rosso Fiorentino pleased at the court. Vasari wrote that our artist was tall, very handsome, with a grave way of speaking. He was gracious, a very good musician and he had a splendid grasp of philosophy.^{G46} His outstanding, fantastic imagination, grandeur of composition and poetry of colours, his daring stamina and bravura were exactly what the French king, who desperately wanted to outclass the German Emperor Charles V, needed. Rosso Fiorentino painted many decorations for Fontainebleau in an ornamental style that can still be admired in Francis' great hall of the palace. But much of what Rosso had painted was torn down after his death in 1540. Another artist who was also an architect demolished whole existing sections of Fontainebleau in an effort to enlarge and modify the palace. Francesco Primaticcio, who was much a competitor of Rosso Fiorentino at the court of Francis I, did this.

If Rosso had not won much praise in Florence and Rome, he seduced Paris. A group of painters revolved around him and also around Primaticcio, so much that these painters are now called 'The School of Fontainebleau'. Giorgio Vasari mentions the names of the artists who worked at Fontainebleau. These were Lorenzo Naldino and Bartolommeo Miniati of Florence, masters Simone and Claudio of Paris, Il Primaticcio and Rosso, Primaticcio's pupil and companion Nicolo dell'Abate, Francesco di Pellegrino, Lorenzo Piccardo, Domenico del Barbieri, Luca Penni, Leonardo Fiammingo, Francesco Caccianimicci and Giovanni Battista da Bagnacavallo. Francis I called other artists to his court such as Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci (who died in Francis' castle at Amboise near the Loire River) and the Florentine jeweller Benvenuto Cellini. Cellini wrote a marvellous autobiography in which he tells of his years in Paris and of Francis I. Cellini did not describe Rosso in such nice terms as Vasari.

We recognise in Rosso Fiorentino's picture 'Moses defending the Daughters of Jethro' a picture of innovation and free revolt against established Florentine tastes. Together with Michelangelo, various painters of Florence drew the technique of representation further on. With Rosso we are far of Pietro Perugino's and Sandro Botticelli's refined grace of sacred art. Power and violence entered painting.

Other paintings:

Moses protects the Daughters of Jethro. Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734. Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. Ca. 1720.

Moses drives away the Shepherds. Cesare Dandini (1596-1656). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. 1635/1645.

Moses in the Burning Bush

Moses and the burning Bush

Nicolas Froment (ca.1430-ca.1485). Cathédrale Saint-Sauveur – Aix en Provence. 1475-1476.

While Moses stayed with Jethro, Pharaoh died. God heard the call of distress of Israel and he remembered the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. One day, Moses led his flock to the far side of the desert, to a place called Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of God appeared to Moses, in a flame that blazed from the middle of a bush. The blaze however did not consume the bush. ^{G38}

God called to Moses from the middle of the bush. He told him to come nearer and to take off his sandals for the place where he was standing was holy ground. Then the voice said, 'I am the God of your ancestors.' Moses covered his face for he was afraid to look at God. Yahweh then said that he had seen the misery of Israel and had come down to bring them out of Egypt to a country rich with milk and honey, to Canaan. God told Moses, 'So now I am sending you to Pharaoh, for you to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.' ^{G38}

Moses asked in whose name he had to tell the Israelites to follow him and God then gave Moses again the name of 'I am', Yahweh. God told, 'This is my name for all time, and thus I am to be invoked for all generations to come.'

God continued to tell he was well that aware Pharaoh would refuse to let them go unless a mighty hand compelled him. But he, Yahweh, would stretch out his arm and strike Egypt with many wonders and Israel would plunder the Egyptians. Moses then asked for wonders to convince Israel to follow him. Yahweh gave a staff to Moses. When Moses threw the staff on the ground, it turned into a snake. When Moses took it up by its tail it became a staff again. Moses also could put his hand in his tunic and when he drew it out, it was diseased. When he put his hand again in his tunic and drew it out, it was restored.

Then Moses pleaded that he was not eloquent to talk and convince the people. Yahweh answered that he would help Moses speak. When Moses still insisted for anyone else to send, Yahweh pointed to Moses' brother Aaron the Levite and said that Aaron also would speak to the people if Moses instructed Aaron what to do. Yahweh said of Aaron, 'He will be your mouthpiece and you will be as the God inspiring him.' ^{G38}

Moses went back to Jethro, asked for permission to leave, put his wife Zipporah and his son on a donkey and started back for Egypt. On the way Yahweh tried to kill Moses' son. But Zipporah circumcised the boy with a sharp flint and Yahweh let him go.

Moses and Aaron went. They gathered the elders of the Israelites and Aaron repeated everything that Yahweh had told Moses. Moses showed the sign of God and thus convinced the Israelites. They rejoiced and bowed to the ground in worship. ^{G38}

Nicolas Froment, a French painter of the fifteenth century read this text of Exodus and painted a picture of 'Moses and the Burning Bush' in 1476 for the church of the Grands-Carmes in Avignon. Nicolas Froment worked from 1448 in the French Provence for the king of that region of South-France, King René d'Anjou who was called 'Le Bon Roi René', the Good King René. René reigned over the Provence as a father in peace and tolerance so that artists flocked to his court, troubadours singing their love poetry in the 'langue d'Oc' and artists like Froment painting beautiful pictures. The picture of 'Moses and the Burning Bush' was the central panel of a triptych ordered by King René. It is a somewhat unusual painting, a very interesting one, in which as was the custom in medieval times many symbols were shown.

There are four figures in the painting: Moses, the angel of God, the Virgin Mary and the young Jesus. The Virgin appears in a burning bush, surrounded by flames. Moses' flock is nearby, guarded by a dog. The angel seems to talk to Moses and Moses, like in the Bible story, is taking off his sandals entreated to do so by the angel. The scene happened on the mountain of Horeb, God's mountain, and this mountain is indeed also drawn under the Virgin. In its various images the painting refers to the Bible and in other to a New Testament tradition and a tradition of throning Madonna's. Hence this painting is a blend of older traditions and of new, freer tendencies in art. The painting also contains many medieval symbols.

The angel is painted as a beautiful youth with wings in the traditional picture of angels that we find throughout all Gothic and the Renaissance. Yet, in the Bible the angel was fearsome and not an entity independent from Yahweh but part of Yahweh itself. The Bible talks of the 'Angel of God' as an act, an agent or part of God that talks the words of God directly. We can only wonder at when this powerful image of the concept of angel was transformed into the nice image of a peerlessly beautiful youth that we find in all European paintings. It was very difficult to paint such an agent of God. The angels were easier depicted as youth and could be shown as symbols. The angel wears a robe of which the folds are detailed in the fashion of the High Gothic. The angel wears a sceptre since it is the envoy of God, the agent or the spoken word of Yahweh. On its breast it wears a medal with a picture of Adam and Eve referring to the original sin. The eyes of the angel are directed at Moses, but the direction of its head moves to the Virgin.

There we see Jesus holding a mirror. The universe is held in a mirror by a deity, but the image in the mirror is again one of a Madonna and Child. The Bible wrote in the Book of Genesis that woman would always be set between the snake of the original sin and humankind. Jesus would expiate the original sin and Mary was considered to be the new Eve of purity. Thus Nicolas Froment put a link between the angel and Mary. The Virgin is sitting on a throne of bush. This is a bush of wild roses, which were often associated with Mary and the flowers are small but of the white colour of purity. Beneath the Virgin Mary is the mountain Horeb. But she is seated high in the airs like in pictures of her Ascension.

The Virgin holds the newborn Jesus in a white cloth. Reference here is maybe made to the Revelation of John, who saw as written in his book a woman robed with the sun standing on the moon and with on her head a crown of twelve stars. In that vision the woman is in labours and in Nicolas Froment's picture also Jesus is a newborn baby. The reference to the vision of Saint John the Evangelist is not so obvious, but contrary to the Bible story Nicolas Froment represented the burning bush and the Virgin as a vision in the sky, and thus conforming to John's vision.

Under the Virgin, down mountain Horeb, lies a garden, and a spring in a cave pours out water. The spring of water is also a symbol of the Virgin since it is an image of the Song of Songs very often associated with Mary. The water turns into a small river that is meandering away from the Mountain of Horeb. This is the purifying water. The sinuous lines of the river also may signify the road to God, to Horeb, the road that pilgrims and humans must take to reach salvation.

The flock of sheep at Moses' feet is mentioned in the Bible since Moses was herding the animals of his father-in-law Jethro. But the lambs also refer to the Passion of Jesus since he was often called the 'Lamb of God', sacrificed for the redemption of Israel. The sheep were often animals used in sacrifices by the Israelites. Among the sheep is one black, with fiery glowing eyes, maybe a reference again to the sin or evil hidden among the pious. The black sheep can be a symbol of the animal loaded with the sins of Israel that was sent into the desert. But most obviously we can also see the apostles in the herd, whereby the black sheep could represent Judas. Judas was the traitor with the black soul of evil. The sheep are fourteen however, and this is not exactly the right number even though there are fifteen animals and that could mean the twelve apostles plus the three Evangelists since the fourth Evangelist, John, was also an apostle. Indeed, three sheep wear horns maybe to indicate their difference from the rest of the flock. Moses was often compared to Saint Peter, who led the apostles. The dog is close to Moses, a symbol of loyalty, maybe like Saint Peter who was loyal to the church so that the dog could represent Peter, so close as it remains to Moses. Moreover the animal also wears a leash of fierce spikes, a symbol of protection. The animal will defend faith, as Saint Peter once fought for Jesus and was the first defender of the church. Moses wears a heavy grey beard although this scene happened rather early in his life. But Saint Peter is usually depicted as an elder and wise man. Moses was often a reference to Saint Peter.

Moses protects his eyes from the light of the burning bush, exactly as in the Bible story. Nicolas Froment had of course read and read again the Book of Exodus and he remembered small details like this one for his painting.

In the far background Nicolas Froment painted a town that must represent Jerusalem even if it may be a landscape of Avignon with its famous bridge over the river Rhône clearly visible on its right. Wasn't Avignon for a while the New Jerusalem, where the Popes lived? The landscape unfolds marvellously in the background, as well to the left as to the right. It is bathed in full light of a sun rising on the left just above the horizon. This is a dawn scene.

Nicolas Froment painted a panel filled with scenes, images, and symbols of the Old and New Testament and of medieval mystical tradition. All figures, landscapes and animals are shown in great detail. The show is always stolen in such Gothic pictures however by the hanging folds of the robes, as learnt by the Byzantine very old images of the Madonna and the angels in the damp-fold style. This style is here transformed in the sophisticated complexity of the High Gothic. Nicolas Froment proved his skills in that way as well in the cloaks of Moses as of the angel, and as of course in the splendid cloak around the Virgin.

Froment used subtle colour hues in a natural manner. Moses and the angel have in a symmetric way the same brown cloak, which is also the colour of the centrepiece, mountain Horeb. The sky is always clearer near the horizon as Froment painted it, and then upwards it grows dark into the cosmos. This is called aerial perspective and Froment knew this technique well. The uppermost part of the picture is indeed coloured black and therefore Froment must have decided also to dress the Virgin in black or dark grey instead of in her usual colours of bright red and blue. The Virgin may seem to us in the black colours of the night against which appear the flames of the burning bush. The young Jesus appears very strong in his pale colours against the background of the Virgin's dress so that he draws attention. The colours of the other figures, angel and Moses, are bright as in pure Gothic images, in full light with very skilful play of shadows to create volume in the figures. The colours are warm, well balanced in their areas and joyful to the eye.

The composition of the painting also is cleverly organised in an obvious way. The angel and Moses open a 'V' in the middle of the painting, in which we then find mount Horeb and the Virgin. The lower part and the upper part are balanced with Horeb in between. In the middle of the picture the horizontal lines of the landscape background contrast with the verticals of the trees out of which grows the rose bush. There is a definite vertical élan in this picture, a direction of higher aspiration, as in many Gothic pictures.

The final remark on this picture must go to the marvel of details of figures and nature that Nicolas Froment worked into his painting. For instance we astonish at the patience and dedication with which the artist worked on the images of the sheep and of the dog, and also on the figures of the angel, Moses and the Madonna in general. The face of Moses, its expression with all wrinkles and lines shown in direct realism is a masterpiece in its own right. Details like this elevate Nicolas Froment's painting far above what could be non-ambitious local works of art. The 'Moses and the Burning Bush' was a royal commission to a master artist. Nicolas Froment took the order very seriously and indeed delivered a masterpiece of art and of intellect as could compete with the best Italian and Flemish pictures. The panel is a very rare, strange and beautiful work of Gothic. It is admirable in its colours, composition and love for detail. Froment's painterly skills are obvious and marvellous. His intelligence is a compliment to the intelligence of the viewer. The subject Froment chose was unusual for medieval Gothic art or even for the Renaissance in which scenes of the Old Testament are rather seldom. We remark that even for Froment showing only a picture of Moses was difficult. So maybe for that reason he modified the scene of the burning bush into a popular scene of devotion to the Madonna, a theme that was far better known and in line with the name of the church for which the panel was made. This combination of themes is rare.

All these qualities make of the picture a marvellous piece of art that deserves for Nicolas Froment to be part of the group of very greatest artists of his era.

Other paintings:

The Burning Bush. God tells Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Francisco Collantes. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1634.

Moses before the Burning Bush. Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1960-1966.

Moses and the Burning Bush. Gaspare Diziani (1689-1767). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.

The eternal Father appears to Moses. Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1577/1578.

The Passage of the Red Sea

Pharaoh and his Host overwhelmed in the Red Sea

Ludovico Mazolino (ca. 1481-1530). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin.

The Passage of the Red Sea

Cosimo Rosselli. Palazzo del Vaticano, Cappella Sistina – Rome.

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and told him that their God Yahweh had said, 'Let my people go, so that they can hold a feast in my honour in the desert'. But Pharaoh did not know Yahweh, and Pharaoh's magicians repeated the tricks that Moses showed.

Yahweh then sent ten plagues to Egypt. First the water turned into blood, then the river swarmed with frogs; the dust of the earth became mosquitoes that settled on man and beast. Later still horseflies swarmed, the Egyptian livestock but not the livestock of the Israelites died and when Moses threw a handful of root in the air, boils broke out into sores on man and beast throughout the whole of Egypt. The seventh plague was hail that fell when Moses stretched out his hand. Then locusts invaded Egypt in great swarms. But Yahweh made Pharaoh stubborn and he refused to let them go. Yahweh then said to Moses that he would inflict one more plague on Pharaoh, after which the king surely would let Israel go away. Yahweh said that at midnight he would pass through Egypt and all the Egyptian first-born would die, from the first-born of Pharaoh, heir to his throne, to the first-born of the slave-girl at the mill and all the first-born of the livestock. God then installed the feast of Passover for the Hebrews. At midnight the tenth plague struck Egypt.^{G38}

It was still dark when Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and told them, 'Leave my subjects, you and the Israelites. Go and worship Yahweh as you have asked. Take your flocks and herds and go. And bless me too!' The Israelites did as Yahweh had told them, asked the Egyptians for silver and golden jewellery, and clothing. Thus the frightened Egyptians were plundered as Yahweh had predicted. Then the Israelites left Rameses. They were about six hundred thousand on the march. The Israelites had stayed in Egypt four hundred and thirty years. Moses had taken with him the bones of Joseph, since Joseph had made the Israelites swear a solemn oath to be buried in Canaan.^{G38}

The Israelites left Egypt fully armed, but Yahweh did not lead the people on the road to the Philistine's territory but in a roundabout way through the desert of the Sea of Reeds.

When Pharaoh King of Egypt was told that the people had fled, he and his officials changed their attitude towards the Israelites. Pharaoh had his chariot harnessed and set out with his troops among which were six hundred of the best chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers in each. He chased the Israelites. Pharaoh caught up with Moses near Pi-Hahiroth, facing Baal-Zephon. Then the angel of God, who had preceded until then the army of Israel, changed position and followed them. The pillar of cloud thus came between the armies of Israel and Egypt. The cloud was dark and the night passed without one army nearing the other. Then Moses stretched out his hand and Yahweh parted the waters with a strong wind so that the Israelites went on dry ground right through the Sea of Reeds, with walls of water on either side of them. In the meantime the cloud threw the Egyptian army into confusion and clogged their chariot wheels. When the Egyptians also drove through the open ground in the sea, Yahweh told Moses to stretch out his hand again. And as day broke, the sea returned to its bed. Yahweh overthrew the Egyptians in the middle of the sea and Pharaoh's entire army drowned.^{G38}

Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead in the seashore. They put their faith in Moses and in Yahweh and sang a song of victory. Miriam, Aaron's sister and a prophetess took up a tambourine and all the women followed the dancing.

Moses led Israel away from the Sea of Reeds and into the desert of Shur.

The passage over the Red Sea was a welcome theme for painters, whereas the plagues of Egypt though spectacular were less so. Lodovico Mazzolino made a striking picture of the scene in 1521. As example he took a picture of the same theme in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican.

Mazzolino was a painter of Ferrara. We hear often of the painters of Florence, Siena, Rome, Venice and Bologna. But also in the town of Ferrara that lay in the Papal States existed a tradition of successive painters that had studied with each other, and thus formed a School of Ferrara. One of the best known painters of Ferrara was Cosimo Tura. This was the master of Lorenzo Costa, whose student was our Lodovico Mazzolino. Other artists of Ferrara were Ercole de' Roberti, Garofalo and Dosso Dossi. The Ferrarese School preferred strong lines and areas of monochrome light colours.

This style can easily be recognised in Lodovico Mazzolino's picture of the 'Passage through the Red Sea'. Mazzolino presented his scene at the moment that Pharaoh and his army are overwhelmed in the sea. Numerous small figures are caught in the waves. Pharaoh is the only one standing high on a drowning horse so that he almost jumps in the air to desperately avoid being drowned too. Mazzolino had no idea how Egyptian soldiers could have been dressed in Moses' time so he more or less depicted the figures as Muslims with turbans, white broad trousers and harnesses of leather. Pharaoh has a long beard as a Muslim sultan. Mazzolino may have recalled these details from the picture in the Sistine Chapel.

There is something touchingly naïve in the way Mazzolino painted all the small figures in various attitudes full of movement. Moses and the Hebrews stand on the bank of the Sea of reeds, to the right. Mazzolino inverted this composition when we compare it to the picture of the Sistine Chapel. Moses stretches out his arm and he holds the staff that Yahweh gave him to perform his miracles. Aaron, the future first priest of Israel can be seen down left, in front of the censers or vases of his new position. On the bank too Mazzolino painted many figures in a very great variety. There are men, women and children. Some are facing the spectators and others are turning their backs. The people of Israel are safe on the dry bank and they are already discussing their good luck, apparently unconcerned with the Egyptians that are drowning next to them. Moses stretches out his arm, but Yahweh above in the clouds commands the waters and the angel of God frightens and fights Pharaoh's army.

Lodovico Mazzolino's painting is not ambitious. The artist's aim was not to show a scene of psychological power. But the great number of figures, almost all painted in a stylised deliberately two-dimensional flat way, was something quite unusual in the Italian Renaissance art. Mazzolino linked with this picture to medieval miniatures. The painting charms by its vivacity of colours and multitude of lines, whereas nice details such as the landscape on the right and the downpouring waters make the delight of the observant viewer.

The entire picture is in a uniform light. Mazzolino used brilliant colours but mostly his white and browns deliver battle in the nervous, complex composition as the armies of Moses and Pharaoh would have clashed. One must admire all the details of the figures.

Mazzolino painted his picture of the passage of the Sea of Reeds after the example in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican. In the fresco of Cosimo Rosselli, the scene is very similar to Mazzolino's. Here also Pharaoh's army is seen in disarray in the middle of the waters and a very similar Pharaoh is drowning as an oriental satrap. Moses and the people are standing on the bank. Miriam has her musical instrument near her, but in Rosselli's picture it is more a harp than a tambourine.

Remarkable in Cosimo Rosselli's picture is the strange image of a Greek column standing in the sea between Pharaoh's army and the Israelites. It is an incongruous, mystical image. But the column refers directly to the Bible story since it is told that a pillar of cloud showed the way to the Israelites during the day and a pillar of fire during the night. When Pharaoh's army came in sight of the Israelites, the pillar positioned itself between Pharaoh and the Israelites. Cosimo Rosselli read the Bible story with good attention and so he placed instead of a pillar of cloud a Greek column in the centre of the sea.

We see thereby art history in the making, for the symbol of the pillar is lacking in Mazzolino's painting. There is neither column nor a pillar in his scene. Mazzolino may have found the symbol unnatural for his own picture or he may not have understood what the column stood for in the picture

of the Sistine chapel and hence omitted it in his own picture. Yet this symbol is very old. There is a fresco in the nave of the church of the abbey of Saint Savin in France, dating from the second half of the eleventh century that also contains a column. One of the frescoes of the Moses scenes shows how the people of Israel march forward, guided by a pillar of fire. The painters of Saint Savin showed a column, though only drawn by parallel vertical lines and a different colour, and with black flames around it. In this fresco Moses leads the people protected and blessed by a divine hand, whereas an angel of God follows the people. The pillar or column of God thus was used in the Sistine Chapel painting, but it was a Bible image that was used and painted in Western Europe already at least three hundred years before.

What could the pillar of cloud have been? Modern scholars have linked it to the explosion of the volcano on the Greek Island of Santorini. The explosion may have happened about 1200 BC, at the time of the Exodus. The volcano itself could not be seen from Egypt as it lay behind the horizon, but the column of smoke went high in the skies and could have taken the form of a high column. When the volcano finally exploded, a tidal wave ran through the Mediterranean. This tidal wave may at first have sucked away water from the Nile Delta and from the marshes of the Sea of Reeds near the Mediterranean, then flooded the land again. The Bible indeed states not that Moses passed the Red Sea, but the Sea of Reeds, and that name indicates marshland or shallow lakes close to the Mediterranean, part of the vast Nile Delta. Marshes lay around Rameses, the newly built capital of Egypt, which afterwards fell in disuse again and of which now only ruins remain in Eastern Egypt.

Other paintings:

The Passage of the Red Sea. Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1955.

Exodus. Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1952-1966.

The Pillar of Fire. Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1577/1578.

The Crossing of the Red Sea. Andrea Donducci (1575-1655). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome.

The Jews cross the Red Sea. Jan Brueghel de Velours (1568-1625). Galleria Sabauda. Turin.

Miriam. Anselm Feuerbach (1829-1880). Nationalgalerie. Berlin. 1862.

The Crossing of the Red Sea

Piero di Giovanni Bonaccorsi called Perino del Vaga (1501-1547). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1522.

The Gathering of the Manna

The Gathering of the Manna

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art - Sarasota. Ca.1625.

The Israelites went through the desert of Shur to Elem. From there they entered the desert of Sin, lying between Elim and Sinai. This was on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left Egypt. The Israelites had nothing to eat. They feared starvation. But God through Moses promised to provide for them. In the evening after several days quails flew in and covered the camp. When the dew lifted the next morning, the surface of the desert was covered with something fine and granular. It was small and round, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. The House of Israel called this man-hu or manna, meaning 'what is it'? It was the edible secretion of the insects. Moses told the people to collect it and eat this manna as much as he or she needed. Yahweh told not to keep it until the following day. If it was kept longer than one day it bred maggots and smelt badly. Only when Moses told the day before the Sabbath to collect it and keep it until the next day, for on the Sabbath God sent no manna, only then the heavenly dew stayed edible. It was like coriander seed. It was white and its taste was like that of wafers made with honey. The Israelites ate manna all the time they stayed in the desert and until they reached inhabited country.^{G38}

The picture of the 'Gathering of the Manna' by Peter Paul Rubens in the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art is a cartoon for a tapestry, even if it is an oil painting that could be hung for decoration as well as a tapestry. The Archduchess Isabella, Governess of Flanders and Brabant ordered twenty designs of cartoons called generally 'The Apotheosis of the Eucharist' around 1625 from Rubens. The tapestries were made in Brussels, woven in 1625 to 1628 in the workshops of two of the best Brussels weavers, Jan Raes and Jacob Geubels. They were ready three years later and the Archduchess Isabella donated the eleven major scenes to the Carmelite Convent of Las Descalzas Reales in Madrid. The cartoons were put on the back of the tapestries for weaving, so the scenes of the oil painting are seen in reverse.

Rubens finally made four scenes from the Old Testament, and two scenes of victories of religion over paganism and heresy. Two further scenes are from the New Testament and Rubens also made three triumphal processions. Rubens worked occasionally for cartoons of tapestries. He had designed the 'Story of Decius Mus' (now in the Palacio Real in Madrid) around 1616 and the 'Story of Constantine' between 1622 and 1626 (The Philadelphia Museum of Art). Still later, in 1630-1635, he made cartoons for the 'Story of Achilles' woven for a Milanese merchant living in Antwerp between 1649 and 1669 (five of these tapestries are in the Musée du Cinquantenaire of Brussels).^{G70}

In the 'Apotheosis of the Eucharist' Rubens enhanced the effect of decoration and of grandeur by treating his scenes as tapestries within tapestries, hung in an architectural framework of columns. Thereby he created an illusion that even more stresses the imaginative character of the scenes. The paintings themselves hung first at least partly in the Archduchess' palace in Brussels. Six cartoons were sent to the church of Las Descalzas Reales in Leoches near Madrid in 1648 and these were brought to England in 1808. John Ringling bought four cartoons, among which the 'Gathering of the Manna', from the estate of the Duke of Westminster in 1925. Peter Paul Rubens had a large workshop in Antwerp with an enormous output, so little is known of just how much he painted these cartoons himself. But the style and design is obviously his own.

The 'Gathering of the Manna' is a very Baroque and a very true Rubens design. Since manna was sent from heaven, the Israelites hold their baskets high. Moses on the right calls on God to send down the manna by which the people could survive. On the left is a woman with child, maybe Zipporah and Gershom. In the central scene are four figures. One is crouching to gather manna from the ground; one is of middle height and two hold a basket above their heads in a frantic movement of hope. Typical for Rubens and Baroque are the movements of all the figures, the curved lines of the clothes and the sinuous lines of the whole scene. Rubens used broad and full, generous colours and of course he

showed voluptuous nudity, as was almost his proper brand. He added sumptuous decoration in the heavily worked-out columns and the way the tapestry of the background is hung. Rubens brought all the paraphernalia of Baroque together.

Moses and Zipporah are seen standing out of the background tapestry; the other four figures form part of that background. Thus we have a tapestry in a tapestry, an illusion in a painting that is always in itself an illusion since only a representation of reality. The cartoon scene is decorative and exaggerated in figures and theatrical gestures. We forget then that the scene is eminently spiritual. The Eucharist was the living Jesus, who was God come down to earth. Jesus was the spiritual bread of the Eucharist and also literally present in the host of the Eucharist. In the same way, Yahweh sent his manna, his bread down for the Israelites to eat. The manna was as much material food as spiritual solace. The 'Gathering of the Manna' was an illustration of one of the main themes of the 'Apotheosis of the Eucharist', not chosen by accident.

Rubens' painting was an ode, a triumphal glorification of the Eucharist and of the Catholic Church, shown in all grandeur and pomp as the Counter-Reformation could deliver at its best in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Rubens tried to convince the people by his grand pictures that the true Roman Catholic Church was the only true church and that this truth was prevailing in the splendour of Jesus. His style of Baroque painting could not be grandiose, as Rubens himself was. He was a man of the world, who moved among kings. He was an ambassador, a courtier but also an independent and free-minded lord who must have radiated with confidence in the world and in his convictions. His convictions were for the Catholic faith, as Antwerp had remained Catholic. So much is clear from the very many pictures he made for Catholic kings. But as we remarked in the 'Gathering of the Manna', this did not mean that he remained shallow. He represented very spiritual themes in the grandest, most resplendent way possible.

Other paintings:

The Israelites harvest the Manna. Nicolas Poussin (1594-1666). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1637-1639.

The Miracle of the Manna. Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1577.

Gathering the Manna. Diego Polo (ca. 1610-1665). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid.

The Israelites gathering Manna. Maerten de Vos (1532-1603). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Ca. 1560.

Moses strikes Water from the Rock

Moses strikes Water out of the Rock

Lucas van Leyden (1494-1533). Museum of Fine Arts – Boston.

When the Israelites left the desert of Sin, they pitched camp at Rephidim. There was no water for the people to drink. Yahweh told Moses to take his staff with which he had already struck the river, and go to the rock at Horeb. Moses struck the rock and water flew out for the people to drink. He gave the place the names Massah and Meribah. This episode of the Exodus is repeated in the Book of Numbers. In that story, the Israelites settled at Kadesh in the desert of Zin. Miriam died and was buried there. The Israelites blamed Moses for having brought them to a place without water. Moses and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting, threw themselves on their faces and spoke to the glory of Yahweh. Yahweh told Moses to take a branch, and in full view of the Israelites to order the rock to release its water. Moses did as Yahweh had commanded. He assembled the people in front of the rock, raised his hand and struck the rock twice with branch. Water gushed out of the rock in abundance.^{G38}

The story of Moses and the water in the desert was important for what happened afterwards. Yahweh accused Moses and Aaron not to have believed that Yahweh could assert his holiness in front of the Israelites. Yahweh told Moses and Aaron that they would not lead the Israelites into Canaan. This happened at Meribah.

The bible story does not tell exactly why Moses doubted and Yahweh's punishment comes abruptly, as a surprise in the Bible narrative. Yet, the punishment and blame of Moses and Aaron were very real.

An entirely different picture from Rubens' 'Gathering of the Manna' is the 'Moses strikes Water from the Rock' of Lucas van Leyden. Rubens was a flamboyant Brabander, van Leyden a stricter Hollander.

Lucas van Leyden was born in 1494, almost a hundred years before Rubens, in the town of Leiden of the Netherlands, from which he received the name. He died already in 1533. Little is known of his life but he seems to have been a child prodigy since he already engraved at merely fifteen years old. We know he was in Antwerp, Rubens' town, in 1521 because Dürer mentions him there in the diary of his travels in the Netherlands. We also know that Lucas van Leyden knew well Jan Gossaert called Mabuse, an artist who originated from the town of Maubeuge in what is now the north of France. Lucas van Leyden and Jan Gossaert travelled through the Netherlands together in 1527. Lucas' masters were his father, who was also a painter of Leiden, and Cornelis Engelbrechtsz. Van Leyden died young; his art did not mature. He was not a court painter, in all so different from Rubens. He did not really profile himself as a religious painter and he worked in a period when Dutch painters, Lucas in the first place, were looking for a new kind of pictures that rooted better in their character. Holland was evolving slowly to a middle class burgher society that for the first time in its history could hope for more welfare from its overseas trade. Van Leyden did not follow Gossaert and others in their italianising Renaissance, Classicist scenes. He was one of the precursors of the genre art of the Netherlands.

Van Leyden was a marvellous engraver. He had a very keen eye for detail and an unrivalled skill with the engraver's pen. But he was a painter with more skill than a painter endowed with powerful talent of individual imagination and force. He liked to engrave many figures in one scene and he excelled in this. Most of his paintings therefore also show many figures, to such a point that often his main scenes are lost in a crowd of personages. The same is the case with the 'Moses strikes Water from the Rock'. The viewer has to search for Moses to discern him in the scene. In fact, Moses has already struck the rock and water is flowing from it. All the people have come to drink, to fill and take forth pots and vases filled with the precious liquid. Moses stands only to the right, not in the centre of the picture. The act is finished; Moses is almost only like any other figure in the picture. He is watching the scene flanked on his right (our left) by the priest Aaron and on his left by Joshua, his general. Moses wears his long, elaborated staff and he looks more like a magician with his forked beard than the powerful leader. The people follow Moses like courtiers. People are sitting near the water, chatting, explaining what their magician has accomplished as his latest trick. On the left of the canvas men and women are carrying away the water to the camp.

Van Leyden used a composition by filling the lower triangles made by the diagonals of the frame. In the triangle made by the base and the diagonal that runs from the lower left to the upper right, he positioned most of the people. In the other base triangle, under or around the other diagonal, Van Leyden placed Moses and his court. The result is an open 'V' structure in which the artist pictured mount Horeb and two figures, two men of which one wears a barrel and who are discussing the events with two other, lower figures. The scene is very lively, but then so lively that all figures seem to have their own life and pre-occupation, independent of the main act and theme of the picture. This also is typical for the few paintings of large scenes we still have of Van Leyden. This artist was more interested in small separate compositions than in the power of expression of his theme and the unity of figures around his theme. Remark how van Leyden, like Froment, gave a dominant position to Mount Horeb. This was a characteristic of many pictures of scenes of Moses. The reason is obvious. Mountains called Horeb, which means simply 'Mountain of God', played important roles in Moses' life stories in several instances. God spoke to Moses often on mountains.

Lucas Van Leyden did not paint the miraculous and powerful deed of the great leader Moses. Moses is not caught at the moment of striking out the water. We are too late, the miracle is over, and we missed the very theme. And van Leyden could indeed have put Moses and Aaron in a secondary, awkward position since they doubted water would flow from the rock. But these are also not feelings we can find on their faces. As a result we have a quiet picture even though there are so many figures. Van Leyden obtained the effect of a very static, still scene even though motion is everywhere. This static general impression comes from the rigid attitudes of the very heroes of the picture, Moses and his followers. Van Leyden seems to have missed the theme in all the power of its meaning. We lack the grand spiritual breadth of the tale of the Bible that should have inspired the artist. Rubens on the other hand, brought only a few figures in his picture and yet the gestures of hope towards the heavens, all in unison and synchronous in time, in symbiosis with the theme is like a prayer sent upwards in all its effects of decoration.

One can criticise the lack of force of Lucas van Leyden. But one must admire the work of fine detail of the figures and the way this artist depicted nature in the background, the fine colours and the skill with which he composed his scenes of figures. Van Leyden chose to dress most of his figures in ordinary contemporary Dutch clothes, while others are dressed in the oriental way. Thus he mixed Bible story and his own times, Bible figures and men and women of Holland. There is much to discover in his picture, but we miss the epic soul of an artist's spiritual vision. Rubens had that vision so much that he only needed to give a design to his students, quickly but with the confidence of a genius, for them to do the rest and yet make a powerful picture. Lucas van Leyden preferred the small design of figures and in doing that neglected vision and force. Genre painting would become exactly that. It would become a kind of painting not always avoided by the greatest painters, a kind we can like, but also not a kind that we can fully admire for it lacks grandeur of content.

Other paintings:

Moses makes the water flow under the rock. Gioachino Assereto (1600-1649). Museo del Prado – Madrid.

Moses strikes Water from a Rock. Jan Tassel (1608-1667). Museum Bredius – The Hague.

Moses strikes Water from a Rock. Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1960-1966.

Moses draws Water from the Rock. Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1577.

Moses draws Water from the Rock

François Perrier (1590-1650). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo dei Conservatori. Rome. 1641-1642.

Moses makes Water spring from the Rock

Andrea Donducci (1575-1655). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome.

Moses draws Water from the Rock. Jean-Baptiste-Marie Pierre (1713-1789). Musée Magnin. Dijon.

Moses strikes Water from the Rock. Charles Le Brun (1619-1690). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1648-1650.

The Tablets with the Law

Moses receives the Tables of the Law

Anonymous – Abbey of Saint Savin – Saint Savin, France. Second half of the eleventh century.

At Rephidim where the Israelites had arrived after passing the desert of Sin, the Amalekites attacked Israel. Moses asked Joshua to engage Amalek while Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Moses kept his arms raised and as long as he did that, the Hebrews had the advantage. When Moses lowered his arms because he grew tired, the Israelites had to give way. In the end, Aaron and the others had to support Moses' arms to stay up. Joshua defeated Amalek.^{G38}

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law was a Midianite priest. He had taken back Moses' wife Zipporah and Moses' two children called Gershom and Eliezer. Now he joined Moses. Jethro heard all that had happened to the Israelites. He blessed Yahweh, offered a burnt offering and Aaron and all the elders of Israel came and ate with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God. Until then Moses had spoken justice over the Israelites. But Jethro saw that Moses could not do all that alone by himself. Jethro urged Moses to appoint judges and to teach them the statutes and laws and to show them the way they ought to follow and how they ought to behave. Moses took his father-in-law's advice and did just as he had said. He chose capable men from Israel and put them in charge of the people. These acted as the people's permanent judges.

The Israelites again set out from Rephidim, three months after leaving Egypt. They reached the desert of Sinai and set up camp in the desert, facing the mountain. There, Yahweh called Moses to the mountain and he said, 'If you are really prepared to obey me and keep my covenant, you, out of all peoples, shall be my personal possession, for the whole world is mine. For me you shall be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.'^{G38}

At daybreak, two days later, there were pearls of thunder and flashes of lightning, dense cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast. In the camp, all the people trembled. Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God. Mount Sinai was entirely wrapped in smoke. Yahweh had descended in the form of fire. Then Yahweh spoke to Moses. The people of Israel were not allowed to come up the mountain. Moses climbed to the top. God then gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. He also told Moses to build an altar and burn sacrifices. Moses received instructions for the building of a sanctuary. Aaron and his sons were to be installed as priests of Israel. Yahweh thus delivered the Law of Israel to Moses. He gave to Moses the stone tablets with the Law and the commandments, written for the instruction of Israel. The tablets of stone were written by the finger of God. The glory of Yahweh stayed in the cloud that covered the mountain. Moses put all Yahweh's words in writing, built an altar at the foot of the mountain and gave the laws to the elders of the people.^{G38}

'Moses receiving the Tables of the Law' is one of the over sixty scenes in the nave of the Romanesque abbey church of Saint Savin. The frescoes are very old. The preservation of the pictures of Saint Savin is almost a miracle. All Romanesque important churches were filled once with polychrome paintings. Saint Savin is one of the very rare examples of a church in which so many pictures of the eleventh century have survived. Colours have almost completely faded at Saint Savin except the red, yellow and ochre colours, but the drawings and the designs are sufficiently clear for us to recognise the scenes.

In the fresco of 'Moses receiving the Tables of the Law', God stands in the middle of the scene in a mandorla, an almond-shaped aura. This mandorla is a very ancient Byzantine symbol. The radiation of God or Jesus was thus represented in a tradition that continued into the Renaissance, as a symbol of the divinity. God stands barefooted on green ground. He has around his head a nimbus in crucifix form and he is clothed in a white toga and an ochre cloak in the Byzantine or Roman way. The painters of the eleventh century in France continued to use these ancient images of Roman times to indicate the noblest dignity, even though the Romans had been replaced in Gaul by the Franks since many centuries

already. God hands over the tables of the Law to Moses. Two commands, the most important ones, are written on the tablets: 'Deum Adora' or 'You shall adore God' and 'Non occides', 'You shall not kill'. Moses receives the tables and according to medieval representation of religious hierarchies, he is shown smaller and in a lower position than God. The early painters of Saint Savin were not after realism; they interpreted reality according to the religious vision of their time. Around Moses and God the anonymous artists painted four angels with long trumpets, resembling somewhat the Jewish zofars for the instruments are slightly curved. This whole scene is set against a green background that has almost disappeared.

The pictures of Saint Savin are very old, but the figures of Moses and God are very well drawn and the scene is lively. The artists may have lacked the skill of the later Italian geniuses like Giotto, but more than representing beauty and keen observation of nature the Saint Savin artists wanted to tell stories in a clear and simple way. God and Moses look to each other and the artists caught vivaciously the act at the very moment of the handing over of the tables. The scene is thus not static and we must admire the efficiency with which the artisans of Saint Savin, who had probably very little instruction in the techniques of artistic representation, took and then captured in lines and colours the very meaning and immediacy of the scene. The painters of Saint-Savin had not yet mastered essential techniques that would be discovered in the late Gothic and in the Renaissance. They did not know yet how to create volume and depth, how to set figures in realistic landscapes and in architectures. They only applied a crude form of chiaroscuro to give volume to their figures and their drawings remained very two-dimensional. But they were master storytellers.

The mandorla is decorated with a pearl-like border and it also has a white flame-like decoration around it to indicate the divine rays. The painters of Saint Savin were only artisans, but they had read their Bible with great attention. They also knew symbols used in Europe that were of Roman and Byzantine tradition. They could not have been just local artisans. They were people with education, people who could read Latin, the only language in which the Bible could be read in the eleventh century. They must have seen many other pictures in other churches or monuments. Therefore they must have been professionals who went from church to church, who were known in the religious community for their trade, who could be contacted and who had reached some degree of fame in their time. These artists knew how to introduce action in a scene and how to narrate to the delight of the viewers and their commissioners. They also had a keen eye for detail as can be shown in the way they painted the feathers of the angel on the left of our scene. This was a sign these artists were becoming slowly conscious of the beauty of detail when enough patience could be given to a fresco. We know that Roman painting of frescoes and Roman mosaic artists knew all these qualities of art, but much of that knowledge was lost in the five hundred years that separated Roman times from the Saint Savin period. But we see in Saint Savin revive a new search and taste for art.

'Moses receiving the Tables of the Law' is one of the best-preserved scenes in the nave of the church of Saint Savin, one of the liveliest and among its best.

Other paintings:

Moses shows the Tables of the Law. Claude Vignon (1593-1670). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen – Rouen.

Moses and the Tables of the Law. Gaspare Diziani (1689-1767). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.

Moses with the Tablets of the Law. Guido Reni (1575-1642). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1624-1625.

Moses with the Tables of the Law. Giovanni Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666). Galleria Colonna. Rome.

The Adoration of the Golden Calf

The Adoration of the Golden Calf

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). The National Gallery – London.

Moses destroys the Tables with the Law

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. 1659.

Moses stayed a long time on the mountain. He stayed away too long. The people started to mutter. They said to themselves, ‘Where is that man that has led us out of Egypt?’ They feared to stay without a god. So they decided that they needed a god to lead them further. ^{G38}

Aaron organised the construction of the god. The people stripped off the gold rings in the ears of their wives and daughters and sons and they brought all their gold to Aaron. Aaron received what they gave to him, melted it down in a mould and with it he made a statue of a calf. All shouted then, ‘Israel, here is your god who brought you here from Egypt.’ Aaron built an altar for the Golden Calf and the people sat down to eat and drink and to amuse themselves.

Yahweh was very angry that the Israelites had made the Golden Calf and that they were adoring another god. Moses, who was still on the mountain with Yahweh, pleaded with God and Yahweh in the end relented over the disaster that he had intended to inflict on his people. Moses came down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, tablets inscribed on both sides, on the front and on the back, by the finger of God. As he approached the camp with Joshua, he saw the calf and the groups dancing. Moses blazed with anger. He threw down the tablets he was holding, shattering them. ^{G38}

Moses seized the calf they had made and burned it. He grinded the remains into powder, scattered that on the water and made the Israelites drink the water.

Aaron explained what had happened. Moses saw that the people were out of hand and that Aaron had let them go out of hand to the derision of their enemies. He called out, ‘Who is for Yahweh?’ Only the Levites rallied around Moses. Moses then told to them to take their swords, go down the camp and slaughter every man from gate to gate. The Levites did as ordered and about three thousand men perished that day. ^{G38}

Moses then again talked to God. Yahweh told the people had committed a great sin by making for themselves a god of gold. Yahweh said that he would blot out of his book the ones who had sinned against Him and that on the day of punishment he would punish them for their sin. But Yahweh again stopped from inflicting an immediate disaster on Israel. God ordered the Israelites to depart once more. From mount Horeb on, the Israelites stripped themselves of their ornaments. Yahweh had told to do so in wait for his decision of punishment.

Moses went into his tent. The pillar of cloud would come down and station itself at the entrance of the Tent, while Yahweh spoke with Moses face to face, as a man talks to his friend. The young man who was Moses’ servant, Joshua, son of Nun, never left the inside of the Tent. Yahweh told Moses to cut two tablets of stone like the first ones and to go up the mountain. Yahweh then wrote on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which Moses broke. Yahweh on the mountain repeated the covenant. He said he would drive out the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. He told Moses to tear down the altars of these people, to smash their cultic stones and to cut down their sacred poles. The Israelites were to worship no other God but Yahweh. They should make no pact with the inhabitants of the country and not intermarry. The Israelites should not cast metal gods for themselves. God gave many more rules for the Law. ^{G38}

When Moses came down the Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, the skin of his face was radiant because he had been talking to God. The Israelites were afraid of that. Moses put a veil over his head. Each time afterwards when Moses talked to God, his face would radiate thus. The Israelites would see Moses' face radiant and believe him. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went again in the Tent to speak to Yahweh.

Nicolas Poussin

The 'Adoration of the Golden Calf' by Nicolas Poussin has as subject the very moment that Moses, coming down Mount Sinai, sees the Israelites dancing around their new god, the Golden Calf.

Poussin painted a scene in which the people are delirious. They had hidden their frustrations with Moses for a long time. They had heard about milk and honey but until now they had only seen deserts and manna. Moses had led them so far and they had come to rely on Moses to provide them with what they needed. Finally, they had forgotten that they had wanted so dearly to escape from the persecutions of Egypt and that they had acclaimed Moses. Moses now was driving them forward on his energy alone, almost against the wish of the people. The Hebrews had doubts about a God of whom they saw deeds but never saw in person. They had doubts about a God who only spoke through a human. They probably were wondering whether the great deeds they had seen were indeed actioned by the heavens or by the tricks of a genius leader. And they had known the fear for a journey into the unknown for a long time. They had been constantly under stress, fearing for their survival. They had known only hardships. Now they could believe in something tangible again, in any image whatever, as long it could be seen and touched, a Golden Calf made from their wealth. The tension was broken and a burst of joy had taken possession of the Israelites. For Nicolas Poussin, the catharsis has even overtaken Aaron, priest already because dressed in the white robes of purity. Aaron is standing in front of the monument.

Most pictures of the Golden Calf show a smaller statue. Poussin painted the Calf truly impressive and of the purest gold. The statue is shimmering in a warm light, in full glory, throning high above the people. There is little place for Moses and his anger in this picture of unbridled dancing. But still, Moses comes down the mountain on the left and he shatters the tablets of stone inscribed with the Law. Not all is outrageous joy and wild feasting. Above, in the skies, dark clouds seem to gather and to cover the scene. Thunderstorms and disaster looms but the Israelites have not yet remarked this; no figure looks to the menacing heavens. Menacing also are the rocks of the hills. The rocks are abrupt, long and straight hanging over the scene of mirth. From out of the plain grow two trees, whose foliage reach into the dark clouds above. Our view is thus being taken upwards to the darkening heaven.

The scene of the adoration of the Golden Calf is in the morning. The sun has come up from behind the mountains, behind the viewer. Light is still early red, but it is strong enough to throw a diffuse light on the Calf and on Aaron as well as on the mountains to the right.

This is the content of the picture. Nicolas Poussin was right on his subject. He shows the crucial moment of the action of the Bible story and he also created unity in that action since all the picture's figures centre on the main theme. Poussin only deviated a little by also showing Moses on the left, but that element attracts the curiosity of the viewer and his delight in finding out the detail. After looking at the content, let's examine the lines and structure of Poussin's painting.

Nicolas Poussin used the diagonals so that his two main subscenes on left and right are situated well within the two base triangles formed by the diagonals and the base of the canvas. Thus, he created the traditional middle open 'V' in which he situated the far landscape as background as well as the sky. The two sides of the open 'V' are held by the hills' rock formations. The vertical middle line of the picture is the rightmost bright line of the altar on which stands the Golden Calf and the right upper corner of that monument is exactly at the intersection of the two sides of the 'V'. Thus the picture has two clear, geometrical subscenes which each occupy one half of the picture. To the left are dancing people, to the right other people are frantically gesticulating towards the Calf. The horizontal middle line lies somewhat lower than the head of the girl dancing in the centre. This may be Miriam, the same who danced with her tambourine after the destruction of the Egyptians by the waters of the Sea of Reeds.

Nicolas Poussin situated much of his scene, and especially the Calf, above that horizontal line so that the viewer looks at the scene somewhat from below. This enhances the effect of the monumentality, of the imposing dimensions of the Golden Calf. It underscores the feeling of the adoration of the Israelites and that feeling, by putting the viewer in a humble position lower down, is also induced in the viewer. The Calf indeed is placed on two altars, to give the viewer an impression that it is positioned high up so that it is naturally honoured and divinised to be the symbol of the strange natural powers of the universe. The Golden Calf received life and Poussin achieves this effect by very simple means: the Calf holds up one foreleg as if it wanted to start walking. This element alone makes of the statue a magic miracle. The crowd by its frantic dancing, under a dynamic, quickly moving sky, has poured its soul and breath into the statue so that it starts to move. Thus, Poussin combined form and content.

The two halves of the picture contain two separate scenes. To the left, people are engaged in a round dance, holding each other's hands. To the left is Aaron with a wild crowd that conjuring lifts all arms. These are the people that blew life in the Calf. And with the life in the statue it has become a god, so the people under Aaron began to adore it. People kneel, first still half-standing, then completely on their knees. This is not only a dynamic effect in the painting. It has also allowed Poussin to fill the lower part of the picture with figures entirely visible and in different poises.

The light in the painting comes from the left front. It falls playfully on the white areas of Aaron and Miriam. Nicolas Poussin used these white surfaces to bring attention to the centre of the picture. From that centre out, the colours grow naturally darker in lower tones and the white colour almost entirely disappears. Poussin used delicate tones, mostly warm red and brown colours, to give the impression of a scene bathed in the first red light of the morning sun. But Poussin also brought balance in the colour hues and still more brightness and variation in zones that otherwise would have been too monotone. Thus we find both to left and right small areas of bright blue. With simple, delicate design of colours Poussin created liveliness. Remark how the blue surfaces, two on each side of the centre, balance in intensity and in surface area.

Nicolas Poussin also balanced the dynamism in both sides of the picture. On the left, people are dancing but their movements are not directed upwards. Their circle of arms held high emphasise the long horizontal lines in the scene, even though the people are all in motion. The viewer's eyes are attracted upwards by the Golden Statue so that the figures could remain low. And in the statue also the emphasis is on the horizontal lines. On the right side however there is no Calf, no golden statue that naturally draws attention to the upper line of the frame. So Poussin applied two effects. First, he had the people on the right throw their hands in the airs and secondly he threw light on the rock formation of the right. This light catches our view, balances with the light falling on the Golden Calf, and likewise takes our eyes upwards. We have to the left a subscene that emphasises horizontal lines, to the right a scene of verticals. There is a tension between left and right.

The picture of Nicolas Poussin is of course a very dynamic, energetic scene. Especially to the left Poussin created a formidable atmosphere of dancing people. The effect is reached in the positions of the actors, all shown in wild movement. How can an artist show movement in a fixed frame? There are several techniques to reach effects of motion in paintings and Poussin applied them all. Each person must be shown as if caught, frozen in movement and the various figures must show successive phases of movement. Thirdly, the artist must use slanting lines. Slanting lines deviate from the direction of gravitation, mean falling out of equilibrium and thus induce movement. Straight vertical lines give the viewer an impression of non-movement, of rest, of equilibrium, of static. So if Aaron stands still, upright and in a strict vertical position, the people on the left are all in slant poises. But too many slant lines bring unrest, chaos, and too much movement in a picture so that it becomes hard to look at and the viewer loses equilibrium. So Poussin painted two high trees whose verticals call the viewer back to equilibrium. These trees form with the basis of the canvas the reference lines of the viewer. Since all the dancers are drawn in oblique lines, stable references are needed by the viewer for him or her to find back the anchors of stability.

Nicolas Poussin's picture of the 'Golden Calf' combines thus all the tricks of the genius painter's skill. Poussin created depth in the landscape. He knew how to create the illusion of volume in a painting. He knew how to situate one person in front of the other. He gradually changed colours away from his central scene and applied aerial perspective completely. The artist made a wild scene, full of contrasting effects but behind the apparent chaos and dynamic of the scene lies a most strong structure,

lie design and balance of composition. On the left Poussin side Poussin emphasised the horizontal lines of the statue, of the arms of the dancers. On the left side he underscored the verticals. Aaron makes the link between the two sides because he stands upright and static but he holds his arms horizontally. On the left side Poussin created movement, on the right side rest in the figures but movement upwards. The resulting impression is one of tension between left and right and this tension of the scene is built in by structure. Tension there needs to be in this picture of the Golden calf. View had to be squinted, to struggle, to be strange, alien and menacing. After all, although we only see this canvas before us we all know a lot more than what goes on in the picture. We know the anger of Moses and the whole story, what happened before the dancing and we know what will come. Nicolas Poussin needed only to hint at Moses in the background in order to support the title, the viewer does not discover this until after a while but he knows. With the title alone the viewer's imagination fill the world beyond the canvas with meaning. And the viewer knows the tension between the frantic dancing and the disaster that will follow. At the same time Poussin tells that something is wrong, the Golden Calf is no god even if it seems to move. The adoration is badness, the scene feels wrong.

We analysed Nicolas Poussin's painting in detail. We looked at the content, the lines and structure, the composition of the scene, the colours, and the symmetries. Now close your eyes and open them only gradually. Look at the picture in the haze of half-opened eyes and see the dancers move, see the frantic people gesticulate in their hysteria, turn their hands to conjure the Calf. Then the scene truly is in motion.

Few paintings look simple, dynamic yet have strong underlying structure. Yet here is a common trait of many of the greatest pictorial artists like Poussin, Caravaggio and Rubens who were contemporaries. Did Poussin and Rubens learn movement from Caravaggio? Slanting lines for movement had been used earlier, for instance by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, but Caravaggio certainly brought this technique to the foreground and then it became one of the main style figures of Baroque. These painters understood that for the viewer's soul to resonate with the artist's inspiration, they had to construct pictures on very sound foundations. Whether they came to their geometrical compositions by design or by intuition or by the restraints of the dimensions of the canvas will always remain a subject of debate. But the diligence and skill was very present with the greatest artists mostly. In later periods of art of course, artists had to show that by destroying structure they also could create emotion in the viewer. But that would only come very much later than Nicolas Poussin. Poussin is and remains the grand master of structure, of supreme balance and harmony, of the supremacy of mind and rationality over emotion. Yet, his picture of the 'Adoration of the Golden Calf' recognised and emphasised emotion in the viewer. But Poussin managed that, and he led it with a master's hand.

Rembrandt

What was Moses like when he destroyed the tablets with the law?

Moses had led the Israelites through deserts on dangerous roads. He had travelled on foot like the Israelites, always in the lead. He had slept less than anyone else had. He had worried for years, aware of his responsibility to bring the tribes of thousands of people including little children to an unknown Promised Land. He had Yahweh on his side. But he also knew the rapid anger of God and Yahweh's force of destruction. He knew the relentless, strict, unyielding view of Yahweh that no one should adore anything but himself. He knew God's willingness to forgive, but that willingness had better put to the test as few times as possible and God just might not always relent. Yahweh had told already he would destroy the Israelites in the event they would break the Covenant. The worries and the unfaithfulness of his people had worn out the man Moses. He had become thin and old. He had now a wrinkled, emaciated face with a long unkempt, unshaven beard. Moses did not worry about his own appearance. He had other, more important worries to think of. Moses was angry to the death and he feared Yahweh as death itself. He was sad and determined at the same time. He thought how ever on earth was it possible for the people to adore a statue when they all knew the power of Yahweh. Yet, Moses had an inner force that was unbroken and that was the evidence of the existence of Yahweh, since Yahweh spoke to him.

That is the Moses that Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn, the Dutch genius of the seventeenth century showed in the picture of Moses destroying the tablets with the Law.

Moses holds high the tablets with both hands and he is ready to shatter the tables on the ground in a mighty blow. Rembrandt showed all the sadness, the worries, and the desperateness but also the determination. More than any other painter he could bring to the viewer the inner state of a person with few means.

In this picture Rembrandt almost only used yellow and brown hues, with here and there his lead white to make light shimmer. Moses' long figure is painted with strong brushstrokes. Detail was not necessary and Moses' face remains partly hidden in the shadows. But what is given to be seen is enough to have the perfect picture of Moses, made with the wisdom of an artist who knew what Moses had become because he was a Moses himself.

In 1659 Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn was fifty-one years old and living in Amsterdam. His very beloved wife Saskia van Uylenburgh had died in 1642. She was of good family and had been the ideal wife to channel his art to refinement. But she had died and Rembrandt had only his talent left. Saskia had had four children but only one, a son, Titus, had survived. Rembrandt had lived since about 1649 with his housekeeper Hendrickje Stoffels as husband and wife. But the worries of the world had overcome Rembrandt. When Hendrickje had become pregnant with a child of Rembrandt in 1654, she had been banned from church by the deacons and thus effectively shut off from public social life. Rembrandt was in deep financial problems. He had been declared bankrupt in 1656. His last possessions could be taken away any moment from him. He was unable to manage his household financially. He was at the most desperate period of his life. In 1660, Hendrickje Stoffels and Rembrandt's son Titus would found a company and make the artist like an employee of theirs. Thereby they prevented that all his pictures would be taken away by creditors. Hendrickje and Titus took over the financial care of his house. Rembrandt had not the physical awareness anymore to cope with the outside world. His strong inner force had overtaken him. No wonder he painted in 1660, just months after his Moses, a painting called 'Jacob fights with the Angel'. Rembrandt thought he was in fight with God. God was destroying him, but the artist fought back and as in the story of Jacob there was hope he would prevail. Hendrickje and Titus could protect him and he would finally have rest and peace.

In 1659, Rembrandt was as desperate as Moses was on the mountain, angry at the world and broken by the worries after a long journey and constant struggle. He understood how Moses felt. And Rembrandt too felt an inner force that did not relent. For him it was the supernatural force and the solace of artistic talent.

Moses destroys the tablets, but the tables are not broken yet. And Rembrandt brought whirling colours around the figure. He played upon the two separate stories in the Bible of Moses and the tablets. In the first story Moses saw the adoration of the Golden Calf and he indeed shattered the tablets of stone. But later, Yahweh restored the tablets. Moses sculpted new tables and Yahweh inscribed them again. When Moses then descended the mountain with the new tablets, a bright light shone from his face. The Bible tells that Moses' face was so radiant that the Israelites were afraid of him. Rembrandt combined the two stories to show a Moses of inner strength surrounded by heavenly fire generated by that strength.

Moses strikes an imposing figure with the huge tablets of stone above his head. He draws almost supernatural strength out of his thin body. His very muscular and large hands show that the strength is there and have found the force. As Rembrandt made the picture, we too are menaced by Moses to receive the tablets of stone on our head. All the world consists of sinners says Rembrandt, and the punishment of God hangs above every head. Furthermore, Moses rejects what he sees of the world and throws the tables at that world.

Moses arrives out of the darkness of times to give his timeless wrath. That was Rembrandt's message and for that he could not apply the technique of Gothic or Renaissance grace. He needed the direct pathos of Baroque and the technique of Tenebrism of tones to push all detail out of the picture and to concentrate all attention on the intensity of the fury of Moses.

Other paintings:

The Adoration of the Golden Calf. Pieter Pourbus (1523/1524-1584). National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin. 1559.

Triptych with the Adoration of the Golden Calf. Lucas van Leyden (1489-1533). Rijksmuseum. Amsterdam. Ca.1530.

The Dance around the Golden Calf. Lucas van Leiden (ca. 1489-1533). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam. Ca. 1530.

The Adoration of the Golden Calf. Antonio Molinari (1655-1704). The State Hermitage Museum. Saint Petersburg. Ca.1690.

The Dance for the Golden Calf. Emil Nolde (1867-1956). Pinakothek der Moderne. Munich. 1910.

The Adoration of the Golden Calf. François Perrier (1590-1650). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo dei Conservatori. Rome. Ca. 1641-1642.

The Land of Canaan

The Spies of Canaan

Johann Heinrich Ferdinand Olivier (1785-1841). Kunstmuseum – Basel.

Moses had received new tablets with the Law and Testimony of Yahweh. He gave instructions to build the Ark and the sanctuary. When all was finished, Moses brought the Testimony and put it inside the Ark. He brought the Ark in its dwelling and put the screening curtain in place, screening the Ark of the Testimony as Yahweh had ordered. Moses set up the lamps, put the golden altar inside the Tent of Meeting, and he burnt fragrant incense. Then Yahweh took possession of the sanctuary.

Whenever the cloud rose from God's dwelling, the Tent and Sanctuary that Moses had erected, the Israelites would resume their march. During the daytime Yahweh's cloud stayed over the Dwelling and there was fire inside the cloud at night.^{G38}

Moses anointed Aaron and Aaron's sons and consecrated them to be the priests of Israel. Aaron took up his function as high priest. Moses held a census of the Israelites by clans and families. He appointed census officials and the names of all the males of twenty years and over, fit to bear arms, were recorded. The Levites, members of the clan of Levi, were not counted as the others. The Levites were enrolled to take charge of the Dwelling. They would kill any unauthorised person coming near the Tent. The Levites were thus put at the disposal of the priest Aaron, to be at his service. Only after this a census also of the Levites was taken. After the census the leaders of the clans brought their offerings to Yahweh and thus they proved their allegiance.

The Israelites then set off away from Yahweh's mountain, preceded by the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh, searching for a place for them to halt.

In the desert of Paran, Moses sent out men from each tribe to reconnoitre the land of Canaan. God ordered to send men to explore Canaan, one leader from each tribe. Moses sent out Shamua, Shaphat, Caleb, Igal, Hoshea, Palti, Gadiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi and Geuel. Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name of Joshua. The men departed and spied on Canaan. When they reached the Valley of Eshcol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs. Then the spies returned to Moses after forty days and they showed to the Israelites the fruit of the land. When the men came back they reported that indeed Canaan was a land of milk and honey, but that it was also a land that devoured its inhabitants. They spoke of the strength of the cities, of the Amalekites who lived in the Negev, the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites of the hills and of the Canaanites who lived along the coast and along the River Jordan. They said they saw powerful tribes there, and giants. Caleb wanted to attack the country immediately, but the other Jews were afraid of the power of the people of Canaan. The Israelites then cried out in dismay and they rebelled against Moses. Yahweh was angry again, but Moses interceded. Yahweh only struck the messengers that had enticed the people by disparaging the country. Of the men who had gone to reconnoitre the country, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb, son of Jephunneh were left alive. The Israelites then travelled on.^{G121}

Ferdinand Olivier was born in Dessau of Germany and first also studied painting there. In 1802 he moved to nearby Berlin and learned to make woodcuts there. From 1804 to 1806 he studied with his brother Heinrich in Dresden, where he met Caspar David Friedrich. He lived in Paris with his brother from 1807 to 1810 and then went to Vienna, always accompanied by his brother. In Vienna they came to know the Nazarene painters and they became members of the Lukasbund of Vienna, even though they were Protestants and the Lukasbund largely a Catholic association of artists. Ferdinand and Heinrich Olivier became members of the Nazarenes in 1816 and his brother Heinrich that year even accompanied Schnorr von Carolsfeld, one of the very main Nazarenes, to Rome. Ferdinand Olivier however never went to Italy. In 1830 he returned to Germany; he now went to Munich and became Professor of Art History at its Academy.

Ferdinand Olivier was a landscape painter but he never stayed far from Old and New Testament themes and many of his pictures, though they have as their main theme a landscape often also contain scenes

from the Bible. His painting 'The Spies of Canaan' is not a very complex picture. It is a painting that simply and clearly shows a scene from the Old Testament, from the Book of Numbers. Olivier painted two Israelites returning from Canaan and as the Bible told that it was Joshua and Caleb only that were the messengers that remained true to the order of Yahweh, we may suppose that Olivier for that reason painted only these two of the spies. Joshua later became the great general that would capture Canaan, so Olivier may well have painted him in the lead and given him a round red hat, which looks like a saintly halo. The two men wear a huge bunch of grapes on a pole between them. The painting is allegorical, because the grapes on the pole are out of proportions, even if also the Bible told about a single cluster and men wearing the grapes. The grapes however indicate the image of the crucified Jesus on the cross. Jesus was often called the 'cluster of grapes from the Promised Land' after the theme from Numbers and Jesus was also referred to as a figure threading the grapes placed under the winepress. The Prophet Isaiah wrote on the avenging God of Israel that threaded in the winepress of his wrath the nations that oppressed Israel. Thus, Jesus was associated with grapes and the winepress. Images of Jesus threading a winepress are not uncommon. Ferdinand Olivier's 'Spies of Canaan' is a rarer example of a painting of the first association of Jesus with grapes and vineyards. Caleb, the man on the left, holds a cane that resembles of vine and the grapes still hold the golden-green leaves of the vine.

Olivier made this picture probably after 1839-1840, when he started anew to paint in oil. His colours are light, like many of the Nazarene painters, in a desire to imitate the early Renaissance hues. He used no harsh colours on the men but broken white, light pink and broken green and also in his landscape overall soft colours can be seen. Olivier placed the men high vis-à-vis the viewer so that they dominate the low landscape, which unfolds at their feet. Here lies Canaan with its rich plain, cities, river and hills, as told in the Bible. Olivier's composition is simple, but he did paint Joshua larger than Caleb and thus introduced a feeling of distance and an upwards movement, indicating the advance of the men.

Ferdinand Olivier's 'Spies of Canaan' is a simple illustration of a Bible scene. Yet also with this picture we can appreciate how well he mastered his art: landscape, figures, shadows in the dresses, clouds in the sky are finely painted so that the painting could be admired in one or other hall or collection of a person that loved the style of the Nazarenes and was pious enough to seek such paintings. As it was, the picture entered the collection of just such a person, Emilie Linder (1797-1867) of Basel, who acquired many paintings of the Nazarenes and left her collection to the Kunstmuseum of her town.

The Chastisement of Korah, Dathan and Abiram

The Chastisement of Korah, Dathan and Abiram

Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) – Palazzo del Vaticano, Cappella Sistina – Rome.

On the way to Canaan, a serious rebellion once more broke out. This time it was led by Korah, son of Ishar, son of Kohath the Levite, and the men of the tribe of Reuben, Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab and On, son of Peleth. They rebelled against Moses and Aaron with two hundred and fifty Israelites. All were reputed men and leaders. They especially reproached Moses and Aaron to have set themselves higher than the others of the community. Moses threw himself on his face when he heard the accusations. He ordered one censer for each man to be filled with incense and put on fire before Yahweh. Yahweh then would choose who would be the consecrated men. Moses scolded the men to want to be priests and to mutter against Aaron. Dathan and Abiram reacted. They told that they had not seen much yet of the country flowing with milk and honey and they refused to come. Moses repeated to Korah, and also to Aaron as well as to the other men to come with their censers tomorrow, to confront Yahweh. Korah did so.^{G38}

Korah assembled the community before the Tent of Meeting. Yahweh spoke to Moses and he told Moses and Aaron to get away from the community of the Israelites for he was going to destroy them all. But Moses pleaded to God and threw himself on his face before Yahweh. God said, 'Stand clear of Korah's tent'. Moses stood up, went to Dathan and Abiram and all the elders of Israel followed him. Moses spoke to them and told them to stand away from Korah's tent and to touch nothing that belonged to Korah, lest his sins be also upon them. Moses then said they would know the power of Yahweh if the earth should open its mouth and swallow Korah's family with all their belongings and if they would go down alive to Sheve. Also Dathan and Abiram were standing at their tent doors, with their wives, sons and little children. As soon as Moses had stopped speaking, the ground split apart under their feet and swallowed them and they disappeared.^{G38}

Fire then shot out from Yahweh and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who had offered incense.

Moses ordered to gather the burned censers from the remains for the bronze censers were consecrated by Yahweh's fire. He ordered to hammer the censers into sheets to cover over the altar as a reminder that no unauthorised person, no one not of Aaron's line, should approach the altar and offer incense to Yahweh.^{G38}

The most marvellous series of frescoes on the theme of the life of Moses are in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican in Rome. Pope Sixtus IV della Rovere had the chapel built by Giovannino de' Dolci supposedly on plans by Baccio Pontelli, to serve as the Palatine Chapel of the Vatican. Building started in 1475. The chapel is a rather simple hall, with the dimensions of the Temple of Salomon. There was no interior modelling by sculptures except for the marble screen that separated the chapel in two parts of unequal length and the balustrade of the tribune. These were made by Mino da Fiesole, helped by Andrea Bregno and Giovanni Dalmata. Interior decoration by painting imposed itself. In 1481 Sixtus called to Rome the best Florentine artists to decorate the walls. On both sides of the length of the chapel, two times forty metres, frescoes were painted. The chapel was approximately thirteen and a half metres broad, and twenty-one metres high, the dimensions of the Temple of Jerusalem. The artists painted scenes from the life of Jesus on one side and scenes from the life of Moses on the other. Moses had founded the monotheist religion and given the law of the Old Testament. Jesus had founded Christianity. The pictures represented the founders of the Roman Papacy, a subject that may have been the wish of the Pope himself for his private chapel. The walls of the chapel are high and Sixtus wanted to hang tapestries along them, so the frescoes were put relatively higher up, between the tapestries and the windows that were set almost against the ceiling. The frescoes formed a long frieze that ran the length of the walls, and on which religious history could be read in a long narrative. Between the windows Pope Sixtus wanted the portraits of the first thirty-one Popes.

Sixtus lived from 1414 to 1484. He came from a relatively modest family. He was born near Savona and his real name was Francesco della Rovere. There would be another Rovere after him to become

Pope, his nephew, the most notorious Giuliano della Rovere who took the name of Julius II and who ordered Michelangelo to continue the work of decoration of his uncle by painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Sixtus first entered the Franciscan Order and became its General in 1467. He was elected Pope in 1471. Sixtus tried to halt and temper the influence of the Muslims in the Mediterranean but he also participated in wars in Italy. Sixtus founded the Apostolic Library and we have a fine picture by Melozzo da Forli that shows Pope Sixtus IV appointing Platina at the head of that library. Sixtus looks like a rather humble and quiet man, nice and well in flesh. He is shown not as a man of high ambitions but as a gentle father. Yet, Sixtus was in war with Florence from 1475 to 1480 and he was on Venice's side in its wars with Ferrara from 1480 to 1484. When in 1481 he called Florence's masters of art to Rome, he had just made peace with the Tuscan capital. Sixtus IV may well have called the Florentine artists to his court as much in an assertion of his supremacy as in a gesture of appeasement and recognition of Florence's splendour. And Sixtus explicitly wanted the artists of the Sistine Chapel to emphasise the authority of the Roman Papacy.

Sixtus was another kind of man than the gentle Pope of Melozzo da Forli's portrait. Jacob Burckhardt called him the terrible Pope. It was under Sixtus IV that the system of the 'nipote' or nepotism was introduced at the Papal court of Rome. Sixtus had family and courtiers who gravitated around him and on whose support he counted – for a price. With the help of the nepoti Sixtus destroyed the influence of the Roman noble families, the Colonna and the della Valle and the like. Sixtus employed hired war generals or condottieri and unscrupulously dropped these when they had become too powerful and thus dangerous. Most importantly of all, Sixtus engaged in Italian politics as a temporal ruler to expand the Papal States. With Sixtus, the Milanese Sforza dictators and the Spanish Kings of Naples he formed a trio source of constant ambition, of wars and battles in Italy. This was a Pope desperately seeking to realise his worldly expansion, a Pope needing to ascertain his power and divine institution. The frescoes in the Sistine Chapel were not the works of a Maecenas of the arts but of an ambitious leader, seeking power and authority over Italy. Whether he sincerely believed to be able to better realise his spiritual duties is an open question. As is the question to what extent the artists who came to paint in the Sistine Chapel were aware of this.

Pope Sixtus first called in Pietro Perugino. Perugino called in his aid Pinturicchio. Then came Cosimo Rosselli, helped by his student Piero di Cosimo. Sandro Botticelli arrived also and Domenico Ghirlandaio, finally also Luca Signorelli. These painters worked in the chapel from 1481 to 1484. Sixtus consecrated the chapel in 1483 and he died the year after. More than for any other feat, Sixtus is known for having built the Sistine Chapel, named after him, and for having commissioned the cycles of Moses and Jesus. After the paintings by Michelangelo of the Genesis on the ceiling and the Last Judgement on the wall of the altar, the Sistine Chapel became one of the most marvellous wonders of the universe. No other series of pictures can compare with the grace, force and spiritual enchantment than the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel.

There are six scenes on Moses in the Sistine Chapel. The first scene by Pietro Perugino and Pinturicchio represents the 'Travels of Moses in Egypt'. God called Moses back, away from his arcadian life with his wife Zipporah and his father-in-law Jethro. This picture starts Moses' religious life. Sandro Botticelli painted first 'Episodes from the Life of Moses' and later, further along the wall, the 'Punishment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram'. Cosimo Rosselli painted the 'Passage of the Red Sea'. This same painter and his helper, Piero di Cosimo, made 'God hands over the Tablets with the Law'. Finally, Luca Signorelli painted the 'Testament and Death of Moses'. Two further frescoes of the life of Moses have disappeared. Four paintings on the walls of the entrance and of the altar were destroyed. Michelangelo painted his Last Judgement over the altar wall and the ones on the entrance wall were destroyed when those walls cracked. The frescoes on the life of Moses form a long frieze above the part of the wall where tapestries were to hang, and below the windows and the images of the first Popes. These full-length portraits were painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio and by Fra' Diamante, maybe also by Cosimo Rosselli or even Sandro Botticelli.

When Sandro Botticelli made the 'Punishment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram' he was at the height of his mastership. His best works date from 1475 to just after his works in the Sistine Chapel. He was born in 1445 in Florence, so he was thirty-five years old when he came to Rome. His real name was Alessandro di Mariano Filipepi but his surname came from the nickname of his brother. Sandro lived with one of his brothers, who had a potbelly and was known therefore as 'Little Barrel' or Botticelli. The name stuck not just to the brother but also to poor Sandro. Hence Sandro Botticelli. We know he was a student of Filippo Lippi, with whom he tied a close relationship. He also studied with Andrea del

Verrocchio and must have met there another student of Andrea, Leonardo da Vinci. Pietro Perugino also had been a student of this Verrocchio. In 1481 Lorenzo de Medici let Botticelli go to work for Pope Sixtus IV.

The frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, exception made for the works of Michelangelo, have a unity of style that is astonishing knowing that the frescoes were put on the walls by so many different artists. The painters worked to a common view, which was primarily narrative of scope. These frescoes now seem to epitomise the Renaissance. The figures form a procession that runs the entire length of the walls. The scenes show landscapes and rock formations on the sides of the panels, but the line of figures is uninterrupted. The frescoes represent Renaissance figures; the people are dressed as in the painters' times and not as in the Old or New Testament periods. The scenes are lively, but the figures are shown in static poses full of dignity and elegance of court. Decoration and detail are sumptuous. The colours are bright and splendid and the hues remain the same over all the frescoes. The general impression one receives when looking at all the paintings in a glance is one of elevated beauty, of dignity, of sophisticated elegance and grace. These were the works of Tuscans and almost exclusively of painters that had been schooled in the workshops of Florence. So design and line are important above colour. There are no black contours to denote the surfaces, but all areas are well delineated by contrasting pure colours. The artists of course applied Chiaroscuro to give volume to the figures and to bring spatial effects in landscapes. They knew the rules of perspective after the studies of Paolo Uccello and Piero della Francesca and that shows in the way they treated their background architectures.

The frescoes of the Sistine Chapel are narration in the first place. Most of the frescoes therefore tell even various stories in one panel. Botticelli's 'The Punishment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram' contains thus four different subscenes. To the right, Korah, Dathan and Abiram and the two hundred leaders accuse Moses. Moses has a long grey beard and he shows a movement of horror as he holds up one arm as if to hide his face. This scene was according to the title of the picture, written in Latin words above, 'Rebellion against Moses the Law-giver'. The leaders of the rebellion push on him and some Levites have to hold back the thronging mass. In the centre of the picture Moses holds high his magic staff and the three leaders of the rebellion are struck by the wrath of God. They are taken by seizures and fall to the earth. Also their thurifers tumble to the ground. Moses is in movement in this scene, so Botticelli used an oblique pose for Moses. He brought equilibrium by flanking Moses with a Levite priest, who is holding the censer that will indicate the Levites as the rightful guards of the sanctuary. In the leftmost scene Moses continues to hold his arm high and he condemns Korah, Dathan and Abiram. The earth opens and the men fall into the opening cracks.

These are three different acts, but remark how Botticelli created unity by having Moses not only dressed in the same golden robe and green cloak, but also by giving him the same poses in the three subscenes. To the left Moses holds up his right arm and lowers his left hand. Such is the case also in the centre and right scenes. In the middle Moses dominates the whole picture with his majestic gesture, bringing his staff of judgement high over the three rebels. Moses orders to death but with his left hand he also blesses. Thus he exerts the two main powers of the Christian Popes. Moses commands in Botticelli's panel like the leader with supernatural powers who can dispose of life and death. But the real power is of course the power of God and Jesus represents God. So, the full meaning of the scene that is from right to left, the meaning of rebellion, punishment and redemption leads to Jesus. Botticelli therefore painted Jesus on the extreme left, standing higher than the rest of the figures. We recognise him in his simple clothes of white robe and pure blue cloak, and these colours were always associated with purity and divinity.

Behind the centre Moses scene, Aaron, Moses' brother, appears in another scene. Aaron was the high priest and he is dressed here with the tiara of the Papacy. He brandishes and gathers the censers that will be molten in the fire that burns already in the centre. This is the sacred fire that cleanses. In Botticelli's picture of the 'Temptation of Jesus and the Purification of the Lepers' on the opposing wall in the Sistine Chapel, such a hearth of fire is also part of the centre image. This is the fire that cleans away sins, always a very moral symbol of the redemption by Jesus. The censers will be molten down and the bronze hammered into thin sheets to cover the sanctuary. God ordered that this was to be the sign that only Aaron, the priest, could serve God in the sanctuary. Nobody would be allowed to approach God's sanctuary but Aaron and the Levites had to kill anyone who would try to come near.

Botticelli thus showed a clear statement of the divine instoration of the Papal authority. This statement is emphasised by the Roman triumphal arch behind the scene. In the front of the fresco, Moses as the

agent of God condemns the ones that contest the supremacy of the Law. Behind this scene Aaron serves the sanctuary with a censer. Aaron wears now the tiara of the Popes and this is the triumph of the Papacy, indicated by a high triumphal arch that is Rome's arch of Constantine. Emperor Constantine installed the Christian religion as the Roman state religion and he was the first emperor to convert to Christianity. This was the highest triumph of the Catholic Church in Rome and thus in the whole civilised world of antiquity. On the arch is written in Latin, 'No one may claim the honour of high priesthood, unless called by God as Aaron was'. The pictorial program and message of Botticelli could not be clearer.

In the 'Punishment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram' the background is formed by architectural structures. To the right are the marvellous ruins of the Septizonium, which could still be seen in the late fifteenth century. In the centre is the Roman arch of Constantine and to the left is a Renaissance palace. Moses and Aaron are thus placed in a scene of history whereby classic antiquity is linked to the Renaissance reality. In the left landscape is a church, a spiritual symbol, whereas on the right stands a city and castle, signs of lay power. Centuries form the eternal background of the divine instoration of the Popes.

The qualities of Botticelli's frescoes do not need to be lauded here. The picture has all the qualities one might expect of one of the greatest Florentine masters. There is strong structure of composition, symmetry and balance in the use of colour areas, love and patience of splendid detail, dignity and grace of content, vivid drama, and sophistication in colours. But Botticelli was after much more than a mere narrative or a splendour for the eye. As his other fresco in the Sistine Chapel on the life of Jesus, this artist brought profound meaning and communication of message in his painting. He brought in references to the Papacy and to Jesus in his picture on Moses. The message of Botticelli is one of the very moral ones of the Sistine Chapel series, both in his picture of Moses and in his picture of the life of Jesus. These are key images. Botticelli chose a story of accusation, of contestants, of putting into question the authority of Moses, that is of the religious Law, and of Aaron, by which he symbolised the position of the Popes. He showed the results of such a challenge. Moses here does not diminish or averts God's wrath. The authority of Aaron is divinely installed and must not be challenged. The program of Botticelli's picture is therefore one of the most explicit of the whole series of the Sistine Chapel. There is only one Pope for Christianity and that Pope receives the justification of his function from God. The Pope is divinely appointed to lead the community. The authority is divine and unapproachable.

It is remarkable how a painter of the Renaissance, and maybe even its most resplendent one, an artist so imbedded in antique philosophies, a learned man accompanied by philosophers and humanists, was so devotedly dedicated to the Papacy. Botticelli explicited the Papal authority very obviously in his fresco. His 'Punishment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram' may be a picture of static dignity and Renaissance courtly splendour. But emotions are clear in the images and passionate dedication to the Pope is present. We do not believe such an expression to be the work merely of a skilled artist working with a rational intelligence, composing the images to an intellectual program. We believe Botticelli to have been really zealous and filled with a profound desire to assert his religious convictions. We see in his painting and in the choice of his subject the core of a convinced believer in Catholic religion and dogma. Botticelli's biography learns us how affected he was subsequently to his work in the Sistine Chapel by the teachings of Girolamo Savonarola in Florence. More than any other painter of his generation, the two frescoes of the Sistine Chapel let us perceive something of Botticelli's spiritual character. We feel the solemnity with which he worked in the chapel. The duality, of on the one hand the longing and expression of classical beauty and on the other the sincere religious devotion to the Catholic Church symbolised by the subservience to the Popes, pervaded the Renaissance artists who worked in the Sistine Chapel.

This devotion was of course needed for the program of Sixtus IV. For Catholic dogma and the supremacy of the Popes of Rome was being challenged as well in Florence as in Germany.

The Brazen Serpent

Moses and the Brazen Serpent

Cesare Ligari (1716-1770). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. 1740.

The people of Israel while on travel muttered several times and rebelled over and over again against Moses. Yahweh wanted then each time to destroy Israel. But Moses also always pleaded and interceded with God to divert disasters.

Once a rebellion broke out. God wanted to destroy Israel, and Moses pleaded. Moses told Aaron to quickly take a censer and place it in the middle of the community for a plague had broken out. But it was too late. Fourteen thousand seven hundred fell victim to the plague and Moses stood between the living and the dead until the plague halted. Moses then re-installed Aaron and the Levite priests.^{G38}

Aaron died on Yahweh's command at mount Hor near Kadesh. Aaron would not see Canaan and he would not lead the Israelites into the Promised Land as Yahweh had predicted in punishment for having doubted him at the Waters of Meribah.^{G38}

The Israelites left Mount Hor on the road to the sea of Suph, to go round Edom who refused to give way to the Israelites. On the way the people lost patience. They regretted that Moses and his God had taken them away from Egypt to bring them to these hardships of the road. God then sent fiery serpents among the people. The bites of the snakes brought death. The Israelites repented then and appealed to Moses to intercede with Yahweh to save them from the serpents. Moses spoke to God.

Yahweh ordered to make a fiery serpent and to raise it like a standard. Anyone who would look at the standard would survive from the bites. Moses made a serpent out of bronze and he raised it as a standard and it happened as Yahweh had told that people bitten by the snakes survived when they looked at the brazen serpent standard.^{G38}

In the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana of Milan is a painting of the theme of the 'Brazen Serpent', made by the Lombard artist Cesare Ligari. Ligari was a Milanese, born in Milan in 1716. He worked in several cities of the North of Italy and also in Venice. His picture of the 'Brazen Serpent' was made during a stay in Venice in 1740. There were still very important artists in Venice in the eighteenth century. While Ligari came to the town Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770) was the most prominent Venetian artist and Tiepolo's style was predominant in the decoration of the city. But others worked in Venice also, such as Antonio Canaletto (1697-1768), Bernardo Belotto (1720-1780), and the strange Pietro Longhi (1708-1785). Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734) had died not so long ago. The last truly Venetian artist was probably Francesco Guardi (1712-1793) and it is generally accepted that with him disappeared the great painters who worked in a typical Venetian style. The Republic of Venice disappeared almost together with Guardi in 1797. Cesare Ligari made his painting of the 'Brazen Serpent' based on a picture that Tiepolo had made in 1735 for the church of Santi Cosma e Damiano in Venice.

The structure of the picture is typical of Tiepolo and Ligari enhanced the dramatic effect. There is indeed a giant epic breadth in the 'Brazen Serpent'. One remarks first the powerful movement of lines going from the people assailed by serpents to the magician Moses, holding the high trunk of a tree with the symbol of the serpent. The standard is in the form of a cross so that the triumph of Christ is implicit in the painting.

More than in other pictures, Moses is here the magician who conjures the elements. He stands on a hill with his cloaks flowing in the wind. He raises his long thin staff high and thus commands the scene, the people and the elements. He holds with his other hand the heavy but slender, hastily assembled standard of wood with the sign of the serpent that may save the Israelites. This wood is many times longer than Moses is, but with a supernatural power Moses keeps the sign upright. His face radiates and long golden lines emanate from his face. He truly dominates nature, the people, the divine wind and the

landscape. Of all the figures he is the only one to stand and to defy the tumult. He is the only one who can save from total destruction and his power comes from the cross of God. The 'Brazen Serpent' is a view that is difficult to forget and Ligari has been able to bring full epic élan to his picture, such as we find in very few other grandiose images. Moses is caught in a dramatic act of high tension and pathos.

The long, oblique line of Israelites pushing on to Moses enhances Moses' dominance. But the people are only crawling over the ground to Moses. Here are the terror-stricken Israelites, men, women and children, clutching to each other and yet each in the solitude of horror and pain, reaching out for the only possible saviour amidst the unleashed natural elements. The picture is painted in soft pastel colours, as Tiepolo loved. But Ligari rendered all detail splendidly and with much talent. That detail is also very passionate. Ligari showed contorted naked bodies surrounded by snakes that crawl over and around the bodies. Men are trying to throw off the serpents in frantic gestures of horror. Frightened mothers cling their children to them in vain protection. Men with powerful nude backs have been bitten by the snakes and fall to the earth. The serpents wind around the people and these are caught in a scene of terrifying horror. The serpents bite and the red colour of blood is preponderant among the people.

Cesare Ligari tempered somewhat this craving. He painted a long tent of the Hebrew camp behind the people so that a more horizontal view was created, consisting of the line of the top of the tent and the line of the top of the hill ridge on which Moses is standing. These lines form a horizontal separation between the ground and the sky. Ligari even underscored the drama of the scene by depicting the people and Moses so small as figures against the vast sky. Also, all the people are part of the ground. Only Moses grows out of them, reaches to the skies and thus forms more part of the heavens than of the lowly scene of the miserable Israelites. Moses represents the craving of the people for salvation and redemption. Ligari obtained a grand sense of drama in this way. Finally, he also pictured in a smaller group of Israelites on the right. The eyes and the direction of the bodies of these also go to Moses so that he stands in the cross of two intersecting lines, drawing even more the attention of the viewer to his conjuring figure.

Ligari painted trees to the left and the right so that the view opens in the centre to create the vastness of space behind Moses. He set the viewer low against the sky, to make the viewer feel that he is part of the suffering people, far more than part of the grand nature that dominates the picture.

Cesare Ligari is not such a well-known painter, but he was a man of talent and he grasped in a very emotional way the epic drama of the scene of the 'Brazen Serpent' of Moses.

Other paintings:

Moses and the brazen Serpent. Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). Museo del Prado – Madrid. 1653-1654.

Moses and the brazen Serpent. Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Ca. 1575-1576. Venice.

The brazen Serpent. Attributed to Guillaume Perrier (active 1623-1656). Musée Magnin. Dijon.

Moses and the brazen Serpent. Jacopo Amigoni (1682-1752). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg. Ca. 1725-1730.

The Prophet Balaam

The Prophet Balaam and the Donkey

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). Musée Cognacq-Jay. Paris. 1626

The Israelites moved from Oboth to Iye-Abarim in the desert. From there they travelled to the gorge of Zead. They camped on the other side of the Amon. Here began the territory of the Amorites. They went to Beer, a place with a well. Then they continued to Mattanah, to Nahaliel, to Barmoth and from there to the valley that opened into the land of the Moabites. The Israelites had to give battle to Sihon, king of the Amorites for this king would not allow them to pass through his country. Israel conquered the Amorite towns and occupied the Amorite territory. The Israelites then put down their camp in the plains of Moab, beyond the Jordan and opposite Jericho.^{G38}

At that time the king of the Moabites was Balak, son of Zippor. The Moabites were afraid of the Israelites. Balak send messengers to summon Balaam, son of Beor, who lived at Pethor in the territory of the Amawites. Balak wanted to ask Balaam to come and curse the Israelites so that he would be able to defeat them and drive them out of his country. The elder of Moab and the elders of Midian thus went to Balaam. Balaam asked them to stay over the night. During the ensuing night God said to Balaam that he should not go with them to Jericho. God said not to curse the Israelites. The elders went back, whereupon Balak sent other messengers again to Balaam. He promised much silver and gold this time. Balaam asked the messengers to stay for the night. During the night God appeared once more to Balaam, but this time God said to get up and to go with the Moabites, but to do only what God would tell Balaam to do. So Balaam got up, saddled his donkey and went with the chiefs of Moab.

But Yahweh was angered. He sent his angel to take stand in the road and block the way. Balaam's donkey saw the angel standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand. The donkey turned off the road and went into the open country. Balaam struck his donkey to get her back onto the road. The angel of Yahweh then went further and positioned on a narrow path among the vineyards, with walls on the left and the right. The donkey again saw Yahweh's angel and scraped against the wall. The donkey scraped also Balaam's foot against the wall, so Balaam struck the donkey again. But Balaam and the donkey passed the angel. The angel then went a little further and stood now in a place so narrow that there was no room to pass on either side. The donkey stopped and lay down under Balaam. Balaam now flew into a very rage and he struck the donkey once more. Yahweh gave the donkey the power to talk and the donkey reproached Balaam for having struck her because she had worked for Balaam all her life and Balaam had mounted her often. When the donkey asked whether she had ever behaved this way, Balaam had to answer 'No'.

Yahweh then opened Balaam's eyes and now the Prophet also saw the angel of Yahweh standing in the middle of the road with a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam then regretted to have struck the donkey, for if the donkey had gone on, Balaam would have been dead. Balaam proposed to the angel to turn back, but the angel said to go on but to only tell what Yahweh told him to tell.

Balaam went to Balak and after having made many offerings to Yahweh, he prophesied that Moab would fall to Israel. And Balaam refused to curse Israel; he left and went home.^{G38}

We know that the 'Prophet Balaam and the Donkey' is a painting by Rembrandt, but it doesn't look like one. There is no black or very dark background; there are plants on the lower right so that the painter tried to show some decoration of nature; there is no striking contrast of light and darkness; there is no static depiction of figures but a very energetic representation; and we lack Rembrandt's lead white palpable paint strokes. And yet, the picture is painted in ochre, red, orange, very broken white hues; all importance is given to the figures; after all there is almost no background but a few brown rocks that are hardly discernible from the scene of the figures and clouds in an unrecognisable sky; there is no blue colour in the painting and in the details of Balaam's face and in the tortured donkey's vividness we sense a great master.

'The Prophet Balaam and the Donkey' is truly a picture by Rembrandt, but it is one of the very first paintings of the Dutch master, made when he was a mere twenty years old. The theme and its composition was not yet his. He used an example of his teacher Pieter Lastman.⁶⁸⁹ But Rembrandt added extraordinary dynamic and life, a feature of his youth and of his early works.

The 'Balaam and his Donkey' is one of the very few pictures in which Rembrandt made a try at a landscape background. He was not very successful at that. He did put darker toned mountain rocks behind Balaam and the Moabites, but painted this in colours that differed not so much from the other colours of the scene, so that it is really difficult at first sight to discern the details. He did not yet really know how to create an open, deep view on space. But for the sense of volume of the figures, feeling for space is almost absent from the picture. There are no trees, no bushes, and the only ornament of nature that Rembrandt tried to depict are some low plants in the right lower corner; the dark colours he used there almost hide that part of the painting.

Rembrandt showed the moment at the third appearance of the angel of God. The donkey laid her down under the Prophet. Balaam strikes the donkey once more with his stick, but also the angel readies to strike. Behind the Prophet are the Moabite chiefs arrogantly wondering whatever happens before them, why Balaam is acting so strangely.

Rembrandt painted as a twenty-year old new painter a very dynamic scene since the donkey, Balaam and the angel are in full action. This is not a contemplative painting aimed at being a reflection on life, but the depiction of an event. So he drew the head of the donkey, Balaam's body and the figure of the angel in oblique directions, always a characteristic of motion. The vividness and ostentatious show of action and emotions is very Baroque, very seventeenth century, but not really very Rembrandt. In his earlier pictures however, the painter made pictures like he saw from other great examples of Baroque, and overly show of emotion in exaggerated gestures is one of the major features of this period. But Rembrandt was also a master at that style. Look at the spirit in Balaam's face, Balaam's force since with bare arms he raises the wooden stick. Look at the donkey's open muzzle. The viewer instinctively and immediately feels the pain and the obstinacy of the animal, which looks at the threatening angel of God. The angel also is in full movement, with magnificent open wings that make him more dangerous and imposing, and the angel also brandishes its sword in a moment of striking.

The young Rembrandt was already a master of colour. Apparently he had already chosen not to use blue and green. His hues in this picture are very warm and very rich in their variety of tones, tints and shades. The picture overall is in a very harmonious, warm mood. There is the rich red in Balaam's cloak and the pale yellow-white in the angel's robe are colours that would stay with Rembrandt until his death. Rembrandt was a master in creating volume with little means and that also can be seen in the donkey and in the dress of Balaam. Balaam wears a wealthy brocaded robe in golden and red colours and these are simply splendidly rendered. Its chiaroscuro shows a somewhat set, elder man and a bellied Balaam.

Balaam is dressed in oriental robes and he wears a turban, but in the donkey's saddlebag we discover papers of the Torah. Rembrandt thus understood something very important from the Bible story. Moses' Exodus led the Jews out of Egypt. But some Jews must have remained in Canaan from before the departure to Egypt, many centuries before. In very rare stories such as 'Balaam and Balak', the Bible admits that holy men that could prophesy by Yahweh were already or were since always in Canaan. So, Rembrandt painted an oriental Prophet and not necessarily one that would look like a poorer Jew. Balaam seems for Rembrandt to have been a respected citizen of Canaan and a holy man that could be called in by the local, non-Jewish chieftains.

The Death of Moses

The Testament and Death of Moses

Luca Signorelli (ca. 1445-1523). Palazzo del Vaticano, Cappella Sistina – Rome.

In the plains of Moab, near the Jordan by Jericho, Yahweh ordered Moses to speak to the Israelites. Moses told to cross the Jordan into Canaan. The Israelites would take possession of the country and settle in it for God had given this land as their property. The local inhabitants had to be driven out, their gods destroyed. This country, Canaan, would be the heritage of the people. And God determined the boundaries of this land.

Moses named leaders to divide the country among the tribes. The head leaders were the priest Eleazar and Joshua, the son of Nun. Then there was one leader from each tribe. Moses gave towns to the Levites in which to live and to pasture land. There were six cities of refuge, ceded as sanctuary for those who committed accidentally manslaughter, to save them from their pursuers. These cities were to be refuges not only for the Israelites but also for foreigners and for the resident aliens. In all the Levites received forty-eight towns. God gave further laws and commandments on the plains of Moab near the Jordan by Jericho. And Israel came to the Promised Land.^{G38}

Moses was then a hundred and twenty years old. He told the Israelites he could not act as their leader anymore. Yahweh had told Moses that he could not cross the Jordan. Moses gave over command to Joshua. He committed the Testimony to the Levite priests who carried the Ark of Yahweh's Covenant. Yahweh said to Moses, 'And now the time is near when you must die.' Moses and Joshua went inside the Tent of Meeting and the pillar of cloud stood at the door of the Tent. Yahweh predicted once more that the Israelites would give themselves over to the gods of the country, break the Covenant and Yahweh would have to send his blaze against the people. God gave further commandments to the Israelites, which Moses wrote down in a book.

Then Moses sang a song of praise to Yahweh. Yahweh ordered Moses to climb the mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, just opposite Jericho and to view from there Canaan, the Promised Land. Yahweh ordered Moses to die there because he had broken faith with Yahweh at the Waters of Meribah-Kadesh in the desert of Zin. Moses had failed to make Yahweh's holiness clear to the Israelites there. Thus, Moses was allowed by Yahweh to see Canaan, but not to enter it.^{G38}

Moses blessed the tribes, went up Mount Nebo, and looked at the Promised Land.

There, in the country of the Moabites, Moses the servant of Yahweh died.

Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died. His grave was never found.

For the last scene on Moses we return to the cycle on his life in the Sistine Chapel. Luca Signorelli there made a fresco of the 'Testament and Death of Moses'. Not much is known of this painter. He was born in Cortona around 1450 and he learned to paint in the workshop of Piero della Francesca. Luca Signorelli worked in Florence, from 1481 in Rome on the Sistine Chapel, but also in Perugia and Orvieto. His fresco 'The Testament and Death of Moses' closes the frescoes on Moses' life in the Sistine Chapel.

In Signorelli's fresco we find the continuation of the style of the other Umbrian and Tuscan artists who worked on the series. The figures form one long procession of a crowd. The background contains a few additional scenes against an imaginary landscape. Signorelli represented various scenes in his fresco. As in most of the paintings of the series, the narrative starts from the right. Moses is sitting on a throne. He is reading from a book. Moses is reading his Testament and singing a song of praise to Yahweh. The book contains the Law, the Testimony that Moses has written down on order of Yahweh. The commands of the Law are Moses' heritage to the Israelites and his Testament. Going to the left, we follow a crowd to a scene on the other extreme end where Moses hands over his staff, the symbol of his authority, to the young Joshua, son of Nun. The Bible told that Moses' face was radiant when he had

spoken to Yahweh. So Signorelli painted rays coming out of Moses' face. But Moses was an Old Testament figure, so the rays are not in the form of the saints' nimbuses but of radial lines of gold emanating from his face.

In the background Luca Signorelli painted a beautiful landscape that is at least as fine as those of the other artists that made scenes in the Sistine Chapel. Starting again from the right, one remarks first high mountain rocks and a town that vaguely resembles Florence with its Duomo. In the centre stands Mount Nebo. On its top an angel of God shows Canaan to the old Moses. We understand why there is no picture or small additional scene in the right background. Signorelli had to keep this space free for a landscape of the Promised Land. Down Mount Nebo Moses descends the hill to die. And to the left Moses is lying dead enveloped in the white linen, ready to be entombed. Moses will be entombed in a cave for on the far left we see again a rock formation and a suggestion of caves, not unlike as in pictures of the entombment of Jesus.

When we compare Signorelli's picture with Botticelli's 'Punishment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram', we find only narration in Luca Signorelli's scenes. No profound spiritual meaning is emphasised. Signorelli showed various scenes of Moses' last days, but there are no other references to specific symbolic meaning. There is no pathos, no moral message but the tale itself. Signorelli's picture was made to tell a story simply and plain. Yet, he was a marvellous painter and had to show he was not the lesser painter in another way. It was an honour for Signorelli to work next to the greatest of the masters of his town, next to Perugino and Botticelli. So he made a picture that pleased the eye as none other of the series. He painted marvellous detail in his procession of figures.

Luca Signorelli drew attention to his own painting by his splendid depiction of the crowd around Moses. We find here all the wealthy courtiers, merchants, noblemen and ladies having come to hear the testament of Moses. Signorelli pictured a heavenly scene in which all men and women are rich and can live at leisure. He used gold lines and delicate patches of gold colour to indicate the wealth. All the people are richly and elegantly dressed, as all should be on earth and maybe as all will be in the presence of God.

In the centre of the procession, Signorelli painted an entirely nude man over whom other men look with pity and care. This man may represent the poor and destitute, but he was also the occasion for Signorelli to present his skills in painting anatomy. The man forms a striking contrast in the very centre of the procession. This may be a symbol of the ideal of classical beauty represented in a religious picture, or it may represent Adam, the first man and eternal mankind.

Somewhat to the right of the naked man stand a pregnant woman with a baby on her shoulders and with young children at her feet. Here is eternal womanhood, the primeval pregnancy, the Eve of Genesis, Mother Nature. This is the Ceres of antiquity and thus also Signorelli linked Renaissance to antiquity.

The procession of people is a most marvellous assembly. Every figure is different, differently dressed, with different faces, young and old, bearded and unbearded, with grey or brown hair. The colours of the people are varied but we do also find here the strong Florentine line and symmetry of composition. Signorelli divided the fresco in two horizontal parts. The lower part contains the procession; the upper part is filled with the landscape. The symmetry is not only in the scenes but also in the blue colours. One courtier is painted in blue in the centre, and then Signorelli used blue sparingly to the right and left. Symmetry is of course also in the background landscape. Mount Nebo is in the centre and two rock formations are on the left and the right.

The main attraction of Signorelli's picture remains the delicacy of detail, the elegance and grace of his figures and his reference to classic antiquity in the image of the nude man and the pregnant woman in the centre.

The Death of Moses

Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1889). The Dahesh Museum of Art. New York. 1851.

Alexandre Cabanel, born in Montpellier, France, started to study in his home-town but won a price in 1839 issued by his town, to study in Paris at the Academy of Fine Arts there. He tried several times to win the 'Prix de Rome' but he succeeded in that only in 1845, when he won a second price behind Léon Bénouville but was nevertheless allowed to go to Rome and study at the Villa Medici. The French Academy in Rome still today owns the Medici Palace and the students of France were boarded there and followed courses by the best art teachers of France. Cabanel stayed in Rome for five years, and then returned to France in 1851. Shortly thereafter he obtained success in France and became one of the most prized painters of the era of Napoleon III. In 1870, after France's defeat at the German army and Napoleon's abdication, Cabanel returned to Italy, to Venice, to Florence, and back to Rome. In 1878 he was appointed a professor at the 'Accademia Romana delle Belle Arti'. He died in Paris in 1889.

Alexandre Cabanel painted his picture 'the death of Moses' in 1851. It was one of his first pictures made in Rome. Sketches of this painting still exist, so that we may assume that the young painter – he was only twenty-six years old – quite laboured on its design. Rome was, as it remained today, not just the city of ancient art, of Roman antiquity, but also the town where Michelangelo, Raphael and Bernini made their most impressive masterpieces. It was also a city impregnated by Christianity in its most outwardly, splendidly glorious expression, in its Roman Catholicism. Rome was the city where you could find several over-decorated Baroque churches in every street, and where the overpowering mass and splendour of Saint Peter's basilica is. In all those churches were – and are – famous and magnificent paintings. San Luigi dei Francesi for instance, a church dedicated to Saint Louis of France, was a monument in which you could admire three enormous paintings by Caravaggio. The Sistine Chapel was in Rome and so were the various collections of the grand maecenasses of the seventeenth century, such as the Borghese, the Colonna, Corsini, Barberini, and Doria-Pamphilj. These collections were installed in majestic, but terribly over-decorated halls and protected in their entirety by 'fideocommeso' provisions. These provisions enacted by testaments, forbade heirs to sell the paintings and sculptures separately from their surroundings, the halls and palaces that contained them.

The Parisian Revolution dated from 1789, merely sixty years before Cabanel and his colleagues worked in the Villa Medici, but Napoleon I had been replaced by kings since 1815 and then by another emperor of the same name, which re-installed and re-recognised the spiritual authority of the Popes in Rome. A new cultural battle between lay ideas of the supremacy of state interests and state-directed views over the claims of the Christian church for moral ascendancy of ideas was not yet apparent in Alexandre Cabanel's times of 1845 to 1850. Many students of the villa Medici sent Biblical or Christian scenes from the New Testament to France, as official contributions from their stay in Rome paid by governmental allowances. We should not be surprised that after the classical themes of Greek or Roman antiquity of a Jacques-Louis David or a Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, Alexandre Cabanel painted a scene from the life of Moses. The painting however is a surprising image for its times.

One would have expected the young Cabanel, student of the French Academy in Rome, to have presented a picture entirely in the academic, neo-classical style. He would then have made a picture in clear lines, nicely separated areas, with much dignity, composed with primarily vertical directions and in finely contrasting colours, with not too many figures. For his work to be original, Cabanel should have brought a new view in his presentation of the contents. In many aspects, Cabanel's work deviates from this style, maybe not always favourably, so that his contemporaries quite openly criticised the painting. That was to Cabanel's great distress, because he seemed to have loved and admired his work, and on which he spend much time in conceiving it.¹³⁸ Still, his painting is remarkable, in part and truly because of this conflict of appreciation.

While Cabanel was in Rome he must have met and seen working many other great artists and painters. The Directors of the Villa Medici were Victor Schnetz and Jean Alaux. Other great masters that studied at the same time were Victor Biennoury, Félix-Joseph Barrias, Léon Bénouville, Jules-Eugène Lenepveu; Gustave Boulanger and Paul Baudry. Also in Rome but without a price of the Academy was Léon Bonnat. Before Victor Schnetz, from 1835 to 1840, Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres had been Director of the Villa Medici and before him Horace Vernet. How could one distinguish oneself before

and with such names? It was hard and one had to be a genius to bring new views if one did not want merely to conform to tradition and to break out of the rules without being stigmatised and crucified as a revolutionary. Yet, that was the goal demanded of the 'pensionnaires' of Rome. When one was young like Alexandre Cabanel, talented, very talented, but still in the naivety of youth, one experimented with an unsure mind, unsure of one's style and of one's aims in art. Cabanel tried to be original, and he succeeded in that. But in a city like Rome some images are simply too overwhelming to forget and go beyond. In this knowledge we can comprehend Cabanel's 'Moses dying'.

Cabanel painted Moses lying in the arms of angels. He is dying but opens his arms widely to the glory of God, Yahweh. Yahweh floats in the heaven, as he comes to receive his best servant Moses and his cloak opens in the wind that accompanies him. God also opens his arms in a gesture of grandeur and of empathy with Moses, and with one hand he points to Moses. It is impossible not to think of Michelangelo's 'Creation of Adam' in the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican. Cabanel set his God in the same oval form, surrounded by angels, arms wide. Cabanel's God also points to the other figure of the painting, here to Moses. Cabanel could not but have admired the powerful, daunting scene of love between man and God of Michelangelo. He must have noted, and very well known even in his sketches, that when people saw his Yahweh, they would see the God Creator of Michelangelo. He must have thought that instead of refusing comparisons, viewers would find some interest in another version of the scene. But the young can be foolish to want to adapt grand scenes of the giants among the geniuses of painting. Such attempt might be understood as the arrogant try to ameliorate an image that was universally considered as being perfect. Cabanel received hard critic. Still, he did paint a marvellous Yahweh.

God has a forceful face, a dark and full beard and dark, heavy hair that express will-power and self-confidence. A soft yellow halo surrounds his head. His chest is strong and large; the arms well muscled like of an athlete. God represents the ideal man of a mature age, of an age at which wisdom and strength are at their highest culmination. God's gesture is all-encompassing and commanding. Angels flow around God but they do not tear at him. They accompany God like the wind. Their bodies express youth, dependence, courtly life, softness and elegance. They take their energy from God. Yahweh wears a dark robe low and a purple cloak curves in the wind. Tyrrhian purple was a colour reserved for the Roman Emperors in antiquity, so the colour is not casual in this scene. God appears against the setting sun, which he eclipses entirely. So Cabanel painted God in the shadows of his own figure.

Moses lies in the arms of the angels. We are reminded of the traditional Pietà pictures of the dead Jesus but here also Cabanel modified the usual view. Moses is not dead but dying. So he opens his arms, in empathy with God, in the same dramatic gesture. By these open arms Cabanel reminded to his viewers even more the reference to Jesus, since Moses now lies like the crucified Christ. Moses was the teacher, the priest, the wise and very old man. Cabanel painted him with full white hair and a long white beard. Two angels hold him tenderly in their arms, whereas an angel behind him is ready to cover him with the white shroud of death. This gesture also reminds of pictures of Chronos, readying his scythe to bring a man to death. Other angels come to Moses from among the group that accompanies God and these form the link between God and Moses. God and Moses also of course look at one another, strengthening the visual link in the painting.

The first and overall impression that a viewer receives of Cabanel's picture is one rather of confusion. There are so many flowing, curving, intertwining lines and forms in the painting that any viewer has difficulty in rapidly discerning the main figures of the picture. That feature makes it difficult for a viewer to love Cabanel's painting at first sight. One has to strain oneself to find the figures in the picture and get a good, easy grasp of the scene. When viewers have to do such effort, for some mysterious reason they seem generally less to like a painting in first impression. The human eye and mind is lazy, likes orderliness, clear views, distinct areas, easy discerning of forms, balance and symmetry, and Alexandre Cabanel in a quite un-academic way tampered with these qualities. Moreover, he also did not bring clear definition and contrast of forms by colour.

Cabanel used soft pastel hues in his painting and in the figures. Moses and God are painted in the same tones of hues and also the hues of their robes, cloaks, even faces do not differ much but seem to be shades of the same emotion. Cabanel did bring some bright tones in the robes and wings of the angels that are holding Moses, but these colours are peripheral. Even then, the angel on the right of Moses wears a white-pink robe and the angel behind Moses wears also a robe that is somewhat of a deeper hue but still reminds of the first. Truly fine, but painted in the same soft hues are the angels' wings. We

see pale blue and pink below right, deeper and evolving blue but pink also in the wings of the angel behind Moses, and this blue points to the imperial purple of God. The colours do not contrast enough in their various possible contrasts of hue, tone and intensity for the viewer to be able to discern the forms immediately.

Alexandre Cabanel also did not apply sharp differences in light and shadows. He was a master in creating volume by the play of chiaroscuro on the robes and bodies but he painted the scene as if it happened in the rests of a sun that disappeared already beyond the horizon. We see only its reddish glow under the sky, beyond the dark landscape. Cabanel painted his figures in a very diffuse light that seems to come from the lower left, but is weak and unpronounced. The effects of light thus also do not allow a rapid reading of the picture.

Cabanel clearly used the right diagonal in his composition, the diagonal that goes from the right lower corner to the upper left, as the main line of structure. The direction starts on the angel in the lower right, goes over its arm to the right arm of Moses and from there to God, then over God's lifted arm to the top left corner. God and Moses look at each other over this direction also. But Cabanel brought such variation in his scene and broke in so many places this strong structure, that it remains almost unremarked by viewers. The two angels in reddish hues around Moses are standing and emphasise the vertical direction. Since these angels are painted in the most brilliant colours of the picture, they form a predominant direction. So is the mass of the white shroud that winds out behind Moses. Moses himself lies almost perpendicularly to the right diagonal, but not quite so. Behind God are various angels and they form a mass that is almost parallel in direction to Moses' body, but also not quite so. The strong diagonal structure that we found is also in many places weakened by the many curved lines, such as in the purple mantle of God, in the white, bulging shroud, in the angels' wings and robes, even in the curling movement of Moses' beard. Cabanel stressed much these curved lines in so many places, that we must acknowledge that these are the style element by which Cabanel really deviated most openly from the solemn rigidity of the Neo-Classical pictures, which went back to late Gothic representations.

Cabanel kept few academic and Neo-Classical characteristics in his painting. Moses lies very long and rigidly on the ground. The angels around Moses are upright. He took care to use a diagonal in his composition. His areas of colours are well delineated. He used only slight chiaroscuro. His background is almost non-existent, as it consists of a blue sky and a dark Canaan, with a hint of black Mount Horeb on the right. Critics of Cabanel's picture mostly disliked his reminiscence of Michelangelo's 'creation of Man' and the confusions of forms.

Alexandre Cabanel experimented with his 'Death of Moses'. He clearly did not want to deny his academic teaching and its Neo-Classical style. Nevertheless, he introduced a fluidity of forms that expressed Romanticism, the curved lines of emotions and of tragedy. He represented ostentatious feelings in Moses' acceptance of God's will, in his pathetic opening of arms and in God's almost similar response. Such overt show of emotions is not what modern viewers appreciate, nor the rational spectators of the middle nineteenth century. One finds such views mainly in Baroque paintings of the seventeenth century and not really in Neo-Classical imagery. Cabanel maybe wanted to leave or modulate at least a little the straight lines of academism, the clear and easily recognisable forms accentuated by bright contrasts of hues, as he had been taught at the Academy. He brought in his picture many figures, even though there are only two important personages: God and Moses.

We are less hard than Cabanel's critics since we understand now what the artist Cabanel was trying to do: create his own vision and style while evolving academic regulations of style. Cabanel longed to be very original, to be striking and special. This streak he had in common with the greatest geniuses of art, who never can really create a work of art that is not different from everything created yet. Cabanel experimented in many of his paintings in this sense. He sometimes succeeded, sometimes less so. If we do not care very much for Cabanel's so obvious reference to Michelangelo's picture of the Sistine Chapel, for his reference to the crucified Jesus and to the Pietà image, and look at his Yahweh as an essay in the alternate, then we can also look with new interest at Cabanel's 'Moses'. The picture is visually confusing at first sight in its intertwining forms, colours and curved lines. But after a while one discerns so many fine other elements in this picture, that one can easily admire it.

Alexandre Cabanel did have a great talent and the ambition of a genius. He mastered completely the difficult art of painting. He knew well how to bring harmonious colours and good structure in his paintings. His 'Death of Moses' is the result of his trying, of experiments in art, and Cabanel succeeded

in offering an original view of fluidic, respectful and smoothed motions. Among so many other powerful pictures of his, this search must be admired and less happy results excused.

The Jordan

The Crossing of the Jordan

Karel van Mander (1548-1606). Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen – Rotterdam.

Joshua, son of Nun, filled with the wisdom of Moses and of Yahweh, led the Israelites across the Jordan.

Joshua struck camp and set out from Shittim. They camped at the Jordan before they crossed. Yahweh ordered the Levite priests to carry the Ark of the Covenant ahead of the Israelites. When the bearers of the Ark reached the waters, the upper waters of the Jordan stood still and formed a single mass so that the column could advance unharmed by the river. The people crossed opposite Jericho.^{G38}

The picture of the 'Crossing of the Jordan' that we show is a painting of Karel van Mander. It is rare painting for very few pictures of this painter remain. Van Mander led a very active life but next to his work as a painter he is also known as one of the few and best Renaissance poets of the Netherlands. Van Mander was Flemish. He was born near Kortrijk in 1548. He learned to paint and he had talents for this art. He went to Italy from around 1574 to 1577. He returned to Flanders but converted from Catholicism to Protestantism so he immigrated to Holland, to the town of Haarlem. In 1604 he published a book there called 'Het Schilderboeck', the 'Book of Paintings'. This was a biography of Flemish and Netherlands painters. Van Mander must have seen Giorgio Vasari's 'Lives of the Artists' in Italy, published in 1550 but of which also a second edition was printed in Florence in 1568, just a few years before van Mander arrived in Tuscany. Vasari's writings must have still been famous and van Mander, who had also a writer's instinct, must have found it a good idea to pursue on. Van Mander's book was for the Netherlands what Vasari's text was for Italy. On the front page of the book of van Mander he called himself proudly a painter. Van Mander however was even more an author than a painter. He wrote poems and he translated Virgil, Homer and Ovid in Dutch. He published several collections of poems. His fame has grown as a theorist of the art of painting of the Netherlands. Art historians often go back to his text when they need to learn more about the lives of the Dutch artists.

Karel van Mander had been to Italy in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. That was the period of Mannerism in Florence and Rome. Van Mander's tastes went to this style. In 1604, after the publication of his 'Schildersboeck' in Haarlem, van Mander went to live in Amsterdam. His picture 'The Crossing of the Jordan' dates from this period, from 1605. He lived in wealthy Amsterdam and died a short while later, in 1606.

Van Mander's work 'The Crossing of the Jordan' shows the Israelite tribes travelling in a long column to Canaan. The river has been crossed, now the march is on to the Promised Land. The procession starts on the left and the Israelites advance to the right. On the extreme left we find the Ark of the Covenant. It is carried by two priests, two Levites, who are sumptuously dressed. Joshua strides just before the ark. The stone tablets of the Law are worn in front of the Ark and then a long, flowing line of Israelites advances and disappears into the right far background. They march into the brightly-lit plains of Canaan, to Jericho. The Israelites advance with their flags to confront the Canaanites. There will be a battle soon.

In this scene of the advancing column of Israelites, van Mander painted tens of figures in various attitudes. The men are advancing. They work. They carry loads, and they lead the crossing in full action. They walk first into the dark, and then back into the light of the Promised Land. Van Mander used the diagonal of the frame to hold the long procession of people, and the column winds in curves around this line to give an impression of the very length of the advancing tribes. Van Mander used the diagonal because it is the longest line in a picture and maybe he had already understood also that a painter has to use oblique lines to indicate movement. This allowed van Mander to impress his viewers

by the epic movement of the thousands of people advancing in a grand scene of nature. Contrary to many other painters, van Mander did not use the open 'V' structure to show the background. Since his troops are marching to the upper right, he could show mount Nebo in the centre and then unfold landscapes of Canaan to the right and left.

In the lower right part of the picture van Mander showed an assembly of obviously wealthy people. These are standing next to their bags. They turn their backs to the advancing column. Van Mander may just have painted this one small scene to fill up one lower triangle of his picture and show his skills in painting beautiful people and sumptuous dresses, a way of comparing his skills with other painters of details. In the Book of Joshua, it is told that Yahweh ordered the fighting men to cross but the wives and the cattle had to stay behind beyond the Jordan. But another interpretation could be that he meant here a moral message. The wealthy people have just crossed the Jordan, but now they rest and wait. They turn their backs to the column that is marching energetically and that is hard at work to enter God's land. Van Mander may have meant here to moralise on the wealthy burghers of Amsterdam, saying that they wait and refuse to leave behind their riches to follow the design of God.

We have only few pictures left of van Mander and that is a pity. For van Mander shows obvious painterly qualities. His picture is made in splendid, harmonious colours. He had clearly a good feeling for colours and the fine combination of figures and landscape brings him in the best tradition of the northern landscape painters, of which Brabant and Holland were so rich. Van Mander liked landscapes and he depicted nature in 'The Crossing of the Jordan' with obvious relish, love and skill. Remark for instance how nicely he let the light play in the foliage of the bushes in the centre.

Van Mander combined various painterly styles in the same picture. In certain places he painted detail minutely, in other places he applied a broader, more nervous brushstroke. We know this style in particular of Rembrandt, who worked also in Amsterdam. Van Mander also marvellously masters light and dark and he used the contrasts quite earlier than Caravaggio did, though not of course with the force of this Roman artist. The horizontal middle part of the painting is hidden in a belt of dark colours, whereas light is in the lower and upper parts. Van Mander had no difficulty with the drawing of figures. The lady with the white cloak in the right corner, almost in the lower middle, is well drawn and shown elegantly.

Karel van Mander was a poet, a writer of a now famous biography of Dutch painters and a he was a fine painter. He was truly an all-round Renaissance man, a humanist who preferred freedom of thought in Protestantism to any dogma of Catholicism. Yet, he also saw some narrow-mindedness in Amsterdam. In his picture of 1605 he tells we need to advance together as free people to the Promised Land. Salvation is in the journey and one does not stand on the side waiting haughtily for someone to take up one's burdens. Join the column, he says, and advance, as the long history of Christianity does.

Other paintings:

The Victory of Joshua over the Amalekites. Nicolas Poussin (1594-1666). The State Hermitage Museum. St Petersburg. 1625-1626.

The Transport of the Holy Ark

Nicolo Malinconico (1663-1721).). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1692-1694.

Epilogue

We started our series of paintings from the Old Testament, from Genesis, with pictures of landscapes of Eden. Karel Van Mander links with the northern tradition of landscape painting so that we can rightly close our series of pictures from the Pentateuch with a grand landscape. We started with open, wide landscapes of the Paradise, in which man was small. We close with a landscape that is as grand, in which man is still small, but they are many and they have shaped the land. The Pentateuch is a long and epic narrative of grand characters. But the land, the views that are described, the link with the land that we constantly feel in the writers of the texts, are all-important and remain the linking thread. Israel had finally reached Canaan to stay and make this land theirs.