



RIVKA ULMER

Egyptian Cultural Icons  
in Midrash

DE GRUYTER

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EGYPTIAN CULTURAL ICONS IN MIDRASH



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# EGYPTIAN CULTURAL ICONS IN MIDRASH

BY  
RIVKA ULMER

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## Introduction: The Significance of Egypt in Rabbinic Texts

When the Holy One, Blessed be He, came to give the Torah to Israel, He spoke to them in a language they knew and understood, *anokhi* (*I am*) the Lord your God (Exod. 20:2). R. Nehemiah said, What kind of word is *anokhi*? – an Egyptian word. In Egypt, when someone wishes to say “*ani* (I),” he says “*anokh.*” (Tanh., Buber ed., Yitro 16)

As may be seen from the above quotation, Jews continued to engage with Egyptian culture long after the Exodus from Egypt.<sup>1</sup> In this book, I will explore the rabbinic use of Egyptian images and concepts, mainly in the literature known as midrash, a form of scriptural interpretation that was the major rabbinic hermeneutical enterprise from late antiquity through the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> Rabbinic midrash and related texts of late antiquity and the early medieval period frequently visualized Egypt and presented Egyptian icons. One of the critical objectives of these portrayals of Egypt was to set boundaries of Jewish identity by presenting rabbinic Judaism in opposition to Egyptian culture. The Egyptian cultural icons in rabbinic texts also demonstrate that the rabbis were clearly aware of cultures other than their own. The rabbinic texts utilized portrayals of Egyptian culture in order to make statements of their own values and ideologies. Rabbinic texts referred to Egyptian cultural icons, which served to demarcate rabbinic Judaism from Egyptian culture. In this book, I will compare the textualized images of Egypt utilized by the rabbis, the originators of the initial midrashic and talmudic texts, with Egypt’s own internal representations of its culture.

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- 1 Arguments for the historicity of the Exodus are supported by some Egyptological evidence. See Sarah I. Groll, “The Egyptian Background of the Exodus and the Crossing of the Reed Sea: A New Reading of Papyrus Anastasi VIII,” in *Jerusalem Studies of Egyptology* (ed. Irene Shirun-Grumach; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 159-172; Manfred Görg, “Exodus,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 1, 489-90; Siegfried Herrmann, “Israel in Ägypten,” ZÄS 91 (1964), 63-79; James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Donald B. Redford, “An Egyptological Perspective on Exodus,” in *Egypt, Israel and Sinai: Archaeological and Historical Relationships in the Biblical Period* (ed. Anson F. Rainey; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1987), 137-61.
- 2 See Rivka Ulmer, “The Boundaries of the Rabbinic Genre Midrash,” *Colloquium* 38 (2006), 59-73.

My particular approach to the Egyptian elements in midrashic and related rabbinic texts is to read midrash in a cross-cultural manner from an Egyptological perspective.<sup>3</sup> I utilize insights from the discipline of Egyptology in assessing the essence of Egyptian textual icons in rabbinic texts.<sup>4</sup> However, my objective is not to demonstrate the penetration of Egyptian culture into the Land of Israel and the Diaspora, but rather to investigate the dynamics of the fusion between rabbinic visions of Egypt and their religious implications in midrash.

The presence of Egyptian elements in midrash had previously been noted to a very limited extent by scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*,<sup>5</sup> and it has not escaped the attention of more recent scholarship.<sup>6</sup>

3 J. Gwyn Griffiths, "The Legacy of Egypt in Judaism," *CHJ* 3, 1025-51, views Judaism from an Egyptological perspective.

4 Alice Bach, "Whatever Happened to Dionysus?" in *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies. The Third Sheffield Colloquium* (ed. Cheryl J. Exum and Stephen D Moore; JSTOTSupp 266; Gender, Culture, Theory; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 91-116. Bach remarks in respect to the tension between classical studies and Afro-centric approaches: "Thus I shall be carried along the current of cultural studies, in arguing that the pull of pan-European beginnings that awarded cultural priority and privilege to ancient Greece over Egypt and the Near East became a proxy fight for cultural privilege, one that continues to be waged in certain academic circles." (94) In my opinion, there is a similar tendency in the study of rabbinic texts and the cultural icons found in them; with few exceptions, such as Zoroastrian influences, the great majority of scholars explain rabbinic culture from a Greco-Roman context.

5 Moritz Güdemann, *Religionsgeschichtliche Studien* (Schriften des Israelitischen Literatur-Vereins 2; Leipzig: Oskar Leiner, 1876); Bernard Heller, "Egyptian Elements in the Haggadah," in *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, pt. I (ed. Samuel Löwinger and Joseph Somogyi; Budapest, 1948), 412-18; Jakob Horovitz, *Die Josephserzählung* (Frankfurt a. M.: Kauffmann, 1921), and others.

6 See Gideon Bohak, "Rabbinic Perspectives on Egyptian Religion," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 2 (2000), 215-31; Rivka Ulmer, "Zwischen ägyptischer Vorlage und talmudischer Rezeption: Josef und die Ägypterin," *Kairos* 24/25 (1992/93), 75-90; "Discovering Mosaistics: Israel's Egyptian Roots," موزایستکس، در کتاب لاسانیل عرض و نقش ونقد | Bulletin of the Israeli Academic Centre in Cairo 18 (1994), 24-27; "The Divine Eye in Ancient Egypt and in the Midrashic Interpretation of Formative Judaism," *Journal of Religion and Society* 5 (2003), 1-17; "Visions of Egypt in Midrash: Pharaoh's Birthday and the Nile Festival," *Biblical Interpretation in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Isaac Kalimi and Peter Haas; Sheffield: T&T Clark, 2006), 52-78; "Visions of Egypt and Roman Palestine: A Dialectical Relationship between History and Homiletical Midrash," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 33 (2006), 1-33; "Visions of Egypt in Midrash: The Nile as the Landscape of the Other," in *Discussing Cultural Influences: Text, Context, and Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism: Proceedings of a Conference on Rabbinic Judaism at Bucknell University* (ed. Rivka Ulmer; Studies in Judaism Series; Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2007), 193-234; "Egyptian Magic and the Osiris Myth in Midrash," *Midrash and Context* (ed. Lieve Teugels and Rivka Ulmer; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), 165-208; "Cleopatra as a Cultural Icon in Rabbinic Literature," *Hen* 29, 2 (2007), 327-53.

Some Egyptian elements in midrash are fairly accurate depictions of Hellenistic-Roman customs,<sup>7</sup> while other references to Egypt are consistent with images and customs found in earlier periods of Egyptian history. Among the numerous Egyptian elements eliciting religious responses found in different midrashim are the Nile inundation,<sup>8</sup> the Nile god,<sup>9</sup> mummy portraits,<sup>10</sup> funeral customs,<sup>11</sup> and Egyptian festivals.<sup>12</sup> Egyptian elements in midrash also served as cultural icons that were immediately recognizable as Egyptian; such additional elements included the Egyptian language,<sup>13</sup> the myth of Osiris,<sup>14</sup> the gods Anubis,<sup>15</sup> Isis,<sup>16</sup> Serapis,<sup>17</sup> Ra<sup>18</sup> and Horus,<sup>19</sup> as well as Queen Cleopatra.<sup>20</sup> Greco-Roman Egypt and the spread of Hellenism were the main cultural conduits for Egyptian and “Egyptianizing” concepts in rabbinic texts. From a literary perspective, these Egyptian elements are components that enhance the veracity of the narrative and provide literary density; furthermore these elements make the background of the story appear to be quite realistic. From a religious perspective, the use of the Egyptian past, whether imagined or factual, provided the rabbis with a hermeneutical device to discuss agendas of their own time.

My exploration of Egypt in midrash – often from the tannaitic stratum – also includes additional rabbinic sources and non-rabbinic sources as well. I trace the complex transmission of ideas from Egyptian culture to Jewish culture, and the extent of the rabbis’ knowledge about Egyptian culture as reflected in these texts. The rabbis used and processed these images and related their own experience under Roman rule and other oppressive governments to the ancient Israelite expe-

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7 See, for example, the following works pertaining to this period of Egyptian cultural history, which is close to the rabbinic period: J. Lindsay, *Daily Life in Roman Egypt* (London: F. Muller, 1963), 160–75, and Alan Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs: 332BC-AD 642. From Alexander to the Arab Conquest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, repr. of 1986 ed.).

8 Gen. Rab.13:9 and parallels.

9 Gen. Rab. 69:4 and parallels.

10 Pesiq. Rab. 17 § 13 and parallels.

11 Ibid.

12 Exod. Rab. 11:11 and parallels.

13 Esth. Rab. 4:12 and parallels.

14 Mek. Beshallah 1 and parallels.

15 Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 11 and parallels.

16 t. ‘Abod. Zar. 5:1.

17 Ibid.

18 Yalq. 1, 372 Ki tissa and parallels.

19 y. Mo‘ed Qat. 3:7, 83c and parallels.

20 t. Nid. 4:17 and parallels.

rience of bondage in Egypt. The engagement with Egypt had been decisive in the establishment of Judaism in the Bible, and it became a defining element in the emerging Judaism of the first few centuries of the Common Era.

Midrash and related interpretive texts served as a repository of rabbinic cultural knowledge. The midrashic utilization of Egyptian images reveals that the rabbinic interpreters moved beyond their own cultural sphere and in so doing generated rhetorical patterns in regard to a culture both ideologically and topographically different. The complexities of this engagement with Egypt will be noted; for example, rabbinic texts sometimes manipulated Egyptian concepts and customs in ways that were significantly different from Egyptian practices, while at other times the rabbinic texts are amazingly consistent with Egyptian traditions. The purpose of manipulating these Egyptian ideas and customs was to establish rabbinic concepts in contrast to Egypt or to reinforce existing Jewish religious ideas.

The rabbinic visualizations of Egypt in midrashic literature were occasionally independent of written texts; this is unlike the usual midrashic approach to issues raised that required hermeneutic intervention, in which the Hebrew Bible was utilized as the major source of information for the inquiry under investigation. Primarily, midrashic texts endeavored to find in the Bible an answer to every problem; intermittently the rabbis accepted other sources, such as science, philosophy, and common knowledge. The rabbis first and foremost existed in a textual world; however, occasionally, especially with regard to information concerning Egypt, the rabbis stepped out of this textual world.

Consequently, rabbinic awareness of Egypt was not only based upon the Biblical corpus, but also included the following factors: 1. teachers from Alexandria are mentioned in rabbinic texts; 2. rabbis visited Alexandria; 3. Alexandrian Jews traveled to Israel; 4. extensive trade relations existed between the Land of Israel and Egypt; 5. the Land of Israel contained many Egyptian artifacts; 6. Roman and Byzantine artifacts relating to Egypt have been found in Israel and the Diaspora. As further possible sources of information regarding Egypt, which may have been available to the rabbis of the midrash, one might consider antique popular knowledge of Egyptian culture in the realms of medicine, wisdom, magic and noteworthy events, such as earthquakes, pogroms, and wars. For example, even before the Common Era, some inhabitants of the Land of Israel visited major religious cen-

ters in Egypt as traders or tourists;<sup>21</sup> there are Aramaic graffiti in Abydos, Egypt (5<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE). Some people fled from Israel to Egypt and rabbis traveled to Egypt to visit the large Diaspora community in Alexandria. Thus, the ideological and social interactions of the Land of Israel with Egypt were extensive. This broad engagement with Egypt requires us to examine references to Egyptian culture in midrash, which could supplement previous studies of elements from Greco-Roman, Persian and Babylonian cultures in rabbinic literature.

In Judaism in general, and in rabbinic texts in particular, “Egypt” as a metaphor<sup>22</sup> is almost of equal significance as the metaphors “the Romans” or “the destruction of the Temple.” Ultimately, the sojourn in Egypt as depicted in the Hebrew Bible served as the prime example of initial assimilation and the subsequent return to one’s heritage, or “dissimilation.” Similar cultural tendencies were experienced by Joseph and Moses in the Bible, as well as in midrash.<sup>23</sup> In the medieval and modern period, Egypt had become more of an ideological position rather than a real place. This ideological position served as a trope for rhetorical effect in the rabbinic battle against religious and cultural threats posed by life in the Diaspora. In many respects the Diaspora was viewed as another Egypt. The memory of the Exodus from Egypt has been a major theological topic that has shaped the expression of Jewish thought from antiquity to modernity. The Jewish ghetto in Frankfurt am Main was referred to as “Egypt” in early modern times, and a 20<sup>th</sup> century parody of the Passover Haggadah depicted the English king as Pharaoh.<sup>24</sup> In Germany, immediately prior to the Sho’ah,<sup>25</sup>

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21 John S. Holladay, “Judaeans (and Phoenicians) in Egypt in the Late Seventh to Sixth Centuries B.C.,” in *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford* (ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Antoine Hirsch; Probleme der Ägyptologie 20; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 404–38.

22 John Searle, “Metaphor,” in *Metaphor and Thought* (ed. Andrew Ortony; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 83–111, 85, defines metaphoric meaning based upon the linguistic and philosophical construct of “truth conditions.”

23 For example, the cultural interaction with Egypt of these towering Biblical figures (Pirqe R. El. 38 [39]).

24 *Haggadah Kulo Maror* (Warsaw, 1934); Pharaoh is depicted as King George V and Moses as the Zionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky (see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Haggadah and History: A Panorama in Facsimile of Five Centuries of the Printed Haggadah from the Collections of Harvard University and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2005; repr.), 80).

25 The destruction of European Jewry, the “Holocaust.”

rabbis in their sermons<sup>26</sup> referred to Egypt as the ultimate Diaspora experience of oppression.

The experience of exile and living in the Diaspora not only changes the sociological aspect of one's existence, but also radically impacts thought processes and the particular collective memory of one's group.<sup>27</sup> Collective memory is usually defined as a collection of representations of the past that are communally adopted.<sup>28</sup> The impact of Egypt upon the Jewish collective memory is pervasive and is found in rituals such as the Passover celebration and the Kiddush for the Sabbath. The Kiddush for the Sabbath states:

כִּי הַוְּיָם תְּחִילָה לְמִקְרָאֵינוֹ קָדֵשׁ וְכֵר לִיְצָאת מִצְרָיִם

[The Sabbath is a reminder of Creation], since it is the first among the sacred days which recall the Exodus from Egypt.

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאלו "In every single generation every person [Jew] is obligated to view himself as though he had gone forth from Egypt."<sup>29</sup> This

26 See the sermons of Rabbi Leo Baeck (1873-1956) delivered in Berlin in the late 1930's (*Aus drei Jahrtausenden* [Berlin: Schocken, 1938, repr. 1958]). George Steiner addresses the issue of exile as a discourse in modern Judaism (see George Steiner, "Our Homeland, the Text," in *idem, No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1995* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996]), 304-27.

27 Wolfram Burisch, *Das Elend des Exils: Theodor Geiger und die Soziologie* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1995), in his interpretation of Theodor Geiger (1891-1952).

28 Doron Mendels, *Memory in Jewish, Pagan and Christian Societies of the Graeco-Roman World: Fragmented Memory – Comprehensive Memory – Collective Memory* (Library of Second Temple Studies 45; London: T & T Clark, 2004), 30.

29 This is part of the maror ceremony in the Haggadah. Although the phrase "In every single generation ..." is not contained in the early Mishnah nor in the Talmud, it is found in the earliest extant manuscripts of the Haggadah (MS JTS 9560, between 950 and 1050 CE; MS CJS Halper 211, and others) which follow the versions from the Land of Israel (see Clemens Leonhard, "Die Älteste Haggada: Übersetzung der Pesachhaggada nach dem palästinischen Ritus und Vorschläge zu ihrem Ursprung und ihrer Bedeutung für die Geschichte der christlichen Liturgie," *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 45,2 (2003), 201-31, 215). Generally, it is necessary to differentiate between the date of the Seder (the Passover meal) and the date of the text of the Haggadah. The Haggadah was composed as a new text on the basis of the Mishnah. This implies, according to Leonhard, that the Haggadah could not have been part of the liturgy of the Passover Seder during Amoraic times. Louis Finkelstein, "The Oldest Midrash: Pre-Rabbinic Ideals and Teachings in the Passover Haggadah," *HTR* 31 (1938), 291-317; and *idem*, "Pre-Maccabean Documents in the Haggadah," *HTR* 35 (1942), 291-332; 36 (1943), 1-38, claimed that the key passages of the Haggadah are political statements relating to the time of the Maccabees. The text is said to refer to the time of the Egyptian reign over the Land of Israel and therefore the conflict between Israel and Egypt is played down (3rd century BCE). The celebration of the Paschal meal is confirmed in Second Temple apocryphal texts that provide "incidental

book could possibly provide more subtle meanings to those blessings and ritualistic formulations that refer to Egypt and permeate Judaism. The references to Egypt and to the Exodus recall the oppression and the divine defeat of the Egyptians and their gods. Egypt was a dominating factor in the shaping of Judaism, and it continued to influence Jewish religious expressions long after the Exodus.

The rejection of Egyptian practices and worship, including Egyptian magic and sacrifice, became fundamental to the establishment of the “Israelite religion” and of the ensuing development of Judaism. Additionally, Egyptian involvement in the southern Levant provided the context within which Israel came into existence in the thirteenth and early twelfth centuries BCE.<sup>30</sup> The distinction between Egypt and Israel is stated in a Biblical text: *And I will put a division between My people and your people; tomorrow shall this sign come to pass* (Exod. 8:19). “Mosaic monotheism” became central to this division, the separation from Egypt.<sup>31</sup> However, monotheistic tendencies under Akhenaton (1360-1340 BCE) were only partially successful for a brief period in Egypt.<sup>32</sup> The Biblical rejection of Egypt resulted in a presumed inversion of events. What happened to Israel during the Exodus and in later exiles would happen in the future to Egypt, as expressed by the prophet Ezekiel: *I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations* (Ezek. 30:23). Occasionally, Jewish extra-biblical texts in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha condemned Egyptian practices; for example, *Wisdom of Solomon* 11:15 (and 15:18-16:1), in commenting upon the Exodus criticizes Egyptians and their cults.<sup>33</sup> The Biblical Exodus narrative depicts the Egyptians as oppressors, idol worshippers, and magicians, while the Alexandrian anti-Jewish myths portray Jews as misanthropes, lepers

details,” although the earliest comprehensive description of the meal and the acts is found in the Mishnah (Joseph Tabory, “The Passover Haggadah,” in *The Literature of the Sages: Second Part*, ed. Shmuel Safrai, et al.; Amsterdam: Royal Van Gorcum, 2006), 327-38, 328.

- 30 See Carolyn R. Higginbotham, *Egyptianization and Elite Emulation in Ramesside Palestine: Governance and Accommodation on the Imperial Periphery* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East, 2; Leiden: Brill, 2000).
- 31 Jan Assmann, *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2003).
- 32 The influence of Akhenaton and the Amarna period on the development of Biblical “monotheism” is viewed as probable, but highly controversial; see Jan Assmann, “Theological Responses to Amarna,” in *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford* (ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Antoine Hirsch; Probleme der Ägyptologie 20; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 179-91.
- 33 Samuel Cheon, *The Exodus Story in the Wisdom of Solomon: A Study in Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

and violators of the sacred traditions of Egypt. The abhorrence (“abomination”) of anything Egyptian has a long history in Judaism; it served as a category of distinction and self-identification to divide Israelite and rabbinic Judaisms from alien cultures. Even if other religions were tolerated, any cross-cultural connection in the religious realm was unthinkable.

Nevertheless, the ideological baggage carried by the Israelites from Egypt was enormous.<sup>34</sup> Theological implications and Egyptian influences upon “Israelite” and Jewish religious concepts are vast, e.g., the netherworld monster known from the judgment scenes and found in multiple versions of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (Spell 110) is referred to in Isa. 5:14; Hab. 2:5 and Prov. 1:12; in the nineteenth century a Jewish newspaper suggested that Rosh Ha-Shanah may be based upon an Egyptian holiday.<sup>35</sup> Individual details such as these may not have been apparent to the rabbis; however, rabbinic texts cite some Egyptian elements and integrate them into their textual worlds.

A fundamental question in respect to the sources of these Egyptian elements is: What role did the Egyptian religion and its spread in the Hellenistic and Roman world play in shaping the visions of Egypt in rabbinic texts? In midrash, Egyptian source material was organized in such a manner that it could serve as the antithesis to rabbinic concepts. In this dialectical engagement with Egypt, it should be noted that midrash does not constitute an extensive repository of Egyptian culture. Midrash and related literature present additional information on the issue of how one particular group (the rabbis) among the many groups in the Roman Empire viewed Egypt. This is significant because Judaism views itself as coming out of Egypt, another nation, another culture, and from our vantage point, another religion.

There are some oversimplifications of Egyptian images in rabbinic literature; the rabbis did not possess expertise in other religions, but we may note that very often the construct of Egypt in rabbinic texts re-

<sup>34</sup> John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1997); Manfred Görg, *Die Beziehungen zwischen dem alten Israel und Ägypten: von den Anfängen bis zum Exil* (Erträge der Forschung 290; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), *idem*, *Ein Haus im Totenreich: Jenseitsvorstellungen in Israel und Ägypten* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1998); *idem*, *Gott-König-Reden in Israel und Ägypten* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1975); Pierre Montet, *Egypt and the Bible* (transl. Leslie R. Keylock; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968); Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden: Brill, 1970); Joseph Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte: Genèse chap. 37-50 à la lumière des études égyptologiques récentes* (Louvain: Publication Universitaires, 1959); Abraham S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in its Relation to Egyptian*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

<sup>35</sup> See *The American Israelite*, 33,19 (Nov. 5, 1886), 4.

markably coincides with what we presently know about the Ancient Egyptian religion. Furthermore, the rabbinic texts of the early centuries CE and the Middle Ages also echo some aspects of the Biblical and the Roman negative perceptions of Egyptian civilization. These rabbinic texts on occasion display an even sharper criticism, concerning both the Egyptian people and their religious practices. Nevertheless, these texts mainly reveal continuity of a theology derived from the Exodus from Egypt which sustains a positive attitude towards the future. The rabbinic strategy with regard to Egyptian civilization is articulated by criticizing Egypt and utilizing this criticism in order to mark the differences between rabbinic Judaism and contemporary religions, such as Christianity. Reengaging with Egypt on a textual level also served to redefine Jewish identity in the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora, in addition to reexamining the core of Judaism. For example, it is stated that the Plagues of Egypt would be visited upon Rome.<sup>36</sup> As the cultural theorist Yaakov Shavit claims, an encounter with a foreign culture that is physically close but oppositional may lead to a complex, dialectical process of discovery and reorganization of self-understanding.<sup>37</sup> The fact that the Jewish links to the Egyptian past are primarily cultural constructions does not reduce their significance.<sup>38</sup>

In short, rabbinic views of Egypt provide us with rich source material for reading midrashic texts in their religious and cultural contexts and for a better understanding of the world in which the texts were composed, collected, edited and studied. The issue of the intellectual framework of exile, and processing the exile beyond the scope of the Biblical sojourn in Egypt, suggests that the rabbis were caught in a dialectic between history and exegesis. This dialectic is part of the discussion of the various exiles experienced by the Jewish people. With respect to an historical context concerning exile, I would like to emphasize that some of the rabbinic texts cited in this book were composed in the Diaspora. These “late” midrashic texts contain older traditions, although the ways in which the authors present and modify these traditions are clearly products of the Diaspora experience.

It is fundamental that we recognize the rabbis’ own disempowered relationship to Rome and any other superpower of the late antique and medieval world. Much of the rabbinic material relating to Egypt is polemically charged. Can we therefore retrieve anything historical from this material? This rhetorical question should be answered in the affir-

<sup>36</sup> Tanh., Buber ed., Va’era 14; Bo 6.

<sup>37</sup> Yaakov Shavit, *ההדות בראויי הזמנת* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1992), 24.

<sup>38</sup> Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs* (transl. A. Jenkins; New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 11.

mative. We may assume that some historical and cultural evidence is found within texts designed to provide one presentation of reality for a particular persuasive purpose. The rabbinic texts contain literary and cultural tropes rather than focused historical analyses; visions of Egypt's image in midrashic and other rabbinic texts are shaped by several factors including, but not limited to: 1. the Biblical tales which are set in Egypt, such as the sojourns of Abraham, Joseph and the "Hebrews" in Egypt; 2. the conflicts in Ptolemaic, Roman, and Christian Alexandria, as well as the intellectual and commercial prominence of that city; 3. some Greek and Roman attitudes towards Egypt; 4. the theological foundations of rabbinic Judaism that identifies itself as a culture of continuity which provides for a recurring Exodus mentality. In regard to the factor of Biblical tales mentioned above, the rabbinic panorama of Biblical events has come to be regarded as an absolute reality, which is to serve as a model for all subsequent generations. The stories and the characters from the past have become an epistemological tool for understanding the ever changing realities of each era. Set forth below is a brief summary of each of the ten chapters of this book.

## 1. Pharaohs

Among the pharaohs mentioned in midrash we find the unspecified "Pharaoh of the Exodus." As Egypt began to fade into memory, the pharaoh of the Exodus continued as an active presence in rabbinic texts. Additionally, some rabbinic texts utilized pharaohs from the post-Exodus era that appear in the Bible as leading their Egyptian armies into the Land of Israel; these are Shoshenq, Necho, and Apries. In rabbinic literature the Egyptian kings (pharaohs) are strong cultural icons symbolizing the oppression during the Exodus and the historical engagements with Egypt before Alexander the Great conquered Egypt. Midrash often looks at Ancient Egypt using the pharaoh as the focal point; midrash provides a new context for the former historical context by inscribing the Egyptian kings into the collective memory of Judaism. Midrashic texts subvert these powerful pharaohs by revealing their character flaws; consequently, the pharaohs are readily rendered impotent by the rabbinic authors and the superior ethics of Judaism. Beginning with Alexander the Great the new foreign rulers of Egypt, the Ptolemies, assumed pharaonic customs and were portrayed in pharaonic garb and posture in Egypt. In rabbinic texts the Ptolemies are generically referred to as "Talmai" with the exception of Cleopatra. One par-

ticular Ptolemy, “King Talmai,” is mainly discussed within the rabbinic criticism of the Greek Bible translation, the Septuagint.

## 2. The Nile

The Nile was equivalent to Egypt and the river was a major contributor to the development of Egyptian religion, culture and civilization. The Nile dominated the Egyptian cultural landscape. The midrashic texts explore the geography of the Nile; the texts display knowledge of the Nile inundation and the flora and fauna of the Nile delta. The Egyptian water supply and the work of the Egyptian farmers are compared to the Land of Israel. The Nile as the focus of the hermeneutics of midrash was ultimately a symbol of the “Other” from the perspective of the rabbis. This “otherness” was brought into the world of the familiar and was transformed and compared to Jewish concepts, so as to make it intelligible to those who studied the midrash. Discussing the Nile is part of the rabbis’ strategies to shape and transmit Judaism from a cultural perspective by referring to a culture that was different from their own.<sup>39</sup>

In Egypt, the Nile served as a supremely positive symbol, indicative of life, while in midrashic texts the Nile is transformed into a negative symbol, indicative of idolatry and death. From a Jewish religious perspective, the waters of the Nile served as the divinely chosen agent of destruction that turned against Egypt. The midrashic texts explore the religious significance of the Nile, contemplate the “Nile god” and comment upon the relationship of the Egyptian king to the river. The rabbinic portrayals of Egypt and the Nile include themes that were motivated by ideological and religious norms wholly different from those of the Egyptian religious practitioners.<sup>40</sup> In the later midrashic works that I cite in this chapter concerning the Nile, the Diaspora is understood to be *like* Egypt. The status of Jews living in the landscape of the “Other” remains a core issue in rabbinic and liturgical Jewish texts.

<sup>39</sup> Among the rich literature focusing upon the cultural transfer between Israel and Egypt during the reign of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, is the following title that utilized a cultural perspective: Bernd Ulrich Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit: Die kulturellen Kontakte von Salomo bis zum Fall Jerusalems* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 170; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Compare Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, 11.

### 3. Egyptian Festivals

Several Egyptian festivals are mentioned in rabbinic texts; I focus upon these festivals in my examination of selected midrashic and Egyptian texts from a comparative perspective. In the course of this analysis, particular topics are emphasized, such as the cultural transmission and construction of ideas. The Egyptians celebrated specific festivities associated with the Nile and the pharaoh. The term *יום גנוסיה* (*yom genosia*) may be compared to Pharaoh's birthday which was the Romanized version of the Ancient Egyptian *Hebsed* festival. The term *יום נילוס* (*yom nilos*) may be compared to the Nile festivals (the Romanized Nile festival or the Egyptian *Opet* festival).

### 4. The Osiris Myth and Egyptian Magic

In the rabbinic texts that concentrate on the retrieval of Joseph's coffin during the Biblical Exodus from Egypt there are specific elements from Egyptian culture, including Egyptian magic and the Osiris myth. Joseph's coffin is either located in the royal tombs or at the bottom of the Nile. The elements of the midrashic narrative have many parallels to the Egyptian Osiris myth. The magic that Moses performs to raise Joseph from the Nile is similar to Egyptian magical practices, and there are very specific parallels. The midrashic intersections with the Osiris myth are generally close to, but not limited to, the version in *Papyrus Jumilhac*: the concept of a double burial, the fertility related to the coffin, the coffin at the bottom of the Nile, raising the coffin through the use of magic and Moses carrying the coffin on his back. The midrashic texts contain additional elements of the Egyptian funeral cult: embalmers (magicians), protective dogs and royal tombs. The question of why the framers of some midrashic texts purport to refer to Egyptian magic is a hermeneutical question that is largely determined by rabbinic theology which contends that Moses had far greater magical prowess.

### 5. Egyptian Funeral Practices and Statues of the Roman Emperor

In this chapter I will focus upon the term *iqonin* which refers to statues, such as the statues of Hadrian, the Roman emperor, who ruled Egypt and Roman Palestine (the Land of Israel). Additionally, the term *iqonin*

in midrash refers to the depictions of a deceased family member which connotes funeral practices of late Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. Relating to the depiction of the deceased, which is applied to the death of the Egyptian firstborn, the homilies recast the Exodus narrative. Based upon the mourning of a deceased family member, the midrash inverts the Egyptian punishment of flogging; instead of being inflicted upon the Israelites the Egyptian firstborn sons are flogged.

This midrashic inversion, which exemplifies a rising tension between history and homiletic midrash, may be explained by applying Theodor Adorno's theory of inversion. Furthermore, I refer to Ernst Cassirer's philosophies of culture and language in order to offer a theoretical framework for the peculiar view of time in midrash, which is essential to the rabbinic view of history. Homiletic midrashim of late antiquity and of the early medieval period created a historical narrative for the Diaspora, which was viewed to some extent as a repetition of the Egyptian experience. In constructing this narrative particular rabbinic perceptions of time as a hermeneutical strategy were utilized, which requires us to consider the functionality of time in relation to historical events within the rabbinic framework. The narrative that is created by the homiletic midrashim involves visual images of past and future events, which are combined within the context of the same time frame. Thus, the rabbis utilized the past in order to explain and illustrate both the present and future.

## 6. Alexandria

Alexandria in Egypt was the major conduit for information flowing between Egypt and the Land of Israel during Ptolemaic and Roman times. Rabbinic sources acknowledge the rich history of the city, as well as the observance of Jewish laws and customs practiced by the Jews of Alexandria. Nevertheless, Alexandria, the splendid city founded by Alexander the Great, was treated with suspicion in rabbinic literature. Rituals derived from the culture of Ancient Egypt, which were rejected by the rabbinic texts as idolatry, continued to permeate Alexandria even in Greco-Roman and Christian times. According to the rabbinic texts, Egyptian religious practices and Egyptian icons were intrinsically connected to Alexandria. Conflicts and persecutions involving the Alexandrian Jews are also noted in rabbinic texts. As a major city of the Jewish Diaspora, Alexandria was viewed as a potential rival of Jerusalem. The tension between Jerusalem and Alexandria is reflected in the

tannaitic stratum of rabbinic literature and continued to be mentioned in the talmudic corpus.

Above all, Alexandria was stereotyped in rabbinic literature; it was viewed as a source of magic and sexual licentiousness. Concurrently to the expression of these stereotypes, rabbinic texts recognized that skilled craftsmen and physicians, as well as wisdom, were abundant in this city. Several rabbis claimed to have visited Alexandria, which invokes the well-known *topos* of fleeing to Egypt in times of danger or famine. This *topos* is shared by Jewish and Christian texts. Visiting or fleeing to Egypt may be viewed as a reversal of the Exodus. Stepping off the boat at the ancient harbor of Alexandria, visitors could not avoid seeing Egyptian artifacts, statues of pharaohs and Egyptian and Greco-Roman gods.

In addition to the presence of Alexandria in rabbinic texts, there were images of Alexandria in the Land of Israel; e.g., the so-called Nilotic scenes in mosaics from the Roman and Byzantine eras often depicted Alexandria and its lighthouse. The famous buildings and sites of Alexandria were markers of a recognizably foreign culture that had invaded the cultural space that the creators of rabbinic texts were carving out for themselves in a multi-cultural world.

## 7. Cleopatra, Isis and Serapis

Rome, the ruling power in the Land of Israel in late antiquity, was fascinated with Egypt and the last Egyptian ruler, Queen Cleopatra VII. Rome also adopted Egyptian gods, such as Isis and Serapis that offered new religious perspectives and who were both viewed as representatives of an ancient and exotic culture. The rabbinic discussions textualize these Egyptian icons in the polemical or dialectical engagement of the rabbis with foreign cults and beliefs. The Egyptian gods Isis and Serapis appear in the tannaitic stratum of rabbinic texts. Legends found in these texts depict Cleopatra as a physician schooled in Alexandrian medical knowledge and as a cruel tormenter of her subordinates. The cultural icon Cleopatra appears in a talmudic passage in which Cleopatra participates in a discourse on the afterlife. In the rabbinic passages her physical appearance is not described; only her voice is mentioned in discursive textual units.

Although the Ptolemaic rulers and the subsequent Roman rulers of Egypt presented themselves in Egyptian garb,<sup>41</sup> Cleopatra was probably the only one who spoke the Egyptian language and who emphasized her Egyptian roots. She presented herself as the goddess Isis, her husbands Julius Caesar and Mark Antony as Osiris and her son, Caesariion, as Horus (or Harsieris). Guided by an analysis of what a cultural tradition produces and erases, I tentatively illuminate the rabbinic approach to Cleopatra by referring to some of the available Egyptian and classical sources. This results in viewing Cleopatra as a representative of Egypt, which in itself is an icon that is saturated and inundated in memories that permeate rabbinic texts.

## 8. The Egyptian Gods, Language and Customs

Egyptian mementos found in rabbinic texts recall Egypt primarily by referring to the Egyptian language and Egyptian gods. The “Egyptian” language is mentioned in an interpretation of the Ten Commandments; additionally, tannaitic and amoraic texts contain a few Egyptian loanwords. Talmudic texts reflect upon the use of Coptic, the last stage of the Egyptian language, and discuss the reading of the Bible in Coptic. The Egyptian gods Ra’, Horus, Khnum, and others are referred to in rabbinic texts. The Egyptian gods cited in rabbinic literature are mementos of the Biblical sojourn in Egypt, whereas Isis and Serapis, who are mentioned above, were revered in Greco-Roman Egypt and in the Roman provinces. Egyptian customs, such as elaborate hair-styles and eye-makeup, are indicative of the cultural assimilation of the Biblical Joseph.

## 9. The Divine Eye

In this chapter I use a semiotic approach to the religious phenomenon of the eye drawing upon multiple traditions from Ancient Egypt and comparing these traditions with rabbinic Judaism in late antiquity. The semiotics of vision is a theoretical model that may unite the viewing of the eye by Ancient Egyptian and rabbinic viewers under one canopy, although they existed in different historical settings and in different cultural specificities of seeing and the seen. Generally, the eye in both

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41 For example, the depictions of Philip Arrhidaeus at Karnak, of Augustus worshiping Isis in Dendera or Hadrian in Egyptian garb in Philae.

traditions represented an all-seeing and omnipresent divinity. In Egypt the power of the eye usually emanated from the sun god, but there is a broad spectrum of the concept of the eye in Egyptian culture. The religious concept of the eye in rabbinic Judaism could be viewed as an icon that denotes a discerning God, who ultimately differentiates between good and evil. Although the eye as an icon was perceived in the Ancient Near East for centuries before the rabbinic era, the rabbis were able to establish their own religious concepts pertaining to the eye in a purely textual medium.

## 10. The “Finding of Moses” in Art and Text

Symptomatic of the often indeterminate rabbinic engagement with Egypt are the gaps in the Hebrew Bible, which does not elaborate upon many aspects of the life of Moses, such as his youth and education in the household of Pharaoh's daughter. As is well known, the Biblical text jumps from the childhood of Moses to the adult Moses within two verses; one verse states: *And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses; and she said, Because I drew him out of the water* (Exod. 2: 10), indicating that Moses was raised in the royal Egyptian household. The following verse states: *And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brothers, and looked on their burdens; and he spied an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brothers* (Exod. 2:11). Texts that are not part of the Hebrew Bible, e.g., the Pseudepigrapha, midrashic texts, as well as the New Testament, attempt to fill in some of the gaps in the life of Moses. The historian Josephus, *Ant.* 2.236 mentions that Moses was brought up by a princess;<sup>42</sup> similarly, Philo of Alexandria mentions the royal upbringing of Moses.<sup>43</sup>

The fascination with the Exodus and its Egyptian setting is pervasive. The Biblical scene of the “Finding of Moses” by Pharaoh's daughter intrigued not only textual interpreters, but also visual artists throughout the ages. Text and images are interrelated; additionally, we may note intertextuality as well as interpictoriality in the representa-

42 See Louis H. Feldman, “Josephus’ Portrait of Moses,” *JQR* 82 (1991-92), 285-328, 83 (1992-93), 7-50, 301-30.

43 See Louis H. Feldman, “Philo’s View of Moses’ Birth and Upbringing,” *CBQ* 64 (2002), 258-81. Whether the foundation of Judaism is based upon Moses’ Egyptian education or exclusively upon divine revelation to Moses in the desert is viewed as debatable according to Burton Mack, “Under the Shadow of Moses: Authorship and Authority in Hellenistic Judaism,” *SBL SP* 118 (1982), 299-318.

tions of the Biblical “Finding of Moses” scene. There is a similarity between rabbinic ideas of late antiquity of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and Christian art as late as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, e.g., the painter Poussin utilized the Biblical interpretations of Josephus that are similar to those found in rabbinic texts. Poussin and his artistic depictions of these interpretations of Josephus served as a model for subsequent painters. I trace the textual tradition of the “Finding of Moses” scene and the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century depictions of this scene. Subsequently, I focus upon several *Haggadot* (Venice Haggadah with Judeo-Italian Translation, 1609; Amsterdam Haggadah, 1695; a Bohemian Haggadah, 1728) and upon select European paintings: “The Finding of Moses” (c. 1570) by Veronese; “Pharaoh’s Daughter Finding Moses,” (1638) by Nicolas Poussin; “The Finding of Moses” by Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671).

The depictions demonstrate the conflation of several traditions: Moses is in an ark or in a basket; Pharaoh’s daughter is in or out of the Nile; she either fetches Moses or simply stretches out her arm; alternatively, she sends her maid or several maids or her male attendants to fetch the child. Similar to midrashic interpretations, the artists lemmatize the Biblical texts and create narratives of their own when they relate their art to the perceived gaps in the stories concerning Biblical events and figures. This practice of adding to the Biblical scene is already extant in the few examples of Jewish art from late antiquity, and it continued into Christian and Jewish art of later periods. The Jewish interpretive tradition expressed in Josephus, as well as in midrash, was mediated through cultural contexts which noticeably influenced Christian art. In the same vein, Jewish art was influenced by the transformation of the Nile into a European landscape and the transformation of Pharaoh’s daughter into a fully dressed European princess.

## Summary

Deeply entrenched in the midrashic scenes of Egypt and the underlying rabbinic theology are the following aspects: the paradigmatic function of the Exodus, life under Roman occupation, and the circumstances of living in the Diaspora. From the rabbinic perspective living under Roman rule or living in the Diaspora was a “Second Egypt” for the Jewish people. The midrashic texts that allude to the Egyptian experience should be understood to address the fate of Israel under dire circumstances and the question of whether the Jewish people will return to the Land of Israel from the Diaspora. Despite their limited knowledge of Egypt, the rabbis composed some remarkably accurate passages con-

cerning Egypt and its culture. A critical concern in some midrashic texts is the theme of escaping from Egypt. Egypt in midrash was ultimately a symbol of the “Other.” The “Otherness” of Egypt was brought into the world of the familiar by the rabbis and Egypt was transformed, so as to make it intelligible and meaningful to those who studied midrashic texts.

Cultural icons are easily recognizable as belonging to a specific culture; rabbinic texts contain many identifiable Egyptian cultural icons. Those rabbis that utilized Egyptian cultural icons might have reacted to the high prestige that anything Egyptian enjoyed in late antique Roman culture. They may have gained a superficial knowledge of Egypt based upon the popularity of Egyptian culture. However, there are several specific intersections with Egyptian culture found in midrashic texts that require us to examine Egyptian concepts in rabbinic discourse in addition to the previously recognized elements from Greco-Roman, Samaritan, and Sassanian Babylonian cultures. One challenge in isolating and interpreting these Egyptian elements is the temporal distance between the dates of some of the Egyptian cultural icons that originated in Pharaonic, Ptolemaic, Roman or Coptic Egypt, and the dates and locales of some rabbinic texts. Nevertheless, one may note that there were multiple commercial and intellectual connections between Egypt and the Land of Israel (Roman Palestine), which was the geographic, political, and intellectual environment that produced most of the initial rabbinic texts.

To a large extent Jewish identity was formed in opposition to Egypt. Jewish identity continues to be linked to the sacred geographical sites of the Land of Israel. Many Jews return periodically or in spirit to these places to reconnect with their people and their land; many make a final journey to be laid to rest in this ancestral land, which represents an antithesis to Egypt. The Land of Israel contains great spiritual meaning, particularly to those raised with knowledge and understanding of the Land of Israel.<sup>44</sup> In the hermeneutical engagement with living in the Diaspora, Egypt served as the absolute metaphor of “Otherness.” Throughout late antiquity the rabbis and the identities that they constructed through a hermeneutic process continued to affect and alter received traditions; what we call rabbinic Judaism was in an enormous state of flux and self-examination, while Judaic culture was a work-in-progress. In the midst of this dynamic tension, the rabbis and their associates still contributed to their community’s identity. Like the Biblical

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44 I find this response to sacred land to be somewhat similar to American Indian identities, compare Gerald McMaster and Clifford E. Trafzer, ed., *Native Universe: Voices of Indian America* (Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, 2004).

writers, who struggled with the concept of the “Exodus from Egypt” and defined Judaism in opposition to Egyptian customs, the rabbis expressed their perspective of this struggle in their own evolving terms. Reengaging with Egypt in order to shape and define Judaism was a way of conducting one’s life within the philosophical framework of one’s community, aspiring to an ethical ideal of differentiating oneself from the majority culture that was viewed as “Otherness.” Individual and communal identities, as well as the textual study of the past and a program for the present, were woven together by rabbinic thought that gave meaning to their world.<sup>45</sup>

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45 My keen interest in Egypt was originally stimulated by my late mentor, Arnold Goldberg, Chair of the department of Judaic Studies in Frankfurt am Main; Goldberg had a PhD in Egyptology on the Egyptian loanwords in the Hebrew Bible (*Über die ägyptischen Elemente der Sprache des Alten Testaments* [Ph. D. Diss., Freiburg/Breisgau, 1957]). He often encouraged his students to learn about the “Others” – Hieroglyphics and Ancient Egyptian culture – while teaching the soul of Judaism, the midrashic interpretation of post-biblical Judaism. In my view, Goldberg had a reunion with Egyptologists that resulted in collaboration with Jan Assmann (“Die Zerstörung von Kontext als Voraussetzung für die Kanonisierung religiöser Texte im rabbinischen Judentum,” in *Kanon und Zäsur* [ed. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann; Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation 2; München: W. Fink, 1987, 201-11; repr. in Arnold Goldberg, *Mystik und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums: Gesammelte Studien I*, [TSAJ 61, Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1997, 413-25]).



# Chapter One: Pharaohs Shoshenq, Necho, and Apries

## 1. Introduction

In rabbinic literature pharaohs – the Egyptian kings – symbolized the power relationship that existed between Egyptian culture and Biblical Judaism. The disenfranchised Hebrews/Israelites and, subsequently, the kings of Israel and Judah, were viewed as pawns in the hands of the mighty pharaohs, and it was believed that only Divine intervention could restore the equilibrium. The rabbinic texts include memories of the pharaohs and revisit the relationship between Israel and the pharaohs. Egypt, a land of total “Otherness,” and its pharaohs are central elements in the collective memory of Judaism.<sup>1</sup> The memory of Egypt is preserved in an inscribed narrative<sup>2</sup> that includes the master text – the Bible against which everything is measured and compared – as well as the collective writings of rabbinic interpretive literature. The memory of Egypt does not only focus upon the Egyptian cultural and ideological artifacts, but also upon a few fragments of past historical engagement between Egypt and Israel, and the ways in which these fragments were transferred in the Greco-Roman period. The memory of Egypt is kept current and alive through a constant discussion in midrash with respect to the vision of Egypt. Egypt is viewed from differing perspectives and it is reinterpreted over and over again. Concurrently with the reinterpretation of Egypt, the memory of Egypt is updated; e.g., a pharaoh will be viewed from the knowledge of Egypt in the Greco-Roman period. The hermeneutic strategy of updating Egyptian kings and locations renders the past flexible.

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- 1 Collective memories are created by a group or imposed by authority in order to create a unified image of the past. Interpretive texts create and contain the collective memory of Israel after the enormous change from a Temple-centered religion with many small sects to the Torah-centered Judaism of the minuscule rabbinic movement.
  - 2 For the idea of inscribed narrative, see Doron Mendels, *Memory in Jewish, Pagan and Christian Societies of the Graeco-Roman World: Fragmented Memory – Comprehensive Memory – Collective Memory* (Library of Second Temple Studies 45; London: T & T Clark, 2004), 30.

Midrash and other rabbinic interpretive texts show the interspersal of Biblical memories of Egypt in Greco-Roman times and later periods. Furthermore, when the rabbis had polemical agendas, they would often deliberately intersperse memories of Egypt in order to advance their rhetorical positions. With such objectives, the original memories could become corrupted. Moreover, the original memories of Egypt were at times erased by later interpretations or the experience of powerful events superseded the earlier memories. Against the background of medieval persecutions of Jews and Judaism at the hands of Christians and Muslims, the memories of Egypt were further fragmented and new collective memories were added to the canon of Jewish memories. However, these new memories were often viewed from the meta-narrative of the Exodus experience.

Concerning the changes in these staggered fragments of memories of Egypt in rabbinic literature, it should be noted that literary theory posits that any “citation” of a text is subsumed under the new text and becomes part of the new text. A model of text amalgamation and heuristics might be of assistance in explaining the citations and the changes of fragments of memory in rabbinic texts.<sup>3</sup> One model of text amalgamation is the utilization of citations. Exact citation according to our

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3 See, e.g., Rivka Ulmer, “The Mishnah in the Later Midrashim,” in *The Mishnah in Contemporary Perspective. Handbook of Oriental Studies. Part 1 Ancient Near East*, 65 (ed. Alan J. Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 193–233, 209. A question may be raised: What happens if one document is cited in another document? We could imagine a kind of textual amalgamation, in which scriptural, halakhic, and aggadic boundaries recede to the extent that a new compositional text replaces separate textual boundaries. The quotation of text into text is aptly discussed in a sub-field of linguistics, in the field of text linguistics. Text linguistics for our purposes is the study of the creation of new meanings in texts, i.e., a certain amount of linguistic creativity in respect to a received body of text and the received ways or devices of formulating new texts as in midrashic texts, such as “our rabbis taught.” Hypothetically one would expect that the descriptive semantics of a text, whereby the text in one area of rabbinic literature is deconstructed and then reconstructed from the pieces by applying rules, would generate the same text as previously existed. However, only coherent information of texts can be handled efficiently by formulating rules of a rabbinic text in some meta-language. This procedure applies to the coreference between single sentences and would be a very limited, locally restricted, transformation. In a summary of the text linguistic theories of Teun van Dijk (Teun van Dijk, *Zur Bestimmung Narrativer Strukturen auf der Grundlage von Textgrammatiken* [Hamburg: Buske, 1972]); Hannes Rieser, “On the Development of Text Grammar,” in *Current Trends in Linguistics. Research in Text Theory 2* (ed. W. U. Dressler; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1978), 6–20, 11f., states that these limited successes are called “micro-restrictions;” Rieser continues: “Micro-restrictions or micro-structures such as the restrictions on pronouns, pro-adverbs, and connectives are examples of such local restrictions. Apart from these microrestrictions there are more global restrictions which are determined by the primary and secondary topics of the discourse, they are called ‘macro-restriction’ ...”

contemporary academic standards, was simply not an objective of the authors of the texts of late antiquity and the Middle Ages. For example, midrash, when citing the Hebrew Bible, often provides Scriptural references that have been transformed and contain a midrashic reading of a Scriptural lemma. This type of explanation, eisegetics, usually predetermines what the midrash wants to find in the Biblical text. This means that the interpreter knew in advance the specific information that would be disclosed. The midrashic interpreter might find the theological framework of the relationship between Egypt and Israel in the Bible, but he might also find other information in the collective cultural memory and from outside the text. The methodology of midrash is to “lemmatize” Scripture, i.e., to cite a string of Scripture for hermeneutical purposes. This midrashic approach to the Bible is also applicable to the retrieval of the memories of Egypt. Egypt becomes “lemmatized,” placed into fragments of information, which are the basis for the hermeneutical objective. This method of recalling the fragmented memories of Egypt cannot be accomplished without some level of partiality by the editors and interpreters of the narrative. In short, midrash is what we would call “biased” in its recall of pharaohs and other aspects of Egyptian culture. Except for references to the Bible, to rabbinic authorities and to other rabbinic texts, midrash frequently disguises its sources.

Since the past plays such a critical role in midrash, the memory of Egypt became stronger. The Biblical narratives concerning Egypt are sacred texts and the very act of reading these narratives often creates a desired response.<sup>4</sup> The negative descriptions in the Bible of the pharaohs as representatives of Egypt are to set clear boundaries between Egypt and Israel. This demarcation between the powerful and the dis-enfranchised continues in midrashic texts.

## 2. The Application of a Method of Memory

In addition to the textual fragments concerning Egypt, the Land of Israel contained many archaeological artifacts that may have served as reminders of the Egyptian past.<sup>5</sup> The presence of Egyptian artifacts in

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4 Mendels, *Memory*, 71.

5 James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), No. 320, lists the stela of Seti I found at Bet-She'an; ANET, 3, 255, and provides the text of the stelae of Sety I and Ramses II. A list of artifacts that may be dated to the New Kingdom – presumably the time of the Exodus – is found in Ann E. Killebrew, “New Kingdom Egyptian-style

the landscape of Israel and in the “landscape of the mind” rests in part upon artifacts that were removed from their original cultural space. The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud had a collection of Egyptian artifacts on his desk in Vienna. Why would Freud, who was interested in reconstructions of personal memory and who wrote “Moses and Monotheism,”<sup>6</sup> have a selection of Egyptian beetles and figurines on his desk? What kind of memories do interpreters construct when they think about Egypt and what type of cultural icons do they retain? The phenomenon of selecting artifacts that generate memories might be comparable to the deliberate reduction of one’s precious belongings. These selected artifacts may become beloved objects that stimulate the collective memory and facilitate contemplation. In a book about symbolism and identity by Tilman Habermas,<sup>7</sup> the English title of which might be rendered as “Beloved Objects,” the author deals with people who have to move from their homes and practice downsizing because of old age or other factors. For example, foreign students must make a conscious effort in respect to the objects they may take with them on their journeys to a dorm room; consequently, only objects of symbolic value are taken along to memorialize a life-time of experiences. The beloved objects are displayed and become symbols of the past.

The rabbis of late antiquity who created midrash had their own “beloved objects” when they visualized Egypt. As Egypt began to fade into memory, the unspecified Pharaoh of the Exodus narratives grew in significance in rabbinic texts. Additionally, some rabbinic texts utilized post-Exodus pharaohs that appear in the Bible as leading their armies into the Land of Israel. In Egypt, pharaohs were representatives or embodiments of Egyptian gods; furthermore, pharaohs were rulers, warriors, conquerors and kings. In particular, the pharaohs of Egypt were warrior kings, frequently fighting at the front, leading their armies

and Egyptian Pottery in Canaan: Implications for Egyptian Rule in Canaan during the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty,” in *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford* (ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Antoine Hirsch; Probleme der Ägyptologie 20; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 309-43. In my opinion, it is significant that some pottery was “imported” and some was “produced in Canaan” (p. 341), because this indicates close cultural ties with Egypt. See Carolyn R. Higginbotham, *Egyptianization and Elite Emulation in Ramesside Palestine: Governance and Accommodation on the Imperial Periphery* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East, 2; Leiden: Brill, 2000), for Egyptian-style architecture.

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1939). In respect to Freud’s involvement with Biblical Judaism, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud’s Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Tilman Habermas, *Geliebte Objekte: Symbole und Instrumente der Identitätsbildung* (Perspektiven der Humanwissenschaften 19; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996).

onward. A pharaoh had to prove himself or herself to his or her people through leading successful military campaigns or, at least, provide a larger than life scale depiction of himself or herself in the pose of killing enemies on temple walls.<sup>8</sup> Pharaonic campaigns into Canaan/ Palestine/ Israel were numerous and occurred throughout the period of Ancient Egypt, due to the geographic contiguity. Additionally, the Land of Israel served as a bridge between the great powers of antiquity (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, etc.).<sup>9</sup>

Midrash often contemplates ancient Egypt by using the pharaoh as a focal point, for example, the claims of divinity of Pharaoh are stated<sup>10</sup> in Exod. Rab. 8:2: "Pharaoh was one of four men who claimed divinity and thereby brought evil upon themselves. These were: Hiram, Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh, and Joash, King of Judah." Pharaoh as a generic term is the epitome of an evil king who resembles the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

The absence of Pharaoh Ramses<sup>11</sup> in midrashic texts may be significant: silencing him, editing him out of memory and defeating him once

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8 The campaigns of Ramses II are described in Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant: The Life and Times of Ramesses II* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1982).

9 See, e.g., Donald Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

10 See chapter 2.

11 If one argues for a late date of the Exodus, Ramses II (1279-1213 BCE) could be considered as the "Pharaoh" of the Exodus. Already Eusebius identified the Pharaoh of the Exodus as Ramses II of the 19th Dynasty and dated the Exodus (Eusebius, *Chron.* Ed. Schoene-Petermann, 95). The formulation of the so-called "conventional" chronology for Egypt is based upon Eusebius and ultimately on the biblical date of the Exodus. Eusebius placed Ramses II around 1450 BCE, because of his supposed association with the Exodus. Thus originally the date of Ramses depended upon the Exodus, although currently the date of the Exodus is thought to depend on an independently-derived date for Ramses II. Generally unaware of the biblical origins of Egyptian chronology, most scholars still seem to favor Ramses II, but many suggest his father Sety I. The Merneptah Stele (1208 BCE) mentions "Israel" by name as already in Canaan, so it seems unlikely if the son of Ramses II, Merneptah I, or any later pharaoh is the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The biblical "Pharaoh" could be a king of the 18th dynasty, such as Hatchepsut, Thutmose III (1490-1438 BCE or 1479-1426 BCE), or possibly his son Amenhotep II. If one argues for an early date of the Exodus, ca. the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century BCE, then Amenhotep could have been the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Josephus correlated the Exodus with the expulsion of the Hyksos: "Such is Manetho's account; and, if the years which he enumerates, are summed up, it is clear that the so-called shepherds, our ancestors, left Egypt and settled in our country 393 years before Danaus came to Argos. Yet the Argives regard him as one of the most ancient of men. Manetho has thus furnished us with evidence from Egyptian literature on two most important points: first that we came into Egypt from elsewhere, and secondly, that we left it at a date so remote in the past that it preceded the Trojan War by nearly a thousand years. His additional statements, which he derived not from the Egyptian records, but, as he admits himself,

more by erasing his name from the texts. (Fig. 1)<sup>12</sup> This procedure of erasing history or the names of pharaohs is well-documented in Egypt.<sup>13</sup> In midrash the Biblical place name “Ramses” – related to the name of Pharaoh Ramses – is explained as a site that was destroyed by divine vengeance; the Biblical place name “Pithom” – based upon the Egyptian *per tem* (house of Atum)<sup>14</sup> – is interpreted as the mouth of the deep:<sup>15</sup>

Exod. Rabb. 1:10: *Pithom and Ramses* (Exod. 1:11). Rav and Shmu’el differ. One said: Its real name was Pithom, and why was it called Ramses? Because one building after another collapsed [*mitroses*]. The other said that its real name was Ramses, and why was it called Pithom? Because the mouth of the deep [*pi tehom*] swallowed up one building after another.<sup>16</sup>

from fables of unknown authorship, I shall refute in detail later on and show the improbability of these lying stories.” (Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.103-105, quoting the Egyptian priest Manetho, who lived in the 3rd Century BCE). Thus, according to Josephus, the Pharaoh of the Exodus is assumed to be one of the Theban pharaohs of the late-17th or early-18th Dynasties, who fought against the Hyksos, especially Ahmose I (1570-1546 BCE or 1550-1525 BCE). Ahmose is also referred to by Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.21: “the exodus of Moses from Egypt will appear to have taken place in the forty-second year of the Assyrian empire, in the thirty-second year of the reign of Belochus, in the time of Amosis the Egyptian, and of Inachus the Argive.” With regard to midrash, the absolute date of the Exodus is not important; we may have to consider several waves of “escaping” workers, such as mentioned in PAn V, which includes the report of an Egyptian frontier official concerning the pursuit of two escaped “slaves” who passed through the vicinity of Migdol.

- 12 Statue of Ramses II, Memphis (Ulmer).
- 13 See, e.g., Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs* (trans. Andrew Jenkins; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Pres, 2002), 226.
- 14 Karol Myśliwiec, “Atum,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 1, 158-160, 160. Exod. 14:2 *Pi-hahirot* (explained as “Pikeret” in Mek. Beshallah 2, Lauterbach ed., p. 188), is mentioned in an inscription by Ptolemy Philadephus which also mentions that he “rebuilt the abode of Tum” [i.e., Atum] (see Amelia A. Blanford Edwards, *Pharaoh’s Fellahs and Explorer* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891], 37-69, 48, based upon the Egyptologists of her time). The Biblical location Ramses (Exod. 1:11), thought to be based upon *per-Ramses*, the “house of Ramses II” in Tanis-Qantir or Avaris of the Hyksos, may not refer to Pharaoh Ramses II, but may be an anachronism as in Gen. 47:11: *And Joseph situated his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.* See Eric P. Uphill, “Pithom and Raamses: Their Location and Significance,” *JNES* 27 (1968), 291-316, 28 (1969), 15-39.
- 15 See Lester Grabbe, *Etymology in Early Jewish Interpretation: The Hebrew Names in Philo* (Brown Judaic Studies 115; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 31, who refers to Philo’s interpretation “harassing mouth” for Pithom and “commotion of a moth” for Ramses. These explanations are not based upon the Egyptian language. The LXX refers to Pithom as *Heroöpolis* (Gen. 46:28), and in the Roman era Pithom was referred to as “*Ero Castra*;” the location is Tell el-Maskhutah.
- 16 b. Sotah 11a; Pes. Zut. Shemot 1:1.

Another text relates the place name “Ramses” to the divinely ordained exile:

Song Rab. 2:1: Another explanation: *I am the rose of Sharon* (Cant. 2:1) – I am the one, and I am beloved. I am she who was hidden in the shadow of Egypt, and in a brief space the Holy One, blessed be He, brought me to Ramses, and I blossomed forth in good deeds like a rose, and I sang a song before Him, as it says, *You shall have a song as in the night when a feast is hallowed* (Isa. 30:29)

However, in addition to the elusive Pharaoh of the Exodus, there are several named pharaohs in midrash that appear in the Hebrew Bible: Shishaq (Shoshenq), Necho, and Hophra (Apries). There are several named Ptolemies in the Apocrypha, which are generically referred to as “Talmai,” with the exception of Queen Cleopatra, in rabbinic literature. Since midrash contains the names of pharaohs that are known from Biblical texts, we may surmise that the Bible was the source of the particular pharaohs cited in midrash; we have no information whether the sages of Israel were cognizant of the statues and slabs of stone in the Land of Israel that depicted pharaohs, e.g., the stela of Sety I and numerous Egyptian artifacts in Bet She’an.<sup>17</sup> It should be emphasized that the rabbinic interpretation regarding pharaohs was written down in the absence of pharaohs. In most cases, there were only Roman emperors in Egyptian garb in Hellenized Egypt, which may have served as models in the rabbinic texts that analyzed pharaohs in their rewritten histories. Eventually, pharaohs and the perceived threat emanating from them were inverted into “beloved objects” of interpretation that served as reminders of the past, but were overwritten with the memory of God’s superior plans.

### 3. Pharaoh Shoshenq

As mentioned above, with few exceptions, pharaohs in Biblical as well as in rabbinic texts are nameless; they are typological kings of Egypt that usually act according to stereotypes of pharaohs. One exception is the named Pharaoh Shoshenq, referred to as “Shishaq”<sup>18</sup> in Biblical and

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Amihai Mazar, “Four Thousand Years of History at Tel Beth-Shean: An Account of the Renewed Excavations,” *BA* 60 (1997), 62–76.

<sup>18</sup> Although occasionally the consonantal text (1 Kgs. 14:25) has *שׁשָׁק*, *shoshaq*; the Egyptian name *sh-shnk* is sometimes spelled *sh-sh-k*. With regard to the Egyptian name of Shoshenq, David M. Rohl, *Pharaohs and Kings: A Biblical Quest* (New York: Crown, 1995), 135, maintains that the Shishaq/Shoshenq synchronism is “historically untenable.” Rohl, 161, mentions *ss* (alternatively: *sysw* or *ssy*) as a hypocoristicon for the royal name *sysa* of Ramesses II and III. He furthermore states that the equivalence

rabbinic literature, who was a historical figure (945-924 BCE). Shoshenq ruled in the Late Period of ancient Egypt (after 1085 BCE), immediately after the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty.<sup>19</sup> This dynasty was established by successors of Pharaohs Herihor and Smendes, who separately continued to rule Upper and Lower Egypt from Thebes and Tanis respectively. By the time of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty external threats from Libyan and other invaders were eroding Egypt's power to defend its borders. Eventually both Upper and Lower Egypt succumbed to foreign invasions. The Tanites were driven from power by Libyan warriors who established their own dynasty, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty. Shoshenq is the founder of the 22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty, also known as the Bubastite dynasty.<sup>20</sup> (Fig. 2)<sup>21</sup>

Squeezed between the expansionist empires of Assyria and Babylon to the north and Egypt to the south, the inhabitants of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah often suffered disastrous invasions at the hands of their neighbors. In a relief in the Temple of Amun in Karnak (Upper Egypt) commemorating his Palestinian campaign, Pharaoh Shoshenq I (945-924 BCE) is poised to strike down his Semitic adversaries, whom he grasps by the hair.<sup>22</sup> The same temple relief lists approximately 150 towns that were conquered by Shoshenq,<sup>23</sup> however, while the Biblical

between "the biblical name Shishak and the pharaonic name Shoshenk is misleading ...", 163. In this chapter I follow the standard Egyptological equivalence of Shishaq/Shoshenq.

- 19 Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100-650 B.C.)* (2nd ed. with suppl.; Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1986). A critical section is found on pp. 292-302, while an excursus surveying previous works and discussing the identification of name rings in a topographical list in Karnak is found on pp. 432-47. Beatrice Goff, *Symbols of Ancient Israel in the Late Period* (Religion and Society 13; The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 32, mentions the diminished power of the king in the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty.
- 20 See *The Epigraphic Survey, Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak III: The Bubastite Portal* (Oriental Institute Publications 74; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 124.
- 21 Karnak, Bubastite Portal, Shoshenq (Ulmer).
- 22 Erika Feucht, "Zwei Reliefs aus El-Hibeh," in *SAK* 5 (Festschrift H. W. Müller), 1978, 69-77, pl. XXI-XXII; *eadem*, "Ein Relief Scheschonqs I. beim Erschlagen der Feinde aus El-Hibe," *SAK* 9, 1981, 105-17, pl. II, 105ff. The Black Obelisk of the Assyrian conqueror Shalmanezer III (859-824 BCE) shows another scene of triumph, in which he accepts tribute from a prostrate King Jehu of Israel.
- 23 Gösta W. Ahlström, "Pharaoh Shoshenq's Campaign to Palestine," in *History and Traditions of Early Israel: Studies Presented to Eduard Nielsen, May 8<sup>th</sup> 1993* (ed. André Lemaire and Benedikt Otzen; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 1-16. Martin Noth, "Die Wege der Pharaonenheere in Palästina und Syrien IV," *ZDPV* 61 (1938), 277-304; Benjamin Mazar, "Pharaoh Shishak's Campaign to the Land of Israel," *VTSup* 4 (1957), 57-66 (reprinted in Benjamin Mazar, *The Early Biblical Period: Historical Studies* [ed. Shmuel Ahituv and Baruch A. Levine; Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 1986] 139-50); Siegfried Herrmann, "Operationen Pharao Schoschenks I. im östlichen Ephraim," *ZDPV* 80 (1964), 55-79; see also Frank Clancy, "Shishak/Shoshenq's Travels," *JSOT* 86 (1999), 3-23.

account of the campaign in the Book of Kings only mentions Jerusalem as the focus of the Egyptian attack, a few sites in Judah are also found in this triumphal relief. These Judean towns are referred to in the Book of Chronicles. Furthermore, Shoshenq's cartouche is engraved on a limestone stela that was found at Megiddo.<sup>24</sup> In Biblical literature there are brief references to Shoshenq's campaigns:

*1 Kgs. 14:25-28: And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishaq, king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem. And he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house; he took away all; and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. And king Rehoboam made in their place bronze shields, and committed them to the hands of the chief of the guard, which kept the door of the king's house. And it was so, when the king went to the house of the Lord, that the guard carried them [bronze shields] and brought them back to the guard chamber.*

The Book of Kings states that during the reign of Rehoboam (931-913 BCE), Pharaoh Shishaq (Shoshenq I) went toward Jerusalem and took away the Temple treasure, including shields of gold made by King Solomon. This report may not represent the Egyptian view, but it may reflect the interests of the "Juhadite historiographer."<sup>25</sup> The Chronicler (2 Chr. 12:1-12)<sup>26</sup> expanded the report in Kings (1 Kgs. 14:25-28). In the

24 Israel Finkelstein and David Ussishkin, "Back to Megiddo," *BAR* 20,1 (1994), 26-43; David Ussishkin, "Notes on Megiddo, Gezer, Ashdod, and Tel Batash in the Tenth to Ninth Centuries B.C.," *BASOR* 277/278 (1990), 71-91

25 Ahlström, "Pharaoh Shoshenq's Campaign," 2. Rohl, *Pharaohs*, 155, proposes a new chronology, which places Ramses II in the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> century; he refers to an inscription on the North Pylon of the Ramesseum of Thebes: "the town which the king plundered in Year 8 Shalem," p. 149. The king, according to Rohl, would be Ramses II who went up to Jerusalem in 926 BCE, matching 2 Chr. 12:2 (set forth below). Nevertheless, Rohl places Shoshenq I, according to his dating: 823 BCE, in the reign of Jehoahaz of Israel (814-798), since Israel was oppressed by the Aramean kings of Hazael and Benhadad; this would make Shoshenq the savior in 2 Kgs. 13:5: *The Lord gave Israel a savior who freed them from the grip of Aram.*

26 2 Chr. 12:1- 12: *And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the Torah of the Lord, and all Israel with him. And it came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, Shishaq king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the Lord. With twelve hundred chariots, and sixty thousand horsemen. And the people were without number who came with him from Egypt: the Libyans, the Sukkites, and the Kushites. And he took the fortified cities which belonged to Judah, and came to Jerusalem. Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, who were gathered together in Jerusalem because of Shishaq, and said to them, Thus said the Lord, You have forsaken me, and therefore I also have left you in the hand of Shishaq. And the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The Lord is righteous. And when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and My wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishaq. Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries. And Shishaq king of Egypt came*

Chronicler's style, a theological reason is provided for Shoshenq's campaign. The reason proffered was that King Rehoboam had abandoned the Lord. The Egyptian cultural background is expanded, e.g., chariots and horsemen have been added. The ethnic groups fighting under Pharaoh Shoshenq are referred to as Libyans, Sukkites (from the area of Sukkot), and Kushites (Nubians). The Chronicler's version constitutes a recognizable interpretation of the Biblical account in The Book of Kings.<sup>27</sup>

Shoshenq's campaign left a lasting memory in Israelite religion, and it was mainly explained within the Biblical theology of retribution for sins committed by a king. The Egyptian documents concur that the campaign took place, but disagree with the Biblical details; for example, the remaining parts of the wall in Karnak do not mention Jerusalem.<sup>28</sup> Although many other place names in Israel and Judah are mentioned, only roughly twenty of the place names are identical with Biblical place names.<sup>29</sup> The date of the campaign is shortly before 926 BCE. Egyptologists speculate as to the reason for this war: Shoshenq may have undertaken this war because the area was politically fragmented; one of the fragmentations was the division into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (930 BCE). Alternatively, Shoshenq might have planned to prevent the rebuilding of the Israelite state after its fragmentation. It is questionable whether Shoshenq wanted to subdue the Judahite king, Rehoboam, or whether he wanted to punish the Israelite king, Jeroboam,<sup>30</sup> for a lapse in his vasality. Another possibility is that Shoshenq may have wanted to support the Sea Peoples along the coast. Whatever the reason for Shoshenq's campaign may have been, this pharaoh was only able to regain control over the area for a short period of time.

*up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all; he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made. Instead king Rehoboam made shields of bronze, and committed them to the hands of the chief of the guard, who kept the entrance of the king's house. And when the king entered into the house of the Lord, the guard came and fetched them, and brought them back into the guard chamber. And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him, that he would not destroy him altogether; and also in Judah things went well.*

- 27 Bernd Ulrich Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit: Die kulturellen Kontakte von Salomo bis zum Fall Jerusalems* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 170; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).
- 28 ANET, 242-43; Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*, No. 313. Graham I. Davies, *Megiddo* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 96, mentions the attack of Megiddo.
- 29 Ahlström, "Pharaoh Shoshenq's Campaign," 4.
- 30 1 Kgs. 11:40: *Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled to Egypt, to Shishaq king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.*

### Shishaq (Shoshenq) and the Temple Treasure

In rabbinic texts the campaign of Shoshenq is explained as an upshot of the Exodus from Egypt – Shoshenq took back the wealth that the Egyptians had given to the departing Hebrews during the Exodus from Egypt (Exod. 3:21-22; 11:2-3).<sup>31</sup> The text set forth below cites a lemma from Gen. 47:14, which serves as a proof-text that this wealth had initially been collected by Joseph. This passage, similar to the Bible, depicts Joseph as the governor of Egypt,<sup>32</sup> whereas Shoshenq is the avenger who took back what was taken from Egypt.

b. Pesah. 119a: Rav Judah said in the name of Shmu'el: All the gold and silver in the world Joseph gathered in and brought to Egypt, for it is said, *And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found [in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan]* (Gen. 47:14). I know this only in regard to that of Egypt and Canaan; from where do we know it about that of other countries? Because it is stated, *And all the countries came unto Egypt [to Joseph to buy grain]* (Gen. 41:57). And when the Israelites migrated from Egypt they carried it away with them, for it is said, *and they despoiled the Egyptians* (Exod. 12:36). R. Assi said: They made it like a trap in which there is no grain. R. Shim'on b. Lakish said: Like a net without fish. Thus [the treasure] lay until Rehoboam, when Shishaq, king of Egypt, came and seized it from Rehoboam, for it is said, *And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam that Shishaq king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; and he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house* (1 Kgs. 14:25-26).

The continuation of the above Talmudic passage lists a series of owners of the Temple treasures and it ends: “the Romans came and took it from the Greeks, and it is still lying in Rome.” The significance of the implication that a pharaoh returned the “wealth of Egypt” to its origin is expressed in another passage (b. Pesah. 87b) in a statement of R. Alexandri; the proof-text is 1 Kgs. 14:25-26. The following passage also reflects the legends of the Temple treasure which was dispersed and finally remained in Rome; in this case, it also states that Solomon’s throne was taken by Shoshenq during his campaign.

Esth. Rab. 1:12: It is related that when Solomon died, Shishaq, king of Egypt, came up and took [Solomon’s throne] from them. R. Shmu’el b. Nahman said: Shishaq is the same as Pharaoh. And why was he called Shishaq? Because he came driven by greed [*shekhikhut*] against Israel and he said: I am taking it in lieu of my daughter’s marriage settlement ...<sup>33</sup>

31 See chapter 8.

32 See Louis H. Feldman, “Joseph,” in Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus’s Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 335-73, 343.

33 The midrashic text again presents a series of owners of the Temple treasure.

Eleazer b. R. Jose said: I have seen its fragments in Rome. Nebuchadnezzar sat on it; Cyrus sat on it; Ahasuerus wanted to sit on it, but was not permitted. They said to him: No one who is not ruler over the whole world can sit on it. He made one for himself which he paid for. Therefore it is written, *on the throne of his kingdom [malkhuto], the word malkhuto is written defectively; [moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the finest gold; The throne had six steps, and] the top of the throne was round behind; [and there were arm rests on either side on the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the arm rests]* (1 Kgs. 10:18-19).

The midrashic text is engaged in etymology; the Hebrew name “Shishaq” represents the character of the pharaoh and is a clue to its deeper meaning. Shoshenq’s name is exploited to describe his character; a midrashic reading offers a metonymic explanation of “Shishaq” (שִׁשָּׁק) as “greed” (שְׁחִיקָה – *shekhikhut*) to account for his alleged motivation to besiege Jerusalem. This pharaoh’s name stands for his action. Rabbinic texts offer a belated reason for Shoshenq’s war, namely to return to Egypt what belonged to Egypt in addition to plundering the Jerusalem Temple. The spoils of Egypt and the Temple treasure looted by Shoshenq are no longer traceable and have become the subject of speculation.<sup>34</sup> Although many archaeological artifacts have forever been lost, in Alexandria there are remnants depicting Shoshenq on a frieze.<sup>35</sup> These scenes on a frieze were “beloved objects” of the Egyptian past that were brought to Ptolemaic Alexandria.

#### 4. Pharaoh Necho

Another historical figure that appears frequently in rabbinic literature is Pharaoh Necho II (26<sup>th</sup> Saite dynasty), who was the son of Psammetichus I (664-610 BCE).<sup>36</sup> Necho II (Nekau) ruled from 610-595 BCE. Necho II faced major problems in Egyptian foreign policy; there was a threat of Chaldean expansionist tendencies. When the Assyrian empire was falling, Pharaoh Necho marched with his army into battle (608 BCE). Necho II campaigned in Syria-Palestine to assist the Assyrians in forcing out the Chaldeans. This Egyptian king is mentioned in the He-

<sup>34</sup> The quest for the treasure is still the stuff of legends; in a popular book Sean King-sley claims that the Greek Orthodox Monastery Mar Theodosius was the last hiding place of the Temple treasure.

<sup>35</sup> Jean Yoyotte, “Un nouveau souvenir de Sheshanq I et un muret Héliopolitain de plus,” *REg* 54 (2003) 219-265, describes this part of a *sebekhet* (corridor) that was found in Alexandria.

<sup>36</sup> See Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 435ff., 444.

brew Bible and the historical background as it relates to Judaism may be summarized as follows: Josiah, King of Judah, attempted to check Necho's progress, but was defeated by Necho at Megiddo (2 Kgs. 23:29-37<sup>37</sup> and 2 Chron. 35:20ff.<sup>38</sup>). After king Josiah died at Megiddo,<sup>39</sup> his younger son, Jehoahaz (also referred to as Shallum), was anointed king by the Judahites. Necho also engaged with King Jehoahaz of Judah who was made to appear before this pharaoh at his camp in Riblah; subsequently, Pharaoh Necho took Jehoahaz to Egypt (2 Kgs. 23:33; 2 Chr. 36:1-4). Necho raised Eliakim, the brother of Jehoahaz, to the throne, changing his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim reigned under the protection of Necho. It seems that Necho induced king Jehoiakim of Judah (609-598 BCE) to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>40</sup> Necho laid a tribute of one talent in gold and one hundred talents of silver upon Judah. In 602 BCE Pharaoh Necho was again campaigning in Asia, but he was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar in the battle of Carchemish. These events are mentioned in Jer. 46, which contains prophecies against Necho and

- 37 2 Kgs. 23: 29-37: *In his days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates; and king Josiah went against him; and he [Necho] killed him at Megiddo, when he saw him. And his servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulcher. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's place. Jehoahaz was twenty three years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done. And Pharaoh Necho put him in bonds at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and put the land to a tribute of a hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold. And Pharaoh Necho made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in place of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and took Jehoahaz away; and he came to Egypt, and died there. And Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh; he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give it to Pharaoh Necho. Jehoiakim was twenty five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Zebudah, the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done.*
- 38 2 Chr. 35:20: *After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him. 2 Chr. 35:22: Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but sought an opportunity to fight with him, and he did not listen to the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. 2 Chr. 36:4: And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And Necho took Jehoahaz his brother, and carried him to Egypt.*
- 39 See Abraham Malamat, "Josiah's Bid for Armageddon: The Background of the Judean-Egyptian Encounter in 609 B.C.," *The Gaster Festschrift* (ed. D. Marcus; New York: ANES, 1974), 267-79. Josiah took on the Egyptian army at Megiddo ("Armageddon"); thus, Necho suffered an unexpected ambush.
- 40 2 Kgs. 24:1: *In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his vassal three years; then he turned and rebelled against him.*

the land of Egypt.<sup>41</sup> After this campaign, Necho and his army retreated to Egypt, which was spared an invasion by Nebuchadnezzar, since he had to return to Babylon.

The campaigns of Necho reverberate in rabbinic texts; Seder ‘Olam Rabbah 24 refers to the conquests of Necho. There are also tannaitic interpretations that relate the peacefulness of Necho, in which the term “sword of peace” is used. The following passage explains that King Josiah had false hopes and did not follow Pharaoh Necho’s advice.

b. Ta'an 22a-b: And the sword. [Mishnah]

Our Rabbis have taught: “Sword” means not only a hostile attack by an invading army, but also the passing en route of a peaceful army. For there could be no more peaceful army than that of Pharaoh Necho, and yet through it king Josiah met his fate, as it is said: *But he sent ambassadors to him, What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I have come not against you this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: and God has given command to speed me; forbear from meddling with God, who is with me, that He will not destroy you* (2 Chr. 35:21). What is meant by *God who is with me* (*ibid.*)? Rav Judah said in the name of Rav: Idols, [because] Josiah said, Since [Pharaoh Necho] puts his trust in his idols I will prevail over him. *And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants: Take me away, for I am badly wounded* (2 Chr. 35:23)

The citation of an etymology seems to be very deliberate and adds to the interpretation of Pharaoh Necho; the ensuing narrative inserts hinges upon this etymology. The name Necho (נְכֹה) is explained as “the lame one” (נְכֹה); e.g., in the lament over King Josiah who was killed by Pharaoh the Lame [Necho] in the valley of Megiddo.<sup>42</sup> A text relates the *topos* of Necho, the lame, to the Targumic translation of the name (b. Mo'ed Qatān 28b). Some texts utilize a homoleuton and compare the Biblical Noah and Necho, both were “lame” (or “castrated”?) because both were injured by a lion. “Lameness” has ritual consequences since it prevents a person from offering proper sacrifices in the case of Noah, as well as the benefits of conquering the throne of Solomon in the case of “Necho.”

Lev. Rab. 20:1:<sup>43</sup> *After the death of the two sons of Aaron* (Lev. 16:1). R. Shim'on opened his discourse with: *All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked* (Eccl. 9:2). *To the righteous* (*ibid.*) – that is Noah, of whom it says, *A man righteous* (Gen. 6: 9). R. Yohanan observed

<sup>41</sup> Jer. 46: 1-2: *The word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah the prophet against the nations. Against Egypt, against the army of Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, who was by the river Euphrates in Carchemish, whom Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah.*

<sup>42</sup> b. Mo'ed Qat. 28b.

<sup>43</sup> Eccl. Rab. 1:53; Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 26:1; Tanh., Buber ed., Va'ethanan 1:1.

in the name of R. Eli'ezer, the son of R. Jose the Galilean: When Noah left the ark a lion struck and maimed him so that he was unfit to offer sacrifices, and Shem his son offered them instead. *And to the wicked* (Eccl. 9:2) – that is Pharaoh Necho. When he attempted to sit on the throne of Solomon he did not know its workings, so a lion struck him and maimed him. The former [Noah] died a lame man and the latter died a lame man. This explains the text: *There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked. To the good and to the clean and to the unclean* (Eccl. 9:2).

The midrash presents an etiological legend to claim that Pharaoh Necho was lame; proving the physical defect of a supposedly strong king serves as a delayed revenge for the events that transpired during Necho's campaign that are described in the Bible.

### Necho's alleged Involvement with Solomon

The Bible refers to a marriage of King Solomon to "Pharaoh's daughter" (1 Kgs. 3:1); there is a substantial gap in this passage, since neither the name of the princess nor the name of the pharaoh are mentioned. In the midrashic interpretation it is alleged to have been the marriage of Solomon to Necho's daughter; this marriage is utilized to interpret a lemma in Song of Songs: *My own vineyard I did not keep* (Song 1:6). According to tradition, Song of Songs was composed by King Solomon, who then proclaims that it is he who did not keep his own vineyard. The midrash comments that Pharaoh Necho's daughter became the wife of King Solomon; following the established standard chronology in Egyptology, this is the wrong pharaoh.<sup>44</sup> Thus, pharaoh Necho in some midrashic texts should be corrected to Shishaq. The following midrashic text may express the fear that King Solomon's marriage to pharaoh's daughter was inappropriate and that the consequent weakening of Israel's moral fiber was the first step in Israel's collapse. The collapse of Israel under this construction included the Roman occupation of the Land of Israel. Interestingly, the legend of the founding of Rome is intertwined in this midrash about Necho and Solomon.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Solomon ruled from 968-928 BCE; more likely candidates for this marriage would include Pinudjem, Psusennes from Thebes or Osorkon, Siamun, and Shoshenq I from Tanis. See André Lemaire, "Salomon et la fille de Pharaon: un problème d'interprétation historique," in *'I will speak the riddles of ancient times:' Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, vols. 1-3 (ed. Aren M. Maeir and Pierre de Mroschedji; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006) and Bernd Ulrich Schipper, "Salomo und die Pharaonentochter: zum historischen Kern von 1 Kön 7,8," *Biblische Notizen* 102 (2000), 84-94.

<sup>45</sup> For further references, see Louis H. Feldman, "Abba Kolon and the Founding of Rome," *JQR* 81 (1991), 239-66.

On the other hand, the rabbinic interpretation implies an idealized vision of Solomon's marriage; this important Israelite king could only have married the daughter of an important rival king.

Song Rab. 1:41:<sup>46</sup> *My own vineyard I did not keep* (Song 1:6) – R. Levi said: On the day that Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh Necho, Michael the great prince came down from heaven and stuck a great pole in the sea, and mud came up on each side so that the place became like a thicket of reeds, and that was the site of Rome.

The above midrashic text raises the important issue of "Rome," which is viewed as another oppressive government and which is frequently compared to Egypt.

### The Temple Building Legend

Pharaoh Necho II was known as a builder; he commenced the construction of a canal through Wadi Tumilat; this canal was to connect the River Nile to the Red Sea. According to the report in Herodotus (*Hist.* 2.158), this canal had originally been built by Ramses II and was covered by sand. The Persian king Darius I (522-485 BCE) completed the canal.<sup>47</sup> Midrashic texts present a legend that Pharaoh Necho sent construction workers, who were close to death, to King Solomon; however, Solomon in his superior wisdom sent them back clothed in shrouds. The legend serves as an interpretation of a scriptural lemma in 1 Kgs. 5:10. Excelling the wisdom of Egypt is exemplified by Solomon who is wiser than a pharaoh. Again Solomon is said to have had contact with Necho.

Num. Rab. 19:3:<sup>48</sup> *[And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east] and all the wisdom of Egypt* (1 Kgs. 5: 10). What was the wisdom of Egypt? You find that when Solomon wished to build the Temple he sent to Pharaoh Necho and said to him: Send me craftsmen to work for me for a wage, for I wish to build the Temple. What did Pharaoh do? He assembled all his astrologers and these looked into the future and saw the people who were destined to die in that year. These he sent to Solomon. When they came to Solomon he foresaw by the Holy Spirit that they would die that same year, so he gave them funeral shrouds and sent them back to Pha-

<sup>46</sup> b. Šab. 56b; Sanh. 21b.

<sup>47</sup> See chapter 2. In Herodotus, Sesostri is mentioned as the pharaoh who had canals built all over Egypt to irrigate the country and to give plots of land to the inhabitants (*Hist.* 2:108-109); in Diodorus Siculus this is ascribed to the god Osiris (*Bibl. Hist.* 1.57.1-3).

<sup>48</sup> This Temple building legend is also found in Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 4:3; Eccl. Rab. 7:33.

raoh, with this message: You apparently had no shrouds in which to bury your dead; I send you herewith both the victims and their shrouds.

Pharaoh Necho II is also known to have brought additional Greeks to Egypt and to have built a mercantile navy; if this connection to building ships is reflected in another rabbinic narrative that places Necho at sea (Lam. Rab. 4:20), is uncertain.

## 5. Pharaoh Hophra (Apries)

Pharaoh Apries (Οναφρης, 589-570 BCE),<sup>49</sup> the son of Psametichus II, was also known as Hophra. The Biblical name is based upon the Egyptian *wahibre*. Hophra sought to recover Syria and Palestine and had an alliance with King Zedekiah to avert the fall of Jerusalem. Hophra is mentioned in Jer. 44:30, a passage that prophesies the downfall of Apries:

Thus says the Lord; Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt, to the hand of his enemies, and to the hand of those who seek his life; as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah to the hand of Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, his enemy, who sought his life.

The reputed claim of pharaohs to be gods<sup>50</sup> is viewed as extreme hubris in rabbinic literature; this is exemplified by Hophra who ultimately was given into the hand of the Israelite God. The name Hophra' (חוֹפְרָא') is deconstructed and is set into relationship with the Hebrew root *para'* (פָּרָעֵ); usually this term pertains to one of the rituals performed by a priest during the examination and chastisement of the Sotah, a woman suspected of adultery. The midrashic hermeneutic operation connects this term to the calumny that Egypt was punished like an adulterous woman. This midrashic operation dismembers the powerful, militant Egyptian king Hophra and it fulfills a lemma from the prophet Isaiah providing hope to Israel.

Exod. Rab. 8:2:<sup>51</sup> From where [in Scripture] do we know that Pharaoh claimed to be a god? Because it says: *My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself* (Ezek. 29:3). God delivered him into the hands of his enemies, as it says, *Thus says the Lord: Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra, King of Egypt, into the hands of his enemies* (Jer. 44: 30). What is the meaning of "Hophra?" Similar to this [ritual]: *And [the priest] shall unfasten the hair of the woman (pa-*

49 Herodotus, *Hist.* 2:161; Diodorus Siculus, 1.68.1.

50 See Chapter 2.

51 This midrashic explanation of Hophra's name is also found in Pesiq. Zut. Bereshit 41, Yal. 1, 180 Va'era.

*ra'), and set the meal-offering of memorial in her hands* (Num. 5:18), and it is written: *In that day shall Egypt be like unto women* (Isa. 19:16).

## 6. Talmai

A critical transition occurred in Egypt after the time of the pharaohs that were active before Alexander the Great conquered Egypt. This break roughly coincides with the initial closure of the Biblical canon and its pharaohs, who physically engaged with the Land of Israel and the Hebrews, Israelites or Jews. From the perspective of the Bible and midrashic texts, native Egyptian pharaohs had previously ruled Egypt, notwithstanding the foreign rulers of the past, and mostly these pharaohs acted against Israel. This break with pharaonic Egypt is paralleled in midrash. The transition to the Ptolemaic kings, the new “pharaohs” of Egypt, was accompanied by a different cultural threat: the Hellenization of Judaism. Hellenization created a new flourishing Egyptian culture that included consistency and change, something that I call a “transformed continuity.” In Egypt, the transition included continued veneration of former Egyptian kings. Pharaoh Nektanebos I (380-363 BCE) was venerated as a god similar to other pharaohs, and several cults were dedicated to him. His veneration lasted into the middle of the Ptolemaic period. The last native pharaoh of Egypt was probably Nektanebos II, the “guardian of Egypt” (*mkj km.t.*)<sup>52</sup> a king of the 30<sup>th</sup> dynasty, before Alexander the Great conquered Egypt and presented himself as a pharaoh. Nektanebos II constructed and restored the Egyptian temples and several cults were established for his worship during the Ptolemaic period. The new foreign rulers, the Ptolemies, also assumed pharaonic habits and were portrayed in pharaonic garb and posture. In rabbinic literature any Ptolemaic king is referred to as “Talmai”:<sup>53</sup>

Gen. Rab. 38:10: *Come, let us go down* (Gen. 11:7). This is one of the words which they altered for King Talmai [Ptolemy]: Come, I will go down, and there confound their language.

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52 Jack A. Josephson, “Nektanebo,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 2, 517-18; there may have been a short-time successor to Nektanebos II.

53 The Bible mentions the king of Geshur, who is named Talmai (2 Sam. 3:3; 13:37; 1 Chr. 3:2); rabbinic interpretation associates his name with “ridge” (*telem*) in b. Yom. 10a. This king had no relationship with the Ptolemaic “Talmai.”

Talmai is mainly mentioned in connection with changes that he allegedly made to the Biblical text in the Greek translation,<sup>54</sup> the Septuagint, which is said to have taken place under a Ptolemaic king in Alexandria, Egypt.<sup>55</sup> The assumed translation technique<sup>56</sup> instigated by “Talmai” is portrayed as having usurped the Biblical text; instead of conquering the Land of Israel the Hellenistic Egyptian king is viewed as triumphing over the Biblical text in Greek.

## Conclusion

Midrash records what the rabbis of their time claimed to be their version of the past; it presents a picture of how they saw their present. The figures of memory were consciously selected from a wide range of possibilities. A new construction of the past, an awareness of the historical ties to Egypt, was seen in the named historical pharaohs, who represent a different type of ruler than the unnamed Pharaoh of the Exodus.

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- 54 See also Gen. Rab. 8:11; 10:9; 38:10; 48:17; 98:5; Exod. Rab. 5:5; b. Meg. 9a; for further references and a discussion of this translation project, see Giuseppe Veltri, *Eine Tora für den König Talmai: Untersuchungen zum Übersetzungsverständnis in der jüdisch-hellenistischen und rabbinischen Literatur* (TSAJ 41; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1994).
- 55 If the rabbinic Talmai was Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-247 BCE), is questionable; see also Edwyn Bevan, *The House of Ptolemy: A History of Egypt under the Ptolemaic Dynasty* (Chicago: Argonaut, 1968), 112f.
- 56 Sebastian P. Brock, “Aspects of Translation Techniques in Antiquity,” *GRBS* 20 (1979), 69-87.



# Chapter Two: The Nile

## 1. Introduction

The Nile was equivalent to Egypt and the water of this river was a major contributor to the development of Egyptian religion, culture and civilization.<sup>1</sup> References to the Nile also appear outside of Egypt, in Greek and Roman authors,<sup>2</sup> as well as in Roman and Byzantine art. In Jewish sources, the Nile is frequently mentioned in Biblical and post-Biblical literature, including rabbinic literature. Despite the fascination that the Nile obviously exerted on ancient and early medieval writers, misinterpretations arose repeatedly on all fronts. On the one hand, Egyptian ideas were used as the foundation for other systems of belief, and Egypt was understood as the original fount of wisdom, yet numerous aspects of cult practices seemed abhorrent to the recipients of these ideas in other cultures. This accounts for the mixture of historical account and fable, of interpretation and prejudice.

The Exodus narratives in the Hebrew Bible depict the Nile as an element in a religious drama that unfolds in the Nilotc landscape; pro-

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- 1 Some of the works focusing upon cultural aspects of the Nile include: Ernest A. Thompson Wallis Budge, *The Dwellers on the Nile* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1926) and Alexandre Moret, *The Nile and Egyptian Civilization* (trans. of *Nil et la civilisation égyptienne*) (New York: Knopf, 1927). James Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940, repr. 1972) presents an incisive overview of the cultural development in Egypt.
  - 2 See, e.g., Gwyn J. Griffiths, "Hecateus and Herodotus on 'a gift of the river,'" *JNES* 25 (1966), 57-61; Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.5, "[Egypt] is the land that has been given to the Egyptians as an addition and as a gift of the river." The Greek image of Egypt and the Egyptians was summarized by Katell Berthelot, "The Use of Greek and Roman Stereotypes of the Egyptians by Hellenistic Jewish Apologists, with Special Reference to Josephus' *Against Apion*," in *Internationales Josephus-Kolloquium, Aarhus 1999* (ed. Jürgen U. Kalms; Münsteraner Judaistische Studien 6; Münster: Lit, 2000), 185-221. One may observe that the Romans viewed Egyptian religious practices as well as the practice of Judaism as strange and exotic cults (e.g., Juvenal, *Sat.*, 6.522-41). A summary of the Roman sources is found in Manfred Clauss, "46 Quellen zum Ägyptenbild der Römer," in *Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom: Abwehr und Berührung. Städelisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, 26. November 2005-26. Februar 2006* (Frankfurt am Main: Liebighaus alter Plastik and Tübingen/Berlin: Wasmuth Verlag, 2005), 392-97.

phetic texts include the Nile as a metaphor for Egypt.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, there is a parallel discourse to the Biblical text, namely the Jewish oral tradition that is found in the interpretative texts of Judaism. The rabbinic midrashic texts explore the religious significance of the Nile, as well as its geography. The rabbinic statements concerning Egypt and the Nile represent attempts to shape and transmit Judaism from a cultural perspective,<sup>4</sup> while discussing a culture that is different from their own. The Nile in rabbinic texts may be viewed as an Egyptian artifact in strange surroundings, whereas, from a religious perspective, the waters of the Nile serve as the divinely chosen agent of destruction.

As may be gathered from the rabbinic texts at hand, it was not the purpose of rabbinic descriptions of Egypt and the Nile to write a coherent history of the Jewish experience in Egypt; the Egyptian references in midrash are found only in fragmentary form. The textual fragments relating to Egypt are found in different and separate rabbinic texts. The textual fragments resemble fragments of memory which leads me to suggest that they belong to the cultural memory of rabbinic Judaism. Through the ongoing efforts of cultural memory, essential elements of the conceptual world of Egypt maintained their presence in Jewish sources through the end of the era of midrashic activity in medieval Europe and even flowed into other genres such as the liturgy of the synagogue and the medieval philosophical constructs of Egypt. Although the rabbinic texts are interrelated, it is not my intention in this chapter to rewrite these texts in order to create a comprehensive narrative with regard to the Nile as portrayed in midrash.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, an attempt will be made in this chapter to analyze the rabbinic discourse on the Nile. The numerous Nilotica landscapes devel-

3 For example, Isa. 19; Amos 9:5: *The Lord, God of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile, and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt.* See also Jer. 2:18.

4 Among the rich literature on the cultural transfer between Israel and Egypt, extending into the first century of the Common Era, the following utilize a cultural perspective, Bernd U. Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit: Die kulturellen Kontakte von Salomo bis zum Fall Jerusalems* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 170; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag and Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); Ernst Bannal, "Das Judentum als eine Religion Ägyptens," in *Religion im Erbe Ägyptens. Beiträge zur spätantiken Religionsgeschichte zu Ehren von Alexander Böhlig* (ed. Manfred Görg; Ägypten und Altes Testament 14; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988), 11-7. The medieval Cairene Jewish writer, Joseph Sambari, also engaged in a cultural, topographical perspective (see Dinah Bonen, "נילוס נהר מצרים- דוגמה לדרך עיברו של יוסף סמבראי את מקורותיו יוסף," *Zion* 47 (1982), 429-34).

5 Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (trans. Henrietta Szold and Paul Radin; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003, 2nd ed., 1st. 1967-1969) attempted to create such narratives.

oped in midrashic literature link the Egyptian landscape to rabbinic ideology. The land of Egypt in these midrashic scenes is more an idea than a reality. The scenes evoke the Egyptian images that we find in Greco-Roman Egypt and earlier Egyptian culture. These scenes point to a specific moment in time. For example, the Exodus experience is extensively mentioned in midrashic literature, although the time of this event is indeterminate in midrashic texts. The rabbis' portrayal of a physical relationship to the Egyptian landscape is mediated by the memory of specific Egyptian geographic elements of the past, including the Nile. The sojourn in Egypt and the Exodus connected the rabbis to Egypt and its geography on multiple levels. As Egypt began to fade into memory, the Nile emerged as an icon of Egyptian culture, while the rocks of the Land of Israel and the rain that watered the land represented landscapes of reality and salvation, each bearing specific connotations.

The rabbis of late antiquity, who created the genre midrash, crafted scenes of life in Egypt. Among the numerous Egyptian elements in midrash are depictions of the river Nile. These textual images may be compared to scenes from Egyptian sources. The rabbinic interest in the Nile may be explained in terms of a culture of memory, as mentioned above. This memory organizes the Egyptian events and icons in a temporal sequence; however, the midrashic texts connect and interrelate both the events and the icons. It is apparent that in the rabbinic imagination the Nile became the landscape of the "Other."<sup>6</sup> The views of the "Other" take shape in different ways under different editorial constraints, which may have been influenced by historical circumstances. To illustrate this point, the scenes referring to Egyptian landscapes frequently multiply in the late midrashic works at the same time that the Diaspora experience becomes more onerous. Yet there seem to exist certain recurring patterns of Egyptian motifs in midrash. Rabbis usually follow the depiction of the Egyptian landscape as the "Other" through the process of negative self-definition, which may be based upon Egyptian religious practices.<sup>7</sup> The midrashic passages analyzed in this chapter form a framework which supports our understanding of the rabbinic

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- 6 This term, which appeared in the 1950's as the title of a work on the secondary status of women in Western society by Simone de Beauvoir, *Deuxième sexe*, rendered into English as *The Second Sex* [trans. H. M. Parshley; New York: Knopf, 1953, repr. 1993], has become a term of common linguistic use. Without delving into the constructions of philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas, I use the term to refer to a culture that seems to be different, but is known to a group, and that as an entity cannot be avoided in the construction of one's own identity.
- 7 See the so-called "Negative Confession," in *Book of the Dead*, 125 (the "Negative Confession" is attested to in several papyri).

discourse on Egypt. This discourse had a profound impact upon the development of Judaism.

The midrashic interpretation in regard to Egypt involves creativity in addition to pure exposition of Biblical lemmata. Jewish Bible interpretation utilized the events, people, and historical settings surrounding Israel's sojourn in Egypt to construct an Egypt that is a signifier of "Otherness" and becomes critical in the development of Judaism. The Nile serves as a platform for rabbinic texts to engage in polemics against a metaphorical Egypt. In midrash, the importance of the Nile includes the river Nile as a metaphor for Egypt and as a symbol of life, as well as a symbol of the king of Egypt. One might ask: Are these rabbinic perspectives consistent with what we know of the cultural significance of the Nile inundation from Egyptian sources? Do the rabbinic statements and the aggadic sections of midrash reflect any knowledge of religious ideas emanating from Egypt? I will now examine the various literary functions of the Nile in midrashic texts and discuss some rabbinic statements about the Nile in light of some Egyptian evidence.

## 2. Terms for the Nile

Midrashic literature uses several terms for the river Nile: *ye'or* (Nile); *nahar* (river); *Nilos* (Nile). At times the term *nahar* in midrash is combined with *misrayim* (Egypt), rendering "the River of Egypt," but this term does not refer to the Nile; we may also exclude the term *nahal misrayim* (the Brook of Egypt) which is not identical with the Nile.<sup>8</sup> The term נַּרְ (ye'or) is Biblical.<sup>9</sup> The plural *ye'orim* refers to the estuaries of the Nile delta or the Nile canals. The Hebrew term *ye'or* is probably based upon the Egyptian term *'rw* (*iteru*), which is usually translated as "river." Beginning in the 18th dynasty of Egypt (c. 1567-1320 BCE) the documents show the related term *'rw*;<sup>10</sup> the vowel "o" (written as a "w") is based upon usage during the Amarna period (1379-1362 BCE).<sup>11</sup> The Septuagint usually translates *ye'or* as ποταμός, less frequently as διωρυξ. Deut. Rab. 11:4 specifies "the Nile (*ye'or*) of Egypt." As may be

<sup>8</sup> Haim Bar Deroma, "River of Egypt (Nachal Mizraim)," *PEQ* 92 (1960), 37-56. "Nahal misrayim" is also referred to as the "Wadi of Egypt;" this is probably Wadi El Arish (see Jos. 15:4).

<sup>9</sup> *ThWAT*, s.v. "Je'or," 385-90.

<sup>10</sup> *WÄS* I, 146.

<sup>11</sup> This is the era of Akhenaten that may be significant in the development of monotheism, which was practiced to a certain extent at that time, and suggest a possible cultural interchange between Canaanite (pre-Israelite) and Egyptian populations.

expected, the term *ye'or* occurs mainly in Biblical quotations within midrashic texts. Rashi on Gen. 41:1 comments:

*Ye'or* – all the other rivers are not called *ye'orim* except the Nile (*Nilos*) because the entire land is turned into many *ye'orim* by mankind and the Nile overflows into these and irrigates them since there are no regular rainfalls in Egypt as in the other countries.<sup>12</sup>

Sometimes the Nile is referred to simply as “the river (*nahar*)” as in Isa. 19:5; Jer. 46:8.; Ez. 32:2.

According to Diodorus Siculus, the oldest name for the Nile is “Okeanos” (Ωκεανός).<sup>13</sup> “Okeanos” (ocean) is the water in which Egyptian deities were born. This body of water is related to the Egyptian term “Nun,” the primeval ocean, the “father of the gods.”<sup>14</sup> Even though Egyptian creation myths show a variety of gods, one creator god emerged from the primordial waters, *Nun*, a limitless expanse of motionless water. After creation, *Nun* continued to exist at the margins of the earth and would eventually return to destroy the earth and cover it with water. *Nun* also participated in the destruction of humanity, which at one point had ceased obeying the god Ra'; it was *Nun* who suggested that Ra' send his eye on a mission of destruction.<sup>15</sup>

Even in 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Alexandria there persisted the concept that the Nile was connected to the ocean; for example, there is evidence for a combination of the terms Nile and Ocean.<sup>16</sup> “Siris” was the name given by the Ethiopians to the Nile;<sup>17</sup> this name is found in 1<sup>st</sup> century inscriptions and in Pliny.<sup>18</sup> The term “Siris” was eventually attached to the star “Sothis” (in Latin: *Sirius*); the term “Sothis” is Egyptian. The appearance of this star marked the annual time of the Nile inundation. The goddess Isis, whose cult was well known in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE,<sup>19</sup> was associated with the star “Sothis.” The name of this star, which ruled over the annual inundation of the Nile, was commingled with the Ethiopian name for the Nile (Siris).

12 Compare other passages in Rashi, e.g., Gen. 47:10.

13 Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 1.37.7.

14 WÄS Bel. 2,215.

15 See Rivka Ulmer, “The Divine Eye in Ancient Egypt and in the Midrashic Interpretation of Formative Judaism,” *Journal of Religion and Society* 5 (2003), 1-17.

16 Danielle Bonneau, “La divinité du Nil sous le principat en Egypte,” *ANRW*, II.18,5 (1995), 3195-215, 3198.

17 Bonneau, *ANRW*, 3197.

18 Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 5.9.10.

19 See Robert A. Wild, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Serapis* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 16.

The term “Nilos”<sup>20</sup> Νεῖλος refers to the river Nile in Greco-Roman Egypt; it also refers to the god *Nilos* during this time period. In rabbinic literature the term *Nilos* occurs frequently and usually refers to the Nile river.<sup>21</sup> *Nilos* is used to identify the location of Joseph’s coffin that Moses<sup>22</sup> has to retrieve during the time of the Exodus.<sup>23</sup> *Nilos* also appears in midrash in regard to a Nile festival<sup>24</sup> and in reference to the Nile as a source of water.<sup>25</sup> It is possible that rabbinic texts from a certain time period, e.g., the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, utilized the term *Nilos* more frequently than the other terms for the Nile. In late midrashic texts from the medieval period the authors of these texts revert to the Biblical term *ye’or* in order to antiquitize their texts.

### 3. Geographical and Topographical Descriptions of the Nile

Discussing the topography of Egypt and the workings of the Nile river demonstrates a midrashic involvement with geography; one goal of this interest in the geography of this Egyptian icon is setting boundaries. As a result, reflecting upon the landscape of the Nile turns into a distinct polemical topic. The polemical engagement with the Nile is demonstrated in the following midrashic passage:

Lam. Rab., Petihā 19: R. Avin opened his discourse with: *He changes the times and the seasons* (Dan. 2:21). Jeremiah said to Israel: Had you been worthy, you would be dwelling in Jerusalem and drinking the waters of Siloam, the waters of which are pure and sweet, but now that you are unworthy, you are being exiled to Babylon, where you will be drinking the waters of the Euphrates, the waters of which are impure and ill-smelling, as it is said: *And now, what is the good of you going to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile? And what is the good of you going to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates?* (Jer. 2:18)

<sup>20</sup> Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 2, 905.

<sup>21</sup> The Vulgate contains the term “Nilus” (Isa. 23:3).

<sup>22</sup> See chapter 4.

<sup>23</sup> An early attestation of the retrieval of Joseph’s coffin from the Nile is found in the Tosefta (t. Sot. 4:7, Lieberman ed.); see also Mek., Beshallah (Horovitz/Rabin, ed.); Exod. Rab. 20:19; Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 11; Tanh. Beshallah 2; Yal. 1, 247 Beshallah; Midr. Aggadah 13. *Mishnat Rabbi Eli’ezer* 19 states: “If you think he [Joseph] was put into the ground, they put him into the ocean.”

<sup>24</sup> Pesiq. Rab. 6:2, Ulmer ed.; Gen. Rab. 87; 13:7; Exod. Rab. 11:11, Shinan ed.; Rashi on Gen. 39:10 refers to the Nile festival, based upon midrashic interpretation (see chapter 3).

<sup>25</sup> Sif. Deut. 38; Midr. Tannaim 11:10; Gen. Rab. 13:9; Tg. Yer. Gen. 47:7.

In the Bible there is a focus upon the associations between the garden of Egypt, which was created by the Nile, and the desert journey that led to the Promised Land. If we look at the Nile passages in midrash from the perspective of landscape theory, we find that some midrashic descriptions regarding the shape of the Nile are indicative of a familiarity with the geography of Egypt, although this may be based upon the existing Biblical familiarity with the Nile. Generally, the descriptions of the Egyptian landscape as found in the midrashic corpus are characterized by both the brevity of the narrative and the paucity of adjectives. Unlike landscape painters or poets who outline broad details of the Nilotc vegetation, the *fellahin* (the Egyptian farmers), the shifting colors of the watery surface, rabbinic texts rarely linger on the poetics of the Nile landscape;<sup>26</sup> rather, the rabbis quickly proceed to the cultural meanings of the landscape. In general, descriptions of the landscape are scant and midrash only isolates certain facets of places in Egypt in order to expose religious discontent and to criticize them. However, at times the rabbis attempt to raise the awareness level of their intended audience by updating or integrating the memory of the Nilotc landscape with transcendental notions of the Nile and its waters.

Identifying the Nile with other rivers and moving it to the Garden of Eden is found in the Septuagint, as it identifies the Nile as Gihon (LXX Jer. 2:18: Γηών).<sup>27</sup> Pishon, the river flowing from the Garden of Eden, is occasionally identified with the Nile in midrashic texts. The late midrashic work Agg. Ber. 2 states that the river Pishon in the Garden of Eden is the Nile.<sup>28</sup> The identification of Pishon with the Nile is also found in Rashi,<sup>29</sup> thus relocating Paradise to Egypt. This transfer strategy may serve to underline the importance of Egypt and the great fertility of Goshen, which is watered by the Nile; in the alternative, it may simply reflect an erroneous updating of older geographical terms. The Nile and the rivers of Eden are also commingled on the 6th century CE Madaba map.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, the editor of Eldad Ha-Dani's trave-

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26 By contrast, the Hallel Psalms dwell upon the poetics of the Jordan River (Ps. 114).

27 Compare Sir. 24:27; Gen. 2:10; see the references to Gihon in Alfred Hermann, "Der Nil und die Christen," JAC 1 (1958), 30-69, 40-41, and Yehuda Radday, "The Four Rivers of Paradise," HS 23 (1982), 23-31. Josephus, Ant. 1.39 also identifies Gihon with the Nile.

28 'Ag. Ber., Buber ed., and the translation by Lieve Teugels, *Aggadat Bereshit* (Brill: Leiden, 2001). This passage is also found in Midr. Aggadah 2 (Buber ed.) and in Ramban on Gen. 2:11; 3:22.

29 Rashi on Gen. 2:11, s.v. *pishon*, and in other Bible commentaries (Ramban on Gen. 2:11; 3:22).

30 Henry Maguire, "The Nile and the Rivers of Paradise," in *The Madaba Map Centenary 1897-1997: Travelling through the Byzantine Umayyad Period. Proceedings of the Interna-*

logue<sup>31</sup> corrected “Pishon in Ethiopia” to read “the Nile,” drawing upon some geographical knowledge. Another midrashic unit (Pesiq. Zut., Bereshit 15) reduces the size of the Nile to a river that is smaller than the Babylonian Euphrates by claiming that the letter “Lamed” has to be changed into the letter “Nun,” thus changing *nilos* to *ninus*. This is an interpretation of Gen. 15:18: *I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates*; apparently this passage served the rabbinic interpreters to diminish the significance of the Nile. The Nile is reduced to a “small” river. In Pesiq. Zut., Bereshit 15 the diminution of the Nile transpires as the result of its unfavorable comparison to the Land of Israel.<sup>32</sup> This is an example of rabbinic polemics against the Nile. This rabbinic technique of engaging in polemics in respect to the Nile is illustrated by the following text, in which the rabbinic text focuses upon geographical details in the Land of Egypt:

Gen. Rab. 1:1: Amon (Prov. 8:30) means “great,” as it says, *Are you better than No-Amon [that was situated among the ye'orim, surrounded by water]* (Nah. 3:8)? This we translate: Are you better than Alexandria the Great, which is situated in the [Nile] delta?

The above text translates<sup>33</sup> the city of No-Amon, Egyptian *njwt jmnw* (Lesser Thebes),<sup>34</sup> which is surrounded by Nile water, into the more contemporary city of Alexandria. By virtue of this hermeneutic strategy of “updating,” the midrash changes an ancient Egyptian city to the Hellenistic Egyptian metropolis of Alexandria, situated in the Nile delta. Alexandria (*Alexandria ad Aegyptum*) was a center of wisdom and learning in the Hellenistic world.<sup>35</sup> The geography of Egypt is also the focus

*tional Conference Held in Amman*, 1997 (ed. Ichelle Piccirillo and Eugene Alliata; Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum, 1999), 179-84.

31 OM 1, 22.

32 Pesiq. Zut. (Midr. Lekah Tov), Buber ed.

33 The reference to the process of translation is not accidental in this midrash; e.g., Tg. Onq. Nah. 3:8 utilizes the same juxtaposition as the midrashic text. In regard to the delta, cf. Herbert Donner, “Das Nildelta auf der Mosaikkarte von Madeba,” *Fontes atque pontes pontes: Eine Festgabe für Hellmut Brunner* (ed. Manfred Görg; Ägypten und Altes Testament 5; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), 75-89; s.v. “Nilmündungen,” LÄ 4, 498.

34 The Egyptian capital Thebes was located in Upper Egypt. Based upon the term “ye'orim” in the passage from Nah., which could be translated as “Nile estuaries,” I would argue that No-Amon refers to the Lesser Thebes in the delta of Lower Egypt. See also John R. Huddelston, “Nahum, Nineveh, and the Nile; the description of Thebes in Nahum 3:8-9,” *JNES* 62 (2003), 97-110, who, based upon some Egyptological readings, raises the possibility that the Biblical No-Amon refers to another location, the so-called Lesser Thebes or the Island of Amun, also known as Tell el-Balamun, 99, n. 10. This site is related to the cult of Horus the Behedite.

35 See chapter 6.

of a passage in Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 7:5, which lists the Greek names of several Egyptian locations. This passage also indicates that the rabbis endeavored to update the names of some Egyptian cities:

Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 7:5: R. Hilkiah in the name of R. Simon said: "No" is Alexandria, "Noph" is Memphis, "Tehaphnehes" is Hupianas,<sup>36</sup> "City of Shards" is Ostracena,<sup>37</sup> "City of the Sun" is Heliopolis.

Other passages from midrashic works demonstrate a clear knowledge of the location of the Nile in Egypt. A passage in Exod. Rab. 1:21 implies that the Nile reached as far as the Red Sea; this could very well have been accurate if one takes into consideration the great public works under the Persian kings of the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty in Egypt. The building campaigns under the Persian rulers of Egypt, Cambyses (525-522 BCE)<sup>38</sup> and Darius I (522-486 BCE), included the completion of a canal that was commenced under the reign of Necho II (610-595 BCE), connecting the Nile with the Red (Reed) Sea. The "Sea of Reeds" and the "Red Sea" are often synonymous in ancient texts.<sup>39</sup> The midrash set forth below explains the location of the "reeds by the river's bank" found in a lemma in Exod. 2:3 as the "Sea of Reeds." The midrash establishes a religiously significant connection between the location chosen by the mother of Moses to save her son and the location of the future salvation of the "Hebrews."

Exod. Rab. 1:21: *She put the child into it and laid it into the reed by the river's bank* (Exod. 2:3). R. Eleazar said: The Sea of Reeds, since the Sea of Reeds reaches as far as the Nile.<sup>40</sup>

### Sources of the Nile

In ancient Egypt, the location of the sources of the Nile was believed to be at two springs at Silsileh (located at the first Nile cataract), as shown on a stela from the 19th dynasty (c. 1320-1200 BCE). Herodotus also placed the source of the river at the first Nile cataract.<sup>41</sup> The god

36 The cities of No, Noph and Tehaphnehes are mentioned in Ezek. 30:13,14 and 18.

37 See Krauss, *Lehnwörter*, 1, 414.

38 See Jürgen von Beckerath, "Nochmals die Eroberung Ägyptens durch Kambyses," *ZÄS* 129 (2002), 1-5.

39 Bernard F. Baato, "Red Sea or Reed Sea: how the mistake was made and what Yam sūp really means," *BARev* 10 (1984), 57-63; for Egyptian connotations, see Alessandra Tibbi, "The Lake of Reeds of the Pyramid texts and Yam Suph," *GMi* 29 (1978), 95-100.

40 Similar in Exod. Rab. 1:1.

41 Compare Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.11.28.

Khnum, a god in the form of a ram, was considered as the patron of the first cataract and the guardian of the Nile sources in the caverns at Elephantine (an island located at the first cataract). In a religious sense, Khnum was considered as the donor of the Nile inundation.<sup>42</sup> Mythological sources of the Nile are also discussed in midrashic literature. From a rabbinic perspective, God has the power to bring forth rain and dew,<sup>43</sup> while the self-acclaimed Egyptian god, Pharaoh, declares that his source of water is the Nile that comes forth from the tree of life in the Garden of Eden (OM 2, 407 Zeh Moshe). According to this midrashic reading, the source of the Nile is the tree of life.

### Pools and Ponds

The conception of the Nile as a religiously significant body of water extends to its pools. The pools of the Nile are also related to notions of primeval waters in ancient Egypt; when the sun god is portrayed as a child he is often depicted as rising from a pool that represented the *Nun* (the primeval ocean). Pools are also related to visualizations of the afterlife; the dead are often shown drinking water from a pool. The Four Sons of Horus are shown rising from a lotus flower that is emerging from a pool before the god Osiris, who is seated on his throne in the underworld. The term “Pool of Horus” (*shihor*) is found several times in the Hebrew Bible; the Hebrew word is an Egyptian loan-word.<sup>44</sup> Jos. 13:1-3 states:

And Joshua was old and advanced in age; and the Lord said to him, You are old and advanced in age, and there remains still very much land to be possessed. This is the land that still remains; all the borders of the Philistines, and all the Geshurite, from Shihor, which is before Egypt, to the borders of Ekron northward.

<sup>42</sup> In regard to the functions of the god Khnum, see Ahmad M. Badawi, *Der Gott Chnum* (Glückstadt, 1937).

<sup>43</sup> See Rivka Ulmer, “Consistency and Change in Rabbinic Literature as Reflected in the Terms ‘Rain’ and ‘Dew.’” *JSJ* 26 (1995), 55-75.

<sup>44</sup> Isa. 23:3 *ye'or* and *shihor*; Jer. 2:18 *shihor*; 1 Chron. 13:5 *shihor*. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, s.v. נִיר, 822, states that Jos. 13:3 refers to the canals and estuaries of the Nile, and possibly to the canal at the Eastern border of Egypt; however, in Isa. 23:3 and in Jer. 2:18 it is said to refer to the Nile. The Hebraized Egyptian word (*sei ḥor*) contains the same elements as the Biblical *shihor*, namely “pool” and the god “Horus.” ANET 3, 471, “In Praise of the City of Ramses,” mentions that this may refer to the Tanite branch of the Nile, which has salt-flats.

The Pool of Horus (*shihor*) is a geographical location in Goshen (see also the medieval Bible commentary, Rashi on Isa. 23:3). Rashi on Jos. 13:3, comments “this is the Nile (*Nilos*), this is *nahal misrayim*.” In midrash, *shihor* is connected to Egypt; in an enumeration of the kings that will appear at the end of times in ‘Aseret ha-melakhim (OM, 2, 466), the Pool of Horus is mentioned as follows: “in Egypt and at the Pool of Horus up to the Euphrates.” Thus, in this particular midrashic passage the Pool of Horus is understood to extend beyond Egypt. In this eschatological text this reference to *shihor* transpires at a time when Israel will have no *zakhut* (merit). Former experiences of the Israelites and future eschatological events of the Jewish people are collapsed into *shihor*. This particular midrashic text emphasizes the centrality of Egypt in Jewish eschatology.

In another late midrash the Pool of Horus is mentioned as a location for a Nile celebration; this pool was completely filled up during the Nile inundation.

Sefer Ha-yashar, Va-yeshev: And it came to pass after these things that the “Brook of Egypt (*nahal misrayim*)” was at its crest ... The “Pool of Horus (*shihor*)” was completely filled.

In the above text the Pool of Horus is a detail that emphasizes the comprehensive impact of the Nile inundation upon all of Egypt. The Hebrew term “Pool of Horus” also includes the element *shihor* which could refer to the black waters of the Nile during its inundation. Egypt is referred to as *kemet*, the black land, in Egyptian and *kem wer* (great black) refers to the area of Lake Timsah. The magnitude of the Nile inundation and the fertility indicated by the black, muddy water of the river is the catalyst for festivities.

Still another text, Midr. Sekhel Tov,<sup>45</sup> casually mentions the Nile canals, ponds and pools in order to portray the landscape of the Nile. The pools and ponds of the Nile are also mentioned in Exod. Rab. 9:10; their function is to collect the water of the Nile. The question addressed in a subsequent passage is whether the Nile water that protected Moses as a child should be struck by him during the Ten Plagues. This problem is solved by the premise that instead of Moses, Aaron had to “smite the Nile.”

Exod. Rab. 9:10 (similar to Exod. Rab. 10:4): *And the Lord spoke to Moses: Speak to Aaron* (Exod. 7:19). R. Tanhum said: Why did not Moses smite the waters? Because God said: It is not proper that the waters, which protected you when you were thrown into the river, should now be smitten by you, rather, they shall be smitten by none other than Aaron. *And stretch out your*

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<sup>45</sup> Midr. Sekhel Tov, Shemot 8, (Buber, ed.).

*hand over the waters of Egypt (ibid.),* this refers to all the waters of the Nile, the pools and the ponds.

Another explanation as to why Moses should not strike the water of the Nile, is his acknowledgement that the Nile itself rescued him from death: "Why did not Moses smite it? He said: Because though I was thrown into [the Nile], it did not injure me" (Exod. Rab. 20:1).

#### 4. The Nile Inundation

Some rabbinic texts explicitly refer to the inundation of the Nile as a progenitor of rabbinic religious ideas related to water. In this section, I will examine the Nile inundation and its impact upon the Egyptian landscape, as well as its relation to rabbinic texts. Since the dawn of recorded history, the Nile inundation has played a crucial role in the development of Egyptian civilization and the parallel advancement of religious ideas.<sup>46</sup> The inundation of the Nile,<sup>47</sup> which made the Nile so crucial to the survival of Egypt, is caused by rains which fall in Central Africa and by the melting snow and the rainfall from the Ethiopian highlands. By the end of May, the river Nile was at its lowest level in Egypt. During the month of June the Nile, between the first cataracts and Heliopolis, began to rise and some greenish water appeared at this time. During late July and August the river rose rapidly and its waters assumed a reddish, muddy color, which was due to the presence of red earth brought into the Nile by two rivers, the Blue Nile and the Atbara River. The rising of the water continued until September, after which it remained level for a few weeks. This vast expanse of water resembled an ocean and thus could have been related to the concept of "Nun" discussed above. In October a further slight rise occurred, and then the water level began to recede. Thus, from our perspective, the Nile inundation transpired mainly during the summer months.

After the floodwaters had subsided, it was time for planting. The main phases of the Nile determined the agricultural cycles and the calendar which divided the year into three seasons: inundation, growing, and drought. The fascination with the inundation continued from ancient Egypt<sup>48</sup> into Coptic Egypt.<sup>49</sup> In antiquity the Nile and its waters

46 Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Assuan high dam has interrupted the Nile inundation.

47 *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, s.v. "Nile," 2,543-551.

48 See for example, Alfred Hermann, "Die Ankunft des Nils," ZÄS 85 (1960), 35-42, who discusses a Nile hymn from the Middle Kingdom, as well as the celebration of the Nile's inundation in Roman and Coptic art; John L. Foster, "Hymn to the Inundation," Four Hieratic Ostraca," JNES 32 (1972), 301-10; these texts refer to the inun-

served as a symbol of the life and fertility of Egypt. However, in accordance with the theme of the disruption of life and fertility, the Nile is the first casualty in the plague narratives commencing at Exod. 7:17. Midrash uses these thematic webs to reinforce the negative and destructive character of the waters, which contrasts with the positive image of the Nile in Egyptian traditions.

An analysis of midrashic texts may address how and why the writers in some cases manipulate the river in ways that show significant differences from the Egyptian conceptions of the Nile, while at other times the rabbis use it in ways that are often very compatible with Egyptian traditions about the river. In speaking of the Nile, the midrashic texts move into a domain beyond the rabbis' own cultural sphere, into a culture different, both ideologically and topographically, from their own. The rabbinic interpreters strive to inform their students about that which is outside the immediate world of their experience: the Nile is different from the Jordan; the Nile is Egypt.<sup>50</sup>

An awareness of the critical significance of the Nile to the ecological welfare of the earth is illustrated in several midrashim; for example, in Gen. Rab. 13:9 there is a statement by R. Yehudah in response to the question: how does the earth drink?

Gen. Rab. 13:9: R. Judah said: Like the Nile, which repeatedly waters [the land of Egypt] *כָהֵן נִילוֹס דְמַשְׁקָה וְהַדָּר מַשְׁקָה*.<sup>51</sup>

This demonstrates knowledge of the Nile's annual overflow, which was probably common knowledge in late antiquity. The cyclical nature of the inundation is expanded upon in a gloss in Pesiq. Zut. (Lekah Tov) Gen. 39, which states in part:

“... because this is the manner of the Nile, it increases and it decreases, and the ministers (*sarim*) go and celebrate at the river, and it is to them like a festival of idolaters.”

dation (303), and the role of the Egyptian god Khnum in fashioning the Nile (305); R. Cribiore, “A hymn to the Nile,” *ZPE* 106 (1995), 97-106.

49 See, e.g., Leslie MacCoul, “Stud Pal XV 250ab, a Monophysite Trishagion for the Nile Flood,” *JTS N.S.* 40 (1989), 129-35, “Holy and Immortal, make, we beseech thee, the waters of the river to rise ...” (131).

50 See also George A. F. Knight, *Nile and Jordan, being the Archaeological and Historical Interrelations between Egypt and Canaan from the Earliest Times to the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70* (London: J. Clarke, 1921).

51 Parallel in Eccl. Rab. 1:2; 1:14. Exod. Rab. 20:1 states that the Egyptians drink from the Nile.

## The Nile Economy

The economy of Egypt was dependent upon the Nile. Already some Biblical passages address the economic conditions following the divine intervention that detrimentally affected the Nile. Furthermore, the Biblical authors were aware of the impact of the famine when the Nile inundation failed to occur. Isa. 19:5-10 mentions the dependence of weavers and rope-makers upon sufficient water from the Nile; probably, because the availability of flax was dependent upon an adequate inundation. Later midrashic texts comment upon the abundant agricultural production in Egypt due to the Nile, e.g., Midr. Sekhel Tov, Gen. 47, posits that the years of famine, which were predicted in Pharaoh's nightmares to last for seven years, were reduced to two years: "in the third year the Nile filled with water and the Nile rose and irrigated the face of the earth and they ploughed and sowed and they gave one fifth to Pharaoh."

## Irrigation Techniques and Canals

The many irrigation techniques utilized by the Egyptians to control the water flow of the Nile in Pharaonic, Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt are well-documented.<sup>52</sup> In midrashic texts the irrigation techniques of Egypt reveal a significant distinction from the Land of Israel: Israel's water supply is unlike Egypt. This dichotomy is based upon the divine providence in regard to water in the Land of Israel; this is addressed in a Biblical passage:

*For the land, which you enter to possess, is not like the land of Egypt, from where you came out, where you sowed your seed, and watered it with your foot, as a garden of vegetables. But the land, which you are going over to possess, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinks water from the rain of the skies. A land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year (Deut. 11:10-12).*

<sup>52</sup> Karl W. Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt, A Study in Cultural Ecology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 27ff.; Julien Barois, *Les irrigations en Égypte* (Paris: Ch. Béranger, 1911); Ladislav Varcl, "Zum Bewässerungswesen im römischen Ägypten," *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete* 17 (1960), 17-22. Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.108, 137-138, 158, mentions water management in canals. The invention of canals is attributed to Moses by Artapanus (*Fragm.* 3.2), who also states that Moses invented boats and had control over the Nile flood; furthermore, the Israelites are said to have built canals and dykes to contain the waters of the river (A 2.203).

"Watered it with your foot" refers to the practice of Egyptian farmers to open and close irrigation canals with their feet.

The Biblical authors were familiar with the irrigation techniques in Egypt: the hard work of the peasants to irrigate the fields including the opening and closing of ditches for irrigation purposes. Mention of the Nile canals is made in the medieval Bible commentaries (for example, Rashi on Isa. 19:15 and on Ez. 29:3: the Nile canals are man-made). The Nile canals in Egypt had additional functions; the Egyptian temples were given access to the Nile by water via the construction of special canals, such as found in the temple complex at Karnak. Canals brought water to the temples and, conversely, presented conduits for holy barques to reach the Nile. In a midrashic passage that focuses upon the lemma "it is not like" (Deut. 11:10), the Egyptian laborers working under the pressures of the Nile's inundation work far more intensely than the agricultural workers in the Land of Israel that are sustained by the rainfalls brought about by God (Sif. Deut. 38, see below). This rivalry between rain and the Nile was a *topos* in antiquity.<sup>53</sup> The midrashic texts create a difference between the landscape of the "Other," Egypt and the Nile, and the landscape of the familiar, the Land of Israel, which receives water from God through the rainfalls caused by God. Israel is not dependent upon an inundation of a river, while Egypt clearly is. In midrashic texts the river Jordan is not utilized in this comparison; from the midrashic perspective, the Jordan does not play any significant role in watering the Land of Israel. The Jordan did have a different religious function; one has to cross it, similar to the crossing of the Reed Sea, in order for the Israelites to distance themselves from their Egyptian past as they enter the Land. The rabbis constructed a rebuttal by Pharaoh in respect to their unfavorable comparisons between the landscapes of Egypt and Israel in *Otiyyot de-Rabbi Aqiva*, OM 2, 422, in a midrash that primarily focuses upon the claim that Pharaoh created himself (see also below). The particular passage is as follows:

*Otiyyot de-Rabbi Aqiva*, OM 2, 422: ... this teaches that [Pharaoh] said this to them: You say [God is the master of the universe], since He causes the dew and the rain to fall, but I already have the Nile that comes forth from under the tree of life and its waters are blessed.

The difference in regard to the landscapes of Egypt and Israel is also important on a cosmic scale, because water is within God's control in Israel and because He waters the land, while this is not the case in Egypt. The fact that there is no rain-god in Egypt is perceived in mi-

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53 Philo, *Mos.* 2.195.

drash as a lack of divine power in the Egyptian “pantheon.” It is impressive that the rabbis were so knowledgeable about Egyptian divinities that they noticed that there was no Egyptian rain-god. As an aside, due to the geography and culture determined by the Nile, the Egyptians introduced into their rank of divinities a Semitic god of the ocean, Yamm.<sup>54</sup> The Nile simply floods the land of Egypt and provides water without divine intervention in the reasoning of the rabbis. This is reiterated in later midrashic texts, e.g. Ber. Rbt., Vayyigash, in a midrashic interpretation of Deut. 11:10; and it is found numerous times in medieval Bible commentaries which repeatedly state that there is no rainfall in Egypt (e.g., Rashi on Isa. 7:18; 19:5; Zech. 14:18; Ps. 110:7). The absence of an Egyptian rain-god was a convenient hermeneutical gap that enabled the rabbinic interpreters to engage in polemics against the Nile and its inundation. A significant midrashic analysis of Deut. 11:10 is found in a passage which distinguishes between the landscapes of Egypt and Israel:

Sif. Deut. 38: *It is not like the land of Egypt* (Deut. 11:10) – the land of Egypt drinks from below, while the Land of Israel drinks from above. The land of Egypt drinks the waters below, but not those above, while the Land of Israel drinks the waters below and those above. The land of Egypt drinks the waters below and then those which are above, while the Land of Israel drinks both those below and those above simultaneously.

In the land of Egypt what is exposed is watered but what is covered is not. In the Land of Israel both what is exposed and what is covered are watered. The land of Egypt is watered and then planted. The Land of Israel is watered and then planted, planted again and then watered, and can be watered and planted every day.

*The land of Egypt:* only if you work on it with mattock and ax and give up sleep for it; if you do not [work hard] it will yield nothing. The Land of Israel is not like that; its inhabitants sleep on their beds while God sends down rain.<sup>55</sup>

A parable of a king who was taking a stroll and noticed a young man from a noble family. He presented him with a servant to serve him. After that the king saw a young man from a noble family who was well dressed and delicately reared; he was working as a hired laborer. The king knew him and his family and he said: I declare that I will see to his needs and feed him.

Thus, all the lands were given servants to work on them: Egypt drinks from the Nile and Babylon from its rivers, but the Land of Israel is not like that.

54 See Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many* (trans. J. Baines, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 79, n. 49.

55 Midr. Tannaim 11:10; Yal. 1, 857 ‘Eqev. Cf. also Philo, Mos. 2.195, who addresses the rivalry between the Nile and rain.

There the inhabitants sleep on their beds while God causes the rain to fall. Thus we learn that the ways of God are different from those of flesh and blood. A man acquires servants to feed and sustain him, but He that spoke and the world came into being, acquires servants so that He may feed and sustain them.

In the first paragraph of the above text the expression “the waters below” was understood to refer to the surface water of the Nile. In the case of Egypt, an additional meaning of “the waters below and then those which are above” could refer to the assumed sources of the Nile, such as the sources at the first cataract (Elephantine and Silsile), which rise to the surface and feed into the Nile. This explanation is surprising in that it indicates a purely topographical explanation, rather than a theological one. In contrast, the source of water for Israel has a divine basis, since water to Israel is supplied from heaven.

The parable in the last portion of the midrashic text highlights the hard work of the inhabitants of the lands that are sustained by rivers. God ordained perpetual labor for the people of Egypt and Babylon, countries that are dependant upon the flow of water from river systems.<sup>56</sup> Whereas the Israelites had previously toiled during their period of bondage in Egypt and during their captivity in Babylon, they were now set free, while the toil of their former oppressors continues due to their total dependence upon their respective river systems. Thus, topography has become an instrumentality of divine justice.

Additional contrasts in midrashic texts focus upon the different agricultural systems in Egypt and in Israel:

b. Ketub. 112a: The sages taught: In her blessed years, an area in Israel’s land sown with a *seah* of grain would produce five myriad *kor* of grain, whereas even in the days of her prosperity, the same area in Zoan yielded no more than seventy *kor*. Now among all the countries none is more fertile than the land of Egypt, of which it is said: *like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt* (Gen. 13:10); and in the entire land of Egypt there is no area more fertile than Zoan, where Egypt’s kings used to be reared, as it says: *Its princes are in Zoan* (Isa. 30:4). Furthermore, in all the Land of Israel, no ground has more rocks than Hebron, where the dead are buried. Nevertheless, Hebron was seven times more fertile [*mevunneh*] than Zoan, as may be inferred from the passage: *Hebron was built [nivenetah] seven years before Zoan in Egypt* (Num. 13:22). What is the meaning of *mevunneh* here? If it be suggested that it means “built,” is it likely that [Ham] would build a house for his younger son [Canaan] before he built one for his elder son [*Misrayim*]?

<sup>56</sup> This geography “lesson” is also found in Ber. Rbt., Vayyigash 263. Reuven Hammer, “Section 38 of Sifre Deuteronomy, an example of the use of independent sources to create a literary unit,” *HUCA* 50 (1979), 169-72, commented upon this passage. Although he refers to the conditions in Egypt (169, 172), his analysis does not include a perspective from Egyptology.

The order of the birth of the two sons is given in the passage: *The sons of Ham: Cush, Misrayim [Egypt], Put and Canaan* (Gen. 10:6). The meaning of *mevunneh* must be that Hebron [Canaan] was seven times more fertile than Zoan.

After acknowledging the great fertility of the land of Egypt, the focus in the above passage is upon the contrast between the landscapes of Israel and Egypt. Based upon the multiple meanings of *banah*, which may either mean “to build” or “to be fertile,” this midrashic passage decontextualizes the meaning of the term *nivenetah*, thereby changing the meaning of the Hebrew root *BNH* in Num. 13:22 from “build” to “fertile.” The rabbis utilized this change of definition of the term to describe the rocky landscape around Hebron in Israel, which is said to be more fertile than Zoan in Egypt. This is an example of the rabbinic need to elevate the Holy Land as superior to Egypt; the rocky landscape around Hebron is praised for its abundant fertility, which does not reflect any topographical reality. Egypt was the bread basket of the Near Eastern and later Roman world; from the earliest times, Canaanites would go down to Egypt to purchase grain. Rhetorically depriving the landscape of the “Other” – Egypt – of its fertility renders impotent the Egyptian gods and emphasizes the divinely bestowed fertility of the Land of Israel that can even overcome the barrenness of the rocky terrain of Hebron. This extreme fertility might imply the resurrective powers of the Land of Israel. The polemical nature of this midrash denies any holiness to the land of Egypt. The diminution of the fertility of the Egyptian landscape is contrasted to the divine providence over the Land of Israel.

### Dikes

The functions of dikes and of the embankments of the Nile served to control the flow of the river, as well as to serve as a defense for military purposes.<sup>57</sup> Controlling the flow of the Nile is mentioned in a midrashic text:

Tanh., Bereshit 7: Come and see: anyone who wants to make himself into a god builds a palace for himself in the water. Pharaoh built himself a palace<sup>58</sup> in the water and he blocked the waters of the Nile and prevented

<sup>57</sup> Strabo, *Geogr.* 17.1.3, explains how the water supply was channeled by the construction of embankments.

<sup>58</sup> Arba’ah Melakhim, OM 1, 69, contains the same tradition: Pharaoh built a palace on the water and during the Nile inundation this palace floated; in this passage different kings and their respective arrogant attitudes are compared.

them from flowing down toward the ocean. But the waters were stronger and they took the palace and lifted it up, as it says, *Speak, and say, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, [the great crocodile that lies in the midst of his streams, which has said, My river is my own, and I have made it for myself. But I will put hooks in your jaws, and I will cause the fish of your streams to stick to your scales, and I will bring you up from the midst of your streams, and all the fish of your streams shall stick to your scales.]* (Ez. 29:3-4)

The above passage addresses the midrashic understanding that Pharaoh referred to himself as a god in a dialogue with the God of Israel (see also Gen. Rab. 89:3). The sea-like appearance of the Nile inundation may be the basis of this midrash; furthermore, the idea that the pharaoh would construct an edifice to dam the waters of the Nile could be related to building activities that utilized the Nile as a defensive mechanism against invaders, such as the fortifications mentioned in Diodorus Siculus.<sup>59</sup> Diodorus reports that Nectanebo I defended Egypt against the pending invasion by Persians and Greeks in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The line of defense included the use of the Nile; the protective embankments of the Nile, the dikes, were torn down in an attempt to flood the area subject to an imminent attack.

### Nile Fauna

A Biblical lemma from Ez. 29:3 mentions the “crocodile” in reference to Pharaoh. In the Bible the crocodile personifies the land of the Nile. The passage in Ezekiel may have been an indirect reference to the Egyptian god Sobek, who is portrayed in Egyptian depictions as a man with the head of a crocodile; he was one of the gods whose cult is related to the Nile. Generally, the Nile is under the tutelage of gods in the form of crocodiles, and the crocodile was regarded as sacred and was worshiped.<sup>60</sup> Usually, the crocodile is stereotypical in the representation of Nilotic fauna in the Bible and in Ancient Egyptian art; however, midrashic texts usually focus upon fish and frogs, which play significant roles in the Exodus story in the Hebrew Bible. Surprisingly absent from midrashic texts is the other stereotypically Egyptian water creature, the hippopotamus.

Not only was Egypt exceptionally fertile for the raising of crops, but it was also rich in its animal life. The Nile teemed with fish and, although fish were held to be abhorrent to the Egyptian gods, fishing was

59 Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.*, 15.41.4; 15.42.2; 20.76.4.

60 Emma Brunner-Traut, “Krokodil,” *LÄ*, 3, 791-801.

practiced.<sup>61</sup> A Biblical passage in Isa. 19:8 mentions fishermen at the Nile and the medieval commentator Rashi explains that there was a great dependency by the Egyptians upon the fish of the Nile as a source of food. Egyptian fish in midrashic texts are related to the Exodus; for example, the first-born Hebrews that were drowned by the Egyptians are returned from the domain of the fish (Gen. Rab. 97:4), otherwise, the Nile fish die during the plagues (Exod. Rab. 9:10).

Of special interest to the midrashic interpreters were the Nile frogs, due to their role in the Biblical Exodus story. The indication that frogs multiplied at an extraordinary rate as part of the plagues is found in the following rabbinic text.<sup>62</sup>

Exod. Rab. 10:2-3: *The Nile shall swarm with frogs, which shall go up and come into your house ... and into your ovens, and into your kneading troughs* (Exod. 7:28). Whenever an Egyptian woman was kneading dough or heating her oven with bread inside, frogs would come and settle on the dough and devour it, or jump into the oven, cool it, and get at the bread. R. Aha said: From the phrase *upon you* (Exod. 7:29) the inference may be drawn that when an Egyptian drank water and a drop fell on his chest, the drop would burst and turn into a frog.

Nile frogs and a bird are presented in the text of Pesiq. Zut., Shemot 7:29, which deconstructs the word “frog” (*sepharde'a*) into a “knowable bird” – צְפַר בָּעֵל. This deconstruction could have been derived from the Egyptian belief that the ibis, a Nile bird,<sup>63</sup> was in fact a sacred bird to the god Thot, who was also assumed to be the god of knowledge, in particular in his Greco-Roman transformation.<sup>64</sup> The

61 Douglas Brewer, “Fish,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 1, 532-35.

62 b. Sanh. 67b: “*And the frog came up, and covered the land of Egypt* (Exod. 8:2). R. Eleazar said, It was one frog, which bred prolifically and filled the land. This is a matter disputed by Tannaim. R. Aqiva said, There was one frog which filled the whole of Egypt” (comp. Josephus, *Ant.* 2.296); a passage in b. Pesah. 53b may suggest that frogs in Egypt were engaged in worship. In Egypt the hieroglyphic sign “frog” was utilized in the computation of numbers, e.g., indicating 100,000; one Egyptian term, *kerer* (*krr*, frog), may be related to the sound of croaking.

63 Hannes Buchberger, “Vogel,” *LÄ* 6, 1046-51.

64 The Egyptian god Thot in the form of Thot-Hermes possessed magical powers (Artapanus in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9. 27.3); Gerard Mussies, “The Interpretatio Judaica of Thot-Hermes,” in *Studies in Egyptian Religion Dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee* (ed. M. Heerma Van Voss, D. J. Hoens, G. Mussies, G., et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1982), 89-120, refers to Eupolemus in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.17.9. Additionally, one may note, that Mussies found many similarities between Moses and Thot in addition to their supposed authorship of magical writings, e.g., 110, Thot came forth from the Nile (as represented in the *Book of the Dead*); Hermes Trismegistus, was occasionally identified with Moses as well in the *Hermetica*, 1st-4th century CE (Walter Scott, ed., *Hermetica, The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus* [Boulder, Hermes House, 1982]); Garth

passage interprets one of the plagues, the frogs, and states that the noise made by the frogs was intolerable. By means of the hermeneutic rule *notarikon* the word “frog” becomes “a knowledgeable bird.” In this midrash this bird is prodding the frogs to make extreme noise and the frogs are named after the bird.<sup>65</sup> It is readily apparent that the midrashic interpreters were not naturalists; the passage is probably an animal fable in midrash. In the subsequent discourse of the passage (*Pesiq. Zut.*, *Shemot* 7:29), the horrors of the Egyptian plagues are described and the terrible noise caused by the frogs is mentioned. The citation of the plagues enables the writers of this midrash to rely upon a previous experience of the divine power, which could possibly be repeated by divine intervention in their time.

Still another Egyptian animal that is depicted in midrash is that of the Nile pig. A polemical intention may be detected in a passage in ‘Abot R. Nat. (a) 1 that refers to the Nile pig: “As long as Israel fulfills the will of The Place (God), the nations of the world will not rule over them.” The passage compares the circumstances of the Diaspora to the supposed perils emanating from the Nile pig; the Nile pig in this text will be rendered harmless through Israel’s actions, similarly, no nation will harm, kill, or rule over Israel. The Nile pig may be a metaphor for Egypt, and Egypt itself was utilized as a metaphor for the countries in which Jews resided in the Diaspora.

### Nile Flora

Since the Nile flora is utilized in some midrashic engagements with the Nilotic landscape, I will briefly explore the symbolic plants of Egypt that are frequently cited in Jewish texts. In ancient Egypt, the lotus was a symbol of *Hapy*, the inundation. This lotus symbol was also used in connection with the gods Isis and Osiris<sup>66</sup> and continued into the Roman period. Papyrus plants and reeds are closely connected with the Nile in Biblical texts (e.g., Isa. 42:3). Isa. 18:2 reads: *[The land] that sends ambassadors by the sea, in vessels of papyrus upon the waters;* this refers to papyrus boats on the Nile that were common in Egypt. Isa. 36:6 (see

Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes, a Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 23.

65 This is also quoted in Midr. Sekhel Tov, *Shemot* 8, based upon Lekah Tov (*Pesiq. Zut.*).

66 Wolfgang Helck, “Flora,” *LÄ*, 2,267-76. Plutarch, *Is. Os.*, 363d, mentions Osiris as the Nile and Isis as the earth, since the allegorical exegesis of the Osiris myth leads to “physical truths.”

also 2 Kings 18:21) compares a reed that pierces a man's hand to Pharaoh's actions. Ez., chapters 40-42, repeatedly mention the measuring reed, which was used by Egyptian bureaucrats to count livestock. The terms "reed" (*suph*) and "papyrus" (*ahu*) are found several times in the Bible, in particular in the Joseph story and in the Exodus narrative. It is significant that the Hebrew terms for these plants are based upon Egyptian words.<sup>67</sup> In a midrashic passage (Gen. Rab. 89:4) that focuses upon Pharaoh's dreams, the Egyptian word for papyrus thicket, "*'aha*" (or: '*ahu*), in its Hebrew transliteration, is the basis of a midrashic interpretation of a lemma in Gen. 41:2: *[the cows] grazed in the reed grass [papyrus thicket (*ahu*)]*. The "reed grass" (*ahu*) that grows on the banks of the Nile is read in the midrash as "brotherhood" because several of the letters match the letters of this Hebrew word. The passage claims that in years of prosperity people become as close as brothers: *and they grazed in the ahu* – this means, love (*ahavah*) and brotherhood (*ahavah*) reigned in the world.

### Positive Aspects of the Inundation

As mentioned above, the Nile inundation was a major ecological, cultural, and religious event in ancient Egypt. The inundation was known to the authors of the rabbinic texts. A passage, Pesiq. Zut., Bereshit 39:11, mentions the Nile inundation; the statements in regard to the inundation are set within the interpretation of the lemma "day" in Gen. 39:11. The particular "day" in this scriptural verse was the reason for the people from the Egyptian household of Potiphera (Potiphar) to attend festivities and to leave Joseph behind.<sup>68</sup> The rabbinic interpretation inserts a Nile festival and qualifies it as "an idolatrous feast," and the text continues: "since this was the manner of the Nile, it would rise and subside." The text further specifies that the king and his ministers would go to the river and celebrate the arrival of the flood.

The beneficial results of the flooding of the Nile waters during the inundation are used for comparative purposes to demonstrate the power of God's blessing.<sup>69</sup> For example, Sir. 39:22 states: *God's blessing floods*

<sup>67</sup> "Reed" (sedge), Hebrew *suph* סוף, Egyptian *twf*; "Reed grass," Hebrew *ahu* עה, Egyptian *3hw* (ahu), papyrus thicket; Papyrus (*atr*); Hebrew *gome* גומ, Egyptian *qem*/ *qema*. The terminology is not consistent.

<sup>68</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>69</sup> According to Jan Assmann, *Ma'at, Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten* (Munich: Beck, 1990), 221, n. 44, the only cosmic sign of blessing is a high level of the Nile inundation.

*like the Nile.* Furthermore, midrashic texts address the idea that blessings are related to the inundation. Jacob's blessing over Pharaoh during the encounter of these two leaders includes Jacob's blessing for a beneficial inundation in order to avoid a famine.

Sif. Deut. 38: When Joseph went down to be with Potiphar, blessing followed his footsteps, as it is written: *the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake* (Gen. 39:5). When Jacob went down to be with Pharaoh, blessing followed in his footsteps, as it is written: *Jacob blessed Pharaoh* (Gen. 47:7). How did he bless him? By withholding from him years of famine, as it is written: *therefore fear not, I will sustain you* (Gen. 50:21). Just as "sustenance" referred to in Scripture elsewhere refers to a time of famine, so here the "sustenance" mentioned in Scripture refers to a time of famine.

Specifically, the phrasing of the blessing in some texts mentions the height of the inundation, which should rise up to Pharaoh's feet. "May the Nile rise to his (my, your) feet" may indicate the flood level of the Nile or the high-water mark of the inundation (see below).

Gen. Rab. 95:7: *And Joseph brought in Jacob, his father... and Jacob blessed Pharaoh* (Gen. 47:7). With what blessing did he bless him? R. Joshua b. Korhah said: May some of my years be added to your years. R. Shim'on b. Yohai said: May the Nile rise to my feet [rise for my sake] and irrigate the whole land of Egypt.

Tanh. Naso 26: R. Berekhia Berabbi said: *Is the earthling more just than God? And is man purer than his creator?* (Job 4:17) From where in Scripture? *And Jacob blessed Pharaoh* (Gen. 47:7). The Holy One Blessed be He said: Even I when I will come to you I will come laden with blessings and I will bless you ... Our masters said: that the Nile may rise to his feet.<sup>70</sup>

The blessing pronounced by Jacob over the land of Egypt is rhetorically compared to God's blessing, which will be as great as the flood of the Nile. In Num. Rab. Jacob's blessing is related to the revelation at Sinai and the blessing will be extended to include future generations.

Num. Rab. 12:2: *And it came to pass on the day that Moses had finished* (Num. 7:1). This is written in Scripture, *Is the earthling more just than God?* (Job 4:17). R. Berekhiah Ha-Kohen said: When Jacob came to Pharaoh he did not take leave of him before blessing him, as it says, *And Jacob blessed Pharaoh* (Gen. 47:10). How did he bless him? He said: May the Nile rise to his feet. So I too, when I will come to you I will come laden with blessings. Where did He hint this to them? At Sinai. R. Joshua b. Levi said: By a hint the Holy One, blessed be He, told them that they should make the Tabernacle and that He would give them blessings when He entered it; as it says, *An altar of earth*

<sup>70</sup> Tanh., Buber ed., Naso 26 (also fragmentary in Mann, Midrash Yelammedenu, Bereshit 180, p. 115); Yal. 2, 897 Job; Pesiq. Zut. on Gen. 47:7 and Midr. Sekhel Tov, "May it be His will that the Nile may rise to your feet." 'Ag. Ber. 42 has a slight variation, "that the Nile may rise toward him [Pharaoh]," it retells a midrash in regard to Jacob's blessing.

*you shall make unto Me ... in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come unto you and bless you* (Exod. 20:21).

In Egypt the “donor” of the inundation shifted from the god Khnum to the Egyptian gods Isis-Sothis, Amon-Ra, Aton, Sobek, Osiris and other deities. Osiris was identified with the water of the Nile, as explicated in the Osiris myth. The relationship of Osiris to the Nile is partially paralleled in Joseph’s relationship to the river.<sup>71</sup> As has been shown, the fertility of the land is intricately linked to the Nile, although there was always the danger of insufficient inundations. In a midrash, the Nile regained its fertility after Joseph, in a metal coffin, was thrown into the water (Ber. Rbt., Vayyehi 263 Mek. Rashby , Beshallah 13: “that its waters would be blessed”). The second part of this midrashic narrative, namely that Joseph was “buried” in the Nile, is clearly reminiscent of the Egyptian Osiris myth. The presence of the Osiris myth in midrashic texts has been recognized since the 19th century;<sup>72</sup> however, some of the earlier conclusions in respect to this topic need to be challenged and additional components have to be considered. We thus find that in several midrashic texts remnants of the Osiris myth are applied to the recovery of Joseph’s bones and coffin, which are supposed to travel with the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan.<sup>73</sup> However, there are many variants and conflations of the so-called “Osiris myth” in ancient Egypt and in Greco-Roman antiquity. The fertility related to Joseph may suggest a link to Osiris. The connection between life after death and the sprouting of plants, as well as the agricultural cycle, is evident in this Egyptian god of the dead.<sup>74</sup> Osiris was also the god of vegetation and was frequently painted green. Moreover the mummy of Osiris was depicted with plants sprouting from the mummy, because he was closely associated with germinating grain.

In Ber. Rbt., Vayyehi 263, the fertility of Joseph’s coffin is emphasized in two literary sequences. After his mummification, Joseph is buried in the fields and the fields are blessed through him; “when this became known to the king, Pharaoh’s wise men said: Egypt is solely watered by the waters of the Nile, bury him [Joseph] in the Nile, and it will be blessed through his merit.” After these events, Joseph, according to this midrashic text, is put into a metal coffin and thrown into the Nile

71 Here I am excluding an analysis of the relationship of some elements of the Osiris myth and midrash; see chapter 4.

72 See chapter 4.

73 Tanh. Beshallah 2:5; Ekev 6:5 Mek. de-Rabbi Yishmael, Beshallah, Petihṭa; Deut. Rab. 11:5 (Vilna, 1887); Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 11:5; see also b. Sotah 13a and the short version in T. Sot. 4:7 (Lieberman ed.).

74 Coffin texts, 3,744. See chapter 4.

to fertilize the water. Mummification was known to rabbis since it is mentioned in respect to the burial of both Jacob (Gen. 50:2) and Joseph (Gen. 50:26). Although the rabbis were aware of the process of mummification, there is no explicit evidence in rabbinic literature that they were aware of the purpose of mummification from the Egyptian perspective, which included the transformation of the dead into Osiris. The aspect of fertilization of the waters of the Nile by Joseph's body, as mentioned in the above text, is also related to a function of Osiris as a god of fertility. In this midrashic text of Ber. Rbt. it is made clear that the fertility is a result of Joseph's *zakhut*, i.e., the merits he acquired by fulfilling the *mitzvot*; in an attempt to minimize any reliance upon any Egyptian god the rabbis elected to emphasize Joseph's pious character. Thus, the fertility of the Nile is enhanced by an Israelite ancestor, Joseph, and not by an Egyptian god. Joseph replaces the function of Osiris.

In addition to the above-mentioned symbolic functions of fertility, which show the Nile as a symbol for Egypt, at least two other significant aspects of the Nile in midrashic literature should be noted: first, an extreme inundation of the Nile as a signifier for divinely initiated cosmological destruction and second, the Nile as an incidental detail within a narrative passage with Egypt as the literary setting. In such passages the editor, in citing the Nile, arguably assumes a certain amount of knowledge concerning Egypt on the part of his readers. Most references to the Nile and Egypt contextually integrate the river with existing Biblical traditions from the Joseph narrative and the Exodus stories.<sup>75</sup>

### Famine as a Result of Low Levels of the Inundation

Egypt's existence depended upon the Nile and its annual inundation during the summer months; this reality is presupposed in the nightmares of the Egyptian king in the story of Joseph in Gen. 41:1-3:

*And it came to pass at the end of two full years that Pharaoh dreamed; and, behold, he stood by the river. And, behold, there came up from the river seven cows handsome and healthy; and they grazed in the reed grass [papyrus thicket]. And, behold, seven other cows came up after them from the river, ugly and gaunt; and stood by the other cows upon the brink of the river.*

According to the Biblical dream interpretation, the first group of cows indicated an ideal level of the Nile inundation that would transpire for seven consecutive years, while the second group of cows symbolized a desperately low inundation that would devastate Egypt for seven years.

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75 I am not including the Nile festival here because it will be discussed in chapter 3.

In Pharaoh's dream<sup>76</sup> the cows symbolize the abundance or lack of Nile water. In this Biblical passage one may detect a link to Egyptian iconography that includes an image of seven cows. I think it is far more than a coincidence that the Tomb of Nefertari, Wife of Ramses II (1304-1237 BCE), contains a mural of seven cows and a bull standing on the banks of the river Nile.<sup>77</sup> (Fig. 3)<sup>78</sup>

In the Bible none of the wise men of Egypt is able to adequately interpret Pharaoh's dreams, and Joseph is consulted. Rashi on Gen. 41: 8 comments that "there were indeed some who interpreted it, but not in reference to Pharaoh." In midrash some of the incorrect interpretations of the Egyptians are presented. Nevertheless, the midrashic focus is upon Joseph's ability to interpret the dream to Pharaoh's liking, and Pharaoh is portrayed as dismissing the interpretations of the Egyptians.

Gen. Rab. 89:6: *But there was no one who could interpret them* (Gen. 41:8). R. Yehoshua of Sirkhnin said in the name of R. Levi: They did interpret them, but Pharaoh did not like what they said. For example, they said: The seven fat cows mean that you will beget seven daughters; the seven lean cows mean that you will bury seven daughters. The seven full ears of corn mean that you will conquer seven principalities; the seven thin ears mean that seven principalities will rebel against you.

Another midrashic passage, Midr. Sekhel Tov, Bereshit 41, when addressing the dreams of Pharaoh, comments that the seven cows of famine indicated that the Nile would dry up. The earth would be so parched that cows would not be able to plough it. With low inundations, drought and famine were prevalent and agriculture was devastated. The Bible also describes the dire effects of a low inundation; Isa. 19:2 mentions that during such severe circumstances a civil war would occur: *Egyptians against Egyptians*, and that *the river shall be wasted and*

76 See also Midrash Ha-Gadol, Bereshit 617; Tanh., Buber ed., Bereshit 190.

77 See Rivka Ulmer, "Zwischen ägyptischer Vorlage und talmudischer Rezeption: Josef und die Ägypterin," *Kairos* 24/25 (1992/93), 75-90. The mural is located on the South wall of the cult chamber in the Tomb of Nefertari (*Book of the Dead*, 148); the seven cows in this mural are related to the *Hathor* goddesses. The term *mehet-weret* ("great flood") refers to the cow that stepped out of the *Nun*, the primeval water, and gave birth to the sun-god. The mural also depicts four rudders that are partially emerged in water; the rudders refer to the four corners of heaven. However, it should be noted that in the version of the *Book of the Dead* as found in *Papyrus Ani* the seven cows are sitting in front of offering tables; the rudders are behind the cows and the rudders are not partially emerged in a river. Additional depictions of seven cows are presented in Abraham S. Yahuda, *The Accuracy of the Bible: The Stories of Joseph, the Exodus and Genesis confirmed by Egyptian Monuments and Language* (London: Dutton, 1935), 6-9.

78 Cows in the Tomb of Nefertari (Ulmer).

dried up (Isa. 19:5); this speaks of the failure of the inundation to arrive.<sup>79</sup> The drastic consequences of a low Nile inundation are further described in Ez. 30:12, in which droughts through divine intervention are prophesied. A low inundation would greatly lower the level of well water; the Bible assumes that the Nile served as the major source of drinking water in Egypt (Exod. 7:18, 21, 24). Exod. 7: 24 states *And all the Egyptians dug around the river for water to drink; for they could not drink of the water of the river.* Midrash (Exod. Rab. 20:1) also emphasizes that the Nile is the only source of water in Egypt, thus making the Nile particularly vulnerable to contamination and the anger of God. Drinking from the river and the “waters below” characterizes Egypt and distinguishes it from the Land of Israel, as mentioned above.

### Devastation as a Result of Excessive Inundation

In addition to a low level of inundation or the absence of the inundation, the destructive potential of the Nile becomes evident at extremely high flood levels. Excessively high inundations are well attested in Egyptian records that mention the destructive force of the water.<sup>80</sup> Midr. Eliyahu Rab. 8 contends that God has the capacity to destroy Egypt by creating a high inundation of the Nile. The tremendous volume of water released at the time of an excessive inundation is cited in the Biblical texts, e.g., Amos 8:8: *And it shall all rise up like the river; and it shall overflow and sink down like the river of Egypt.* This passage in Amos emphasizes the power of the flood which rises and then subsides. A record level of an extremely high Nile inundation could destroy Egypt. Such a high level of the inundation is referred to in Jeremiah, in a prophecy against the nations.

*Against Egypt, against the army of Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, who was by the river Euphrates in Carchemish, whom Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah ... Who is this who rises like the river, and like streams of turbulent waters? Egypt rises up like a river, and like streams of turbulent waters; and he said, I will go up, and will cover the earth; I will destroy the city and its inhabitants. (Jer. 46: 2, 7-8)*

79 For a comparison of Egyptian inundation texts and the Biblical prophets, see John R. Huddlestun, “Who is this that rises like the Nile? Some Egyptian Texts on the Inundation and a Prophetic Trope,” in *Fortunate the Eyes that See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman ... Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Astrid B. Beck, et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 338-63.

80 A flood level of 9 meters was destructive (Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization*, 93.)

Jeremiah apparently is mocking the hubris of the Pharaoh who contends that he himself controls the flow of the Nile. The close relationship between Pharaoh and the Nile will be discussed further below.

### Nilometer

Egypt was dependent upon the level of the inundation in any given year and the extent to which the Nile flood reached the arable land. With average floods, the waters would overflow the levees, flooding the flood basins and the alluvial flats. A nilometer, Νειλομέτρον, measured the level of the Nile at a certain point.<sup>81</sup> The purpose of the measurement of the Nile flood in earlier times was to facilitate the prediction of famine or prosperity and the determination of how labor would be allocated during the summer months. In the Greco-Roman period the function of the nilometer at Oxyrhynchos is attested in a papyrus (P. Oxy 2341). The height of the Nile flood was a factor in the assessment of taxes in Greco-Roman times. Occasionally, a nilometer has been found as part of a sacred water basin within a temple precinct. Consequently, on occasion, we are looking at religious motifs in addition to economic motifs – the sacred economy of Egypt.

The monitoring of the water level of the Nile involved its height measurement; the measuring unit, an Egyptian cubit (*mh*), was a divine measurement. The ideal height of the Nile was thought to be sixteen cubits, which was preferable to other heights.<sup>82</sup> A water level substantially greater or lesser than sixteen cubits would negatively affect the land and its inhabitants.<sup>83</sup> The measuring units of a nilometer are mentioned by Diodorus Siculus.<sup>84</sup> A depiction of a nilometer in Sepphoris

<sup>81</sup> Danielle Bonneau, *Le Régime Administratif de l'Eau du Nil dans L'Égypte Grecque, Romaine et Byzantine* (Probleme der Ägyptologie 8; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 179; *eadem*, *Le Fisc et le Nil, Incidences des irrégularités de la crue du Nil sur la fiscalité foncière dans l'Égypte grecque et romaine* (Paris: Cujas, 1985) lists nilometers in the Egyptian locations of Syene, Gebel Silsileh, Edfu, Latopolis (Esna), Karnak, Luxor, Memphis, and Elephantine, 29.

<sup>82</sup> Manfred Görg, "Neilos und Domitian, Ein Beitrag zur spätantiken Nilgott-Ikonographie," in *Religion im Erbe Ägyptens* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988), 65-82, 67, refers to the goddess Hathor, "the mistress of sixteen," and to coins from the reign of Domitian (ca. 86/87 CE) which show the sixteen children of the Nile and *Nilus*; see also A.M. El Rashab, "Représentations du Nil sur les monnaies romaines," *Annales du Service des antiquités de l'Égypte* 48 (1948), 611-17.

<sup>83</sup> Horst Jaritz, "Nilmesser," *LÄ*, 4,496-98.

<sup>84</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 1.36.10, referred to as "Niloscope." See also Strabo, *Geogr.* 17.1.48.

has depictions of numbered units.<sup>85</sup> Apparently the Egyptians were able to observe that at certain times of the year there was a consistency in respect to the water level of the Nile; these observations possibly led to the designation of the three Egyptian seasons, one of which was the “inundation.” The midrash in Pesiq. Zut., Shemot 8:16 asserts that it was the custom of the Egyptian king to go to the river Nile and to check how many cubits the Nile had risen.<sup>86</sup> This midrashic passage again contends that Egypt was ultimately dependent upon a river and not upon God.

In Agg. Ber. 42 the assumed context of Jacob’s blessing for Pharaoh is illustrated by referring to Egyptian messengers who announce the height of the inundation:

Agg. Ber. 42: When he was in his palace a messenger came to Pharaoh and said: Today the Nile has risen so and so much. The famine disappeared immediately, as it is written: *You visit the earth, and water it* (Ps. 65:10).

This is a comment on how the rabbis understood the manner in which Pharaoh was advised as to the level of the inundation; within the midrashic text the effectiveness of Jacob’s blessing is demonstrated. In the continuation of this midrashic text the focus is upon the blessing that the patriarch Jacob derives from God; ultimately, the prooftext from Ps. 65:10 relates the source of the blessing to God, who waters the earth. God blesses Pharaoh for the sake of Jacob. The term “river of God” is specifically mentioned in the second half of this verse from Psalms: *You greatly enrich it [Egypt] with the river of God, which is full of water; You provide their grain, for You have prepared it.* Although the second half of the verse is not specifically cited, it appears that the Rabbis assumed that the readers were aware of the entire verse – citing only a lemma of Scripture is a regular procedure in midrash. The second half of the verse served a polemical purpose against Egypt. This lemma would suggest that the Nile is God’s river and that it is the Israelite God who provides or withholds water and grain from Egypt.

<sup>85</sup> See fig. 63 in Zeev Weiss and Ehud Netzer, “The Mosaics of the Nile Festival Building,” ‘The Mosaics of the Nile Festival Building’, in *Sephoris in Galilee. Crosscurrents of Culture* (ed. Rebecca Martin Nagy, Carol L Meyers, Eric M. Meyers, and Zeev Weiss; North Carolina Museum of Arts, 1966; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 127-31, 129. (See chapter 3)

<sup>86</sup> See also Midr. Sekhel Tov, Shemot 8.

## 5. The Nile as a God

The Nile was the first casualty in the Biblical Exodus story, because according to a midrashic statement, “Pharaoh and the Egyptians worshiped the Nile and God said that he would smite their god first” (Exod. Rab. 9:9). The underlying idea of these rabbinic assumptions that the Egyptians revered the Nile as a god is based upon notions of natural theology, in which other cultures worshiped trees, lightning and other natural phenomena. Some rabbinic passages emphasize that the Nile was considered as a god by the Egyptians:

Gen. Rab. 69:3: R. Yohanan said: The wicked stand over their gods, as it says, *And Pharaoh dreamed, and, behold, he stood over the river* (Gen. 41:1).

According to another midrashic passage, Pharaoh himself thought that he was a god: “this wicked one [Pharaoh] used to boast that he was a god and did not require to relieve himself; therefore he used to go early in the morning to the water” (Exod. Rab. 9:8). The text suggests that the rabbis were mocking the divinity of the Pharaoh who, according to the rabbinic perception, had to enter the Nile in the morning in order to relieve himself, thus, concealing his bodily functions.

The primary Egyptian term denoting the Nile inundation is *Hapy* (*h'pj*), which is a divine figure.<sup>87</sup> Within the ancient Egyptian context, *Hapy* may be viewed as the Nile inundation or the personification of the inundation; *Hapy* brings abundance and prosperity to Egypt. Occasionally, *Hapy* refers to the waters of the Nile. *Hapy* carries gifts consisting of water jugs and plants. The depictions of fecundity figures relating to the Nile inundation,<sup>88</sup> which are often found in temple reliefs and the Hieroglyphic texts, show male figures with characteristically long divine wigs, long pendulous breasts, and big bellies; these depictions of multiple figures seem to diminish the importance of any one particular Nile divinity. *Hapy*'s cult reached a climax in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> dynasties.<sup>89</sup> (Fig. 4)<sup>90</sup> These fecundity figures were worshiped and represented lesser gods. The Egyptologist Hornung writes: “The only fecundity figure who takes on an independent existence as a deity is the inundation, *Hapy*.<sup>91</sup> *Hapy* is also frequently shown as a pair of figures uniting the

<sup>87</sup> John Baines, *Fecundity Figures: Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre* (Worminster: Aris and Phillips, 1985; repr. 2001), 120.

<sup>88</sup> See also the hymns to the Nile (pChester Beatty V, pAn VII) that praise the Nile and mention that offerings are made to it when it overflows.

<sup>89</sup> Bertha Porter and R. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs and Paintings*, 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 5, 227.

<sup>90</sup> *Hapy*, Abydos, Temple of Ramses II, 19th dyn., c. 1250 BCE (Ulmer).

<sup>91</sup> Hornung, *Conceptions*, 79.

two symbolic plants (lotus and papyrus) of “the two countries,” i.e., the Nile of Upper Egypt *H'pj sm'w (sma)* and the Nile of Lower Egypt, *H'pj mhm*; these depictions are frequently found during the Greco-Roman period. The construction of Egyptian-style temples under the Romans utilized *Hapy* as a fecundity figure; usually, there is a procession of numerous androgynous figures who serve as carriers of offering tables. Alternatively, *Hapy* is represented by a series of gods representing the nomes of Egypt. Examples of such depictions of *Hapy* include the Elephantine Temple of Augustus,<sup>92</sup> the Isis Temple at Philae,<sup>93</sup> the Kalabsha Temple, the Mandulis Temple, and the Hathor Temple at Dendera.<sup>94</sup>

The above midrashic assumption that there was a “Nile God” may derive from a common misunderstanding of the meaning and function of the Egyptian figures intended to personify aspects of fecundity that are present in antiquity (4<sup>th</sup> dynasty up to the Roman period). The Romans introduced the concept of one Nile god, *Neilos*. The rabbis assumed that the Egyptians worshiped the Nile. However, the transformation of the Nile into a divinity with a major cult transpired during the Greco-Roman period. Prior to this era, as explained above, fecundity figures related to the Nile inundation. However, these fecundity figures were not major gods; their identification as Nile gods is not warranted.<sup>95</sup> A similar flawed assumption is found in midrashic texts that speak of a Nile god; consequently, we may place the origin of this rabbinic assumption in the Greco-Roman period when the Nile was revered as a god. An example of this assumption is found in the following text:

Exod. Rab. 9:9: [Thus said the Lord, In this you shall know that I am the Lord; behold, I will strike with the rod that is in my hand] upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood (Exod. 7:17). Why were the waters first smitten, and with blood? Because Pharaoh and the Egyptians worshiped the Nile, and God said: I will smite their god first and then his people.

The above text states that the Egyptians worshiped the Nile. The assumption that the Nile was a god continued in later midrashic texts, which specifically refer to the Nile as a god: “And He struck the Nile that was [Pharaoh's] god” (Ber. Rbt., Vayyishlah, p. 171) and “From where [can we prove] that the Nile was [Pharaoh's] god? Because it says: [Pharaoh] goes out to the water; and you [Moses] shall stand on the bank of the Nile (Exod. 7:15)” (Midr. Sekel Tov, Gen. 41). Apparently the rabbis assumed that Pharaoh went to the Nile in order to worship it. In Ber. Rbt., Miqqes, p. 198, another prooftext is utilized to support the idea

<sup>92</sup> Porter and Moss, *Topographical*, 6,247.

<sup>93</sup> Porter and Moss, *Topographical*, 6,47.

<sup>94</sup> Dieter Kurth, “Nilgott,” *LÄ*, 4,485-98, 485.

<sup>95</sup> Bonneau, “La divinité du Nil,” *ANRW*, 3199.

that the Nile was a god: **אשר אמר לִי יָאֹרֶי**. The *peshat*, the simple interpretation, usually understands this lemma to mean: *Because he [Pharaoh] has said, the Nile is mine* (Ez. 29:3); however, this midrash understands this lemma as “because my Nile spoke to me” in order to support the contention that Pharaoh worshiped the Nile as a god. Nevertheless, according to most Egyptologists, the Nile itself was not worshiped as a god until the Greco-Roman period, as previously mentioned.

Starting in the Ptolemaic period (305-30 BCE) the Nile was referred to as Θέός, a god. In an inscription from Elephantine the Egyptian king Ptolemy IX Soter II (116-107 BCE) referred to the Nile as “the great god” (μέγας θεός).<sup>96</sup> The Nile continued to be revered as a god until the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, in particular, at the time when the level of the Nile flood level was announced, as Bonneau remarks: “... les adjectives qualifiant le Nil dans un contexte religieux présentent une variété qui révèle l’absence de règle en la matière.”<sup>97</sup> In the Ptolemaic period the entire Nile was venerated as a divine body of water, ποταμός. For example, the Egyptian name of the divine inundation was part of a Greek oath formula, in which one swore “by the flood” in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.<sup>98</sup> In the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE an offering table was dedicated to “the river,”<sup>99</sup> this indicates that the river Nile was revered as a god.

The name of the Greco-Roman river divinity Νεῖλος (*Neilos*) is of Egyptian origin based upon the term “the great river” (*n’itrw ’3w*); after the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great, the name *Neilos* became semantically equivalent to *Hapy*, the divine Nile inundation.<sup>100</sup> The Nile god in the Roman period<sup>101</sup> was not a Greek god that was Romanized, rather, it had some Egyptian background. Under Roman rule (after 29 BCE) the Nile god is one of the gods, *dei patrii*, in the Roman pantheon. A statistical analysis of the frequency of the name *Neilos* indicates that this term was mostly utilized in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE;<sup>102</sup> the name is found in the nomes of Fayoum, Oxyrhynchos, and Hermopolis Magna. In the Roman period a religious significance was attached to the Nile, which evoked an Egyptian concept relating to the origin of the

96 Bonneau, *ibid.*, 3200.

97 Bonneau, *ibid.*, 3196f.

98 Bonneau, *ibid.*, 3196f.

99 Karl W. Butzer, “Nil,” *LÄ*, 4,480-83.

100 Danielle Bonneau, “Le dieu-Nil hors d’Egypte (aux époques grecque, romaine et byzantine),” *Hommage à Jean Leclant* (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire, 1994), 3, 51-62.

101 Bonneau, *ANRW*, 3210.

102 Danielle Bonneau, *La crue du Nil, divinité Égyptienne à travers mille ans d’histoire* (332 av.-641 a. J.-C.) (Paris: Librairie C. Klucksieck, 1964), 398f.

river. According to Bonneau, this religious conception of the Nile was then incorporated into the Greco-Roman cycles of myths.<sup>103</sup>

The Nile during the Roman period was indubitably revered as a god;<sup>104</sup> this conclusion is supported by the murals of the Isis Temple at Philae (Egypt). Every year the Nile preserved the fecundity of the land of Egypt in support of the well-being and good fortune of the Roman emperor. Occasionally, there was confusion between the divinity of the Roman emperor and the divinity of the Nile. Eusebius<sup>105</sup> in the 4<sup>th</sup> century characterizes the Roman emperor as a crocodile; Eusebius, referring to the writings of Philo of Alexandria,<sup>106</sup> uses the following language: "the crocodile is born and nourished by the very sacred Nile." Emperor Domitian (81-96 CE) is depicted together with the Nile god *Neilos* in Roman artwork.<sup>107</sup> Beginning with Trajan (98-117 CE) agricultural production in Egypt became a significant aspect in Roman politics and the Nile cult was further developed.<sup>108</sup> At the time of Hadrian (117-138 CE) the water of the Nile was considered as sacred and the emperor was referred to as "the beloved of the Nile."<sup>109</sup>

*Neilos* (or "Nilos") is mentioned in rabbinic texts in conjunction with the Nile festival that is referred to earlier in this chapter;<sup>110</sup> Nile festivals were depicted in the Roman and Byzantine era in the Land of Israel<sup>111</sup> and throughout the Roman Empire.<sup>112</sup> In my opinion, it is questionable

103 Bonneau, *La crue du Nil*.

104 Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 7.1.3.

105 See Görg, "Neilos und Domitian."

106 On the Nile in Philo see Sarah Pearce, "Philo on the Nile," in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz and Stephanie Gripenrog; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 137-57.

107 Bonneau, *ANRW*, 3202.

108 Jean-Claude Grenier, "Traditions pharaoniques et réalités impériales: le nom de couronnement du Pharaon à l'époque romaine," *Egitto e Storia Antica dall'Ellenismo all'Età Araba*, (Bologna, 1989), 403-20, 416.

109 See n. 105.

110 See chapter 3.

111 For example, Wiktor Adrzej Daszewski, *Corpus of Mosaics from Egypt I. Hellenistic and Early Roman Period* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1985, Aegyptiaca Treverensia, 3), discusses the motifs of these mosaics and the Alexandrian influence, "First of all it shows that neither the Egyptian panels nor the ones in Ostia (if some of them are from Alexandria) betray any typically Egyptian motifs. An exception is the Nile scene in Cairo (Cat. No. 44 pl 37a). Otherwise all the emblata belong to the Graeco-Roman koine repertoire ..." (p. 18). He also attempts to identify the new components in the mosaics and to differentiate them from those of other lands, because local features do not necessarily mean that a motif was derived from Pharaonic Egypt (p. 2).

112 See Hornung, *Conceptions*, 65, "This divine-ness or state of belonging to god is a quality that is always attributed to personal divine forces and their emanations; it

whether the rabbis had direct knowledge of these depictions of the Nile festivals. It is also uncertain whether the Nile festival which worshiped the Greco-Roman Nile god, *Neilos*, was widely celebrated in the Land of Israel during the Roman and Byzantine period.

### Pharaoh as the Nile God

Rabbinic texts utilized the argument that Pharaoh presented himself as a god in order to construct a contrast between the impotent Egyptian gods and God. The passage “I over my god [the Nile] or my god over me” (Gen. Rab. 89:3) implies that Pharaoh understood himself as a god over the Nile. In midrash Pharaoh is considered as an extreme threat to the survival of the Jewish people; not only is he an oppressor of the Hebrews, but he also symbolizes the foreign cult of the “Other.” The hubris of Pharaoh in rabbinic texts includes the claim that he created himself.

The Egyptian king whose titulary includes divine epithets was rarely referred to as “god” (*ntr*) in Pharaonic Egypt. Additionally, the term *ntr* is not congruent with the religious understanding of God in Jewish texts, according to the Egyptologist Hornung.<sup>113</sup> Hornung concludes that the Egyptian king was not a deity<sup>114</sup> despite the numerous references that call him “god” and despite the idea that the reigning king is the “son of god.” Thus, the so-called “divinity” of Pharaoh,<sup>115</sup> thought to be related to his attribute “Son of [the god] Ra’,” is an erroneous conclusion.

In ancient Egypt, the Nile was sometimes referred to as having created itself, because the Nile was viewed as primordial. The Nile became the personal domain of the Egyptian king, who was in control of the river. A key passage in the Bible is *the Nile is mine, and I myself made [it]* (Ez. 29:9); the Egyptologist Görg comments on this passage that the phraseology of this lemma should be studied by applying form-critical comparisons, since the style of this Biblical passage shows a greater dependency upon Egyptian sources than previously thought. Specifically, Görg refers to the Jerusalem priesthood before the (Babylonian) exile that may have had knowledge of Egyptian sources. In midrashic interpretation, Ez. 29:9 is utilized to support the position that Pharaoh pro-

never becomes an abstract idea or a personified concept behind, above, or in addition to gods.”

<sup>113</sup> Hornung, *ibid.*, 141.

<sup>114</sup> See also Georges Posener, *De la divinité du pharaon* (Paris: Impr. Nationale, 1960).

<sup>115</sup> Görg, “*Neilos and Domitian*,” 65.

claimed that he created himself and the Nile. In Exod. Rab. 8:2, Pharaoh “boasts” that the river Nile was created by him and that he owns it. In Exod. Rab. 10:2,<sup>116</sup> the response to these claims of Pharaoh is the divine response: “I will show you whether it is Mine or yours. My plague shall come upon it and I will decree that it bring forth frogs, just as in the beginning of things when I decreed, *Let the waters swarm*” (Gen. 1:20), they performed My bidding, and so will the Nile perform My decree.” In another example of the hubris of Pharaoh, in Midrash Va-yosha’, OM 1, 146-149, Pharaoh contradicts the creative powers of God and states that he created himself and the Nile, which is his river. Pharaoh’s statement is viewed as heretical and as a result God invoked the Ten Plagues. Thus, the rabbis add a new religious aspect to the Biblical sojourn in Egypt by deeming Pharaoh as a heretical figure. This portrayal of deeming other religions as heretical can be construed as ultimately reflecting rabbinic perspectives of other, competing, religions in their own time. In the following midrashic text Pharaoh claims that he not only created himself and the Nile, he proclaims that he is the lord of the universe.

Tanh. Va’era 5: [Pharaoh] said to them: From the beginning you have been lying, because I am the lord of the universe and I created myself and the Nile, as it is said: *[And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste; and they shall know that I am the Lord; because he has said,] the Nile is mine, and I myself made it* (Ez. 29:9).

In regard to the interpretation of the lemma from Ez. 29:9: **יאָר לִי וְאַנְיֵ עֲשִׂיתִי**: in this passage the above midrash establishes the reading: “I have created myself and the Nile.” This is necessary due to the indeterminacy of the lemma in the Biblical text, which lacks an object: What did Pharaoh create? Did Pharaoh create himself or did he create the Nile? The rabbinic text answers these questions by stating that Pharaoh claimed to have created both himself and the Nile.

Otiyyot de-Rabbi Aqiva contains a midrashic hermeneutic formula in respect to the same lemma (Ez. 29:9) that emphasizes Pharaoh’s assertion of self-creation:

Otiyyot de-Rabbi Aqiva, OM 2, 422: “I made [‘asiti’] is not said but “I made myself [‘asitani’] implying [that Pharaoh said:] I created myself.

Another midrashic passage also refers to the Scriptural lemma that may be read as Pharaoh’s claim to have created the Nile. The co-text, the preceding and succeeding text of the midrashic passage set forth below, contains a lengthy discussion about God. Pharaoh expresses the hubris

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<sup>116</sup> The text presents the midrashic reading of the lemma from Ez. 29:9; cf. Tanh., Buber ed., Va’era 8; Yal. 1, 441 Beshallah.

of a human king who claims divinity for himself and whose “wise counselors” are only fools.

Exod. Rab. 5:14: [Pharaoh’s] reply to them was: From the very outset you have spoken falsehood, for I am the lord of the universe, and I have created myself and the Nile; as it says: My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself. He then gathered all the wise men of Egypt and said to them: Have you heard the name of their God? They said: We have heard that he is a son of the wise and a son of ancient kings. God then said to them: You call yourselves wise, but Me [you call] only a son of the wise, as it says: *Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counselors of Pharaoh has become stupid; How can you say to Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings?* (Isa. 19:11). See what it says of them: *Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counselors of Pharaoh (ibid.). And the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden* (Isa. 29:14). [Pharaoh] answered them: I do not know who this God of yours is; as it is said: *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? [I know not the Lord, nor will I let Israel go]* (Exod. 5:2).<sup>117</sup>

An extremely intimate relationship between Pharaoh and the Nile is found in several Egyptian hymns to the Nile,<sup>118</sup> which imply that Egyptian kings were the “Nile;” this is also expressed in Egyptian iconography.<sup>119</sup> However, it should be noted that Pharaoh does not always play such a crucial role concerning the Nile. According to some Egyptian theological perspectives, the god Amon-Ra was the creator and master over the Nile, whereas other theologies claim that Khnum created the Nile.

We also notice a close relationship between the Nile and the Egyptian king in midrashic texts. Pharaoh is master over the Nile; Pharaoh is always thinking about the Nile and he even dreams about it (Gen. Rab. 89:3). The king is “standing over the river” based upon a scriptural verse from Genesis 41:1: *And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed; and, behold, he stood over the river.* The phrase “over the river” may mean that Pharaoh is master over the river. In Egyptian texts, the king is linked to the Nile inundation, because he is responsible for the annual flood which relates to his duties in respect to maintaining the *Ma’at*, the cosmic order. This duty commences immediately upon the Pharaoh’s accession to the throne. The idyllic description of the state of the land at his accession reflects the way things should be – the Nile

<sup>117</sup> Comp. Exod. Rab. 5:5, Shinan ed.

<sup>118</sup> ANET 3,372f.; see also Dirk van der Plas, *L'hymne à la crue du Nil* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1986), 33.

<sup>119</sup> Amenemhat III is represented as god of the Nile (12<sup>th</sup> dynasty, Tanis, ca. 1820 BCE, statue, Cairo Museum).

inundation is just one key-element in this ordered world.<sup>120</sup> The so-called “Presentation of the *Ma’at*” scenes are numerous in certain periods of Egyptian history; they depict the king (Pharaoh) presenting the *Ma’at*.<sup>121</sup> (Fig. 5)<sup>122</sup> This is an important cult ritual; the king presents the figurine of *Ma’at* as an offering. The king is the guarantor of the world order; he performs continuous, sacred tasks that include providing water to the thirsty. The basis for the king’s actions is *Ma’at*, the fundamental concept of the Egyptian world view that combines social solidarity and justice, as expressed by the Egyptologist Jan Assmann. Pharaoh is responsible for governing the land, leading to the idea of “vertical solidarity,” a solidarity emanating from the top of society.<sup>123</sup> The control of the *Ma’at* by the ruler of Egypt is also depicted in Roman Egypt; the Roman emperor is shown to present the *Ma’at* (Fig. 6 on page 78).<sup>124</sup>

The failure to control the *Ma’at* by the Pharaoh will lead to some type of “upside-down world” in Egypt that is also reflected in the level of the Nile inundation. In the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*<sup>125</sup> the sun-god depends upon the *Ma’at*; the purpose of this dependence is to prevent the Nile from rising to heaven and to prevent the sun-god, Ra’, from descending to the Nile and to live off the fish.<sup>126</sup> At times in the ancient Egyptian religion, the king was considered to be responsible for the inundation’s arrival. The king’s actions in respect to the Nile inundation are prerequisites for his ability to rule effectively. In Ptolemaic Egypt, in Memphis “... this covenant of the king with his people, a covenant mediated through priests, in which the calendar and control of both the flood and of agricultural land are guaranteed by the king’s prowess and

120 *Pyr. T.*, Unas, I, 388a (1969).

121 Emily Teeter, *The Presentation of Maat, Ritual and Legitimacy in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1997; Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, 57) analyzes the increase in scenes representing *Ma’at* during the Ramesside period. This increase emphasizes the long-term nature of the ritual. We may also note that Ptolemy I (305-282 BCE) is shown as presenting the *Ma’at* (Leiden, Rijksmuseum, Van Oudheden, F1961/12.3, from the area of Oxyrhynchos). See also Ahmed El-Sawy, “The Nile-God; an unusual representation in the Temple of Sety I at Abydos,” *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 6 (1983), 7-13.

122 Presenting the *Ma’at*, Abydos, Temple of Sety I (Ulmer).

123 Assmann, *Ma’at*, 206f.

124 Friedrich Wilhelm Freiherr von Bissing, *La catacombe nouvellement découverte de Kom Chougafa* (Munich: Obernetter, 1901), Plate IV.

125 *Book of the Dead*, 65.11.

126 Assmann, *Ma’at*, 190.

by his oath, dates from Egypt long before the Greeks arrived."<sup>127</sup> This responsibility of the king continued in truncated form into the Roman period, when Isis, a goddess who was revered throughout the Roman Empire, was connected to the principle of *Ma'at*.<sup>128</sup>

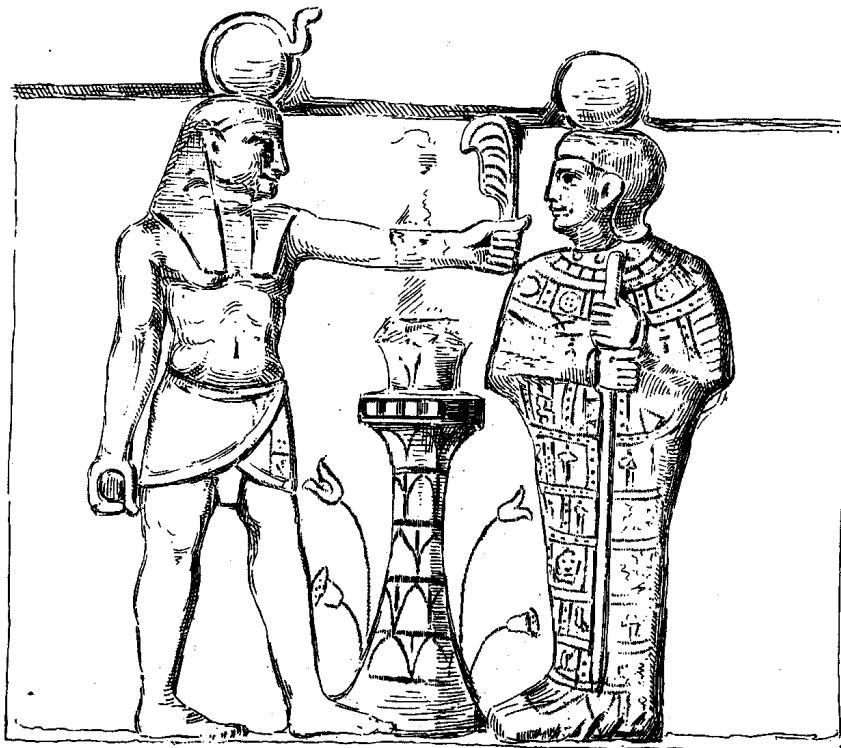


Fig. 6. Alexandria, Kom el Shuqafa, main tomb, emperor crowned with a solar disc holds the *Ma'at* (feather of truth) to Ptah.

The notion that Pharaoh was involved in rituals relating to the Nile is part of the midrashic explanations concerning the Nile.<sup>129</sup> In midrash

<sup>127</sup> Dorothy J. Thompson, "The High Priests of Memphis under Ptolemaic Rule," in *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 95-116, 107.

<sup>128</sup> See, e.g., Gwyn J. Griffiths, "Isis as Maat, Dikaiosunê, and Iustitia," in *Hommage à Jean Leclant*, 3, 255-64.

<sup>129</sup> Morning rituals of the Egyptians are alluded to in Targum Yerushalmi, Exod. 7:15.

the power and hubris of the king are linked directly to the Nile river.<sup>130</sup> Such hubris does not go unpunished in midrash; the Egyptian king invariably suffers defeat or humiliating death. In midrashic texts there is also the inevitable element of competition between the Egyptian king, who claimed divine status for himself,<sup>131</sup> and the God of Israel in respect to the Nile. Eventually the God of Israel is triumphant over the gods of the “Others.”

## 6. Conclusion

In the midrashic texts, we have noted frequently the fusion of various non-Biblical and Biblical themes and traditions in respect to images of Egypt. The rabbis composed some remarkably accurate passages concerning Egypt and its culture. However, describing the Egyptian landscape and the Nile was not the primary focus of the midrashic corpus; the main concern in midrash is the idea of “escaping” from the land, culture and theology of ancient Egypt. It is critical that one recognizes the disempowered relationship to “Egypt” of the writers of midrash and the role Egypt plays rhetorically and polemically in their texts. Egypt as the focus of the hermeneutics of midrash was for the rabbis ultimately a symbol of the “Other.” This “otherness” was brought into the world of the familiar by the rabbis. The “otherness” was transformed and compared to Jewish concepts, so as to make it intelligible to those who studied the midrash.

The midrashic inversion of “otherness” into something familiar would be the second inversion of Egyptian culture after the first inversion of Egyptian practices that occurred in the Bible. Egypt is transformed into the familiar, insofar as it is placed within well-known scenes from the Biblical tradition. In Egypt, the Nile served as a supremely positive symbol indicative of life, while in the midrashic texts the Nile is transformed into a negative symbol, indicative of idolatry and death. It is clear that the rabbis possessed a basic knowledge of Egypt, but they manipulated this information to serve their own ideological purposes in their texts. In their portrayals of Egypt are included topics and themes that were motivated by ideological and religious norms, wholly different from those of the Egyptian religionists.<sup>132</sup>

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130 Compare Jer. 46.

131 Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1987), 80, writes, “The pharaoh was a self-proclaimed god ...”

132 Compare Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt* (trans. Andrew Jenkins, New York: Holt, 2002), 11. See also, Rivka Ulmer, “The Nile as the Landscape of the Other,” In *Discus-*

The Egyptian landscape is present in all midrashic scenes focusing upon the Nile, although the landscape element is only depicted schematically in midrash. Deeply entrenched in the midrashic scenes and their associated theology are the memory of the Exodus and the circumstances of the Roman occupation and the subsequent exile to the Diaspora. With respect to a historical context, I would like to emphasize that some of the rabbinic texts reviewed in this essay were composed in the Diaspora.<sup>133</sup> These “late” midrashic texts contain older traditions, the ways in which the authors present and modify these traditions, however, are clearly a product of the Diaspora experience. The midrashic texts construct memories of Egypt and enrich them with Egyptian cultural icons. Much of the midrashic agenda concerns the fate of Israel in the Diaspora and the issue of who will return to the Land of Israel. The rabbis reenter Egypt in their dialogues with Egyptian cultural icons that are displayed in the Egyptian landscape. In the latest midrashic works cited in this chapter the Diaspora is understood to be *like* Egypt and the status of Jews living in the landscape of the “Other” remains a core issue in rabbinic and liturgical Jewish texts.

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*sing Cultural Influences: Text, Context, and Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism: Proceedings of a Conference on Rabbinic Judaism at Bucknell University* (ed. Rivka Ulmer; Studies in Judaism Series; Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2007), 193–237.

133 For example, Eccl. Rab. is from the 6<sup>th</sup> century or later; ‘Ag. Ber. is dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century; Midr. Sekhel Tov is dated to 1139; Pesiq. Zut. (Lekah Tov) was authored by Toviah b. Eliezer in the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century, although older material was incorporated into the text; Midr. Ber. Rbt. and Midr. Aggadah were authored by Moshe Ha-Darshan (11<sup>th</sup> century), who also utilized older midrashic material; the first part of Exod. Rab., cited here, is probably from the 11<sup>th</sup> century; Midrash Ha-Gadol is dated to the 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century; Sefer Ha-Yashar is from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

# Chapter Three: Egyptian Festivals

## 1. Introduction

Egypt was perceived as the ultimate Diaspora experience of initial assimilation and the subsequent return to one's heritage, or "dissimilation" in midrashic texts. These identity transformations were ascribed to Moses and Joseph in the Bible, as well as in midrash.<sup>1</sup> In rabbinic texts, Egypt had become more of an ideological position than a real place. This ideological position served as a vehicle for the rabbis for defeating religious and cultural threats posed by life in the Land of Israel (Roman Palestine) or in the Diaspora. Egyptian culture was to a large degree defined by numerous festivals that were public spectacles involving the masses in addition to the priests and the king.<sup>2</sup> Several of these Egyptian festivals were utilized in rabbinic texts to launch a theological response to acculturation; this is similar to the rabbinic textual responses to other specifically non-Jewish festivals that were characterized as idolatrous.<sup>3</sup>

In Egypt, the Nile and its inundation gave rise to numerous festivals that were related to water and its spirituality. Egyptian festivals celebrated the inundation as a cosmic event. These celebrations of the Nile became fashionable and were observed in Roman Egypt, as well as in other locations of the empire. On the other hand, the Egyptian calendar also celebrated life-cycle events of kings and gods, which were in different fashion part of Roman Egypt. Among the numerous Egyptian elements that elicited rabbinic theological positions, one finds some gentile festivals that may be characterized as Egyptian festivals, as set forth below.

The rabbinic texts, which serve as the data for the investigation of Egyptian festivals in this chapter, are permeated with the awareness of

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- 1 For example, see the Egyptian education of these towering Biblical figures (Pirqe R. El. 38 [39]). On the topic of assimilation, see Diane Lipton, *Longing for Egypt and Other Unexpected Biblical Tales* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 15; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 37.
  - 2 See Hartwig Altenmüller, "Feste," *LÄ*, 2,172-91; Anthony J. Spalinger, "Festivals," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 1, 521-25.
  - 3 Fritz Graf, "Roman Festivals in Syria Palaestina," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture III* (ed. Peter Schäfer; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 435-51.

the different festivals for gentiles and Jews.<sup>4</sup> The following text addresses an event for a common rejoicing:

Gen. Rab. 13:6: A gentile asked R. Joshua, and said to him: You have festivals and we have festivals; we do not rejoice when you do, and you do not rejoice when we do. When then do we both rejoice together? When the rain descends. What is the proof? *The meadows are clothed with flocks* (Ps. 65:14). What is the following [verse]? *Shout unto God, all the earth* (Ps. 66: 1)—[this means:] Not priests, Levites, or Israelites is written here, but [it is written:] *all the earth* (*ibid.*).<sup>5</sup>

The noted difference between gentile and Jewish festivals could have been based upon visual experience. We may assume that the rabbis' visualizations of Egyptian festivals in midrashic literature were rarely dependent upon written texts; unlike their usual approach to situations that required hermeneutic intervention relying upon textual evidence, several gentile festivals may have been witnessed by Jews.

In this chapter I will examine two expressions: יֹם נִיּוֹתָא (Pharaoh's birthday, the Hebsed festival) and יֹם נִילָת (the Egyptian Opet festival). These Egyptian religious festivals will serve as focal points through which a comparative examination is made of selected midrashic and Egyptian texts. I will also explore the various interpretations of these textual passages and the underlying rabbinic agendas that resulted in their inclusion in the rabbinic corpus. In the course of this analysis, particular topics will be emphasized, such as the cultural transmission and construction of ideas, and the type of knowledge the rabbis might have possessed about Egyptian culture.

The base text of all midrashic interpretation, from which the rabbis cited their lemmata, is the Hebrew Bible, which demonstrates an enormous intellectual and religious engagement with Egypt. This engagement with Egypt is to a certain extent replicated in midrash. Without the Egyptian experience and the subsequent "inversion" of Egyptian cultural and religious ideas in the Bible, Judaism would not have developed some of its major religious concepts. In respect to the Bible, this interdependence of Judaism and Egypt has been recognized by the Egyptologist Jan Assmann who wrote: "The principle of normative inversion consists in inverting the abominations of the other culture into obligations and vice versa."<sup>6</sup> Jewish Bible interpretation utilized

<sup>4</sup> See Rivka Ulmer, "Consistency and Change in Rabbinic Literature as Reflected in the Terms 'Rain' and 'Dew,'" *JSJ* 26 (1995), 55-75, 67.

<sup>5</sup> A parallel passage is cited in the name of R. Yohanan b. Zakkai in Deut. Rab. 7:7, which mentions the Roman festivals of *Calends*, *Saturnalia*, and *Kratesis*.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 31.

the events, people, and historical settings surrounding Israel's sojourn in Egypt and additional information concerning Egypt that is not found in the Bible. We may therefore ask the following questions: 1. Did Egyptian ideas about the king (Pharaoh) and the Egyptian festivals serve as the basis for rabbinic descriptions within the texts? 2. To what extent were Egyptian influences present in midrash? 3. What was the purpose of the Egyptian elements in midrash?

In order to respond to the above questions one has to analyze the perspective of the rabbis in the midrashic texts. I view the text of the midrash as containing a refraction of the rabbis' knowledge and the broader culture of the Land of Israel, as well as the surrounding regions. The points of orientation for understanding what we read in midrash should be grounded in synchronic as well as diachronic inquiry. The synchronic inquiry would explore the dating of the midrashic texts and would assess the cultural phenomena that transpired at the supposed time the texts were conceived or edited. This procedure is problematic in that we often find earlier cultural icons in later texts. From a diachronic perspective, the Biblical text is the paramount "data base" of the rabbis. However, the Biblical text does not mention a substantial portion of the Egyptian elements from the perceived past that do occur in midrash, such as the Nile festival. This indicates that the rabbis probably had some extra-Biblical knowledge of Egyptian customs. The larger issue to be addressed in some midrashic texts is to confront and analyze the differences between the Biblical text and the rabbinic text in reference to information concerning Egypt. The difference between knowledge about Egypt from Biblical sources and the rabbinic understanding depicted in midrash is exemplified by a passage from Gen. Rab. 88 set forth below.

## 2. Pharaoh's Birthday (Hebsed – Pharaoh's Coronation Festival)

Midrashic texts refer to several Egyptian festivals that are specifically related to the Egyptian king (Pharaoh), for example, "the day for the reception of ambassadors"<sup>7</sup> and "Pharaoh's birthday." The Biblical text referred to in these midrashic interpretations is Gen. 40:20, which reads:

7 Exod. Rab. 5:14; Tanh., Va-era 5; Tazri'a 14 (Buber ed.): "And they said to Pharaoh: Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, *Let My people go that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness* (Ex 5:1). R. Hiyya b. Abba said: That day was Pharaoh's day for the reception of ambassadors when all the kings came to honor him, presenting him with crowns."

ויהי ביום השלישי יום הַלְדָת אֶת-פְּרֹעָה וַיַּעֲשֶׂת מִשְׁתָּה לְכָל עֲבָדָיו וַיֵּשֶׁא אֶת רָאשׁ שֶׁר הַמְּשִׁקִים  
וְאֶת רָאשׁ שֶׁר הַאֲפִים בְּחֵךְ עֲבָדָיו:

*And it came to pass on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast onto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and the chief baker among his servants.*

A rabbinic interpretation of a lemma from this Biblical passage, namely Pharaoh's birthday, is found in Gen. Rab.:

Gen. Rab. 88:6 (Theodor/Albeck, 1085):

ויהי ביום השלישי יום הַלְדָת וכו' ים גִּנוֹסָו שֶׁל פְּרֹעָה

*And it came to pass on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, etc. (Gen. 40:20) – yom genoso [Manuscript variations: *genesia*, *genosav*] of Pharaoh.*

Before continuing with an Egyptian based analysis of the above text, I deem it necessary to have an extensive discussion of the term *genoso/genesia*. The term *genos(o)* (and its variant readings: *genesia* or *genosia*) in this passage from Gen. Rab. are presented as a synonym for *יום הַלְדָת*, Pharaoh's birthday, in the midrashic analysis of this Biblical lemma.<sup>8</sup> One may observe an interesting feature of this midrashic passage, the translation of a Hebrew term into another language, in this case translating “*yom huledet/birthday*” into Greek. This hermeneutic device of translating a Hebrew term into another language is well-established in midrash. This midrash utilizes the term *γενεσία*. Within a Greco-Roman cultural context, the expression *ta genesia* refers to the anniversary of a king's accession to the throne. At an earlier period in the Greek language, *genesia* referred to the commemoration of the dead and in later Greek the same word became interchangeable with *genethlia*, birthday celebrations. Observing the birthday of kings was a widespread custom in antiquity; e.g., 2 Macc. 6:7, Matt. 14:6, Mark 6:21: *Herod [i.e., H. Antipas] on his birthday (γενεσία) made a supper to lords ... It is significant that the NT utilizes the same term as midrashic literature, which firmly situates this concept in Greco-Roman culture. A rabbinic attempt at defining the term “the king's *genosia*” is found in b. ‘Abod. Zar. 10a:*

**יום גִּנוֹסָא שֶׁל מלכיהם וכו'.** מאי יום גִּנוֹסָא שֶׁל מלכיהם אמר רב יהודה: יום שמעמידין בו  
עובדינו כובדים את מלכם. והחניא: יום גִּנוֹסָא ויום שמעמידין בו את מלכם לא קשיא הא  
דיידה הא דבריה.ומי מוקמי מלכא בר מלכא והחניא רב יוסף הנה קטע נתחיך בוגנים - שאין  
מושיבין מלך בן מלך בזוי אחת מד – שאין להן לא כתוב ולא לשון

8 Compare also the Targumim on Gen. 40:20 which emphasize that “birthday” refers to Pharaoh's birthday.

אלא מאי יומ גנוסיא יומ הילדה. והתニア יומ גנוסיא ויום הילדה לא קשיא הא דידייה הא דבריה. והתニア יומ גנוסיא שלו יום גנוסיא של בנו ויום הילדה שלו ויום הילדה של בנו אלא מאי יומ גנוסיא יום שמעמידין בו מלכם ולא קשיא  
הא דידייה הא דבריה ואי קשיא לך דלא מוקמי מלכא בר מלכא ע' שאלת מוקמי בגון  
אסירוס בר אנטונינוס דמלך...

[Mishnah:] The anniversary of the *genosia* of their [the gentile] kings, etc.

[Gemara:] What is meant by [the mishnaic lemma] “*genosia* of their [the gentile] kings”? Rab Judah said: It is the day of the king’s accession [to the throne which is celebrated by] the idolaters. But has it not been taught: The day of *genosia* and the day of the king’s accession? There is no difficulty there; one term indicates the king’s own accession, the other that of his son. But do [the gentiles] ever appoint a king’s son as king? Did not R. Joseph apply [the following scriptural lemma to Rome]: *Behold, I made you small among the nations* (Obad. 1:2)? [This means] that they do not place the son of a king on the royal throne. *You are greatly despised* (*ibid.*); [does this not mean] that [the gentiles] did not possess a script or a language? What then is the meaning of ‘*genosia*’? [It means] birthday.

But we learn ‘The *genosia* and the birthday.’ That, too, is no contradiction. The one refers to the king’s own birthday, the other to that of his son. But we have also the wording: ‘The king’s *genosia* and his son’s *genosia*, [which means] his own birthday and his son’s birthday.’ Then, [as said previously,] *genosia* means indeed the day of the King’s accession, but there is no difficulty [raised by the mention of both terms], the one applying to his own accession, the other to that of his son. And as to your question about their not appointing a king’s son as king, such appointment would be made at the [king’s] request, as was the case with Asverus [Severus], the son of Antoninus, who reigned [in his father’s stead].<sup>9</sup>

The mishnaic context underlying the above Talmudic passage is the prohibition of engaging in business transactions with gentiles for three days prior to gentile festivals. This prohibition is followed by an extensive list of gentile festivals. In the above Talmudic text, the lemma from the Mishnah, “The *genosia* of the gentile kings,” is explained: “What is the day of *genosia* of their king? R. Judah said: It is the day of the king’s accession ...” If one interprets this rabbinic explanation of *genosia* according to a cross-cultural reading based upon the discipline of Egyptology, the festival set forth in the above text is reminiscent of the royal accession festival in Egypt. The Talmud further asks: “But has it not been taught, the day of *genosia* and the day of the king’s accession?” This question raises the issue whether *genosia* and the festival celebrating the fact that a gentile king is put on his throne may be one and the same. Initially the Talmudic passage attempts to distinguish between

9 Translation adapted from the *Babylonian Talmud, transl. and ed. I. Epstein* (London: Soncino, 1978, repr. of 1935-52 ed.), Abodah Zarah 10a, footnotes omitted.

“birthday” and *genosia* by claiming that one term is reserved for a celebration of the king and the other for his son. This possible distinction between the synonyms, the Hebrew *yom huledet* and the term *genosia*, is reconciled by providing examples in which both terms relate to either the accession of the king or the accession of his son. Samuel Lachs in his explanation of this passage in ‘*Avodah Zarah* explains the two birthdays by referring to the Roman custom of celebrating the birthday during an individual’s lifetime, as well as the birth date after his demise.<sup>10</sup> This may very well be a useful explanation for the two terms referring to a person’s birthday. Nevertheless, it should be noted that y. ‘Abod. Zar. 1:2, 39c contains an interpretation of these terms that would eliminate the post-mortem commemoration of a birthday: “The day of birth and the day of death.” In any event, it should be emphasized that the above passage in b. ‘Abod. Zar. 10a, the term *genosia* definitely refers to the anniversary of the king’s accession to the throne.<sup>11</sup> Herodotus also reports that the term “birthday” in Egypt refers to the anniversary of the King’s accession;<sup>12</sup> the institution of a set date for a royal birthday commemoration belongs to Ptolemaic Egypt.<sup>13</sup>

In rabbinic literature the two gentile festivals of *genesia* and *kalendas*<sup>14</sup> are sometimes mentioned in conjunction. The festival of *kalendas* was also an Egyptian holiday connected with birthdays. In Roman times in Egypt<sup>15</sup> several of these festivals known as *kalendas* were celebrated as the respective birthdays of the following Egyptian gods: Isis (January 3rd), Ra’ (January 4th), Horus (January 7th). The so-called *kalends* of April celebrated the goddess Hathor (April 1st). These Egyptian *kalendas* festivals are based on the Roman *kalend* days, which were also *dies comitiales*, certain days when committees of Roman citizens could vote on political matters.

Now that I have explored the meaning of the term *genosia/genesia* I wish to return to the midrashic passage, cited earlier, Gen. Rab. 88:6. I contend that this passage, which specifically mentions Pharaoh’s birth-

10 Samuel Tobia Lachs, “A Note on Genesia in Abodah Zara I,3,” *JQR* 58 (1967), 69-71; Andreas Lehnhardt, “Der Geburtstag in den Jüdischen Schriften aus hellenistisch-jüdischer Zeit, im Neuen Testament und in der rabbinischen Literatur,” in *Jüdische Schriften in ihrem antik-jüdischen und urchristlichen Kontext* (ed. Hermann Lichtenberger and Gerbern S. Oegema; Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002), 402-28.

11 Compare Lachs, “A Note on Genesia,” 69.

12 Herodotus, *Hist.* 9.110.

13 Jürgen von Beckerath, “Geburtstag,” *LÄ* 2,476-77; Peter Kapolny, “Geburtstage (Götter),” *LÄ* 2, 477-79.

14 The *calendae* (i.e., *kalendas*) replaced the *saturnaliae* by the 4th century CE; see *Der Kleine Pauly, Lexikon der Antike*, s.v. *Kalendae Ianuariae*, 3,57f.

15 Jack Lindsay, *Daily Life in Roman Egypt* (London: F. Muller, 1963), 162.

day, requires that we examine the Egyptian festival that most closely resembles *genesia/genosia*, namely the Hebsed or, at least, one of its Roman-Egyptian or Coptic transformations. These later adaptations and their ritual elements were firmly rooted in earlier Egyptian traditions. The Egyptian Hebsed was an anniversary festival<sup>16</sup> and ceremony performed by the Egyptian king for the renewal of his rule,<sup>17</sup> usually after thirty years of his reign. Obviously, not many kings were able to celebrate this festival. Some of the major buildings dedicated to this festival are still in existence, thus permitting us to gain some understanding of the spatial aspects of this festival. These buildings include the remnants of a false festival hall in the area stretching around the Step Pyramid of King Djoser in Saqqara<sup>18</sup> and Thutmose III's Festival Hall in the Temple in Karnak.<sup>19</sup> This latter Festival Hall was built to commemorate the ancient Hebsed Festival, which symbolized rebirth, rejuvenation or renewal of life, and the king's coronation date. This festival was also related to the Nile inundation.<sup>20</sup> The Pharaoh was the central figure in the rebirth ritual in his Hebsed festival.<sup>21</sup> In this festival a procession was led by a man holding aloft the Pharaoh's placenta mounted upon a pole. During the thirty year jubilee a statue of the king was buried in order to revive his powers. Immediately afterwards a second coronation ceremony transpired.

At some stage in the festival the king actually ran some distance in order to prove that he had been revitalized and reborn. It should be noted that there was a late Egyptian custom at the time that Egypt was under Roman rule of building a special birth house, the *mammisi* (a

16 Jocelyn Gohary, *Akhenaten's Sed-festival at Karnak* (London and New York: Kegan Paul and Routledge, Capman & Hall, 1992).

17 Edouard Naville, *The Festival-hall of Osorkon II. in the Great Temple of Bubastis* (London: Paul, Trenche, Trübner, 1892); William Murnane, "The Sed Festival: A Problem in Historical Method," *MDAIK* 37 (1967), 369-76, 372.

18 Jean-Philippe Lauer, *Les pyramides de Sakkara: la pyramide à degrés* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1991). King Djoser (2686-2647 BCE) built the "Step Pyramid" in Lower Egypt. Although this building complex is from the Old Kingdom of Egypt, it is referred to in this chapter because of its clear design that is still visible today; a picture of the Sed Festival court, Saqqara, mortuary complex of Djoser, 3rd dynasty, is found in Regine Schulz and Matthias Seidel, *Egypt: The World of the Pharaohs* (Cologne: Könemann, 1998), 49.

19 Thutmose III was a general and later a king of Egypt (1504-1450 BCE).

20 Wolfgang Helck, "Nilhöhe und Jubiläumsfest," *AZ* 93 (1966), 74-9.

21 A depiction of Sesostris I during his "cultic race" and the god Min, from Coptos, c. 1950 BCE, is found in Dietrich Wildung, *Sesostris und Amenemhet: Ägypten im Mittleren Reich* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), 134.

Coptic word), within the Egyptian temples,<sup>22</sup> which celebrated the birth of the Pharaoh, although there are older depictions of the royal birth. The midrashic citation of Pharaoh's birthday may be a reflection of this particular custom which coincided to some degree with early rabbinic tradition.

If one analyzes the above-mentioned text from Gen. Rab. and the terms *genosia* and יֹם הַוְלָדָת from the academic perspective of Egyptology, one may postulate that there are traces of the double ceremony of coronation and birth renewal in the rabbinic utilization of the term *genosia*. Although the Greco-Roman wording of the rabbinic utilization of the terms *genosia/genesia* is evident, a reading taking into consideration the recollection of Egypt in the collective memory of the Jewish people could certainly lead to the above-mentioned Hebsed festival.

Additionally, the *genosia* festival mentioned in rabbinic sources<sup>23</sup> had to be differentiated from the Jewish sacred allocation of time, designated as the Sabbath that God mandated for Israel's observance. Given the unique purposes of the Jewish Sabbath, this holy time should not simulate any idolatrous festival, including Pharaoh's *genosia*. In Pesiq. Rab. 23/24 § 3, which also mentions the *genosia* festival within the midrashic interpretation of Biblical lemmata from the Joseph story, Israel is reminded that it should celebrate the Sabbath instead of the *genosia* festival:

אמרו איזה מלך רוצה שלא יהו מכבדין יום גנוסיא שלו והקב"ה רוצה שייהו ישראל מכבדיין  
את יום השבת

They said, which king does not want his *genosia* day to be honored? But the Holy One, Blessed be He, wants Israel to honor the Sabbath.

The necessity to avoid replicating Egyptian festivals such as the Hebsed may be described as a dissimilatory tendency in which a group that has its own identity is surrounded by an overwhelming foreign "host culture," with the group being determined that it must assert its own culture to preserve its identity. The paramount significance of cultural and religious freedom is a major issue for the rabbinic framers of the midrashic texts; such ideas were a form of intellectual and spiritual resistance to the perceived influence of Egypt.

22 For example, the Temple at Dendera contains a Roman *mammisi* from the reigns of Trajan and Aurelius.

23 On these passage, see also Lehnhard, "Der Geburtstag," 423-24, who offers different interpretations: "Gott, der König, so bringt der unbekannte Verfasser dieser kurzen *derasha* zum Ausdruck, möchte, daß er an seinem Feiertag, dem Shabbat, genauso geehrt wird wie heidnische Könige an ihrem *yom genesiya*."(P. 423)

In midrash, and in particular in the above passage from Gen. Rab. (88:6), the reading of *yom huledet* as Pharaoh's birthday resonates with the Biblical passage that indicates that this birthday is a day of judgment for the king's servants, who were in prison with Joseph. The continuation of this passage in Gen. Rab. is an exegetical commentary on the Biblical passage. Joseph, who is not Egyptian, is forgotten by Pharaoh's steward (the cup bearer) on this Egyptian festival day.<sup>24</sup> As a result, Joseph was not freed from prison. It may be argued that the midrashic text is implying that if Joseph was an Egyptian and was following Egyptian customs he would have been freed as well. The festival of *genesia* in midrash was utilized by the rabbis to note that this Egyptian celebration in the Bible was instrumental in the ultimate advancement of Joseph. Additionally, the theology of midrash requires that the time and location of the Biblical Joseph and his appearance in midrash be situated in Ancient Egypt.<sup>25</sup> The midrash presents a hidden agenda for the Biblical lemma "birthday." Assuming the writers of the midrash understood the Pharaoh's birthday as a renewal ceremony (the commemoration of the Pharaoh's accession to the throne and his physical rebirth), then, on the level of interpreting these midrashic texts as literature, this double renewal festival had a dual purpose, a renewal for the anonymous Biblical pharaoh and a renewal for Joseph, who would soon radically alter his life's course.

It should be noted that *yom genosia*, the Egyptian Hebsed festival, is a celebration of origins, while the term *genosia* in isolation has the meaning of "origin" or "genealogy" in rabbinic literature. According to my reading of the above passage from Gen. Rab., the Pharaoh celebrated his origins on his birthday celebration, whereas Joseph as a non-Egyptian had to conceal his origins. In another midrashic passage the meaning of *genesia* as origins is used in reference to the Biblical Joseph when the appearance of his brothers in Egypt reveals Joseph's true origins:

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24 Philo, *Ios.* 18. 97-98, offers a similar interpretation that is obviously colored by Philo's cultural space, Alexandria in Egypt: "But, when the three days had passed, came the king's birthday, when all the inhabitants of the country held festive gatherings. So, while the dignitaries were banqueting, and the servants were regaling themselves as at a public feast, the king remembered the eunuchs in the prison ..."

25 For a general overview of the problems of establishing ethnic and religious identities, including Jewish self-identification, and citations of important secondary literature, see Dimitris J. Kyrtata, "Ancient Mediterranean Views of Ethnic Identity," in *The Howard Gilman International Conference II. Mediterranean Cultural Interaction. Tel Aviv University* (ed. Asher Ovadiah; 2000), 53-68.

ד"א אם להם עד שלא ירדתם למצרים היו המצריים נהוגן ב' Pesiq. Rab. 29/30 § 10: כבוד ומשירדתם הודיעתם גינויシア של' אם אני הורג אתכם עכשו יאמרו המצריים עם אחוי לא שומר אמונה עם אחרים על' אחת כמ' וכמ'

Another comment: [Joseph] said to [his brothers]: Before you came down to [Egypt] the Egyptians treated me with respect; however, now that you have come down you have made known my origins. If I kill you now, they will say, he did not have a relationship of trust with his brothers, how much less with us.

### 3. The Nile Festival

Another festival that is mentioned in midrash, the so-called “Nile festival,” retains a strong Egyptian identity. This festival is very similar to the Egyptian Opet festival. Centered in the Egyptian Thebes, this popular festival was held at the time of the inundation of the Nile, in the second month of the inundation season. Theban citizens and visitors from other Egyptians provinces celebrated the fertile link between the king (Pharaoh) and the god Amun, his father. The Opet festival came at the time of the year when the god Amun was dying, and the world was threatened with chaos. As a consequence of the Nile inundation, work was temporarily suspended in the fields. In the context of the Opet festival the future king traveled to his father, Amun, in order to receive the powers of kingship. The people joined in a dramatic procession honoring Amun that commenced at the Karnak Temple<sup>26</sup> and ended at the Luxor Temple. At Karnak, the Pharaoh led the rituals and ceremonies of renewal, which simultaneously renewed his own *ka* and reestablished his legitimacy as ruler and mediator. The people watched the high priests enter the temple. Inside, the priests bathed the statue of the god Amun and dressed and adorned it. The priests then enclosed the statue in a ceremonial box and placed it on top of a ceremonial barque, often supported by poles which enabled the priests to carry the barque. When the priests emerged from the temple, they carried the barque on their shoulders through the pillared halls and courtyards of the Temple at Karnak.<sup>27</sup> The priests entered the crowded streets where people attempted to catch a glimpse of the sacred vessel. In Queen Hatshepsut’s

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26 Constant de Wit, *Les inscriptions du temple d'Opet, à Karnak* (Bibliotheca aegyptiaca, v. 11-13; Brussels: Édition de la Fondation égyptologique rein Élisabeth, 1958-68). Vol. 1 contains the festival procession of *Opet* in the colonnade hall of Karnak.

27 A depiction of the *Opet* festival, the boat of Amun, Ostracon, Der el-Medineh, is found in *Knaurs Lexikon der ägyptischen Kultur*, 87.

time,<sup>28</sup> the complete journey was accomplished on foot, with stops at different resting stations. Subsequently, the barque was carried to the Nile and then towed by high government officials up the river to Luxor. The Pharaoh himself was in Thebes to greet the god Amun and escort him to the Luxor Temple. A continuation of such a festival transpired in Coptic Egypt.

The nature of the Nile festival as conceived by the rabbis has some similarities to the Opet festival described above. The midrashic passage from Gen. Rab. (87:7-11) and the other midrashim cited in this chapter display some descriptions of the Nile festival that are also found throughout the parallel texts and the manuscripts. The Nile festival in midrash includes the Nile inundation, sacrificial offerings and spectacles. These midrashic descriptions could be understood as a reference to the Egyptian Opet festival<sup>29</sup> and its modifications in Roman Egypt.<sup>30</sup> I maintain that the Nile festival in midrash is probably based upon this Egyptian celebration of the Nile inundation. In Gen. Rab. 87:7 a Nile festival (*יום נילוטס*) is mentioned in the text concerning Joseph and Potiphar's wife.<sup>31</sup> This Nile festival is the reason that all the Egyptians had left Potiphar's house, except for his wife, and that Joseph was left alone with this Egyptian woman.<sup>32</sup> In my previous analysis of Joseph's encounter with the Egyptian woman I had compared this encounter to scenes from Egyptian literature; however, I did not discuss this story from the perspective of Egyptian festivals.<sup>33</sup> I will now focus on the

28 1498-1483 BCE.

29 Samuel Tobias Lachs, "An Egyptian Festival in Canticles Rabba," *JQR* 51 (1960), 47-54, explicitly mentions that the rabbis were well acquainted with Egyptian rites. Other Nile festivals are mentioned in Alfred Hermann, "Der Nil und die Christen," *JAC* 1 (1958), 30-69.

30 Danielle Bonneau, "La divinité du Nil sous le principat en Egypte," in *ANRW*, II.18.5, 3195-215, 3199.

31 Josephus mentions a festival as the reason for the absence of the inhabitants of Potiphar's house in the context of the Joseph story as well. Josephus knows that the Nile festival was also attended by women (Josephus, *Ant.* 2.45); see Louis H. Feldman, "Joseph," in Feldman, Louis, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1998), 335-73, 370.

32 Isaac Kalimi analyzed Joseph's presence in Potiphar's house, see *idem*, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy: Studies in Scriptures in the Shadow of Internal and External Controversies* (Assen, The Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2002), 88-103. See also Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten, "Madame Potiphar," in *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies: the third Sheffield Colloquium* (ed. J. Cheryl Exum and Stephen D. Moore; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 203-19, which contains a description of a college course that focused on Gen. 39.

33 Rivka Ulmer, "Zwischen ägyptischer Vorlage und talmudischer Rezeption: Josef und die Ägypterin," *Kairos* 24/25 (1992/93), 75-90. James L. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House:*

Nile festival in a passage from Gen. Rab. in which the midrash interprets several lemmata from the Joseph episode in the Bible.

יְהִי כָּיוֹם [בַּיּוֹם] הַזֶּה [יְבַא הַבִּתְהָה]  
 לְעֵשֶׂת מְלָאכָתָן] ר' יְהוּדָה א' יוֹם נְבוּל לְנְלוֹס [נוּבָל, זְבוּל] הָיָה וְהַלְכָה כָּל לְרוֹאֹת וְהַוָּא בָּא  
 הַבִּתְהָה לְחַשְׁבָּנוֹת שֶׁלְרָבָו ר' נְחֶמְיהָ א' יוֹם תִּירְעָן הָיָה וְהַלְכָה כָּל לְרוֹאֹת וְהַוָּא בָּא  
 הַבִּתְהָה לְחַשְׁבָּנוֹת שֶׁלְרָבָו ...

*And it came to pass on a certain day, when he went into the house to do his work* (Gen. 39:11). [R. Judah and R. Nehemiah, each has his own explanation of this]. R. Judah said: [On that day] there was a day of idolatrous sacrifice to the Nile; everyone went to see it, but he [Joseph] did not go. R. Nehemiah said: It was a day of a theatrical performance, which all went to see, but he went into the house to work on his master's accounts.

This midrash focuses upon the lemma “on a certain day;” the term “a certain day” is understood by the rabbis as the day of the Nile festival. Since the nature of the assumed Nile festival mentioned in this, as well as other midrashic texts, was ambiguous to the rabbis, explanations are given that idolatrous sacrifices were offered on this day or that it was a day of theatrical performances. Sacrifices and gifts to the Nile were practiced in pharaonic, as well as in Roman Egypt.<sup>34</sup> The parallel midrashic texts vary as to the inclusion of Roman spectacles, such as theatrical performances and circuses.<sup>35</sup> The concurrence of the festival of the Nile inundation with theaters as well as circuses is found several times in different midrashic texts (see Table 1 below). Although certain events that might be described as spectacles were practiced during the Egyptian Opet festival, the mention of theaters by the rabbis would place us in Roman Egypt.<sup>36</sup> In the context of the above midrashic pas-

*The Interpretative Life of Biblical Texts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990, repr. 1994), 153, n. 14. Kugel collected material in respect to Joseph in Potiphar's house, but he did not emphasize the Egyptian evidence.

34 See Ricardo A. Caminos, “Nilopfer,” *LÄ*, 4, 498-500; John Whitehorne, “The Pagan Cults of Roman Oxyrhynchus,” in *ANRW* II.18.5, 3040-91, 3076; Bonneau, “La divinité du Nil,” 3199.

35 The combination of theaters and circuses is often found in midrashic texts from a certain period; e.g., Lev. Rab. 34:3 (in a statement by Hillel, 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE). See Samuel Krauss, “Circus,” in *JewEnc* 4, 103-04; and Daniel Sperber, *The City in Roman Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), circuses are referred to as hippodromes or *stadia* (78, 85f.). In respect to the circus in Jerusalem, see Joseph Patrich, “On the lost circus of Aelia Capitolina,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 21 (2002), 173-88, 182. In respect to theaters, see, e.g., Zeev Weiss, “Games and Spectacles in Ancient Gaza: Performances for the Masses held in Buildings now lost,” in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity* (ed. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 23-39; and Sperber, 79f. The gentile institutions of the circus and the theater are juxtaposed to the House of God and the synagogue (Gen. Rab. 67:3).

36 Theaters in Alexandria are mentioned, e.g., by Philo, *Ebr.* 177; *Congr.* 64-66.

sage, the absence of virtually the entire household from Potiphar's house emphasizes the social functions of theatrical festivals in late antiquity – generally, religious festivals were perceived as spectacles in Roman Egypt and some of these festivals transpired in amphitheaters.<sup>37</sup> In my opinion, this citation of the Roman institutions of theaters and circuses in midrash was an act of contemporizing of the Nile festival by the rabbis.

The continuation of the above passage from Gen. Rab. uses the Egyptian Nile festival as a dramatic background to explain Joseph's presence in Potiphar's house at the time his wife attempted to seduce him. According to this midrashic reading, Joseph did not participate in the festival and was therefore left alone with the woman. Within the midrashic passage the sexual impotence of Joseph is addressed in several scenes. The continuation of the scriptural lemma (Gen 39:11: *there was not a man*) is applied to Joseph who is not capable of acting as a "man." The next scene, which explains Joseph's impotence, utilizes the lemma in Gen 49:24: *his bow lost its strength*. This accumulation of proof texts for Joseph's sexual impotence also utilizes *the seed of his hands was scattered* (Gen 49:24) and *by the mighty hand of Jacob* (Gen 49:24), which implies that Joseph had a vision of his father that interfered with the attempt of Potiphar's wife to arouse him sexually. Interestingly, the Egyptian Opet festival is also a festival of fertility for the land, as well as for humanity that included sexual rites. The midrashic text might imply that the impotence of Joseph was due to his refusal to participate in the sexual rites that were associated with the Egyptian Opet festival. This implication is due to the nature of rabbinic texts, which declined to be explicit in respect to many matters. While Greco-Roman historians or Christian writers often made their purposes explicit through prefaces and summaries, the creators of midrash rarely revealed their purposes directly. Thus, we may conclude that Joseph is presented in the midrashic texts in opposition to the idolatrous behavior of the Egyptians. Within an Egyptian context Joseph would have been viewed in opposition to the potent Egyptian fertility god Min (Fig. 7)<sup>38</sup> during the Egyptian Min festival<sup>39</sup> or to the Nile god that was revered in Roman Egypt as the source of the fertility of the Nile inundation.

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37 David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 58.

38 Depiction of the god Min, Luxor Temple (Ulmer).

39 A ceremony honoring Min, featuring a procession of a statue of the god Min, sometimes took place during the royal coronation as a means of ensuring the Pharaoh's potency; these rituals were also part of the (*Heb*)*Sed* festivals, the king's jubilees. The Min festival was celebrated during the ninth civil month of the Egyptian calendar.

Another midrashic passage which illuminates Joseph's stay in Potiphar's house mentions theaters and circus performances taking place on the day of the Nile festival. This passage is found in Pesiq. Rab. (and the parallels in Tanhuma and Song Rab.). A verse from Proverbs is applied to Joseph, who as a diligent person works on the day of Nile festival while almost everyone else is celebrating. It is important to note that the text has the term inundation (*zevul*).

Pesiq. Rab. 6:2 (MS Parma):

ד' א והשלם כל המלאכה אשר עשה המלך שלמה [מלכים א' ז נא] כך פתח ר' תנומח ביר' הוּא שָׁאֵם רוח הַקּוֹדֶשׁ עַל יְדֵי שָׁלֵם' וּזְיוֹת אִישׁ מְהֻרָּב בְּמְלָאכָתוֹ [משלי כב כט]  
וז יוסף ויהי כהיום הזה ויבא הביתה לעשות מלואכתו [בראשית לט אא] ר' יהודה יום זיבול  
נילוס היה והכל יצאו לזיבול נילוס והוא נכנס לעשות מלואכתו ור' נחמני אום יום תיאטרון  
וקורקסין את ה' התק נזרמת במלאתה חיזק לנו מלכים זיבוב [משלי כב כט] וויסף בן  
שלשים שנה בעמדו לפני פרעה [בראשית מא מו] ואל תיזכט לפני החסכים [משלי כב כט] לפני  
פיטיפר החשוב"

*All the work that Solomon had done was completed* (1 Ki. 7:51). R. Tanhuma Be-rabbi began: This is what has been said in the Holy Spirit by Solomon: *Do you see a man diligent in his work* (Prov. 22:29) -- this refers to Joseph [who worked on an Egyptian festival day] and it came to pass on a certain day when he went into the house to do his work (Gen. 39:11). R. Judah said: This was a [festival] day of the Nile inundation (*zevul*) and everyone went forth to the Nile inundation,<sup>40</sup> but he went inside to do his work. R. Nehemiah said: A day of theater and circus performances. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: You are zealous in your work; by your life! *He shall stand before kings* (Prov. 22:29). *And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh [king of Egypt]* (Gen. 41:46). *He shall not stand before obscure men* (Prov. ibid.) -- before Potiphar, the obscure man.

This passage suggests the divine providence that is accorded to Joseph, who will eventually stand before the Pharaoh. We may also add the reading that Joseph did not participate in gentile festivals, such as the Nile festival. This could be a reflection of the general theological concern of the rabbis at the time that these midrashic texts were conceptualized to preserve Jewish holy days and to discourage Jews from participating in "idolatrous" (Christian/Roman) celebrations. This attitude of the rabbis is mirrored in the different terms for the Nile festival, which include calumnies against practices of other religions. The Nile festival

There was a Ptolemaic temple of Min and Isis at Coptos built for Ptolemy II; the Roman emperors constructed a temple of Min, Horus and Isis close by (see *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, 413-15).

40 William Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati, discourses for feasts, fasts, and special Sabbaths* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 119, n. 5, mentions that this is *zibbul*, meaning "covering with dung, with manure." However, "manuring" could also refer to the fertile mud that came with the Nile inundation and which was the reason that a fertility cult was related to the Nile.

is referred to in some midrashic texts as an idolatrous sacrifice, a sacrifice that was invalid from the rabbinic perspective.<sup>41</sup> The texts indicate there was a slight variation in the characterization of the Nile festival, shifting between idolatrous sacrifice to the Nile and the celebration of the Nile inundation, as set forth in Table 1. In Egypt, the Nile festivals also had different underlying reasons for their observance.<sup>42</sup>

A late version in midrashic literature in regard to the Nile festivities surrounding Joseph's sojourn in Potiphar's house is found in Sefer Ha-yashar, Va-yeshev:

ויהי אחריו כן ויתמלא נחל מצרים על כל גדוותיו ויצאו כל יושבי מצרים וילכו לראות את הנחל בכל צל שיר כמשפחות בארץ מצרים: וגם המלך והשרים יצאו לראות בחופים במחלות כי שמחה גודלה היא למלחינים וום טוב בעת אשר יתמלא ים שיחור והלכו שם לשמהו כל היום: ויהי בצתת המצרים אל היאור לשמהו כמשפטם ויצאו גם אנשי בית פוטיפר אחים: אך זלכה לא צאה...

And it came to pass after these things that the "Brook of Egypt"<sup>43</sup> was at its crest. All the inhabitants of Egypt went forth to look at the brook and they carried all kinds of musical instruments, as was the custom of the Egyptians. The king and his ministers went also to see it and they were accompanied by music and dancing, because it was a great celebration and a festival for the Egyptians. The "Pool of Horus"<sup>44</sup> was completely filled and they went there for a day-long celebration. And when the Egyptians went

41 Parallels: Song Rab.1:1; Exod. Rab. 11:11 (ed. A. Shinan); Tanh., Va-yeshev 9:9; Midrash Ha-Gadol, Bereshit 39:11; the very late Midrash Aggadah, ed. Buber, has "a day of the Nile flood" (39:5). Even the manuscripts of Gen. Rab., referred to above, have different terms in respect to the Nile festival and its purposes. A tannaitic statement in b. Sotah 36b, also explains the behavior of Joseph: "R. Yishmael said: This was their festival and they all went to the house where idolatry was practiced, and she said that she was sick and that she needed Joseph on this particular day." A comparison of the midrashic material was also performed by Esthi Dvorjetski and A. Segal, "פסיפס חג הנילוס – מצפוריו ויקתו לח' התרבות בארץ-ישראל בתקופת הרומיות והביזנטית", *Bamah* (1995), 97-105, 100-3 (Estée Dvorjetski, and Arthur Segal, "The Nile Festival Mosaic of Sepphoris and its Relationship to Roman-Byzantine Leisure Culture in the Land of Israel," *Assaph: Section B: Studies in Art History* [Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, Faculty of Fine Arts], vol. 9 (2004), 65-84, is an English version of the Hebrew article).

42 Günther Hölbl, "Aussagen zur ägyptischen Religion in den Zenonpapyri," *Papyrologica Lepiensa* 2 (1993), 1-30, states with regard to the Nile festival in the papyri of Greco-Roman Egypt: "PCair Ze. II 59176, 38-40 belegt uns die Feier des Nilfestes der Katachteria ... für Juli 255 v. Chr. Im Fajjum, vielleicht Philadelphia. Die Nilfeste, mit denen die Ankunft der Überschwemmung in der pharaonischen wie in der griechisch-römischen Epoche im ganzen Land gefeiert wurde, sind in den römerzeitlichen Quellen als Neilaia oder Neilo bekannt ..." 22; specific locations included, but are not limited to, Crocodilopolis, Tebtynis, Bacchias, and Karanis.

43 "Nahal Mitzrayim" is also referred to as the "Wadi of Egypt;" this is probably Wadi El Arish (Jos. 15:4).

44 Located in Goshen.

forth to the Nile to celebrate, the people from Potiphar's house left as well; however, Suleika<sup>45</sup> did not go out ...

The above description of the Nile festival in Sefer Ha-Yashar contains new elements concerning the Nile Festival, such as music and dancing. Moreover, Potiphar's wife is given a name, Suleika. This name probably places this midrash well into the Middle Ages. This late midrashic passage is somewhat similar to a passage in Pesiq. Zut. (Lekach Tov 39), which also mentions the Egyptian king and his ministers; otherwise, the text is similar to Gen. Rab. 87:7 in that Pesiq. Zut. also cites the statement of R. Judah in respect to the Nile festival. The Nile festival is explained in the text of Pesiq. Zut. in a gloss which states: "this is a festival of idolaters." Additionally, Pesiq. Zut. adds the aspect of the Nile's fertility. It is interesting to note that with the increasing temporal and geographic distance the description of the Nile festival becomes more elaborate and is partially transferred to geographical location known as the "Brook of Egypt." This may be due to the increasingly difficult situation in the Diaspora in which the rabbis felt the necessity constantly to look back in time and imagine the circumstances in Ancient Egypt.

In respect to the Nile and the festivals related to it, we have the archaeological remains of Nilotic scenes in the so-called "Nile Festival building" in Sepphoris in the Land of Israel and numerous other buildings such as churches in the Land of Israel.<sup>46</sup> These Nilotic scenes have been explained as exclusively based upon classical, Greco-Roman sources. Some art historians cited below claim that the rabbinic texts

45 In some later midrashim Potiphar's wife is assigned the name of Suleika; this is an "updating" of Biblical lemmata within a new cultural context, since the Bible does not provide a name for Potiphar's wife.

46 See the survey essay by Rachel Hachlili, "Iconographic elements of Nilotic scenes on Byzantine mosaic pavements in Israel," *PEQ* 130,2 (1998), 106-20; the table on p. 108 has the following locations in Israel: Emmaus, Beth Guvrin, Sepphoris (a villa dated to the 4th-5th century and the Nile Celebration dated to 5th-6th century), Beth She'an, Tabgha and Haditha. In respect to Haditha, Hachlili mentions the Nile as presented in stripes of wavy lines (p. 110); through an Egyptological perspective, this is reminiscent of the Hieroglyphic sign "n;" the depiction of the Nile at Beth She'an pouring forth from a jug and flowing in two wavy lines is similar to the description of the Nile source in the Isis Temple of Philae, in Upper Egypt. The nilometer in the form of a well is also present in the Temple at Kom Ombo in Egypt. See also Zeev Weiss and Ehud Netzer, "The Mosaics of the Nile Festival Building," in *Sepphoris in Galilee: Crosscurrents of Culture* (ed. Rebecca Martin Nagy, Carol L. Meyers, Eric M. Meyers, and Zeev Weiss; North Carolina Museum of Arts, 1966; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 127-31; and Zeev Weiss and Ehud Netzer, "Sepphoris during the Byzantine Period," 81-9, 82-4. Some of these mosaics were previously depicted and discussed in Hermann, "Der Nil."

discussed in this chapter, including Gen. Rab. (87:7-11), reflect a Roman festival. The “Nile Festival building” is the largest structure excavated in Sepphoris in the Galilee. The building was constructed in the 4<sup>th</sup>-5th or 6th century, the early Byzantine period, above the ruins of Roman buildings. The building’s central location within the city, its artistic richness, its size and numerous rooms indicate that it was probably a public building (perhaps a municipal basilica). The Nile mosaic is the largest of the mosaics found in this building (fig. 8).<sup>47</sup> Nilotic scenes, as well as various hunting scenes relating to the Nile, are well known in Roman art. The Nilotic scenes in Sepphoris depict a nilometer (a meter which was used to measure the Nile inundation) and the Pharos (lighthouse)<sup>48</sup> in Alexandria, with an inscription referring to Alexandria and Egypt.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the Nilotic scenes in Sepphoris included pictures of fish, crocodiles and other creatures and plants from the Nile. There is also a picture of a woman with a wreath, who is the personification of the festival.<sup>50</sup> A personification of the Nile god is found as well. If the “Nile Festival Building” in Sepphoris was in fact a large municipal basilica, Jews might have had access to it. However, it is pure speculation to posit that the visual experiences of Jews who entered that building served as the basis for the midrashic descriptions of the Nile festival at the time of Joseph. Another possibility of direct knowledge of mosaics containing Nilotic scenes from Byzantine buildings is the private home in Beit She’an that was owned by a Jew (fig. 9).

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47 A detail from one of the mosaics of the Nile festival building at Sepphoris. Courtesy of Prof. Zeev Weiss, The Sepphoris Expedition, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Photo: G. Laron.

48 The Pharos was a building project under Ptolemy I Soter (323-305 BCE, governor of Egypt; 305-282, king of Egypt).

49 The Greek inscriptions are discussed by Leah Di Segni, “Greek inscriptions in the Nile Festival Building,” in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research*, vol. iii, (ed. J. H. Humphrey; Journal of Roman Archaeology; Portsmouth, RI, 2000), 91-100.

50 Dvorjetski and Segal, “The Nile Festival Mosaic,” 99, mention the Latin name *Semasia* for the festival, which occurred when the water of the Nile reached its expected height. The city of Alexandria was locally personified as *Semasia*, who was a woman on a horse (see Fig. 22) signifying the sacred, high mark of the Nile on the Nilometer, as discussed by Danielle Bonneau, *La crue du Nil: divinité Égyptienne à travers mille ans d’histoire* (332 av.-641 a. J.-C.) (Paris: Librairie C. Klicksieck, 1964) in her analysis of the Nile festivals; this figure is a local herald, p. 375; see also Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman*, 44.



Fig. 9 Mosaic from Bet She'an in: Nehemiah Tzori, "בֵּית לְאֹנוֹתִים בַּבָּיִת-שָׁאן," *Eretz Israel* 11 (1973), 229-47, 232, fig. 4; the mosaic is in room number 3. I am very grateful to the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem, for the permission to reproduce this image.

However, the creators of midrash might have been reluctant to interact with Romanized Jews, because said Jews were probably quite distant from the intellectual and religious realm of the rabbis. It should be emphasized that the mosaics in the Land of Israel with Nilotic scenes almost invariably contained depictions of a Nile god. The rhetoric of midrash does not permit such depictions of pagan gods and it is doubtful that the creators of midrash would have been inspired by such mosaics. If one transfers the visual images in said mosaics into a text, there is virtually no correlation between these visual images and the actual descriptions of the Nile festival set forth in midrash. In short, these mosaics are to a great extent inconsistent with the midrashic texts.

The significance of the Nile mosaic in Sepphoris demonstrates the veneration of the Nile,<sup>51</sup> which was practiced even into the 5th century CE by Egyptian Christians. The theme of this mosaic in Sepphoris is a

51 See the excellent analysis by Zeev Weiss, "The Nile Festival Building and its Mosaic; Mythological Representations in Early Byzantine Sepphoris," *The Roman and Byzantine Near East* 3 (2002), 55-90, 69.

Nile festival (חג הנילוס), according to Dvorjetski and Segal,<sup>52</sup> who have an expertise in the history of the theater in antiquity. In their essay they mainly focus on the relationship of theatrical performances and festivals during Roman times, and the strong rabbinic opposition to such theatrical performances. Most of the variant readings that Dvorjetski and Segal utilized from different midrashic works are attested in the manuscripts of the above mentioned passage from Gen. Rab. Dvorjetski and Segal conclude that Gen. Rab. dates from the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century and matches the Byzantine era they discuss. Dvorjetski and Segal contend that the sources for the Nile festival in midrashic literature were the actual mosaics themselves that were found in the Land of Israel. However, several of these mosaics are located in churches and I doubt that the rabbis actually visited these sites. In my opinion, the rabbis probably had independent knowledge of the Nile festival other than the mosaics in the Land of Israel.

Another art historian, Yehudit Turnheim, discusses the origins of the Nilotic scenes in the Land of Israel and she claims that such scenes as the Nile Festival during Roman times were based on Hellenistic art from Egypt under the Ptolemies, the rulers of Egypt after the death of Alexander the Great. She writes: "The Nilotic motifs in the Roman world and in Eretz Israel, are however, not based on depictions from Pharaonic Egypt, but on Hellenistic works from the Ptolemaic period."<sup>53</sup> I suggest that such Hellenistic scenes in Egypt referred to by Turnheim were in all likelihood inspired by Pharaonic images; Hellenistic images in Egypt basically followed the syncretistic cultural patterns practiced by the Ptolemies, in which they combined Pharaonic material with Greek images.<sup>54</sup> There is ample evidence of Nilotic scenes from Ancient Egypt<sup>55</sup> that are comparable to the Nile mosaic in Sep-

<sup>52</sup> Dvorjetski and Segal, "The Nile Festival Mosaic."

<sup>53</sup> Yehudit Turnheim, "Nilotic Motifs and the Exotic in Roman and Early Byzantine Eretz Israel," in *Assaph. Section B: Studies in Art History* (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, Faculty of Fine Arts), vol. 7 (2002), 17-40, 22, made extensive use of previously published scholarship. She wrote: "It is evident that Nilotic motifs are indications of an Egyptian source. But despite the connections between Eretz Israel and Ptolemaic Egypt, which ruled the region in the third and early second centuries BCE, one may consider the appearance of Nilotic scenes in Eretz Israel to be the result of their dispersion throughout the Roman world in general" (p. 24).

<sup>54</sup> Turnheim, "Nilotic motifs," mentions a few scenes from Pharaonic Egypt, 33, n. 12.

<sup>55</sup> Rachel Hachlili, "Iconographic elements of Nilotic scenes," 115, refers to other scholarly work on the topic and mentions that the crocodile and the hippopotamus, which are found in some of the mosaics in the Land of Israel, were "the two most characteristic animals of Egypt."

phoris and the other Nile mosaics found in Eretz Israel.<sup>56</sup> The collective memory of Egypt was relevant in the choice of the icons depicted in the mosaics of the Nile festival found in the Land of Israel; Griffiths points out with regard to the basilica of Tabgha that “Jewish reminiscences of Egypt clearly contribute to these fine descriptions. They may derive from the early fifth century CE, but they probably transmit an earlier tradition ...”<sup>57</sup>

#### 4. *Mayoumas*: Roman Water Spectacle or Religious Festival?

A difficult term with ambiguous historical references is *mayoumas*.<sup>58</sup> The question may be asked: Do we have a cultural icon that points to either Roman or Egyptian customs that may be reflected in the term *mayoumas*? The rabbinic term *mayoumas* may refer to a mock sea battle,<sup>59</sup> an unspecified Egyptian festival,<sup>60</sup> a North African May festival involving water rituals<sup>61</sup> or a geographic location.<sup>62</sup> Mek., Beshallah 2 (Lauterbach, p. 119) describes it as an Egyptian festival:

[Tell the people to encamp in front of *Pi-ha-hiroth*] between *Migdol* and the sea (Exod. 14:2). There was the greatness of the Egyptians, there was their glory, there they celebrated their *mayoumas* festivals, there Joseph had

56 Scenes of marshland in the tomb of Hesi, Saqqara, 6th dynasty; fowling with a throw-stick in the Tomb of Henikem, Meir, 6th dynasty; cattle crossing the river with a crocodile lurking in the Nile as well as scenes of fish, a hippopotamus and a crocodile in the Tomb of Ankhmahor, Saqqara, 6th dynasty; a hippopotamus hunt in the Tomb of Idut, Saqqara, 6th dynasty. For depictions of these tombs as well as others, see Naguib Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond: Burial Customs of Egyptian Officials* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 2001).

57 J. Gwyn Griffiths, “The Legacy of Egypt in Judaism,” *CHJ* 3, 1025–51, 1037. Griffiths further states: “A tradition of Jewish art is doubtless behind the exquisite mosaics at the basilica of Tabgha on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee ...” (*ibid.*).

58 See Lorena Miralles Maciá, *Marzeah y th'asos: Una institución convivial en el Oriente Próximo Antiguo y el Mediterráneo* (Madrid: Publicaciones Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2007; Anejo xxx. Serie de monografías). I am grateful to the author for presenting me with a copy of her work.

59 *Encyclopedie Judaica* 11, 793, s. v. “Maiumas;” Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 2, 771, s.v. מַיּוּמָה, “a kind of mock sea fight,” and “Mayday;” Samuel Krauss, *Lehnwörter*, 1, 95.

60 Mek. Be-shallah 2, p. 190, Lauterbach ed.

61 Robert McClive Good, “The Carthaginian ‘mayumas’,” *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente Antico* 3 (1986), 99–114, discusses the development of this festival from Phoenician to Semitic sources; similarly, Lorena Miralles Maciá, “The Interpretation of the Word Marzeah in Rabbinic Literature.” (Paper presented at the SBL International Meeting, Vienna, 2007).

62 The seaport of Gaza was referred to as “Majuma” (see A. Ovadiah, “Gaza Maiumas,” *RB* 84 (1977), 418–22).

brought together all the silver and the gold, as it is said: *And Joseph gathered up all the money* (Gen. 47:14).

The term *migdol*, which in the Bible referred to a geographic location, may also refer to an architectural element, e.g., in the Temple of Ramses III at Medinet Habu, the *migdol* was a highgate or tower resembling an Asian fortress, through which a festival procession may have proceeded. Furthermore, pAn V.20 refers to a *migdol* at the time of Merneptah (1212-1205 BCE). The specific Egyptian festival is not recognizable; the Mekhilta may just have referred to a Roman festival in Egypt.

*Mayoumas* was utilized by the darshan in a mashal in the homily on the Ten Commandments in Pesiq. Rabbati 21, and may recall Hadrian or another Roman emperor. The Roman emperors at times flooded the Colosseum in Rome in order to stage mock sea battles as spectacles;<sup>63</sup> a connection between water passageways and *mayoumas* is also attested on the Madaba Map.<sup>64</sup> In Rome, water spectacles were facilitated by the construction of the Colosseum, known in antiquity as the Flavian Amphitheater, which was funded with spoils from the Jewish revolt of 66-70 CE. The Colosseum contained a system of tunnels beneath the arena floor, including passageways for gladiators, wild animals, and room for the theatrical machinery that was used during performances. The plumbing system that was used to flood the arena for water spectacles, including mock sea battles, was also installed within this subterranean substructure. The following text could refer to such a Roman spectacle and its derivations in the Roman world, although it is possible that the

63 The Colosseum in Rome was begun after 70 CE; see Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 150f., which contains a diagram of the edifice; John Pearson, *Arena: the Story of the Colosseum* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973); Leonardo Lombardi, "The Water System of the Colosseum," in *The Colosseum* (ed. Ada Gabucci; Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2001), 229-40, 229, 236, refers to mock naval battles in some amphitheaters in his explanation of Roman hydraulic technology.

64 The 6<sup>th</sup> century Madaba map refers to "Betomarsea otherwise known as Mayoumas;" Guadalupe López Monteagudo, "The Architectonic Models on the Madaba Mosaic Map," in *The Madaba Map Centenary 1897-1997. Travelling through the Byzantine Umayyad Period – al-Dhikrā al-mī'awiyah li-kharīṭat Madaba: khilala al-'asr al-Umawi al-Bizantī: Proceedings of the International Conference held in Amman, 7-9 April 1997* (ed. Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata; Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 1999), 256-58, refers to the building which is identified as *mayoumas*: "... another building, this one formed by three vaulted units, reminding us of the thermal structures in the Roman mosaics, and identified as Maiumas as well, appears in the Madaba Mosaic Map."

midrashic passage refers to another type of spectacle during May festivals, which also involved water:<sup>65</sup>

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א"ר יוזן נסיה בנווה שביעולם מלך בשור ודם כשהוא יוצא לימיום יוצא בהם בני אדם ובעשרה בני אדם כשהוא {נ} יוצא לכם בגינויו ובלגונות אבל ה' אין לנו אלא כשונגה על ים סוף לעשות מלחמתן של בני לא נראה להם אלא ייחיד יי' אש מלחמה [שמות ט ג] וכשריך ה' על הר סיני ליתן תורה לישראל יירדו עמו ומיכאל ודיניאל גבראל ונא יי' אלה ובל קדושה עמד<sup>66</sup> [זכירה יד ה]<sup>67</sup>

Pesiq. Rab. 21:24: R. Judah (II), the Patriarch, said: In the way of the world, when a prince of flesh and blood goes to a *mayoumas*, he goes with a multitude of men and with ten men, when he goes [to a real war], he goes with companies and legions. But the Holy One is not like this, but when He revealed Himself at the Reed Sea and fought the war of his children, He appeared to them only as one, [as it is said:] *the Lord is a warrior* (Ex. 15:3). When the Holy One came down to Mount Sinai to give the Torah to Israel, Michael and his cohort, Gabriel [came with him], *then the Lord, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with him* (Zech. 14:5).

The comparison in the above text is not a simple parable in which the ways of God are contrasted to the ways of an earthly king. Rather, the comparison is approached in two exegetical moves, one proposition states that an earthly king goes to war with a host, whereas God does not take a host along. The propositional content of the second exegetical move states that God is like an earthly king, since both go to their respective *mayoumas* spectacles with a host. The festival called *mayoumas* or *mayoumam* is likened to the giving of the Torah. Within the homiletic context, God is different from an earthly king, who takes companies and legions of soldiers with him into battle, while God fought the battle at the Reed Sea by Himself at the time of the exodus from Egypt. However, God is similar to an earthly king who takes many men along to attend a spectacle; God, who performed the spectacle of Revelation on Mount Sinai, was accompanied by cohorts of angels. The

65 Good, "The Carthaginian ...," 108, writes: "The festival featured a collective transport of water from a source to a sanctuary, possibly in connection with sexual rites, and perhaps in the context of a theatrical mystery." See also Zeev Weiss and Rina Talgam, "The Nile Festival Building and its Mosaics: Mythological Representations in Early Byzantine Sephoris," in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *The Roman and Byzantine Near East. Some Recent Archaeological Research*, vol. 3 (Portsmouth, RI, 2002, Journal of Roman Archaeology), 55-90, 71.

66 This should read: *מוי*.

67 The text contains several scribal errors; additionally, the text-witnesses are not helpful in providing a clear reading; "mayumam" could be a scribal error, not distinguishing between the Hebrew letters *mem sofit* and *samekh*. The parallels are also problematic; Sif. Num.131 on Num. 25,1f. utilizes the term "מרץ." See also Susan Ackerman, "A marzeah in Ezekiel 8:7-13," *HTR* 82 (1989), 267-81.

text expresses a comparison between God and earthly kings, such as Pharaoh during the crossing of the Reed Sea, or any Roman and Byzantine emperors during battles and spectacles. The midrash emphasizes that God performed some type of spectacle<sup>68</sup> during the Revelation at Sinai and this is visualized through the contemporary comparisons from Roman or Byzantine times that move the Biblical scenes forward in time.<sup>69</sup> The text in Pesiq. Rab. is almost unintelligible; even the late recension of the parable in Midrash Tehillim,<sup>70</sup> which is based upon Pesiq. Rab. or utilizes a similar source, does not clarify the term *mayoumas* any further.

## 6. Conclusion

The self-perception of the *darshan* within the Jewish community of “another time” (i.e., the time when a particular midrashic text was edited) may have led to the question, if the recipients of the midrash still saw themselves as the people of God, because they may have been tempted to engage in foreign festivals. The midrashic texts themselves allow one to draw tentative conclusions about what the rabbis knew in regard to Egyptian festivals. The Egyptians celebrated specific festivities associated with the Nile and the Pharaoh. Furthermore, the rabbis composed only fragmentary textual scenes of Egypt, including the Egyptian festivals, since the rabbis were not able to replicate the Romans in creating elaborate artistic depictions of Egypt and the Nile. Only in later illuminated Hebrew manuscripts do we encounter nu-

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68 Other rabbinic texts refer to this spectacle as “pompa” (Num. Rab. 12:4; Tanh. Naso 17; Pesiq. Rab. 5:32).

69 Ephraim Urbach, “The death of Joab: A Midrashic Interpretation of Political History,” *Binah* 1 (1989), 1-13, 2, noted in respect to the exegesis of a Biblical episode concerning King David that midrash moves forward to events “that were chronologicaly later, but which, for the viewer, have also become part of the past”; however, Urbach provides no further explanation of this “forward” function.

70 Midr. Ps. 18:17: “R. Judah (II), the Patriarch, said: In the way of the world, when a king of flesh and blood goes to war he takes his soldiers with him and when he goes to his *mayoumas* he takes his legions with him to assist him. But the Holy One, blessed be He, when He goes to war, He goes by Himself, as it is said: *the Lord is a warrior* (Exod.15,3), and when He goes to His *mayoumas* on Mount Sinai, see what is written: *myriads of thousands* (Ps. 68:18) of angels, and it is written: *then the Lord, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with him* (Zech. 14:5).” The rhetorical construction of this parable does not utilize the strategy of doubling the contrast between God and a king.

merous “Egyptianizing” scenes. Such illustrations are most familiar from the Haggadah for Pesach.<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, it could be argued that some of the Egyptian images in midrash merely reflect what an educated person in antiquity might have heard and read about Egypt. However, other images are too specific to fit this scenario. For example, the Egyptian god Anubis is referred to in some midrashim<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, it must be conceded concerning rabbinic knowledge of Ancient Egypt that one encounters great difficulty in isolating every detail, theme, motif or pattern in a given midrashic text as pertaining to a specific era of Egyptian history. Some Egyptian elements in the midrashim are from Roman and even Coptic Egypt, while other elements are from earlier Egyptian dynasties. This occasional lack of a detailed chronological correlation between Egyptian images and midrashic texts may raise some questions about the problems that arise when one compares cultural icons from different religious traditions.

As mentioned earlier in this book, the first inversion of Egyptian culture transpired in the Hebrew Bible itself. The second inversion of Egyptian culture emerged in the midrashic texts that utilized Egyptian cultural icons in the rabbinic interpretations of Biblical passages. For example, in Egypt, the Nile served as a supremely positive symbol of life and fertility, while in the midrashic texts the Nile is frequently transformed into a negative symbol relating to the destruction of Egypt. Furthermore, the Egyptian festivals discussed above had a negative connotation in midrash, because the midrashic writers perceived these festivals as idolatrous. Apparently, the rabbis had some knowledge of Egypt and its culture that they utilized to serve their own ideological purposes in the text. In their portrayals of Egypt, the rabbis presented details that were motivated by their own religious norms which were radically different from Egyptian religious practices. Although the rabbis had a basic knowledge of Egypt, the images of Egypt that we find in the midrashic texts were hermeneutical constructions created by the rabbis. Even though the midrashic links to the Egyptian past are cultural constructions, they have had a great significance in the development of Judaism and Jewish thought.<sup>73</sup>

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71 See chapter 10.

72 Exod. Rab. 20:19; Pesiq. Rab. Kah.11. See chapter 4.

73 In respect to Egypt, see Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs* (New York: Metropolitan, 2002), 11: "... the course of events forms the backdrop and the discourses generating and reflecting meaning occupy the front of the stage."

Table 1: The Distribution of the term **יום נילוס** in midrashic texts

“The Day of the Nile” (Nile festival) יום נילוס	Idolatrous Sacrifice ניבול/ זיבול/	Nile inundation גידול	Theater	Circus
Gen. Rab. 87:11	+	+	+	
Exod. Rab. (Shinan ed.) 11:11	+	+	+	
Song Rab. 1:1	+	+	+	
Pesiq. Rab. 6:2	+	+	+	+
Tanh, Vayeshev 9	+ בוחן של נילוס			
Midr. Aggadah		+		
Midr. Ha-Gadol on Bereshit 39:11	+		+	+



# Chapter Four: The Osiris Myth and Egyptian Magic

## 1. Introduction

Egypt was recognized as a major source of magic in rabbinic texts. The texts refer to the magic that was prevalent in Alexandria, and some rabbinic texts claimed that the origins of magic were to be found in Egypt,<sup>1</sup> a view that the rabbis shared with others, such as Clement of Alexandria.<sup>2</sup> Thus, viewing Egypt as the center of magical activities was a common idea in antiquity,<sup>3</sup> which assisted in the continuous creation of stereotypical views of Egypt and its culture. Any attempt to speak about magic in Egyptian or Rabbinic texts is, of course, limited by the application of the term “magic” from our own perspective and the fact that we have merely literary representations of magic in midrash. Contemporary western definitions of magic are deeply influenced by attempts already present in antiquity to differentiate magical procedures into those that are based upon “rational” explanations and those that are seemingly irrational and superstitious.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it seems a daunting task to construct a general theory of magic in antiquity in spite of the fact that there are similar evaluations of magic across different cultural and religious spheres. There are a few structural

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1 ‘Abot R. Nat. 48; Gen. Rab. 86:5; b. Šabb. 115b; b. Qid. 49b; Rivka Ulmer, “The Depiction of Magic in Rabbinic Texts: The Rabbinic and the Greek Concept of Magic,” *JStJ* 27 (1996), 289–303, 294. Generally, see Philip Alexander, “Incantations and Books of Magic,” in *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman; Edinburgh, 1983), vol. 1, 342–79.

2 According to Clement of Alexandria, Egypt was the mother of magicians (see Geraldine Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995], 47). John Chrysostomos, in his homily on Matt. 7:4, expresses similar views. See also Lucian, *Philopseudes* 34, who asserts that the culture of the Egyptians is expressed in their magical expertise.

3 Compare Origen, *Cels.* 1, 22.

4 See Dale E. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 15ff., in respect to the shifting attitudes as to what constituted superstition in antiquity. Similar developments and shifts in evaluating superstitions were present in the corpus of rabbinic writings from late antiquity.

analogies between the phenomena relating to magic, but these are also present in medieval and even later magical texts.<sup>5</sup>

Since our categories of magic are not easily applicable to rabbinic texts, I submit that the rabbis viewed magic as belonging to that area of human experience that we call religion, a term that was likewise unknown to the rabbis of the midrashic texts. The rabbinic texts do not provide a sophisticated theory of magic; rather, the apparatus of magic found in the texts depends on such theories without explication.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, rabbinic texts from different periods and different geographic areas approach magic from different perspectives and they have different nascent theories. Generally, we may observe that the rabbinic texts have a different agenda than the magical books; rabbis and their associates of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages compile, sort, and interpret traditions and laws that are apparently important to the transmission and revival of Judaism. The rabbinic texts neither follow the patterns provided by philosophical treatises<sup>7</sup> nor do they follow the conventions of contemporary scientific or natural histories. An approach describing the cultural phenomenon of magic in midrash as comparable to that in the culture of Greco-Roman<sup>8</sup> and Coptic Egypt<sup>9</sup>—a time that roughly parallels the inception of rabbinic Judaism and its major documents—offers possibilities of expanding our knowledge of magic in homiletical midrash.

5 For an excellent statement concerning the problematic definition of magic in antiquity, see Michael Becker, "Die 'Magie'-Problematik der Antike. Genügt eine sozialwissenschaftliche Erfassung?" ZRGG 54 (2002), 1-22; Becker, 21, writes: "Mit Blick auf die Antike darf keineswegs übersehen werden, daß daneben tiefgreifende strukturelle Analogien zwischen den als different charakterisierenden Phänomenen bestehen." See also Yuval Harari, *המגיה היהודית הקדומה: עייניהם מטודולוגיים ופונומנולוגיים* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Ph. D. Diss., 1998). An extensive list of titles relating to Jewish magic in antiquity and the definition of magic compiled by Scott Noegel may be viewed at <http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/jmbtoc.htm>

6 In particular, this is evidenced in the extensive pharmacopoeia, which utilized body fluids and other ingredients for magical purposes.

7 The famous case of Apuleius, who was accused of practicing magic, is discussed by Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (trans. F. Philip, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 84f., who remarks that for Apuleius the difference between magic and philosophy was similar to the difference between rural ignorance and education.

8 The term "Greco-Roman" refers to the alien culture in Egypt that led to syncretistic forms of religious expression in Ptolemaic Egypt (305-30 BCE) and Roman Egypt (30 BCE - 395 CE).

9 The Roman period partially includes the Coptic period (from the early 1st century until the 7th century CE).

Rabbinic Judaism as found in the midrashic corpus and related talmudic texts, merely conceptualizes magic as belonging to “permissible” or “prohibited” categories within the larger framework of halakhic formulation by utilizing this dichotomy on a sliding scale. As such, magic may have been forced unto the outer margins of the rabbinic religious system and magic rites may have been perceived to be deviant from most religious rites discussed by the rabbis. Often practitioners of magical arts were members of certain social classes and professions.<sup>10</sup> However, sacred figures of the Jewish tradition (such as Moses) and the intellectual elite (such as the rabbis themselves) are not criticized or condemned for practicing magic, possibly due to their alliance with a higher authority. Moses as a magician<sup>11</sup> is compared to God in a midrashic text; traces of this idea are found in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>12</sup>

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- 10 Georges Vajda, “Le magie en Israël,” in *Le Monde Du Sorcier* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966; Sources Orientales, vii), 127–53, 137, mentions the difference between the work of *shedim* (demons) and the work of magic (*keshafim*) as perceived by the rabbis. This comment is applicable to the Babylonian Talmud and to a lesser degree to midrashic texts. Magic was a more distinct category in Roman legal and philosophical thought; see Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001), 124f.
- 11 See Wayne A. Meeks, “Moses as God,” in *Religions in Antiquity* (ed. Jacob Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 1968), 354–71, 354, and Gary Rendsburg, “Moses as equal to Pharaoh,” in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis; Providence, RI: Brown University, 2006), 201–19, 201.
- 12 E.g., Exod. 4:16, in which God refers to Moses as a god to Aaron, and Exod. 7:1, which states that Moses will be made a god to Pharaoh; see also Philo, *Mos.* 1:158, according to Philo, Moses was a divine child at birth. A midrashic passage attempts to prove that Moses was like God; see Deut. Rab. 11:4 (compare *BM*, 121–22): “Another comment: *And this is the blessing* (Deut 33:1) ... R. Shmuel b. Nahman said: When Moses was going to bless Israel, the Torah and God likewise came to bless Israel. *And this is the blessing* refers to the Torah of which it is said, *And this is the law which Moses set before the Israelites* (Deut. 4: 44). *With which Moses blessed* (Deut. 33:1), this refers to Moses. *The man of God* (*ibid.*) refers to God, of whom it is said, *The Lord is a man of war* (Exod. 15: 3). And why all this? In order to fulfill Scripture: *And a threefold cord is not quickly broken* (Eccl. 4:12). Another comment: *And this is the blessing* (Deut. 33:1)—R. Tanhuma said: If Moses is referred to as ‘God,’ why [is he also referred to as] ‘man’, and if ‘man,’ why also ‘God’? The reason is the following: When he was cast into the river of Egypt, he was a man, but when the river was turned into blood, he was like God. Another comment: When [Moses] fled from Pharaoh he was a man, but when he caused [Pharaoh] to drown he was like God.” The quasi divine status of Moses in respect to his ability to perform magic, is probably implied by Josephus’s portrayal of Moses, *Ant.* 2.286, in an exchange between Pharaoh and Moses. It is Moses who states that his deeds are superior to those of Egyptian magicians, “in the same way as things divine are remote from what is human.” Louis H. Feldman, “Moses,” in *idem, Josephus’s Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 109.

Magic is sometimes considered to be star worship, foreign worship (idolatry) or Amorite practice.<sup>13</sup> This may be the reason that the centers of magic -- Egypt and Babylon -- were viewed to be geographically and ideologically external to the Land of Israel and Palestinian Judaism. Furthermore, magic might cast doubt on the idea of an omnipotent God. Magical activity in midrashic texts is often channeled through Judaizing expressions, or, the activity is spiritually connected to the divine. For example, one may observe substitutions of names, "Jewish" names for non-Jewish names, and substitute ingredients that derive from the local markets for foreign and "exotic" ones. Mainly, rabbinic attempts at defining magic are adaptations of the Biblical categories that are part of the forbidden practices in Exodus 22:17 and Deuteronomy 18:9-14;<sup>14</sup> there is relatively limited creativity in respect to the invention of new practices of magic and the analysis of the phenomenon of magic in midrash.

In Egypt, we have at least a term, *heka*, *hq3*,<sup>15</sup> (Coptic: *hik*),<sup>16</sup> a cosmic force that refers to magic or to ritual power. (Fig. 10)<sup>17</sup> *Heka* was a force

nia Press, 1998), 374-442, 428f., mentions that Moses acknowledges the "cunning" of the magicians; Josephus, according to Feldman, uses rationalization, relating Moses' powers to divine providence (*prónoia*).

- 13 Ulmer, "Depiction," 293; similarly, unacceptable magic in Egypt was performed by foreigners.
- 14 Deut. 18:9-14: *When you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or who uses divination, or a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord; and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. You shall be perfect with the Lord your God. For these nations, which you shall possess, listened to soothsayers, and to diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you so to do.*
- 15 The restrictive use of the term was probably an invention of German Egyptologists; in Egypt, as in most religious cultures of antiquity, magic and religion were inseparable. Herman Te Velde, "The God Heka in Egyptian Theology," in *Jaarbericht ... van het Vooraziatisch Egyptisch Genootschap; Ex Oriente Lux*, vol. 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1969-70), 175-86, discusses *Heka* as the god called "eldest magician." Magic was certainly part of the Egyptian religion and as such it may be characterized as performative religion. The Egyptian embalmers, who are often referred to as sorcerers in biblical and midrashic texts, were secretive; they whispered during the embalming ceremony and they did not communicate with others about their professional activities.
- 16 Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1993; SAOC 54) states: "The shift from pharaonic *hq3* to Coptic *hik* represented far more than a linguistic development. If the Coptic pairing of *hik* and *magia* opens the way for the legitimate use of the term 'magic' in Egyptology, it must not be forgotten that this equation entailed the adaptation of native terminology to accommodate a Roman category further transformed by Christian belief." (P. 236)

holding the universe together; it could be represented by a divine entity, the god *Heka*<sup>17</sup> and additionally by the god Thot, who is said to have possessed *heka*. However, even Egyptian magic,<sup>19</sup> was quite fluid and it changed under the influence of Hellenism and Christianity with their ensuing syncretism of forms and rituals.<sup>20</sup> Egyptian magical practices became widespread in the Mediterranean world in late antiquity, with Egyptian gods found in spells and curses outside Egypt.<sup>21</sup> In Egypt priest and magician were overlapping performatory categories and they were the same cult functionaries;<sup>22</sup> as such they fulfilled the social norms of Egyptian society.<sup>23</sup> The Jewish historian Josephus was correct, when he wrote that Egyptian priests practiced magic and thus gave expression to Egyptian wisdom.<sup>24</sup> Magicians<sup>25</sup> became a separate category of practitioners and replaced priests only later and in a presumably less literate society,<sup>26</sup> although in most cases the combined identities

17 Heka (Tomb of Ramses I) (Ulmer).

18 For a depiction of *Heka*, see the Tomb of Ramses I, Valley of the Kings. I would like to emphasize that the concepts of pharaonic Egypt were in continuous usage even in Coptic Egypt, albeit in Christian garb.

19 Adolf Erman, *Die Religion der Ägypter, ihr Werden und Vergehen in vier Jahrtausenden* (Berlin: Reimer, 1934); Theodor Hopfner, *Griechisch-Ägyptischer Offenbarungzauber*, 2 vols. (StPP 23; Leipzig: H. Haessel, 1921-1924); Erik Hornung, *Das esoterische Ägypten. Das geheime Wissen der Ägypter und sein Einfluss auf das Abendland* (Munich: Beck, 1999); László Kákosy, *Zauberei im alten Ägypten* (Budapest: Kadémia Kadó, 1989); Ritner, *The Mechanics*. Some of the major collections of Egyptian texts, which are magic texts from our perspective, are found in pHarris (Hans O. Lange, *Der magische Papyrus Harris*, Copenhagen, 1927).

20 Joachim Friedrich Quack, "Kontinuität und Wandel in der spätägyptischen Magie," *SEL* 15 (1998), 77-94, 89.

21 Graf, *Magic*, 5. Katarina Nordh, *Aspects of Egyptian Curses and Blessings: Conceptual Background and Transmission* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis 26; Upsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1995).

22 Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, 9, differentiates between the following types of magic in Egypt: funeral magic, ritual magic of the temples, and everyday magic; however, she concedes that magic was performed by priests.

23 See Robert Ritner, "Egyptian Magical Practice under the Roman Empire: the Demotic Spells and their Religious Context," in *ANRW*, Vol. XX.2, 3333-79, 3354.

24 Josephus, *Ant.* 2.286.

25 Important Egyptian performers of magic included the *sem* (lector) priests.

26 In respect to Egypt, especially later, Roman Egypt, see Pinch, *Magic*, 49f., 58, and based upon her, David Frankfurter, "Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt and the Problem of the Category 'Magician,'" in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium* (ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 115-36, 119f.

of priest and magician continued to exist until late antiquity.<sup>27</sup> Jan Assmann emphasizes this intersection between magic and theology in Egypt, and that it is impossible to set the Egyptian *heka* into opposition with religion.<sup>28</sup>

For the purposes of this investigation, Egyptian magic in midrash is defined as the utilization of rituals that purport to take place in an Egyptian context or that are similar to Egyptian magic rites. Generally, a ritual recreates in the present, actions which happened in the past; thus, a magical rite that was successfully performed can be repeated with renewed force. We may define ritual as the language of religion; this definition applies even more to magic which is based to a large extent upon linguistic performance.<sup>29</sup> I suggest using a pragmatic approach to the appearance of Egyptian magic in midrash that is informed by semiotics. There seems to be a conflation of the discourses of religion and magic in midrashic texts; we may only speculate under which circumstances this occurred and if a rabbinic theory of magic was involved. Due to these factors, and because midrash seems to have incorporated Egyptian magical practices, I am applying my method of a cross-cultural reading of the texts from an Egyptological perspective, focusing upon performative rites (magic) and the Horus-Osiris myth. This analysis results in the description of common patterns of mediated knowledge of the “Other.”

## 2. Joseph’s Burial in the Nile and the Burial of Osiris

The Biblical Joseph, who, according to the Bible and midrash, experienced an extraordinary career in Egypt, was buried twice, first in Egypt and subsequently in the Land of Israel.<sup>30</sup> At the time of the Ex-

27 Zosimus of Panopolis (3rd-4th century CE) claimed that Egyptian priests were knowledgeable in alchemy.

28 Jan Assmann, “Magic and Theology in Ancient Egypt,” in *Envisioning Magic*, 1-18, 2f.

29 Ulmer, “Depiction,” 293.

30 Joseph’s death and the embalming of his corpse in Egypt is mentioned in Gen. 50. *And Joseph said to his brothers, I die; and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath from the people of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here. So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt* (Gen. 50:24-26). Joseph’s burial in Canaan is mentioned in Josh 24: 32: *And the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of silver; and it became the inheritance of the sons of Joseph.* However, the so-called “small Genesis” in Jub. 46:9 states that the Israelites brought

odus from Egypt it was Moses<sup>31</sup> who was confronted with the task of finding the coffin of Joseph in Egypt, and Moses utilized magic to raise the coffin. This was either improvised magic or magic based on oral and literary traditions with fixed formulae and utensils. The midrashic texts (s. Table 2) provide two separate legends in respect to Joseph's coffin:<sup>32</sup> (1) Joseph in his coffin had a proper Egyptian burial; (2) Joseph's coffin is located at the bottom of the river Nile. In particular, this latter motif is close to motifs extant in the Egyptian Osiris myth, since Osiris was buried in the Nile; additionally, the double burial of Joseph in Egypt and in the sacred earth of the Promised Land is reminiscent of the Egyptian god Osiris who was buried twice as well. The midrashic text in Exod. Rab. 20:19 reads:

מןין היה משה ידע היכן היה יוסף קבור "א סרחה בת אשר הראה אותו והיה קבור בנילוס מה עשה משה וכו'"

ו"א בتوزק הפלטרין היה קבור בדרך שהמלכים קבורים

How did Moses know where Joseph was buried? Some said that Serah bat Asher showed him the place in the Nile where he was buried ... Others say that he was buried, like the kings, in a mausoleum.<sup>33</sup>

The midrashic textual unit about Joseph's burial, similar to the Egyptian kings, refers to the royal "mausoleum;" the text witnesses<sup>34</sup> of this passage contain different readings for this term, which may also be translated as "palace" or "capitol." Whether this is supposedly Memphis or the necropolis on the Western Shore of the Nile in ancient

out all the bones of Jacob's sons, except Joseph's bones. Josephus, *Ant.* 2.195-200, states that the bones of Joseph were carried away to Canaan much later, when the Hebrews left Egypt.

31 Exod. 13:19 *And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him; for he had solemnly sworn the people of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and you shall carry up my bones from here with you.*

32 Joseph Heinemann, אגדות ותולדותיה: עיונים בהשתלשותהן של מסורות (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), 49-61, 49, adds a third version that is found in Samaritan texts.

33 In Midrash Rabbah (Vilna: Romm, 1938, repr.). Ilona Skupinska-Lövset, *Funerary Portraiture of Roman Palestine: An Analysis of the Production in its Culture-Historical Context* (Gothab, 1983), 356, mentions that occasionally in Roman-style burials a mausoleum with a domed central room was used in the Land of Israel throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE and later.

34 Mek. (Lauterbach ed.), 177: editio princeps, Constantinople 1515: הקייפיטולין; 2nd edition, Venice 1545: קייפיטולין; Mek. (Horovitz/Rabin ed.), 78f., list similar differences. In regard to b. Sotah 13a "קברנית," see Michael Sachs, *Beitraege zur Sprach- und Alterthumsforschung: aus juedischen Quellen*, 2 pts. (Berlin: Veit, 1852-1854), pt. 1, 55. He emends "קברנית" (Labyrinth); this would place Joseph's tomb in the Fayoum "labyrinth" of the Middle Kingdom. Test Simon 8:3 states that the bones of Joseph were kept in the tombs of the kings.

Thebes or a more contemporary mausoleum in Roman Alexandria is left open. The specific location is irrelevant, because Joseph's burial in a manner similar to that of the pharaohs merely emphasizes his importance in Egypt.<sup>35</sup>

The first part of the midrashic narrative, namely that Joseph was "buried" in the Nile, is clearly reminiscent of the Egyptian Osiris myth. The presence of the Osiris myth in midrashic texts has been recognized since the 19th century;<sup>36</sup> however, some of the earlier conclusions in respect to this topic should be challenged and additional components need to be considered. Judah Goldin,<sup>37</sup> Gideon Bohak<sup>38</sup> and I<sup>39</sup> have also referred to the Osiris myth from the perspective of magic.<sup>40</sup> We thus find that in several midrashic texts remnants of the Osiris myth are applied to the recovery of Joseph's bones and coffin, which are sup-

35 Osiris was also buried with the kings of Egypt, i. e., the early kings in Abydos.

36 Jakob Horovitz, *Die Josephserzählung* (Frankfurt a. M.: Kauffmann, 1921), 125-29, *passim*, presents a thorough investigation of the biblical Joseph in midrashic and related literature. Other interpreters of the coffin legend include: Bernard Heller, "Die Sage vom Sarge Josephs und der Bericht Benjamins von Tudela über Daniels schwebenden Sarg," *MGWJ* 70 (1926), 271-76, 271; *idem*, "Egyptian Elements in the Haggadah," in *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, pt. I (ed. Samuel Löwinger and Joseph Somogyi; Budapest, 1948), 412-18, 414f. Moritz Güdemann, "Joseph-Osiris," *Religionsgeschichtliche Studien* (Schriften des Israelitischen Literatur-Vereins 2; Leipzig: Oskar Leiner, 1876), 26-40. Based upon the work of Güdemann, Heinemann, תורת נזקן ותורת חיה, 53, refers to the Osiris myth in very general terms in a short chapter about Joseph's bones. James L. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 137, cites Güdemann and Heller. Arthur Marmorstein, "Egyptian Mythology and Babylonian Magic in Bible and Talmud," in: *Dissertationes in honorem dr. Eduardi Mahler ...* (Budapest, 1937), 469-87, 470, assumes that a popular folk tale and magical elaborations were used in the midrashic legend.

37 Judah Goldin, "The Magic of Magic and Superstition," in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 115-47.

38 Gideon Bohak, "Rabbinic Perspectives on Egyptian Religion," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 2 (2000), 215-31, 220f.

39 Rivka Ulmer, "Visions of Egypt in Rabbinic Bible Interpretation." (Paper presented at SBL Annual Meeting, Session: Egyptology and Ancient Israel Section, Atlanta, 2003); "Visions of Egyptian Magic in Midrash: Moses and the Retrieval of Joseph's Coffin." (Paper presented at a Conference at Bucknell University: Rabbinic Judaism [February 22nd, 2004]); "Egyptian Magic and the Osiris Myth in Midrash," *Midrash and Context* (ed. Lieve Teugels and Rivka Ulmer; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), 165-208.

40 Heinemann, תורת נזקן ותורת חיה, 49, does not mention any magical activity; he utilizes the term "miracle working" in regard to Moses.

posed to travel with the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan.<sup>41</sup> However, there are many variants and conflations of the so-called “Osiris myth” in Ancient Egypt and in Greco-Roman antiquity; additionally, the Horus myth was merged with the Osiris myth.<sup>42</sup>

If we examine the elements of the Osiris myth, we find that the major motifs are extant in the Pyramid texts,<sup>43</sup> the oldest written Egyptian documents (3<sup>rd</sup> millennia BCE). Osiris’ son, Horus, together with Isis and Nephthys, Osiris’ sisters, search for the body of Osiris, who had been murdered. Horus finds his father and is able to revive him; “To say it is Horus; he is come to reclaim his father, Osiris N. ...” (Pyr. T., 1335a). The god Osiris experienced a complicated development in many different locations. Originally, Osiris was a god who represented the fertility of the earth, but many attributes of other gods were attached to him as well.<sup>44</sup> His cult in Busiris in the Nile delta merged forms of a local god from ‘Andjety with Osiris. Osiris rivaled Ra’ of On (Heliopolis); Osiris became a member of the original nine Egyptian gods (*psd .t-ntrw*) as the son of Geb and Nut; thus, he also emerged as the brother of Isis,<sup>45</sup> Nephthys and Seth. Additionally, the falcon-bodied Horus became Osiris’ son. In Memphis Osiris was syncretized with the gods Sokaris and eventually with Ptah and the features of the Osiris myth which related to his kingdom on earth became dominant in the Memphite theology, while simultaneously he became the god of the dead. In Abydos Osiris gradually suppressed the god Chontamenti, the

<sup>41</sup> Tanh, Beshallah 2:5; Eqev 6:5 Mek., Beshallah, Petihta (Horovitz/Rabin ed.); Deut. Rab. 11:5 (Vilna: Romm, 1887); Pesiq. Rab. Kahana 11:5; Midr. Petirat Moshe in *Bet ha-Midrash*, 1, 115-16; Midr. *Shir ha-Shirim*, Grünhut ed., 13a-b; Mid. *Agadah* 13; Pesiq. Zut. Shemot 13:19; *Divre Ha-yamim shel Moshe*, *Bet-Ha Midrash*, 2, 10-11; Perek R. Yoshiahu, *Bet Ha-Midrash*, 6, 112-113 (and the reprinted texts of these midrashic works in OM); *Midrash Ha-Gadol*, *Bereshit* on Gen. 50:24; Yalq. 1, 226 Beshallah *pasim*; t. *Sotah* 4:7 (Lieberman ed.; Zuckerman ed., 299-300) and the version in b. *Sotah* 13a; *Bereshit Rabbati*, Va-yehi 264; Tg. Ps.-J. *Exod.* 13:19, Gen. 50:26. Table 3 has a list pertaining to the narratives in different texts.

<sup>42</sup> J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride: Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: University of Wales Press, 1970), 18; Griffiths works with the variants of the Egyptian myths that relate to Osiris, Isis, and Horus in order to discover Plutarch’s sources; for example, Griffiths mentions that Plutarch used sources of extremely varied chronological origin, 38.

<sup>43</sup> However, these texts do not offer a coherent mythology because they are performative texts and as such consist of spells to be recited by the deceased king [pharaoh]. The texts are found in several pyramids (Pyramid Texts).

<sup>44</sup> See J. Gwyn Griffiths, *The Origins of Osiris and his Cult* (Leiden: Brill, 1980); Jan Bergman, *Ich bin Osiris: Studien zum Memphitischen Hintergrund der Griechischen Isiatalogien* (Uppsala, 1968).

<sup>45</sup> LÄ 3, 203, s. v. “Isis;” and 4, 623-33, s. v. “Osiris.”

"prime among the Western beings," as the god of the dead and the necropolis.<sup>46</sup>

Plutarch composed the most elaborate version of the Osiris myth.<sup>47</sup> According to the myth in Plutarch, Isis and Osiris descend to earth to civilize Egypt, introducing agriculture and laws. Isis and Osiris are so successful in civilizing Egypt, i.e., the people of the Nile valley, that Osiris goes away to teach the rest of the world to be civilized.<sup>48</sup> At this juncture in the myth, we may observe the concept of the diffusion of civilization from Egypt to other lands. While Osiris is away, Seth tries to do harm to Egypt. However, Isis, the sister-wife of Osiris, is very powerful, because she is in possession of magic; her epithet is "she who knows all the names."<sup>49</sup> This means that she knows the "secret" names of humans, e.g., the Egyptian king's secret name. Isis is able to control her evil brother, Seth, through magic spells, and as a result Egypt is protected from disaster.

Eventually, Osiris returns; however, Seth is always scheming.<sup>50</sup> While Osiris is sleeping Seth takes his physical measurements and he builds a wooden chest to Osiris' exact proportions (resulting in an anthropoid coffin). At a banquet Seth tricks Osiris and promises a prize to anyone who exactly fits into this chest; guest after guest tries, but it does not fit. Finally Osiris tries and it fits him, but Seth nails the chest shut, and pours molten lead on the coffin and throws it into the Nile.<sup>51</sup>

46 Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 33, states: "At the time when Plutarch wrote his book, the god Osiris and his circle had been worshipped for two and a half millennia."

47 Plutarch, *Is. Os.* (LCL), chs. 12-20. Although Plutarch had based his work on literary works relating to Egypt, he changed and added Greek motifs and re-interpreted the myth; see Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 48, who writes: "By way of contrast, many of his interpretations are intensely Greek, and they derive principally from two traditions, the Neo-Platonic and the Stoic." Additionally, there are Gnostic as well as Iranian elements in Plutarch.

48 According to Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 53, this is a reflection of a Hellenistic image of Dionysus. We find that Diodorus Siculus attributes to Osiris a particular role in the civilization process; Osiris is said to have developed agriculture and viniculture which he planned to teach humanity (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 1.54.1-5).

49 For example, pTurin, 133, 1 (and pChester Beatty, 11).

50 Joachim Spiegel, *Die Erzählung vom Streite des Horus und Seth in Pap. Beatty I als Literaturwerk* (Glücksburg, 1937); A. H. Gardiner, *The Library of A. Chester Beatty. Description of a Hieratic Papyrus with a Mythological Story, The Chester Beatty Papyri*. No. I (London, 1931), pl. 1-16; see also Herman Te Velde, *Seth: God of Confusion* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 107.

51 Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 13.356C: "Then Osiris got into it and lay down, and those who were in the plot ran to it and slammed down the lid, which they fastened by nails from the outside and also by molten lead. Then they carried the chest to the river and sent it on its way to the sea through the Tanitic Mouth. Wherefore the Egyptians even to

Osiris dies in the chest. It is noteworthy that in Ancient Egypt there was no contradiction involved in someone being a god and dying. The Nile flows northwards toward the Mediterranean and carries the chest along. The chest washes ashore in Byblos,<sup>52</sup> and it is blown by a storm into the branches of a tree.<sup>53</sup> The tree grows to tremendous proportions, encompassing the chest in the trunk. The King of Byblos plans to build a palace and he needs large trees for pillars and roof beams, and the same tree is cut down and incorporated into the palace. It becomes a pillar, but Isis, the devoted wife of Osiris, sets out on a journey to recover his body. She finds out where Osiris is located. Isis works as the handmaiden of the queen of Byblos<sup>54</sup> and speaks to the queen and explains that Osiris is in the pillar of the palace. The queen lends her ear to Isis and the pillar is cut down. The dead Osiris is in the pillar. Isis brings the body back to Egypt for proper burial, but Seth, who is conniving, finds the properly buried body of Osiris and cuts it into fourteen (*Papyrus Jumilhac*: twelve) pieces,<sup>55</sup> and scatters them up and down the Nile. Isis searches for the body parts. There are different places where the pieces are buried. Isis, wanting to give her husband a proper burial, finds the pieces with the help of her sister, Nephthys.<sup>56</sup> According to Plutarch, they find almost all of the pieces of Osiris; however, the phallus is missing.<sup>57</sup> It had been thrown into the Nile and was devoured by three fish. Isis reassembles the body, and fashions an artificial phallus for Osiris.<sup>58</sup> However, according to *Papyrus Jumilhac*,<sup>59</sup>

this day name this mouth hateful and execrable." Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 311, mentions that "[t]he detail of the Plutarchean episode is not, however, paralleled." Nevertheless, Griffiths continues to enumerate related Egyptian motifs; pHarris 8.9-9.14, concerning a giant entering a shrine of certain measurements; Pyr. T., 184a-b, state that Osiris is "He who is in the chest ...;" furthermore, Griffiths states: "The story recorded in Plutarch recalls depictions of the god in or on a sarcophagus..." (*ibid.*).

52 One would expect that this element in the myth is a later interpolation, e.g., Siegfried Herrmann, "Isis in Byblos," ZÄS 82 (1958), 48-55, states that this legend is not part of the Egyptian myth. However, Hellmut Brunner, "Osiris in Byblos," *Revue d'Egyptologie* 27 (1975), 37-40, finds hints at this location in earlier Egyptian texts, dating well before Plutarch. Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 54, 321, discusses some of the motifs in Plutarch that may be considered as "un-Egyptian embellishments."

53 Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 322f., discusses this tree ("Erica").

54 See Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 326.

55 Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 55, 339, emphasizes the Egyptian origin of this motif.

56 Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 256, Isis is known for her wisdom and her magical powers.

57 Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 17.357F.

58 Griffiths, *Plutarch*, 18, 358B. In addition, in order for resurrection to transpire, the body had to be complete, even if artificial limbs had to be made by the embalmers.

the phallus of Osiris is discovered. Isis is able to reverse the decomposition of Osiris' body, and she uses magical spells and breathes life into Osiris.<sup>60</sup> There are many scenes in Egyptian temples<sup>61</sup> depicting Isis taking the form of a bird, hovering over her husband. Osiris is "resurrected" (i.e., revived), and as the resurrected one he becomes the god of the dead. Many Egyptian funerary beliefs may be traced to this myth, in particular to the motif of the mourning of Isis and her sister, Nephthys.<sup>62</sup>

It is crucial to Isis to recover the body and bury it on Egyptian soil; there is something special about Egyptian soil. Nobody wanted to die outside of Egypt; the deceased were brought back to Egypt, mummified, and buried. In addition, there seemed to have been the belief that there was a container for the body that was going to preserve it; every human being had that special coffin, if the body was completely intact and buried in Egyptian soil, then, like Osiris, a person would be resurrected and enter the next world.<sup>63</sup> Thus, a coffin was the most important and most consistent item of funerary equipment in Egypt. The myth continues in various ways in the different textual traditions; Osiris has a son, Horus,<sup>64</sup> who battles his evil uncle, Seth.<sup>65</sup> In Plutarch, the

59 pJumilhac 4.20 (ed. J. Vandier, 1962). This papyrus from the Greco-Roman period contains among other myths the Osiris myth as it was known in a local variant in Upper Egypt.

60 Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 63, states: "The joyous reaction to the finding of Osiris and to his revival after death is amply evident in Egyptian texts of all periods."

61 For example, in Abydos. See also Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 328, and the discussion of Isis as a bird.

62 The mourning of Isis and Nephthys is also found in the Pyr. T. 1280c f.: "Isis bewail thy brother! Nephthys, bewail thy brother!" This motif was part of the Greco-Roman descriptions of Isis and it was reenacted in public performances (cf. Apuleius, *Metam.* 11).

63 The belief that human beings were to be resurrected as gods, specifically Osiris, was "still alive when Christianity took root in the Nile Valley" (Christian Cannuyer, *Coptic Egypt: The Christians of the Nile* (New York: Abrams, 2001), 12; in respect to Osiris in Coptic Egypt see also Claus Wessel, *Coptic Art* (trans. from the German by Jean Carroll and Sheila Hutton, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 93.

64 Hermann Kees, *Horus und Seth als Götterpaar*, 2 vols. (Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-aegyptischen Gesellschaft 28; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1923-24), 1, 89. Horus also continued in different appearances into Coptic Egypt; for example, the representations of Jesus standing on crocodiles in the Alexandrian funeral niches, which is a Christianizing interpretation of the god Horus (see Alexander Badawy, *Coptic Art and Archaeology: the Art of the Christian Egyptians from the Late Antique to the Middle Ages* [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978], 20). There are depictions of Horus and Thot drawn in the Egyptian composite projection (*idem*, 230f.), Tomb chapel at Hermonpolis West, 11 CE

brother of Osiris is named Typhon<sup>66</sup> and the son, Harpocrates, not Horus, is born after the death of Osiris.<sup>67</sup> One of the important messages that is conveyed in the battle is that Horus defeats Seth; however, two important events take place: Horus' eye is taken out in the battle and it is magically regenerated. In the Pyramid texts (591b) the myth is presented in a different order: (1) in a conflict between Horus and Seth, Horus lost his eye; after his eye has been restored Horus presents the healed eye to the dead king (pharaoh); (2) Osiris is identified with the dead king and Seth becomes the enemy of Osiris; (3) Isis and Nephthys are searching for Osiris.<sup>68</sup> Although Horus defeats Seth, he does not kill him. On a wall of the Temple in Edfu, a hippopotamus that represents a form that Seth has taken<sup>69</sup> is shown on a very small scale compared to the figure of Horus who spears Seth. The idea behind this depiction may be that by reducing evil its power becomes limited, which is a magical practice.

In my opinion, a more sophisticated understanding of the elements of the Osiris myth as found in midrashic texts would not only rely upon the version in Plutarch, but also explore earlier,<sup>70</sup> albeit scattered, Egyptian versions of the myth.<sup>71</sup> Generally, the midrashic texts are closest to the Egyptian Horus myth which we find partially on the walls of

65 ANET 3, 14, "The Contest of Horus and Seth." The filial piety of Horus is "on solid Egyptian ground" (Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 55).

66 Additionally, Nephthys is the wife of Typhon, but is impregnated by Osiris; she abandons her son because she is afraid of Typhon. Isis together with Anubis search for the child, Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 12-19, 38f.; see J. Gwyn Griffiths, *The Conflict of Horus and Seth from Egyptian and Classical Sources; a Study in Ancient Mythology* (Liverpool: Liverpool University, 1960), 101.

67 Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 19, 358D: "Typhon formally accused Horus of being an illegitimate child, but with the help of Hermes to plead his cause it was decided by the gods that he also was legitimate. Typhon was then overcome in two other battles. Osiris consorted with Isis after his death, and she became the mother of Harpocrates, untimely born and weak in his lower limbs."

68 See Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 34.

69 Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 52, mentions that in Plutarch (50, 371D) Typhon changes into a crocodile; this may be seen as an Egyptianizing tendency in Plutarch.

70 Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 103f.: "Although [Plutarch] was writing a little before A.D. 120 at a time when demotic had long been in use and less than a century before the emergence of Coptic, all Plutarch's allusions to written modes are to hieroglyphic, and his etymologies and derivations seem often to involve a much earlier phase of language than that current in his own day."

71 I would prefer to refer to the versions as "cycles," because they are part of myths that focus upon different heroes and different locations; in respect to the Temple in Dendera, see Horst Beinlich, "Zwei Osirishymnen," *ZÄS* 122 (1995), 5-30, who translates the texts on the roof that mention many Egyptian nomes, e.g., Heliopolis, Busiris, etc.

the ambulatory of the Temple in Edfu (early 1st century BCE)<sup>72</sup> (Fig. 11)<sup>73</sup> and in Papyrus Jumilhac (Greco-Roman period) (Fig. 12).<sup>74</sup> The problems of identifying any Egyptian paradigm of the Osiris myth in midrash are multiplied by the fact that the Egyptians did not have a canonized body of religious texts and that religious ideas were spread through a multitude of texts over many centuries. However, the Osiris myth was ancient and it was wide-spread in the Greco-Roman era,<sup>75</sup> probably because in Egypt the Osiris cult spread after the New Kingdom, in particular from the 22nd dynasty<sup>76</sup> onwards, with many local shrines.<sup>77</sup> The different Osiris tombs were venerated until the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>78</sup>

If we review the literary elements of the Osiris myth and the literary elements of the midrashic texts in respect to Joseph's burial, we may perceive certain similarities. In midrashic texts, Joseph in his coffin was thrown into the Nile by the Egyptians or more specifically by the Egyptian magicians. In the Osiris myth, Osiris is trapped by his brother Seth in a coffin, which is enclosed in lead before it is thrown into the Nile. The midrashic texts frequently mention that Joseph's coffin was made of lead or metal before it was thrown into the Nile by the magicians. Mainly a single detail in several of the midrashic texts, Joseph's metal coffin, resembles Plutarch's elaborations of the myth,<sup>79</sup> although some Egyptian funerary shrines were covered in metal (gold). One late version of the midrashic legend<sup>80</sup> states that the Egyptian magicians

72 Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 38, states: "Egyptian temple inscriptions of the Ptolemaic era ... are linguistically archaic and may well incorporate much earlier traditions." Ptolemy VIII is depicted as offering a pectoral to Osiris, Edfu, outer hypostyle, north wall.

73 Edfu, ambulatory (Horus spearing Seth, depicted as a hippopotamus) (Ulmer).

74 Horus spearing crocodile, Ptolemaic, c. 300-30 BCE (22.39 "Horus Spearing the Enemy, Anonymous, Egyptian, 332-27 BC, limestone." Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum).

75 pOxyrhynchus XI. 1380 contains an Isis hymn that shows elements from the Osiris myth; see also Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 1.13-27.

76 945-715 BCE.

77 Marco Zecchi, *A Study of the Egyptian God Osiris Hemag* (Archeologia e Storia della civiltà egiziana e del vicino oriente antico 1; Imola: Editrice la mandragora, 1996).

78 For example, the Temple in Philae and the Osireion in Abydos. Originally, there may have been one burial place (Abydos). The burial of Osiris in different places is mentioned and documented by Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 340f.

79 See Table 3. Lead was not a highly valued metal in Egypt; it was often used as a sounding lead, see Wolfgang Helck and Eberhard Otto, *Kleines Wörterbuch der Ägyptologie*, 67, s.v. "Blei." The use of lead in Roman coffins is well-attested (see D. White, "Eschatological Connection between Lead and Ropes as Reflected in a Roman Imperial Lead Coffin in Philadelphia," *IEA* 49 (1999), 66-81).

80 Midr. Petirat Moshe, *Bet Ha-midrash*, 1, 115.

sealed Joseph's coffin on its four corners. In at least one Egyptian version of the Osiris myth preserved in Papyrus Jumilhac, the god Osiris was said to have been drowned in the Nile; Griffiths mentions that in later periods "death by drowning was blessed because it was like the death of Osiris."<sup>81</sup> A water ritual<sup>82</sup> showed Osiris' recovered body being carried by Seth. One magical technique that might be applicable to the midrashic story is hydromancy;<sup>83</sup> after all, Moses is attempting to locate Joseph and his coffin in the water of the Nile and Moses is casting magical paraphernalia into the Nile. Moses' action is somewhat similar to the Egyptian water ritual.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, Moses is said to have carried Joseph's coffin on his back out of Egypt just as Seth carried Osiris.

It was a customary funerary rite to carry the coffin of the deceased in a boat on the Nile. If this was the case, Osiris' body would have been borne by a ship to its funeral; this rite would have been consistent with the midrashic account of Joseph's coffin floating on the Nile. Alternatively, the floating on the water could refer to Osiris in the so-called "floating" position,<sup>85</sup> which is assumed by him after the application of magic. (Fig. 13)<sup>86</sup> The Egyptian king becomes Osiris in the funerary cult. Horus, the son of Osiris, was the living king<sup>87</sup> and the father, Osiris, was the dead king. The major episode in the Osirian myth is the revivification of the deceased god. In the midrashic texts, Moses was the living leader and Joseph was the dead leader. However, it is noteworthy that neither Osiris nor Joseph were truly resurrected.<sup>88</sup> Osiris continued as the god of the dead and Joseph was to be reburied.<sup>89</sup>

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81 Griffiths, *Origins*, 9.

82 Griffiths, *Origins*, 160.

83 Goldin, "Magic," 126, mentions that hydromancy would require that a stone be cast into the sea and that counting would take place; this type of magic would be ruled out by the rabbis because it would resemble the forbidden ways of the "Amorites."

84 In Exod. Rab. 1:18 the Egyptian astrologers predict that Israel's savior would be drowned in water.

85 For example, depictions of Osiris in a floating position are found in the late temples at Dendera and Philae, see Trygge N. D. Mettinger, "*Dying and Rising Gods*" in the *Ancient Near East* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), 173.

86 Philae, Tomb of Osiris (Floating Osiris) (Kurt Aram, Magie und Zauberei in der alten Welt [Berlin: Deutsche Buchgemeinschaft, 1927], p. 232).

87 Griffiths, *Origins*, 3.

88 Osiris became the god of the netherworld; he did not return to the land of the living.

89 A comparison of Joseph to the Egyptian or Greco-Roman god, Serapis, is found in b. 'Abod. Zar. 42a; additionally, Isis was compared to Eve (see chapter 7).

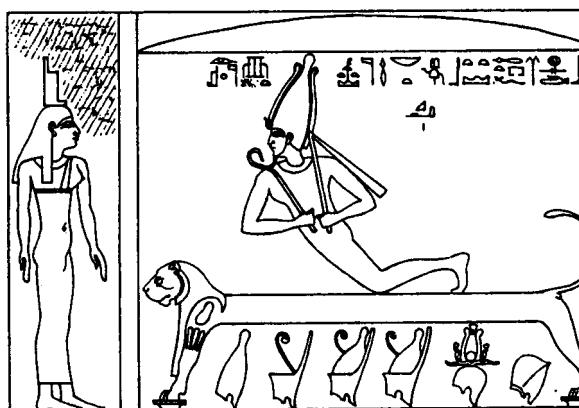


Fig. 13. Philae, Tomb of Osiris (Floating Osiris).

According to a talmudic passage, dumping the coffin of Joseph into the Nile by the Egyptians was done in order to bless the land with fertility, which was greatly dependent upon the Nile:

b. *Sotah* 13a: [But how did Moses] know where Joseph was buried? It is told that Serah bat Asher was a survivor of that generation. Moses went to her and asked: Do you know where Joseph was buried? She said to him, The Egyptians made a metal coffin for him and cast it into the river Nile in order to bless its waters ...

A midrashic text, Deut. Rab. 11:7,<sup>90</sup> also has the element that depositing Joseph's coffin in the river was done to make the Nile more fertile, as a source of fruitfulness for the land. The rising of the coffin is compared to the sprouting of a "stalk of reed" אַרְוֹנוֹ שֶׁל יוֹסֵף מִפְעָפָע וּשְׁוֹלָה. The "stalk" of reed strongly suggests a connection to Osiris, because the link between life after death and the sprouting of plants in the agricultural cycle is epitomized by Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead.<sup>91</sup> Osiris, who was also the god of vegetation, was frequently painted green.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Osiris was frequently depicted with plants sprouting from his mummy, because he was closely associated with germinating grain.<sup>93</sup> (Fig. 14)<sup>94</sup>

<sup>90</sup> See also Yal. 1, 227 *Beshallah*; 1, 965 *Ve-zot ha-berakhah*.

<sup>91</sup> Coffin texts 3, 744

<sup>92</sup> See, e.g., the paintings in the Tomb of Horemhab, Valley of the Kings.

<sup>93</sup> E.g., in a vignette in pJumilhac and in the Philae Temple.

<sup>94</sup> Philae, Tomb of Osiris (Sprouting Osiris) (Kurt Aram, *Magie und Zauberei in der alten Welt* [Berlin: Buchgemeinschaft, 1927], p. 233).

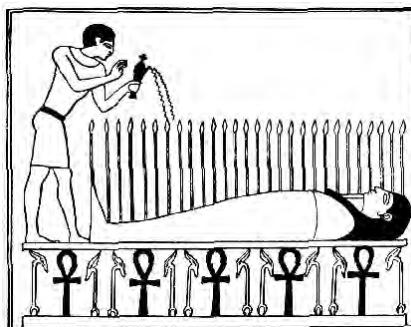


Fig. 14. Philae, Tomb of Osiris (Sprouting Osiris).

Deut. Rab. 11:7:<sup>95</sup> And why did Moses merit that the Holy One, Blessed be He, should busy Himself with his burial? Because when He went down to Egypt and the time for the redemption of Israel had come, all Israel were busy (gathering) silver and gold, but Moses was walking through the city, and for three days and nights he was trying to locate Joseph's coffin, since the Israelites could not leave Egypt without Joseph. Why? Because he bound them by oath before his death, as it is said, *And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel saying, etc.* (Gen. 50:25). When Moses had become extremely tired, Serah bat Asher met him and seeing that he was tired she said to him: My lord Moses, why are you tired? He said: For three days and nights I have been walking through the city to locate Joseph's coffin, but I cannot find it. She said to him: Come, I will show you where it is. She brought him to the river and said to him: This is the place where the magicians and astrologers made a coffin of five hundred talents for him and cast it into the river; they said to Pharaoh: If it is your wish that this people should never leave, then as long as they will not find the bones of Joseph, they will be unable to leave. Immediately Moses placed himself by the bank of the river and shouted: Joseph, Joseph, you know how you swore to Israel, *God will surely remember you* (Gen. 50:25); honor the God of Israel and do not delay the redemption of Israel; you have good deeds to your credit. Intercede with your Creator and come up from the depths. Immediately Joseph's coffin began to break through the water and to rise from the depths like a stalk of reed. Moses took it and placed it upon his shoulder and carried it, and all Israel followed him. And while the Israelites carried the silver and gold which they had taken away from Egypt, Moses was carrying Joseph's coffin. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: Moses, you say that you have done a small thing; by your life, this act of kindness is a great thing; since you ignored the silver and the gold, I will do unto you this kindness in that I will busy Myself with your burial.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Bereshit Rabbati, Va-yehi 264, has a slightly embellished version of this midrash.

<sup>96</sup> Another midrashic passage points out that Moses carried boards for the construction of the future Temple, while the Israelites carried gold and silver (Gen. Rab. 94:4).

Serah bat Asher appears in several texts relating to the retrieval of Joseph's coffin. In my opinion, it is not plausible to compare her to either Isis or Nephthys of the Osiris myth.<sup>97</sup>

### 3. Moses the Magician

The above passage in Deut. Rab. 11:7 may reflect the idea of the Biblical Exodus account that Moses was more powerful than the Egyptian "magicians," and additionally that Moses could "undo" their magic by performing neutralizing water rituals. Midrash follows the Biblical example of equating the *hartumim* (e.g., Exod. 9:11) with magicians, but adds the term "astrologers," a more Romanized term.<sup>98</sup> One element in the Osiris myth is the seeking and finding of the deceased; e.g., Isis looking for the coffin. In midrash this may be accompanied by the fear of abandoning an ancestor, as exemplified by leaving Joseph's bones in Egypt. The rabbinic text may have been influenced by the Osiris myth by envisioning a proper burial for Joseph. The appeal of Moses to Joseph to rise from the Nile is similar to the appeal of Isis,<sup>99</sup> the wife of Osiris, for her husband to rise. Isis used magic incantations to revive Osiris, e.g., "I am Isis, the goddess, the possessor of magic, who performs magic ..."<sup>100</sup> Moses also used magic to raise Joseph's coffin from the Nile.

The conviction that Moses was a magician<sup>101</sup> was wide-spread in antiquity.<sup>102</sup> Pliny even defines a school of magic related to Moses,

<sup>97</sup> However, Moritz Güdemann, "Mythenmischung in der Hagada," *MGWJ* 5 (1876), 177-95; 6 (1876), 225-31; 7 (1876), 255-61, 231, compares Serah bat Asher to Isis and offers an etymology of the name נָשָׁה; according to him, the name is based upon "Osiris" ("the daughter of Asher" becomes "the daughter of Osiris").

<sup>98</sup> In respect to the meaning of the biblical term *hartumim*, which is related to the term "chief lector priest" in a particular manner of spelling reflected in the Hebrew Bible, see Jan Quaegebeur, "On the Equivalent of Biblical Hartummim," in *Pharaonic Egypt, the Bible, and Christianity* (ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll; Jerusalem, 1985), 162-72, and Hans Gödicke, "Hartummim," *Orientalia* 65 (1996), 24-30, 26.

<sup>99</sup> The Isis cult continued into Coptic Egypt; see Wessel, *Coptic Art*, 93, 99.

<sup>100</sup> Metternich Stela (C. F. Sander-Hansen, *Die Texte der Metternichstele* [Analecta Aegyptiaca VII, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1956], 6, 59, p. 41: "Ich bin Isis, die Göttliche, Herrin der Zauberkraft, die die Zauberkraft verübt, die ausgezeichnet an Beschwören ist, sodaß jede beißende Schlange mir gehorcht."); see also *ANET* 3, 12ff.

<sup>101</sup> See, for example, Graf, *Magic*, 5ff.; Georg Luck, *Magie und andere Geheimlehren in der Antike* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1990), 14, 53; Moses is still viewed as a magician, see Andreas B. Kilcher, "The Moses of Sinai and the Moses of Egypt: Moses as Magician in Jewish Literature and Western Esotericism," *Aries* 4,2 (2004), 148-70

namely Jannes, Lotapes and “the” Jews.<sup>103</sup> In Acts of the Apostles it is stated: “So Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and acts.”<sup>104</sup> This recognizes that Moses had magical powers and presupposes his Egyptian education; similarly, Jesus is thought to have received his education as a magician in Egypt.<sup>105</sup> That Moses was one of the most powerful magicians is claimed by Apuleius.<sup>106</sup> The Egyptian god Thot,<sup>107</sup> who possessed magi-

<sup>102</sup> John G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (SBLMS, 16; Nashville: Abingdon, 1972); see also *idem*, “Moses the Magician: Hero of an Ancient Counter-Culture?” *Helios* 21 (1994), 179-88.

<sup>103</sup> Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 30.2.11; this passage also mentions Jannes and Lotapes. In regard to Pliny, see, Stephen Gero, “The Enigma of the Magician Lotapes (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 30.11),” *JStJ* 27 (1996), 304-23; Charles C. Torrey, “The Magic of ‘Lotapes,’” *JBL* 68 (1949), 325-27. In midrash, the chief magicians accompanying Pharaoh are called Yohāney and Mamre (*Exod. Rab.* 9:6; compare b. *Menah* 85a); Pharaoh’s magicians were among the mixed multitude joining the Israelites (*Tanh*, printed edition, Ki Tis-sa 19); consequently, Egyptian magic may have followed the Israelites during the Exodus. Pharaoh’s magicians, who competed against Moses, are mentioned in 2 Tim 3:8. This competition between Moses and Pharaoh’s magicians continues in different texts, e.g., Eusebius, *Praep. ev.*, 9.8, supposedly relying upon Artapanus, mentions that these magicians were able to overcome the disease that Moses allegedly brought upon the Egyptians; Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 27:9 (*Origenes Matthäuserklärung* [ed. E. Klostermann; Berlin: Akademieverlag, 1976]) mentions the magicians as well. Origen, *Cels.*, 1.26, implies that Moses was a teacher of magic. The Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres tells the Exodus story from an Egyptian perspective in a retrospective account dating to the Greco-Roman period. When Jannes was called to Pharaoh, he matched the feats of Moses; see Albert Pietersma, *The Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres the Magicians: P. Chester Beatty XVI (with new Editions of Papyrus Vindobonensis Greek inv. 29456+ 29828 verso and British Library Cotton Tiberius B.v.f. 87)* (Religions in the Greco-Roman World, 119; Leiden: Brill, 1994). Pietersma provides a list and a discussion of the different names of these magicians, 38f., in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin. The names appear as Jannes and Mambres in Tg. Ps.-J. *Exod.* 1:15; 7:11; *Num.* 22:22.

<sup>104</sup> Acts 7:22. Philo, *Mos.* 1.6, mentions that Moses received an Egyptian education in science, art, and philosophy. The power of Egyptian magic is acknowledged in Philo, *Mos.* 1.92, and in Josephus, *Ant.* 2.284. Among the numerous passages asserting that Moses was educated in Egypt, Philo, *Mos.* 1.21, specifically mentions that Moses learned Hieroglyphs and (Philo, *Mos.* 1.24) both “Chaldean and Egyptian astrology.” See Louis H. Feldman, “Philo’s View of Moses’ Birth and Upbringing,” *CBQ* 64 (2002), 258-81; and *idem*, “Josephus’ Portrait of Moses,” *JQR* 82 (1991-92), 285-328, 83 (1992-93) 7-50, 301-30. See the “instruction” which Moses received in Ezekiel the Tragedian (3<sup>rd</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE), *Exagoge* 36-38, in Ton Hilhorst, “And Moses was Instructed in All the Wisdom of the Egyptians’ (Acts 7.22),” in *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luitjikhuijsen* (ed. Anthony Hilhorst and George H. Van Kooten; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 153-76, 162.

<sup>105</sup> Origen, *Cels.* 1, 28, in the words of Celsus; Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 93.

<sup>106</sup> Apuleius, *Apol.* 90, in comparison to Jannes.

cal powers,<sup>108</sup> in the form of Thot-Hermes<sup>109</sup> or Hermes Trismegistus, was occasionally identified with Moses as well.<sup>110</sup> Moses is mentioned in the Greek Magical Papyri<sup>111</sup> (e.g., PGM XIII.1060); the Papyri include a book of instruction in magic ascribed to Moses.<sup>112</sup> In addition to the visions from late antiquity of Moses as a magician knowledgeable in the Egyptian mysteries, the Bible portrays Moses as a magician,<sup>113</sup> in

- 107 With respect to Thot, see W. J. Tait, "Theban Magic," in *Hundred-gated Thebes: Acts of a Colloquium on Thebes and the Theban area in the Graeco-Roman period* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 169-82, 174, mentions the so-called *Setna* text which is a text about a magical book owned by Thot. This book itself had magical power, 175; the *Setna* text is found in Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 3. Thot is also found on Jewish amulets from the Greco-Roman period (see, e.g., E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* [New York: Pantheon Books], 2, 269-84).
- 108 The *Book of the Dead*, 18, contains a list of calamities which were averted by Thot in order to save Osiris.
- 109 Artapanus in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.27.3. This extended also into Syriac literature, e.g., Michael the Syrian. See also Luck, *Magie*, 57. Gerard Mussies, "The interpretatio Judaica of Thot-Hermes," in *Studies in Egyptian Religion Dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee* (ed. M. Heerma Van Voss, D. J. Hoens, G. Mussies, et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1982), 89-120, refers to Eupolemus in Eusebius, *Praep ev.*, 9, 17,9. One may note that Mussies found many similarities between Moses and Thot in addition to their supposed authorship of magical writings, e.g., 110, Thot came forth from the Nile (as represented in the Book of the Dead). Moses also "came forth" from the Nile.
- 110 See the Hermetica, 1st-4th century CE (ed. Walter Scott, *Hermetica. The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus* [Boulder: Hermes House, 1982]); Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 23.
- 111 According to Assmann, "Magic and Theology ...," 17, "the magical discourse of the greco-egyptian papyri is fundamentally different from that of the traditional Egyptian sources," because they reflect domestic applications of magic. However, Daniel Sperber, "Some Rabbinic Themes in Magical Papyri," *JStJ* 16 (1985), 93-103, did find similarities to Jewish magic in some papyri; see also Dieter Betz, "Jewish Magic in the Greek Magical Papyri," in *Envisioning Magic*, 45-63.
- 112 PGM VII, 620; Graf, *Magic*, 6, mentions this "didache" of Moses (pAnastasi), in addition to the *Eighth Book of Moses* from the mid 4th century, which is found in the pAnastasi 6; see also Morton Smith, "The Eighth Book of Moses and How it Grew (PLeid. J 395)," in *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, 2 vols. (ed. Shaye Cohen; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 217-26.
- 113 Moses and his brother, Aaron, are viewed as possessing magical powers in Exod. 7:9-12, 20-22; 8:2-3; 13-14. See Alfred Hermann, "Der Nil und die Christen," *JAC* 1 (1958), 30-69, 44, who mentions Moses' magical powers over the Nile; Scott B. Noegel, "Moses and Magic: Notes on the Book of Exodus," *JANES* 24 (1997), 45-59; John Van Seters, "A contest of magicians? The Plague stories in P.," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells; Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 569-80.

particular as a magician, who had power over the Nile. The unique magical powers of Moses are presupposed in the midrashim that refer to the retrieval of Joseph's coffin from the Nile. There is no attempt in the midrashic texts about the coffin legend to relate Moses to other late antique practitioners of magic,<sup>114</sup> including those that are mentioned in talmudic literature. There is no further development in the midrashic portrayal of Moses as a magician. Moses simply performs rituals that are common in Egyptian magic.

An analysis of the magical elements in the midrashic passages from an Egyptian perspective would include the following: incantations, pebbles, sticks, tablets, pottery, and dogs. Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 11, Vayehi Beshallah (Mandelbaum ed., 187-188) reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֵת עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ ... וְכֵן לְהֹדִיעַ שְׁבַחוּ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה שֶׁבַח 'עַזְקָן בְּבִיה' ...  
וְמֹשֶׁה עֲסֻוק בְּעֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף הָד', הַיְאָכֵת וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֵת עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ מִה הַוָּא עִמּוֹ אֶר'  
יוֹחָנָן עִמּוֹ בְּמַחְנָה לְוַיה מֵי הַוְּדִיעָה לְמִשְׁאָה אַיִּכְן הַיְהוָה יוֹסֵף קַבּוֹר אָמָרָה שְׁרָח בְּתַאֲשֶׁר הִיְתָה  
בָּאוֹתוֹ הַדָּרוֹ אָמָרָה לְמִשְׁאָה מִשְׁאָה בְּנִילָס הַנְּהָר לְלִכְדָּן מֹשֶׁה וְעַמְּדָן לְעַל נִילָס הַנְּהָר  
...  
וְאָמָר יוֹסֵף יוֹסֵף הַגְּעָה הַשְׁעָה שְׁהַקְּבָה" הַגָּאֵל אֶת בְּנֵי ...

הַשְׁכִּינָה מְעוֹכְבָת לְךָ יְשָׁר' מְעוֹכְבֵי, לְךָ עַנְנִי בְּבוֹד מְעוֹכְבֵין לְךָ אִם מְודִיעַ אֶת עַצְמַךְ הָרִי אָנוּ  
נְקִים מְשֻׁבּוּהָה שְׁהַשְׁבָּעָתָה אֶת אֶבֶוּתֵינוּ מִדְ צָפָן אֶרְוֹנוֹ שְׁלִוּסְיָה ...

*Moses went and took the bones of Joseph with him* (Ex. 13:19). Moses went and stood over the river Nile and said: Joseph, Joseph the time has come that the Holy One, Blessed be He, will redeem his children ...

The wording "Moses stood over the river" recalls the midrashic reading of Gen. 41:1, in which Pharaoh is standing over the river, meaning that he had power over the Nile (and the supposed Nile god).<sup>115</sup> This Pharaonic posture is ascribed to Moses. Moses calls out the name of Joseph twice. Doubling words could be a magical repetition; it is attested in the Magical Papyri. In the context of the resurrection of the dead doubling words is mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud<sup>116</sup> that calling the names of the deceased is a means of raising the dead from their tombs. Many magic spells in the Magical Papyri describe how to make a god appear and respond to questioning; this may be compared to the rebukes and questions that Moses addresses to the deceased Joseph in the Nile. The calling out or questioning by Moses may incidentally be consistent with the Egyptian idea of the dead as merely sleeping at the location of the burial.<sup>117</sup> Drowning in the Nile assigned a sacred, divine status to the dead in Egypt; it was common practice to

<sup>114</sup> Such as blood-letters (b. Git. 69a) and barbers (Eccl. Rab. 1:22).

<sup>115</sup> Eccl. Rab. 5:1.

<sup>116</sup> b. Sanh. 65b.

<sup>117</sup> *Am Duat* (Erik Hornung, *Das Amduat*. 2 pts. (AA 7; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963).

mention these drowned people in magic spells. If the coffin story is considered to include the element of raising the dead, the question could be asked, whether the raising of Joseph's coffin involves an act of necromancy.<sup>118</sup> Moses attempts to speak to a dead person; however, Joseph does not communicate verbally with Moses, whereas the purpose of necromancy is to retrieve verbal messages from the dead. Moses' attempt to receive an answer is somewhat reminiscent of the mouth-opening ceremony that was performed on Egyptian mummies.<sup>119</sup> Additionally, Moses is not only credited with raising Joseph from the Nile, but also the dead Israelite children that were thrown by Pharaoh into the Nile.<sup>120</sup>

The midrashic texts provide the text of the spell that Moses used to raise Joseph's coffin; it is rare that such an incantation is preserved in rabbinic texts, which usually avoid the exact wording and paraphrase the spells with "he said what he said" and the action with "he did what he did."<sup>121</sup> In the midrashic texts additional aspects of Moses' adjuration of Joseph are mentioned. For example, the adjuration contains an accusation of "sins" against the Israelites.<sup>122</sup> Similar accusations are found in renditions of the Egyptian scenes concerning the judgment of the dead.<sup>123</sup> If Joseph does not rise, he would impede the future re-

118 Jonathan Seidel, "Necromantic Praxis in the Midrash on the Seance at En Dor," in *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World* (ed. Leda Ciraolo and Jonathan Seidel; Leiden: Brill/Styx, 2002), 97-106.

119 The Opening of the Mouth ceremony served to re-animate the mummy during the seventy day interval between death and burial; after the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE there were Books of Breathing that imply new life is granted to the dead based upon divine decrees.

120 Gen. Rab. 97:4: "R. Levi said: The wives of the Israelites conceived sixty myriads of children in one night; they were all cast into the Nile, but they came up again through the merit of Moses. This is meant when he said, *The people, among who I am, are six hundred thousand men at my foot* (Num 11: 21)— they all came up at my foot. R. Zakkai the Elder derived it from this verse, *And let them increase like fish in the midst of the earth* (Gen. 48:16). As there were sixty myriads in the midst of the earth, so there were sixty myriads in the domain of the fish. Since they did not die in the midst of the earth, so they did not die in the domain of the fish [in the Nile]."

121 b. B. Mesia 107b; b. Soṭah 22a: "the magician mumbles and does not know what he says."

122 This is somewhat reminiscent of the genre *Letters to the Dead* that flourished mainly before the 13th century BCE (Sir Alan H. Gardiner and Kurt Sethe, *Egyptian Letters to the Dead* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1928).

123 Reinholt Merkelbach, "Diodor über das Totengericht der Ägypter," ZÄS 120 (1993), 71-84, refers to the travels of Diodorus Siculus through Egypt in 56 BCE; p. 75, the deceased is placed upon water, i.e., on a pool or container of water, while humans accuse him. The embalmers were artisans that would be classified as γραμματεύς (the supervisor), ταφασχίστης (the cutter, who opened the body), and ταφιχευτά (the

demption of Israel. The midrashic texts contain the following elements of rebuke of Joseph in Moses' incantation: not fulfilling an oath, delaying redemption, disturbing the appearance of the Shekhinah and the clouds of glory, etc.:

Deut. Rab. 11:7: Joseph, Joseph, you know how you swore to Israel, God will surely remember you; honor the God of Israel and do not hold up the redemption of Israel; you have good deeds to your credit. Intercede then with your Creator and come up from the depths.

This may be an inversion of the Egyptian incantation of attributing impious acts to an adversary -- the so-called magical "transfer" situation that is found in numerous texts in Egypt. In the alternative, it could be an inversion of the negative confession of the deceased in Egypt, which listed prohibited acts that the dead did not commit during their life.<sup>124</sup> In the above text Moses cites the "good deeds" of Joseph.

Many Egyptian magic spells began with the invocation of divine beings,<sup>125</sup> because the magician hoped to emulate the creative power of authoritative utterances. Additionally, the magician who knew the name of a god or a goddess, such as Isis, could require their assistance. Isis used magic to force the god Ra to reveal his secret name, and she used magic to cause him to suffer from fiery poison. Isis claims that if she knew his secret name, the poison would dissipate quickly.<sup>126</sup> The spells in midrash resemble the Egyptian *dd* (*djed*, statement), which refers to magical words utilized by Egyptian magicians. The midrashic texts disclose a double incantation, one at the Nile and the other at the royal cemetery. The purpose of Moses' incantations is to raise Joseph; there are numerous Egyptian litanies that address the same request, among the sources is the Book of the Dead,<sup>127</sup> in which it is said: *ts tw* "raise yourself." One of the incantations<sup>128</sup> utilized in midrash is per-

(the one responsible for preserving the mummy), 73; Reinhold Merkelbach, "Porphyron über das Totengericht der Ägypter," *ZÄS* 127 (2000), 181-82, has further additions to the judgment scenes.

124 *Book of the Dead*, 125. The Book of the Dead was placed in the tomb; Goodenough compared this to the Jewish custom of placing sacred texts in the tomb (Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, vol. 3, fig. 821).

125 Pinch, *Magic*, 70.

126 NET, 12-14; pTurin, 131-132.

127 *Book of the Dead*, 168.

128 Tanḥ Beshallah 2; Jacob Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* (Cincinnati,: Hebrew Union College Press, 1931-1935), Genizah fragments, a fragment of Midrash Tanhuma, 116; Bereshit Rabbati, vayehi, 264; OM, 1, 202a. Compare Rashi on Exod. 32:4. Zohar, Shemot 46a, reflects the legend: "Some say that Joseph's coffin was in the Nile and Moses removed it from there by the power of the Holy Name; he also said: Rise, oh ox! The time of the redemption of Israel has come. Some say that

plexing: Moses adjures Joseph and says: ‘aleh shor, “rise, oh ox.”<sup>129</sup> Although the identification of the bulls Apis and/or Serapis with Joseph is a common theme in Jewish and early Christian literature, I do not perceive this connection in this adjuration.<sup>130</sup> If vocalized differently, the lemma from Gen. 49:22, a problematic verse, is read ‘aley shur, “above the wall.”<sup>131</sup> It contains a lemma (*aley ayin*) that is used to

his body was buried among the kings of Egypt, and had to be removed from there. Others say that his body was put into the Nile in order that the Egyptians should not practice idolatry, and that Serah, the daughter of Asher, showed Moses the exact spot where it lay.” Tanh, Ki tissa 19, printed edition, refers to the coffin legend: “[Moses] took the tablet on which he had written ‘Rise, oh ox!’ when he raised Joseph’s coffin...” In this retold version Moses utilizes the same tablet for another purpose.

- 129 Joseph is described as “a bullock” or “an ox” in Moses’ farewell speech: *The firstling bullock of his herd, grandeur is his, and his horns are like the horns of a wild ox; with them he shall push the people together ...* (Deut. 33:17).
- 130 The identification of Joseph with Serapis is known in antiquity and later (e.g., Suidas, *Lexicon*, sv. Σάραπις), Mussies, Gerard, “The Interpretatio Judaica of Serapis,” in *Studies in Hellenistic Religions* (ed. M. J. Vermaseren; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 189–214; Horovitz, *Josephserzählung*, contains a very extensive discussion of Joseph as Serapis, esp. 120–28. Most of this early work of Horovitz parallels the excellent survey by Mussies. See the additional, older literature: Sachs, *Beitraege zur Sprach- und Alterthumsforschung*, pt. 2, 99; Gudemann, “Mythenmischung,” 255; Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: JTS, 1962), 136–38, 138, n. 87. Serapis was an embodiment of Osiris, and Joseph was identified with Osiris in midrashic texts (see chapter 7). However, the midrashic resemblances of Joseph to Osiris in the Horus and Osiris myths have little in common with Osiris-Apis, i.e. Serapis. Additionally, the identification of Joseph as a bull with the Apis bull is questionable in the midrashic texts about the coffin legend. Mussies, “Interpretatio Judaica,” 212, concludes that there is no connection between Joseph and Apis. The equation of Joseph with the bull is found in the Church Fathers. Mussies states, 193, that the identification of Joseph with Serapis dates at least from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Mussies refers to Melito of Sardis as the earliest Christian source (before 190 CE): “The Egyptians worshipped Joseph, a Hebrew, who was called Serapis, because he supplied them with sustenance in the years of famine” (*ibid.*) In my opinion, the equation of Joseph with Serapis is in all likelihood based upon Manetho’s etymology of Osarsyph (Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.238, relates it to Osiris in Heliopolis). We may also note “the aged Osiris” at Heliopolis. Giuseppe Veltri, *Eine Tora für den König Talmai: Untersuchungen zum Übersetzungsverständnis in der jüdisch-hellenistischen und rabbinischen Literatur* (TSAJ 41; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1994), 69, mentions that the identification of Serapis with Joseph [in b. ‘Abod. Zar. 43a] could have derived from the identification of Joseph with a bull, since Serapis was a designation of the divine Apis bull in Memphis; furthermore, this identification of Joseph with a bull is inherent in a passage in Deut. 33:17. However, I agree with Mussies; there is a difference between the bull (ox) Joseph in the Hebrew Bible and Joseph as Serapis, the god who may have the shape of a bull.
- 131 The term “shur” appears in Exod. 15:22 and refers to a landscape, the wilderness of Shur. The term could also be associated with “the line of forts that defended Egypt’s

demonstrate that Joseph is “above the eye,” i.e., he is protected from the evil eye.<sup>132</sup> Recovering through magic spells something that has been thrown into the Nile is found in Ancient Egypt<sup>133</sup> and it may be related to Moses’ ability to perform magic involving water, which is found in the Bible as well as in our passage.

In addition to orally pronounced incantations, Moses is described as throwing magical paraphernalia into the Nile or writing incantations or the Tetragrammaton<sup>134</sup> on different media. Depending on the manuscript consulted, different objects were cast into the Nile. Mek. de-Rabbi Yishmael has a “stone”<sup>135</sup> that Moses cast into the Nile (Ms Oxford 151, Neubauer, from 1291). “Moses wrote the Tetragrammaton on a golden tablet” (MS Munich 117 from c. 1435);<sup>136</sup> see Table 2.

Inscribing a magical golden tablet or leaf is a practice familiar from the Magical Papyri:<sup>137</sup> “I call upon you, the one on [corrected by Morton Smith: “in”] the gold leaf, before whom the unquenchable lamp contin-

frontier;” this phrase is listed as one of the possible meanings entertained by some scholars referred to by James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 188. I think this term may have referred to another Egyptian title of Joseph, referring to some type of overseer of the frontier reports.

132 See Rivka Ulmer, *The Evil Eye in the Bible and in Rabbinic Literature* (Hoboken, NJ: KTav, 1994), 166.

133 Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1, 216f. In pWestcar (17th century BCE) a lector priest recovered a lost object from a pond by parting the waters; see also Serge Sauneron, “Le monde du magicien Égyptien,” in *Le Monde Du Sorcier*, 27-65, on retrieving lost jewelry from a lake, which he relates to Moses at the Red Sea, 52: “Il prononça à quelque mots magiques, puis il plaça une moitié de l'eau du lac sur l'autre moitié, et il retrouva le bjou qui reposait sur un tesson ; il alla le chercher, de sorte qu'il fut restitué à sa propriétaire ...”

134 Eccl. Rab. 3:11 mentions the power of the letters of the Divine Name. A plate with the Tetragrammaton is referred to as one of the magical paraphernalia utilized by Balaam (Num. Rab. 20:20).

135 צַרְוָר (Mek., Lauterbach ed., 1, 176). In my judgment, a stone was a common medium in the magic. The cursory discussion of the Mekhilta passage by Hans-Jürgen Becker, “The Magic of the name and Palestinian Rabbinic Literature,” in *Talmud Yerushalmi*, vol. III (ed. Peter Schäfer; TSAJ 71; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 391-407, contains several errors. Becker translates צַרְוָר as “bundle.” *Tseror* in this context means “pebble” or “stone;” magicians often used stones to perform magic. Becker bases his further arguments on the passage from MS Munich (in the Lauterbach ed. of the Mek.), which mentions the gold tablets. According to Becker, this is a singular passage in rabbinic literature. However, we may note some parallels (see Tanh, printed ed., Be-shallah; Pesiqta Zutarta, Shemot 13:19, which state that Moses utilized a “pebble” that he throws into the Nile); some passages mention the writing by Moses on a “stone,” a “tablet” or a “pottery shard” and other solid media (cf. Table 3).

136 See also Goldin, “Magic,” 127: “[he] engraved on it the Ineffable Name ...”

137 PGM IV, 1215.

ually burns, the great God ...” (p. 61).<sup>138</sup> More specifically (PGM XIII.899), cites the engraving of gold or silver lamella. The Magical Papyri also mention tablet charms (e.g., PGM VII. 925) and they often state that spells had to be written on metal tablets, lamella, made from metals, such as gold or lead.

Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 11, Vayehi Beshallah.

ויש אוי גטל חרס וכותב עליו שם המפורש והשליכו ליאור מיד צף ועליה ארונו של יוסף [כ:] ע”ג המים] וההוו תמן תרין כלבין דוחרין שרון [צ: בין השיטין הונה י”ד] [נבחן במשה אם' משה ענמא אתון חמיין כלבון דקושט', לא נבחין וכלבון דשקרא נבחין א”ר יודן לפם דהדין כלבנא מליחית בלשינה ברם הכא ולל בני ישך' לא יחרץ כלב לשונו (שמות יא:ז) ...

Others say that Moses took a pottery shard, wrote the Tetragrammaton upon it, and tossed it into the Nile. Immediately Joseph's coffin floated [MS variant: up to the surface of the water]. There were two dogs [MS variant: between the acacia<sup>139</sup> trees]; they barked at Moses. Moses said: Come, people, look. Real dogs would not bark, but artificial dogs would bark. R. Judan said, since that dog was moving his tongue because of [the verse:] *But against any of the people of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, [against man or beast; that you may know that the Lord does put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel]* (Ex. 11:7).

The means employed by Moses to raise Joseph's coffin are different in the text-witnesses; here we have the Tetragrammaton written upon a piece of pottery. Spells were often written on pots, bowls and other dishes, a usual practice in the Ancient Near East and during the Byzantine period in the Land of Israel. Written words had magical powers because they were fixed and did not disappear into the wind. As is often the case, the Mekhilta attempts to provide settings for the Exodus stories that are antiquitizing and therefore point to Ancient Egypt.

The most elaborate magical writing is mentioned in a later midrashic work,<sup>140</sup> which is otherwise similar to the text in Deut. Rab. 11:7.

OM, 1, 202a-b:

בנילוס הנהר יוסף קבור הלק משה ועמד על נילוס הנהר ואמר יוסף יוסף הנגע אותה שעה שהקב"ה גואל את בניו והשכינה מעכבות לך וענני הכבוד מעכבן לך ואם אתה מודיע את עצמן הררי מوطב ואם לאו הרי אנו נקים משבעותך אשר השבעתנו מיד צף ארונו של יוסף יש אמר כhab על צי' הו Hab שם המפורש והיה תחתיו בצורת העגל וזרקו בנهر נילוס ואמר עליה שור מיד צף ועליה ארומו של יוסף ...

[Joseph was buried in the Nile and Moses] went and stood over the river Nile and spoke: Joseph, Joseph, the time has come that the Holy One,

<sup>138</sup> A hand-written note in PGM in the book from Morton Smith's personal library, presently located at The Jewish Theological Seminary.

<sup>139</sup> This could be a reference to the location of magical acts; b. Git. 69b mentions acacia extract in a list of remedies.

<sup>140</sup> Cited in OM, 1, 202a-b.

Blessed be He, will redeem his children, but the Shekhinah and the clouds of glory are delayed. If you make yourself known -- good; if not, we will be exempted from the oath that you swore. Immediately Joseph's coffin floated to the surface. Others say, he wrote the Tetragrammaton on a golden tablet and beneath it was the image of a calf and he threw it into the Nile and spoke: 'Aleph shor! And Joseph's coffin rose.

In addition to words, Moses used images that were engraved on the underside of the tablet or stone. The engraving of spells on a solid surface has been documented in Egypt.<sup>141</sup> Tablets of lead with *defixiones*, binding spells, were equally wide-spread in Greco-Roman culture.<sup>142</sup> The version of Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah, which is based upon a Genizah fragment of the midrashic text, mentions the four images from Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:5ff.) that Moses engraved on magical tablets, which possibly leads us into Merkavah Mysticism.

Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim, ed. Grünhut, 13a-b: When [Moses] came to raise the coffin, he inscribed and engraved on four silver tablets the images of four living creatures: a lion, a human being, an eagle, an ox.

After this short description of the magical paraphernalia we might ask: Why did Moses not use his magical staff?<sup>143</sup> This staff was a magic wand, as well as a symbol of power.<sup>144</sup> As is known from studies of Egyptian magical artifacts, staffs, wands, and rods were widely utilized.<sup>145</sup> A typical magical rod in Egypt would carry the symbol of the protective *wedjat* eye (Horus eye), contain engravings, and have magical figurines attached.<sup>146</sup> Some of the Egyptian magic spells refer to the magician holding a simple stick or tree branch; however, the knowledge of the exact use of the sticks seems to have been lost. Similarly, there is also a lack of information in respect to hand gestures in the midrashic passage. Egyptian water spells may have involved at least an

141 Pinch, *Magic*, 74, fig. 36, shows a magic spell board.

142 Graf, *Magic*, 3; 118f.

143 Moses' staff is mentioned in Esth. Rab. 7:13. Christine Meilicke, "Moses' Staff and the Return of the Dead," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6 (1999), 345-72, 350, refers to the possibility of magic related to Moses' staff. Moses' staff and the magic he worked with it is well-known and has been discussed in the literature. Scott Noegel, "Moses and Magic: Notes on the Book of Exodus," *JANES* 24 (1997), 45-59. Rimon Kasher, "Sorcery and Magic in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch and in the Toseftot Targum to the Prophets." (Paper presented at the SBL International Meeting, Groningen, 2004), analyzed an example from Tg. Ps.-J. Exod. 4:20, which mentions that Moses' staff was engraved with the divine name.

144 Staffs were carried by Egyptian officials.

145 Snake-shaped wands and bronze cobra wands existed in Egypt; see John D. Currid, "The Egyptian Setting of the 'Serpent' Confrontation in Exodus 7:8-13," *BZ* 39 (1995), 203-24.

146 See Pinch, *Magic*, 79.

extended forefinger.<sup>147</sup> In regard to a variant explanation of the ability of Moses to raise Joseph's coffin, a wooden staff is mentioned through the application of a Scriptural passage, in which Elisha uses a wooden stick:

*And when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. But as one was felling a tree-trunk, the ax head fell into the water; and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, Where did it fall? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and threw it in there; and made the iron float (2 Kings 6:4ff.).*

This passage is cited as a proof-text in the Joseph story for the "fact" that the metal coffin could float and rise to the surface of the Nile,<sup>148</sup> but there is no direct connection between Elisha's staff and Moses' staff, except that Elisha is presented as a distant disciple of Moses.

The midrashic texts that dramatize the recovery of Joseph's coffin do not mention that Moses was using his staff or a magic wand to raise Joseph's coffin, although Moses' magic powers are displayed by historicizing his magical acts in Egypt and locating them in Pharaonic Egypt. In addition to the magic performed by the magicians, there are other opposing powers that Moses has to combat when attempting to locate Joseph's coffin at the time of the Exodus from Egypt.

Exod. Rab. 20:19:

ועשו מצרים כלבים של זהב בכשפים שאם יבא אדם לשם יהו נובחים וקולן הולך בכל ארץ  
מצרים מהלך מ' יום ושתקון משה שנאמר ולכל בני ישראל לא יחרץ כלב לשונו (שמות יא:)

... and the Egyptians had constructed dogs made of gold which, by means of magic, barked for forty days whenever a man approached the sarcophagus, however, Moses made them shut up, as it is said: *But not a dog shall growl at any of the Israelites [not at people, not at animals, so that you shall know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel]* (Ex. 11:7).

Within the different cycles of the Joseph legend in midrash, we find "magical dogs" or "artificial dogs" that are rendered powerless by Moses. The Oxford manuscript of Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana cited by Mandelbaum has "among the acacia trees," which is a further indication of magic activity that often took place under trees. These dogs are fashioned from gold, which was frequently utilized in funeral rites and funeral furnishings in Egypt because of the eternal value of the material. It is remarkable that the dogs are identified as watching over the tombs in some versions of the midrashic texts. The dog motif brings to

<sup>147</sup> Tomb of Queen Ti, 18th dynasty; a shepherd (priest) makes a hand gesture to protect the calves fording a river.

<sup>148</sup> Mek., Beshallah 1; Tanh. Beshallah 2; b. Sotah 22a; Pirqe Rab. El. 19.

mind the jackal-headed god Anubis (*inpw*)<sup>149</sup> who was a figure prominent in the rites of embalming (Fig. 15);<sup>150</sup> specifically, Anubis or a man dressed up as Anubis watched over the embalming of the deceased.<sup>151</sup> Involving Anubis in the cult of the dead continued into Greco-Roman and Coptic Egypt; for example, in an Alexandrian tomb. (Fig. 16)<sup>152</sup> Additionally, some reliefs show two jackals on both sides of the deceased in Alexandrian tombs.<sup>153</sup>

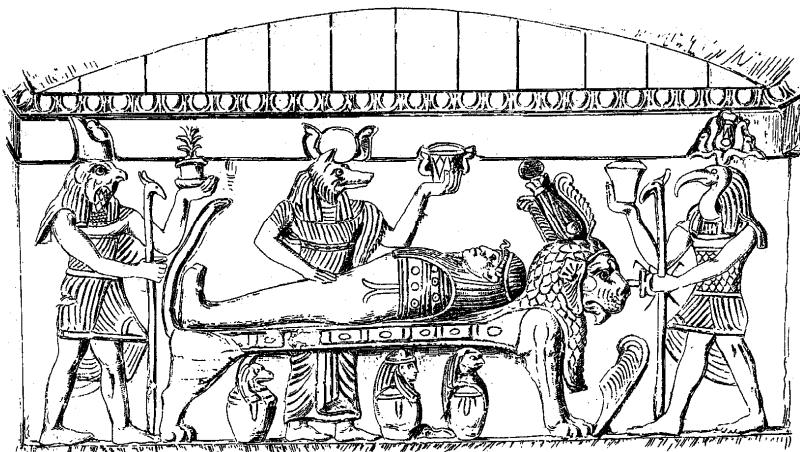


Fig. 16. Kom el-Shuqafa, main tomb, central niche, lustration of the mummy.

149 Brigitte Altenmüller, "Anubis," *LÄ*, 1, 327-33. Additionally, we might consider the Egyptian *upuaut*, the jackal or dog watching over desert trails, or the magical dog called "Tutu." Tutu also appears in composite form consisting of different animals and human features in Saïs during the Greco-Roman period; Tutu had apotropaic qualities.

150 Anubis, Cairo Museum, Tut Ankh Amun collection (Ulmer).

151 Pyr. T. 1122c-d; depictions of Anubis in this function are numerous, e. g., the Tomb of Rai, Dra Abu el-Naga, 18th dynasty, 1300 BCE (Staatliche Sammlung Ägyptischer Kunst München); the Temple of Hatshepsut, Der el-Bahari; Der el-Medina, Tomb No. 1 (Emma Brunner-Traut, *Kleine Ägyptenkunde* [Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1982, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.]); pRhind (ca. 9 BCE); see also Merkelbach, "Diodor," who refers to the voice of Anubis, 77; Günter Vittmann, "Von Kastraten, Hundskopfmenschen und Kannibalen," *ZÄS* 127 (2000), 167-82, 167; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.85, mentions Anubis. Generally, Anubis was connected with rites that addressed endangered moments of human beings, such as birth, disease and death.

152 F.W. von Bissing, *La catacombe nouvellement découverte de Kom Chougafa* (Munich: Obernetter, 1901), Plate VI.

153 The Tigrane Tomb, which was moved to Kom el-Shoqafa, depicts a corpse flanked by two jackals, see Susan Marjorie Venit, *Monumental Tombs of Ancient Alexandria: The Theater of the Dead* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), plate X.

On a shroud painting from Coptic Egypt (c. 180 CE) we find Anubis attending to the deceased, a man in Roman garb, i.e., the mummified Osiris.<sup>154</sup> Among the numerous examples from the Coptic period in Egypt, there are painted cartonnages of the deceased that show Anubis.<sup>155</sup> The Egyptian embalming ceremony involved the use of spells and amulets. In the above-mentioned version of the Osiris myth in Papyrus Jumilhac Anubis resisted Seth because Anubis is pictured as the commander of the arms-carrying followers of Horus. Anubis was also known to Roman writers<sup>156</sup> and he was a well-known figure on amulets from the 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.<sup>157</sup> Some of these amulets had mixed inscriptions, e.g., the name of the Hebrew God in Hieroglyphs. Moses was in the possession of superior or “correct” magic and was able to locate Joseph between the royal tombs. Within the midrash, if we read the midrash from the bottom up, “backwards,” which is a regular method in midrash and in magic,<sup>158</sup> the magical dogs are Egyptian dogs stripped of their divine status and their magical powers. They are hermeneutically reduced to the “barking dogs” that are present in the Biblical passage (Ex. 11:7).

#### 4. Conclusion

In late antiquity magic was strongly identified with Egypt; the rabbinic texts express this idea and they weave together details of cultural and religious icons from Pharaonic, Greco-Roman and Coptic Egypt with rabbinic interpretations of Biblical passages. Midrashic literature has references to Egyptian magic, from magical rites to apotropaic menstrual rags reminding us of Hypathea of Alexandria,<sup>159</sup> as well as other

<sup>154</sup> See Cannuyer, *Coptic Egypt*, 12 (The picture is based upon a shroud in Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin).

<sup>155</sup> See for example exhibits numbers 9 and 10, from the late 3rd-4th century CE, described on 16f., in *Pagan and Christian Egypt; Egyptian Art from the First to the Tenth Century A.D. ... Exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1941; repr. Arno Press, 1969) and the catalogue of the Coptic Museum (Egyptian Antiquities Organization, *Coptic Museum* [Cairo, 1984]), no pagination), a funerary stela from the 4th century CE, “bearing the ancient Egyptian” influence.

<sup>156</sup> For example, Propertius, *Elegies* 1, 39 writes that [Cleopatra] “dared to pick barking Anubis against our Jupiter,” and Mark Anthony is said to have been accompanied by Egyptian gods in the battle against Octavian, such as “Anubis the barker” (Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.698-700).

<sup>157</sup> Pinch, *Magic*, 166f.

<sup>158</sup> The instruction to read a name backwards is found in b. Git. 69a.

<sup>159</sup> Tanh, Buber ed., Va'era 12; see Ulmer, *Evil Eye*, 141.

magical supplies that were traded and imported in the first six centuries CE.<sup>160</sup> As a result, the Land of Israel was probably filled with magical artifacts from Egypt, such as amulets<sup>161</sup> and pharmaceuticals; additionally, the ideological and social relationships with Egypt were extensive.<sup>162</sup> This requires us to examine Egyptian references in midrash in addition to the often studied elements from Greco-Roman, Persian and Babylonian cultures. In the midrashic texts that focus on the retrieval of Joseph's coffin during the Biblical Exodus from Egypt there are specific elements from Egyptian culture: magic and myth. Joseph's coffin that Moses has to retrieve is either located in the royal tombs or at the bottom of the Nile. The elements of the narrative have many parallels to the Egyptian Osiris myth. The magic that Moses performs to raise Joseph from the Nile is similar to Egyptian magical practices and there are very specific parallels. From a reader-response perspective, Moses and his magical methods present a picturesque, visibly pleasing, story. Although in Judaism there was ambivalence toward Egypt, nevertheless the rabbis might have been influenced by the high prestige that anything Egyptian enjoyed in late antiquity in order to provide a historical garb to their arguments. There are several midrashic intersections with the Osiris myth, which are generally close to, but not limited to, the version in Papyrus Jumilhac: the concept of a double burial, a coffin, the fruitfulness and the blessing emanating from the coffin, the coffin at the bottom of the Nile, finding and raising the coffin through the use of magic, carrying the coffin, and the reburial. Additionally, the midrashic texts provide further elements of the Egyptian funeral cult: embalmers (magicians), protective dogs and royal tombs. Some of the elements of the midrashic narratives are listed in Table 3.

The question of why the framers of some midrashic texts may have been referring to Egyptian magic is a hermeneutical question that is largely determined by rabbinic theology. This hermeneutical question might have been created by the cultural and religious situation of the late midrashic texts themselves, in which Egypt had become a metaphor for the Romans, Byzantines or other foreign rulers. Egypt was

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160 Daniel Sperber, "Objects of Trade between Palestine and Egypt in Roman Times," *JESHO* XIX, part II (1976), 113-47, 128f.

161 Claudine Dauphin, "A Graeco-Egyptian magical amulet from Mazzuvah," *Atiqot* 22 (1993), 145-47, describes a 3rd century CE amulet with exclusively Egyptian motifs. See also Gideon Bohak, "A Note on the Chnoubis Gem from Tel Dor," *IEJ* 47 (1997), 255-56.

162 In Alexandria, the largest Jewish community of the Jewish Diaspora, traditions of Judaism, Greek thought, and the new mystery cults intermingled with ancient Egyptian concepts (see chapter 6).

associated with the estrangement of Diaspora Jews from the Land of Israel and the memory of the Exodus provided them with hope for a return to the Land. Whether or not the rabbinic interpreters of the Bible “inherited” accurate descriptions of Egyptian magic, their historicizing and Egyptianizing reconstructions, and my Egyptological readings of the midrashic texts, are close to the paradigm provided in the Osiris myth and Egyptian magical practices.

Table 2<sup>163</sup>

בְּאָוֹמֵד עַל נִילוֹס נֶטֶל צָרָר וּרְקָה לְתַוּכָה	Horvitz/Rabin text
בְּאָוֹמֵד עַל הנִילוֹס נֶטֶל לֹוח שֶׁל זהב וְחַקָּק בָה שֵׁם המפּוֹרֵשׁ וּרְקָה לְתַוּכָה	MS Munich
צָרָר בְּאָוֹמֵד עַל נִילוֹס נֶטֶל זְרָקָה לְתַוּכָה	MS Oxford
צָרָר בְּאָוֹמֵד לְנִילוֹס נֶטֶל זְרָקָה בְתַוּכָה	editio princeps, 1515

Table 3<sup>164</sup> Elements of the narrative in different texts

Texts ↓	Joseph's coffin is in the Nile	Moses' adjuration at the Nile	Magical devices	Moses' incantation at the tombs	Joseph's burial place
t.Sotah <sup>165</sup> 4:7 (ed. Lieber- man)	+ metal rods fastened with lead	+		+ יִסְף יִסְךְ הַגְּיֻעָה שְׁעָה	in the royal tombs
Mek., Beshal-lah,	+ metal coffin	יִסְךְ יִסְף הַגְּיֻעָה הַשְׁבּוּעָה	pebble נֶטֶל צָרָר וּרְקָה לְתַוּכָה	יִסְךְ יִסְף הַגְּיֻעָה הַשְׁבּוּעָה	Egyptian קִיפּוֹסּוּלִין <sup>166</sup>

163 Mek., Lauterbach ed., 1, 176.

164 Goldin, “Magic,” 126f., briefly discusses some parallels.

165 t. Sotah 4 (Zuckerman, 299-300); b. Sotah 13a, has a metal coffin, made from iron; the burial place is in the royal necropolis; Moses' adjuration: **יִסְךְ הַגְּיֻעָה שְׁנִשְׁבַּעַת הַקָּבָה**.

166 Possibly related to “capitolium,” as discussed by Horovitz/Rabin, 78f.

Texts ↓	Joseph's coffin is in the Nile	Moses' Adjuration at the Nile	Magical devices	Moses' incantation at the tombs	Joseph's burial place
Petihta (Horo-vitz/ Rabin, p. 78)		שנשבע		שנשבע הב"ה <sup>167</sup>	
Mek., Beshalalah 1 (ed. Lauterbach, 1, 176)	+ metal coffin	יוסף בן יעקב הגיעה השבועה	Gold tablet; MS: pebble Tetra-grammaton	יוסף בן יעקב הגעה השבועה	royal קפיטולין
Mek. de RashBY 13:19 (ed. Epstein/ Melamed)	+ metal coffin	+ יוסף יוסף הגעה השעה שנשבע		יוסף יוסף	royal קברנtiny
Exod. Rab. 20:19	+	+		יוסף יוסף הגעה השעה שאמרה פקוד פקוד אליהם אתם	In the royal פלטורי; golden magical dogs
Deut. Rab. 11:7 <sup>168</sup>	+ metal coffin	+ יוסף ידעת אתה ידעת היאך נשבעת לישראל פקוד פקוד			

167 The version in the Oxford manuscript states: "They buried him with the kings as it says, *they embalmed him* (Gen. 50:26); and how did Moses know which coffin was Joseph's? Moshe stood among the coffins and shouted: Joseph, Joseph ... and Joseph's coffin moved."

168 See also Midr. Petirat Moshe in *Bet ha Midrasch*, vol. 1, 117f.

Texts ↓	Joseph's coffin is in the Nile	Moses' Adjuration at the Nile	Magical Devices	Moses' incantation at the tombs	Joseph's burial place
Tanh <sup>169</sup> (printed ed.) Beshal-lah 2	+ metal coffin	+ יוסֵף יוֹסֵף הגִיעָה שְׁעָה	pebble; inscription <sup>170</sup> נֶל צָרוּר וחקק ובו	יְוַסֵּף יוֹסֵף הגִיעָה השְׁעָה	embalmed; royal necropolis
Perek R. Yoshia-hu (BHM, 6, 112-113) <sup>171</sup>	+	+ יְוַסֵּף יוֹסֵף הָגִיעָה אֲוֹתָה שְׁעָה ...	gold <sup>172</sup> leaf; inscribed; Tetragram maton כתב על צי' מ זהוב שם המפורש והיה תחתיו בצורתה העגל וורקו בנהר נילוס and he said: עליה שור		royal tombs פלטירין
Divrei hayamim shel Moshe (BHM, 2, 10f) <sup>173</sup>	+		Moses writes the Tetragrammaton עליה שור		
Petirat Moshe (BHM, 1, 115) <sup>174</sup>	+ clay/lead <sup>175</sup> coffin	+ יְוַסֵּף יוֹסֵף אתָה יְדַע שָׁהָגָע זָמָן ...			

169 See also *Kit'e midrashim*, ad. loc., which contains the pebble motif and the inscription by Moses; compare Tanh, Eqev 6, Joseph's coffin is “among the coffins ...” (there is no further specification, and there is no Nile legend). Rashi on Exod. 32:4 comments that Moses utilized the Tetragrammaton and a tablet (**שם** ו**טַבֵּח**) and wrote “עליה שור.”

170 Mann, *Texts and Studies*, a Tanhuma fragment, 116, is very similar.

171 Reprinted in OM, 1, 202b.

172 The passage is introduced as a variant legend by “others say ...”

173 Reprinted in OM, 2, 361b.

174 Reprinted in OM, 2, 362a.

175 This may refer to the earth used by potters; alternatively, the term may be a variant spelling for “lead.” The midrashic text specifies that the “four corners were bolted down.”

Texts ↓	Joseph's coffin is in the Nile	Moses' Adjuration at the Nile	Magical Devices	Moses' incantation at the tombs	Joseph's burial place
Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 11 vayehi beshal- lah <sup>176</sup>	+	+ טַסְפִּי הגִּיעָה הַשְׁעָה ...	pottery shard; Tetragrammaton		+ artificial dogs
Shir Ha- Shirim (ed. Grünhut)	+	+ טַסְפִּי הגִּיעָה הַשְׁעָה	pottery shard; Tetragrammaton		
Midrash Ha- Gadol, Gen. 50:24	+( and in the ocean) <sup>177</sup>		טַסְפִּי הגִּיעָה הַשְׁעָה pottery shard; Tetragrammaton		
Pesiq. Zutarta, Shemot 13	+ metal coffin		pebble; Moses speaks		
Midr. Agadah 13 <sup>178</sup>	+ lead coffin		Moses writes the Tetragrammaton		

176 Yal. 1, 226 Beshallah, utilizes the same version of the legend.

177 In Pirqe Rab. El. 19, the proposition that Joseph was buried in the ground is refuted and it is stated: "they put him in the ocean." This short reference to the coffin legend does not contain the motif of a metal coffin; Moses merely stands on the bank of the Nile and speaks to Joseph, no mention is made of magical paraphernalia.

178 "[The Egyptians] put Joseph in a lead coffin and cast it into the Nile. They said: 'From here it cannot be raised,' but Moses wrote the Ineffable Name [the Tetragrammaton] and cast it into the Nile and Joseph's coffin floated to the surface." The author of Bereshit Rabbati presents many different versions of the coffin legend that he excerpted from the midrashic corpus. In a dictum of R. Natan, Joseph is buried in the royal קְפִיטוֹלִין, in an additional excerpt he is buried in the פְּלִיטְרִין; these passages resemble some of the textual versions cited in this essay.



# Chapter Five: History, the Roman Emperor, and Egyptian Funeral Practices

## 1. Introduction

The rabbinic recreation of Egyptian scenes is related to a particular view of history. The similarities and the differences between historiography and the midrashic interpretation of the past<sup>1</sup> frequently cause a dialectical relationship between history and midrash. If we view homiletic midrash as a religious text, which may rely upon the certainty of religious promises in the documents of the past, we may notice that its purpose is very different from the recording function, although not the interpretative function, of some historical works. Historiographers generally present a macro history by piecing together disparate pieces of evidence into a more or less coherent interpretative narrative, whereas if midrash at all contains historical fragments these are found in separate textual units that more closely resemble a micro history of Egypt or some other place. Given that homiletic midrash does not represent history in the same way that ancient historiography did, one may pose the question of how specifically is history and time itself being represented in midrash?

This chapter explores the dialectical relationship between history and homiletic midrash and its linguistic underpinnings. Thus, in order to assess any historical material that may be hidden in midrashic texts it is necessary to understand the methodology of midrash. The tension between history and homiletic midrash may be explained by Theodor Adorno's theory of inversion,<sup>2</sup> whereas the peculiar view of time in midrash—essential to the rabbinic view of history—may be grasped by

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1 For example, see Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, repr. 2005), 378ff., who presents in this work on the history of the synagogue the statements in Pesiq. Rab. that relate to the communal dimension of the late antique synagogue as reliable historical information.

2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (trans. E. B. Ashton; New York: Seabury Press, 1973, repr. 1994; *Negative Dialektik* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, repr. 1975]).

considering Ernst Cassirer's philosophies of culture and language.<sup>3</sup> Homiletic midrashim of late antiquity and of the early medieval period created a historical narrative for the Diaspora. In constructing this narrative, particular rabbinic perceptions of time as a hermeneutical strategy were utilized, which requires us to consider the functionality of time in relation to historical events within the rabbinic framework. The narrative that is created by these later midrashic texts involves visual images of past and future events. However, I do not attempt to defend the historical "referentiality" of midrash, since such interpretations involving so-called "historical midrash" are diametrically opposed to the presuppositions of midrash and often lead to the misdating of homilies.

Primarily, I am focusing upon some historical elements relating to Roman Egypt and Roman Palestine. Some examples are found in *Pesiq. Rab.*, a text that has its own problems, because the transmission of *Pesiq. Rab.* evolved in stages from an early nucleus of homilies to a later canonization of homilies for the festivals and special Sabbaths. Due to this diverse corpus of homiletic material, one finds different strata of "historical" material. *Pesiq. Rab.* contains some polemical material that is of interest in respect to the emergence of distinct Christian and Jewish groups and their relationship to one another in the first few centuries of the Common Era;<sup>4</sup> it has some historical references relating to events in Roman Palestine<sup>5</sup> and some references to the cultural milieu of the Byzantine era<sup>6</sup> as well as some constructions of the historical reality of the Exodus from Egypt that took place in the Biblical past.

3 Ernst Cassirer, *Symbol, Myth, and Culture. Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer 1935-1945* (ed. Donald Phillip Verene; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) = SMC; *idem, Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte, Bd. 2* (ed. Klaus Christian Köhnke and Johann Michael Krois; Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1999) = NM; *idem, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Volume One: Language* (trans. Ralph Manheim, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953, repr. 1968) = PSF.

4 *Pesiq. Rab.* 8 and 34.

5 Saul Lieberman, "Palestine in the Third and Fourth Centuries," *JQR*, N.S. 37 (1946/47), 31-54, 329-36, 33f.; Léon Gry, "La Ruine du Temple par Titus," *RB* 55 (1948), 215-26; Louis H. Feldman, "Some Observations on Rabbinic Reaction to Roman Rule in Third Century Palestine," *HUCA* 63 (1992), 39-82.

6 See Bernard J. Bamberger, "A Messianic Document of the Seventh Century," *HUCA* 15 (1940), 425-31; Michael Avi-Yonah, *בימיו רומא וביינטן* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1962; updated and enlarged 3rd ed., 1st ed. 1946), 114. (Engl. trans.: *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine rule: a political history of Palestine from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab conquest* [New York: Schocken, 1984]).

## 2. Theories: Adorno and Cassirer

The inversion theory of Theodor Adorno, a philosopher from the famous Frankfurt School of Thought, who died in 1969, is of assistance to this exploration of history and homiletic midrash. Adorno posits that historical perspective is significantly influenced by one's current cultural milieu; historical events are inverted to fit a culture's own historical context.<sup>7</sup> This insight by Adorno is consistent with the nature of hermeneutical reflection, which is never completed. The reason that hermeneutical reflections are inevitably incomplete is due to the ever-changing historical conditions. In midrash, one finds both subservience to tradition, as well as an approach that Adorno would term an "enlightened" attitude toward history.<sup>8</sup>

In my view, such an "enlightened attitude toward history" in homiletic midrash is applicable to those texts which contain some critical engagement with a well-defined historical state of affairs; one such engagement for the rabbis was the Exodus from Egypt. I see these particular homiletic midrashim as the bridge between the Biblical Exodus, living under Roman occupation and a future Exodus from the Diaspora, an idea that has continued to define the Jewish interaction with the more recent past. Indeed, it is not the Egyptian experience, but rather the Exodus that marked the end and the break that changed everything. The rabbis were more than willing to endlessly reflect upon the Egyptian past. As a result of this reflection more and more details of Egypt were illuminated in their texts. One would expect that with historical distance such details would diminish. On the contrary, the detailed descriptions of Egypt increased in the later midrashim from the medieval period. The rabbis obviously had a fascination with Egypt. As one literary critic, Maurice Blanchot, notes: "Fascination is ... no longer the possibility of seeing, but the impossibility of not seeing ..."<sup>9</sup> For the rabbis it was impossible for them not to see Egypt when they looked at their own historical situation.

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7 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 20ff.

8 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 3. The negative can become manifest only through inversion of reality; the determinate negation that emanates from a historical situation may lead to the realization of an emancipatory truth. Inversion is an oppositional strategy and Adorno thus employs an inverted historicism to confront enlightenment versions of history (p. 320). For example, "Heilsgeschichte" is inverted and becomes a history of "damnation." (See Paul Connerton, *The Tragedy of Enlightenment: An Essay on the Frankfurt School* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 114.)

9 Maurice Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus* (trans. Lydia Davis; Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1981), 75.

Furthermore, references to historical events or episodes in homiletic midrash often relate to the Roman invasion of the Land of Israel that was understood to have occurred as the consequence of persistent idolatry and failure to heed prophetic warnings. The concept of retributive justice is expressed in the rabbinic term “measure for measure.” The destruction of Jerusalem, the quelling of the Bar Kokhba war and its consequences were similarly interpreted in midrashic texts. The historical material may be presented within various types of folk traditions, biographical stories and moral tales in rabbinic parables (*meshalim*).<sup>10</sup> Stereotypical stories, such as the repeated genre of a fictitious dialogue between a Roman emperor and a Rabbi,<sup>11</sup> are in contrast to verifiable place-names from the Roman and Byzantine eras. The *darshan* (composer) linked these materials together into comprehensive exegetical frameworks, informed by a distinctive theological understanding of history.

The rabbis did not differentiate between the distant past of dwelling in Egypt before the Exodus and the present, or the more recent past, of Roman Egypt and Roman Palestine. The unwillingness to differentiate time sequences or past and present may be explained by the midrashic approach to time that collapsed everything into the present.

Of assistance to this exploration of history and the notion of time in homiletic midrash is the linguistic philosophy of Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) who was a professor of Philosophy at the University of Hamburg. Midrashic interpretation and analysis is a language based activity; it therefore seems highly appropriate to utilize Cassirer’s language philosophy. According to Cassirer, language as well as religion and some other activities of the human mind are only “stations” in the construction of the world.<sup>12</sup> I assume that the rabbis attempted to construct a world in midrash that could be communicated, and that contained a message, to varying groups of “students” of midrash. Relying on Cassirer’s approach to linguistic philosophy, one may assume that in midrash there are no faithful representations of prior “existing” events. Prior events and historical time could be understood within the context of midrash as symbolic expressions of religious phenomena, which are

<sup>10</sup> See Daniel Boyarin, “History becomes parable: A reading of the midrashic ‘meshal’,” *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text* (ed. John Meier and Vincent Tollers; Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1990), 54-71.

<sup>11</sup> See Ofrah Meir, “התמורה ההיסטורית של אגדות חז”ל לאור אגדות רבי ואנтонינוס,” *Mahanayim* 7 (1994), 8-25; Moshe D. Herr, “The historical significance of the dialogues between sages and Roman dignitaries,” *ScrHier* 22 (1971), 123-50.

<sup>12</sup> This is a type of progressive objectification of the human experience; Cassirer, SMC, 167f.

displayed in their functional relations. Symbol systems, including the language encoded in midrash, are the way in which meaning and experience are transmitted among the rabbis and their followers, and passed down as the historical record of this group.

It is very difficult for any reader to analyze midrashic historical material, because midrashic text is often a means for emotional and religious evaluations of historical encounters. The rabbis seem to know that the future cannot consist of the mere memorization and subsequent reconstitution of the past, although midrash as a religious text recalls experiences and events upon which a seemingly new future can be built. Midrash plans to comprehend what would be possible, not what was, in its discursive analysis of linguistic units. In contrast, history often concentrates upon the meanings in ongoing events as investigated by contemporaries and reported by witnesses; this type of historical investigation frequently involves the recording of politically significant events. Historical writing (in the 19th and early 20th century) used to depend upon a commitment to seek an understanding of human actions in the past by a critical evaluation of contemporary sources and the disciplined procedures of analysis. Therefore, the historian's task was to discover what happened in some actual past event and the attempt to reach some type of objectivity.<sup>13</sup> The most enlightening historical generalizations tended to be those that were basic enough to illuminate the contours and dynamics of intention and action in circumscribed "events." Presently, the aspects of making sense of historiography are in the foreground,<sup>14</sup> while simultaneously the search for the reality behind the midrashic and other rabbinic texts continues.<sup>15</sup>

Midrash mainly reacts to hermeneutically significant events encoded in linguistic signs. The midrashic enterprise disparages the role of the historian, since history is so dependent upon contingency and accident. In contrast, there are no accidents in the events utilized in homiletic midrash. Events of the past can best be understood as hermeneutical truths. The distance in time to some events may cause the rabbis to determine a contrived character of historical events and their

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13 This is similar to the "process of objectification" identified by Cassirer as the terminating point of analysis that equals human knowledge (Cassirer, SMC, 166).

14 See, for example, the approaches outlined by Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2004), 23, *passim*.

15 See, for example, the collection of essays in Peter Schäfer, ed., *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Revolt against Rome* (TSAJ 100; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2003), with its focus upon the exact reconstruction of the physical and legalistic surroundings of midrashic passages and the problem of approval raised by Emmanuel Friedheim, "Politique et Rabbinisme en Palestine romaine: Opposition, approbation et réalités historiques," *TZ* 59 (2003), 97-112.

own world. The use of historical referencing in midrash demonstrates an approach that is distinct from the historiography of events, the history of culture or the history of civilizations. Some views of historiography may superimpose a Western perspective upon late antique and medieval rabbinic literature.<sup>16</sup> This perspective would lead one to conclude that rabbinic texts, and in particular midrashic texts, are not historical. Another perspective, as expressed by Peter Schäfer, contends that although midrashic and talmudic material frequently refer to recognizable historical events, midrash is best understood as theological rather than historical.<sup>17</sup> That the Tanna'im made use of history to address questions from their present<sup>18</sup> had been posited by Nahum Glatzer. This recognition of the purpose of history could also be applied to the interdependency of language and culture in midrash that engaged with and analyzed historical material.

### 3. The object of history

Cassirer<sup>19</sup> postulates that the object of history and the object of cultural analysis as well as the objects of other fields, such as mathematics and biology, are not separate pieces of existence; rather, the division between these different areas of *Erkenntnis* is along analytical lines. In my opinion the historical material in midrash has profound extra-historical and religious dimensions that go far beyond the mere recounting of some historical facts; the historical material has become part of the rabbis' existence, creating a dialectic relationship between history and created text. Historians and their historical methods might explain the siege of Jerusalem or the possibility of an Exodus from Egypt as an accumulation of different events and crises, and in this process they often discount the religious and hermeneutical dimensions of these events. The Exodus and its constant repetition in midrashic texts is one of the ways in which midrash affirms a Jewish identity, a divine cove-

16 Reorientations in historical thinking based upon a Western perspective in contrast to non-Western perspectives are collected in Ivan Davidson Kalman and Derek J. Penstler, *Orientalism and the Jews* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2005).

17 Peter Schäfer, "Die Geschichtsauffassung des Rabbinischen Judentums," *JSJ* 6 (1975), 167-88.

18 Nahum N. Glatzer, "The Tannaim and History," (*Untersuchungen zur Geschichtslehre der Tannaiten*, trans. Rivka Ulmer) in *The Christian and Judaic Invention of History* (ed. Jacob Neusner; American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion 55; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 125-42, 135.

19 Cassirer (NM, 13).

nant, and a connection to the past.<sup>20</sup> The conflicting memories of the historian and the authors of midrash often react in radically different ways to the same historical events. Midrash frequently overlooks some well-documented facts, e.g., that the Jews participating in the rebellion against Rome in 70-73 were in no position to win the war against the Roman war-machinery from the onset of the conflict. The Roman view of the conflicts in the Land of Israel, especially in regard to the Bar Kokhba insurrection, may put rabbinic references to this event into a more realistic perspective.<sup>21</sup>

Some historians would adopt a structuralist explanation as to the causes of the defeat at the hands of the Romans.<sup>22</sup> This explanation might be reduced to a particular causation, such as socio-economic restraints. In contrast, midrash would explain the defeat by referring to sin, human deficiencies, and the neglect of the divine commandments.<sup>23</sup> Still another historical approach would focus upon the question of who is guilty or who is responsible. This method would seek to establish a relationship between the culpability of the Romans and the oppression of the Jewish population within the given historical continuum of Roman-Jewish relations in the political history of the Land of Israel. On the other hand, midrash would merely contend that it required God's own will to have His vineyard and His house, the Jewish people and the Temple, destroyed by bandits. The focus is co-suffering in homiletic midrash, which leads to the situation that God Himself needs to be comforted. There is no attempt in midrash at synchronizing rabbinic history and the real events in Roman Palestine in midrash, as is demonstrated in the following passage:

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- 20 Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "Abschied von 'historischer Wirklichkeit.' Das Realismusproblem in der Geschichtswissenschaft," in *Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit. Beiträge aus geschichtstheoretischer, philosophischer und theologischer Perspektive* (ed. Jens Schröter and Antje Eddelbüttel; Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 127; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 1-18, writes: "Was 'Wirklichkeit' ist, kann ein Diskurspartner in einer bestimmten Situation überhaupt nicht wissen, denn der Zeitraum, der als Wirklichkeit gefasst wird und wie eine Erzählung einen Anfang und ein Ende hat, ist in dem Moment, in dem eine diskursive Aussage über die Wirklichkeit gemacht wird, noch nicht abgeschlossen." (P. 6)
- 21 See Werner Eck, "The Bar Kokhba Revolt; the Roman point of view," *Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999), 76-89.
- 22 The starting point of a structuralist approach to history is the assumption that historiography is "scientific;" see, for example, Joseph R. Roach, "Introduction," in *Critical Theory and Performance* (ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 7-9, 7.
- 23 See Isaiah Gafni, "Concepts of periodization and causality in Talmudic Literature," *Jewish History* 10 (1996), 21-38.

Pesiq. Rab. 29/30:26 (The Jewish Theological Seminary, MS 8452, 148b): Another comment: *Comfort, Comfort* (Isa. 40:1). R. Berekhya Ha-Kohen Be-rabbi says: Comfort Me. In the way of the world, if a man owns a vineyard and bandits [*lēstai*] come and cut it down, who needs comfort, the vineyard or the owner? Similarly, if a man owns a house and bandits [*lēstai*] come and burn it down, who needs comfort, the house or the owner? You are My vineyard.

Midrash often reads like a recital of the major stages in the relationship between God and Israel that unfolds in history. The above passage addresses the devastation of Israel and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Historical events in rabbinic thought are shaped by the vicissitudes of Israel's relationship with God. For Jacob Neusner,<sup>24</sup> attempting to write history based upon midrashic stories is a "violation of the premises" of this type of rabbinic literature—the premise being that midrash is exegetical in nature.<sup>25</sup> In Cassirerian terms, the rules of style govern the thinking implicit in midrashic exegesis.<sup>26</sup> Midrash does not write historical treatises, rather, we find certain episodes that are highlighted and which depict those areas of the human experience that we view as historical. These areas are historical, because they are recognizable. The majority of midrashic works does not indicate that they are writing a chronology or a history;<sup>27</sup> there is no progressive, systematic narration of the Jewish past. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the midrashic authors or *darshanim* never had their facts right, and that midrash is useless as a source of historical details of different time periods, in particular of the early centuries of the Common Era.

Historical references are probably merely hermeneutical in midrash, a strategy to invoke past events in a meaningful way. Steven Fraade integrates the role of extra-textual, historical factors into his

24 Jacob Neusner, *Studying Classical Judaism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 95.

25 See also Jacob Neusner, *A Religion of Pots and Pans? Modes of Philosophical and Theological Discourse in Ancient Judaism* (Brown Judaic Studies, 156; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 49: "What happens is important because of the meaning contained therein. That meaning is to be discovered and revealed through the narrative of what has happened." This quote stresses the creation of a narrative about events.

26 Cassirer, PSF, 79.

27 An exception is, *Seder Olam*, a chronological compilation; Chaim Milikowsky, "Josephus Between Rabbinic Culture and Hellenistic Historiography," in *Shem in the Tents of Japhet* (ed. James Kugel; JSJSupp.; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 159-200, 182, remarks that *Seder Olam* is "not a self-contained history; it can only be used as an adjunct to the Bible ..." which again would not permit us to set it side-by-side with the work of the ancient historians.

view of rabbinic hermeneutics.<sup>28</sup> For him, history and midrash are not mutually exclusive. One may add to this that similarly, according to the historian Hayden White, historical statements are basically only possible if they speak about the meaning of a past event.<sup>29</sup> Midrash as a hermeneutic enterprise may have its own meta-historical approach to the essential meaning of events. Consequently, one may contend that midrashic sources cannot be summarized in an attempt to write history in the early modern sense, in Leopold Ranke's (1795-1886) often cited terms: to find out how it really was.<sup>30</sup> The writing of history from a nineteenth century Jewish perspective, which included the use of history to defend Judaism against Christian hostility toward Jews, as demonstrated by the monumental work of Heinrich Graetz, incorporates some of the rabbinic notions of historical importance. Graetz's work is not objective in a critical sense,<sup>31</sup> although he professes objectivity in his preface reminiscent of the ancient historian Josephus's pledge to "objectivity." Rather, Graetz is committed to a traditional vein of Judaism and the limits of his explorations are similarly defined by the hermeneutics of self-understanding and self-indulgence in intellectual texts and strengthening the connection to the past. In the twentieth century, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's approach to history is closer to the midrashic expression,<sup>32</sup> because Yerushalmi accentuates the tension between objective history and the collective memory of Judaism. In my opinion, this tension has left traces in midrashic texts.

Since one may primarily view midrash as a text-based activity that to a large extent is linguistically determined, I utilize some of the insights of Ernst Cassirer. With respect to historical events in midrash, which are described out of context, we may refer to Cassirer who based parts of his philosophy on a fundamental epistemological idea in order to describe the workings of language. That idea is that historical transplants are often understood by their structure and not by their function.

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28 Stephen Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash to Deuteronomy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 14f.

29 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

30 Leopold Ranke, *Sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1885), 33/34, 7. In respect to historical reasoning within different historical and ideological settings, see, for example, the summary by Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2004, rev. ed.).

31 Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (English trans.; New York: Dobsevage, 1933), 7 vols.; for example, the beginning of the *History* reads: "It was on a spring day that some pastoral tribes passed across the Jordan ..." (1, 1).

32 Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).

By using a phrase of Cassirer, the “bond connecting the most diverse realms of thought with one another”<sup>33</sup> we may understand many rabbinic homilies as the methodological units by which midrash engages a sacred text and presents historical data, often in anachronistic fashion.<sup>34</sup>

Midrashic historical material can be understood within the framework of narrative history. This means that events are interpreted within the context of other events. Midrash focuses upon a few monumental events, such as the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and some insignificant historical elements as the prism through which one is able to understand both current and past events, because these events were highly influential in the mind of the *darshan*. Consequently, most other events and historical data recede into the background and only the most significant of them figure prominently in homiletic midrash. The significant ones include the above-mentioned destruction of God’s Temple. In these few instances the history that is related in midrash reflects a shift in meaning for the *darshan*. Furthermore, if one compares midrash with the works of Josephus and Tacitus, one can only reemphasize that the rabbinic sages were not historiographers<sup>35</sup> and that they did not claim to portray historical truth.<sup>36</sup> Graeco-Roman historians wrote with several purposes:<sup>37</sup> historical writings should be useful, true and entertain the reader.<sup>38</sup> Lucian<sup>39</sup> stated that the main func-

33 Cassirer, PSF, 79.

34 See Gideon Bohak, “The Hellenization of Biblical History in Rabbinic Literature,” in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. II (ed. Peter Schäfer; TSAJ 72; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2002), 3-16; Bohak speaks of the rabbinic “anachronistic Hellenization of biblical scenes and verses” (p.15).

35 An analysis of ancient historians and rabbinic historical thought was presented by Moshe D. Herr, “ל’תפיסה ההיסטורית אצל חזקיהו,” *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division C*, Vol. III, Jerusalem 1973 (Jerusalem, 1977), 129-42.

36 In contrast to Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.1-8, who claims that he is engaged in real historical writing.

37 This is not the place to review the flood of criticism of Roman historians; however, some recent works apply new methodological insights that render the strict division between historiography and literature meaningless, see Guy Lachenau and Dominique Longrée, eds., *Grecs et romains aux prises avec l’histoire: représentations, récits et idéologie*, (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003); Yasmin Syed, *Vergil’s Aeneid and the Roman Self. Subject and Nation in Literary Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Michael Hofmann and Hartmut Steinecke, eds., *Literatur und Geschichte. Neue Perspektiven* (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 2004); Ellen Bradshaw Aitken and Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean, eds., *Philostratus’s Heroikos: Religion and Cultural Identity in the Third Century C. E.* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).

38 Lucian of Samosata, 2nd century CE, *How to write History*; this is a manual addressing this question because many writers attempted to chronicle a contemporary “event,” namely, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Parthian war (162-65 CE).

tion of historical writing was practicality, i.e., usefulness; he requested that there be no *encomium* in the writing of history, because exaggeration and fabrication in respect to history should have their place only in the writing of poetry. Thucydides demanded that historical writing be analytical and provide insights to deal with comparable events in the future;<sup>40</sup> however, his intended audience were statesmen. Dionysius of Halicarnassus<sup>41</sup> stressed the practicality of history and the insights into causes of events. Appian ventured religious explanations and he addressed the problem of divine jealousy of human prosperity.<sup>42</sup> The notion that historiography has moral values was also expressed by the ancient historians.<sup>43</sup> Most of these historical perspectives contrast with the structure and content of historiography in midrash, which is defined by the view that history is shaped by the vicissitudes of Israel's relationship with God. The causes of events are religious by definition in midrash and they are not political or military, while the audience seems to consist of practitioners or followers of the rabbinic teachers.

I do not think that the editors of homiletic midrash were consciously misleading the reader, but rather the story was gradually embellished by each person who retold it. This embellishment may have been an instrument to express Jewish frustration with their present, unspecified oppression. Desperately wanting and needing the story to be true, visualizing it, exulting in it, the rabbinic interpreters made it true, and they and their intended audience derived courage from the midrashic rendition of events. In content, events in the Land of Israel (Roman Palestine), centering mainly in Jerusalem, occupy center stage in rabbinic writing. For this reason, one may claim that history in the Graeco-Roman sense is useful, even according to the rabbis.

#### 4. The Time Cycle

History is interconnected with the notion of time as a concept that permits the review of the past. It has often been noted that the rabbinic sages were not interested in astrology, which was a key discipline for

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39 Lucian, *Hist.* 9.

40 Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (trans. C. Forster; London and New York, 1919, LCS), 1, 22.4; see also Virginia Hunter, *Past and process in Herodotus and Thucydides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 21ff.

41 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* 1.2.1

42 Appian, *Macedonian History* 9.19.1.

43 For example, Isocrates, *Oration* 9.77.

comprehending time in the ancient world.<sup>44</sup> In respect to understanding time, we may note that textual interpretation of the Bible is inherent in Scripture from the beginning, but the rabbinic exegete understands Scripture's meaning from the perspective of his own time. Thus, the present, at any given moment, forms the context of Scriptural interpretation and reality is created by the interpreter who reviews the past.<sup>45</sup> Midrashic interpretation is hermeneutical because there are no boundaries between the time of the rabbis and Scripture.<sup>46</sup> All signs in Scripture and the rabbis of the midrash are in one semiotic field and the signs of Scripture are indeterminate from the perspective of time. What we view as the "past," the utilization of an earlier and available textual medium, forms a constant "present" for the rabbis, although the "present" as a concrete historical situation, such as the 777<sup>th</sup> year after the destruction of the Temple,<sup>47</sup> is rarely expressed in midrashic homiletic texts. The rabbis interject themselves into the past and this past becomes their "present tense" in their process of interpretation.

For the rabbis most events that are presently occurring had a precursor or a paradigmatic event that already occurred in the past.<sup>48</sup> Scripturally encoded past experiences and memorized historical episodes served as the framework for the midrash; the achievement of midrash is the perception of the endless and similar survival of the Jewish people. Historical episodes serve to support an unlimited repetition of sameness. The midrashic enterprise has an almost perfect coherence with the past, and merely seems to organize it. The sequence of events in the scriptural narrative as set forth in midrash moves at least as instantly from future to past as it does from the past to the future. This might be due to the flexibility of the narrative, which may link past, present and future in a story. The movement of time forms a seamless web, with no distinctive, chronological divisions. This can only be accomplished by textual interpretation and the vistas created

<sup>44</sup> See Rivka Ulmer, "Superstition," *The Encyclopaedia of Judaism*, IV, Supplement One (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 1904-16, and the literature cited there.

<sup>45</sup> Arnold Goldberg, "The Rabbinic View of Scripture," in *A Tribute to Geza Vermes. Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History* (ed. Philip R. Davies and Richard T. White; JSOTSup 100; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1990), 153-66.

<sup>46</sup> In regard to the notion that the rabbis of classical Judaism viewed time as a process, see Sacha Stern, "The Rabbinic concept of time from late antiquity to the Middle Ages," in *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse* (ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Gerson Moreno-Riaño; Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 129-45.

<sup>47</sup> The date cited is only found in the 17th century *ed. princeps* and the subsequent printed editions of Pesiq. Rab.; it is a late interpolation.

<sup>48</sup> See Rivka Ulmer, "Theological Foundations of Rabbinic Exegesis," *Encyclopedia of Midrash* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 2, 944-964.

by it. The text and the interpreter are in the same time zone; any present or future interpretations will retroactively apply the content of the original teaching. Nevertheless, there is more complexity to the issue of time within midrashic literature.<sup>49</sup> If midrash is timeless, then only the so-called “historical” events can re-introduce the time element into midrash. Moreover, the historical events in midrash have a deictic function of pointing to a retrievable past. These inclusions claim that by citing and interpreting a historical event the rabbinic interpreter becomes a witness to this event; the interpreter may point to this episode and claim that the students of the midrashic passage were also present when the event transpired. The interpretation makes the claim that when the recipients read and visualize the situation of the past “this happened then when we were there ...” This is the hermeneutical function of history in the late midrashic texts: an awareness of the past and pointing to the future. Insertion of historical events is one of the few instances in which the rabbis step outside the textual world.

The midrashic view of Scripture rejects the possibility that there is a realm of knowledge, such as philosophy, medicine or astrology, that is as reliable and as authoritative as Scripture. Frequently, the rabbinic interpreters applied an exegetical principle<sup>50</sup> that contradicts our view of the sequence of time in historical analysis. There is almost no external corroboration of the theological implications of Scripture or any “facts” gathered from the text itself. This problem is sometimes solved by the utilization of historical facts, pseudo-historical facts, or legends. These vignettes, which may or may not have any historical basis, may provide external confirmation of the exegesis in the midrashic text.

## 5. Hadrian, Roman Emperor and Ruler of Egypt and Israel

The Roman emperor Hadrian (117-138 CE) was the ruler of Egypt and the Land of Israel.<sup>51</sup> He is depicted on Egyptian Temple walls, his sta-

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49 A major attempt to approach the element of time in midrashic narratives was made by Jonah Fraenkel, “Time and Its Role in the Aggadic Story,” in Joseph Dan, ed., *Binah. Studies in Jewish Thought* 2 (1989), 31-56, who utilized the distinction between the time that passes within the plot of a story and the amount of time that a reader spends reading the story. I am not addressing these issues.

50 See Margarete Schlüter, “Kein ‘früher’ und ‘später’ in der Torah? Polemische Aspekte eines Rabbinischen Prinzips,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 30 (2003), 1-38.

51 S. Follet, “Hadrien en Égypte et en Judée,” *Revue de philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes* 42 (1968), 54-77, focuses upon the documents of Hadrian’s sojourns in Egypt and Israel.

tues were set up in Alexandria and in the Egyptian countryside (*chóra*);<sup>52</sup> similarly, his statues were ubiquitous in Israel. Hadrian was worshiped as an emperor and thus as a divinity.<sup>53</sup> Hadrian is mentioned numerous times in midrashic works; for example, in dialogues with R. Joshua b. Hananya.<sup>54</sup> In most rabbinic writings Hadrian is vilified by attributing to him the epitome of anti-Jewish persecutions.<sup>55</sup> In Roman history, the emperor Hadrian is portrayed as a wise emperor, who ruled over the vast empire during its greatest days; based upon Roman sources, the historical figure had a more complex relationship with the Jews in the Land of Israel<sup>56</sup> than the midrashic texts convey. One of the passages engaging with Hadrian is found in a homily on the Ten Commandments:

Pesiq. Rab. 21:1-3 The ten words<sup>57</sup>

*[I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Ex.20:2)] With an instrument of ten strings; with the psaltery; with a solemn sound upon the harp (Ps.92:4). It is taught in the name of R. Judah: The harp of the present has seven strings because of [the verse]: With seven a day do I praise you (Ps.119:164). In the days of the Messiah, [the strings will amount to] eight, as it says, For the leader on the eight strings (Ps.12:1) - the eight stringed harp. And in the world-to-come, they will be ten, in accordance with: Give thanks to the Lord with the harp, sing praises unto Him with the psaltery of ten strings (Ps.33: 2).*

Hadrian, May his bones be crumbled to dust, asked R. Joshua b. Hananya, and he said to him: The Holy One, blessed be He, bestowed honor upon the nations of the world when he gave five commandments to Israel and five to the nations of the world. In the first five commandments that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave to Israel, His name is mentioned in them.

52 Richard A. Fazzini and Mary E. McKercher, "Egyptomania," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 1, 458-65, state that "Rome's greatest Egyptomaniac was undoubtedly the emperor Hadrian (r. 117-138 CE), whose friend Antinous drowned in the Nile River during their visit to Egypt; he was later deified by Hadrian ..." (p. 458); Hadrian's villa in Tivoli contained an Egyptian section with a miniature Nile, temples and statues of Egyptian gods.

53 Donald L. Jones, "Christianity and Emperor Worship from Hadrian and Constantine," *PRSt* 6 (1979), 34-44; emperor worship did not only offend Jews, but also Christians.

54 Gen. Rab. 10:3; 28:3; 78:1; Lev. Rab. 18:1; Lam. Rab. 3:8; Eccl. Rab. 2:12; 9:3.

55 However, see Galit Hasan-Rokem, "הדרינו נגבור הוצאה היהודיה, או גספה פרבינציאלית של יהדותם, עין ספרותי-עממי בזיקרא רביה כה, ח," *ח' הקיסרים : עין ספרותי-עממי בזיקרא רביה כה, ח Resef ha-temurah ha-yehudit be-eres yisra'el ha-bizantit-nosrit*, Merkaz dinur 14 (Jerusalem: Merkaz Dinur, 2004), 157-96.

56 See, for example, E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Boston: Brill, 1981, repr. 2001), 432.

57 Translation based upon Parma Manuscript 3122, 171b and Dropsie Manuscript 26, 86a-87a.

Therefore, if Israel sins, God shouts out to them. [In the second five commandments, which He offered to the nations of the world, His name is not connected to them. Therefore, when the nations of the world sin, does he not shout at them?]<sup>58</sup>

[R. Joshua] said to [Hadrian]: Come and walk with me through the city. In every place where R. Joshua took him, [Hadrian] saw an image<sup>59</sup> [*iqonin*] of himself set up. [R. Joshua] said to him: What is this? [The emperor] said: It is an image of myself. [R. Joshua] drew him further away until he took him to a toilet, and he said: My lord king, I see that you are the ruler everywhere in this city, but you are not the ruler of this place. [The emperor asked]: Why? [R. Joshua] said to him: Because in every place I saw an image of you, [but in this place there is none]. [Hadrian] said to him: And you are a sage among the Jews? Would such be the honor due to a king that an image of him is set up in a location that is despicable, a location that is disgusting, a location that is filthy?

[R. Joshua] said to him: Do not your ears hear what your mouth is saying? Would it contribute to the glory of the Holy One, blessed be He, to have His name mentioned with murderers, adulterers and thieves? [The emperor] dismissed [him].

Hadrian is portrayed as rather neutral in the above text; in contrast to other texts;<sup>60</sup> he does not order the execution of the rabbi. This text raises questions of authenticity and of real time. The explanation of the *petihah* verse (Ps. 92:4) is placed onto a religious, eschatological time line, from the imperfect “harp” of the present time of the interpreter to the days of the Messiah and the future world. These times are embedded in Psalm 92, a text from the past, and they are substantiated with the mention of other texts from different Psalms. What is authentic about the above passage, even when authentic does not mean verbatim copies of historical events or cultural icons related to a specific era? Is the seven string instrument of the “present” referencing any Roman musical instruments, such as the lyre, “harp,” (*κιθαρα*), which may have had seven strings?<sup>61</sup>

The *iqonin* (image, statue) of Hadrian that is found throughout the city in the text has limited historical referentiality; the towns of the

<sup>58</sup> The translation of this insertion is based upon MS Parma, 171b.

<sup>59</sup> Or: “statue.”

<sup>60</sup> For example, Lam. Rab. 3:41.

<sup>61</sup> See for example, John G. Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 48. Eric Werner, “The conflict between Hellenism and Judaism in the music of the early Christian church,” *HUCA* 20 (1947), 407-70, 414f., describes the Greek terms relating to musical instruments in rabbinic texts, e.g. עִזָּם נַחַם “Strings.”

Land of Israel did display numerous images of Hadrian.<sup>62</sup> The curse in this passage is a common curse in rabbinic literature, the words insinuating that someone's bones should be crushed, which was applied to Hadrian.<sup>63</sup> This is a possible reversal of the Roman punishment of crushing the leg bones of a rebel, who was to be crucified.<sup>64</sup> The vagueness of the curse is probably intentional.

However, once an event or an icon has been chosen from other events and icons, and entered into the text of midrash, it does not fade or disappear like other historical events or icons that are not mentioned. As soon as an event has been formed into language, the linguistic determination defines the event and may transform it into a symbolic event or figure. According to Jürgen Habermas, in his critique of Cassirer, it is this symbolic expression that creates the possibility of looking back.<sup>65</sup> Hadrian in midrash is highly symbolic and his figure transcends time, because he is usually assigned the same identical meaning of being a persecutor. However, in this passage, a reversal takes place, since Hadrian is the one who is defeated; his defeat is a rhetorical one accomplished in the dialogue between Hadrian and Rabbi Joshua that concluded with an antithetical comparison that is applied to Hadrian. Dialogue is important in historical narrative because of its capacity to dramatize scenes using only two characters. Instead of the Romans and the inhabitants of the Land of Israel, the dialogue focuses upon representational figures, the emperor Hadrian and Rabbi Joshua. These conversations were literary devices used by the *darshan* to visualize historical events<sup>66</sup> for the purpose of teaching the superior

62 See for example, Richard A. Gergel, "The Tel Shalem Hadrian Reconsidered," *American Journal of Archaeology* 95 (1991), 231-51. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.261-262, informs us that the first century Jews in the Land of Israel objected to the placement of a statue of Caligula in the Temple.

63 See Rivka Ulmer, *The Evil Eye in the Bible and in Rabbinic Literature* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1994), 86ff.; the punishment of being turned into "a heap of bones" is found numerous times in rabbinic literature (e.g., Gen. Rab. 79:6; Eccl. Rab. 10:9; b. Ber. 85a).

64 See Gerard S. Slayan, *The Crucifixion of Jesus: History, Myth, Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 16ff.

65 Jürgen Habermas, "Die befreiende Kraft der symbolischen Formgebung. Ernst Cassirers humanistisches Erbe und die Bibliothek Warburg," in *idem, Vom sinnlichen Eindruck zum symbolischen Ausdruck* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 9-40, writes: "Die Symbolisierung stiftet mit identisch bleibenden Bedeutungen ein Medium für Gedanken, die den zeitlichen Strom des Bewußtseins transzendentieren." (P. 19).

66 Peter Schäfer, "Hadrian's Policy in Judaea and the Bar Kokhba Revolt: A Reassessment," in *A Tribute to Geza Vermes*, 281-303, 291, speaks of "fantasy" vs. "reality." This may be "true" from our perspective; however, I do not think that the rabbis de-

value of the Divine commandments. Discourse also plays an important role in such midrashic historical episodes; the narration in these passages, in fact, is subordinate to speech, because the dialogue and its elements are sufficient to reconstruct history.

## 6. Mummy Portraits, Funeral Niches and Statues of the Deceased

Specific elements from Egyptian culture require us to examine Egyptian references in midrash in addition to the often studied elements from Greco-Roman, Persian and Babylonian cultures. The rabbis did not produce a historical work that treats Israel's experience in Egypt, outside the Land of Israel. The most that we find are the Egyptian episodes that are over-shadowed by the onset or the existence of a new, post-destruction Diaspora, i.e., a new Egypt. Obviously, in material that purports to deal with an event in Egypt, these Egyptian elements are found in abundance. In particular, Egypt was known for its elaborate funeral customs in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>67</sup> In Pesiq. Rab. 17, *והיה בחצ'י הלילה*, a homily based upon the Torah reading for the first day of Passover, we have an exegetical, moral narrative in respect to the Exodus story, as well as "Egyptian" funeral customs. Typically the name of Pharaoh's daughter<sup>68</sup> is mentioned and explained. We also find an elaborate description of a detailed "historical" episode, the killing of the Egyptian first-born.

Casanata MS 3324, 47b-48a

וַיְהִי כֹּל בָּכָר בָּאָרֶץ מֵצְרָיִם [שָׁמוֹת יב כט] בָּכֹר כָּל בָּכֹר לְאִישׁ בָּכֹר לְאִשָּׁה בָּכֹר לְכֹר בָּכֹר לְקַבְּהָה הָא כִּיצְדָּק אִישׁ אֶחָד בָּא עַל עֲשָׂר נְשָׁים וְהָיוּ לְזָוֹת עַשְׂרָה (רָה) בְּנִים נְמַצְאָו כָּלִם בָּכֹורי נְשָׁים – הַגָּע עַצְמָךְ בֵּית שָׁאֵן שָׁם בָּכֹר לְאִישׁ וְלֹא לְאִשָּׁה מִהָּא מַקְיִים כִּי אַין בֵּית אֲשֶׁר אַין שָׁם מֵת [שָׁמוֹת יב ל – אַמְּדָר אַבָּא בָּר אַחָא אַפְטוּרָפָס שֶׁל בֵּית הַיּוֹת מִתְּכַמְּתָה שְׁמָרֵי הָרָאשׁ כִּי לֹא הָיָה בָּכֹר וַיְשִׁימֵהוּ אָבִיו לְרָאשׁ [דְּבָרֵי הַיּוֹם א' כו י –]

תני בשם ר' נתן ביום שהיה בכורו של אחד מהם מת היה צר איקונון שלו בתוכו ביתו ואותו היום היה נידקה ונשחתת ונורת {הו} והיה קשה עליו כללו אותו היום קברו – אַמְּדָר יְזֹן לפִי שָׁוֹי המִצְרָיִם קּוּבְּרִים בְּתוֹךְ בְּתִיהם וְהָיו הַכְּלִיבִים נְכֻנָּן דָּרָךְ הַכּוֹן וּמְשֻׁמְטִין אֶת הַבְּכוּרָת מִבּין המַתִּים וּמַתְעִתְעִים בָּהֶם וְהָיו קַשָּׁה עַלְיָהֶם כָּלֹו אֶתְהוּ הַיּוֹם קּוּבְּרָם –

liberately falsified events. Rather, they viewed and interpreted certain events of history from their own perspective, which was part of their theological system.

- 67 The events surrounding Joseph's Egyptian funeral are discussed in chapter 4, and there is no need to repeat them here.
- 68 See also 1 Chr. 4:18. Margaret Jacobi, "Serach bat Asher and Bitiah bat Pharaoh -- names which became legends," in Sybil Sheridan (ed.), *Hear our Voice; Women in the British Rabbinate* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 109-19.

מכור פרעה [שנות יב כת] מכאן שפרעה היה בכור נחכנו כל הבכור' אצל אבותיהם אם' להם בגין דאמ' משה ומות כל בכור [שנות יא ה] כל מה דאמ' על הלין עמא אתה עליהן אלא איתון ונפיק אלין עבריא מביניכון וא' לא הלין עמא מיתין אמרו ' בנימ לחד מננא ימותו כחד – מנהון ולא תקום // על אלין עבריא אמרין כל סמא דמלחאת נזילו גבי פרעה דהוא בריה דלמא הוא חיים על נשוי(ה) ונפיק אלין עיבריא מביניכון הלכו להם אצל פרעה אמרו לו – דאמ' משה ומות כל בכור בארץ מצרים [שנות יא ה] וככל (דאמ' על הליך<sup>69</sup> עמא אתה עליהן אלא קומ ואפיק אלין עבריא מביניכון וא' לא הליך עמא מיתין אם' צוא וקפחו שוקיים של אלו אני נפשי או נשכון לאלין עבראי ואתון אמרין הבדן

Pesiq. Rab. 17:11-13 (Casanata MS 3324, 47b-48a): *The Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt* (Ex. 12:29). *The first-born* -- all the first-born: a man's first-born, a woman's first-born, whether the first-born was male or the first-born was female. How [was] this [possible]? If one man cohabited with ten women and they gave birth to ten sons, all were considered first-born of women. Suppose [there was] a household that had no first-born, neither of a man nor of a woman [neither a first-born male nor a first-born female], how do I maintain that there was not a single house without one dead (Ex. 12:30)? R. Abba bar Aha said: The *epitropos*, [head of the household] was dead, such as is referred to in: *Shimri was the head for though he was not the first-born, yet his father appointed him as the head* (I Chr. 26:10).

It was taught in the name of R. Nathan, on the day when one of their first-born died, his *iqonin* was made [his picture was painted or his statue was formed] in the house; on the same day, it was smashed, torn into fragments and scattered. And it was hard for him, as if he had buried him that very day. R. Yudan said, Since the Egyptians buried [their dead] in their houses, the dogs got in through the burial niches<sup>70</sup> and dragged the corpses of the first-born from [amidst] the dead and cauoted with them. And it was hard on them, as if they had buried [their first-born] that very day.

[*At midnight ... the Lord smote all the first-born*] ... from the first-born of Pharaoh (Ex. 12:29). From this verse it follows that Pharaoh himself was a first-born. All the first-born gathered around their fathers and said to them: *Since Moses has said, All the first-born [in the land of Egypt] shall die* (Ex. 11:5), and all that he had said before in respect to those people [the Egyptians] has befallen them, we must act and get these Hebrews out of your midst. Otherwise those people will die. The [fathers] said: Each one of us has ten sons; let one of them die that [the request to leave] may not be granted those He-

69 Compare Pesiq. Rab Kah. 7 (Mandelbaum ed., 1, 128).

70 In Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 7, Braude/Kapstein, 146, n. 7, *kwk* "sepulchral niche" is amended to read *byb* "sewer pipe" (reading in O1) and Mek., Epstein-Melamed ed., 29 Mek., Horovitz/Rabin ed., p. 44. This emendation does not make sense; Greco-Roman Alexandria has ample evidence of funeral niches. These niches are called *כוכין*; see Marjorie Susan Venit, *Monumental Tombs of Ancient Alexandria: The Theater of the Dead* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16, who states: "In archaeological literature Alexandrian *loculi* are occasionally called *kokhim* ... based on their prevalence in tombs in Israel." However, the earliest loculi in Israel (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE) were based upon Alexandrian models.

brews.<sup>71</sup> The [first-born] said: There is a way to settle the matter: let us go to Pharaoh who himself is a first-born and who may take pity upon himself and let these Hebrews get out of our midst. They went to Pharaoh and said to him: Since Moses has said, *All the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die* (Ex. 11:5) and since all that he said concerning those people has befallen them, rise up and let these Hebrews get out of our midst. Pharaoh said, Go and beat them on their legs! My life or the lives of the Hebrews! And you talk like that!

In approaching this text I again utilize the Greek term *iqonin* as a starting point. In addition to referring to a “statue” [his statue was formed], this term can be understood as a picture or image.<sup>72</sup> The term *iqonin* is used in the text to refer to the representation of a deceased Egyptian first-born. The midrashic text presents interpretations of *The Lord smote all the first-born* (Ex. 12:20). A tannaitic level of interpretation is referred to when the text suggests the following propositions of the midrash: “On the day when one of their first-born died, his *iqonin* was made [his picture was painted] in the house ...” The *iqonin* or picture of the Egyptian first-born brings to mind the numerous mummy portraits (Fig. 17),<sup>73</sup> which demonstrate the funerary customs and practices of affluent Egyptians during the Roman era.<sup>74</sup> In the Hadrianic period, on some busts of Hadrian, he is shown with full hair, which is combed to the forehead; this coiffure is comparable to mummy portraits.<sup>75</sup>

There was a cult in which the *imago clipeata*, circular portrait bust, of the mummy was venerated in the home as Lares, Roman guardian spirits of house and fields. The cult of the Lares is probably derived from the worshipping of the deceased master of the family. It was be-

71 The text in this sentence in Pesiq. Rab. (and in Pesiq. Rab Kah. 7) is problematic; the parallel text in Tanh. Bo 3 and Yal. 2, 136 Tehillim, reveals tighter editing. John Townsend translated: “The <first-born> said to <their fathers>: Whatever Moses has said he has brought upon us. Do you not wish us to live? Rather come and let us have these {slaves} [Hebrews] go away from among us; for if we do not, we are dead. They answered them and said to them: Even if all the Egyptians die, they will not go away from here...” (*Midrash Tanhuma*, vol. 2 [Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1997], 70).

72 Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1, 60a, s.v. εύκονιον: picture, image; see Daniel Sperber, “מליליות: אַקְוֹנִיא, דִּסְסָ - דִּסְסִים - הַדְּסִים - בִּירְסִים”, *Sinai* 87 (1980), 150-53.

73 Mummy portrait (Metropolitan Museum, New York; Portrait of the Boy Eutyches, Panel painting, Roman period, 100-150 CE, Gift of Edward S. Harkness, 1918, 18.9.2.) This image was provided by The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

74 L. H. Cororan, “Evidence for the Survival of Pharaonic Religion in Roman Egypt: The Portrait Mummy,” in *ANRW* II.18.5, 3316-32.

75 Ilona Skupinska-Lövset, *Funerary Portraiture of Roman Palestine: An Analysis of the Production in its Culture-Historical Context* (Gothab, 1983), states: “Hadrianic portraiture of Asia Minor appears to encompass the varieties of hairstyle shown by the Egyptian mummy portraits” (p. 135).

lieved that he blessed the house and brought fertility to the fields. Just like the Penates, patron gods for the entire household, the Lares were worshipped in small sanctuaries or shrines, called Lararium, which would be virtually found in every Roman house. They were placed in the *atrium* or in the *peristylum* of the house.<sup>76</sup> The first-born was revered in his physical appearance before being buried in family crypts. The portraits were fixed to the walls of the Egyptian homes<sup>77</sup> and they were placed on the mummy. In Coptic Egypt, representations and statues of the deceased continued to be used. (Fig. 18)<sup>78</sup> The term *iqonin* as represented in this midrash serves as a realistic representation of these details. In addition, the text mentions the *epitropos*, head of the household, which is a more common term in midrashic literature. In Alexandrian wall-niches we frequently find the statue of supposedly principal members of a household.<sup>79</sup> The burial niches of the Graeco-Roman period in Egypt are also mentioned in the above midrashic text. These burial niches are the *loculi* holding less important members of a household.

This elaborate rabbinic passage emphasizes that the whole of the episode cannot be understood unless the midrash actualizes it in all its details, in the words of Cassirer: "... the whole of an action cannot be apprehended either in thought or language unless the consciousness literally 'actualizes' it in all its details, thrusting each of its stages, one after another, into the light of the now."<sup>80</sup> This is actually what is happening here in this hermeneutical rendition of the image of the first-born. The cultural distance to Egypt did not diminish the rabbinic understanding of the terms referring to Alexandrian funeral customs. The question may be asked, how and where did the rabbis get this information? We may note that the series of events as presented in the midrashic text was something that was only present in Roman Egypt. It was preserved in the presumably late text of Pesiq. Rab. in a tannaitic quote referring to Egypt; however, the term *iqonin* could be a hint at an edi-

76 See, e.g., *Der Kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike*, s. v. "Lares," 3, 494-96.

77 The Egyptians additionally believed in Osiris, a god that promised resurrection, whereas the Olympian religion did not promise an afterlife.

78 Tomb stela of a young man, Oxyrhynchos (Kop 0511, Ikonen-Museum Recklinghausen).

79 See Alan Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs, 332 BC-AD 642; from Alexander to the Arab Conquest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 203, fig. 131, depicts a male statue; another wall-niche in Alexandria (Kom el-Shuqfa) contains statues of the deceased.

80 Cassirer, The Representation of Time, PSF, 222.

torial level of the text transpiring in the Byzantine era in which icons served important functions.<sup>81</sup>

The text of Pesiq. Rab. continues: "On the same day, it was smashed, torn into fragments, and scattered." There is an abundant corpus of smashed masks of mummies in plaster-of-Paris stucco of this type from Hermopolis Magna, a cemetery from Greco-Roman times in Egypt.<sup>82</sup> (Fig. 19)<sup>83</sup>

The Egyptian elements in this midrash are fairly accurate depictions of Hellenistic-Roman customs that were obviously not practiced in Egypt at the time of the Exodus. From a literary perspective, these Egyptian elements are factual pieces that enhance the veracity of the narrative and provide literary density, which makes the background of the story to appear to be quite realistic. These insertions of anachronistic material nevertheless express a craving by the authors of midrash to include "historical" moments within the text about the Exodus. This type of midrashic interpretation involves both change and creativity in addition to pure exposition.

This midrashic narrative continues: The Egyptian first-born went to Pharaoh demanding that he send the Hebrews away and Pharaoh responded by commanding that the Egyptian first-born should be punished by flogging. The particular type of beating בִּקְשׁוֹן (on the legs), referred to in this midrash, is documented in tomb decorations (Fig. 20).<sup>84</sup> The type of punishment in Jewish sources, for example, the forty lashes administered, is different from the Egyptian beating.<sup>85</sup> The Egyptians subject to punishment were beaten in the presence of scribes: "The accused were led by men holding sticks to be questioned by scribes. Culpable men were then forced to prostrate themselves and were beaten. In the tombs of Mereruka and Khentika in the Teti cemetery guilty peasants were held naked against a wooden pole and beaten."<sup>86</sup>

81 Euphrosyne Doxiadis, "From Eicon to Icon: Continuity in Technique," in *Portraits and Masks: Burial Customs in Roman Egypt* (ed. M. L. Bierbrier; London: British Museum, 1997), 78-81, 78 points to the "direct continuity between the Fayum Portraits and Byzantine icons".

82 See Elisabetta Valtz, "Religion and Funerary Customs during Ptolemaic and Roman times," in *Egyptian Civilization* (ed. Anna M. Donadoni Roveri; Milan: Electa 1988), 226-37, 235.

83 Mummy mask from Tuna el-Gebel, Hermopolis Magna; gypsum (Egyptian Museum, Turin).

84 Tomb of Menna, Luxor West (Ulmer).

85 Cf. m. Ter. 11:3. See also Hermann Haim Cohen, "Flogging," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 6, cols. 1348-51.

86 Naguib Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond: Burial Customs of Egyptian Officials* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 2001), 89. Punishment scenes are found in the Tomb of Ti,

The propositions of this midrash are highly dramatized and elucidated visually, through visual metaphors taken out of context from other periods in history. The visual images of punishment and oppression from the Egyptian culture are typically mapped from one situation upon another. In this midrashic narrative we encounter a reversal of Biblical events, or, as Adorno would say, an inversion in which the first-born Egyptians are beaten instead of the Hebrews. One of the tasks of the critical theory, as propagated by Adorno, was to rescue semantic material that was present in myth, but had been forgotten. Through theological inversion this mythical material could become part of the discourse; this discourse would extend into different secular and political actions. In midrash, the Egyptians complained and they were punished by Pharaoh himself within the midrashic history of the Exodus and the vivid depiction of past events.

In the above homiletic midrashic texts there usually is a dichotomy between space and time. The terms of locality, such as "here" are much more readily apparent in the text than such temporal factors as "now," "earlier" or "later." The existence of one specification usually signifies the non-existence of the others and vice versa. For example, when speaking about "Egypt" as a geographical entity, the present time frame is blocked out. According to Cassirer, that which we designate as succession, as "time," seems to occupy a higher level of the ideal than a "mere locally determined" existence.<sup>87</sup> The power of language is that it gives midrash the ability to transpose the structural aspects of time into relations of space, often voiced as Egypt or the Jerusalem Temple. In this manner the events of the Exodus became firmly rooted in the geographical location "Egypt." Generally, time reveals a unique irreversible sense since time proceeds in a linear fashion. Additionally, time presents us with a distinction and a distance between its elements. Under normal circumstances, the directions from past to future and from future to past are not interchangeable -- each is peculiar to itself. The essential difference is between "now" and "not-now." The objective of midrash might have been to construct a meta-narrative, a privileged meta-discourse capable of eventually offering the "truth" about history. Historical scholarship is concerned with the reconstruction of historical

Saqqara, 5th dynasty, from the Old Kingdom, and in the Tomb of Menna, Luxor West, from the New Kingdom. Egyptian iconography is canonical and very stable; its icons often continued from Pharaonic Egypt into Coptic Egypt. For example, mummification survived among the early Christians, as evidenced in the illustration depicting a deceased woman on a shroud from ca. 193-235 CE (Christian Cannuyer, *Coptic Egypt: The Christians of the Nile* [New York: Abrams, 2001], 11).

<sup>87</sup> Cassirer, PSF, 216.

events and their interpretation. Historians expect midrash to offer “clues” concerning the time of Roman Palestine. However, this is not the historical narrative that is constructed in homiletic midrash. Minor details of largely noncontextualized historical events, such as the statues of Hadrian, become a mediator of truth and a source of explanation, which are at the disposal of the *darshan*. Events become meaningful only if they are subjected to the hermeneutics of midrash.

The above historical midrashic texts describe the events through the perspective of the *darshan*. It should be emphasized that one can note the literal reworking of the historical facts and the trauma experienced. This deserves a closer analysis, especially since such midrashic passages have served as catalysts for rituals and liturgical poetry that have been practiced for centuries. For example, in its review of significant parts of the Biblical Exodus account, *Pesiq. Rab.* 17 created a parallel narrative to the Passover Haggadah.

In the historian’s judgment we can rely upon an account because it is plausible, internally coherent, and many of its details are “corroborated” from independent sources. However, this need for historical corroboration is absent in homiletic midrashim in which facts are recited as sparsely as possible and there is a mythic potency to fairly ordinary words, such as *iqonin*. Within that context these words are instantly charged with undifferentiated emotional force.

## 7. Conclusion

The homiletic midrashim demonstrate a respect and a commemoration of the past, as well as a strong affinity to Jewish tradition. The midrashic narratives about Hadrian as well as about Pharaoh and the firstborn Egyptians show inversions of Israel’s fate. The inversion of the image of the powerful, divine Emperor Hadrian accepting well-reasoned arguments, and the inversion of the Exodus story, in which the Egyptians instead of the Hebrews are punished by Pharaoh, can inspire and entertain the intended audience in the presence of the *darshan*. The factuality of historical events in homiletic midrash is insignificant in regard to the dating of these passages. We have to disentangle the desire to date midrashic documents in order to separate the discipline of history from midrash. Midrashic narratives make very different kinds of claims upon us than historical scholarship.<sup>88</sup> In homiletic midrashim, some of

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88 If we view homiletic midrash as religious text, we may notice that its function is very different from the recording function, although not the interpretative function, of

the events of the past are rendered important and dominant, which is significant since in the words of Cassirer “everything depends, rather, on which direction of temporal consciousness gains predominance over all others”.<sup>89</sup> The objective of midrash was to construct a meta-narrative, a privileged meta-discourse capable of offering hermeneutical truths. Historical scholarship concentrates upon the reconstruction of historical events. This is not the history that is constructed in homiletic midrash.<sup>90</sup> Rather, in this instance we can expect midrash to “offer clues” to the time period of the Roman occupation of the Land of Israel or Egypt. The fact that the links to the distant Egyptian past are cultural constructions does not make them less authentic. Historical “events” serve as vehicles for expressions of great truths, insights and sources of explanation; these vehicles of midrash were the main concerns of the *darshan*. Events become meaningful only because midrash makes them so.

A group can be defined by its collective memory, which is another way of saying that the historical events related in midrash are nothing more than the stories that midrash relates to the targeted audience about the past. A further aspect of these references to the past is that these stories serve as not only links to the past, but as catalysts for current obligations for the Jewish people to practice Judaism. Not only is the Jewish present invariably connected to the midrashic histories of the past, but these very midrashic histories create a sense of obligation and responsibility for Jews to the past. Consequently, for the rabbis homiletic midrash not only connects us to our past but serves as a guide for our future. Midrash serves as a sacred way for textual engagement and, in the case of homiletic texts about Roman emperors and Egyptian Pharaohs; it offers a narrative for the Jews living in the Diaspora that reveals the relevant, “true meaning” of historical episodes.<sup>91</sup>

some historical works. See, e.g., Niklas Luhmann, *Funktion der Religion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 20: “Unter Sinn verstehen wir dabei eine besondere Form der Reduktion von Komplexität, die zugleich Komplexitätserhaltend oder auch Komplexitätssteigernd wirkt.”

<sup>89</sup> Cassirer, PSF, 119.

<sup>90</sup> This had already been noted by Henry A. Fischel, “Story and History: Observations on Greco-Roman Rhetoric and Pharisaism,” in *American Oriental Society Middle West Branch, Semi-Centennial Vol.* (ed. Dennis Simon; Bloomington, Ind., 1969, 59-88, repr. in Henry Fischel, *Essays in Greco-Roman and related Talmudic literature* [New York: Ktav, 1977]), 443-72), because “rhetoric” in ancient sources distorted history and created “non-history.”

<sup>91</sup> See Regina Schwartz, “Adultery in the House of David: The Metanarrative of Biblical Scholarship and the Narratives of the Bible,” in *Women in the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Alice Bach; London: Routledge, 1999), 335-66, 335, who postulates that the “ambition of midrash was to construct a metanarrative, a privileged discourse capable of offering eventually the truth about history.”

# Chapter Six: Alexandria

## 1. Introduction

Alexandria, the capital of Egypt under the Ptolemies (4<sup>th</sup> century BCE – 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE),<sup>1</sup> was the most important conduit for information between Egypt and the Land of Israel due to the existence of a large Jewish community in Alexandria and the preeminent role of the city as a center of commerce and knowledge in the ancient Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup> From the time it was established, the city had interactions with the Land of Israel. The information flow from Alexandria to the Land of Israel, from approximately the fourth century BCE until the fifth century CE, in all likelihood transmitted impressions of Egyptian religious customs and images. The city of Alexandria and its Jewish inhabitants, as well as the Jewish population in the Egyptian countryside (*chóra*), experienced a very complex history.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter historical events

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- 1 For a survey of Ptolemaic Egypt, see P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Egypt*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Günther Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire* (trans. Tina Saavedra, London & New York: Routledge, 2001); Heinz Heinen, "Ägypten in hellenistischer Zeit (332-30 v. Chr.)," in *Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom: Abwehr und Berührung. Städtisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie*, 26. November 2005-26. Februar 2006 (Frankfurt am Main: Liebighaus alter Plastik and Tübingen/Berlin: Was-muth Verlag, 2005), 198-203; D. J. Thompson, "Egypt, 141-31 BC," in *CAH*, 9 (*The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 BC*), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge, 1994), 310-26. In respect to the interactions between Jews and non-Jews in Alexandria, see Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 66-92.
  - 2 See J. Gwyn Griffiths, "The Legacy of Egypt in Judaism," *CHJ*, 3, 1025-51, 1051: "However, it may be assessed in the areas discussed, the legacy of Egypt in Judaism was transmitted above all through the Jewish communities in Egypt, particularly in those of Alexandria and parts of Lower Egypt."
  - 3 J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE-117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996); Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 54-83, presents a condensed survey of the history of Alexandrian Jews; William Horbury and David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt, with an index of the Jewish inscriptions of Egypt and Cyrenaica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Aryeh Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: The Struggle for Equal Rights* (TSAJ 7; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1985); Bezalel Porten, "The Jews in Egypt," *CHJ*, 1, 372-400; Victor A. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Pub-

are only alluded to if they contribute to an understanding of Alexandria and Egypt in rabbinic texts, since the hermeneutical reactions to Egypt and the Egyptian elements in midrash are the main focus of this book. In Alexandria, which at times was the largest Jewish community in the Jewish Diaspora, traditions of Judaism, Hellenistic culture, and the new mystery cults intermingled with Ancient Egyptian concepts.<sup>4</sup>

Alexandria in Egypt is frequently mentioned in rabbinic literature, particularly in the tannaitic stratum, and rabbinic hermeneutics are applied to the city. Often, Alexandria was viewed in the same negative light as Egypt and Egyptian practices in general; the city was representative of this negativity. In particular, Alexandria was suspect to the composers of rabbinic texts, since it represented a rival city, which was regarded as the Hellenized sister of Jerusalem. The texts strive to present Jerusalem as the continuous center of Judaism, although Jerusalem was overshadowed in size and importance in the Greco-Roman world by Alexandria and its Jewish population. From the viewpoint of Jerusalem, Jews living outside the borders of the Holy Land were Diaspora Jews. A conflict arose between the Diaspora Jews<sup>5</sup> and their "reduced" Judaism, which was dissimilar to the "authentic" Judaism practiced in the Jerusalem Temple during the Second Temple period. I address certain aspects of "Judaism in the Second Temple period" by focusing upon the ethnic-religious identity of Jews, including Alexandrian Jews, some of whom practiced distinctive and religious practices that derived from the traditions of their ancestors. Rabbinic Judaism collected and processed the information regarding Alexandrian Jews. Although the original wording of rabbinic texts is elusive,<sup>6</sup> we may assume that initially the tannaitic stratum processed some information regarding Alexandria, which was subsequently utilized again in the

lication Society, 1959; repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), 272-85, 320-27, 410-15.

- 4 Sally-Ann Ashton, "Ptolemaic Alexandria and the Egyptian tradition," in *Alexandria, Real and Imagined* (ed. Anthony Hirst and Michael Silk; Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), 15-40, documents the Egyptian archeological remnants and some of the ideas in Ptolemaic Alexandria. She also explores "the presence of an Egyptian population established in the area since dynastic times" (p.16). See also Jean Yoyotte, "Pharaonic," in *Alexandria: The Submerged Royal Quarters* (ed. Franck Goddio, et. al.; London: Periplus, 1998), 199-219.
- 5 See, for example, Willem C. van Unnik and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Das Selbstverständnis der jüdischen Diaspora in der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit* (AGJU, 17; Leiden: Brill, 1993).
- 6 See Peter Schäfer, "Once again the *status quaestionis* of research in rabbinic literature," *JJS* 40 (1989), 89-94, 89, who views rabbinic literature as an open continuum in which the process of emergence cannot be separated from that of transmission and redaction.

amoraic stratum of rabbinic texts. The fear of a rival city, in which Jews played major roles and held many civic offices, led to a perspective in which Alexandria was scrutinized and criticized. Although “destructive” in their methodology, the proponents of the hermeneutics of suspicion in literary and cultural criticism did not actually intend to destroy institutionalized edifices of culture and civilization just for the sake of destroying them. Similarly, the rabbis did not intend to “destroy” Alexandria in their statements and stories concerning the city, but they were highly suspicious of this rival city in the country of the Exodus. Nevertheless, Alexandria may have been the location in which the Exodus narrative took center stage in Jewish thought.

The hermeneutics of suspicion in literary criticism embarked on a project to initiate a more “authentic world,” a new reign of “Truth,” not only by means of a “destructive” critique, but by the invention of a new art of interpreting and creating texts. By attacking false assumptions, new and more liberating paradigms of thought allowed the readers and interpreters a revised, “improved” interpretation of reality. In this process, such hermeneutics of suspicion led to a dual critique that was not only addressed to the participants in a system, but the system itself. In talmudic-midrashic literature this process is highly applicable to the rabbinic engagement with the city of Alexandria, which was simultaneously admired and feared, because it was perceived as a threat to the spiritual, religious center of Judaism, Jerusalem. At the same time Alexandria was feared, it should be emphasized that Alexandrian hermeneutics served in part as the foundation of rabbinic hermeneutics.

Even though Alexandria was clearly a thriving city during the era of the initial composition of the talmudic-midrashic corpus, for the rabbis it did not provide the textual environment for a “meta-narrative.”<sup>7</sup> “Meta-narrative” refers to a story or narrative that is presumed to represent a final and apodictic truth; it represents an imaginary concept of “truth,” which presupposes that something is known with absolute certainty. The “meta-narrative” is above the level of the narratives in the text; it assigns meaning to the events transpiring within the actual words of the text. In rabbinic Judaism, one of the core meta-narratives addresses the central theme of the trauma and spiritual significance of the Exodus from Egypt. This meta-narrative is not explicitly set forth, but its components may be deduced from the proposi-

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7 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 13f., defines postmodernism as an incredulity towards meta-narratives. Utilizing Lyotard’s theory we may note that “reality” does not express itself in a single “meta-narrative,” defined by Lyotard as a final and apodictic truth, but rather in multiple manifestations.

tions in rabbinic texts. Applying the views of Lyotard<sup>8</sup> to rabbinic texts places postmodern readers in conflict with rabbinic passages, since rabbinic texts express a belief in meta-narratives, whereas postmodern interpreters are incredulous of meta-narratives. Acknowledging my postmodern position, I am by necessity eclectic and gather my representations of rabbinic beliefs from a variety of sources concerning the Exodus meta-narrative.

From the perspective of the rabbis, Alexandria was thoroughly permeated by the cultures of idolaters,<sup>9</sup> even more so than the Hellenized Holy Land because the city of Alexandria was situated in a country of idolaters that lacked an “island” or center of holiness. The notion of idolatry represents a deviant view from the rabbinic meta-narrative. In the rabbinic narrative concerning the city of Alexandria, one may note religious constructions in respect to the discourse on contextual issues (e.g., ethnicity and culture).<sup>10</sup> The rabbinic texts are heavily influenced by the construction of a meta-narrative about Egypt when they approach Alexandria.

## 2. The Founding of the City

Alexander the Great was the founder of the city,<sup>11</sup> and the establishment of Alexandria is said to have been witnessed by the future Jewish citizens of Alexandria according to the historian Josephus.<sup>12</sup> Knowledge of the founding of the city is alluded to in rabbinic texts. In the following midrash, it is stated that Alexandria was named after Alexander.

8 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). “[The] differend would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments.” (P. xi)

9 From the viewpoint of Christianity, idolatry was referred to as “pagan.”

10 Jean-François Lyotard, “Lessons in Paganism,” in *The Lyotard Reader* (ed. Andrew Benjamin; Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 122–54, 125: “Pragmatics: It means all the complicated relations that exist between a speaker and what he is talking about, between the story-teller and his listener, and between the listener and the story told by the story teller.”

11 The foundation is dated to early in 331 BCE, see Fraser, *Ptolemaic Egypt*, 1, 3. Alexander was depicted as a pharaoh, a true ruler of Egypt, see Erich Winter, “Alexander der Große als Pharaoh in ägyptischen Tempeln,” in *Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom, Abwehr und Berührung. Städtisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie*, 26. November 2005–26. Februar 2006 (Frankfurt am Main: Liebighaus alter Plastik and Tübingen/Berlin: Wasmuth Verlag, 2005), 204–15.

12 Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.35.

The exegetical procedure in this text draws upon the human hope that one's house should endure forever, which is expressed in a Psalm that is cited in order to explain a lemma from Genesis. This hermeneutic strategy of applying one lemma to a different lemma supports the proposition from Gen. Rab. 23:1 that the "wicked" hope to thrive and continue to exist by having cities named after them. In the text set forth below, Alexandria appears within a series of other cities that were named after powerful rulers. It appears that the rabbinic perspective is a critique of the meta-narratives of other cultures that name cities after individuals.

Gen. Rab. 23:1:<sup>13</sup> *And Cain knew his wife [and she conceived, and bore Enoch; and he built a city and he called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch] (Gen. 4:17).* It is written: *Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, [their dwelling-places to all generations, they call their lands after their own names] (Ps. 49:12ff.).*<sup>14</sup> R. Judan and R. Pinehas discussed this. R. Judan explained it: What do the wicked think? That within their houses [they will continue] for ever, and their dwelling-places [will be visible] to all generations, and they call their lands after their own names: Tiberias after the name Tiberius, Alexandria after Alexander, Antioch after Antiochus. R. Pinehas interpreted it: *Their inward thought [kirbam] is that their houses shall continue for ever [ibid.] – in the future their houses become their tombs [kibrat]. Their dwelling-places to all generations [ibid.] – they will neither live nor be judged. Moreover, they have called their lands after their own names, thus it is written, and he built a city and he called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch (Gen. 4:17).*

The city of Alexandria played a crucial role in the life Philo of Alexandria, who was a citizen of the city; he also interpreted the Biblical lemma referring to the city of Cain's son (Gen. 4:17). David Runia noted that the concept of the city served as an exegetical theme in Philo's allegorical symbolism.<sup>15</sup> Alexandria is just one of several cities cited in rab-

13 Similar, with the addition of the Byzantine city of Constantinople, in Midr. Ps. 9; Yal. 2, 643; 2, 758, Tehillim.

14 Ps. 49:7-14: *Those who trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means ransom his brother, nor give to God a price for him; For the ransom of their soul is costly, and it ceases for ever; That he might still live for ever, and not see the pit. For when he sees that wise men die, that the fool and the stupid alike perish, and leave their wealth to others, Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man does not abide in honor; he is like the beasts that perish. This is their way in their folly; yet their posterity approves their sayings. Selah.*

15 David T. Runia, "The Idea and the Reality of the City in the Thought of Philo of Alexandria," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61 (1991), 361-79, 367ff. Philo's understanding of Cain's city (*Spec. 1.334ff.; Post. 49-52*) shows a "'way of thinking' espoused by the mind that is full of arrogance and self-love (*philautia*), impiety and every kind of wickedness" (368). In respect to the cities that Pharaoh built, the king symbolizes the

binic texts for special scrutiny. In rabbinic sources the city of Alexandria is usually referred to as “Alexandria in Egypt;” this may be based upon the term *Alexandria ad Aegyptum* (Alexandria next to Egypt) which refers to Alexandria as a Greek *polis* and Egypt as royal property.<sup>16</sup>

After Alexander the Great founded the city, his viceroy, Cleomenes of Naukratis, continued the construction of Alexandria.<sup>17</sup> The early Ptolemies instituted the Alexandrian *museion*, a cult center which facilitated studies into such areas as philosophical, exegetical, poetic, and mathematical inquiries by permanent members of the *museion*. Consequently, the *museion* served as a leading institution of study.<sup>18</sup> Under Ptolemy I (304-283 BCE) there was a noticeable Jewish presence in the city. The Ptolemies assimilated the native Egyptian culture and garnered the respect of the population. The city developed, and for several centuries it was second only to Rome in significance. Although the city had been under Roman influence for decades, it passed formally under Roman jurisdiction only in 80 BCE, at the behest of Ptolemy XI Alexander II. The last century of Ptolemaic rule in Alexandria was overshadowed by Rome. With the defeat of the Ptolemaic navy at Actium in 31 BCE and the death of Cleopatra VII, who was the last Ptolemaic queen and simultaneously represented the last Egyptian pharaoh, Egypt became part of the Roman Empire under Augustus.<sup>19</sup> Military garrisons were stationed in Alexandria. While it was nominally a free Greek city, Alexandria retained its own senate until the Roman era; after Augustus had abolished this arrangement, it was subsequently reinstated by Septimius Severus.<sup>20</sup>

While the city was experiencing a complicated political history, significant religious events transpired. Alexander established a temple of the “Egyptian Isis” in Alexandria;<sup>21</sup> other cults of the Egyptian gods

mind, which is governed by bodily passions and he forced the Israelites to build these cities of evil because they see God (*Post.* 54; *Somm.* 1.77-78).

- 16 Stefan Schmidt, “Das hellenistische Alexandria als Drehscheibe des kulturellen Austauschs?” in *Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom*, 267-78.
- 17 Hölbl, *A History*, 12; Wojciech Kolataj, “Alexandria,” *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, 129-33.
- 18 Fraser, *Ptolemaic Egypt*, 1, 305ff., 312ff.; Janet H. Johnson, “Late and Ptolemaic periods, overview,” *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, 66-72.
- 19 E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1981, repr. 2001), 220-55, 364-68, 389-412; Stanley M. Burstein, “Roman period, overview,” *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, 73-77.
- 20 For Roman references to Alexandria, see Eleanor Huzar, “Alexandria ad Aegyptum in the Juleo-Claudian Age,” *ANRW*, 2, 10:1 (1988), 619-68.
- 21 Fraser, *Ptolemaic Egypt*, 1, 260.

were probably carried on by groups of devotees. The Ancient Egyptian religion experienced an unprecedented revival under the Ptolemies and under the Romans.<sup>22</sup> Generally, religious life included Egyptian deities that did not always have the same attributes in the Ptolemaic period that subsequently they would have in the Roman period. Major deities were Isis, Harpocrates and Anubis that were connected to Osiris. These Egyptian gods also constituted the associates of Serapis: Isis as his wife, Horus or Harpocrates as their child, and Anubis as their companion. The Egyptian religious influences were intense even when Egypt was Christianized. Relevant to a discussion of the historical events and their minimal recounting in rabbinic texts is that Alexandria figured prominently in religious history during the late Roman period. Major trends emanating from Alexandria included Arianism, monasticism, and opposition to the Christological theology. The city was the focus of conflicts between adherents of the Ancient Egyptian religious practices and Christians.<sup>23</sup> Among these disparate groups the Jewish community continued to exist, while experiencing its own struggles and the violence directed towards Jews.

The presence of a substantial Jewish population in Hellenistic Alexandria and its intellectual accomplishments<sup>24</sup> are extensively documented.<sup>25</sup> Although Jews lived in various sections throughout the city,<sup>26</sup> there were Jewish enclaves and Jews had their own quarter<sup>27</sup> in a city that was divided into several areas in Ptolemaic Egypt. Although the population constellations were fluid, the following neighborhoods were densely populated by different groups: the *Rhacotis*, occupied mainly by native Egyptians; the *Brucheum*, which was the Greek and

22 The Roman emperors, like the Ptolemies, were also portrayed as pharaohs and had Egyptian titles, see, e.g., Günther Hölbl, "Zum Titel *hq3hq3* des römischen Kaisers," *Gött Misc* 127 (1992), 49-52.

23 Birger A. Pearson, "Jews and Christians in First-Century Alexandria," *HTR* 79 (1986), 206-16.

24 Siegfried Kreuzer, "Entstehung und Publikation der Septuaginta im Horizont frühptolemaischer Kulturpolitik," in *Im Brennpunkt: die Septuaginta. Studien zur Entstehung und Bedeutung der Griechischen Bible*, vol. 2 (ed. Siegfried Kreuzer and Jürgen Peter Lesch; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004), 61-75; Emmanuel Tov, "The Septuagint," in *Mikra: Text, Translation and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. M. J. Mulder; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988), 161-88.

25 See n. 3.

26 Philo, *Legat*. 20.

27 Josephus, *Ant.* 14.117. A description of Alexandria is found in Strabo (latter half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE), *Geogr.* 17.6-10, who visited Alexandria in 25 BCE. Strabo's description of Alexandria, in particular of the harbor, has been confirmed by underwater archeology (see Franck Goddio, et al., eds., *Alexandria: The Submerged Royal Quarters* (London: Periplus, 1998)).

royal quarter, as well as the most elaborate area of the city; and the Jewish quarter.

### 3. The Jewish Religious Response to Greco-Roman and Egyptian Cults in Alexandria

Alexandrian Jews were surrounded by multiple cults, but they apparently adhered to Jewish practices that are known from the scarce evidence from that time. Some of the Alexandrian Jewish practices are attested in later, rabbinic documents. Josephus specifies that the early Ptolemies assigned a quarter in the city to the Jews so that they might not be prevented from observing their “law” by other cults.<sup>28</sup> As a community, the Jews of Alexandria had their own buildings. The Tosefta and the Talmuds discuss at length the large synagogue of Alexandria;<sup>29</sup> the description of this synagogue in these texts is probably at least partially drawn upon a direct visual experience that was transmitted from an earlier period. Parts of the following text are hyperbolic.

y. Sukkah 5: 1, 55a-b:<sup>30</sup> It has been taught, R. Judah said: Someone who has not seen the double *stoa* [στοά] <sup>[דִּיבָּרִי אַיסְטָבָה]</sup><sup>31</sup> of Alexandria in Egypt has never seen the glory of Israel. It was said that it was like a huge *basilica*, one colonnade [<sup>[רִיטָסָא]</sup><sup>32</sup> within the other, and it sometimes held twice the num-

28 Josephus, *B. J.* 2.488.

29 See Zvi U. Maoz, “The synagogue in the Second Temple period as a reflection of Alexandrine architecture,” *Bulletin of the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo* 18 (1994), 5-12; J. G. Griffiths, “Egypt and the Rise of the Synagogue,” in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery* (ed. Dan Urman and Paul V. M. Flesher; Studia Post-Biblica 1; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1, 3-16, 8, similarly argues for the likelihood that the synagogue had its origin in Egypt. Griffiths noted that the Great Synagogue in Alexandria did not have a pylon, which was different from the Egyptian temples, 12. As is well known, there is significant evidence for the existence of synagogues in the Egyptian Diaspora in the third century BCE, although the remaining evidence is mainly epigraphic and dedicational. Anders Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-Historic Study* (CB 37; Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 2001), 128ff., presents an overview of the theories and texts; in respect to the synagogues in Hellenistic Egypt, see P.-E. Dion, “Synagogues et temples dans l’Égypte hellénistique,” *ScEs* 29 (1977), 45-75. Aryeh Kasher, “Synagogues as ‘Houses of Prayer’ and ‘Holy Places’ in the Jewish Communities of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt,” in Urman and Flesher, *Ancient Synagogues*, 205-20, discusses the evidence in Philo, 211-12, and refers to the Great Synagogue of Alexandria.

30 t. Sukkah 4:6; b. Sukkah 51b; Yal. 1, 913 Shoftim, with variations.

31 Peter Schäfer, et al., *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi*, II/5-12 (TSAJ 83; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2001), MS Leiden.

32 *Editio princeps*, Venice.

ber of people that had left Egypt. It contained seventy *cathedras* of gold, decorated with precious stones and pearls, corresponding to the seventy members of the Great Sanhedrin, not one of them containing less than twenty-one talents of gold, and a wooden *bemah* [platform] in the middle on which the *hazzan* [attendant] of the synagogue stood. When someone got up for a reading, the *memuneh* [officer] waved the scarf and they responded 'Amen.' They moreover did not have mixed seating, but each [group of] crafts people sat separately, goldsmiths sat separately, silversmiths separately, blacksmiths separately, metalworkers separately and weavers separately, so that when a visitor entered he joined the members of his craft [from the area] where his income would be provided. But who destroyed [this building]? The wicked Trogionus [Trajan].

The description of this former building in Alexandria celebrates the grandeur of the Jewish community in Egypt at the time of the Ptolemies; from an Egyptological perspective we focus on one item mentioned in the text that resembles Egyptian religious artifacts: the *cathedra*.<sup>33</sup> The elaborate design<sup>34</sup> of the seventy chairs – gold, precious stones and pearls – resembles the elaborate Egyptian thrones and chairs that are visible in paintings in many tombs and such thrones and chairs which have been unearthed. The Egyptian decorated throne continued into the period of the Ptolemies. Sacred furniture was essential in Egyptian shrines. The special seats for seventy prestigious members<sup>35</sup> of the synagogue stated their importance, not only within the Jewish community, but also in the civil life of the city. The mention of distinguished chairs illustrates that Jews in Alexandria often understood themselves to be fully integrated citizens of the city.<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, the function of the *cathedra* changed from the Alexandrian synagogue depicted in the

33 The term *cathedra* is not connected to Moses in the descriptions of the Alexandrian synagogues; later the term appeared as the so-called "cathedra of Moses" indicating a seat for synagogue dignitaries. See Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, repr. 2005), 324-26, who discusses the *cathedra*, a magnificent example of which was found in the synagogue on the Island of Delos.

34 Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 84-85: "The description of the golden chairs, each worth twenty-five talents, is probably exaggerated as well. Nevertheless, the above description is so detailed and unique that it ought not be rejected out of hand as totally fanciful ..."; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Egypt*, 133, 136, mentions the advanced metal work in Alexandria, including a golden altar.

35 Variant reading: seventy-one; this may reflect the *gerousia* mentioned in Philo, *Flacc.* 10.

36 See, e.g., Gregory E. Sterling, "'Thus are Israel': Jewish self-definition in Alexandria," *Studia Philonica Annual* 9 (1997), 84-103; Dieter Zeller, "Das Verhältnis der alexandrinischen Juden zu Ägypten," in *Religion in fremder Kultur: Religion als Minderheit in Europa und Asien* (ed. Michael Pye and Renate Stegerhoff; Saarbrücken-Scheidt: D adder, 1987), 77-85.

texts. Another detail found in the above talmudic description of the double *stoa* serving as a synagogue in Alexandria is the office of the *hazzan*; the same term applied to the executive officer for the *politeuma*.<sup>37</sup> The above-mentioned synagogue was not the only building in the city dedicated to Jewish instruction, the reading of the Law, and worship. There were additional synagogues (*προσευχαῖ*) in other parts of Alexandria.<sup>38</sup>

Equally significant to the building of the great synagogue and the civic engagement of Jews in the life of the city were the intellectual achievements and the religious practices of the Alexandrian Jews. There were numerous contacts between Alexandria and the Land of Israel. Generally, there were close ties between the Jews of Egypt and the Land of Israel, especially with Jerusalem, in the last centuries BCE and the early centuries CE.<sup>39</sup> Intellectual and religious contacts between the two countries included educational and methodological exchanges (e.g., teachers of Jewish traditions came to Israel from Alexandria).<sup>40</sup> Some sages and some later rabbis from the Land of Israel visited or

37 See Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 96; and Aryeh Kasher, "הוּא דָגֶם שֶׁ אָרְגֵן קְהִלָּתִי בַּתְּפֹזָה הַלְּנָסִיטִית-רוּמָנִית POLITEUMA: דָגֶם שֶׁ אָרְגֵן קְהִלָּתִי בַּתְּפֹזָה הַלְּנָסִיטִית-רוּמָנִית", in *Merkaz ve-tefusah: Eres yisra'el ve-hatefusot bime bayit ha-sheni, ha-mishnah ve-hatalmud* (ed. Isaia Gafni; Jerusalem: Merkaz Salman Shazar, 2004), 57-91.

38 Philo, *Legat*, 20.

39 In regard to the Hasmonean period, see Menachem Stern, "היחסים שבין ממלכת החשמונאים ומצרים התלמיית על רקע המعرצת הבינלאומית לפני 'ס' החשמונאים והראשונה של המאות השניות והראשונה", *Zion* 51 (1985), 3-28; Sarah Pearce, "Jerusalem as the 'Mother-City' in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria," in *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire* (ed. John M. Barclay; London: T & T Clark, 2004), 19-37; Gregory E. Sterling, "Judaism between Jerusalem and Alexandria," in *Hellenism in the Land of Israel* (ed. John J. Collins and Gregory E. Sterling; Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 263-301.

40 Hillel refers to his teachers Shemaya and Avtalyon (Avot 1), who are considered by the rabbis to have been proselytes from Alexandria (b. Git. 57b; b. San. 96b; their opinions are referred to in b. Šab. 15a, b. Yoma 35b; b. Yoma 71b; b. Bes. 25a; b. Yebam. 67a). These teachers, Shemayah and Avtalyon, are often identified with the Alexandrians Semaias and Pollion (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.172-175); see Louis H. Feldman, "The Identity of Pollio, the Pharisee, in Josephus," *JQR* 49 (1958-1959), 53-69. The significance of Alexandrian teaching methods should be appreciated; see David Daube, "Alexandrian Methods of Interpretation and the Rabbis," *Festschrift Hans Lewald* (Basel, 1953), 23-44, who sees a direct connection between rabbinic exegesis and Alexandrian exegesis. In regard to Alexandrian exegesis, see also John W. Wever, "The earliest witness to Jewish exegesis," *Frank Talmage Memorial Volume* (ed. Barry Walfish; Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1993), 115-127; Rivka Ulmer, "The advancement of arguments in exegetical midrash compared to that of the Greek ΔΙΑΤΡΙΒΗ," *JSJ* 28 (1997), 48-91, and Arkady Kovelman, *Between Alexandria and Jerusalem: The Dynamic of Jewish and Hellenistic Culture* (BRLA 21; Leiden: Brill, 2005).

moved to Alexandria. There were exchanges of letters during Roman times, and Egyptian Jews collected and sent the half *sheqel* to the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>41</sup> *Hallah* (dough-offering) seems to have been brought to Jerusalem from Alexandria, since the Mishnah states that it was rejected.<sup>42</sup> *Bikkurim* (first-fruit offerings) from Alexandria were sent to Jerusalem.<sup>43</sup> The Alexandrians were involved on many levels with the center of Judaism, Jerusalem; for example, they donated Temple doors, i.e., the so-called Nicanor Gate of the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>44</sup> Crafts people from Alexandria, not necessarily Jewish Alexandrians, worked on the Temple in Jerusalem when repairs were necessary.<sup>45</sup> Journeys to Jerusalem were undertaken by Egyptian Jews<sup>46</sup> and various Egyptian Jewish communities maintained their own distinct synagogues in Jerusalem to serve their respective pilgrims. The synagogue of the Alexandrians in Jerusalem is mentioned in rabbinic literature, as well as in the Christian Scriptures.<sup>47</sup>

41 The half *sheqel* is based upon Exod. 30:12-16; it was paid to maintain the cult in Jerusalem (see Sarah Mandell, "Who paid the Temple tax when the Jews were under Roman rule?" *HTR* 77 (1984), 223-32; J. Liver, "The Half-Shekel Offering in Biblical and Post-Biblical Judaism," *HTR* 56 (1963), 173-98. According to Philo, *Spec. I* 76, every Jew above the age of twenty had to pay it.

42 m. *Hal.* 4:10; y. *Hal.* 4:5.

43 Philo, *Leg.* 156; this was permitted by Augustus (Harold Idris Bell, "Roman Egypt from Augustus to Diocletian," *CE* 13 (1938), 347-63). Acts 2:10 states that Jewish pilgrims from Egypt took part in the Pentecost in Jerusalem.

44 Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic*, 347; E. Wiesenberg, "The Nicanor Gate," *JJS* 3 (1952), 14-29; Joshua Schwartz, "Once more on the Nicanor Gate," *HUCA* 62 (1991), 245-83, with regard to Josephus.

45 t. 'Arak. 2:2; b. 'Arak. 10b.

46 Jackie Feldman, "'A City that makes all Israel friends': Normative Communities and the struggle for religious legitimacy in pilgrimages to the Second Temple," in *A Holy People: Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Religious Communal Identity* (ed. Marcel Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 109-26; Shmuel Safrai, *Die Wallfahrt im Zeitalter des Zweiten Tempels* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 20-43; Yehoshua Amir, "Die Wallfahrt nach Jerusalem in Philons Sicht," in *idem, Die hellenistische Gestalt des Judentums bei Philon von Alexandrien* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983), 52-64. Philo states that he himself went to the sanctuary in Jerusalem as a delegate in order to sacrifice and to worship (Philo, *Prov.* 2.64; Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 8.14). However, Pearce, "Jerusalem as the Mother-City," 22, mentions that, according to Philo, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem was the severest test "requiring temporary abandonment of the fatherland and family for life abroad" (*Spec.* 1.68).

47 t. *Meg.* 2:17: "R. Judah said: Ma'aseh: R. Eleazar b. Sadoq bought the synagogue of the Alexandrians in Jerusalem and he did what he needed to do with it;" y. *Meg.* 3:1, 73d; *Acts* 6:9.

Egyptian Jews<sup>48</sup> followed many religious practices and duties relating to the spiritual center of Judaism in Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the Jews of Egypt also observed their own particular customs<sup>50</sup> and festivals such as celebrating the Septuagint<sup>51</sup> as a supplementary expression of the Law. The description in Philo provides that this festival was held on the island of Pharos on the shore, mainly in tents, celebrating the translation of the Law into Greek.<sup>52</sup> A thanksgiving festival was also instituted to commemorate the miraculous rescue of Alexandrian Jews after Ptolemy VII had attempted to massacre the Jews for opposing him and assisting Cleopatra, the mother of Ptolemy VI.<sup>53</sup> The celebration of the Festival of Passover occurred in specific locations in Alexandria.<sup>54</sup> Places of a Jewish cult and sacrifices in Egypt included the Jewish Temple in the nome of Heliopolis,<sup>55</sup> erroneously referred to as the Temple in Leontopolis,<sup>56</sup> founded by the priest Onias, which was in existence from the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE until Emperor Trajan closed it.<sup>57</sup> Albeit, we are not certain as to the extent which Jews of Alexandria were involved in these cults.

48 Peder Borgen, "Judaism in Egypt," in *ABD*, 3, 1061-72.

49 Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic*, 346.

50 Soferim 1:10 states that Egyptian Jews adorned the Tetragrammaton in their Torah scrolls.

51 Fraser, *Ptolemaic Egypt*, 1, 285.

52 Philo, *Mos. II* 41-44; see Baruch M. Bokser, *Philo's Description of Jewish Practices* (The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 13<sup>th</sup> colloquy; Berkeley, 1977); Peder Borgen, "Judaism in Egypt," in P. Borgen, *Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism* (Edinburgh, 1996), 105-20; Jutta Leonhardt, *Jewish Worship in Philo of Alexandria* (TSAJ 84; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2001), 47-8.

53 Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.55.

54 N. Martola, "Eating the Passover Lamb in House-Temples at Alexandria: Some Notes on Passover in Philo," in *Jewish Studies in a New Europe. Proceedings of the Fifth Congress of Jewish Studies in Copenhagen 1994 ...* (ed. Ulf Haxen; Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1998), 521-31.

55 Heliopolis (Hebrew: *On*) had been the cult center for the worship of the sun, e.g., the Egyptian gods Ra', Ra'-Harakhty, and Atum. The religious cult at Heliopolis began in the early Egyptian dynasties, and it continued until the third century BCE.

56 See Gideon Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis* (SBL Early Judaism and its Literature 10; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 26ff.

57 See Hölbl, *A History*, 190; Charles Thomas R. Hayward, "The Jewish Temple at Leontopolis," *JJS* 33 (1982), 429-43; in respect to the priest Onias, see also Peter Schäfer, "From Jerusalem the Great to Alexandria the Small. The Relationship between Palestine and Egypt in the Graeco-Roman Period," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 1 (ed. Peter Schäfer; TSAJ 71; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1998), 129-40.

## 4. Alexandrians and the Land of Israel

Integral to the substantial intellectual exchanges between the Egyptian Jews and the Jews in Israel were halakhic inquiries<sup>58</sup> that generally followed the formula: **אלאו אנשי אלכסנדריה**, “The Alexandrians inquired ...” Some of these halakhic inquiries focused upon the differences between those laws directly reflecting conditions in the Land of Israel versus the Diaspora. One example, which demonstrates familiarity with Egypt in rabbinic texts, was the question, whether Alexandrian Jews were permitted to utilize radish oil instead of olive oil for sacred purposes, i.e., lighting the Sabbath lamps.<sup>59</sup> A series of questions posed by the Alexandrians is mentioned in the Bavli in a *baraita*; the redactor groups the questions into different categories:

- b. Nid. 69b: Our rabbis taught: Twelve questions did the Alexandrians address to R. Joshua b. Ḥinenah. Three [questions] were in respect to *halakhah*, three in respect to *agadah*, three were nonsense and three were in respect to ethical conduct.

This passage demonstrates that the Jews from Alexandria had a strong connection to the halakhic authorities in the Land of Israel. Philo seems to have been knowledgeable in the Oral Law and the *halakhah* of the Land of Israel,<sup>60</sup> and the existence of rabbinic courts in Alexandria is asserted in the texts.<sup>61</sup> There were additional ways in which Alexandrian *halakhah* might have come to the attention of rabbis in the Land of Israel. During times of upheaval or other occasions, Alexandrian rabbis left Alexandria and went to the Land of Israel. “Rabbis from the city

<sup>58</sup> t. Neg. 9:9; m. Neg. 14:13; b. Nid. 69b, R. Joshua ben Ḥananiah; b. B. Mesi’ a 104a, Hillel the Elder renders a decision in respect to an Alexandrian wedding practice; Yal. 1, 936 Ki tese.

<sup>59</sup> t. Šab. 2:3, R. Yohanan b. Nuri questions: “What will the people in Alexandria do, who have only radish oil?”; y. Šab. 2:4; b. Šab. 26a; Tanh., Buber ed., Beha’ alotkha 1; Tanhumta, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Samuel Belkin, “Some Obscure Traditions Mutually Clarified in Philo and Rabbinic Literature,” in *The Seventy-fifth Anniversary Volume of the Jewish Quarterly Review* (ed. Abraham A. Neumann and Solomon Zeitlin; Philadelphia, 1967), 80-103; Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic*, 349; Burton Mack, “Philo Judaeus and Exegetical Tradition in Alexandria,” *ANRW* II, 21.1 (1984), 227-71.

<sup>61</sup> The following passages all mention a *bet din* in Alexandria: t. Pe’ah 4:6; t. Ketub. 3:1; y. Ketub. 4:7; b. Ketub. 47a; some claims to priesthood could have been investigated in Alexandria. See also Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Jurisprudence of the Jewish Courts in Egypt: Legal Administration by the Jews under the Early Roman Empire as Described by Philo Judaeus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), 23; R. Katzoff, “Philo and Hillel on Violation of Betrothal in Alexandria,” in *The Jews in the Hellenistic-Roman World: Studies in Memory of Menachem Stern* (ed. Isaiah M. Gafni, Aharon Oppenheimer and D. R. Schwartz; Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1996), 39-57.

participated in many of the important religious discussions that took place in the Land of Israel during the early talmudic period.”<sup>62</sup> Eleazar (b. Shammua), a third generation tannaitic teacher, was from Alexandria<sup>63</sup> and R. Yohanan Ha-Sandlar, a fourth generation tannaitic teacher, was also from Alexandria.<sup>64</sup> One passage, b. Sanh. 17b, mentions R. Hanan the Egyptian: “It was discussed before the sages – refers to Simeon b. Azzai, Simeon b. Zoma, Hanan the Egyptian, and Hanania b. Hakinai.” The Sage Hanan was a Tannaite of the second century; he is referred to in another *baraita* in the Bavli (b. Yoma 63b). An earlier Sage, also named Hanan the Egyptian, is referred to in b. Ketub. 105b as one of the judges who heard cases in Jerusalem: “Three judges in cases of robbery were in Jerusalem: Admon b. Gadai, Hanan the Egyptian and Hanan b. Avishalom.” This cited Hanan was probably active a few generations before the other Hanan from Egypt.<sup>65</sup> R. Zakkai from Alexandria is mentioned in y. Ketub. 4:6 (see also y. Yebam. 6:1; 7:5; y. ‘Abod. Zar. 2:8). However, no particular Alexandrian methods of exegesis may be deduced from the passages that mention these Tannaites.<sup>66</sup>

A tannaitic passage states that there was an Egyptian convert who became a disciple of R. Aqiva:

b. Soṭah 9a (=b. Yebam. 76b; t. Qid. 5:4): It has been taught: R. Judah said, Minyamin, an Egyptian convert, was a colleague of mine among the disciples of R. Aqiva; and Minyamin, the Egyptian convert, told me: I am an Egyptian of the first generation, and I married an Egyptian woman of the first generation. I will marry my son to an Egyptian woman of the second generation so that my grandson may be permitted to enter the Community.

Under King Herod prominent Alexandrian and Egyptian families lived in Jerusalem; the House of Phabi was from Alexandria in Egypt. They were religious leaders, who held elevated positions in Jerusalem, including the High Priest of the Jerusalem Temple (m. Parah 3:5).<sup>67</sup> Shim’on, son of the priest Boethus from Alexandria, served as High Priest, and Hananel from Alexandria also served as High Priest. Thus, during the Second Temple period, there was a cadre of Jewish religious, cultic leaders from Egypt active in Jerusalem.

62 Haas, *Alexandria*, 97. See also Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Kifeshuta: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta*, Vol. 5 (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), 1162.

63 Wilhelm Bacher, *Die Agada der Tannaiten* (Repr. Berlin, 1965-66; 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Strassburg, 1890), 2, 275-82.

64 m. ‘Abot 4:11; m. Kelim 5:5; m. Yebam. 11:5; y. Hag 3:1.

65 Tosafot ad b. Ket. 105a, s.v. בָּנָה; see also Aaron Hyman, *Toledot Tana'im va-Amora'im* (Jerusalem, 1964), 471.

66 See note 40

67 Josephus, *Ant.* 15.320. See also b. Pesah. 57a.

One of the factors that served as a catalyst for the flight of Jews from Egypt to the Land of Israel was civil unrest and persecutions, e.g., during the tensions between Egyptians and Jews under Ptolemy IV Philopater (221-203 BCE).<sup>68</sup> In Alexandria, there were conflicts between Jews and Greeks in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE., since Jews were denied citizenship. Under Caligula in 38 CE, with the assistance of the Roman governor Flaccus, the synagogues of Alexandria were desecrated and images of Roman gods were placed inside these buildings; the Jews were persecuted. This instigated Philo's famous mission to Rome.<sup>69</sup> Tensions continued under Emperor Claudius. A Jewish revolt occurred in 115-117 CE; in the 18th year of Trajan's reign Egyptian Jews joined the rebellion that was escalating in the Diaspora.<sup>70</sup> During this conflict some Jews attacked Egyptian and other religious shrines in Alexandria, among these were the *Serapeum*, dedicated to the Greco-Egyptian god Serapis.<sup>71</sup> A massacre of Alexandrian Jews took place under Emperor Trajan;<sup>72</sup> this is recorded in the Bavli (b. Git. 57b: Hadrian; Yal. 1, 115 Toldot).<sup>73</sup> It was probably in the aftermath of this massive unrest that

68 See Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic*, 212-32.

69 Broadly addressed in Philo, *Legat.* and *Flacc.* See E. Mary Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini Legatio ad Gaium* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 4-26.

70 Alexander Fuks, "Aspects of the Jewish Revolt in A.D. 115-117," *JRS* 51 (1961), 98-104; T. Barnes, "Trajan and the Jews," *JJS* 40 (1989), 145-62, 155ff.; *idem*, "The Jewish Revolt in Egypt (A.D. 115-117) in the light of the Papyri," *Aegyptus* 33 (1953), 131-58; Miriam Pucci Ben Zeev, "Alexandria Ad Aegyptum: 117-119 A.D.," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 5 (1979/1980), 195-205, 195, attempts to reconstruct the chronology of these events. See also Lam. Rab. 1:45 (Buber ed., 42b) which may reflect the revolt. See also Günther Stemberger, "Die Beurteilung Roms in der rabinischen Literatur," *ANRW* II.19.2, 338-96, 359, and a papyrus, *CPJ*, No. 435 (dated to 115 CE).

71 Appian, *Bell. Civ.* 2.90; A. Rowe and B. R. Rees, "The Great Serapeum of Alexandria," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 39 (1956-57), 485-520, 496. Serapis basically derived from Osiris-Apis in Memphis; see chapter 7 and the literature cited there.

72 Attila Jakab, "Le judaïsme hellénisé d'Alexandrie depuis la fondation de la ville jusqu'à la révolte sus Trajan," *Hen* 21 (1999), 147-64; Miriam Pucci Ben Zeev, "Greek attacks against Alexandrian Jews during Emperor Trajan's reign," *JSJ* 20 (1989), 31-48; Matthew B. Schwartz, "Greek and Jew: Philo and the Alexandrian riots of 38-41 CE," *Judaism* 49 (2000), 206-216. Allen Kerkeslager, "Agrippa and the Mourning Rites for Drusilla in Alexandria," *JSJ* 37 (2006), 367-400, argues that the Jews had violated Alexandrian funeral rites; consequently, the edict of Flaccus was in response to these violations. On Philo, *Flacc.*, see Pieter W. van der Horst, *Philo's Flaccus: The First Pogrom. Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

73 m. Abot 4:11; m. Kelim 5:5; m. Yebam. 11:5; y. Hag. 3:1. The persecutions of the Jews under Trajan and Hadrian were commemorated in an annual festival at Oxyrhynchos, see Jack Lindsay, *Daily Life in Roman Egypt* (London: F. Muller, 1963), 163. The massacre of Alexandrian Jews under Trajan in 116 CE was compared to the encounter between Jakob and Esau in rabbinic texts; b. Git. 57b: "The voice is the voice of Jacob

the Great Synagogue of Alexandria was destroyed (see above, y. Suk. 5:1). Consequently, there was a large scale emigration to the Land of Israel, including Alexandrian rabbis.<sup>74</sup> Conversely, Jews from the Land of Israel immigrated to Alexandria (y. 'Abod. Zar. 2:6; y. Yom. 6:3),<sup>75</sup> where they would be exposed to some of the Egyptian cults. For the purposes of this chapter it is significant that Egyptian Jews, who were exposed to the highly visible Egyptian cults in Alexandria, traveled to the Land of Israel and that Jews from the Land of Israel, including rabbis, traveled to Alexandria and to other locations within Egypt.

## 5. Religion and Culture in Alexandria

In order to evaluate texts in respect to the rabbinic perceptions of Egypt it is critical to examine how the rabbis utilized the information they had in connection with their descriptions and criticisms of Egypt. Additionally, the Alexandria of the Second Temple period that Philo experienced, alluded to above, might not have been the Alexandria of rabbinic contemporaries, such as Pliny<sup>76</sup> or Athanasius (d. 373 CE).<sup>77</sup> A further difficulty in assessing Jewish visions of Egypt is the meager amount of information concerning the Jewish community in Alexandria in late Roman and early Christian Alexandria.<sup>78</sup> The question should be posed: What Egyptian sites would have been visible in late Roman and early Christian Alexandria? In order to provide a partial response to

*and the hands are the hands of Esau* (Gen. 27:22) – the voice refers to [the outcry caused by] Emperor Hadrian, who killed in Alexandria of Egypt sixty myriads on sixty myriads, twice as many as went forth from Egypt.”

74 Aryeh Kasher, “The Nature of Jewish Migration in the Mediterranean Countries in the Hellenistic-Roman Era,” *Mediterranean History Review* 2 (1987), 46-75.

75 Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.186-89; *Ant.* 12.86.

76 Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 5.11; his description of Alexandria is rather short, although he praises the city and mentions the Rhacotes.

77 Haas, *Alexandria*, 135, mentions that Christian contemporary authors (Athanasius, Socrates Scholasticus, Rufinus, Sozomen) refer to *ethnikoi*, which included Jews.

78 Homiletical texts utilized elements of historical events in sermons and frequently presented them in different locations and during a different era, e.g., Hadrian is said to have conquered Alexandria (See Pirqe Rab. El. 28). Steven D. Fraade, “Sifre Deuteronomy 26 (ad Deut. 3:23): How Conscious the Composition?” *HUCA* 54 (1983), 245-301, 249, states that for the historian of Judaism, midrash, “mediating as it does between Scripture, tradition, and history, is an important source for describing and understanding the unfolding Judaism in ancient history and society.” The evidence for Hadrian’s activities in Egypt is presented in Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 275-78, and Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999).

this question we should focus upon the first centuries of the Common Era. This period continued until the end of the fifth century, when the rabbis were collecting the textual materials of the major midrashic works and the Talmuds.<sup>79</sup> In this time period, which marked the gradual establishment of Christianity in Egypt,<sup>80</sup> many of the Egyptian deities, albeit some of them in Roman garb, were still venerated; therefore, Egyptian cults, usually synthesized with Roman and other ideologies, were practiced. For example, Asclepiades, an expert in Egyptian theology,<sup>81</sup> utilized a shroud depicting Osiris in a particular burial.<sup>82</sup> An Egyptian *archiereus* ("high priest") was active in the Early Roman Empire, but not beyond the fourth century of the Common Era and little is known about the exact function of these Egyptian priests. Frequently during this era there was a concomitant veneration by the identical worshippers of Yahweh, Christos, and Osiris. At the same time contemporary Christian authors referred to the *ethnikoi* and their separate specific cults.<sup>83</sup>

A Jewish visitor to Alexandria would have been confronted with the panoply of Egyptian deities. An examination of Egyptian cults in supposedly Christian Alexandria indicates that statutes and edifices venerating Egyptian gods were found in all areas of the city, including the main thoroughfares such as the major street, the harbor and the lighthouse.<sup>84</sup> The *Via Canopica* was the principal artery and the major street of the city, as well as the location where religious processions and civic ceremonies could be watched. The cults in the center of Alexandria, in the area of the main *agora* and the *Via Canopica*, erected shrines, temples and statues, for example, sites dedicated to the snake-god Agathos Daimon, depicted with the Egyptian sun disk and revered as the god who had revealed himself to the early builders of Alexandria. One of these cultic edifices was the *Tychaion*, dedicated to the goddess Tyche, who was represented as a form of Isis. There were also shrines

79 Haas, *Alexandria*, 128.

80 James Carleton Paget, "Jews and Christians in ancient Alexandria from the Ptolemies to Caracalla," *Alexandria, Real and Imagined*, 143–66, describes the efflorescence of Christian culture in Alexandria in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century, although there exists almost no knowledge of the intellectual life.

81 Damascios (480 CE), *Vitae Isidori reliquiae* (ed. Clemens Zintzen, Hildesheim: Olms, 1967).

82 Haas, *Alexandria*, 130.

83 Haas, *Alexandria*, 130.

84 See the results of the underwater excavations of the former royal quarter of Ptolemaic Alexandria, e.g., Françoise Dumand, "Priest Bearing an 'Osiris-Canopus' in his Veiled Hands," in Goddio, *Alexandria*, 189–94, and Zsolt Kiss, "The Sculptures," *ibid.*, 169–88.

of Isis and Serapis who were civic deities. The area between the *agora* and the harbor was traversed by travelers and merchants and included the *Caesarion*, which was dedicated to the worship of Aphrodite. She was presented as a form of Isis, as the divine mother of Julius Caesar. The Pharos Island, which housed the lighthouse in the harbor of Alexandria, had a shrine of Isis Pharia, a merchant and sailor goddess. Specifically, Ancient Egyptian deities – Thot, Anubis, Hathor – had their temples on the periphery of the city, still close to the ethnic quarters of Alexandria.<sup>85</sup>

A major cultic site in Alexandria was the *Serapeion*, the great temple of Serapis that existed until 391 CE. The *Serapeion* enclosed shrines of Isis and Anubis.<sup>86</sup> Additional temples of Serapis/Osiris, Isis, and Anubis were located in the eastern part of Alexandria, in Canopus, which was the preferred destination of processional festivals surrounding the Egyptian gods. Shrines and temples of Isis were found in multiple Alexandrian locations. Further temples in Alexandria dedicated to Egyptian deities included the temple of Mendis and “a temple on the promontory of Lochias dedicated to the goddess Isis, the *temenos* of which incorporated the tomb of Cleopatra VII.”<sup>87</sup> The well-defined ethnic and religious groups in Alexandria were described by Clement of Alexandria (around 200 CE), from the viewpoint of a Christian.<sup>88</sup> Jews had a degree of autonomy; the organization of the *politeuma* is well-documented for certain time periods.<sup>89</sup> In 215 CE the emperor Caracalla visited the city; however, he was so enraged by the insulting satires that the Alexandrians had made about him that he commanded his soldiers to kill all youths capable of bearing arms, and massacres ensued. After the city of Alexandria had come under Christian influence, and especially in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, the Jewish population declined.<sup>90</sup> Emperor Theodosius I mandated in 391 CE the observance of

85 Jews constituted an *ethnos*; see K. Goudriaan, “Ethnical Strategies in Graeco-Roman Egypt,” in *Ethnicity in Hellenistic Egypt* (ed. P. Bilde, T. Engberg-Pedersen, and L. Hannestad; Aarhus: Aarhus University, 1992), 74–99.

86 Alan Rowe, *Discovery of the Famous Temple and Enclosure of Serapis at Alexandria* (Suppl. ASAE, 2; Cairo: Impr. de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1946).

87 Haas, *Alexandria*, 145.

88 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom*. 6.

89 Josephus, *Ant.* 14.117; 12.108; B. J. 7.412; Philo, *Flacc.* 74; see Gert Lüderitz, “What is Politeuma?” in *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy* (ed. Jan van Henten and Pieter van der Horst; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 183–225; C. Zuckerman, “Hellenistic Politeumata of Jews: A Reconsideration,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 8–9 (1988), 171–85.

90 The major work on this period is Harold Idris Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt; the Jewish troubles in Alexandria and the Athanasian controversy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), which contains several Greek papyri and Coptic texts.

Christianity and prohibited public observances of Egyptian and other cults; consequently, the Egyptian and Roman festivals were changed into workdays. After 391 CE the Egyptian temples and other sacred sites became occupied by Christian churches.

The Jewish community in Alexandria experienced a climax of tensions in 414/415 CE, when, under the Patriarch Cyril, Jews were expelled from the city, but subsequently they returned. The Jewish quarter in Alexandria was desolated in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, which may have contributed to the remembrance of its former grandeur in Jewish texts. Other parts of the city and the central monuments, the *Museion* and the *Soma*, also referred to as “*Sema*,” (the pyramidal mausoleum of Alexander the Great) had fallen into ruin. The *Serapeum* (Fig. 21)<sup>91</sup> and the *Caesareum* became Christian churches. Nevertheless, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when general Amr ibn-al-Ass conquered Egypt and converted the populace to Islam, the city of Alexandria appears to have been a fully functioning city with theatres, baths, gardens, and a Jewish population estimated at 40,000.<sup>92</sup>

Those Jews who spent time in Alexandria or in Egypt during the Second Temple period or in the early centuries of the Common Era in all likelihood had visual encounters with Egyptian temples and formed impressions of the Egyptian cults. Egyptian shrines continued to exist, although Egyptian deities and shrines were usurped first by the Greco-Roman religions and later by Christianity.<sup>93</sup> The temples retained their essential Egyptian style and presented the viewer with a uniquely Egyptian appearance. Even stylized and stereotypical Egyptian elements in Hellenistic garb would have elicited responses to Egyptian culture. In addition to the textual presence of Alexandria in rabbinic literature, there is pictorial evidence, e.g., the so-called Nilotic scenes in mosaics in the Land of Israel from the Roman and Byzantine eras which often depict Alexandria and some of its preeminent buildings.<sup>94</sup> For example, we see the lighthouse of Alexandria in mosaics, e.g., Bet Leon-

91 The location of the Serapeum and Pompey’s column, Alexandria (Ulmer).

92 This number is based upon reports of Arab writers, see Eliyahu Ashtor, "The number of Jews in Medieval Egypt," *JJS* 18 (1967), 9-42, 19 (1968), 1-22, 8ff., and Jacob Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs: A Contribution to their Political and Communal History Based Chiefly on Geniza Material* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920-22), 1, 88.

93 Alfred Hermann, "Der Nil und die Christen," *JAC* 1 (1958), 30-69, 45.

94 See chapters 2 and 3.

tis.<sup>95</sup> The famous buildings of Alexandria were markers of a recognizably foreign culture.

## 6. Rabbis from the Land of Israel Traveling to Alexandria

Alexandria was a center of tourism in antiquity; Greek and Roman visitors came through Alexandria in order to explore the splendors of Egypt,<sup>96</sup> and they carved their graffiti into the Egyptian monuments. Rabbis from the Land of Israel, who shaped the Judaic tradition, also traveled to Alexandria. It is impossible to reconstruct every encounter in the first six centuries of the Common Era considering that the historical referentiality of the rabbinic texts is often quite tentative.<sup>97</sup>

There are several specific references in rabbinic literature to rabbis traveling to Egypt. It is debatable whether these references are just constructions to teach a lesson about Egypt or if they are entirely based upon actual travels of rabbis. In either event these passages indicate that the authors of these interpretative texts may have possessed background information concerning Alexandria that was utilized in their rhetorical strategies. Traveling rabbis in late antiquity did not leave us with extensive travelogues such as those of Pausanias and Herodotus; in Jewish literature travel descriptions appeared mainly in the Middle Ages when, indeed, we have extensive descriptions of Egypt.<sup>98</sup> Sages and rabbis traveling to Alexandria often went there for casual business purposes, but others fled to Alexandria to seek shelter; still others taught there. When R. Abbahu went to Alexandria he instructed the Alexandrian Jews in respect to the laws of the Land of Israel, which were different from Alexandrian Jewish practices.

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95 See chapter 2; Rivka Ulmer, "The Nile as the Landscape of the Other," In *Discussing Cultural Influences: Text, Context, and Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism: Proceedings of a Conference on Rabbinic Judaism at Bucknell University* (ed. Rivka Ulmer; Studies in Judaism Series; Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2007), 193-237.

96 See Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt from Alexander to the early Christians: An archaeological and historical guide* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004), 47-50.

97 This becomes evident in the rabbinic references to Egyptian kings (pharaohs), for example, Shishak (Esth. Rab. 1:12; b. Pesah. 119a), is a known historical figure from pharaonic Egypt (Shoshenq I, 945-924 BCE, sometimes confused with Pharaoh Necho, Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 26), while the Ptolemies (Gen. Rab. 38:10, Lev. Rab.13:5), in particular Queen Cleopatra (b. Sanh. 90b), are referred to without further clarification (the Greek rule over Egypt lasted from 332-30 BCE). See chapter 7.

98 See Rivka Ulmer, "Jüdische Reisende des 15. Jahrhunderts in Ägypten," *Kairos* 19 (1987), 233-51.

y. 'Erub. 3:9.<sup>99</sup> R. Abbahu went to Alexandria and he permitted people to carry *lulavs* to the synagogue on the Sabbath day [as was done in the Temple], when that day coincided with the first festival day of Sukkot. Rabbi heard this and said, Who will promise to bring R. Abbahu to them every year [to give them instruction on proper conduct]? R. Yosse sent a letter to them: Even though we have written to you about the proper arrangements [dates] for the festivals, do not revise the customs established for you by your forefathers, whose souls are at rest.

The flight to Egypt is a *topos* found in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in early Christian and rabbinic literature.<sup>100</sup> People from the Land of Israel fled to Egypt during times of economic crisis, such as a famine, and during times of political crisis and persecution.<sup>101</sup> Some of the rabbinic passages should be understood within this larger intellectual and socio-logical context. During an era of political upheaval, R. Joshua b. Perahiah is said to have fled to Egypt as reflected in the following two texts:

b. Sanh. 107a (MS Munich Cod. Hebr. 95, fol. 355v.): What of R. Joshua b. Perahiah? When King Jannai [Jannaeus] killed the rabbis, Shim'on b. Shetah was hidden by his sister. R. Joshua b. Perahiah<sup>102</sup> went to Alexandria of Egypt. When there was peace, Shim'on b. Shetah sent [the following message to him]: From me, Jerusalem, the Holy city, to you, in Alexandria of Egypt. O my sister [Alexandria]! My husband lives within your walls and I live alone. [R. Joshua b. Perahiah] got up, went, and found himself in this inn [*ushpiza* עַשְׁפִּזָּה] where they paid him great respect. [Someone<sup>103</sup> said:] How beautiful is this inn [*akhsanya* אֲכַשְׁנָה].<sup>104</sup> He said: Her eyes are feverish.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>99</sup> *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation*. Vol. 12 *Erubin* (trans. Jacob Neusner, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 122-23.

<sup>100</sup> During famines people from the Land of Israel fled to Egypt. For general migration patterns, see Horst Braunert, *Die Binnenwanderung* (Studien zur Sozialgeschichte Ägyptens in der Ptolemäer und Kaiserzeit; Bonn: L. Röhrscheid, 1964).

<sup>101</sup> In the aftermath of the First Jewish Revolt (66-73 CE), some of the *Sicarii* fled to Alexandria (Josephus, *B. J.* 7.410).

<sup>102</sup> Uncensored version: "and Jesus."

<sup>103</sup> Uncensored version: "Jesus said."

<sup>104</sup> The term אַוְשִׁפְזָה, Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1, 35: "lodging place, inn," evokes hospitality; the term אֲכַסְנָה is usually translated "inn/innkeeper;" this could be changed to "foreign city" depending on the context (see Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Palestinian Aramaic*, s.v. אֲכַסְנִיָּה, 59, derived from ξενία); Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 2, 65, s.v. אֲכַסְנָה, who has "hospitality;" "inn" refers to Exod. Rab. 35: "a lodging place to my children in Egypt"). Ben-Zion Rosenfeld, "Innkeeping in Jewish Society in Roman Palestine," *JESHO* 41 (1998), 133-58, 141, states with regard to the term as mentioned by Josephus: "... in most cases using the word ξενία, which entered Hebrew-Aramaic as the loan-word *aksanya* (= visitor); the meaning conveyed is domestic hospitality".

<sup>105</sup> I base the term טוֹרֵט, usually translated as "narrow, bleary," upon τρίτη.

b. *Sotah* 47a (MS Munich, Cod. hebr. 95, fol. 257r): What of R. Joshua b. Perahiah? – When King Jannai killed the rabbis, R. Joshua b. Perahiah left for Alexandria of Egypt. When there was peace, Shim'on b. Shetah sent to him: From me, Jerusalem, the Holy city, to you, Alexandria of Egypt. O my sister [Alexandria]! My husband lives within you and I live alone.

With the phrases “Jerusalem, the Holy city” and “Alexandria of Egypt” found in the above passages from the Bavli the rabbis clearly emphasize that Jerusalem is holy, whereas Alexandria is merely a city in Egypt. This holiness argument cannot be refuted by the inhabitants of Alexandria. Consequently, Jerusalem is unique and distinct from all other cities.<sup>106</sup> In these talmudic passages, Alexandria is referred to as “sister,” a term that may acknowledge a “sibling relationship” between Alexandria and Jerusalem. From the rabbinic perspective this may have been the case; however, from a geopolitical perspective Rome was clearly the sister city of Alexandria. In the above text from Sanhedrin the narrative states that R. Perahiah or someone else calls the host city, Alexandria, “beautiful.” The precise meaning of the above texts is difficult to determine. There is a possible subtext of “licentiousness,” if one reads the passage so that R. Perahiah found himself in a hostel (possibly, a brothel) with a woman with “feverish” eyes or it could refer to Alexandria as a “whore.” As to the event that triggered the flight of R. Perahiah, the Bavli claims that King Jannai (Jannaeus) persecuted the rabbis.<sup>107</sup> The uncensored Bavli, Munich manuscript, adds the name of Jesus to those who fled and the context mentions that Jesus practiced magic; as is well known, medieval Christian censors rendered these passages illegible in other copies of the Talmud. Although the texts do not inform the reader in every case as to why a sage or a rabbi is in Egypt, rabbis traveling or fleeing to Alexandria leave us with the impression that Alexandria was a powerful city in the Diaspora that was viewed by some Jews as a potential equal of Jerusalem. This perception of Alexandria had to be discounted and the unique significance of Jeru-

<sup>106</sup> Hans J. Klauck, “Die Heilige Stadt Jerusalem bei Philo und Lukas,” *Kairos* 28 (1986), 129-36; in regard to the holiness of Jerusalem in the Roman period, see Martin Goodman, “Sacred space in Diaspora Judaism,” in *idem, Judaism in the Roman World: Collected Essays* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, 66; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 219-31, 219.

<sup>107</sup> Schäfer, “From Jerusalem the Great,” 132, states that Alexander Jannai persecuted his opponents, possibly including Pharisees, based upon Josephus, *Ant.* 13.383; *B. J.* 1.98; and that the letter mentioned in the story is independent from the rest of it. Alexander Jannaeus (104 to 78 BCE), in all likelihood persecuted the Pharisees. In the civil war between Cleopatra III of Egypt and her son, Ptolemy IX Lathyrus (116-80 BCE), the Egyptian Jews were loyal to Cleopatra (Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.51-55; *Ant.* 13.284); Ptolemy IX Lathyrus campaigned in Judea against King Alexander Jannaeus and took vengeance upon the Jews (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.345-347)

salem to Jews had to be emphasized as the only true and holy center of Judaism.

Another passage claims that Judah b. Tabbai initially refused to serve as the Nasi, president of the court in the Land of Israel, and fled to Alexandria.<sup>108</sup> There are obvious historical inconsistencies in these travel reports; however, the central concern of this chapter is the rabbinic ideological engagement with Egypt. Peter Schäfer expresses his skepticism in respect to Tabbai's alleged presence in Alexandria: "It doesn't give any reason why ... and why of all places he fled to Alexandria."<sup>109</sup> However, I argue that the Yerushalmi does not need to explain Tabbai's flight to Alexandria; fleeing to and from Egypt, which later included Alexandria, is a literary *topos* in Jewish, as well as early Christian, literature. Some of these religious documents imply that the flight to Egypt is theologically essential for the spiritual development of a religious leader. The flight to Egypt frequently documents the intervention of Divine Providence and miracles, which led to the survival of the "hero" or main protagonist.<sup>110</sup>

When rabbinic scholars were fleeing to Alexandria, they were seeking shelter in a major Diaspora city. One of the problematic aspects of Second Temple Jewish life was the existence of the Jewish center in the Land of Israel and concurrently the existence of a large and prosperous Diaspora. This duality of Jewish existence raised suspicions in rabbinic literature that touched upon Jewish self-identity and upon the centrality of Jerusalem that was in rivalry with other cities such as Alexandria.<sup>111</sup> Declarations of allegiance to the ancestral homeland were frequently accompanied by contrary expressions of local patriotism by members of the Diaspora community. On the other hand, the spiritual guardians of the idea of the Jewish center in Jerusalem (primarily the rabbis of rabbinic literature), even long after its destruction, argued for its unique significance. Some of these arguments utilized the theme of holiness that, in the case of Judaism, can only be ascribed to one city, Jerusalem, no matter how large and splendid the Diaspora community in Alexandria appeared.

y. *Hag.* 2:2, 77d:<sup>112</sup> Judah b. Tabbai was *nasi*. Shim'on b. Shetah was head of the court. Some teach it vice versa. He who says that Judah b. Tabbai was

<sup>108</sup> y. *Hag.* 2, 77d; y. *Sanh.* 6, 23c); see Schäfer, "From Jerusalem the Great," 129f.

<sup>109</sup> Schäfer, "From Jerusalem the Great," 130.

<sup>110</sup> See chapter 10.

<sup>111</sup> Sib. 11:233-35, describes Alexandria as the "nurse" of the Romans, i.e., providing grain.

<sup>112</sup> My translation follows closely Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: a Preliminary Translation and Explanation*, vol. 20 (Chicago Studies in the History of Ju-

*nasi* finds support in the case of Alexandria.<sup>113</sup> The men of Jerusalem wanted to appoint Judah b. Tabbai as Patriarch in Jerusalem. He fled and went to Alexandria. The men of Jerusalem would write: From Jerusalem, the great, to Alexandria, the small: How long will my betrothed dwell with you, while I am sorrowful on his account?

The terms "Jerusalem, the great" and "Alexandria, the small" demonstrate the relative significance of these two cities in the late antique debate concerning the importance of cities in general. This dichotomy is indicative of the theological conflict between the more populous city of Alexandria in the Diaspora and the much smaller city of Jerusalem.<sup>114</sup> This dichotomy signifies that there was a rivalry between Alexandria and Jerusalem, which were both important Jewish centers. For Philo, Jerusalem was the religious center for all Jews, it was a holy city (*ιερόπολις*)<sup>115</sup> and the Jerusalem Temple symbolized this dominant role.<sup>116</sup> There is discussion revolving around the term "metropolis" ("mother-city") in regard to Alexandria.<sup>117</sup> Sarah Pearce compiled evidence, which supports her position that, from the perspective of Philo, Jerusalem was not viewed as the genuine home of the Alexandrian Jews.<sup>118</sup> However, based upon Greek usage, Jews would be "colonists" who had come from Jerusalem, the mother-city.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, view-

dasm; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 56. The parallel text in y. Sanh. 6, 23c is different; it does not mention the flight to Alexandria.

113 Schäfer, *Synopse*, II/5-12, *editio princeps*, Venice, יובדא דאלכסנדריה מסיע לה.

114 Schäfer, "From Jerusalem the Great," 133, sees jealousy in these formulae. Gregory E. Sterling, "Judaism between Jerusalem and Alexandria," in *Hellenism in the Land of Israel*, 265f., compares the two Jewish communities of Alexandria during the time period of 175 BC-135 CE. He writes: "The numbers that we have reached suggest that both Jewish communities were large. The Alexandrian community was probably more than twice the size of the Jerusalem community." (P. 268) His figures, based upon statistical values of other scholars, support his assumptions of a population of 35,000 for Jerusalem in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and 70,000-80,000 at the time of the First Jewish Revolt, whereas Alexandria had between 300,000-600,000, possibly close to 1,000,000 people during this time period.

115 Philo, *Flacc.* 46; *Legat.* 281.

116 See Runia, "The Idea and the Reality," 376.

117 Aryeh Kasher, "ירושלים כ'מרכז לאומי' בחזותיו הלאומית של פליון" *Cathedra* 11 (1979), 45-56. Isaiah Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 46, explains Philo's expression "fatherland" as an attachment to a place of residence.

118 Pearce, "Jerusalem as Mother-City," 22ff. Pearce, 21, wrote: "The evidence, I suggest, does not support an interpretation of Philo as claiming the centrality of Jerusalem over against other homelands for Jews; an alternative reading ... is proposed."

119 Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks*, 242, asserts that in Philo's view, Jews were sent as colonists, although the "expression 'colony' had a ring of pride and accomplish-

ing Jerusalem as the mother-city was an apologetic strategy based upon Biblical<sup>120</sup> and post-Biblical imagery utilized by Philo in his scriptural interpretations.<sup>121</sup>

The rivalry<sup>122</sup> between cities was a topic in antiquity, which also found its expression in rabbinic texts that often juxtaposed the fates or features of cities (*Sif. Num.* 131; *Yal.* 1, 809 *Devarim*).<sup>123</sup> For example, Alexandria appears in comparisons of various cities, e.g., in *Pesiq. Rab.* 30:1 (and *Pesiq. Rab.* 33:57). In these passages in respect to the divinely caused destruction of Nineveh, Alexandria is paired with Nineveh in order to hermeneutically justify the destruction of Jerusalem. Similarly, in the efforts of the prophets to console Jerusalem, Alexandria is again paired with Nineveh. The consolation homily in *Pesiq. Rab.* 30 compares the destruction of major cities with the efforts to comfort the suffering Jerusalem, which is unlike the other destroyed cities. Consolation and rivalry between cities and empires is frequently cited in rabbinic literature. For example, in the *Yalqut* (*Yal.* 2, 370 *Ezek.*), the downfall of Assyria is said to have consoled the Pharaoh of Egypt and conversely, the Assyrians were consoled by the downfall of Egypt.

A midrash in *Gen. Rab.* 1:1 compares Alexandria with “No Amon,” which was another city in the Nile delta.<sup>124</sup> The midrashic text set forth below “translates”<sup>125</sup> the city of No-Amon, Egyptian *njwt jmnw*

ment.” However, Josephus, *B. J.* 7.375, states that Jerusalem was the mother-city of the Jews.

120 *Jer.* 46:19 refers to the Egyptian Jewish community as “daughter:” *O you daughter dwelling in Egypt! Furnish yourself with the baggage of exile; for Noph shall be waste and desolate without an inhabitant.*

121 Philo, *Flacc.* 7. 46 (LCL 9.327-29) wrote that the Jews of the Diapora continued to “hold the Holy City where stands the sacred Temple of the most high God to be their mother city.”

122 The imperial cult of Roman emperors was one cause for competition among cities, see Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 302ff.

123 See also Menachem Stern, “ירושלים המפורסת לאין שיעור בין עיר המזורה (פליניוס, ‘נתואראליס’, הנטstorיה ה 70 ו-71,” in *Peraqim be-toledot yerushalyim biyme bayit ha-sheni: sefer zikaron le-avraham shalit* (ed. Aharon Oppenheimer; Jerusalem: Yishaq ben Tzvi, 1980), 257-70.

124 *Yal.* 2, 942 Mishle. See chapter 2.

125 The reference to the process of translation is not accidental in this midrash; e.g., Tg. Onq. Nah. 3:8 utilizes the same juxtaposition as the midrashic text. In regard to the delta, cf. Herbert Donner, “Das Nildelta auf der Mosaikkarte von Madaba,” in *Fontes atque pontes: Eine Festgabe für Hellmut Brunner* (ed. Manfred Görg; Ägypten und Altes Testament 5; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), 75-89; see also *LÄ* 4, 498, s.v. “Nilmündungen.”

(Thebes) or more likely the Lesser Thebes in the Nile delta,<sup>126</sup> into the more contemporary city of Alexandria.<sup>127</sup> By virtue of this hermeneutic strategy of “updating,” the midrash transposes the Ancient Egyptian city of Thebes into the Hellenistic Egyptian metropolis of Alexandria, situated in the Nile delta. This passage from Gen. Rab. demonstrates numerous theological insights and hermeneutical strategies in respect to Egypt, as well some knowledge of the geography of this country:<sup>128</sup>

Gen. Rab. 1:1: *In the beginning [bereshit]* (Gen. 1:1). R. Oshaya commenced his discourse: *Then I was with Him as a nursing [amon], a source of delight every day, [rejoicing before Him at all times]* (Prov. 8:30).

*Amon* means ‘tutor’ (pedagogue).

*Amon* means ‘covered.’

*Amon* means ‘hidden.’<sup>129</sup>

And there are some who say, *Amon* means ‘great.’

*Amon* means “tutor,” as in the verse, *as an amon carries the suckling child* (Num. 11:12). *Amon* means “covered,” as in the verse, *those who are covered in scarlet* (Lam. 4:5). *Amon* means “hidden,” as in the verse, *and he hid Haddassah* (Esth. 2:7). *Amon* means “great,” as it says, *Are you better than No-Amon [that was situated among the ye'orim]* (Nah. 3:8)? This we translate: Are you better than Alexandria the Great, which is situated in the [Nile] delta? Another interpretation: *Amon* means “artisan [*uman*]. The Torah declares: I was the artisan’s tool that the Holy One, blessed be He, used [when He practiced His craft]. It is customary, when a human king builds a palace, he does not build it with his own ideas, but he employs an architect [*uman*]. Even the architect does not build it from his head, but he uses plans and blueprints in order to know how to design the rooms and the doorways. So, too, the Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah and created the world. Thus the Torah said, *By means of the beginning did God create* (Gen.

126 The Egyptian capital Thebes was located in Upper Egypt. Based upon the term “ye'orim” in the passage from Nah. 3:8, which could be translated as “Nile estuaries,” I would argue that No-Amon refers to the Lesser Thebes in the delta of Lower Egypt. See also John R. Huddelston, “Nahum, Nineveh, and the Nile; the description of Thebes in Nahum 3:8-9,” *JNES* 62 (2003): 97-110, who, based upon some Egyptological readings, raises the possibility that the Biblical No-Amon refers to another location, the so-called Lesser Thebes or the Island of Amun, also known as Tell el-Balamun, 99, n. 10. This site is related to the cult of Horus the Behedite.

127 Gen. Rab. 23:1 indicates that the framers of this document knew that Alexandria was named after Alexander the Great. For Roman references to Alexandria, see Huzar, “Alexandria ad Aegyptum,” 619.

128 The knowledge of the geography of Egypt in respect to the Nile is also found in Exod. Rab. 1:1; 1:21; Memphis and Heliopolis are mentioned in Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 7:5.

129 The Hieroglyphic “amun” means “hidden.”

1:1). And the word for “beginning” refers only to the Torah, as it says: *The Lord acquired me at the beginning [reshit] of His course* (Prov. 8:22).

This midrash utilizes a lexical method of interpretation, listing many variant meanings of the word *Amon* based on its context in several Biblical passages. As usual, the midrash uses the method of focusing upon certain lemmata, which are linked by the same root and its variant propositions. Many different Biblical citations, which include the word *Amon* and its alternative meanings, are considered. A major theological concern of the rabbis was that the contents of the Torah had to be differentiated from anything similar, in particular from anything Egyptian; thus, one of the underlying themes of this midrash is that the Torah is greater than No-Amon, usually the term for the ancient city of Thebes. This city contained the temple complex known as Karnak, which was mainly dedicated to the Egyptian god Amun. Furthermore, on the western shore of the Nile, across from the city of Thebes, was a necropolis with its many tombs. This text then aims to translate the city of No-Amon (Thebes) into the more contemporary city of Alexandria, situated in the Nile delta, which was a center of wisdom and learning of the Hellenistic world. The hermeneutic strategy in this midrash implicitly advances the theological position that the Torah given to Israel is a greater source of wisdom than the greatest center of wisdom in the Hellenistic world, namely Alexandria. The text indicates that the rabbis were clearly aware that Alexandria was located in the Nile delta.

## 7. The Flight to Alexandria as a Reversal of the Exodus Narrative

The flight from persecution in the Land of Israel to Alexandria, Egypt, may be viewed as a reversal of the Exodus, the flight from Egypt *par excellence*. We do not know precisely when the Exodus narrative became one of the preeminent narratives of Judaism, although there are Biblical precedents of referring to the Exodus in Psalms and in the Prophetic books.<sup>130</sup> Intellectual engagements with the Exodus narrative appear to be traceable to Jews living in Egypt and their literary output. The question, whether this was a reaction by Jews to living in the land of the Egyptian persecutors, is open. Early examples of an intense focus upon Egypt and the Exodus narrative are found in works such as *The Exodus* by Ezekiel the Tragedian, a spectacle presented from the perspective of the victimized, and in *Joseph and Aseneth*, an entertaining

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130 Ps. 105:23-44; Jer. 7:22; Hos. 12:14; Ez. 20:6, and other citations.

Hellenistic work that also presents the acculturation of the Biblical Joseph in Egypt.<sup>131</sup> When exactly the Exodus narrative became part of the Passover celebration is indeterminate.<sup>132</sup>

In Alexandria the extensively documented hostile reactions against the Exodus narrative by Egyptian gentiles included extreme distortions, calumnies and fabrications, as well as negative views of the fleeing Israelites, which were applied to their “descendants” in the well-known defamatory works by Egyptians, such as Manetho (third century BCE), Lysimachus (second or first century BCE), Apion (beginning of the first century CE), and Chaeremon (first century CE), who all wrote anti-Jewish versions of the Exodus story.<sup>133</sup> On the other hand,

131 Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), chapter 3, “The Hellenistic Images of Joseph,” 73-109, presents a summary of the versions and the secondary literature.

132 Passover as a festival commemorating the Exodus is mentioned in Exod. 12:11-14a; Deut. 16:1, 3; these passages may be viewed as part of the historization and centralization process under King Josiah. The Haggadah is based on a compilation that began to be assembled in the Second Temple period; several central parts were in place by 200 C.E. (Baruch M. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984]); the Passover meal is modeled upon Greco-Roman meals (S. Stein, “The Influence of Symposium Literature on the Literary form of the *Pesah Haggadah*,” *JJS* 8 [1957], 13-44). For further literature, see the Haggadah references in the Introduction. Folker Siegert, “Hellenistic Jewish Midrash I: Beginnings,” in *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 1, 199-220, 207, refers to the possible dangers involved in retelling the Exodus story in Egypt. Siegert views this as the main reason for the creation of an alternative story by Egyptian Jewish writers, who attempted to construct a more sympathetic presentation of their religion and history to the Egyptians.

133 Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.75-76; 1.82; 1. 85-90, cites the *History of Egypt* by Manetho; the *History of Egypt* by Lysimachus is cited in *C. Ap.* 1.305-311. Josephus cites Apion’s *History of Egypt* in *C. Ap.* 2.10; 2.15; 2.17; 2.20f.; 2.25 (also found in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 10.10.16); Chaeremon’s *History of Egypt* is cited in Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.288ff.; Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, chapter 2, “The use and the abuse of the Exodus story,” 41-72, 42, specifically mentions the anti-Jewish tracts of the Alexandrians. John Collins investigated the Egyptian background of the Egyptian versions of the Exodus legend (John J. Collins, *Jewish Cult and Hellenistic Culture: Essays on the Jewish Encounter with Hellenism and Roman Rule* [JSJSupp. 100; Leiden: Brill, 2005]); in his chapter “Reinventing Exodus: Exegesis and Legend in Hellenistic Egypt,” 44-57, he analyzes the “creative” account by Artapanus, an ancient Jewish author of the Ptolemaic era. Collins states that Artapanus’ purpose was “to defend the ancestors of his people from gentile slander and to extol them above the heroes of other peoples,” 49. Collins also sees correspondences between the report in Artapanus, who credited Moses for dividing Egypt into nomes and organizing the religion, with the Egyptian king Sesostris, who historically was supposedly the first to divide Egypt into nomes. Collins presents a neutral perspective for Hecataeus and his account of the Exodus by looking into Egyptian sources; similarly the report by Manetho is said to reflect “Egyptian tradition in all its animosity towards the outcasts” (p. 52).

Jewish criticism of Hellenistic culture, and of Egypt, seems to be part of the *Wisdom of Solomon* 11.15-15.19 (25:18-16:1), 3 Macc 2.25-33, and 3 Sib. Or. Nevertheless, Alexandria is revered in 11 Sib. Or. 233-235.

Egyptian anti-Jewish calumnies occasionally refer to the gods Seth and Isis. Plutarch<sup>134</sup> quotes a source that mentions Seth as the tribal patriarch of the Jews. According to this source, Seth was driven out of Egypt and begat his sons Hierosolyma and Judah. Seth was the representative “Other” of the Asiatic invaders or of any foreigners in Egypt. A late, demotic papyrus (CPJ 520) connects Seth with the Jews; thus, the Egyptian fear of the “Others” focused upon the Jews and not, as may be expected, upon Greeks and Romans. A related representation of foreigners, specifically depicting Jews as “lepers,” which originated from a myth of the lepers from the Amarna period (14th century BCE), became popular in Alexandria. This myth is found in Hecataeus of Abdera,<sup>135</sup> according to whom the Egyptians were ascribing a plague in their land to divine anger. It was further assumed that the Egyptian gods were enraged at the presence of foreigners in Egypt. Consequently, the Egyptians banished the foreigners. The exiles establish colonies and Moses is portrayed as the founder and lawgiver of the Jerusalem colony, who bans images and statues of gods. Manetho placed these events in the reign of Amenophis III (1390-1352 BCE). The Alexandrian historian Lysimachus refers to king Bocchoris, who is ordered by an oracle to cleanse the temple of the impure, i.e., the Jews who are viewed as lepers. In Apion, Moses is portrayed as an Egyptian from Heliopolis, who leads the Jews to Jerusalem, while the prayer direction of the Jews is toward Heliopolis. Chaeremon’s version mentions that Amenophis banished the lepers from the land. Eventually, the lepers and other exiles return from their temporary abode to conquer Egypt (Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.288-92). An extremely conflated version in Tacitus<sup>136</sup> portrays the rituals of the Jews as a blasphemous inversion of what is sacred to the Egyptians. These negative reworkings of the Exodus tradition in Hellenistic sources also resonate in rabbinic literature.

The following passage in the Bavli retells the story of the Exodus from the perspective of a gentile Alexandrian. This may represent an apologetic inversion of the hatred of Jews.<sup>137</sup> Similarly, Louis Feldman

<sup>134</sup> Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 31.

<sup>135</sup> Hecataeus of Abdera, *Aigyptiaka*, in Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 40.3.

<sup>136</sup> Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.3-5.

<sup>137</sup> In respect to Greco-Alexandrian and Roman prejudice of Jews, see Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 125-33, and in particular, 137-38. The often cited “leper motif,” i.e., an Egyp-

refers to a comment by Josephus and states "... when the Israelites departed from Egypt the Egyptians lamented and regretted the harsh way they had treated the Israelites."<sup>138</sup> The story in the Bavli depicts an old man who acknowledges the suffering of the ancestors of the Jews, which could refer to either the Hebrews prior to the Exodus from Egypt or to the Jews who resided in Alexandria.

b. Sanh. 111a:<sup>139</sup> It has been taught: R. Eleazar b. R. Jose said: I visited Alexandria of Egypt and found an old man. He said to me: Come, and I will show you what my ancestors did to yours: some of them they drowned in the sea, some they slew by the sword, and some they crushed in the buildings. And for this Moses was punished, as it says, *For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people, neither have You delivered Your people at all.* (Ex. 5:23)

The scriptural lemma cited consists of a classical passage that expresses the uncertainty of Moses in respect to the redemption of the Hebrews by God. In the context of this Talmudic passage, God responds to this doubt by revealing to Moses some of the horrific details of the future battle against Pharaoh that would transpire when the Hebrews would be rescued from Egyptian bondage. What is interesting is this tannaitic passage from the Bavli is that an "old" man is the source of information which is similar to the experience of other travelers to Egypt who received information from priests knowledgeable in ancient rites, such as the above-mentioned Manetho and Chaemeron.

## 8. Sexual Licentiousness and Magic in Alexandria

Roman and other gentile cities were permeated by immorality in the view of the rabbis; this view was applied to Rome itself and to Hellenistic and Roman Alexandria in particular. This disdain may reflect general tendencies during the Hellenistic period; members of one group – for example, the Greeks – tended to classify others as "barbarians and to deny them any connection with Greek culture," as stated by Katell Ber-

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tian calumny that the Israelites of the Exodus were lepers, who were forced to leave Egypt is found, among others, in Josephus, *Ap.* 1.229, 233-236., 305-311.

138 Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 137 on Josephus, *Ant.* 2.315.

139 Yal. 1, 176 Va-era'.

thelot.<sup>140</sup> This pattern is evident in the cultural assertions of superiority found in talmudic literature; the literary form of the "comparative series" plays a decisive role in the stereotyping of gentile cities and towns and denying them the same value as their Jewish counterparts in the Land of Israel. For instance, wealth is said to be found in Rome, whereas courage is found in Judea. A series of comparisons of a virtue, vice, or other characteristic prevalent in one geographic location is compared to the prevalence of the same characteristic in another location. These assumed distributions of traits contribute to the rabbinic evaluation of other cultures. Jerusalem and the Land of Israel are compared to the rest of the known world. This comparative series renders a list of cultures that either militarily dominated the Land of Israel or were contiguous. Views of Alexandria and Egypt are also part of this comparative series:

Esth. Rab. 1:17: *The power of Persia and Media* (Esth. 1:3). In the name of R. Nathan the following [series] of "ten measures" is taught:

There are ten portions of prostitution in the world, nine in Alexandria and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of wealth in the world, nine in Rome and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of poverty in the world, nine in Lydia and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of witchcraft in the world, nine in Egypt and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of stupidity in the world, nine among the Ishmaelites and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of health in the world, nine among the Ishmaelites and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of fleas in the world, nine among the Persians and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of physical beauty in the world, nine in Media and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of ugliness in the world, nine in the East and one in the rest of the world.

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140 Katell Berthelot, "The Use of Greek and Roman Stereotypes of the Egyptians by Hellenistic Jewish Apologists, with special reference to Josephus' *Against Apion*," in *Internationales Josephus-Kolloquium, Aarhus 1999* (ed. Jürgen U. Kalms; Münsteraner Judaistische Studien 6; Münster: Lit, 2000), 185-221, 194.

There are ten portions of physical strength in the world, nine among the Chaldeans and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of courage in the world, nine in Judaea and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of beauty in the world, nine in Jerusalem and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of wisdom in the world, nine in the Land of Israel and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of the Torah in the world, nine in the Land of Israel and one in the rest of the world.

There are ten portions of hypocrisy in the world, nine in Jerusalem and one in the rest of the world, as it is written, *[Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall]; for from the prophets of Jerusalem has hypocrisy gone out to all the land* (Jer. 23:15).

In the above text, criticism is accomplished by stereotypes. Alexandria is stereotyped as a haven for prostitution and Egypt is seen as containing more witchcraft than all the other countries combined. The negative view of Alexandria may refer to the perceived notion of lewd behavior in Alexandria<sup>141</sup> and the statement regarding witchcraft refers to the common perception of pervasive magic in Egypt in rabbinic texts.<sup>142</sup> Sex and magic are a common mix in the rabbinic texts.<sup>143</sup> Philo and other Hellenistic writers also criticized the city of Alexandria as a location of sexual licentiousness and slander.<sup>144</sup> In particular, Roman writers asserted that Cleopatra of Canopus (Alexandria) was licentious.<sup>145</sup> In regard to magic, a parallel in the Bavli (b. Qidd. 49b) states: "Ten *kabs* of magic descended to the world: nine were taken by Egypt."

The famous legend of Ze'iri, a 3<sup>rd</sup> century Amora from Babylonia, who sojourned in Alexandria before going to the Land of Israel, illustrates the prevalence of magic in Alexandria, which declares that all

141 Exod. Rab. 1:15; 1:18; 'Abot R. Nat. 2:48.

142 Tanh., ed. Buber, Va-era' 12 states that all of Egypt is full of magic; b. Šab. 104b mentions that magic was brought from Egypt. See Rivka Ulmer, "The Depiction of Magic in Rabbinic Texts: The Rabbinic and the Greek Concept of Magic," *JStJ* 27 (1996), 289-303, and chapter 4 of this book. Imported food and healing preparations from Alexandria are rejected because they may have been affected by magic (b. 'Abod. Zar. 38a).

143 Yal. 1, 182 mentions sexual license and magic with regard to Egypt.

144 Philo, *Spec.* 3.37; negative characteristics of the Egyptians are formulated in Polybius, *Hist.* 15. 33.10; 39. 7.7.

145 For example, Propertius, *Elegies* 1.39 ("the harlot queen of licentious Canopus"); Seneca, *Ep.* 51, considers Canopus among the "resorts of vice."

consumers are expected to test Alexandrian merchandise prior to purchase.

b. Sanh. 67b: Ze'iri happened to go to Alexandria in Egypt and bought a donkey. When he wanted to water it, it dissolved, and there stood before him a ship's debarkation board [*doskanita*]. They said to him: Were you not Ze'iri, we would not return you [your money]: does anyone buy anything here without first testing it?

The neutralizing power of water removed the magic and revealed the magical practices of Alexandrian merchants. Other versions of this story imply that the donkey was turned into a woman. The phrase "in the name of Alexandria" appears in magical spells as set forth below. The following text provides an example of the power of divination based upon the name of the city. The correct magic spell – which is defined by the success of the divination – requires that the name of Jerusalem be mentioned.

Lam. Rab. Petihta 32:<sup>146</sup> *Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high* (Eccl. 12:5) – [Nebuchadnezzar] was afraid of the One who is supreme in the Universe and was not willing to do His bidding. [Nebuchadnezzar] said, He wishes to entrap me in order to do to me what He did to my ancestor. *And fears shall be in the way* (*ibid.*). R. Abba b. Kahana and R. Levi. R. Abba b. Kahana said: The terror of the journey fell upon him. R. Levi said: He began to consult charmers on the way. *For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way* (Ezek. 21:26) – at the point where the roads go into different directions. *At the head of the two ways* (*ibid.*) – which was in the middle of two roads, one leading to the desert and the other to Jerusalem. *To use divination* (*ibid.*) – he began to practice divination. *He shook his arrows to and fro* (*ibid.*) – he began to shake arrows in the name of Rome but without results, in the name of Alexandria but without results, then in the name of Jerusalem and it was successful. He sowed seeds and planted plants in the name of Rome but without success, in the name of Alexandria but without success, then in the name of Jerusalem and it was successful and they sprouted. He tried to light torches and lamps in the name of Rome but they would not light, in the name of Alexandria and they would not light, and then in the name of Jerusalem and they lit up. *He consulted with teraphim* (*ibid.*) – idolatrous [images] that he had; and so it says, *And stubbornness is like idolatry and teraphim* (1 Sam. 15:23). *He looked at the liver* (Ezek. 21:26) – R. Levi said: Just like a certain Arab who killed a lamb and inspected the liver.

A Biblical lemma from Eccl. 12:5 is applied to Nebuchadnezzar<sup>147</sup> by connecting one proposition ("afraid of that which is high") to lemmata from Ezekiel. The passage addresses the imagined fears of Nebuchadnezzar, who then practices magic and divination in order to find out what the future holds for him. The location, at the parting of the way, is

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<sup>146</sup> Eccl. Rab. 12:7; Yal. 2, 361.

<sup>147</sup> Nebuchadrezzar II of Babylon (7<sup>th</sup> century BCE).

a classical location for magic to take place. These lemmata from Ezek. 21:26 enumerate the practices and paraphernalia utilized by the king of Babylon: shaking arrows, consulting idols, inspecting the liver of an animal, mentioning the names of powerful entities, in this case names of cities are invoked in his incantations. Nebuchadnezzar, according to this talmudic passage, practices divination invoking a spell in the names of the great cities of Rome and Alexandria, but he only succeeds when he invokes Jerusalem. This magical incantation is repeated several times and highlights the superior power inherent in Jerusalem in comparison to Rome and Alexandria.

## 9. Ancient Wisdom and Knowledge in Alexandria

Egyptian education was connected to the temples; the temples contained libraries and the temple walls served as documents inscribed with texts. The Egyptian “House of Life” functioned as a library, a scriptorium, a school for priests, and a center of spiritual, religious life.<sup>148</sup> Wisdom was assumed to be eternal, providing guidance and valid for all time, and it is evident that Egyptian wisdom literature greatly influenced Biblical wisdom literature.<sup>149</sup> Under the Ptolemies an attempt was made to create centers of knowledge in the *mouseion* and in the library of Alexandria.<sup>150</sup> Eminent figures in science and literature settled in Alexandria (e.g., Eratosthenes of Cyrene, Callimachus, and Archimedes). Subsequently, Alexandria became an icon of learning and wisdom in the ancient world.<sup>151</sup> Alexandria during the Ptolemaic era

148 The education that transpired in Egyptian temples is discussed in G. Meier, “Erziehung,” *LÄ*, 2, 22-27. This function of the temples was known to Plato, who mentions Egyptian temple libraries (Plato, *Tim.* 23a). See also Alan H. Gardiner, “The House of Life,” *JEA* 24 (1938), 157-79, 159, who mentions that medical books were written in temples. Griffiths, “Egypt and the Rise,” 9, refers to the abundance of terms for Egyptian temples, one of which, “House of Life,” is similar to the function of synagogues.

149 1 Kgs. 5:10. Glendon E. Bryce, *A legacy of Wisdom: The Egyptian Contribution to the Wisdom of Israel* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1979); see also Nili Shupack, “Where can wisdom be found?” *OBO* 130 (1993), 349-51.

150 Fraser, *Ptolemaic Egypt*, 1, 320ff.

151 Plato attributes the discovery of geometry (Plato, *Phaedr.* 274c) and the discovery of astronomy to the Egyptians or their gods (Plato, *Epin.* 987a); Aristotle claims that mathematics was invented in Egypt (Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1, 1, 981b). Herodotus refers to the Egyptians as the wisest people of all nations (Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.160); Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 1.94.1-5, states that Egyptian law-givers were known for their wisdom; he relates the development of geometry to the observation and regulation of the Nile inundation (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 1.81.1-3).

was also famous for its physicians and the medicine practiced by them;<sup>152</sup> after some disruption this continued into the Roman era.<sup>153</sup> The practice of medicine was probably related to expertise in mummification.<sup>154</sup> The medicine practiced in Ancient Egypt, which in addition to the usual folkloristic, superstitious practices, included advanced surgery and skill in pharmacological intervention.<sup>155</sup> The skills of the Egyptian physicians are acknowledged in rabbinic literature.<sup>156</sup> Occasionally these skills are attacked in polemics concerning certain types of operations; alternatively, these medical skills are described in a factual manner when the outcomes of surgeries performed in Alexandria are discussed from a halakhic perspective.<sup>157</sup> A second century rabbi, R. Eliezer, presents a comment in respect to the medical cure of a eunuch.

b. *Yebam.* 80a: Come and hear what was taught: R. Eliezer said. A [man] who has been a eunuch [*saris*] since birth submits to *halisah*, and *halisah* is

- 152 The Alexandrian influence upon the Land of Israel in the sciences, and in particular in medicine, has been researched by Meir Bar-Ilan, “הרפואה בארץ-ישראל במאות הראשונות לספירה,” *Cathedra* 91 (1999) 31-78, 71f., who remarks: “It is not due to a miracle that the marks of a cultural influence of Alexandria upon the inhabitants of the Land of Israel and its sages exist. One has to add to this what is known from other sources, because wheat from Alexandria was brought to Israel ... , also fish, ropes, ladders, paper [papyrus] and other goods. As far as some of the food, such as Egyptian vegetables, is concerned, the Land of Israel was overshadowed by the culture, technology and even the economy of Alexandria.” [My translation]
- 153 Fraser, *Ptolemaic Egypt*, 1, 338ff.; a revival in medicine transpired late in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, 361. Generally, see J. Worth Estes, *The Medical Skills of Ancient Egypt* (Canton, Mass.: Science Historical Publications, 1993). See also Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.83; 17.5; Pliny the Younger sent his emancipated slave, Zosimus, to Alexandria to be cured (*Letter to Valerius Paulinus*, Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 5.19.6).
- 154 For the practice of embalming, see the description by Herodotus, *Hist.* 2. 86; A. F. Shore, “Human and Divine Mummification,” in *Studies in Pharaonic Religion and Society in Honour of J. Gwyn Griffith* (ed. Alan B. Lloyd; London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1992), 226-35.
- 155 Paul Ghalioungui, *The House of Life – Per Ankh: Magic and Medical Science in Ancient Egypt* (Amsterdam: B. M. Israel, 1973) describes Egyptian and Alexandrian medicine in great detail.
- 156 See the references in chapter 7 and Bar-Ilan, “הרפואה;” Samuel Kottek, “Alexandrian Medicine in the Talmudic Corpus,” *Korot* 12 (1996/97), 80-90; Joseph Geiger, “Cleopatra the Physician,” *Zutot. Perspectives on Jewish Culture* 1 (2001), 28-32. In the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, the renowned Jewish physician Adamantius is cited in Christian literature (*Socrates, Eccles. Hist.* 7.13.)
- 157 Tirza Meacham, “Halakhic limitations on the use of slaves in physical examinations,” in *From Athens to Jerusalem: Medicine in Hellenized Jewish Lore and in Early Christian Literature: papers of the symposium in Jerusalem, 9-11 September 1996* (ed. Samuel Kottek, Manfred Horstmannshoff, George Baader and Gary Ferngren; Rotterdam: Erasmus, 2000), 33-48.

arranged for his wife, because cases of such a nature are cured in Alexandria in Egypt.

The problem in the above passage is whether a congenital eunuch should be a party in *halisah*, a ceremony that is necessary when a widow wishes to nullify her obligation to marry her brother-in-law when her husband died childless. However, since the eunuch was apparently cured in the above passage he was required to participate in this *halisah* ceremony with his sister-in-law since he is capable of conjugal relations to produce offspring on behalf of his deceased brother who died childless. The Bavli asserts in this *baraita*, taught by R. Eliezer, that congenital eunuchs were cured in Alexandria. The above passage also reflects the view expressed by some Roman authors that there was a substantial presence of eunuchs in Egypt.<sup>158</sup>

Another instance of healing in Alexandria is found in the following passage:

Song Rab. 4:13: R. Joshua of Siknin said in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi: There were two priestly families in Alexandria; one induced cold and the other heat [in the healing process]. A *ma'aseh*: The physicians sent for some [menstrual blood] and they made *theriaca*<sup>159</sup> with which they healed. Rava said in the name of R. Shim'on: A human being cannot apply the plaster until he sees the wound. Not so He by whose word the world came into being, He first prepares the plaster and then inflicts the wound, as it says, *Behold, I will bring it healing and cure, and I will cure them* (Jer. 33:6).<sup>160</sup>

This passage from Song Rab. 4:13 states that priestly families in Alexandria had two different methods of healing; one family healed by cooling, the other by heating. Additionally, an event or a case (*ma'aseh*) is cited that mentions the use of menstrual blood for medicinal purposes. The town of Rekem (Petra) exported stained menstrual rags to many areas in the ancient world since menstrual blood was deemed to have magical or apotropaic properties.<sup>161</sup> These rags or undergarments with

158 See Berthelot, "Greek and Roman Stereotypes," 199f., who refers to Horace and Lucan.

159 Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 2, 1667, Θηριαχή.

160 Cf. Exod. Rab. 26:2 and parallels: "My way is not the way of a surgeon, who wounds with a knife and heals with a plaster, but I heal with the thing with which I smite."

161 See, e.g., *Der Kleine Pauly. Lexikon der Antike*, 5, col. 1468, s. v. "Zauberei" "Das Menstrualblut hat apotropäische Wirkung: so erklärt sich die seltsame Geste der Hypatia, die ihrem Liebhaber eine mit Menstrualblut befleckte Binde entgegenhält." Tanh, Buber ed., Va'era 12, p. 27: "There are people who carry straw to Afarayim, a stain to Rekem." Bloodstains from Rekem are mentioned in m. Nid. 7:3; b. B. Qam. 38b; b. Yebam. 16a). In regard to the passage from Tanhuma, see Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1942), 102, n. 51. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 1.13; Plutarch, *Quaest. Conviv.* 7.2; Ludwig Blau, *Das Altjüdische Zauberwesen*

blood stains were used in Alexandria. The above passage emphasizes the superior healing powers of God in a *mashal* cited by Rava in the name of R. Shim'on.

In addition to the renowned wisdom and medical skills found within Alexandria, the city exported produce and crafts. The trade contacts between Egypt and the Land of Israel were well established. During the first six centuries of the Common Era there was extensive importation into the Land of Israel of beer, fish, medical remedies and chemicals from Egypt; during the same time period substantial exports were sent to Egypt from the Land of Israel.<sup>162</sup> Alexandria was a major trade center because it was linked by canals to the Nile, which facilitated cheap and reliable transport for Egypt's abundant resources, such as linen and grain.<sup>163</sup> The two harbors of Alexandria sent ships sailing to Joppa in the Land of Israel. In respect to grain exports from Alexandria, we note that R. Joshua b. Perahiah rejected wheat imported from this city because it could have been contaminated by the Alexandrian method of baling bilge-water on the ships carrying the wheat; however, the sages declared the wheat acceptable.<sup>164</sup>

## 10. Alexandrian Craftsmanship and Luxury Items

In addition to ordinary items of everyday life, Alexandria also produced goods of fine craftsmanship that were exported. For example, the Yerushalmi mentions Alexandrian papyrus production: "And scribes' glue (m. Pesah. 3:1) – in Alexandria they make the molds (holding the glue for paper) from dough."<sup>165</sup> Rabbinic sources refer to the

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(Budapest, 1898), 77; Rivka Ulmer, *The Evil Eye in the Bible and in Rabbinic Literature* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1994), 141.

162 Daniel Sperber, "Objects of Trade between Palestine and Egypt in Roman Times," *JESHO* XIX, part II (1976), 113-47. It is reasonable to assume that "*toteft*" (t. *Šeqal.* 2:14) is based upon an Egyptian word containing the name of the Egyptian god Thot (see chapter 8); this could imply that magical paraphernalia were either copied from Egyptian models or imported from Egypt to the Land of Israel. Pharmaceuticals from Egypt were used in the Mediterranean world, see Renate Germer, "Ancient Egyptian pharmaceutical plants and the eastern Mediterranean," in *The Healing Past: Pharmaceuticals in the Biblical and Rabbinic World* (ed. Walter Jacob and Irene Jacob; Studies in Ancient Medicine 7; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 69-80.

163 Josephus, *B.J.* 2.383-386, refers to the grain trade.

164 t. Maks. 3:4; the term *antalia* ('ἀνταλία) is discussed by Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic*, 347; y. *Yoma* 6:3.

165 *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation*, vol. 13, *Pesahim* (trans. Baruch Bokser, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Alexandrian practice of preventing the copying of their products and prohibiting breeding with exported animals.<sup>166</sup> As will be discussed below, in rabbinic sources, items from Alexandria in Egypt often failed the inspections that were required to fulfill the ritual requirements of the Temple in Jerusalem. The following text suggests that some Alexandrian products were so defective they could not be used for sacred purposes in the Land of Israel:

Song Rab. 3:10:<sup>167</sup> It was taught: [t.Yom. 2:6] The house of Abtinas were experts in the preparation of the incense, in the mixing of the spices, and their incense used to send up a straight pillar of smoke. They were not willing to teach others. The sages sent and brought spice-makers from Alexandria. These were skilled in the making of incense, but they could not procure the straight column of smoke. The smoke from the incense of the house of Abtinas used to ascend like a straight rod up to the roof and then spread out and come down like a cluster. The smoke from the incense of the Alexandrians used to spread out and come down at once. When the sages realized this they said: The Holy One, blessed be He, created everything for His glory, as it says,<sup>168</sup> *Whatever is called by My name, I have created for My glory* (Isa. 43:7), and so the house of Abtinas were restored to their position [of spice-makers for the Temple].

In this passage a priestly family, which was known to possess the secrets of preparing frankincense for the Temple, was temporarily replaced by Alexandrian spice-makers. Spice and perfume played a great role in Egyptian offerings and the Egyptian gods supposedly carried divine aromas and could be detected through their perfume.<sup>169</sup> The spice trade from Alexandria is mentioned in y. Hag. 3:1. However, in the above rabbinic text, it is asserted that the frankincense of the priestly family in Jerusalem was superior to the Alexandrian concoction because it burnt in a certain manner indicative of divine acceptance and connection to the divinity. Although the above passage alludes to the spices brought from Alexandria, these spices did not fulfill the requirements of frankincense burnt at the Temple; the secret to this compound was known only to the Jerusalemite spice-makers, the house of Abtinas.

A further narrative describes similar problems with the bakers of the showbread that was an essential feature of the Temple service; Alexandrians were brought to Jerusalem to bake the showbread, but

<sup>166</sup> Examples include the cutting of an animal's uterus before shipping (b. Sanh. 33a; 93a; b. Bek. 28b)

<sup>167</sup> b. Yoma 38a; Yal. 2, 953 Mishle.

<sup>168</sup> y. Seqal. 5:15;

<sup>169</sup> Jennifer Houser-Wenger, "Nefertum," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 2, 514-16, 515.

their bread had deficiencies. The reputation of Alexandrian bakers was perhaps due to the recognition of an abundance of bread in Egypt; Egyptian bread is depicted in many different shapes in offering scenes in Egyptian temples and tombs. However, in this text the Egyptian product has some deficiency that renders its unfit for use in the Jerusalem Temple.

Song Rab. 3:11:<sup>170</sup> [m. Yoma 3:11] The members of the house of Garmu were experts in the making of the showbread and in removing it from the oven. They were unwilling to teach others [how to bake it and how to remove it from the oven]. The sages sent and brought bakers from Alexandria, who were expert at making the bread but not at removing it from the oven.

As can be seen from the above rabbinic text, there was a theme of deficiency regarding the Alexandrian bakers. This theme of deficiency of Alexandrian artisans and craftsmen working in the Land of Israel is replicated in another tannaitic text cited in the Bavli:

b. 'Arak. 10b: Our Rabbis taught: There was a pipe in the Sanctuary which was smooth and thin, made of reed, and from the days of Moses. The king commanded to overlay it with gold, and its sound was no longer pleasant. They removed its overlay, and its sound was pleasant again as before. There was a cymbal in the Sanctuary from the days of Moses, made of bronze, and its sound was pleasant [until] it was damaged. The sages sent for craftsmen from Alexandria of Egypt, and they repaired it, but its sound was no longer pleasant. They removed the improvement and its sound became as pleasant as it was before. A bronze mortar was in the Sanctuary, from the days of Moses, and it would mix the ingredients. When it became damaged the sages sent for craftsmen from Alexandria of Egypt who repaired it, but it would not mix the ingredients as well as before. They removed the improvement, and it would mix them well again as before.

Suspicion of Egypt is the underlying subtext of the above passage; Alexandrians could not even repair holy instruments "from the days of Moses." After repairs were made by the Alexandrian craftsmen the instruments did not work as well as they did prior to repairs, according to the above passage. These texts express a critical view of Alexandrian capabilities; even artifacts made at the time of Moses worked better prior to the failed repairs by the Alexandrians. This pattern of criticism is consistent with the rabbinic agenda that Jerusalem was a far more significant city than Alexandria, especially in the realm of the sacred. In addition to these tannaitic textual accounts and their amoraic embellishments, we have archaeological evidence of the work of Alexandrian artisans in the Land of Israel. For example, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century in the Land of Israel, an inscription in a Nile mosaic mentions the Alexan-

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<sup>170</sup> t. Yoma 2:5; y. Šeqal. 5:14; b. Yoma 38a.

drian artists Procopius and Patricius: "And indeed black as soot was the water of the great stream. But his own mother-city and fellow-citizens made thus far-famed Procopius, glorifying with his excellence the guardian of the city, and also his son-in-law, Patricius ..."<sup>171</sup> (Fig. 22)<sup>172</sup>

The temples in Ptolemaic Egypt, such as the Edfu temple, frequently had tremendous wooden doors and Egypt had to import wood from Tyre. The artisans produced work of superb quality;<sup>173</sup> the Bavli contains a story concerning the Nicanor gates of the Jerusalem Temple that were imported to Jerusalem from Egypt.<sup>174</sup>

b. Yoma 38a:<sup>175</sup> Nicanor experienced miracles with his doors [Mishnah]. Our Rabbis taught: What miracles happened to his doors? It was told that when Nicanor went to bring doors from Alexandria of Egypt, on his return a storm arose in the sea [and threatened] to drown him. They took one of his doors and cast it into the sea, but the sea would not stop its rage. When they were about to cast the other into the sea, he rose and clung to it, saying: Cast me in with it. The sea at once stopped raging. He was deeply grieved about the other [door]. As he arrived at the harbor of Acco, it broke through and came up from under the sides of the boat. – Others say: A sea monster swallowed it and spat it out on the dry land. In regard to this, Solomon said: *The beams of our houses are cedars, and our panels are berothim* [cypresses] (Cant. 1:17). Do not read *berothim* but *brit yam* [covenant of the sea].

This story refers to the high quality of Alexandrian craftsmanship and the usual way of transportation by ship from Alexandria to Acco or Joppa. From a religious perspective, we may surmise that the doors

171 Leah Di Segni, "Greek inscriptions in the Nile Festival Building," in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research*, vol. iii, (ed. J. H. Humphrey; Journal of Roman Archaeology; Portsmouth, RI, 2000), 91-100, 91.

172 Nile mosaic, Sepphoris (Zippori, Israel). Photography: Yigal Feliks. This mosaic shows the Nile god, a Nilometer, the inscription "Alexandria" and *Semasia* (see chapter 3, n. 50).

173 Artisans from Tyre and Alexandria are often mentioned in conjunction (Midr. Abba Gurion 1; Shlomo Hamelekh, OM 2, 527).

174 Bernard Goldman, *The Sacred Portal: A Primary Symbol in Ancient Judaic Art* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966), studies the portal-symbol as a common feature of synagogues and Greco-Roman cults. I. Renov, "A View of Herod's Temple from Nicanor's Gate in a mural panel of the Dura Europos Synagogue," *IEJ* 20 (1970), 67-74, assumed that the depiction of the Temple is framed by the Nicanor Gate. The bilingual Greek-Hebrew inscription of the ossuary of Nicanor, 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE-1<sup>st</sup> century CE, in the British Museum (ANE 126395), states that it contains the bones of the gate-maker Nicanor, the Alexandrian: נִכָּנֵר לְאַלְמָן [sic]. See also n. 44.

175 m. Mid. 1:4; 2:3; 3:10; m. Yoma 3:7; t. Yoma 2:4; y. Yoma 3:4; Yal. 2, 985 Shir.

from Alexandria had to be cleansed by a body of water; the miracles<sup>176</sup> recounted in this passage support divine providence in regard to the doors of the Jerusalem Temple. The miracles occur during the treacherous sea journey; since the doors were destined for the Temple they had to be saved. This story combines elements of the voyage, the storm, the miracles and the rescue and is reminiscent of the Biblical Book of Jonah and other seafarer stories in talmudic literature.

## 11. The Temple of Onias

The debate revolving around the superiority of Jerusalem was also carried on in respect to rabbinic comments concerning the Temple of Onias, located in the nome of Heliopolis, Egypt. The Temple of Onias mentioned in rabbinic sources<sup>177</sup> is a reference to a Jewish temple in Egypt. This temple was established in the second century BCE by Onias IV, who represented the last descendant of the Oniad family of high priests, the descendants of Zadok. Onias IV fled to Egypt (Alexandria) from Jerusalem in order to escape the coerced Hellenization of the Land of Israel under Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his followers in Jerusalem. In Egypt Onias IV constructed in 170 BCE a Jewish temple, rivaling or substituting for the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>178</sup>

y. Yoma 6:3: Shim'on the righteous served as High Priest for forty years. In the final year he said to them: This year I am going to die. They said to him: Whom shall we appoint as your successor? He said to them: Here, there is my son Nehunyon [Onias] before you. They went and appointed Nehunyon [Onias]. His brother, Shim'on was jealous of [his brother] and he dressed him in a gown and a girdle. He said to them: See, what he has vowed to his beloved: On the day on which I assume office as High Priest, I will put on your gown and girdle. They investigated the matter, and they did not find him. They said: He fled from there to the Royal Mountain, and from there he fled to Alexandria. He went and built an altar and he recited the following verse: *In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt* (Isa. 19:19).

176 On the miracles see Wiesenberg, "Nicanor Gate;" E. Stauffer, "Das Tor des Nikanor," ZNW 44 (1952/53), 44-63.

177 m. Menah. 13:10; t. Menah. 13:12-15; b. Menah. 109b; y. Yoma 5:3, 42c; y. Yoma 6:3, 43c-d; b. 'Abod. Zar. 52b; b. Meg. 10a.

178 See also F. Parente, "Onias III's Death and the Founding of the Temple of Leontopolis," in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period* (ed. F. Parente et al.; Studia Post-Biblica 41; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 69-98; John E. Taylor, "A Second Temple in Egypt: The Evidence for the Zadokite Temple of Onias," JSJ 29 (1998), 297-321; Hayward, "The Jewish Temple at Leontopolis."

The rabbinic engagement with the Temple of Onias occurs from a religious perspective; the historical explanations presented in the texts are couched in hermeneutics and rabbinic interpretations. However, it is significant that the *topos* of fleeing to Alexandria in Egypt during political and religious persecutions in the Land of Israel is consistent with the other occurrences of the “flight to Egypt” mentioned above. The rabbinic texts that mention the Temple of Onias contain a rabbinic evaluation of a Jewish shrine in Egypt. Many centuries after the construction of the Temple of Onias the chronologically far removed passage in the Bavli (b. Menah. 109b)<sup>179</sup> incorporates the tannaitic viewpoint that this temple was not a pagan shrine; this elevates and differentiates this structure from the Egyptian and Greek temples in Egypt. The lemma *the city of Heres [destruction]* (Isa. 19:18) is translated as “city of righteousness” in the LXX; this may also reflect acceptance of this temple. The rabbinic acceptance of the holiness of this shrine is provided in the narrative that specifies that the temple was erected by a descendant of a Jerusalemitic priest. The more important proof is the scriptural verse from Isa. 19:19: *In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord.* This indicated that a temple dedicated to God was to be built in the land of the idolaters and that the God of Israel was to be worshiped in Egypt. The “pillar” in Isa. 19:19 may refer to the Jewish military colony which had been established in 525 BCE on the island of Elephantine under the Persians.<sup>180</sup>

The establishment of the Temple of Onias was also presented by Josephus, in differing historiographies in *B. J.* and *Ant.* However, both versions of this account by Josephus mention that Onias approached the Ptolemaic ruler, Ptolemy VI Philometor and asked for permission to build the temple. In *B. J.* Onias bases his proposal for the erection of the temple on the political advantages of uniting the Jews from Egypt and the Land of Israel in support of Ptolemy's polity,<sup>181</sup> whereas in *Ant.* the

179 Contrary to the talmudic text, Onias IV was not the son but the great-grandson of the priest mentioned in the text. Other historical inaccuracies are the mention of Shim'i; this was Jesus-Jason who was responsible for persuading Antiochus IV to appoint him to his brother's office. Schäfer, “From Jerusalem the Great,” 134, who analyzed the texts from a strictly historical perspective, comments on y.Yoma 6:3: “That he infamously dressed Onias in the gown and girdle of his mistress (in the ... Bavli version he pretends that this is the proper dress for the High Priest), is, of course, a polemical distortion of the fact that Jason had bought the high priesthood from the king.”

180 Stephen G. Rosenberg, “The Jewish Temple at Elephantine,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67 (2004), 4-13.

181 Josephus, *B. J.* 7. 423-432.

argument for the construction of the temple is based upon the unification of the Jewish inhabitants of Egypt and the Egyptians.<sup>182</sup> *Ant.* has the text of a letter that Onias is said to have presented to Ptolemy VI. This version by Josephus refers to the same verse in Isa. 19:19 as the talmudic sources cited above. The citation of this Biblical verse by the writer of the petition convinces the Ptolemies that the construction of the requested temple would transpire according to the divine laws of the Jews, even though Onias is reported to have chosen the location at Bubastis ("Leontopolis"), a temple of the Egyptian goddess Bastet in the central Nile Delta.<sup>183</sup> Permission was granted to build the Temple of Onias,<sup>184</sup> it was closed down by the Romans in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE (73 CE). There is speculation that some priests from Jerusalem, particularly from the House of Garmu and the House of Abtinas, may have served at the Jewish Temple of Onias.<sup>185</sup> It should be noted that the Temple of Onias was located in the Egyptian nome of Heliopolis.<sup>186</sup>

Some talmudic statements set forth below in regard to an Egyptian temple are related to the suspicion that the sun was worshipped at this shrine, which would have desecrated any Jewish worship. Although the talmudic passage is dependent upon the Biblical encounter between Hezekiah (727/715 to 698/687 BCE) and Sennacherib (705-681 BCE), the recognition of sun-worship is significant because it demonstrates some knowledge of Egypt and its religious practices. The term *bet shemesh* – "the temple of the sun[-god]" – may be a reference to Egyptian sun-

<sup>182</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 13.66-68: "... and I have found a most suitable place called after Bubastis-of-the Fields, which abounds in various kinds of trees and is full of sacred animals, wherefore I beg you to permit me to cleanse this temple, which belongs to no one and is in ruins, and to build a temple to the Most High God in the likeness of that of Jerusalem and with the same dimensions, on behalf of you and your wife and children, in order that the Jewish inhabitants of Egypt may be able to come together there in mutual harmony and serve your interests. For this is indeed what the prophet Isaiah foretold, 'There shall be an altar in Egypt to the Lord God,' and many other such things did he prophesy concerning this place."

<sup>183</sup> In Ezekiel's prophecy concerning the destruction of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, Bubastis [Pi Beset, the temple of Bastet] is one of the cities to be destroyed in Ezek. 30:17: *The young men of Aven and of Pi-Beseth shall fall by the sword; and these cities shall go into exile.*

<sup>184</sup> Gideon Bohak, "CPJ III, 520: The Egyptian Reaction to Onias' Temple," *JSJ* 26 (1995), 32-41.

<sup>185</sup> Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic*, 347: "Actually, those Alexandrian priests may have been from the temple of Onias, since 'Alexandria' in the Talmud represented Egypt as a whole as can be seen in the talmudic legends about the founding of the temple of Onias."

<sup>186</sup> Bohak, *Joseph and Asenath*, 27f., asserts that the land of Onias is to be viewed as a colony of Jerusalem.

worship at Heliopolis, “the polis of the sun-god Helios,” the later Greek name of the location referred to as *bet shemesh*. The Bible refers to this place as On;<sup>187</sup> however, the term *bet shemesh* is also utilized in a Biblical passage in Jer. 43:13: *He shall break also the obelisks of bet-shemesh [Heliopolis], that is in the land of Egypt; and the houses of the gods of the Egyptians shall he burn with fire.* According to the Masoretic text, Isa. 19:18 reads “city of destruction,” whereas 1QIs<sup>a</sup> reads “city of the sun.” The Hebrew terms שָׁרֵך (destruction) and שֶׁמֶשׁ (sun) are juxtaposed in a talmudic passage (b. Menah. 109b-110a) in order to reflect the destruction of an idolatrous temple. The talmudic text appears to cite still another temple, and the verse from Isa. 19:19 is applied to a temple that would have been erected in Alexandria according to the talmudic passage. The reason for the uncertainty in this passage is that Alexandria was frequently synonymous with Egypt. Upon the request of King Hezekiah the altar is dedicated to God and not to idols, i.e., Egyptian gods. The updating efforts of the authors of this passage, which includes a tannaitic passage, are confusing. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that in rabbinic texts Alexandria had become an icon of such magnificence that the erection of an altar from the time of Hezekiah is placed in this city. Additionally, a passage from the Targum is cited to clarify the Biblical lemma from Isa. 19:19:

- b. Menah. 109b-110a: Mar Kashisha, son of R. Hisda, said to Abaye. How does R. Meir interpret the verse utilized by R. Judah? As [in a *baraita*] that was taught: After the downfall of Sennacherib, Hezekiah went out and found princes sitting in golden carriages. He adjured them not to worship idols, as it is written, *In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that shall speak the language of Canaan and swear by the Lord of hosts* (Isa. 19:18). They went to Alexandria in Egypt, built an altar there, and brought sacrifices in honor of God, as it is written, *In that day there shall be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt* (Isa. 19:19). *One shall be called the city of Heres* (Isa. 19:18). What is meant by *One shall be called the city of Heres* (*ibid.*)? As R. Joseph translated:<sup>188</sup> The sun temple<sup>189</sup> [*beit shemesh*], which will be destroyed [*hrs*], will be counted as one of them. But from where do we know that *Heres* signifies the sun? For it is written, *Who commands the sun [heres] and it rises not* (Job 9:7).

<sup>187</sup> Gen. 41:45: *And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On ...* (see also Gen. 41:50, 46:20). On is the Hebrew form of the Egyptian ‘wnw (WÄS, 1, 50). See also A. Rowe, “The Famous Solar City of On,” PEQ 94 (1962), 133-42, 133; On was a center of the worship of Ra’. See chapter 8.

<sup>188</sup> Or: “referred to in the Targum;” see Tg. Isa. *ad. loc.*

<sup>189</sup> Alternatively: “the city of the sun.”

The above *baraita* emphasizes that sun worship in the temples of Egypt was idolatrous, while implying that worship at Jewish sites in Alexandria and other locales in Egypt was permissible. Furthermore, Alexandria is specifically, although probably mistakenly, cited in the above text as the location for an erection of an altar that facilitated sacrifices made in honor of the Jewish God. Thus, it is implicit that this particular altar met with the approval of the authors of the text in contrast to their strong disapproval of the sun-worshipping temples. As an aside, the existence, as well as the status, of this alleged altar in Alexandria cannot be determined.

The rabbinic debate concerning the holiness of Jerusalem in contrast to other Jewish shrines at which sacrifices were offered also included the question as to whether the Temple of Onias was an idolatrous shrine. The temporal perspective of the following passage in the Bavli (b. Meg. 10a) is post-destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. This passage addresses the possibility of offering sacrifices at the Temple of Onias and contains the phrase “at the present day” in R. Yishaq’s statement; this phrase may refer to the past or is a hypothetical phrase. Another possibility is that this phrase was copied from an older textual layer into the text of the Bavli in order to make certain that Jewish shrines outside of Jerusalem were discussed. The discussion concludes that once Jerusalem had been established as a holy place by the Israelites, there could not be other places dedicated to the sanctification of sacrifices. This is an elegant way of demoting the Egyptian Temple of Onias in retrospect.

b. Meg. 10a: The high places could again be permitted, but subsequent to the sanctification of Jerusalem there cannot be such permission [Mishnah].

R. Yishaq said: I have heard that sacrifices may be offered in the Temple of Onias at the present day. He was of opinion that the Temple of Onias is not an idolatrous shrine, and that the first holiness [of Jerusalem] was conferred on it for the time being, but not for all time, as it is written, *For you have not yet come into the rest and to the inheritance* (Deut. 12:9) Rest here means Shiloh and inheritance means Jerusalem, and inheritance is comparable to rest; just as after the rest the high places were again permitted, so after the inheritance they will be permitted. They said to him: Do you really say so? He said, No. Rava said: By God! He did say it and I learned it from him. Why did he retract [his argument]? On account of the difficulty raised by R. Mari. For R. Mari adduced the following as refutation: After the sanctification of Shiloh the high places could again be permitted, but subsequent to the sanctification of Jerusalem there cannot be such permission. We have also learned further: After [the Israelites] occupied Jerusalem, the high places were forbidden, and they were never permitted again, and [Jerusalem] was the inheritance.

Another passage in the Bavli raises the question whether utensils from the Temple of Onias in Egypt may be used in Jerusalem. This specific question is not really answered. A decisive opinion in regard to the utensils that were used at the Temple of Onias is circumvented, which may indicate that there was a certain level of ambiguity by the rabbis in regard to this temple.

b. 'Abod. Zar. 52b: R. Jose b. Sha'ul asked Rabbi: May utensils which were used in the Temple of Onias be used in the Sanctuary? This question is in response to the opinion of one who said that the Temple of Onias was not an idolatrous shrine; since we have learned: Priests who served in the Temple of Onias may not serve in the Sanctuary which is in Jerusalem, and it is unnecessary to state that [priests who served] an idol [are disqualified].

## Conclusion

Alexandria, the splendid city founded by Alexander the Great in Egypt, was frequently subject to suspicion in rabbinic literature. The rabbinic views of Alexandria are comparable to some negative Greek perspectives of Egypt that were subsequently perpetuated by Rome. The suspicion hinged upon a substantial geographical shift of the center of the Jewish population from the Land of Israel to the Land of the Exodus. This entailed a shift from a Jewish existence within sacred time and space to an existence outside sacred time and space.

As perhaps the most significant city of the Jewish Diaspora, Alexandria was viewed as the potential rival of Jerusalem; in particular the expressions "Alexandria, the small" and "Jerusalem, the great" focus upon the predominance of Jerusalem with regard to holiness. Only Jerusalem had the Holy Temple in contrast to the lesser Egyptian Jewish temples that lacked the status of holiness.<sup>190</sup> Beginning with the founding of Alexandria and the establishment of a very large Jewish community, which was much greater than the Jewish population in Jerusalem, a dialectical tension existed between Jerusalem and Alexandria; this is reflected in the tannaitic stratum of rabbinic texts and continued in talmudic discussions. Identifying and assigning unique value to a place, while rejecting a rival place, constitutes a significant development from the patriarchal narratives in the Bible. Anthropologists have commented upon the continuous movement of a people and an absence of identification with a specific place; such factors may serve as

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<sup>190</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 118, states that "Ritualization invokes dynamics of contrast with other forms of cultural activity and, inevitably, with other ritualized acts as well."

a catalyst to the formation of identity.<sup>191</sup> The rituals and the culture of Egypt, which were rejected on many levels by the rabbinic texts as the religious practices of the idolaters, continued to permeate Alexandria even in Greco-Roman and Christian times. Rabbinic literature also notes the conflicts and persecutions involving the Alexandrian Jews under the Romans. Egyptian religious practices and Egyptian icons were intrinsically connected to the city of Alexandria according to the texts. The rabbinic texts describe the Great Synagogue of Alexandria, which may have contained furniture, such as the *cathedra*, modeled upon Egyptian sacred furnishings. The institution of the synagogue itself may be based upon Egyptian buildings and their specific functions, as has been argued by Egyptologists, such as Griffiths.

However, not all rabbinic views of Alexandria are negative; there are positive comments concerning Alexandria and Egypt in rabbinic texts. The rich history of the city, the substantial presence of Jews, as well as the observance of Jewish law and customs by the Jews of Alexandria, are acknowledged. The Jews of Alexandria, who are referred to in rabbinic texts, were often observant and sent gifts to the Temple in Jerusalem; they also posed questions to the rabbis in the Land of Israel regarding halakhic issues. One of the critical aspects of some rabbinic passages is that rabbis claim to have seen and visited Alexandria; this could be based upon the well-known *topos* of fleeing to Egypt. Alexandria was stereotyped as having many talented craftsmen and artisans, skilled physicians, as well as a tradition of wisdom and great learning. There were negative stereotypes as well, including being a center of magic and lewdness.

In respect to holiness, the products from Alexandria that were intended to be used in the Holy Temple of Jerusalem were deemed to be inferior to products made in the Holy Land. The import from Alexandria of the Nicanor Gates of the Temple had in effect to be cleansed through miraculous events that submerged them in the sea.

It should be noted that an analysis of rabbinic access to Egyptian culture is greatly limited since historical and social contexts between these two entities were rarely cited.<sup>192</sup> It is significant that the majority

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191 Zali Gurevich and Gideon Aran, “על המקומן אנטropולוגיה ישראליית” (*Alpayim* 4 (1991), 9-44).

192 Aryeh Kasher, “Political and National Connections Between the Jews of Ptolemaic Egypt and their Brethren in Eretz Israel,” in *Eretz Israel, Israel and the Jewish Diaspora: Mutual Relations*. Proceedings of the first annual Symposium of the Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization ...1988 (ed. Menachem Mor; Studies in Jewish Civilization 1; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 24-41; see also Braunert, *Die Binnenwanderung*, 79.

of texts reviewed in this chapter are from the tannaitic stratum of rabbinic literature, although they are subsequently utilized in the Talmud and in some midrashic collections. This tannaitic stratum often has citations from the sages that reflect the pre-rabbinic period. Alexandria and its Jewish community flourished during the Second Temple period, which included the demise of Ptolemaic Alexandria and the onset of the Roman occupation of Egypt.

Rabbinic texts do not systematically compare Egyptian practices to Jewish practices.<sup>193</sup> Nevertheless, rabbinic comparisons construct a meta-narrative that is based upon suspicion of Alexandria and Egypt. The diegesis of the rabbinic narrative of Alexandria rarely consists of historical events; rather the events are construed by way of other narratives. These narratives are located in the greater cultural contexts of rabbinic texts that are often elusive to contemporary readers.

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193 Josephus, however, contains such comparisons: "Again the contrast between the two cults created bitter animosity, since our religion is as far removed from that which is in vogue among them as is the nature of God from that of irrational beasts. For it is their national custom to regard animals as gods, and this custom is universal, although there are local differences in the honours paid to them." (*C. Ap.* 1.224-225). On the general prejudice toward Egyptian customs and the particular calumny toward the assumed Egyptian animal worship, see Klaas A.D. Smelik and E.A. Hemerijk, "Who knows not what monsters demented Egypt's worship? Opinions on Egyptian animal worship in antiquity as part of the ancient conception of Egypt," *ANRW* II.17.4, 2337-57; see also Meyer Reinhold, "Roman Attitudes toward Egyptians," *Ancient World* 3 (1980), 97-103; Holger Sonnabend, *Fremdenbild und Politik. Vorstellungen der Römer von Ägypten und dem Partherreich in der späten Republik und frühen Kaiserzeit* (Frankfurt a. M. and New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 25f.

# Chapter Seven: Cleopatra, Isis, and Serapis

## 1. Introduction

The cults of Isis and Serapis were practiced even in remote corners of the Roman Empire. One of the leading figures in the restoration of these cults was Queen Cleopatra VII. Cultural icons are easily recognizable as belonging to a specific culture. For the purposes of this chapter a cultural icon is understood to be a representative of a particular culture or a famous individual that emerged to signify this culture to a sizable segment of the known world of antiquity, the Roman provinces and even Non-Roman territories. As such, a cultural icon is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon that reflects the conflicts and contradictions of its reception or visualization by other cultures. Midrashic and other rabbinic texts contain many identifiable Egyptian cultural icons. The utilization of Egyptian cultural icons in rabbinic texts may have been the result of the prestige that virtually anything Egyptian enjoyed in late antiquity.<sup>1</sup> There are several specific intersections with Egyptian culture that require investigation of Egyptian references in rabbinic texts.<sup>2</sup> This analysis would be in addition to the elements from Greco-Roman, Samaritan and Sassanian Babylonian cultures. One challenge in isolating and interpreting these Egyptian elements is the temporal and spatial distance between the dates of some of the Egyptian cultural

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1 Roman writers who traveled through Egypt composed accounts of Egyptian customs and religious practices, e.g., Diodorus Siculus (60-56 BCE); Strabo (25-19 BCE), and Plutarch (1<sup>st</sup> Century CE). An intensified fascination for Egyptian artifacts and ideas dates from the time of the Roman Empire, when Egyptian artifacts, mosaics, and monuments were transported to Rome. See the catalogue of a monumental exhibition focusing upon the cross-fertilization of Egyptian and Greek, as well as Roman culture: *Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom: Abwehr und Berührung. Städtisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, 26. November 2005-26. Februar 2006* (Frankfurt am Main: Liebighaus alter Plastik and Tübingen/Berlin: Wasmuth Verlag, 2005).

2 In respect to connections between Egypt and the Land of Israel during the time of Cleopatra VII, see Aryeh Kasher, "Political and National Connections Between the Jews of Ptolemaic Egypt and their Brethren in Eretz Israel," in *Eretz Israel, Israel and the Jewish Diaspora: Mutual Relations*. Proceedings of the first annual Symposium of the Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization ...1988 (ed. Menachem Mor; Studies in Jewish Civilization 1; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 24-41.

icons that originated in pharaonic, Ptolemaic, Roman or Coptic Egypt, and the dates and provenance of some rabbinic texts. However, there were multiple connections between Egypt and the Land of Israel (Roman Palestine), which was the geographical and intellectual environment that produced most of the initial rabbinic texts with references to Egypt. The textual passages and statements concerning Egypt further developed in later rabbinic documents outside the Land of Israel.

Rome, the ruling power in the Land of Israel in late antiquity, was obsessed in both a positive and negative sense with Egypt and the last Egyptian ruler, Queen Cleopatra VII (Philopator, 51-30 BCE). Rabbinic Judaism created its own, albeit less significant, Cleopatra. Rome enthusiastically adopted Egyptian gods, such as Isis and Serapis, which offered new religious perspectives and were viewed as symbols of an Ancient and exotic culture. Isis and Serapis also appear in rabbinic texts. In their polemical or dialectical engagement with foreign cults and beliefs the rabbis textualized these Egyptian icons. Roman culture, including Roman Palestine, had pictorial depictions of Egyptian icons in addition to numerous textual renditions. In contrast, the rabbinic texts offer only textual reflections of Egyptian images and ideas. Although talmudic and midrashic texts organize their arguments in different ways, as well as in different genres and documents, the underlying engagement with the propositions resulting from Egyptian icons is similar throughout the texts: a response to non-Jewish culture.

Despite the fascination the land of Egypt held for visitors and distant admirers, misunderstandings arose repeatedly. The Egyptian “pantheon” and the relation of the Egyptian kings to the religious cults of Egypt were used as the foundation for other religious systems. Egypt was understood to be the original fount of wisdom, yet numerous aspects of Egyptian cult practices seemed rather disturbing and abhorrent.<sup>3</sup> It was difficult for Romans to inculcate such traditions as that of the divine bull, Serapis. Nevertheless, in Roman religions Serapis was a divine entity, usually in human form. However, divine animals and statues representing gods were rejected by Judaism in rabbinic texts, although the rabbinic discussions mention the religious cults and objects of other groups.

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3 See Klaas A.D. Smelik and E.A. Hemelrijk, “Who knows not what monsters demented Egypt’s worship? Opinions on Egyptian animal worship in antiquity as part of the ancient conception of Egypt,” *ANRW* II.17.4, 2337-57; see also M. Reinhold, “Roman Attitudes toward Egyptians,” *Ancient World* 3 (1980), 97-103; Holger Sonnabend, *Fremdenbild und Politik. Vorstellungen der Römer von Ägypten und dem Partherreich in der späten Republik und frühen Kaiserzeit* (Frankfurt a. M. and New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 19.

This chapter focuses upon the discourse in rabbinic texts relating to the icon of Cleopatra; the icons of Isis and Osiris (as Serapis) are discussed as well since they are strongly interconnected with Cleopatra. Egyptology and rabbinics are usually considered to be mutually exclusive academic disciplines; Egyptologists perceive the Hebrew Bible as too recent to be studied from an Egyptological perspective, although there are exceptions. Rabbinic Judaism has rarely been studied from an Egyptological perspective<sup>4</sup> in spite of the numerous cultural exchanges that transpired in the Greco-Roman period and the rabbinic reflections upon earlier periods of life in Egypt. An Egyptological perspective may assist in decoding the Egyptian icons in rabbinic discursive and interpretive texts and place the icons into their respective religious contexts. In addition to some considerations of the contiguous nature of the historical and ideological interaction, I will discuss the transfer of ideas and the resulting cultural engagement, whether polemical or integrative, in regard to Cleopatra, Isis and Serapis.

Midrashic and other rabbinic texts contain many identifiable Egyptian cultural icons. The methodology utilized in this chapter includes a theory relating to the construction of cultural icons that may be visually or textually created. In her analysis of Cleopatra, Mary Hamer uses the Bakhtinian idea that a contest of meanings based around one figure indicates that important issues are organized through that figure.<sup>5</sup> Such an approach provides a model of cultural iconography that assigns meaning to the scattered fragments of the icon of Cleopatra in rabbinic texts. My iconographic method is an approach to a particular, meaningful organization of features concentrated in one figure that became an icon. In the case of Cleopatra, her icon pertains to visually conveyed meanings and to textual passages, including her numerous depictions on a variety of materials and the textual representations of Cleopatra in Greek and Roman authors, in Josephus and in rabbinic literature. The icon of a figure such as Cleopatra may be analyzed from the perspectives of its construction, purpose, the channels of its circulation (e.g., religious acceptance or rejection in regard to the icon), and its appearance in non-Jewish and Jewish sources. The type of attention given to an icon, especially in rabbinic texts, is also significant, whether it is rejected, integrated or polemicized.

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- 4 Mainly scholars from the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century compared Egyptian legends to a limited corpus of rabbinic texts: Moritz Gudemann, Bernard Heller, Jacob Horowitz. These approaches should be viewed as part of the European fascination with Egypt at that time.
- 5 Mary Hamer, *Signs of Cleopatra: History, Politics, Representation* (Gender, culture, difference 3; London and New York: Routledge, 1993), xi.

Generally, icon theory is to a certain extent nomothetical<sup>6</sup> and is based upon heuristic models that may rely on a few, selected historical facts. In applying icon theory, close attention should be paid to the occurrence of repetitive features in the particular area of the portrayal of the icon in rabbinic literature and the rabbinic reaction to the icon. Incorporating iconography into an approach of reading and viewing rabbinic texts from the perspective of Egyptology, one ascertains that which is meaningful for most of the Egyptian icons found in the Talmud and midrash. This approach sets Egyptian icons in contrast to other icons, such as Roman, Samaritan, Byzantine, and Christian icons that are also present in the rabbinic texts.

In the analysis of these texts individual instances of icons are examined, which demonstrate underlying general rules, similar to the rules of generative semantics. An icon itself has several generalities attached to it, which are explored in this chapter. In this focus upon rabbinic texts partial subtexts are isolated and constructed, which may be completed by their hypothetical cultural contexts.

The rabbinic view of Egypt is part of a systematic engagement with that culture consisting of a set of repetitive units that are integrated into a heuristic model derived from rabbinic ideology. The texts that contain Egyptian icons – or their Roman derivatives – are based upon the intersection of several conceptual aspects: iconographic, spatial, polemical and historical. These elements are combined in the written text.

## 2. Cleopatra and the Garments of the Afterlife

A woman referred to as “Cleopatra” or “Queen Cleopatra of Egypt”<sup>7</sup> surfaces several times in rabbinic literature; some of these passages contain references to Roman battles and Hellenistic culture. Other passages concerning Cleopatra relate to the ideological and religious presence of Egypt as representing the “Other” in rabbinic texts. An analysis of these texts indicates that Queen Cleopatra was one of the most ste-

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6 See, for example, Michael Gardiner, “Bakhtin and the Metaphorics of Perception,” in *Interpreting Visual Culture: Exploration in the Hermeneutics of the Visual* (ed. Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell; London: Routledge, 1999), 57–73, 64: “... vision, at least when it is subordinated to the logic of objective science, is a distancing, homogenizing ... sensory mode; one that is largely indifferent to the particularity of the other and the nuances of the context.”

7 b. Sanh. 90b; b. ‘Abod. Zar. 8b; t. Nid. 4:17 and b. Nid. 30b specify: Queen Cleopatra of Egypt; Rashi *ad* b. Nid. 30 b: “Queen Cleopatra — of Alexandria.”

reotypical icons of Ptolemaic Egypt.<sup>8</sup> The Egyptian belief in the afterlife and its elaborations had the qualities of an Egyptian icon since this Egyptian idea was highly clichéd in the Greco-Roman world. An inherent assumption in this chapter is that Cleopatra in rabbinic texts was chosen as a representative of Greco-Roman Egypt and some of its religious and cultural concepts. Historically speaking, there is a wide range of choices in regard to the figure of Cleopatra,<sup>9</sup> although I argue that the Talmud mainly refers to Cleopatra VII.<sup>10</sup>

- 8 Diana E. E. Kleiner, *Cleopatra and Rome* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2005), focuses primarily on this aspect of Cleopatra.
- 9 Among the passages from Jewish texts referring to a woman named Cleopatra, the apocalyptic vision in Dan. 11:17 in all likelihood alludes to Cleopatra I (215-176 BCE); she is the wife of the king of the south, i.e., Ptolemy V (205-180 BCE). Cleopatra is the “daughter of woman” who is to be annihilated. In the version of the Qumran texts, in 4QDan, Cleopatra is “the daughter of men” and in this case it is her husband who is to be destroyed. Cleopatra I was married in Raphia; Josephus (*Ant.* 12.154) mentions that her dowry included among other lands Coele-Syria. Cleopatra’s father, Antiochus III, hoped to overthrow Ptolemy, and also to reign over Ptolemaic Syria. Cleopatra I ruled for her son, Ptolemy VI (Ptolemaios Philometor). In the Apocrypha, there are several women with the name Cleopatra. The Greek version of Esther, mentions a Cleopatra; under her and her husband’s rule the Esther legend was brought to Egypt (see Joseph Méléze Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: From Ramses II to Emperor Hadrian* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997], 123). In my opinion, a rendition of the Greek version of Esther, entitled “Mordecai’s dream,” is contained in *Otzar Midrashim*, 1, 61: **בשנה הרביעית למלך תלמי וקלפטרה מלכה** (*In the fourth year of King Talmi and Cleopatra queen*) **מתן בלאשין יונית** (*the gift in Greek language*) **הכהן למלך תלמי אגרת הפורים בלשון זו והעתיקו אותה בירושלם** (*the priest brought the Purim letter in Greek to King Talmi; it was copied in Jerusalem*). (In my translation of the above text I emended the Greek loanword, which should not be **מתן בלאשין יונית** [“in Greek: gift”] as contended by Eisenstein. In my opinion, the word in question should be Dositheus.) The priest Dositheus is mentioned in LXX Esther 10:3 1 in a similar legend. Eisenstein (OM, 1, 61) remarks that this midrash is based on a Ladino text. Cleopatra II had good relationships with the Egyptian Jewish community; under her husband/brother Ptolemy VI Philometor, the construction of the Jewish temple at Leontopolis was permitted. In 1 Macc. 10 there are references to Cleopatra (v. 57-58); this was probably Cleopatra III Thea, married to the Syrian king Alexander Balas, and later to his rival, Demetrius II, and then to Antiochus VIII. She ruled from 129-125 BCE, and subsequently, for a short period, for her son. As punishment for the attempted murder of her son, she was poisoned. 3 Macc. 1:1; 4 mention Arsinoë, the sister/wife of Ptolemy IV, in respect to the battle of Raphia (217 BCE); Arsinoë is later referred to as Cleopatra by Livy (*Hist.* 27.4). The name of Cleopatra continued into Coptic Egypt, see Thomas Maretta (trans.), “The Life of the Holy Martyr Varus and the Seven Christian Teachers who were with him, and the commemoration of the Blessed Cleopatra and her son John,” *Orthodox Life* 44 (1994), 2-9.
- 10 Cleopatra VII was the most famous Ptolemaic queen; her reign coincided with some of the major Alexandrian connections with the Land of Israel. Her reign is documen-

Cleopatra (VII) Philopator (51-30 BCE)<sup>11</sup> was the last ruling queen in the Ptolemaic dynasty;<sup>12</sup> as an Egyptian<sup>13</sup> queen she had a Horus name (*Wernebneferu akhetdjeh*), which was meant to make her similar to previous pharaohs.<sup>14</sup> In the Roman world and up until the present era, Cleopatra was mainly known for her relationships with the Roman leaders Julius Caesar and Mark Antony and for her suicide in 30 BCE. Subsequently, Egypt became part of the Roman Empire. One of the major consequences of the Roman occupation of Egypt may be seen in the intensified assimilation of Egyptian elements into Roman art, and conversely the combination of Roman and Egyptian art in Egypt. Additionally, the Romans absorbed some concepts from the Egyptian religion.

Ideas of the Egyptian religion may underlie a *sugya* in the Bavli (b. Sanh. 90a-b) that refers to Cleopatra. This *sugya* is concerned with the afterlife and the resurrection of the dead.<sup>15</sup> In a passage immediately preceding the mention of Cleopatra, the rabbinic concept of the “Torah speaking in ordinary language” and the idea of the “world-to-come” are offered as midrashic interpretations of Num. 15:31 in a polemical statement directed against the Sadducees. Following these interpretations the question of the physical appearance of the dead in the afterlife is put forth by Queen Cleopatra:

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ted in the following catalogue: *Kleopatra: Ägypten um die Zeitenwende* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1989), 8-10.

- 11 Hans-J. Thissen, “Kleopatra,” LÄ 3, 452-54; Robert S. Bianchi, “Cleopatra,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 1, 273-74.
- 12 In 51 BCE, Ptolemy Auletes died and left his kingdom to his daughter, Cleopatra, and her younger brother, Ptolemy XIII. Cleopatra had two older sisters, Cleopatra VI and Berenice IV, as well as a younger sister, Arsinoë IV, and two younger brothers, Ptolemy XIII and Ptolemy XIV. According to Egyptian custom, Cleopatra was required to have a consort, who was either a brother or a son, throughout her reign. Therefore, she was married to her brother Ptolemy XIII when he was twelve; however, she soon dropped his name from any official documents, disregarding the Ptolemaic practice that the male be first among co-rulers. She also had her own portrait as well as her name engraved on coins of that time, while ignoring her brother, Ptolemy XIII.
- 13 Cf. Sib. Or. 5:16-18; 12:20-22 which seem to support the partial Egyptian background of Cleopatra.
- 14 The Egyptian kings normally had five names, one of these was the so-called “Horus” name. Jürgen von Beckerath, *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1999).
- 15 On this *sugya*, see Arnold Goldberg, “Der Diskurs im babylonischen Talmud,” in *Rabbinische Texte als Gegenstand der Auslegung* (ed. Margarete Schlüter and Peter Schäfer; TSAJ 73; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1999), 263-96; on the topic of resurrection, see Claudia J. Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity: Doctrine, Community, and Self-Definition* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

b. Sanh. 90b: Queen Cleopatra asked R. Meir: I know that the dead will live, for it is written: *May they blossom forth from the city like the grass of the earth* (Ps 72:16). However, when they rise [*עמדוּ*] will they rise naked [*ערוּמִים*] or in their garments [*בְּבוֹשִׁיהָן*]? He said to her, it is a *qal va-homer* based upon a grain of wheat. If a grain of wheat that is buried naked [*ערוּמִים*] comes forth in many garments [*לְבוֹשִׁיָּהָן*], the righteous, who are buried in their garments [*בְּבוֹשִׁיהָן*], all the more [will rise in their garments.]

The question by Cleopatra and the response given by R. Meir are contained in a unit that is a finely crafted piece of midrashic explanation. R. Meir responds to every single proposition raised by Cleopatra, who focuses upon “rise,” “naked” and “in garments.” R. Meir inverts the propositions and answers with a *mashal* that is woven into an *a fortiori*. The seemingly new proposition “grain” is actually based upon another lemma in the verse from Ps 72:16 (*May there be abundance of grain in the land, may it wave on the tops of the mountains; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may they blossom forth from the city like the grass of the earth*) quoted in part in Cleopatra’s question. The answer to Cleopatra’s inquiry is that people will wear garments when they rise from their graves.<sup>16</sup>

The initial question that should be addressed in respect to the above text from the Bavli is: why is Cleopatra mentioned in a cohesive passage presenting differing views of resurrection? From a literary perspective, there are structural reasons for the appearance of Cleopatra in the Bavli. She appears within a series of royal figures in this *sugya*; it is likely that Queen Cleopatra is part of this series. The engagement of R. Meir with the propositions set forth in Cleopatra’s question may be a reflection of the Roman perception that her great gift for intelligent conversation was part of her attraction, and that she spoke many languages, including Hebrew.<sup>17</sup> The tannaitic teacher, R. Meir

16 For a survey of bodily resurrection and the extensive literature on this subject, see Martin Hengel, “Das Begräbnis Jesu bei Paulus und die leibliche Auferstehung aus dem Grabe,” in *Auferstehung—Resurrection: The Fourth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium Resurrection, Transfiguration and Exaltation in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Friedrich Avemarie and Hermann Lichtenberger; WUNT 135; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2001), 119–83. In particular, 2 Bar. 50:1f., mentions that the earth will return the dead without changing their appearance (166f.). See also Saul Lieberman, “Some Aspects of After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature,” in *idem, Texts and Studies* (New York: Ktav, 1974), 245–46; Arthur Marmorstein, “The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead in Rabbinical Theology,” *AJT* 19, 4 (1915), 577–91, 581. Linen wrappings are mentioned in Lk. 23:53; the controversy in regard to resurrection between Sadducees and Pharisees is mentioned in Mk. 12:18–27.

17 These claims about Cleopatra were made by Plutarch, *Ant.* 27. 4–5 (LCL): “And her tongue, like an instrument of many strings, she could readily turn to whatever language she pleased, so that in her interviews with barbarians she very seldom had need of an interpreter, but made her replies to most of them herself and unassisted,

(around 150 CE), is construed to be the discussant in the Bavli; these types of arranged arguments in dialogue form are, of course, typical for talmudic and rabbinic literature; e.g., Antoninus and Rabbi.<sup>18</sup> An example of a dialogue between Antoninus and Rabbi is part of the subsequent passage in the Bavli, which is placed within constructed disputes with the Egyptians.<sup>19</sup> From a structural perspective, Queen Cleopatra of Egypt fits into these disputes. Furthermore, the dialogue format in the Bavli, R. Meir in discussion with Cleopatra, is reminiscent of dialogues that invoke Cleopatra in Egyptian literature. In Egypt, Queen Cleopatra is presented as conducting a dialogue with philosophers<sup>20</sup> in books on alchemy frequently attributed to Hermes Trismegistus;<sup>21</sup> some of these dialogues on the topic of alchemy present Isis and Horus as discussants. In this context, it is significant that during her lifetime Cleopatra repeatedly presented herself as the New Isis. The discussion of the afterlife in the Bavli (b. Sanh. 90b) and the role of Cleopatra may presuppose the Egyptian goddess Isis, who was involved in Egyptian funeral cults. As will be discussed below, Isis was revered in the Roman world and her “new” representative or incarnation was Cleopatra.

whether they were Ethiopians, Troglodytes, Hebrews, Arabians, Syrians, Medes or Parthians.” Plutarch, who wrote in great detail about Queen Cleopatra VII, was said to have received his information from Lamprias, his grandfather, based upon a report of a friend of Lamprias, who had lived in the royal palace in Alexandria.

- 18 See Richard A. Freund, “Alexander Macedon and Antoninus: Two Greco-Roman heroes of the rabbis,” *Studies in Jewish Civilization* 6 (1995), 19-72; Howard Jacobson, “Antoninus and Judah the Prince,” *OCP* 67 (2001), 179; Stephen T. Newmyer, “Antoninus and Rabbi on the soul: Stoic elements of a puzzling encounter,” *Koroth* 9 (1988), 108-23; Samuel Krauss, *Antoninus und Rabbi* (Vienna: Israel.-theol. Lehranstalt, 1910).
- 19 Additionally, the icon of the soul as a bird mentioned in this talmudic passage is again reminiscent of Egyptian images (e.g., a 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE tomb stele shows the soul as a bird leaving the deceased, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, AEIN 1071). b. Sanh. 91a: “Antoninus said to Rabbi: The body and the soul can both free themselves from judgment. Thus, the body can plead: The soul has sinned that from the day it left me I lie like a dumb stone in the grave. Whereas the soul can say: The body has sinned, from the day I departed from it I fly about in the air like a bird.” Egyptian funerary literature attests to the power of the “soul” (*ba*) to transform into another form and leave the tomb as a bird. A misunderstanding of the *ba* led to the Greek misinterpretation that the soul of the deceased was reincarnated into birds. See Victor Aptowitzer, “Die Seele als Vogel,” *MGWJ* 69 (1925), 150-69.
- 20 Dialogue between Cleopatra and the Philosophers (in *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton*, ed. Stanton J. Linden, Seattle: Washington State University Press, 2003), 44-5.
- 21 Geraldine Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 169.

In the talmudic text referred to above there are additional discussants, other than royal figures and Egyptians. An Egyptological reading leads one to surmise that the Bavli includes not only a dispute with the Samaritans<sup>22</sup> or Sadducees,<sup>23</sup> who rejected the concept of resurrection, but also a dispute with the Egyptian idea of “resurrection.” It is suspicious that Cleopatra, the representative of a culture that vehemently believed in the afterlife, and who is portrayed as a proponent of the afterlife, which is compatible with rabbinic concepts, is utilized in a series of polemical statements against those who deny the resurrection of the dead. One response to the suspicious role of Cleopatra in this talmudic passage suggests an implied polemic against Cleopatra’s alleged life of luxury, including lavish garments. Another response implies that this passage contains a polemic against the elaborate Egyptian funeral rites and the Egyptian depictions of the afterlife, which continued into Roman and Coptic Egypt.<sup>24</sup> Neither the Talmud nor the traditional commentaries address these possibilities.

The Egyptian belief that life really begins only after death, and that no effort should be spared in striving to prepare for the afterlife, gave the mortuary cult a more prominent place in the lives of Egyptians than in any other Ancient civilization. The emphasis on garments in Cleopatra’s question in the Bavli may indeed reflect the Egyptian funerary cult in which mummies were dressed and the resurrected were depicted as wearing garments. The Egyptian gods, Isis and Osiris, held out the hope of salvation in the afterlife to Greeks and Romans; Osiris was resurrected, i.e., he continued to live in the afterlife. The mention of wheat in the talmudic passage on resurrection (b. Sanh. 90b) could be compared to the sprouting of Osiris<sup>25</sup> and to the Christian parable<sup>26</sup> of the grain of wheat.<sup>27</sup>

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22 See for example Joseph Heinemann, “Anti-Samaritan polemics in the Aggadah,” *Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Jewish Studies ... Jerusalem 1973* (ed. Avigdor Shinan; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1977), 3, 57-69; Pieter W. van der Horst, “Anti-Samaritan Propaganda in Early Judaism,” in *idem, Persuasion and Dissuasion in Early Christianity, Ancient Judaism, and Hellenism* (Contributions to biblical exegesis and theology 33; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 25-44, 31; *Ginze Talmud Bavli*, 2, 104.

23 See Reuven Kimelman, “Polemics and Rabbinic Liturgy,” in *Discussing Cultural Influences: Text, Context, and Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism* (ed. Rivka Ulmer; Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 59-97, and the literature cited there.

24 See, for example, Alan Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs, 332 BC-AD 642; from Alexander to the Arab Conquest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 23f.

25 See the discussion in Rivka Ulmer, “Egyptian Magic and the Osiris Myth in Midrash,” *Midrash and Context* (ed. Lieve Teugels and Rivka Ulmer; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), 165-208, 174, in regard to the mummy of Osiris that sprouts wheat. Generally, the sprouting of seeds represents a sacred link to the past.

It is significant that in the above talmudic passage a foreign woman, who saw herself as a pharaoh, is referred to by her name, Cleopatra. In contrast, the questions posed by a Roman lady, the *matrona*, do not mention the name of the questioner.<sup>28</sup> The name of Cleopatra in the Bavli is attested in the following manuscripts:

שאל קלפטרא מלכ' את ר' מאיר

שאל קלפטרא מלכ' את ר' מאיר

שאל קלפטרא מלכ' את ר' מאיר

Other rabbinic passages that speak about Egyptian rulers usually refer to them in a generic manner; the king of Egypt is simply called "Pharaoh" as in most biblical passages, and the Ptolemaic kings are referred to generically as "Talmai" (e.g., b. Meg. 9a), although there are some exceptions. For example, Pharaohs Sheshonq and Necho<sup>29</sup> are named.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the underlying reason that Cleopatra is named in the Talmud is that Cleopatra VII had a legendary reputation of being both attractive and learned in antiquity;<sup>31</sup> she was thought to represent Ancient Egyptian wisdom.<sup>32</sup>

- 26 Robert Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Ktav, 1975, repr. of London: Williams and Norgate, 1903), 231, comments on the issue of resurrection in b. Sanh. 90b; David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Arno Press, 1956), 23.
- 27 In the parable of wheat in John 12:24-26 Jesus is envisioned as the grain of wheat sown and destined to bring forth fruit; see Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: S.C.M. press, 1985, 3<sup>rd</sup> revised ed.), 148, with reference to this talmudic passage and the Christian versions of the parable of wheat.
- 28 See Tal Ilan, "Matrona and Rabbi Jose: An alternative interpretation," *JSJ* 25 (1994), 18-51, in which she maintains that the questioner "Matrona" was a Jewish woman who was transformed into a Roman woman. An analysis of the Matrona questions were presented by Felix Böhl, "Die Matronenfragen im Midrasch," *Frankfurter Judentische Beiträge* 3 (1975), 29-64, and Rosalie Gershenson, "A second century Jewish-Gnostic debate: Rabbi Jose ben Halafta and the matrona," *JSJ* 16 (1985), 1-41.
- 29 See for example, Lev. Rab. 20:1; Lam. Rab. 1:18; Tanh. Buber ed., Va-ethanan 1; b. Pesah 199a; Mek. RaShbY Beshallah 1.
- 30 See chapter 1.
- 31 A review of the Greek and Latin authors that portrayed Cleopatra in positive, but often polemical, ways is found in Ilse Brecher, *Das Bild der Cleopatra in der griechischen und lateinischen Literatur* (Schriften der Sektion für Altertumswissenschaft 51; Berlin: Akademieverlag, 1966).
- 32 For a survey of Cleopatra in Josephus, see Jan W. van Henten, "Cleopatra in Josephus: From Herod's rival to the wise ruler's opposite," in *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish*

It has been claimed that the above passage does not refer to Cleopatra; under this scenario Cleopatra's name is a corrupt substitute for a male Samaritan name, since the passage contains some disputes with the Samaritans.<sup>33</sup> However, the argument that the passage concerns disputes with the Samaritans does not justify the removal of Cleopatra from the text. If indeed "Cleopatra" was a Samaritan (or Sadducean) male, whose position needed to be refuted, the acceptance of the resurrection of the dead by this "Cleopatra" would be incompatible with a supposed "Samaritan" or "Sadducean" viewpoint. To illustrate this point, a passage in Eccl. Rab. 5:11 contains a question in regard to resurrection, which is posed by a Samaritan to R. Meir; however, this questioner asks, if the dead will live. In contrast, the Cleopatra passage in the Bavli assumes that Cleopatra clearly accepts the resurrection based upon a midrashic reading of a Psalm. The passage in the Bavli maintains that Cleopatra believed in resurrection; she was only concerned with a detail as to how the resurrection would transpire. In the hierarchy of arguments in the Bavli, the sub-arguments about the physical nature of resurrection necessitate the garment question posed by Cleopatra. Her position in the Bavli does not undermine resurrection or the assumed physical appearance of resurrected bodies, but in fact supports the rabbinic view of resurrection. She is portrayed as knowledgeable when the text claims that she cites Psalms. The polemics of the text appear to be directed against Hellenistic Egypt, possibly including the divinity of the Egyptian kings or the role of Egyptian gods involved in the funeral cults. The question put into Cleopatra's mouth is taken seriously by the talmudic rabbis, and notwithstanding any polemics against Egypt, Cleopatra retains her dignity in this talmudic passage.

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ish, *Early Christian and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luitinkhuizen* (ed. Anthony Hilhorst and George H. Van Kooten; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 115-34.

<sup>33</sup> The Soncino translation of the Bavli, *ad. Loc.*, n. 33 states: "Bacher, Agada der Tanaïten, 1, 68, n. 2, regards קלייאופטרה מלחתא פטרוקי the Patriarch of the Samaritans." (Repr. W. Bacher, "Rabbi Meir and 'Cleopatra,'" *JQR* 2 (1890), 188.) The text-witnesses of the Bavli do not support this emendation. Johann Maier, *Jesus von Nazareth und Jüdische Auseinandersetzungen mit dem Christentum in der Antike* (Erträge der Forschung, 177; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982,), 111, states that it is difficult to determine the status of the *minim* in this passage.

## Cleopatra as the New Isis

Cleopatra presented herself as the goddess Isis and associated herself with the cults of other Egyptian gods.<sup>34</sup> Cleopatra succeeded in her efforts to be linked with the worship of the Apis bull; after her accession to the throne (51 BCE) a new bull was erected at Armant (Hermonthis). She supported the Apis cult in Memphis (see below) that involved Isis in the form of a maternal cow. This identification with Isis increased after she was reinstated in power by Julius Caesar.<sup>35</sup> Caesar and Cleopatra may have taken an extended trip up the Nile.<sup>36</sup> By Julius Caesar she had a son,<sup>37</sup> Ptolemy XV Caesarion. In Dendera (Tentyris) in Upper Egypt Cleopatra was depicted on the walls of the temple as a pharaoh (Fig. 23);<sup>38</sup> some reliefs on the walls of the Hathor temple (and the temple walls in Armant [Hermonthis])<sup>39</sup> portray her in the position of breastfeeding her child, Caesarion,<sup>40</sup> reinterpreting Isis nursing Horus.

In the same site Cleopatra is also depicted with Caesarion presenting offerings to the goddess of the temple, Hathor, who is identified with Isis, and her son, Horus. In this case, Horus is in the form of Har-somtus. In the portrayals of herself, Cleopatra combined the iconogra-

34 Jan Quaegebeur, "Cleopatra VII and the Cults of the Ptolemaic Queens," in *Cleopatra's Egypt: Age of the Ptolemies* (ed. Robert S. Bianchi, et. al.; Brooklyn and Mainz: Brooklyn Museum and Philipp von Zabern, 1988), 41-54.

35 By 48 BCE, Cleopatra had alarmed the court officials of Alexandria by some of her actions. Subsequently, a group of men overthrew her in favor of her younger brother and she probably fled to the Thebaid; alternatively, Cleopatra and her sister Arsinoë were in Syria. (Caesar, *Bell. Civ.*, 3,103, mentions that she was expelled from Egypt). They returned by way of Ashkelon (Ascalon), which may have been Cleopatra's temporary base. In the meantime, Pompey had been defeated at Pharsalus in 48 BCE and attempted to find refuge with Ptolemy XIII in Alexandria, but he was murdered. Shortly thereafter, Caesar arrived in Alexandria. Cleopatra had herself smuggled in through enemy lines in a travel bag and she was delivered to Caesar (Dio Cassius *Hist. Rom.*, *Caesar*, 42.34, 3-4). Ptolemy XIII drowned in the Nile while he was trying to flee the Alexandrian war. Because of his death, Cleopatra became the sole ruler of Egypt. Caesar restored her position, but she was compelled to marry her younger brother, Ptolemy XIV.

36 See the subsequent descriptions and elaborations by Appian, *Bell. Civ.* 2.378; Lucan, *Pharsalia* (*De bello civili*), 10. 192; Suetonius, *De vita caesarum*, 52. 1.

37 Günter Poethke, "Caesarion," LÄ 1, 894.

38 Cleopatra and Caesarion, Dendera (Ulmer).

39 *Déscription de l'Égypte publiée par les ordres de Napoléon Bonaparte*, 1802 (reprint, Cologne, 1994), vol. 1, 148-151. The depictions of Egyptian gods in this temple have been destroyed.

40 Jean-Claude Grenier, "Deux documents au nom de '4Césarion,'" in *Hommage à Jean Leclant*, vol. 3 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 1994), 247-54.

phy of the Egyptian tradition – both Isis and Hathor are depicted with crowns showing the sun disk flanked by cow horns – with the Ptolemaic culture as evidenced in the temples built by Cleopatra's predecessors. The images depicting Cleopatra as Isis were designed to promote Cleopatra's own political authority and portray her as appealing to divine endorsement of her power, especially when she is depicted as bringing offerings to the breastfeeding Isis.<sup>41</sup>

Cleopatra's claim to divinity and her identification with Isis may have been modeled upon Queen Arsinoë II, who had previously been accepted as a divinity and was identified with Isis. This identification with Isis by a Ptolemaic queen was partially based upon Egyptian religious traditions, according to which the king (Pharaoh) was the object of a cult and additionally performed an important role in the worship of divinities.<sup>42</sup> The veneration of Isis<sup>43</sup> in Egypt existed millennia before the Greco-Roman period; Isis (3st) appears in multiple Ancient Egyptian myths<sup>44</sup> and one of her features was that of a mother raising a child.

Cleopatra commenced to refer to herself as the New Isis which became evident when she accompanied Caesar to Rome in 46 BCE. After Caesar's assassination in 44 BCE, Cleopatra fled Rome and returned to Egypt. She had her consort, Ptolemy XIV, assassinated<sup>45</sup> and established Caesarion, her son, as her co-regent, Ptolemy XV, at the age of four.<sup>46</sup> Soon thereafter in 43 BCE Cleopatra regained Cyprus and she had coins struck that showed her as a breastfeeding mother holding a child – Ptolemy XV Caesar. This demonstrates that she strongly identified herself with Isis and identified her son, Caesarion, with Horus.

Cleopatra further emphasized her identification with the goddess Isis during her relationship with Mark Antony,<sup>47</sup> she and Mark Antony

41 For example, a stela in the Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités Égyptiennes, Paris, E. 27113. See also Etienne Bernard, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques du Fayoum*, vol. 3 (Cairo: 1981), 205; the inscription from Fayoum is dated as of 2 July 51 BCE.

42 Jan Quaegebeur, "Cleopatra VII and the Cults of the Ptolemaic Queens," 46.

43 J. Gwyn Griffiths, "Isis," LÄ 3, 203; *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, s.v. "Isis," 2, 188-191. For the history of the Ptolemaic period, see P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Egypt*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1, 259-65.

44 In the Pyramid texts and in Papyrus Jumilhac (ed. J. Vandier, 1962); the combined versions and Hellenistic embellishments are found in Plutarch, *Is. Os.*, mainly in chs. 12-20, and J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride: Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: University of Wales Press, 1970); see also chapter 4.

45 According to Josephus, *Ant.* 15.89; *B. J.* 1.359.

46 Manfred Clauss, *Kleopatra* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1995), 41.

47 There is some evidence that Cleopatra also practiced the cult of the goddess Neith, see Jacques Schwartz, "Cléopâtre et Aséneth," *RHPR* 65 (1985), 457-59.

spent the winter of 41 to 40 BCE in Alexandria.<sup>48</sup> Cleopatra gave birth to twins who were officially recognized by Antony and were given the names of Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene; i.e., including the sun and the moon in their names, which symbolized Isis and Osiris ("Osiris the moon").<sup>49</sup> Antony bestowed land grants upon Cleopatra including parts of Judea (around Jericho), and other territories.<sup>50</sup> In 34 BCE, after Antony had led a successful campaign into Armenia he celebrated his triumph with a parade through Alexandria with Cleopatra as the New Isis. Antony presented himself as the New Dionysus (*Liber Pater*), the incarnation of Osiris.<sup>51</sup>

Cleopatra's titles on coins include *thea neotera* that may refer to Cleopatra as Isis (Aphrodite)<sup>52</sup> or Hathor (the Hellenized Aphrodite-Hathor).<sup>53</sup> For example, this title is engraved on a *tetradrachm* from Ashkelon (Ascalon) from around 37 BCE towards the end of her rule. In contrast to the coins from her earlier reign, which followed Greek conventions, this type of coin is Roman in style; the image is markedly different from the softer images of Hellenistic queens and the coin's less elegant depiction reflects the Roman influence. A cult of Neotera was also practiced in the Land of Israel.<sup>54</sup> The meaning of Cleopatra's title, ΘΕΑ ΝΕΩΤΕΡΑ, is somewhat ambiguous; it could mean "the newer goddess." Cleopatra VII drew upon the cults of the Egyptian gods – Isis, Osiris, and Apis – in order to firmly establish her rule and to Egyptianize her image.

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48 See van Henten, "Cleopatra in Josephus," 116-17.

49 Griffiths, *Plutarch's*, 456, refers to the evidence from ancient and Ptolemaic Egypt that relates Osiris to the moon.

50 Plutarch, *Ant.* 36; see also Josephus, *Ant.* 15.95f.; 106f.; van Henten, "Cleopatra in Josephus," 119, n. 16, mentions that the identification of the territories given to Cleopatra by Antony is not absolutely clear.

51 Velleius Paterculus, *Historiae Romanae*, 2, 82.4.

52 For example, the Egyptian collection in Heidelberg, Ägyptologisches Institut der Universität, 961.

53 *Kleopatra: Ägypten um die Zeitenwende*, Catalogue No. 57u, 191.

54 See Frédéric Manns, "Nouvelles traces des cultes de Neotera, Serapis et Poseidon," *Liber annuus* 27 (1977), 229-38, who lists multiple references to Neotera, e.g., from Dendera (Neotera-Aphrodite), Gerasa (Neotera-Isis), an Oxyrhynchus papyrus and others in order to provide a context for an inscription from the Land of Israel. He refers to V. Buttrey ("Thea Neotera: On coins of Anthony and Cleopatra," *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 6 (1954), 95- 109 [*non vidi*]), 233 and discusses the following inscription: ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΑ ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑ ΘΕΑ ΝΕΩΤΕΡΑ.

## 4. Isis and Serapis

Isis and her cult were well-known in the Roman world and representations of Isis were found in many locations.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Serapis was revered all over the Mediterranean world;<sup>56</sup> remnants of his cult include statues, temples and many smaller objects. The Hellenized cult of Isis and Serapis had existed since the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Augustus banned Egyptian religious rites within the *pomerium* of Rome.<sup>57</sup> At this time in Rome the Serapis-Isis cult was suspect; this Egyptian cult, as well as the practice of Judaism, were both labeled *superstition*.<sup>58</sup> Tiberius destroyed the temple of Isis; her statue was thrown into the river Tiber and her priests were crucified.<sup>59</sup> After this initial fierce hostility, the Isis cult was recognized under Emperor Caligula in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE and it became part of the Roman state cult. The Isis cult increased in adherents until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, but with the Christianization of the Roman Empire this cult went into decline. The Isis cult and the cults derived from it were also found in the Land of Israel,<sup>60</sup> in places such as Raphia, Gaza and Ashkelon; additionally, in the Land of Israel there had been earlier

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55 The cult of Isis attracted many Romans and even some emperors, especially from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE onward, although Augustus had been opposed to Egyptian cults in Rome; Ilse Brecher, "Der Isiskult in Rom: Ein Kult der Halbwelt?" *ZÄS* 96 (1970), 81-90; Laurent Bricault, "La diffusion isiaque: une esquisse," *Städel Jahrbuch N.F.* 19 (2004), 548-56; the survey by Robert A. Wild, "The known Isis- Sarapis sanctuaries from the Roman period," *ANRW* II.17,4, 1739-851; and Sabine Albersmeier, "Griechisch-römische Bildnisse der Isis," in *Ägypten, Griechenland, Rom*, 310-314; Sharon K. Heyob, *The Cult of Isis Among Women in the Graeco-Roman World* (Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain, 51; Leiden: Brill, 1975). See also Willi Wittmann, *Das Isisbuch des Apuleius: Untersuchungen zur Geistesgeschichte des zweiten Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938), and Jan Assmann, *Die Zauberflöte: Oper und Mysterium* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2005), 25-6, 116-21.

56 See Sarolta A. Takáacs, *Isis and Sarapis in the Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

57 Dio Cassius, *Hist. Rom.* 53. 2, 4; 54.6, 6.

58 Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.81, 2; 5.4f.

59 Josephus, *Ant.* 18.65-84; Tacitus, *Annal.* 2.85.

60 Nicole Belayche, "Les devotions à Isis et Sérapis dans la Judée-Palestine Romaine," in *Nile into Tiber; Egypt in the Roman World. Proceedings of the IIIrd International Conference of Isis Studies, Faculty of Archaeology* (Leiden: Leiden University, 2005), 448-69; Jodi Magness, "The cults of Isis and Kore at Samaria-Sebaste in the Hellenistic and Roman periods," *HTR* 94 (2001), 157-77; the figure of Kore was a Graeco-Roman goddess corresponding to Isis. A 1<sup>st</sup> century and subsequently a 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE temple of Kore were constructed on top of an older cult site of Isis and Serapis. Herod probably built the new temple of Kore after 30 BCE when Octavian gave Samaria to him, 158f.

combinations of features of Isis with the local goddesses, such as As-tarte.

Amulets with Isis and representations of *Isis lactans* (Isis as a breastfeeding mother) were prevalent in late antiquity and there are numerous depictions and cameos from the Roman era depicting Isis and Serapis together.<sup>61</sup> The reference to depictions of Isis<sup>62</sup> and Serapis in the Tosefta was in all likelihood added to the other prohibited representations in this rabbinic text in 2<sup>nd</sup> century Roman Palestine.<sup>63</sup> According to Marmorstein,<sup>64</sup> R. Judah's statement in the passage set forth in the Talmud and in its earlier version in the Tosefta ('Abod. Zar. 5:1, Zuckerman, 468), refers to Isis worship in his time. If one finds a seal ring with an image of a breastfeeding woman or the image of Serapis, the finder is required to dispose of the ring in the Dead Sea, i.e., dumping the object into the Dead Sea. This early reference in rabbinic literature reads:

t. 'Abod. Zar. 5:1:

מצא טבעת ועליו צורת חמה צורת דרקון יוליך ל'ם המלה ואף דמות מניקן סרפס<sup>65</sup>

Someone who found a ring with a representation of the sun, a representation of the moon or a representation of a *deraqon* [serpent] should take it to the Dead Sea. [MS Vienna: R. Judah said] And also if [there is] an image

61 For example, Isis and Serapis on a 1<sup>st</sup> century cameo in Kunsthistorisches Museum, Antikensammlung, Vienna, IX A 8. See also another cameo on which Isis wears cow horns and the sun disk on her head and Serapis wears the *Atef* crown, which is usually on the head of Osiris, Brooklyn Museum, 73.85, Charles Edwin Wilbur Fund.

62 Moritz Gudemann, "Mythenmischung in der Hagada," *MGWJ* 5 (1876), 177-95; 6 (1876), 225-31; 7 (1876), 255-61, 226, maintains that identifying Isis and Horus with Eve is similar to the process that identifies Isis and Horus with Mary and the child Jesus. The Tosefta and the Bavli clearly refer to a representation of Isis holding Horus, 225. In respect to an identification with Isis, see also Heinrich Blaufuss, *Götter, Bilder und Symbole nach den Traktaten über fremden Dienst (Aboda Zara) in Mischna, Tosefta, Jerusalemer und Babylonischem Talmud* (Nürnberg: Stich, 1910), 19; Samuel Krauss, "Aegyptische und syrische Götternamen im Talmud," in *Semitic Studies in Memory of Rev. Dr. Alexander Kohut* (ed. George A. Kohut; Berlin: Calvary, 1897), 339-53, 346, views the talmudic iconography of a breastfeeding woman as referring to Isis. Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), 136-38, also mentions Isis based upon the juxtaposition with Serapis.

63 This was observed by Margarete Schlüter, '*Deraqon'* und *Götzendienst* (Judentum und Umwelt 4; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1982), 126-27.

64 Arthur Marmorstein, "Egyptian Mythology and Babylonian Magic in Bible and Talmud," in: *Dissertationes in honorem dr. Eduardi Mahler ...* (Budapest, 1937), 469-87.

65 The toseftan context also refers to the moon and stars on white garments which were symbolic of Isis, see Blaufuss, *Götter, Bilder und Symbole*, 30, 44.

[גַּמֹּות] of a breastfeeding woman or of Serapis [on a ring that someone has found, he should take it to the Dead Sea].

The breastfeeding woman may refer to Isis or another mother-goddess.<sup>66</sup> An image of a breastfeeding woman on a seal ring was not permitted; this prohibition implies that such representations were in existence. Additionally, the term *demut*, which is found in this passage, is often related to divine appearances in rabbinic literature.<sup>67</sup> In all probability an image of the goddess Isis, as a breastfeeding goddess, was the subject of this prohibition.

The above passage from the Tosefta is cited as a *baraita* in the Bavli (b. 'Abod. Zar. 43a)<sup>68</sup> within the talmudic discussion of foreign (idolatrous) worship.<sup>69</sup> The co-text of the talmudic passage (the text surrounding the passage) apparently mandates reading the image of the breastfeeding woman as a foreign goddess. The talmudic passage states:

b. 'Abod. Zar. 43a: For it has been taught: R. Judah adds the image [גַּמֹּות] of a breastfeeding woman and of Serapis<sup>70</sup> [or: Sar Apis, סָר אֲפִיס]. A breastfeeding woman – because of Eve who breastfed the whole world; Serapis – because of Joseph who ruled/was a *sar* [סָר] and appeased [מְפִיט] the whole world. [Serapis refers to Joseph when he is represented as] holding a [grain] measure [גְּמִינָה] and is measuring [grain], and [the breastfeeding woman refers to Eve] when she is holding a child and breastfeeding him.

This talmudic passage mentions Serapis and the grain measure (*modius*) he is holding. In the manner of midrashic *notarikon*, the name of Serapis is divided into two words that serve as the basis for the ensuing interpretation. Serapis is identified with Joseph in the talmudic passage based upon the premise that both provided grain during periods of famine.<sup>71</sup> Identifying Serapis with Joseph is a common theme in Jewish

66 Schlüter, 'Deraqon' und Götzendienst, 126–28, discusses multiple goddesses and their Graeco-Roman or other cultural combinations as well as their transformations.

67 A few examples are listed in Jastrow, Dictionary, 1, 312b, "resemblance," "image."

68 On these passages in Tosefta, Mishnah and Talmud, 'Avodah Zarah, see Schlüter, 'Deraqon' und Götzendienst. Emmanuel Friedheim, "Who are the deities concealed behind the Rabbinic expression 'A nursing Female Image?'," HTR 96 (2003), 239–50, presents the same archeological and textual evidence as Schlüter and slightly updates her documentation; however, his conclusion differs. He maintains that the image of the "nursing female" referred to Nysa-Atargatis, Dionysus, and Jupiter Heliopolitanus.

69 Martin Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1989), 52, refers to Isis as one of the so-called Hellenistic traditions.

70 MS Munich Cod. Hebr. 95 has Serapis in one word [סָרָפִיס].

71 Michael Sachs, *Beiträge zur Sprach- und Alterthumsforschung: aus jüdischen Quellen*, 2 pts. (Berlin: Veit, 1852–1854), pt. 2, 99, based upon the interpretation of Greek le-

and early Christian literature.<sup>72</sup> As mentioned above, Isis and Serapis often appeared in tandem (Fig. 24).<sup>73</sup> It is therefore probable that the breastfeeding mother in the text is Isis, since the breastfeeding woman and Serapis are mentioned in tandem in this passage.

If one attempts to locate the icon of Serapis in rabbinic texts, one should consider that Serapis is a Romanized deity that is based upon an Egyptian god. The Greeks perceived Serapis as Pluton or Helios, as well as other gods. The prevailing view<sup>74</sup> in respect to Serapis has been that this god is a Ptolemaic invention, which combined the Egyptian

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gends, mentions that Apis was a wealthy Egyptian who fed the Alexandrians during a famine.

- 72 The identification of Joseph with Serapis was known in antiquity and later (e. g., Suidas, *Lexicon*, sv. Σάραπις); Jakob Horovitz, *Die Josephserzählung* (Frankfurt a. M.: Kauffmann, 1921) contains a very extensive discussion of Joseph as Serapis, esp. pp. 120-28. See also the excellent survey by Gerard Mussies, "The Interpretatio Judaica of Serapis," in *Studies in Hellenistic Religions* (ed. M. J. Vermaseren; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 189-214. See additional, older literature: Sachs, *Beitraege*, pt. 2, 99; Gudemann, "Mythenmischung," 255; Lieberman, *Hellenism*, 138, n. 87. As mentioned above, Serapis embodied Osiris, and Joseph was identified with Osiris in midrashic texts. However, the midrashic references to Osiris in the Horus and Osiris myths have little in common with Osiris-Apis, i.e. Serapis. Additionally, the contention of equating Joseph as a bull with the Apis bull is questionable regarding the midrashic texts about the coffin legend; the equivalence of Joseph and Serapis is in all likelihood based upon Manetho's etymology of Osarsyph (Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.238, relating it to Osiris in Heliopolis; one may also note "the aged Osiris" at Heliopolis). Mussies, "Interpretatio Judaica," 212, concludes that there is no connection between Joseph and Apis in early Jewish texts; the first equation of Joseph with the bull is found in the Church Fathers. Mussies refers to Melito of Sardis as the earliest Christian source (before 190 CE): "The Egyptians worshipped Joseph, a Hebrew, who was called Serapis, because he supplied them with sustenance in the years of famine." Mussies states, 193, that the identification of Joseph with Serapis dates at least from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Giuseppe Veltri, *Eine Tora für den König Talmai: Untersuchungen zum Übersetzungsverständnis in der jüdisch-hellenistischen und rabbinischen Literatur* (TSAJ 41; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1994), 69, mentions that the identification of Serapis with Joseph [in b. 'Abod. Zar. 43a] could have derived from the identification of Joseph with a bull, since Serapis was a designation of the divine Apis bull in Memphis. This identification of Joseph with a bull is supposedly inherent in a passage in Deut 33:17. However, I agree with Mussies; there is a difference between the bull as Joseph in the above verse and Joseph as Serapis, the god who may have the form of a bull.
- 73 Serapis and Isis, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien, Antikensammlung, 2nd century CE. (Gemme: Die Büsten des Serapis und der Isis gegenüberstehend [ANSA IX b 286]).
- 74 See, for example, John E. Stambaugh, *Serapis under the Early Ptolemies* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

gods Osiris (*wsjr*) and Apis (*hp*).<sup>75</sup> Ptolemy I (323–283 BCE) is said to have construed Serapis as the major god of the state that was populated by Greeks and Egyptians. However, this previously held thesis in regard to the formation of a Greco-Roman god, Serapis, needs to be challenged. The possible revision of this thesis draws upon Egyptology; a more comprehensive understanding of Serapis may contribute to the interpretation of this god in rabbinic passages. Additionally, the Egyptian composite elements of Serapis need to be reexamined in order to identify the iconography of Serapis or Sarapis<sup>76</sup> (*Sar Apis*) in rabbinic texts.

Arguably Serapis should no longer be viewed as purely resulting from a combination of Egyptian and Hellenistic features and as an invention of the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt.<sup>77</sup> The Ancient Egyptian Apis<sup>78</sup> (*hpwj*) and Osiris-Apis (*wsjr p*) had a cult center in Memphis millennia before the first Greeks entered Egypt in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>79</sup> The Apis bull was worshiped commencing in the Early Period in Egyptian history in Memphis;<sup>80</sup> the animal chosen as the divine bull possessed special features. Osiris-Apis was incarnated in the Apis bull and the visible rituals of the bull worship related to this embodiment of Osiris-Apis; the bull mainly symbolized the life cycle, from birth to death and resurrection, from Apis to Osiris-Apis. After death the Apis bull was mum-

75 For Hellenistic and Romanized descriptions of Apis, see Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.28, 38, 41; Strabo, *Geogr.* 17.17, 22, 23; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 1.25.2: “Osiris has been given the name Sarapis by some, Dionysus by others, Pluto by others, Ammon by others, Zeus by some...”; Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 56, (43): “The Apis, they say, is the animate image of Osiris”); see also Aelian, *Nat. an.* 11.11, who mentions the Mnevis bull. Although the antiquity of Egypt was praised in the Roman view of Egypt, the worship of Apis was singled out as a shocking example of animal worship (for example, Cicero, *Resp.* 3.9.24: “a bull, which the Egyptians call Apis, is deemed a god, and many other monsters and animals of every sort are held sacred...”). Aelian, *Nat. an.* 11.10, writes that the Egyptians believed that Apis was the most powerful deity (“Apis apud Aegyptios efficacissimus deus creditur”).

76 Günther Hölbl, “Serapis,” LÄ 5, 870–74, states that “Serapis” is a more recent form for “Sarapis.” In rabbinic texts one may note that the spelling of this god fluctuates between one word and two words, which may be read as Serapis or Sar Apis respectively; however, other than relating the difference in spelling to the *notarikon* method there does not seem to be any meaning attached to this difference.

77 Peter Mayr, “Serapis: Götliche Interpretationshilfe,” *Antike Welt* 35 (2004), 30.

78 Jean Vercoutter, “Apis,” LÄ 1, 338–50, states that the cult of Apis was ancient.

79 Additionally, there was the cult of Osiris and Ptah (Osiris in the Ka-house of Ptah) at Memphis; a depiction of Ptah-Sokaris-Osiris as a bull in front of the western mountain may be found on a coffin from the 22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty, c. 900 BCE (coffin of the Theban priest Denyenemun, The British Museum, EA 6660).

80 Michael Jones, “Memphis, Apis bull embalming house,” *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, 491–93.

mified; it was believed that the bull renewed its existence. In regard to the burial and mummification of the bull in a Serapeum in Greco-Roman Egypt, one may note that from the period of the New Kingdom in Egypt the Apis bulls were buried in the Serapeum in Sakkarah. Based upon Egyptian evidence, this form of Osiris is identical with Serapis.<sup>81</sup>

The Egyptian Memphis continued to be a cult center and a god named “Oserapis” (*Οσεράπις*) was venerated by Greeks in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>82</sup> The introduction of the Serapis cult in Alexandria and the building of a *Serapeion*<sup>83</sup> in that area may have occurred in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE or, in the alternative, this cult may have been derived from an earlier Serapis cult that utilized the site of a previous cult.<sup>84</sup> One purpose of this cult may have been to integrate and unite the multi-cultural inhabitants of Alexandria under one god by following the precedent of other cities that had one main god.<sup>85</sup> The Serapis cult in Alexandria may be reflected in the Septuagint. The LXX (Jer. 46:15) inserts “Apis” into the Greek translation of Jeremiah: *Why does Apis flee from you? Your choice ox does not continue...* In Ptolemaic Egypt we encounter the dual nature of gods, as gods of the Greeks and gods of the Egyptians: Serapis was and remained the form attributed to Osiris in Memphis.<sup>86</sup> (Fig. 25)<sup>87</sup>

81 Some of the speculations of Greek and Latin authors in respect to Serapis and his origins point to the same conclusion; see Pierre Borgeaud and Youri Volakhine, “La formation de la légende de Serapis: une approche transculturelle,” ARG 2 (2000), 37-76, 53-5.

82 Οσεράπις is the same as the Egyptian *wsjr hp* (Osiris-Apis). Alternatively, the name of Serapis may have been derived from the Egyptian *sr hp* (Apis prophesying). Mussies offers a reasonable explanation of the name “Osarseph” based upon the Egyptian name *wśjr sp3* (Osiris-Sepa); this represents a combination of Osiris with the deity Sepa or Sep, (Mussies, “The Interpretatio Judaica,” 210).

83 D. Kessler, “Das hellenistische Serapeum in Alexandria und Ägypten in ägyptologischer Sicht,” in *Ägypten und der östliche Mittelmeerraum im 1. Jhd. v. Chr. Akten des interdisziplinären Symposiums am Institut für Ägyptologie der Universität München 25.-27.10.1996* (ed. Manfred Görg and G. Hölbl; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 163-230, 217f. Other locales included Letopolis, Prosopites, Sa’s, Sakkarah.

84 See Stefan Schmidt, “Serapis – ein neuer Gott für die Griechen in Ägypten,” in *Ägypten, Griechenland, Rom*, 291-304, for a review of the literature.

85 Schmidt, “Serapis,” 294-295; Griffiths, *Plutarch’s*, 43, states: “In the Roman era Serapis became the city-god of Alexandria, but at Memphis and Abydos there was a revival of Oserapis in connexion with the same cult.”

86 Günther Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire* (trans. Tina Saavedra; London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 100, summarizes the shifting nature of Isis and Serapis: “On the one hand, Isis and Sarapis were seen as Hellenistic gods integrated into the Greek world but, on the other, they were also viewed as ancient Egyptian divinities.” The temple of Edfu, outer hypostyle, interior, north wall, depicts Ptolemy VIII

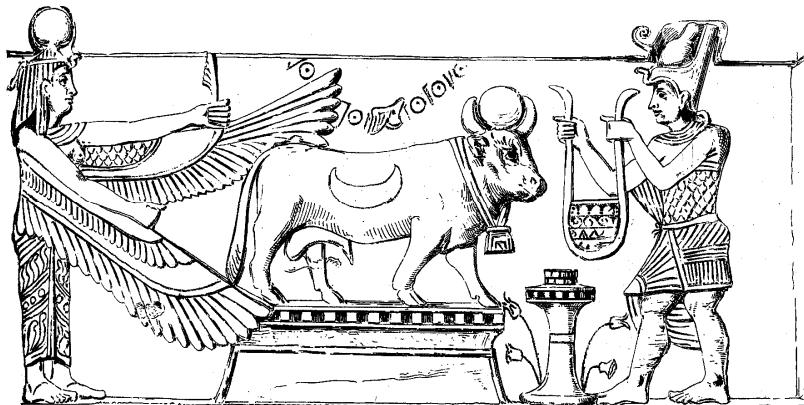


Fig. 25. Apis, Kom el-Shuqafa, main tomb, a Roman emperor venerates the Apis bull, Isis is watching.

In Hellenistic Egypt, Serapis was venerated in Memphis<sup>88</sup> and in Alexandria; he was viewed as the god of salvation after death, as the one who listened to prayers and as the god who healed people following the custom of staying overnight in his sanctuary.<sup>89</sup> Although Serapis was mainly revered as healing the sick, a multitude of other representations of Serapis developed, including motifs borrowed from statues of Greek gods. The portrayal of Serapis with (five) curls of hair on his forehead was prevalent in the Land of Israel and probably derived from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE imperial Rome;<sup>90</sup> however, earlier references to Serapis from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE were also present in Samaria.<sup>91</sup>

who offers a pectoral to Osiris (see Marco Zecchi, *A Study of the Egyptian God Osiris Hemag* [Archeologia e Storia della civiltà egiziana e del vicino oriente antico 1; Imola: Editrice la mandragora, 1996], 42f.).

87 Friedrich Wilhelm Freiherr von Bissing, *La catacombe nouvellement découverte de Kom Chouga* (Munich: Obernetter, 1901), Plate ix.

88 See Dorothy J. Thompson, *Memphis under the Ptolemies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 212ff.

89 Vespasian followed this practice; he sought the counsel of Serapis during his stay in Alexandria in 69/70 CE and spent the night before his triumph in Rome in the temple of Isis.

90 Coins issued in Jerusalem from the time of emperors Hadrian to Valerianus included coins with Serapis; additionally, there is a 2<sup>nd</sup> century inscription referring to Serapis in Jerusalem; see also Müssies, "The Interpretatio Judaica," 191f. For further discussions of the Serapis cult in the Land of Israel, see Manns, "Nouvelles," who analyzes several references to Serapis on objects, among these a small object from the Museum of the Flagellation in Jerusalem, which he compares to the Latin Zeus-Serapis

An important feature of the Hellenistic Serapis was his frequent depiction with a *kalathos* on his head, which may be one underlying reason for the talmudic reference to “a measure,” i.e., the *modius* – a beaker to measure grain.<sup>92</sup> The *modius*, in addition to the horns of the Ancient Egyptian main god Amun and the locks of the Greek god Zeus, often served to identify Serapis.<sup>93</sup> In comparison, from an iconographical perspective, Isis occasionally has been identified with grain on her head or carrying a *cornucopia* (horn of plenty);<sup>94</sup> during the Roman period Isis frequently had a sun disc on her head, flanked by stalks of grain. From the discipline of Egyptology, we may note that Egyptian deities mainly wore their identifiable symbols on their heads.

Based upon the above examination of the evolution of Isis and Serapis it could be speculated that the above rabbinic passage (t. 'Abod. Zar. 5:1, cited in b. 'Abod. Zar. 43a) which juxtaposed a breastfeeding woman (probably Isis) and Serapis manifests an iconographic nexus: the god Serapis as a form of Osiris; Isis and her relationship to Osiris; Cleopatra's identification with Isis and her involvement with the cult of the Apis bull; Cleopatra's relationship with Mark Antony and their self-representation as Isis and Osiris.

## 5. Cleopatra and Roman Politics

One passage in the Bavli mentions Cleopatra in the context of the Roman occupation of the Eastern Mediterranean. The transition to Roman rule in Egypt and an unspecified area is used in order to explain a Greek word in the following talmudic passage:

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inscription from 115 CE found in Jerusalem. Manns specifically refers to the toseftan and talmudic passages and the identification of Joseph with Serapis, 235f.

- 91 The presence of representations of Osiris in Israel is also attested to in Gezer and Ashkelon.
- 92 For a discussion of this term and its possible implications, see Mussies, “Interpretatio Judaica,” 194, who states that the *modius* was mentioned by Firmicus Maternus (346-350 CE) and others.
- 93 For example, a bust, Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin, 11 479, 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, from the nome of Arsinoë; see *Osiris, Kreuz, Halbmond: 5000 Jahre Kunst in Ägypten* (ed. Emma Brunner-Traut, Hellmut Brunner and Johanna Zick-Nissen; Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1984), No. 116, 143f.
- 94 See, for example, the description of Isis-Tyche in Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), 273.

b. 'Abod. Zar. 8b: *Kratesis*.<sup>95</sup> (m. 'Abod. Zar. 1:3) What is the meaning of *kratesis* [κράτησις]?

Rav Judah [in the name of] Shmu'el said: The day when Rome seized an empire.

But have we not learned "*kratesis and* the day" on which Rome seized an empire?

R. Joseph said: Rome seized [power] twice; once in the days of Queen Cleopatra [**אַרְטָפָלְקָה**] and once in the days of the Greeks.

One hermeneutical strategy in the above talmudic passage is a dialectical approach to determine the meaning of *kratesis*. The key issue in this passage is the conjunction "and" in the phrase "*kratesis and* the day." This results in hermeneutic doubling: Rome seized power in two separate instances in the Eastern Mediterranean. These dual Roman conquests are identified. They are applied to events that transpired during the time of Cleopatra VII<sup>96</sup> and to another indeterminate event in the days of the Greeks which provided historical substantiation for the rabbinic statements.<sup>97</sup> The term "in the days of the Greeks" could refer to the Ptolemaic rule over Egypt or possibly to Pompey's intervention in the Land of Israel in 63 BCE. However, in the talmudic *sugya* no further historical discussion transpires. The events seem to be self-evident to the discussants and the conquests are merely cited to explain a gentile festival day.<sup>98</sup> This passage mentions the cultural icon Cleopatra, who was both admired and hated for her relationships with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony in the Roman world, and was remembered for the final loss of her empire to the Romans. The meager historical details in this passage point towards the major crisis in Cleopatra's life; a reader could reconstruct the outcome of the political crisis – the Ro-

<sup>95</sup> טִירָק – κράτησις (Jastrow, 2,1417a); κράτηοις – might, power, dominion (Liddell-Scott, *Dictionary*, 1882, 842), LXX, Sap. 6:3; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.26 (LCL), κρατήσαι (that our ancestors entered Egypt ... and "subdued" the inhabitants).

<sup>96</sup> See also Sib. Or. 3:46-52 which refers to Rome's conquest of Egypt at the time of Cleopatra. The Roman war against Ptolemaic Egypt was mainly a war against Cleopatra; see M. Reinhold, "The Declaration of War against Cleopatra," *Classical Journal* 77 (1981/82), 97-103.

<sup>97</sup> See Livia Capponi, *Augustan Egypt: the creation of a Roman province* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6.

<sup>98</sup> See Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1941), 9-10; Lieberman asserts that the phrase "in the days of Queen Cleopatra" means "namely the day when the Romans conquered Egypt in the time of Cleopatra." Furthermore, Lieberman refers to the evidence presented by other scholars and states that the term *kratesis* here refers to "the date of the capture of Alexandria by Augustus," which was established by the Roman Senate as a festival. See also Deut. Rab. 7:7, which mentions *Kratesis* as a gentile festival.

man occupation of Egypt – and Cleopatra as the victim of Roman politics.

The histories that depict Cleopatra's loss of her empire and her life emphasize the following: Antony divorced his wife,<sup>99</sup> an act which forced the Roman world to recognize his relationship with Cleopatra.<sup>100</sup> Antony had already put her name and portrait on a Roman coin, the silver *denarius*. In 31 BCE Octavian, subsequently referred to as Emperor Augustus, defeated Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony at the battle of Actium.<sup>101</sup> Cleopatra understood her role in Octavian's triumph would be that of a slave to be displayed in the cities she had once ruled. Cleopatra VII avoided this fate and committed suicide by snake-bite on August 12, 30 BCE.<sup>102</sup> Cleopatra may be viewed as the last Pharaoh of an independent Egypt<sup>103</sup> and with her defeat the rule of the Ptolemaic dynasties in Egypt came to an end.

## 6. Cleopatra the Egyptian Physician

Cleopatra appears in a tannaitic passage in rabbinic literature (t. Nid. 4:17), which is cited in b. Nid. 30b. The talmudic passage discusses the length of time of uncleanness after a miscarriage; the question is raised if this time period of uncleanness is related to the length of incubation of a male versus a female embryo. Within this debate some medical observations are cited; however, this evidence is not admissible to the rabbis because proof from the Torah is more valued than the experiments ascribed to Queen Cleopatra.<sup>104</sup> In the passage in t. Nid. 4:17 (Zuckerman-del ed.), Cleopatra is portrayed as some type of cruel physician:

99 Sarah Fielding, *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1994).

100 Plutarch, *Ant.*, 25.5-28.1; Appian, *Bell. civ.*, 2-5; Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 8, 10; Dio Cassius, *Hist. Rom.* 42-51; Suetonius, *De Vitae Caesarum*, *Augustus*.

101 According to the report of Dio Cassius, *Hist Rom.*, Octavian presented Mark Antony as an Egyptian (50.27), which may have contributed to his defeat. Similarly, Antony was viewed as a traitor, because he is said to have relied on assistance from Egyptian gods during the final battle (Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.698-699).

102 T.C. Skeat, "The Last Days of Cleopatra: A chronological problem," *JRS* 43 (1953), 98-100, states that the Roman Senate passed a decree that the day of the capture of Alexandria was to be celebrated as a festival, 98.

103 Capponi, *Augustan Egypt*, 6.

104 Tirza Meacham, "Halakhic limitations on the use of slaves in physical examinations," in *From Athens to Jerusalem: Medicine in Hellenized Jewish Lore and in Early Christian Literature: Papers of the Symposium in Jerusalem*, 9-11 September 1996 (ed. Samuel Kottek, Manfred Horstmannshoff, George Baader and Gary Ferngren,

t. Nid. 4:17: R. Ishmael said: A *ma'aseh* concerning Cleopatra [גִּלְעָרָה], the Alexandrian<sup>105</sup> queen, who brought her handmaids that were sentenced to death under a royal order and she tore them open, and it was found that a male [embryo] was fully developed on the forty-first day and a female [embryo] on the eighty-first day.

The passage seems to presume that Cleopatra VII was viewed in the ancient world as a physician.<sup>106</sup> It was even construed that she was the author of a book on gynecology.<sup>107</sup> It was also claimed that Cleopatra experimented with different methods of inflicting death upon convicts in the market-place of Alexandria, who were tortured in the most brutal ways.<sup>108</sup> These descriptions of crude medical experimentations reinforce the notion that Cleopatra was an Egyptian cultural icon whose continuous influence was present in Rome<sup>109</sup> and in rabbinic texts. The texts may have utilized legends concerning Cleopatra and her alleged medical knowledge.

A passage in the Bavli contains two short narratives about Cleopatra; within this passage we may note that the toseftan word, *kara*, “tore open,” has been replaced by *badaq*, “examine”, concerning Cleopatra’s investigation of the embryos. This critical change in verbs signifies that Cleopatra is not viewed in this passage as such a violent and cruel woman. Furthermore, there is a slight difference between the two stories in the Bavli. In one story, Cleopatra is referred to as “the Alexandrian queen,”<sup>110</sup> in the adjacent story as “the Greek queen.” “Greek” queen probably means Ptolemaic queen. An additional difference is that the first *ma'aseh* appears to contain a conflation in that the incubation period for both male and female embryos is 41 days, while the second *ma'aseh* maintains the 41 and 81 day distinction. This conflation may be due to the fact that the first story derives from late redaction:<sup>111</sup>

Rotterdam: Erasmus, 2000), 33-48, 42: “Because these slaves were not Jews and their owners were not Jews, no Jewish legal principles were derived from the story.”

<sup>105</sup> “Alexandris.”

<sup>106</sup> See the partial summary in Joseph Geiger, “Cleopatra the Physician,” *Zutot. Perspectives on Jewish Culture* 1 (2001), 28-32.

<sup>107</sup> Clauss, *Kleopatra*, 16. A late text on women’s health, *De orbis mulierum*, is ascribed to Cleopatra.

<sup>108</sup> See the fragments of an anonymous epos entitled *On the Egyptian War* that was discovered among the Herculaneum papyri (Clauss, *Kleopatra*, 101).

<sup>109</sup> Christopher Pelling, “Anything truth can do, we can do better: the Cleopatra legend,” in *Cleopatra: from history to myth* (ed. Peter Higgs, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 290-301.

<sup>110</sup> *Ultima Alexandrinorum regina* (the last queen of the Alexandrians) is Cleopatra’s title used by Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.56-61.

<sup>111</sup> See Meir Bar-Ilan, “הרפואה בארץ-ישראל במאות הראשונות לספירה,” *Cathedra* 91 (1999) 31-78, 38, n. 31.

b. Nid. 30b

(I) They said to R. Ishmael:

A *ma'aseh* concerning Cleopatra, the Alexandrian queen: when her handmaids were sentenced to death under a government order they examined them and they found that this and that [a male embryo and a female embryo were fully developed] on the forty-first [day].

He said: I bring proof from fools ...

(II) R. Ishmael said to them:

A *ma'aseh* concerning Cleopatra, the Greek queen: when her handmaids were sentenced to death under a [MS Vatican: Greek] government order they examined them and they found that a male [embryo was fully developed] on the forty-first day and a female [embryo] on the eighty-first day.

They said: No one brings proof from fools. [MS Munich Cod. Hebr. 95: the reason is that no proof is brought from fools]

In the Bavli text the superstructure of the story is the *sugya*'s discussion of an aborted fetus and the time of uncleanness that a woman has to observe based upon the gender of the fetus and other issues regarding women.<sup>112</sup> The first story (I) is incorporated into the medieval midrashic compendium *Yalqut Shim'oni* (Vayyiqra 547); the collector placed the text in the collected interpretations on *tazri'a* (*if a woman has conceived seed* [Lev. 12:2]); the version of the Yalqut is not significantly different from the talmudic version.

The *ma'aseh*, the case-study, derived from Cleopatra's alleged actions is integrated into rabbinic deliberations concerning fetal death and miscarriage; however, the results of Cleopatra's investigation are immediately dismissed because "proof from fools" is rejected.<sup>113</sup> The Talmud also speculates as to the methods employed by Cleopatra: "The [handmaids] were made to drink a potion that induced abortion," and significantly the passage states that the handmaids were "examined," whereas the Tosefta utilizes the term "tore open." As an aside, in the cruel version of Cleopatra she is not only an icon for Egyptian culture, but also for pagan, inhuman cruelty. The tearing or ripping could involve either vivisection or dissection.<sup>114</sup> It should be noted that the

<sup>112</sup> The Mishnah on this talmudic passage states: "R. Ishmael decided: If she miscarried on the 41<sup>st</sup> day, she continues her periods of uncleanness and cleanness as for a male [embryo] and as for a menstruant."

<sup>113</sup> In regard to the rejected testimony, see Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979), 1, 232f.; 2, 790f., n. 62.

<sup>114</sup> Bar-Ilan, "הרפואה," 55, n. 75, refers to the work of Heinrich von Staden, *Herophilus: The Art of Medicine in Early Alexandria* (New York: Cambridge University Press,

Egyptian embalmers had anatomical knowledge, because they cut open the corpses of the deceased in order to remove the organs before mummification.<sup>115</sup>

Although Cleopatra is depicted in a medical role, she is not explicitly referred to as a physician in rabbinic texts. In classical literature she is understood to have had medical knowledge.<sup>116</sup> There may have been a connection between Ancient Egyptian and later Hellenistic medical knowledge in general and in particular in the field of gynecology.<sup>117</sup> Some medical knowledge relating to this topic is also found in Philo of Alexandria.<sup>118</sup>

In addition to the image of Cleopatra as an Egyptian possessing ancient wisdom, there was the image of Cleopatra as a cruel ruler, which was perpetuated by the historian Josephus:

“that woman [Cleopatra], who committed every kind of iniquity and crime against her relatives, her husbands, the Romans in general ...”<sup>119</sup>

It seems that the antifeminist attitude of Roman and later writers that ascribed medical experiments to Queen Cleopatra may be the source of the talmudic stories, although the rabbis do not provide as many details as these classical authors. An additional clue to the assessment of the story about Cleopatra, the physician, in rabbinic literature is the term “fools;” this could refer to Alexandrian physicians in general,<sup>120</sup> since Ptolemaic Alexandria had a number of physicians that performed “unusual” operations.<sup>121</sup> If this was the case, Cleopatra would be a token and an icon of the contempt for Alexandrian knowledge found in rabbinic texts.

1989), 26, who mentioned that there may have been Ptolemaic intervention to utilize live prisoners or, alternatively, corpses for medical experimentation in Alexandria.

115 Reinhold Merkelbach, “Diodor über das Totengericht der Ägypter,” *ZÄS* 120 (1993), 71-84, mentions the ταρασχίοτης (the cutter, who opened the body), 73.

116 Von Staden, *Herophilus*, 519f., mentions that Cleopatra had some contact with a physician, Dioscurides Phacas.

117 Paul Ghalioungui, *The House of Life – Per Ankh: Magic and Medical Science in Ancient Egypt* (Amsterdam: B.M. Israel, 1973), 113-14, explains that the Egyptian methods of determining the gender of the fetus survived in Greek (and European) cultures.

118 Philo, *QG*, 1.25, *Supplement*, 1, 438 (LCL).

119 Josephus, *C. Ap.*, 2.57 (LCL); in respect to the oppression of Jews by Cleopatra during a famine (*C. Ap.* 2.60) and the evaluation of Cleopatra by some classical authors, see Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 90-91.

120 See Bar-Ilan, “הָרָאָה,” 39.

121 See, for example, b. *Yebam*. 80a.

## 7. Conclusion

The most (in)famous Egyptian ruler in late antiquity was Queen Cleopatra VII, who had become a symbol of Egyptian excess and was turned into an icon representing Hellenistic Egyptian culture before its decline.<sup>122</sup> The image of Cleopatra found in the ambiguous and scattered fragments in rabbinic literature have some similarities to her image in classical literature produced by Greco-Roman writers.

In addressing the components of the icon Cleopatra from the perspectives of gender, culture and difference, we may note that Cleopatra signified characteristics including the following: she was a powerful woman in antiquity, she was educated, influential and seductive, and she represented Egyptian culture. For these reasons, Cleopatra VII was different from the Romans, from other rulers, and from other women in the Greco-Roman world. The cultural icon Cleopatra appears in the talmudic passage discussing afterlife in the world-to-come that displays multiple argumentative and exploratory approaches to the topic, including the views of other cultural as well as religious groups and their proponents. In this rabbinic passage we do not have Cleopatra's body – there is no description of her physical appearance – but only her voice in one discursive textual unit. Other talmudic passages refer to the political events that severely affected her. Cleopatra is the victim of the Roman conquest of the eastern Mediterranean and the Romans created a festival day to celebrate their victory over Cleopatra and Ptolemaic Egypt. Cleopatra served for a long time as an icon of the Romans' final victory; the talmudic passage mentioned is to a certain extent a witness to her defeat. The legends depicting Cleopatra as a physician schooled in Alexandrian medical knowledge and alternatively as a cruel tormenter of her subordinates resurface in *beraitot* in the talmudic corpus, although these stories and the insights gathered through her experimentation did not constitute admissible evidence in the eyes of the rabbis.

Although the Ptolemaic rulers and the subsequent Roman rulers of Egypt presented themselves in Egyptian garb,<sup>123</sup> Cleopatra was probably the only one who spoke the Egyptian language and who emphasized her Egyptian roots by presenting herself as the goddess Isis, Julius Caesar as Osiris and her son, Caesarion, as Horus (or Harsieris).

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122 See van Henten, "Cleopatra in Josephus," 123-24 (commenting on Josephus, *Ant. 15.101*): "Cleopatra was not only the woman with the greatest status in the ancient world, but also the person closest to Antony..."

123 For example, the depictions of Philip Arrhidaeus at Karnak, Augustus worshiping Isis in Dendera or Hadrian in Egyptian garb in Philae.

With Mark Antony Cleopatra again replicated Osiris and Isis; the divine attributes in the names of their children implied the same Egyptian divinities. Cleopatra as a cultural icon was so significant that she is remembered for more than two millennia. Guided by an analysis of what a cultural tradition produces and erases, I tentatively compared the rabbinic approach to Cleopatra to some of the available Egyptian and classical sources. This results in viewing Cleopatra as a representative of Egypt,<sup>124</sup> which in itself is an icon that is saturated and inundated in memories that permeate rabbinic texts.

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124 The fascination with Cleopatra and her relationships continued throughout the ages; for example, in the plays *Antony and Cleopatra* by William Shakespeare (1564-1616) as well as in *Caesar and Cleopatra* by George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950). These plays created literary figures based upon the few and diffuse facts known about Cleopatra VII.



# Chapter Eight: The Egyptian Gods, Language, and Customs

## 1. Introduction

Rabbinic texts frequently mirror the Jewish engagement with Egypt of the past; the editors of the texts processed and preserved experiences, including fragmentary religious concepts relating to Egypt. In a textual medium, fragments of another culture may have the character of mementos; in rabbinic texts these mementos included the Egyptian gods, language, and some Egyptian customs and idealized reconstructions of Egypt. By contrast, in a non-textual setting, individuals or cultures may preserve memories in the form of “souvenirs,” physical objects that have significance beyond their place of origin. Although religious souvenirs are rarely mentioned in Judaism in late antiquity, midrashic literature mentions the spoils from Egypt collected during the Exodus from Egypt and refers to Egyptian religious artifacts that were transformed from physical objects into textual subjects.

In contrast to midrashic texts, the collection of physical religious souvenirs was common in late antique Christianity, which was almost contemporaneous with certain stages in the creation and redaction of rabbinic literature. One example is the fourth century visit by Queen Helena – and subsequent pilgrims – to the Christian holy sites in the Land of Israel in late antiquity;<sup>1</sup> these visits transpired before the Islamic conquest (636 CE) made it extremely difficult for Christians to visit the Holy Land. In my view Queen Helena was on a quest for mementos, such as the original cross, parts of which became souvenirs in the form of reliques.<sup>2</sup> Pilgrims and later Christian visitors, including the Cru-

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1 See E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, AD 312-460* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 29, 33-4.

2 See Nicole Chareyon, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 95; John Watson, “Egypt and the Holy Land: the Coptic Church and Community in Jerusalem,” in *The Christian Communities of Jerusalem and the Holy Land*, (ed. Anthony O’Mahony; Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 115-29; H. A. Drake, “A Coptic Version of the Discovery of the Holy Sepulchre,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 20 (1979), 381-92; the Coptic Church administers a chapel in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

saders, brought religious souvenirs back to Europe in order to maintain contact with a holy site. These souvenirs included relics and reproductions of the bodies of saints and martyrs. From late antique Egypt, travelers brought back Saint Menas flasks to their homelands,<sup>3</sup> as well as texts of hagiographic nature,<sup>4</sup> whereas pilgrims in Jerusalem focused upon glass vessels.<sup>5</sup>

With regard to the Jewish approach of preserving memory in textual form, one may ask: should these foreign textual inserts be characterized and treated as mementos? One may argue that once objects relating to locations or to individuals become souvenirs, it is possible to render them portable and to revisit the memories attached to them. However, the original object, place or person can only be reconstructed by means of varying interpretations. By necessity, texts destroy the physical character of a memento as they transcend it. Although some Biblical and rabbinic texts claim that the Israelites brought objects from Egypt, the texts have confined these objects to textual souvenirs and turned them into reminders of the Egyptian experience.

The resulting textual mementos were edited over a long period of time in diverse rabbinic texts; this process of collecting resembles present-day souvenirs of personal experiences, such as the contemporary annual vacation trips, that are symbolized through mundane objects or by messages sent on postcards or through electronic media. The usual brevity of these souvenir messages greatly resembles the textual fragments of Egyptian “mementos” in rabbinic texts, which do not offer a complete summary of the Egyptian experience, but loosely refer to the locations and events that transpired in Egypt. Vacation mementos are supposed to prompt instant recall of a location. Similarly, the Egyptian mementos in rabbinic texts serve to remind the reader of Egypt.

3 Magdi F. Malek, “Saint Mena of Egypt,” *Coptic Church Review* 2 (1981), 99-106, 100, dates Mena’s birth to 285 CE, which is relevant, because some rabbinic texts were edited approximately at this time. The pilgrimage to his shrine in Mareotis in Egypt is further analyzed by Peter Grossmann, “The Pilgrimage Center of Abu Mina,” in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in late Antique Egypt* (ed. David Frankfurter; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 281-302, 282. Samples of the ubiquitous ampullae of Saint Mena are described by Nancy Lapp, “Some Byzantine Pilgrim flasks in the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary,” in *Archaeology of Jordan and Beyond: Essays in Honor of James A. Sauer* (ed. Lawrence E. Stager, Joseph A. Greene, and Michael D. Coogan; Harvard Semitic Museum; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 277-89.

4 Paul B. Harvey, “‘A Traveller from an Antique Land’: Sources, Context, and Dissemination of the Hagiographa of Mary the Egyptian,” in *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford* (ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Antoine Hirsch; Probleme der Ägyptologie 20; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 478-99.

5 See Dan Barag, “Glass Pilgrim Vessels from Jerusalem, I, II, and III,” *Journal of Glass Studies* 12 (1970), 35-63; 13 (1971), 45-63.

There are different conduits of memorializing the experience to be remembered; the characteristics of a memento evoke reflection, evaluation, and occasionally even alienation from a past experience. A textual or physical memento freezes an event in time and provides repeated opportunities to reflect upon it.

On a conceptual level, space and time are the basic dimensions of human existence that enable readers of texts to engage with the past. The engagement of the past through mementos leads to virtual archives of visions and remnants of the experience, which could potentially contribute to collective memories of the experience. The textual fragments concerning Egypt are similar to mementos of an extended journey that are collected and integrated into the texts to be read and studied by subsequent generations. Certain types of mementos reflecting upon trauma and pain do not induce happy or pleasant associations in contrast to the above-mentioned vacation mementos, but their inclusion in the corpus has the power to keep the memory alive in its textualized form. The past is revisited in these mementos. Jewish history often reveals that there is no closure with the Egyptian experience, because the situation of living under the threat of "pharaohs" and other leaders who wish to annihilate the Jewish people resurfaces on a continuous basis. The exploration of Egyptian mementos in rabbinic texts involves examining linguistic and ideological traces of Egyptian religious ideas and relics, often from Greco-Roman Egypt, but also from much earlier periods of engagement between Israelites and Egypt.

## 2. Joseph's Egyptian Hair-Style

Mementos from Egypt also included the adoption of cultural patterns and behaviors, such as jewelry, garments and coiffures. Pirqe R. El. 46 refers to the earrings worn by male Israelites "according to the fashion of the Egyptians." Joseph's elaborate hair-style was subjected to the hermeneutics of midrash and it became an Egyptian hair-style in the view of the rabbis. In opposition to Egyptian customs, applying eye make-up and curling one's hair was considered to render a male effeminate in rabbinic literature. According to Gen. Rab. 84:7, already as a boy, Joseph was using *stibium* sticks in order to "pencil" and beautify his eyes.<sup>6</sup> This could suggest that he was transgendered; he might have

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6 Males who applied beauty aids were regarded as following the evil inclination, e. g., Gen. Rab. 22:4. See also Tanh., Vayeshev 8. Eye painting may be a sign of "harlotry" (Ezek. 23:40). Women "painted their eyes," e. g., the adulteress is thought to have applied eye make-up to attract males (Num. Rab. 9:24; b. Sotah 9a). Nevertheless,

been following perceived Egyptian gender roles or merely imitating Egyptian customs.<sup>7</sup> Penciling one's eyes and paying attention to one's hair-style, usually in the form of a wig, was consistent with Egyptian aesthetic requirements relating to human beauty.

Gen. Rab. 84:7 (Theodor/Albeck, 1008): *Joseph, being seventeen years old* (Gen 37:2). He was seventeen years old, but you say, *he was a boy* (*ibid.*). [It means], however, that he engaged in childish behavior:<sup>8</sup> penciling his eyes, curling his hair, and lifting his heel.

In the following midrashic text, Joseph's appearance is placed within the Egyptian context of the encounter with Potiphar's wife.

Gen. Rab. 87:3 (Theodor/Albeck, 1062-63):

אתה אמרת מזוללים בני שפחות וקורין אותםעבד נמכר יוסוף (תהלים קה ז),  
 אתה אמרת תולמים עיניהם בבנות הארץ אני מגירה לך את הדוב והתשא אשת אדונינו וגוי  
 (בראשית לט ז). מה כת' למלعلا מן העניין ויה יוסף יפה התאר ויפה מראה והתשא אשת אדונינו  
 (בראשית לט ו-ז), ללבור שהיה יושב בשוק ומשמשם בעינויו ומתקן בשערו ומתלה בעקביו,  
 אמר אנא גבר, אם' ליה אי גבר את הא דובא קומיך קופצת.

You say: They despise the sons of the handmaids and call them slaves; *Joseph was sold as a slave* (Ps. 105:17). You say: They cast their eyes upon the daughters of the land: I will incite a bear against you [as it says], *His master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph* (Gen. 39:7). What precedes this passage? *And Joseph was of beautiful form, and fair to look upon* (Gen. 39:6). [And this is immediately followed by], *His master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph* (Gen. 39:7). This is similar to a hero [gladiator?] who sat in the market, penciling his eyes, curling his hair and lifting his heel, while he exclaimed, I am a man [variant reading: hero]. They said to him: If you are a man, here is a bear; get up and attack it!

In the midrashic narrative of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, she is described as a bear, whereas Joseph is depicted as applying Egyptian beauty aids, such as eye-make-up and curling his hair. In other texts, the behavior of Potiphar's wife is also compared to an animal (Gen. Rab. 87:4f.). In the midrashic texts above, Joseph's behavior is compared to a hero/gladiator who indulges in feminine behavior. The hero/gladiator has to prove his masculinity by attacking a bear. Similarly, Joseph is expected to prove his masculinity by fighting off the "bear," i.e., Potiphar's wife; this could imply that he did not respond to Poti-

Gen. Rab. 98:10 mentions people from the South of the Land of Israel who had painted eyes and were good students of the Torah.

<sup>7</sup> Lyn Green, "Toiletries and Cosmetics," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 3, 412-17, 414ff.; Lise Maniche, *Sacred Luxuries: Fragrance, Aromatherapy, and Cosmetics in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> An alternative translation of the phrase מעשה נערות would be "he engaged in girlish behavior" instead of childish behavior.

phar's wife's advances because he was "effeminate." The term "bear" pulls together the Biblical narrative concerning the attempted seduction of Joseph and the midrashic example of a gladiator. This text demonstrates a cultural clash; in Egypt it was the norm for male officials to wear wigs and eye-make-up. For example, in order to appear before the Pharaoh officials had to wear appropriate attire, including wigs and make-up,<sup>9</sup> whereas in the Land of Israel this constituted effeminate or foreign behavior. There are numerous artistic representations of Egyptian hairstyles,<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 26)<sup>11</sup> throughout all periods of Egyptian history, including the Greco-Roman, as well as the Coptic periods. Egyptian hairstyles changed through time, although deities and, occasionally, pharaohs were depicted with archaic hairstyles.<sup>12</sup>

In the above text, according to the rabbis, Joseph appears to be following the Egyptian matrix of prevailing cultural customs. One culturally significant element of the text, the term "hero/gladiator," is probably a direct reference to Roman culture.<sup>13</sup> The hairstyles in the Land of Israel, as represented in Roman-style busts, followed the same fashion as contemporary Roman coiffure,<sup>14</sup> as well as Egyptian hair-styles: "the portraits in Egypt showed great variations in the fashioning of beard and moustache."<sup>15</sup> In the Hadrianic period, some busts depicted the emperor with full hair, which was combed to the forehead; the coiffure was comparable to mummy portraits.<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, "[i]n the Anto-

9 This is found in numerous Egyptian tomb paintings; e.g., in the tomb of Sennefer. See David Warburton, "Officials," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 2, 576-83.

10 See Joanne Fletcher, "A Tale of Hair, Wigs and Lice," *Egyptian Archaeology: Bulletin of the Egypt Exploration Society* 5 (1994), 31-3.

11 Tomb of Ramose (Ulmer).

12 See Wolfgang Helck and Eberhard Otto, *Kleines Wörterbuch der Ägyptologie*, 137, s.v. "Haartracht;" Lyn Green, "Hairstyles," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 2, 73-6. The Theban tomb of Ramose contains depictions of wigs (see Sigrid Hodel-Hoenes, *Life and Death in Ancient Egypt* [trans. D. Warburton; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000], 48). Depictions of Greco-Roman wigs are found in the Alexandrian tombs and on Roman emperors in pharaonic garb.

13 Ilona Skupinska-Lövset, *Funerary Portraiture of Roman Palestine: An Analysis of the Production in its Culture-Historical Context* (Gothab, 1983), 37, presents the description of a male bust with coiffure from Skythopolis (R. 319 Israel Department of Antiquities Museum, 18891 PUM 223). This bust is part of the portrait sculpture of the Hellenized inhabitants of the North; the art work is Roman provincial.

14 Skupinska-Lövset, *Funerary Portraiture*, 129.

15 Skupinska-Lövset, *Funerary Portraiture*, 135.

16 Skupinska-Lövset, *Funerary Portraiture*, 136; she states: "Hadrianic portraiture of Asia Minor appears to encompass the varieties of hairstyle shown by the Egyptian mummy portraits" (p. 135).

nine period these types were first brought to perfection, a young male with softened features framed by full hair arranged in curled locks, an ideal best exemplified [sic] in the portraiture of Antinous, and of boys with very full curly hair ..."<sup>17</sup> This may be compared to the hair-styles found on several damaged busts; this style continued into the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211 CE), whereas the reign of Caracalla (211-217 CE) emphasized short haircuts. The disdain of Rome as the occupier of the Land of Israel is veiled in the rabbinic texts by the implied criticism of Egyptian grooming customs.

Additional Egyptian customs referred to in midrashic literature include Egyptian funeral customs, e.g., the practice of embalming the deceased and providing a coffin,<sup>18</sup> as well as setting up depictions of the deceased.<sup>19</sup> The Bible states that Jacob, as well as Joseph, were embalmed:

*And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father; and the physicians embalmed Israel* (Gen. 50:2). *So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt* (50:26).

The Biblical lemmata concerning Joseph's death, embalming and burial in a coffin, are interpreted in a midrashic text.

Gen. Rab. 100:11: *So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt* (50:26). Who embalmed him? R. Pinehas and R. Judah in the name of R. Nehemiah. R. Judah said: The physicians embalmed him; R. Pinehas said: The tribes embalmed him.

This midrashic text mentions the "physicians," i.e., the embalmers of the Biblical text in the opinion of R. Judah. R. Pinehas deflects from the Egyptian physicians and claims that members of the tribes of Israel performed the embalming.

17 Skupinska-Lövset, *Funerary Portraiture*, 136.

18 See chapter 4; Rivka Ulmer, "Egyptian Magic and the Osiris Myth in Midrash," in *Midrash and Context* (ed. Lieve Teugels and Rivka Ulmer; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), 165-208. Both Jacob and Joseph were embalmed (Gen. Rab. 84:6; Num. Rab. 14:5).

19 See chapter 5; Rivka Ulmer, "Visions of Egypt and Roman Palestine: A Dialectical Relationship between History and Homiletical Midrash," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge/Frankfurt Jewish Studies Bulletin* 33 (2006), 1-33.

### 3. Language

In addition to cultural mementos, the Egyptian language itself is a memento that is present in rabbinic texts.<sup>20</sup> The rabbis acknowledge some terms as Egyptian, whereas other terms that are also of Egyptian derivation are found in personal names and toponyms without explanation of their Egyptian roots. Highly significant terms of rabbinic theology are said to have derived from Egypt, i.e., occasionally they are loan-words from the Egyptian language as explained below. Loan-words are the bi-product of the interaction between one society and another. We may speculate whether some of the Egyptian words in rabbinic texts are Hieroglyphic words that are based upon Biblical usage or, alternatively, whether these words belong to a later phase in the development of the Egyptian language. Written records began to appear in Egypt as early as the third millennium BCE in Hieroglyphic script, which together with its cursive derivatives (Hieratic and Demotic), remained the medium for writing until the end of the second century CE. The Egyptian language evolved into Demotic by 600 BCE and into Coptic by 200 CE. Coptic is a direct descendant of the ancient Egyptian language, and it represents the late form of the Egyptian language; it is mainly written in Greek characters with some additional signs to indicate Egyptian phonemes.

One example of a word described as Egyptian is אָנוֹכִי (*anokhi*), the first word of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2); this word is commented upon in midrashic texts. The Biblical word אָנוֹכִי (*anokhi* [`nky]) is based upon the Hieroglyphic 'ink'.<sup>21</sup> The midrashic analysis of this Biblical word is probably based upon the Coptic *anokh* (ἀΝΟΚ).<sup>22</sup> In either case the Egyptian term and the Hebrew term both refer to the first personal pronoun "I."

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20 The presence of Egyptian terms in the Bible has been well-documented, see Abraham S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in its Relation to Egyptian*, v. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1933); Arnold Goldberg, *Über die ägyptischen Elemente in der Sprache des Alten Testaments* (Ph. D. diss., Freiburg/Breisgau, 1957); WÄS; and the (unreliable) E. A. Wallis Budge, *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary* (New York: Dover, 1978, reprint).

21 Sir Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar being an introduction to the study of Hieroglyphs*, (London: Griffiths Institute, Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1957, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), 53, refers to the Egyptian independent pronouns that almost always appear at the beginning of a sentence; Hannig, *Handwörterbuch*, s.v. jnk, 79.

22 Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 11b.

Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 12:24:<sup>23</sup> R. Nehemiah said, What is *anokhi* (Ex 20:2)? It is an Egyptian word. Why did God find it necessary to use an Egyptian word? Consider the story of a king of flesh and blood whose son had been captured. The son spent many years among his captors, until the king, full of vengeance, went to free his son, brought him back, and then found he had to talk with him in the captor's language. So it was with the Holy One, blessed be He; Israel had spent all the years of their servitude in Egypt where they learned the Egyptian language. Finally, when the Holy One redeemed them and came to give them the Torah, they could not understand it. So the Holy One said: I will speak to them in their captor's speech. Therefore, the Holy One used the word *anokhi* [*'nky*], which is a form of the Egyptian *'nwk* so that the Holy One began His inauguration of the giving of the Torah with Israel's acquired way of speaking: *I am [anokhi ('nky)] the Lord, your God.*<sup>24</sup>

The theological implication of this midrashic statement that the very first word of the Ten Commandments is Egyptian is of great significance and strongly suggests that the Israelite God is substituting Himself in lieu of the Egyptian gods. It implies that God displaced Egyptian gods or the Pharaoh, the representative of an Egyptian god on earth, to deliver His message. The above midrashic text suggests that God chose the Egyptian language to enunciate the Ten Commandments. God's reliance upon the Egyptian language is further attested to in Esth. Rab. 4:12 which comments upon a lemma from Esth. 1:22 (*and that [the king's decree] should be proclaimed according to the language of every people*) is applied to "God spoke with the Israelites in the language, which they had learnt, as it is written, *I ('nky) am the Lord your God* (Exod. 20:2) – in the Egyptian language."

The above two midrashic narratives illustrate that a Jewish community in a foreign setting is invariably influenced by its linguistic environment. Jews in the *chôra* (the Egyptian countryside outside of Alexandria) might have spoken Egyptian, since it was the language of their environment.<sup>25</sup> This is further supported by the custom reflected in Egyptian papyri that Egyptian personal names were widely utilized

23 My translation closely follows Pesikta de-Rab Kahana: *R. Kahana's compilation of discourses for Sabbaths and festal days* (trans. William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society), 248.

24 See also Pesiq. Rab. 21:31, Ulmer ed.; Tanh, Buber ed., Yitro 16; Yalq. Yitro 286; Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 11:6.

25 However, Martin Hengel, *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 127f., points out that there is only scant evidence that Egyptian Jews were in command of Demotic.

by Jews.<sup>26</sup> At the end of the second century CE, the missionaries of the Church, then centered in Alexandria, Egypt, undertook the translation of the Bible from Greek into Egyptian in order to facilitate their goal of Christianizing Egypt. They abandoned the Hieroglyphic writing system, probably due to its “pagan” associations and its complexity. As mentioned above, this last phase of the Egyptian language was Coptic before the country was Islamicized and Arabic was introduced.

Acknowledgement of the existence of the Coptic language is found in the tannaitic stratum of rabbinic texts. Some rabbinic passages set forth below refer directly to the Coptic language and use the term *qatpi* (קַטְפִּי) or *gip̄it* (גִּיפְּטִי), which are based upon the term “Coptic” in Arabic (*qubṭi*), which is derived from “Egyptian” (Αἴγυπτιος) in Greek.

The term “totefet” (תּוֹתֵפֶת) in t. Šeq 2:14 is usually understood as “beads used as charms,”<sup>27</sup> or “fringes;” it contains a theophoric element, namely, the Egyptian god Thot.<sup>28</sup> The Egyptian god Thot,<sup>29</sup> who possessed magical powers, in the form of Thot-Hermes<sup>30</sup> or Hermes Trismegistus, was occasionally identified with Moses.<sup>31</sup> These magical

26 See Victor Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1, 43, cited by J. Gwyn Griffiths, “The Legacy of Egypt in Judaism,” *CHJ*, 3, 1025–51, 1036.

27 Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity* (TSAJ 91; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 385, states: “alternatively, this name may be Egyptian, with the element ‘Thot.’” This point is supported by Hermann Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*, vols. 1-3 (Glückstadt: J. J. Augustin, 1935-1952), 1, 409.

28 Thot’s tasks were generally related to writing, recording, and mediating between the gods; see Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many* (trans. J. Baines, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 284; see also the somewhat dated, but very comprehensive, E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 2 vols. (Studies in Mythology, Chicago: The Open Court Publications, London: Methuen and Company, 1904, repr. New York: Dover, 1969), 1, 400ff.

29 With respect to Thot, see W. J. Tait, “Theban Magic,” in *Hundred-gated Thebes: Acts of a Colloquium on Thebes and the Theban area in the Graeco-Roman period* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 169-82. In Coptic, Thot was usually referred to as the Ibis, based upon the bird that often represented him in Ancient Egypt (see Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 1, 402; Thot in Egyptian [*Tehuti*] is related to *tehu*, ibis, in Coptic). Thot is also found on Jewish amulets from the Greco-Roman period (see, e.g., Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 13 vols. 2, 269-84).

30 Artapanus in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.27.3. The identification of Thot extended also into Syriac literature, e. g., Michael the Syrian. See also Georg Luck, *Magie und andere Geheimlehren in der Antike* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1990), 57. Gerard Mussies, “The interpretation Judaica of Thot-Hermes,” in *Studies in Egyptian Religion Dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee* (ed. M. Heerma Van Voss, D. J. Hoens, G. Mussies, et al., Leiden: Brill, 1982), 89-120, refers to Eupolemus in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.*, 9:17,9.

31 Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 23. See chapter 4.

powers of Thot may have contributed to the implied power in the Hebrew term *totafot*. *Totafot* is deconstructed in rabbinic passages, explaining the term as partially derived from the Coptic language and partially from an African language:

- b. Men. 34b:<sup>32</sup> Our rabbis taught: It is written, *letotafat* (Deut. 6:8), *letotafat* (Deut. 11:18), *letotafot*<sup>33</sup> (Exod. 13:16) – making four in all. So R. Yishma'el. R. Aqiva says, There is no need for that interpretation, *Tot* means two in Coptic and *fot* means two in African.

There are numerous problems with the element “tot” and its derivation from Coptic: the word for “two” in Coptic *snyt* (CN<sup>~</sup>ΤΕ) is only slightly similar to the interpretation put forth by the tannaitic rabbi, R. Aqiva. Furthermore, the Coptic language knew of the meaning “fringe of a garment” (ΤΩΤΕ),<sup>34</sup> which would be similar to the “fringes” mentioned above. Nevertheless, the awareness of Coptic and an African idiom are used to interpret a Biblical term found in three separate passages; thus, this mode of interpretation is similar to other incidences of interpretation by translation.<sup>35</sup> If “totafot” or “totefet” are read as Egyptian words, the original meaning could have been (a protective device) “given by the god Thot.”

Selected discussions of tannaitic statements in the Bavli juxtapose Coptic with other languages, which establishes that a language and not a people or a religion is being discussed. The language of the Scroll of Esther is discussed in the following text:

- b. Meg. 18a:<sup>36</sup> [A scroll] may, however, be read in a foreign language to those who speak a foreign language [m. Meg. 2:1]. But you have just said, if one reads it in another language [Aramaic], he has not fulfilled his obligation? [*ibid.*] Rav and Shmu'el both said: ‘in a foreign language’ refers to Greek. How are we to understand this? Shall we say that it is written in Hebrew script and he reads it in Greek? Is this the same as saying it by heart? ... An objection was brought [against the dictum of Rav and Shmu'el]: If one reads it in Coptic, Hebraic, Elamean, Median, Greek, he has not fulfilled his obligation. This [lemma] means the same as the follow-

32 Parallel in b. Sanh. 4b and b. Zevah. 37b.

33 According to the rabbinic interpretation, the plene spelling in this lemma indicates the plural.

34 Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Sahidic Coptic* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1983), 289, lists *tote* as “fringe, border (of a garment).”

35 A similar hermeneutic procedure is found in y. Ma'aser Sheni 5:9; see Rivka Ulmer, “The Semiotics of the Dream Sequence in Yerushalmi Ma'aser Sheni,” *Hen* 22 (2001), 305-23, 310, the word Cappadocia is dissected and translated into an Aramaic and a Greek term, which shows dual cultural awareness.

36 This passage is also found in b. Šab. 115a and b. Men. 34b.

ing *baraita*: [If one reads it in] Coptic to the Copts, in Hebraic<sup>37</sup> to the Hebrews, in Elamean to the Elameans, in Greek to the Greeks, he has fulfilled his obligation. If that is the case, why do Rav and Shmu'el maintain that the Mishnah refers to Greek? Let them maintain that it refers to any vernacular. The fact is that the Mishnah has to be understood from the *baraita* [that it may indeed be read in the vernacular only to those who speak the vernacular] that which is said in the name of Rav and Shmu'el was meant to be in general [not as an interpretation of the Mishnah]. Rav and Shmu'el both say that Greek covers all [language groups, even non-Greek speaking people]. But it is taught [in a *baraita*]: [He may read] in Greek for the Greeks – [this means] for all; [for the Greeks he may, but] not [for others?] They concurred with Rabban Shim'on b. Gamliel, as we have learnt: Rabban Shim'on b. Gamliel says: Scrolls [of Scripture] also were allowed to be written only in Greek [m. Meg. 1:8]. Let them therefore say, The halakhah is as stated by Rabban Shim'on b. Gamliel.

The above passage refers to a lemma from the Mishnah, which states that the Scroll of Esther may be read in another language if the listeners do not understand Hebrew. The speakers of the languages cited in the Bavli appear to be Jews who spoke different vernaculars, such as Coptic, Elamean, Aramaic or Greek.<sup>38</sup> The passage addresses the question of whether a scroll may be recited in languages other than Hebrew or Greek, which was a permissible foreign language. Does this exception for the Greek language apply to other languages as well? The examples of other languages include Coptic. The Talmud cites from the discussion of languages in the Mishnah and the *baraita* and raises arguments and rebuttals based upon these two readings. In the continuation of the above Talmudic passage the argument is raised that since Scrolls of the Hebrew Bible may be read in Greek translation, other languages such as Median (Persian) are also permissible. The proof-text for this line of argumentation refers to the mention of multiple languages in the Scroll of Esther:

Esth. 8:9-10: ... [And to every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing and according to their language... sent letters by post on horseback riding on swift steeds] that were used in the king's service, bred of the stud.

Coptic is one of the languages mentioned in the *baraita* that clarifies this position on the usage of multiple languages. Sacred writings in Coptic are also referred to in b. Šab. 115a, which discusses whether sacred

<sup>37</sup> Rashi ad b. Meg. 18a, s. v. 'ivrit, mentions that this was a language in Transjordan.

<sup>38</sup> Each scroll (*megillah*) was recited on a particular festival together with the Aramaic translation, the reading of the Targum. With regard to the Scroll of Esther, Josep Riberà-Florit, "Targums to Hagiographa," in *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 1, 148-73, states that there appears to have been an ancient Targum from the tannaitic period (Sofrim 8:6) with at least two recensions.

writings written in Coptic and other languages may be saved from a fire even though they may not be recited.

Based upon the above tannaic quotes and their discussions in the bavli, it appears that Scrolls of “Scripture” were available in Coptic and were recited in Coptic by Jews. The reading of the Bible in Coptic in Christian circles is attested to late in the third century CE,<sup>39</sup> significantly, there were Coptic versions of the Book of Esther.<sup>40</sup>

Daniel Sperber identified a Coptic term in Pesiq. Rab. Kah.: סקיפטורין σκέπτω<sup>41</sup> Sperber corrected the previous transliteration of “exceptor” to “sceptor,” rendering the meaning “scribes” attached to magistrates, who not only wrote out the *apologia*, but also announced it.<sup>42</sup>

Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 5, Ha-Hodesh: R. Hoshaya [early 3<sup>rd</sup> century] taught: The earthly court ruled and said, Today is Rosh Ha-Shanah, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to the ministering angels, Set up a platform (*bemah*) and let the advocates and the *sceptors* (סִקְפָּטוֹרִים) stand [and announce] that the earthly court has ruled today to be Rosh Ha-Shanah. But if the witnesses tarried in coming [and the court could not declare the day to be Rosh Ha-Shanah] or the court decided to lengthen the year until tomorrow, thus having Rosh Ha-shanah tomorrow, the Holy One, Blessed be He, says to the ministering angels: Remove the platform, and the advocates, and let the *sceptors* (סִקְפָּטוֹרִים) be removed, since the earthly court has declared that tomorrow is Rosh Ha-Shanah. Why so? *For this is a statute for Israel, and a law for the God of Jacob* (Ps. 81:5).

Another example of a Coptic term appears in Gen. Rab. 11:4.<sup>43</sup>

Gen. Rab. 11:4 (Theodor/Albeck, 91): R. Hiyya b. Abba said: Once a certain man in Laodicea invited me and brought before me a *trapezin* borne on sixteen poles, and in it was something of everything created in the first six days; a child sat in the middle and recited, *The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof* (Ps. 24:1). Why? So that the owner should not grow too proud. I said to him, My son, whence have you been graced with all this wealth? He said, I was a butcher, and whenever I saw a good animal, I set it aside for the Sabbath.

39 Coptic translations of the Bible into different Coptic dialects from very early Greek translations and versions were in existence by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. J. Neville Bridsall, “Version, Ancient,” *ABD* 6, 787-813, s. v. “Coptic,” 790, states that the conversion of Saint Antony took place through the “hearing of” Scripture about 270 CE. This indicates the existence of a Coptic version of the Bible late in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, since Saint Antony did not know Greek.

40 For example, *A Coptic Palimpsest containing Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Judith and Esther in the Sahidic Dialect* (ed. Herbert Thompson; London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1911).

41 This term is also found in Pesiq. Rab. 15:46, identified as “sceptor” in v. 3, 1209.

42 Daniel Sperber, “Rabbinic Notes to Graeco-Coptica,” *AJS-Journal* 4 (1979) 205-09, 207.

43 Parallels in: b. Šab. 119a; Pesiq. Rab. 23:21; Yalq. 1,16.

The term *trapezin*, as well as the term *diskos* found in some manuscripts, appear to be a reduction of τραπέζιον, referring to a “tray,” such as the trays used in Coptic rituals.<sup>44</sup> Pesiq. Rab. 23:21 is thus correct translating the term as תְמָחוֹת שֶׁל כַּפֵּן (“silver tray”).

The transmission of Coptic terms into rabbinic literature is difficult to assess. As far as Egypt is concerned, Jews from Alexandria were among the first to accept Christianity.<sup>45</sup> The Egyptian Christians spoke Coptic; however, the Alexandrian Church Fathers wrote in Greek. This dichotomy led to a bifurcated transmission of sacred texts and, eventually, to differing Christianities. The Alexandrian Jews, who accepted Christianity, possibly as a Hellenized version of Judaism, were assimilated into the Egyptian population. Egyptians who became Christians practiced remnants of the ancient Egyptian religions in Roman and Christian garb until these practices were suppressed by the Christian Roman emperor Theodosius the Great (379-395 CE) and the patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria (385-412 CE).<sup>46</sup> In the fourth century CE there were clashes between the newly dominant Christian cults and the Greco-Roman, as well as the Egyptian cults in Alexandria.<sup>47</sup> The Islamic conquest put an end to the remnants of the Egyptian religions, albeit in Coptic garb, and systematically destroyed statues and defaced reliefs depicting Egyptian gods.<sup>48</sup> The Egyptian Christians have preserved the Coptic language until today and they use it in their sacred rituals and writings, such as the Coptic Bible.

#### 4. Egyptian Gods

Egyptian gods and the statues representing them were visible manifestations of Egypt. These gods played a critical role in the power struggle between the Hebrew God and the gods of Egypt; the Bible states:

<sup>44</sup> Sperber, “Rabbinic Notes,” 209.

<sup>45</sup> Acts 2:10 states that Jewish pilgrims from Egypt had taken part in the Pentecost in Jerusalem and subsequently preached Christianity. The first Egyptian Christians came from the ranks of Alexandrian Jewry; e. g., Apollos, the Alexandrian Jewish preacher, became Christian (Acts 18:24ff.). In contrast, some Egyptian Christians adopted Philo’s allegorical reading of the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>46</sup> Norman Russell, *Theophilus of Alexandria* (London: Routledge, 2007), 23; Alan Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs: 332BC-AD 642*; from Alexander to the Arab Conquest (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, repr. of 1986 ed.).

<sup>47</sup> Theophilus supposedly discovered a pagan temple; a letter was sent by the emperor instructing Theophilus to destroy this temple.

<sup>48</sup> Harold I. Bell, *Egypt from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest: a Study in the Diffusion and Decay of Hellenism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948).

*And against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments* (Exod. 12:12). The Hebrews/Israelites in the Nile Delta region of Egypt would have been familiar with the Egyptian god Ra', since there were temples dedicated to Ra' in this region. A priest of Ra' at On (Heliopolis) is referred to in the Hebrew Bible by mentioning the marriage of Joseph to the daughter of the priest Potiphera (Gen. 41:45: *And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On*). Potiphera is also mentioned in Gen. 41:50 and Gen. 46:20. The name Potiphera (Egyptian: *p3 dj p3 r'* [he who was given by Ra']) identifies him as a High Priest of Ra'.<sup>49</sup> The name Potiphera (or its variation: Potiphar, Gen. 37:36) is Egyptian; however, as set forth below, the rabbis deduced their own reading of the name, which was not based upon the Egyptian language. The name was merely recognized as foreign in rabbinic texts (e.g., Gen. Rab. 86:3; Tanh., Buber ed., Vayehev 14; b. Soṭah 13b).<sup>50</sup>

Gen. Rab. 86:3 (Theodor/Albeck, 1054): *Potiphar* (Gen. 39:1) is Poti-phera. He was called Potiphar because he fattened bull calves [מִפְטָם פְּרִים] for the purposes of idolatry; "Poti-phera," because he used to uncover [עַזְרָה] himself in idolatry, but when the bull calf [Joseph] came there, [Potiphar] was enlightened [φωτεύοć]. A eunuch of Pharaoh (*ibid.*) – [This means] he was castrated, teaching that [Potiphar] purchased [Joseph] for the purpose of intercourse, whereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, emasculated [Potiphar]. *Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, [the captain of the guard, an Egyptian] bought him* (Gen.39:1).

The rabbis recognized that the names "Potiphar" and "Potiphera" are related names of an Egyptian priest without providing any specific reference to the Egyptian god he served. The above text merely mentions bull calves that could be construed to reflect an Egyptian god in pure animal form, such as Apis<sup>51</sup> (e.g., Apis of Memphis).<sup>52</sup> The names of Potiphar and Potiphera are deconstructed and read as Hebrew roots, rendering terms that are related to idolatry.

49 See Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (Genesis 37-50) (Suppl. VT 20; Leiden: Brill, 1970), 211ff.; Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Egyptian Sun-God Ra in the Pentateuch," *Hen* 10 (1988), 3-15, and the literature cited therein. James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 84f., summarizes the arguments that support the premise that this name seemed to have been "popular" during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE; Hoffmeier also explains the two different forms of the name.

50 I presented an analysis of the Egyptian evidence relating to these texts Rivka Ulmer, "Zwischen ägyptischer Vorlage und talmudischer Rezeption: Josef und die Ägypterin," *Kairos* 24/25 (1992/93), 75-90.

51 Alfred Hermann, "Der letzte Apisstier," *JAC* 3 (1960), 34-50.

52 Hornung, *Conceptions*, 109, 136; Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 1, 195-201.

The Egyptian god Ra' was the powerful sun-god, who was mainly depicted in human form and worshiped as the one, who created and sustains the world.<sup>53</sup> By day Ra' traveled in his barque through the sky and by night he passed through the underworld; he was reborn and he aged. Ra' is referred to in the Bible, e.g., Exod. 10:10. Additionally, several Biblical expressions refer to Ra': "the eye of the whole land."<sup>54</sup> The Hebrew term [ה]עֵד in the Bible often signifies Ra' instead of "evil," thus, the terms "evil eye" or "evil" in some instances refer to the Egyptian sun-god.<sup>55</sup> In midrash, this connection between evil and Ra' is recognized in a medieval compendium:

Yal. 1, 15 Joshua: Pharaoh said to Israel: *Look, evil [Ra' העֵד] is before you* (Ex. 10:10). And he said: I see in my astrological constellations that one star rises against you; his name is Ra', he signifies blood and carnage. When Israel sinned through the calf in the desert the Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted to kill them ...

The parallel passage, Yalq. 1, 392 Ki tissa, has a variation as its text continues: "the Egyptians said: One rises against you, his name is Ra'." Rashi also refers to a midrash in his commentary on Exod. 10:10 (*And he said to them, Let the Lord be with you, if I will let you go, and your little ones. Look, evil העֵד is before you.*)

Rashi on Exod. 10:10: I have heard that in *midrash agadah* there is a certain star, the name of it is העֵד. Pharaoh said to [the Hebrews], Through my astrology I see that star rising towards you in the desert ...

This comment by Rashi, as well as the above citations from the Yalqut, suggest that rabbinic interpretation claimed that the god Ra' persecuted the Israelites during the Exodus. The following midrash has an additional reference to the god Ra' in his role of persecuting the Israelites.

Exod. Rab. 20:6: Another interpretation: *And it came to pass, when Pharaoh let the people go* (Exod. 13:17). It is written: *Our soul escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers* (Ps. 124: 7). Israel may be compared to a dove, which was detected by *nahash Ra'* [an evil snake or more correctly, the snake of Ra']

53 See chapter 9; Rivka Ulmer, "The Divine Eye in Ancient Egypt and in the Midrashic Interpretation of Formative Judaism," *Journal of Religion and Society* 5 (2003), 1-17. On the sun-god Ra', see Hornung, *Conceptions*, 281; Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 1, 332-59; Alexandre Piankoff, *The Litany of Re: Translated with Commentary* (Bollingen Series XL, Egyptian Religious Texts and Representations, vol. 4; New York: Pantheon Books, 1964).

54 Rendsburg, "The Egyptian Sun-God," 7.

55 Umberto Cassuto cited the evidence for this connection, 72 f. פירוש על ספר שמות (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1965, repr. 1982; trans. Israel Abrahams, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* [Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997]).

while sitting in her nest.<sup>56</sup> This was the case with Israel in Egypt, where the snake [*nahash*] Pharaoh used craftiness against them and he said: *Come, let us deal wisely with them* (Exod. 1:10); and he is compared to a snake, as it says: *Prophesy against Pharaoh [...] the great snake* (Ezek. 29:3).

The above text combines the persecution of the Israelites by the god Ra' and the persecution by Pharaoh. Another midrashic text, Mek. Beshalah 2 (Lauterbach ed., p. 211), refers to the persecution of the Israelites by a snake and a hawk:

If she [Israel] enters, there is the serpent. If she stays out, there is the hawk. In such a plight were the Israelites at that moment, the sea forming a bar and the enemy pursuing.

The snake and the hawk could relate to Pharaoh; the hawk may represent Horus (*Harendotes*), the Egyptian god who protected the pharaoh and the snake may represent the uraeus snake<sup>57</sup> on Pharaoh's headdress. Frequently in midrash a snake may represent Egypt or the Egyptian king. In a Biblical passage that speaks about Egypt's destruction (*The word that the Lord spoke to Jeremiah the prophet, how Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, should come and strike the land of Egypt* [Jer. 46:13]), Jeremiah compares Egypt to a "hissing" snake: *Her [Egypt's] sound is like that of a snake on the move* (Jer. 46:22). The Egyptian hissing snake, which again is related to the uraeus snake, which is a symbol of Pharaoh,<sup>58</sup> is also found in the following midrashic text:

Exod. Rab 3:12: R. Ele'azar said that [Moses'] rod was converted into a snake corresponding to Pharaoh, who was called a snake, as it says: *Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh King of Egypt, the great-snake* (Ezek. 29: 3).

This midrashic text elaborates upon the term "snake." Among the possibilities presented in the extended text is a snake god mentioned by a *matrona*. However, the crucial question is why the rod of Moses was transformed into a snake. The midrashic term *keneged* (corresponding to) creates an antithetical comparison between Pharaoh's snake (the uraeus) and Moses' snake; implicitly also between Pharaoh's rod (a scepter) and Moses' rod.<sup>59</sup> The concept of the Egyptian snake is further elaborated upon in the following midrash:

Tanh. Va-era' 4:<sup>60</sup> *When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying [...] (Exod. 7:9). Let our rabbi instruct us [yelammedenu rabbenu]: May someone who is bitten*

<sup>56</sup> See chapter 9 and Ulmer, "The Divine Eye," in respect to the uraeus snake of Pharaoh.

<sup>57</sup> See chapter 9; Ulmer, "The Divine Eye."

<sup>58</sup> Pharaoh is said to be like a snake in Exod. Rab. 3:12; 3; 9:4; Exod. Rab. 20:6 refers to Pharaoh as "the snake."

<sup>59</sup> See chapter 4; Ulmer, "Egyptian Magic and the Osiris Myth."

<sup>60</sup> Exod. Rab. 9:3, with variations.

by a snake during the *tefillah* stop praying? Our rabbis taught [m. Ber. 5:1]: Even if the king salutes, one may not return his greeting, and even if a snake is twisted around one's heel one may not interrupt the *tefillah* ...

Why did the sages compare a snake that is twisted around someone's heel with the kingdom of Egypt? R. Joshua b. Pazzi said, as it is written: *Her sound is like that of a snake on the move; for they shall march with force, and come against her with axes, like wood cutters* (Jer. 46:22). Just as the snake hisses and kills, so the kingdom of Egypt hisses and kills.

The citation of a mishnaic statement<sup>61</sup> in the *yelammedenu* passage in the above text ("let our rabbi instruct us") establishes two propositions that prohibit the interruption of prayer. As a continuation of the above passage from Midrash Tanhuma these two scenarios (snake bite and royal salutation) are connected to the Scriptural passage (*Inyan*) (Exod. 7:9) of the homiletic discourse by means of the question: "Why did the sages compare a snake that is twisted around someone's heel with the kingdom of Egypt?" The answer to this question posits: "just as the snake hisses and kills, so the kingdom of Egypt hisses and kills ..." The above midrashic unit, like some other midrashim, is bi-directional; the interpretation flows in one direction and then turns around in the opposite direction. From the Scriptural verse (Exod. 7:9) that mentions the Pharaoh the passage proceeds to a Mishnah citation that mentions a snake. In the subsequent portion of this text the interpretation returns to Egypt. In short, the text moves away from Egypt and then returns to Egypt. The Mishnah occupies the pivotal position in this reversal of direction. The Mishnah interprets Scripture; Pharaoh is understood to be both a king and a snake. The word "Egypt" in the concluding sentence in the above paragraph illuminates the Mishnah. Even the attack of the snake, representing Egypt, does not interrupt one's compliance with God's commandments, including the *tefillah*.

Whether the golden calf (Exod. 32:4) was an Egyptian god is disputed.<sup>62</sup> Some midrashic and related texts interpret the calf as an Egyptian god; e.g., a late midrash states that "the Egyptians are carrying their gods and they are singing and reciting hymns before it ... [the Israelites said:] Make a god like the Egyptian god for us" (Pirqe

61 The conceptual order and the resulting peculiarities of Mishnah Berakhot are discussed in Angelo Vivian, "Il Lessico Concettuale del Trattato Mishnico Berakhot (MBer)," in *Biblische und Judaistische Studien. Festschrift Paolo Sacchi* (ed. A. Vivian; Judentum und Umwelt 29; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), 383–534.

62 Allan M. Langner, "The Golden Calf and Ra," *JBQ* 31 (2003), 43–7, 44, discusses the relationship of the golden calf to the god Ra'. *The American Israelite*, 35, 16 (Oct. 19, 1888), 4, claimed that the golden calf was in fact an Egyptian god.

R. El. 46).<sup>63</sup> This is based upon a long chain of interpretations that construed that the golden calf was a statue of the Egyptian god Apis.<sup>64</sup> From a literary perspective, it seems reasonable to assume that a group that had just left Egypt would create an Egyptian god. Nevertheless, during the editing process of the Biblical text the vision of a Canaanite god in the form of a calf may have been intended. From the perspective of Egyptology, the calf was an Egyptian god.

The Biblical lemma, *On all the gods of Egypt will I execute judgments* (Exod. 12:12), has been interpreted to mean that God battled and destroyed Egyptian gods; the destruction of the Egyptian gods together with the Egyptian kings is also mentioned in Jeremiah: *Behold, I will punish the multitude of No, and Pharaoh, and Egypt, with their gods, and their kings; even Pharaoh and all them that trust in him* (Jer. 46:25). The divine battle against the gods of Egypt is also a topic in midrashic texts (e.g., Gen. Rab. 96:5; Num. Rab. 16:25; Song Rab. 2:29).

Num. Rab. 16:25: *Moses said to Him: The inhabitants of the land ... have heard that You, Lord, are in the midst of the people ... now if you will kill this people as one man* (Num. 14: 13-15). He meant: Do not do this that the nations of the world will not say: The gods of Canaan are more difficult to overcome than the gods of Egypt; the gods of Egypt are false, but those of Canaan are strong.

These above passages indicate that the rabbis knew of idolatrous worship of Egyptian gods and gods from other cultures. Egyptian gods could have the appearance of animals.<sup>65</sup> The following animals are mentioned in rabbinic texts: snake,<sup>66</sup> ram (lamb),<sup>67</sup> hawk (falcon),<sup>68</sup> jackal (dog),<sup>69</sup> crocodile,<sup>70</sup> frog<sup>71</sup> and bull.<sup>72</sup> These animals were manifesta-

63 See also Targ. Yerushalmi Exod. 32:5; y Sotah 3:4, 19a; Exod. Rab. 9:49.

64 See Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 71-2, who refers to Philo and others to support the contention that the golden calf was a statue of the Egyptian god Apis.

65 See Erik Hornung, "Die Bedeutung des Tieres im alten Ägypten," *StG* 20 (1967), 69-84.

66 Exod. Rab. 20:6.

67 Exod Rab. 16:2.

68 Mek. Beshallah 2 (Lauterbach ed., p. 211).

69 See chapter 4; Ulmer, "Egyptian Magic and the Osiris Myth;" Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 11, Vayehi beshallah (Mandelbaum ed., 187-88).

70 See chapter 2; Rivka Ulmer, "Visions of Egypt in Midrash: The Nile as the Landscape of the Other," in *Discussing Cultural Influences: Text, Context, and Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism: Proceedings of a Conference on Rabbinic Judaism at Bucknell University* (ed. Rivka Ulmer; Studies in Judaism; Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2007,), 193-237; Tanh. Bereshit 7.

71 See chapter 2; Ulmer, "Visions of Egypt in Midrash: The Nile;" Exod. Rab. 10:2-3.

tions of Egyptian gods. Egyptian gods existed in multiple forms; the multitude of visible images and the definite animal species relating to a god “make[s] the god more accessible.”<sup>73</sup> The view that Egyptians worshiped animals was a common misconception in antiquity, shared by the Romans<sup>74</sup> and the rabbis. The existence of animal worship in general, without specific mention of Egypt, is addressed in the following text:

- b. Zev. 114a: But as for an animal set apart [for idolatrous practices] and an animal worshiped [as an idol, is it correct that] no one can forbid that which does not belong to him?

This talmudic passage raises the “jurisdictional” issue as to whether the rabbis had the authority to forbid animal worship, if the animals were owned by idolaters. In short, it could be argued that animal worship could be permitted to the idolaters. The rabbis perceived such animal worship as the cult of the “Others,” ‘avodah zarah

The Egyptian worship of lambs is mentioned in midrashic texts (Tanh., Buber ed., Bo 3; b. Šab. 89a): “the Egyptians were bowing down to lambs.” Specifically, the Israelites were requested to slay the Egyptian lamb god:

Exod Rab 16:2<sup>75</sup>: You find that when the Israelites were in Egypt, they worshiped idols and were reluctant to abandon them, for it says: *They did not cast away the detestable things their eyes fasted upon [nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt]* (Ezek. 20:8). God said to Moses: As long as Israel worships Egyptian gods, they will not be redeemed; go and tell them to abandon their evil ways and to reject idolatry. This is the meaning of *draw out and take you lambs* (Exod. 12:21). [This means:] Draw away your hands from idolatry and take for yourselves lambs, thereby slaying the gods of Egypt and preparing the Passover; only through this will the Lord pass over you. This is the meaning of: *Through returning and resting will you be saved* (Isa. 30:15).<sup>76</sup>

The above reference to lambs may refer to the Egyptian gods Amun or Khnum.<sup>77</sup> Both of these gods were frequently depicted with ram's horns. These Egyptian gods were also known in Greco-Roman times,

72 See chapter 4; Ulmer, “Egyptian Magic and the Osiris Myth;” b ‘Abod. Zar. 43a; Gen. Rab. 86:3.

73 Hornung, *Conceptions*, 137.

74 See Klaas A. D. Smelik and E. A. Hemelrijk, “Who knows not what monsters demented Egypt's worship?” Opinions on Egyptian animal worship in antiquity as part of the ancient conception of Egypt,” ANRW II.17.4, 2337-57.

75 Num. Rab. 16:25; Song Rab. 2:45.

76 “Through returning” from the policy of an alliance with Egypt (See I. W. Slotki, *Isaiah* [London: Soncino, 1949], 142).

77 Hornung, *Conceptions*, 274, 278; Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 2, 49-52.

e.g., Khnum<sup>78</sup> was occasionally identified as Amun<sup>79</sup> and the combination of Zeus and Amun was designated as Zeus-Ammon.<sup>80</sup> Several centuries earlier there had been conflicts in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE between the Egyptian priests of Khnum in Yev (Elephantine; Egyptian: Abu) who worshiped rams (lambs) and their neighbors, the Jewish priests of the local temple of Yah(o), who sacrificed lambs;<sup>81</sup> this tension transpired on the same island in the Nile.<sup>82</sup> Khnum (*Khnemu*) was the ram-headed creator god, who was worshiped together with Satis (*Satet*), goddess of the first Nile cataract, and their daughter, Anukis (*Anqet*).<sup>83</sup>

Israelite worship of Egyptian gods is condemned in Josh. 24:14, a dialogue between the Israelites and Joshua, in which serving the Lord, as opposed to worshiping other gods, is emphasized: *Put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt...* This passage

78 Herodotus, Hist. 2.28 mentions Khnum as the guardian of the Nile source and as a horned ram, *ibid.* 2.42; 4.18.

79 See Stefan Pfeiffer, "Die Entsprachung ägyptischer Götter im griechischen Pantheon," in *Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom: Abwehr und Berührung*. Städelsches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, 26. November 2005-26. Februar 2006 (Frankfurt am Main: Liebighaus alter Plastik. Tübingen/Berlin: Wasmuth Verlag, 2005), 285-90.

80 See Stefan Schmidt, "Ammon," in *Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom*, 187-94. The "horned" Ammon, i.e., Ammon with ram's horns (*corniger ammon*), is found numerous times in classical literature, e.g., Ovid, *Metam.* 5.17. The identification of Egyptian gods with Greek gods, or the combination of Egyptian and Greek gods, is mentioned by Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.144; 2.156, thus, Zeus corresponds to Amun.

81 The animal sacrifice was referred to as *'wh*. The nearby location of Syene (sewen; Assuan) is mentioned in Ezek. 30:6; 1QIsa 49:12.

82 The temple of Yah at Elephantine and its sustaining Jewish community evidenced "clear signs of the penetration of Egyptian religious cults into the life of the community," according to J. Gwyn Griffiths, "The Legacy of Egypt in Judaism," *CHJ* 3, 1025-51, 1029. In respect to this community, as well as the friction surrounding its existence, and the destruction of the Jewish temple, see Bezalel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 279-93. Alexander E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century BC* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923, repr. Osnabrück: Zeller, 1967), 21, contains the so-called "Passover papyrus," and a papyrus that mentions "Khnum" (38) "line 7: 'they shall not find [anything bad] about you. It is known to you that Khnum is against us from [the time] that Hananiah was in Egypt until now'." See also Detlef Franke, "Elephantine," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 1, 465-67. Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*, vol. 1, *Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 211f., comments that this papyrus is too fragmentary to draw conclusions, but acknowledges that friction between the two temple communities could have developed over time. Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 61-4, briefly discusses the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb in relation to the conflict in Elephantine.

83 The triad of Elephantine consisted of these gods. As an aside, Egyptian gods frequently appeared as a trinity.

indicates that the Israelites had actually worshipped Egyptian gods. This idolatrous worship of Egyptian gods is also condemned in Ezek. 20:7-8: *Do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt... not one of them cast away the detestable things their eyes fasted upon, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.*<sup>84</sup>

Another midrashic text continues this theme of the condemnation of the worship of Egyptian gods. The “Hebrews” are rebuked for worshipping Egyptian gods in Egypt.

Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 5:7: Our Master Moses, how can we be redeemed, seeing that the land of Egypt is filled with the filth of idolatry? [Moses] said: Since God wishes to redeem you, He will overlook your idolatrous worship.

There is some evidence that the names of Egyptian gods were assimilated into Hebrew personal names, which is a further indication of the intimate relationship that Jews in Egypt had with their surrounding culture. For example, the name of the Egyptian goddess Neith (*njt*)<sup>85</sup> was thought to be part of the Hebrew name אֶסְנָא ("Asenath," Gen. 41:45, 50; 46:20); however, according to some Egyptologists, deriving this name from an artificial Egyptian term *nsnt* meaning “belonging to Neith”<sup>86</sup> is no longer tenable. Rather, a reconstruction of the Egyptian elements in Asenath’s name could possibly render the meaning “she belonged to her father.”<sup>87</sup>

Several names of Egyptian gods are attested to in rabbinic literature; for example, the phrase in b. ‘Abod. Zar. 11b “there are those who say: *nitbare* (נִתְבָּרֵא),” may contain a combination of Neith and Phre

84 See also Ezek. 23:3,8.

85 Neith had different attributes; often she was depicted as “the terrifying one” with arrows and a shield. Herodotus identified her with Athena (Neith-Athena, see Ägypten, Griechenland and Rom, 619). Alternatively she was a serpent goddess (see Erika Feucht, “Ein Bildnis der Neith als Schlangengöttin,” in *Egyptian Religion: The Last Thousand Years, Studies dedicated to the memory of Jan Quaegebeur* [ed. Willy Clarysse, Antoon Schoors, Harco Willems; Orientalia Lovaniensa Analecta 84-85; Leuven: Peeters, 1998], 105-15). Neith was also a primeval goddess involved in creation and protecting the pharaoh (Hornung, *Conceptions*, 280); see also Susan Tower Hollis, “Five Egyptian Goddesses in the Third Millennium B.C.: Neith, Hathor, Nut, Isis, Nephtys,” *KMT* 5/4 (1995), 46.

86 Redford, *A Study*, 229.

87 See Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 85, who provides this explanation and summarizes the research and states that “no example of the name *ns-nit* is known in ancient Egyptian onomastics.” Kenneth A. Kitchen, “Genesis in the Near Eastern World,” in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12-50* (ed. R. S. Hess, et al.; Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1993), 77-92, 79f., argues that the translation “belonging to (her father)” makes sense in both the Hebrew and the Egyptian. In the Jewish-Hellenistic novel Joseph and Aseneth Asenath is renamed “city of refuge.”

according to Samuel Krauss.<sup>88</sup> Alternatively, in my view the term *nitbare* may be a theophoric name that contains a corruption of Neith: “Neith created.” In Egypt, and in particular in temples from the Greco-Roman period (e.g., Esna), Neith was viewed as a creator goddess.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, Neith was frequently identified with Isis.<sup>90</sup> If *nitbare* means “Neith created,” then this Bavli text claims that a statue of the Egyptian goddess Neith had been erected in Acco. The same passage in b. ‘Abod. Zar. 11b contains the variant reading *nidbakhah*, which could refer to the Syrian god Zeus Madbachos. Nevertheless, this term *nidbakhah* retains an element similar to the name of the Egyptian goddess Neith (*nit*) and could be translated: “Neith wept;”<sup>91</sup> the weeping Neith could relate to the mourning and weeping Nephthys in some versions of the Osiris myth.<sup>92</sup> The reading of “*nidbakhah*” is attested to in a manuscript (MS The Jewish Theological Seminary, Rab. 15, or נידבכה). However, two other manuscripts of the Talmud have a Hebrew transcription of the name of the goddess “Neith” that is closer to the Egyptian name: MS Munich, cod. Hebr, 95, fol. 375v: and MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Suppl. Heb. 1337, fol. 136a, which has “Nitbakhah” twice: “ונתבכה שבעכו אמר ר' נתבכה איכא דאמר ר' נתבכה שבעכו,” “and Nitbakhah in Acco, and there are those who say Nitbakhah.”

b. ‘Abod. Zar. 11b: R. Hanan b. Hisda in the name of Rav, others say: R. Hanan b. Rava in the name of Rav said: There are five appointed temples of idol-worship: The Temple of Bel in Babel, The Temple of Nebo in Kursi, Tar’ata in Mapug, Zerifa in Ashkelon, Nishra in Arabia. When R. Dimi came [he said], they added to these the market-place in ‘En-Bekhi [and] the Nitbakhah of Acco; there are those who say: the Nitbara of Acco. Rav Dimi of Nahardea recited these in the reversed order: The market-place of Acco, the Nitbakhah of ‘En-Bekhi.

The second element of the term *nitbare*, “Phre,” may be derived from the Egyptian *p3 r'*, which also occurs in Gen. 41:45 as part of the name of the priest Potiphera. As mentioned above, Potiphera was a priest of

88 Samuel Krauss, “Aegyptische und syrische Götternamen im Talmud,” in *Semitic Studies in Memory of Rev. Dr. Alexander Kohut* (ed. George A. Kohut; Berlin: Calvary, 1897), 339–53, 344.

89 See Robert Schlichting, “Neith,” LÄ 4, 393–94, who portrays Neith as the goddess of the beginning, and as the goddess of creation and of daily re-creation; see also Hornung, *Conceptions*, 280.

90 Herodotus, *Hist.* 11.59; 11.62 mentions the annual festival of Isis-Neith at Saüs.

91 Gary Greenberg, “Neith and the Two Biblical Deborahs: One and the Same.” (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Research Association in Egypt, 1995), mentions the weeping Neith and suggests that, based upon Plutarch, she is associated with the Tree of Weeping.

92 See chapter 4; Ulmer, “Egyptian Magic and the Osiris Myth.”

Ra' at On (*iwnw*, Heliopolis). LXX translates his name as *petephre* (Πετεφρη) (Gen. 37:36; 39:1) or *petephres* (Πετεφρης) (Gen. 41:45, 50). Additionally, one of the names of the Egyptian kings, containing the element Ra' in its Greek form "Phre," related the king to the sun-god. In the Greek Magical Papyri a spell for invisibility contains the element "Phre" in a series of names that mention other Egyptian gods in a Hellenized form: "I am Anubis, I am Osir-Phre, I am OSOT SORONOUIER, I am Osiris whom Seth destroyed."<sup>93</sup> The evidence is inconclusive in regard to the meaning of the element "Phre" in *nitbare*.

The Egyptian god Arueris<sup>94</sup> ('Αρουηρις; the elder Horus) is presented as a powerful idol in rabbinic literature. We find the admonition: "Close his eyes when you walk by his statue" or "Stomp out his eyes" in several Yerushalmi passages (y. 'Abod. Zar. 3:11, 43b; y. Šeq. 2:5, 47a; y. Mo'ed Qat. 3:7).<sup>95</sup> There are several variant spellings of the name of the Egyptian god, Arueris, in the Yerushalmi passages, including Aduri and Arura. Additional Egyptian gods cited in rabbinic literature include Isis and Serapis in Greco-Roman garb,<sup>96</sup> the Romanized Nile god (Nilos),<sup>97</sup> and the view that Pharaoh presented himself as a god.<sup>98</sup>

Anubis was the god responsible for embalming and also the lord of the necropolis,<sup>99</sup> who is often depicted as a jackal-headed god or a black dog. Traces of the Egyptian god Anubis are found in midrashic texts that refer to the dogs guarding the tomb of Joseph.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, Anubis is often depicted with a key (*ankh*) and in the Greek Magical

<sup>93</sup> PGM I, 247-62.

<sup>94</sup> Krauss, "Aegyptische," 345; on Arueris, see Plutarch, *Is. Os.*, F 355 (LC, vol. 5, 33); Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 2, 129.

<sup>95</sup> The variants include, but are not limited to, the following: אֲדֹרִי in y. 'Abod. Zar. 3:11, 43b (Krotoshin); אֲהֹדָרִי in y. Ber. 2:5, 4b (ed. Peter Schäfer et al., *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi I/1-2* [TSAJ 31; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1991]) y. Ber. 2:11, MS Paris Bibliothèque Nationale Heb. 1389 and MS London British Library Or. 2822-24 אֲרֹורָא, Ed. Amsterdam (1710) דָּאָה רָוֶה; אֲדֹרִי אֲדֹרִי in y. Šeq. 2:5, 47a (ed. Venice, 1523: אֲדֹרָא), (Peter Schäfer et al., *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi, II/5-12* (TSAJ 83; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2001); *Synopse II/5-12* (2001, TSAJ 83), y. Šeq. 2:6, Oxford חַיוֹרָא and in the Bavli, Munich, 2:6 חַרוֹרָא; אֲדֹרִי אֲדֹרִי in y. Mo'ed Qat. 3:7, 83c.

<sup>96</sup> See chapter 7; t. 'Abod. Zar. 5:1; Rivka Ulmer, "Cleopatra as a Cultural Icon in Rabbinic Literature," *Hen* 29 (2007), 327-53.

<sup>97</sup> See chapter 2; Ulmer, "Visions of Egypt in Midrash: The Nile."

<sup>98</sup> See chapter 2; Ulmer, "Visions of Egypt in Midrash: The Nile."

<sup>99</sup> Hornung, *Conceptions*, 275; Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 2, 261-66; Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.

<sup>100</sup> See chapter 4; Ulmer, "Egyptian Magic and the Osiris Myth."

Papyri Anubis carries the key to the tombs of the dead;<sup>101</sup> this may be a *Vorlage* for the key of resurrection of the dead in the midrash of the three keys.<sup>102</sup> In this midrash God keeps this unique key to the tombs.<sup>103</sup>

The Egyptian Apopis, the huge snake that threatens the boat of the sun-god every morning,<sup>104</sup> is also found in rabbinic texts. The Yerushalmi, y. Ned. 11:1, twice contains an oath formula: “*אִפְּסִי* ‘By Apopis!’”<sup>105</sup> This is a non-binding oath; Krauss emphasizes that this term is not equivalent to the term *pipi* (Tetragrammaton), which appears often in the Greek Magical Papyri.<sup>106</sup> If under duress a person is coerced to make an oath, this false oath should be sworn by Pharaoh’s name (Gen. Rab. 91:7).

In her research of personal names from Egypt that appear in Jewish texts from antiquity, Tal Ilan<sup>107</sup> lists the name of a proselyte, נְפִיטִיס, transcribed as “Neptis.” In my view, this name may be based upon the Egyptian goddess Nephthys (*nebt-het*), who is also mentioned by Plutarch<sup>108</sup> in his conflation of the Osiris myth. Similarly, the name “Nephtis”<sup>109</sup> (נְפִיטִיס) in b. Yebam. 98a could also relate to the goddess Nephthys, particularly since incestuous marriage practices are discussed in the extended passage.

b. Yebam. 98a: Come and hear what R. Jose said: A case involving the proselyte Nephthys, who married the wife of his maternal brother, and when the case was submitted to the sages their verdict was that the law of matrimony does not apply to a proselyte.

<sup>101</sup> Siegfried Morenz, “Anubis mit dem Schlüssel,” in *Religion und Geschichte des alten Ägyptens: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (ed. Elke Blumenthal and Siegfried Hermann; Cologne and Vienna: Böhlau, 1975), 510-20.

<sup>102</sup> Gen. Rab. 73:4; Deut. Rab. 7:6; Pesiq. Rab. 42:6, Ulmer ed.; b Ta'an. 2a; b Sanh. 113a.

<sup>103</sup> See Rivka Ulmer, “Consistency and Change in Rabbinic Literature as Reflected in the Terms ‘Rain’ and ‘Dew,’” *JSJ* 26 (1995), 55-75.

<sup>104</sup> Book of the Gates in the tomb of Ramses VI (1142-1135 BCE). In the Graeco-Roman period Apopis is thought to have been created by Neith (Esna temple); see also The Book of Knowing the Creations of Re and of Overthrowing Apophis, *ANET*, 6. In Coptic Egypt Apopis was also mentioned in connection with the belief in the evil eye, see Joris F. Borghouts, “The Evil Eye of Apopis,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 59 (1973), 114-50.

<sup>105</sup> Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1993; SAOC 54), 147, mentions Apophis as the enemy of Horus.

<sup>106</sup> Krauss, “Aegyptische,” 346-8.

<sup>107</sup> Ilan, *Lexicon*, 1, 48, 50.

<sup>108</sup> Plutarch, *Is. Os.*, 12-19

<sup>109</sup> Ilan, *Lexicon*, 1, 335.

Egyptian personal names in Jewish texts include Ani,<sup>110</sup> which is well-known from the version of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* dedicated to an individual named Ani.<sup>111</sup> Another Egyptian name found in rabbinic literature is Sابتיא סַבְתִּיא (Sif. Num., Horovitz ed., 171). Coptic names in Jewish texts appear to be transliterations of Biblical or Ptolemaic names, such as Leah and Arsinoë.

A perceived Egyptian etymology of the name of Moses<sup>113</sup> (Μωυσῆς) is also found in Philo, *Mos.* 1.4:17: “for the Egyptians call water mou;” Josephus, *Ant.* 2.228, states: “for the Egyptians call water môu and those who are saved esês.”<sup>114</sup> These two terms are transcriptions of the Coptic words for “water” and “saved.”<sup>115</sup> With regard to an Egyptian etymology of the name of Moses we may add that “Moses” may be based upon *msw*, “child of ...”<sup>116</sup> Thus, the name Moses could have been an abbreviation of a theophoric name, omitting the name of an Egyptian god.<sup>117</sup> Another derivation is to read Moses as “to conceive, to bear.”<sup>118</sup> However, Abraham H. Yahuda, based upon the spelling in the Hebrew Bible, derives the name of Moses from Egyptian “water” or “seed” and “pond, lake, expanse of water,” thus, Moses would mean

<sup>110</sup> Ilan, *Lexicon*, 1, 361f., s.v. מֹשֶׁה.

<sup>111</sup> Raymond O. Faulkner, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead, The Book of Going forth by Day: The First Authentic Presentation of the Complete Papyrus of Ani* (ed. Eva von Dassow; Chronicle Books: San Francisco, 1994); *Papyrus Ani BM 10.470: vollständige Faksimile-Ausgabe im Originalformat des Totenbuches aus dem Besitz des British Museum* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1979).

<sup>112</sup> Ilan, *Lexicon*, 1, 396.

<sup>113</sup> The inner-biblical etymology of Moses’ Hebrew name is found in Exod. 2:10 *When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, ‘I drew him out of the water.’* In David’s song of deliverance (2 Sam. 22:17 and Ps. 18:17), the same Hebrew root is utilized: *he drew me out of many waters*.

<sup>114</sup> See Lester Grabbe, *Etymology in Early Jewish Interpretation: The Hebrew Names in Philo* (Brown Judaic Studies 115; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 188, referring to Philo’s interpretation and the differences of Philo’s etymologies from the LXX.

<sup>115</sup> Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch*, s.v. מֹשֵׁה. See also Louis H. Feldman, *Philo’s Portrayal of Moses in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 386, n. 29, mentions the Greek transcription esies in papyri and an Egyptian origin (mw ḥsy).

<sup>116</sup> Hannig, *Handwörterbuch*, s.v. ms, 361.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas A.G. Hartmann, “Moses und Maria – ‘Amuns Kind und Liebling’ – Auf den ägyptischen Spuren zweier biblischer Namen,” *ZAW* 116 (2004), 616-22, 618, argues for this interpretation.

<sup>118</sup> WÄS, 2, 137f., s. v. “*mšy*” – to conceive, bear. See also J. Gwyn Griffiths, “The Egyptian Derivation of the Name Moses,” *JNES* 12 (1953), 225-31. Donald B. Redford, “Moses,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 2, 438-39, relates Moses to the same Egyptian root *msi* (to bear), but also considers the Canaanite serpent god (son of Baal), Muš.

“Child of the Nile” (*mw-še*).<sup>119</sup> In my opinion, this view is the most likely derivation of the Hebrew name as it appears in the Bible.

The usage of Egyptian names in rabbinic texts is a fairly rare occurrence; the exception to this statement is the usage of the Egyptian names of Biblical characters such as Pinhas<sup>120</sup> and Zaphnat Pa’neah.<sup>121</sup> This latter name is the name that Pharaoh gave to Joseph (Gen. 41:45), and Joseph’s Egyptian name may be translated as follows: “(an Egyptian god) maintains the life of ...,” since this name definitely contains the Egyptian ‘*nh*’ (“ankh,” life).<sup>122</sup>

The Egyptian etymology of some of the Hebrew names in rabbinic documents demonstrates the pervasiveness and the awareness of Egyptian mementos. It should be emphasized that only a few Egyptian gods are specifically mentioned in rabbinic texts; this may be due to the fear of mentioning a foreign god by name, which could possibly invoke its magical potency. By contrast, the Greek Magical Papyri, written by Jews in Egypt, are filled with references to Egyptian gods and their Greco-Roman or Coptic derivatives.

## 5. Spoils and Idols

Several passages in the Bible refer to the “spoils of Egypt” promised by God through Moses to the departing Israelites:

*And when you go, you will not go empty-handed, each woman shall ask her neighbor and any woman living in the neighbor’s house for jewelry of silver and gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons, and on your daughters; and so you shall despoil the Egyptians.* (Exod. 3:21-22)

*Tell the people that every man and every woman is to ask her neighbor for objects of silver and gold. And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants, and in the sight of the people.* (Exod. 11:2-3)

Carrying away “spoils” has a martial undertone; these divine promises may reflect that the Israelites were freed slaves, who were victorious in their struggle between oppression and freedom. Early interpretations

119 Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch*, 258f.

120 Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch*, 99.

121 Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch*, 31f.

122 Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 85-7, reviews the etymological debate concerning the different interpretations or transcriptions of Joseph’s Egyptian name: *dd p3 ntr* “the god has said, he will live;” [Joseph] *dd (w) n.f ‘ip-‘nh*” “Joseph who is called ‘*Ip-Ankh*,” which would include the Semitic name and the Egyptian name, a practice found in the Middle Kingdom.

of the Biblical passages explained that the silver and gold of the spoils constituted compensation for the labor that the Israelites were forced to perform for the Egyptians (*Jubil.* 48:18-19); similar views were expressed by Philo.<sup>123</sup> Perhaps the determination that the “spoils” would be considered as retroactive compensation was based upon the practice of Egyptian compensation for their workers.<sup>124</sup> A legalistic connection between the spoils and compensation was recognized by David Daube, who argued that the lemma *you shall not go empty* (*Exod.* 3:21) is related to the laws of freeing a Hebrew slave (*Deut.* 15:13).<sup>125</sup> The view that the departing Israelites took Egyptian sacred objects is also presented by classical authors.<sup>126</sup> However, it seems futile to speculate whether Hebrews or Israelites carried away figurines of Egyptian gods.

Additional rabbinic interpretations of the above passages from Exodus include the view that the Israelites received gifts from the Egyptians (*Mek.*, *Pisha* 13, Horovitz ed. 47; *b. Ber.* 9b), but, from a theological perspective, the Hebrews/Israelites were more focused upon gaining their freedom than receiving gifts (*b. Ber.* 9b). Several midrashic texts assert that while all of Israel, except for Moses, was involved in the gathering of silver and gold, Moses was searching for the bones of Joseph.<sup>127</sup> In other words, at the same time that the Israelites were preoccupied with the gathering of the spoils of Egypt, Moses directed his attention instead to retrieving the coffin of Joseph so that it could be taken for re-burial in the Land of Israel. According to tradition, “the day” that God brought the Israelites out of Egypt was “the day” that they took the “spoils of Egypt” and walked out into the desert, finally escaping their bondage.<sup>128</sup>

123 Philo, *Mos.* 1,140-41.

124 An alternative to referring to those who were forced to work on building projects as “slaves”, including both the Hebrews and Egyptians, would be to designate their servitude as corvee.

125 David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Farber and Farber, 1963), 55-61. Joel Stevens Allens, *The Despoliation of Egypt in Pre-rabbinic, Rabbinic, and Patristic traditions* (Suppl. *Vigiliae Christianae*, 92; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 149-77, presents a survey of the rabbinic texts concerning despoliation.

126 As mentioned by Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 48.

127 *Deut. Rab.* 11:7 and parallels. See chapter 4; Ulmer, “Egyptian Magic and the Osiris Myth.”

128 Lawrence E. Frizzell, “‘Spoils from Egypt,’ between Jews and Gnostics,” in *Hellenization Revisited: Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman World. Proceedings of a Conference held in 1991 in Toronto...* (ed. Wendy E. Helleman; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 383-94.

## 6. Conclusion

The mementos that relate to Egyptian gods, the Egyptian language and Egyptian cultural aesthetics and customs are evident in midrashic and related texts. Perceptions of Egyptian gods were transmitted through the media of the Bible and Greco-Roman culture. The utilization of terms from the Egyptian language facilitated the establishment of theological positions in which the God of the Israelites displaced the Egyptian gods. Knowledge of the existence of the Coptic language and a few Coptic words was significant because Coptic was relatively contemporary to some of the para-rabbinic or rabbinic texts.<sup>129</sup> The customs and the cultural, aesthetic issues relating to the human body, such as grooming and attire, as well as the Egyptian gods discussed in this chapter, were widely known in Roman times.

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129 Additional Egyptian customs, such as festivals and further funeral rites, are addressed in other chapters; see chapters 3 and 5; Rivka Ulmer, "Visions of Egypt and Roman Palestine: A Dialectical Relationship," and Rivka Ulmer, "Visions of Egypt in Midrash: Pharaoh's Birthday and the Nile Festival," in *Biblical Interpretation in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Isaac Kalimi and Peter Haas; Sheffield: T&T Clark, 2006), 52-78.

# Chapter Nine: The Divine Eye

## 1. Introduction

The persistence of Egyptian icons in rabbinic midrash is particularly evident in the concept of the powerful divine eye. The eye has religious and metaphorical meanings that go beyond the physical dynamics of seeing. In particular, the divine eye is present in specific manifestations in different religious cultures and communicates intricate values of a particular religion. In this chapter I examine the eye as a religious phenomenon from the traditions of Ancient Egypt compared<sup>1</sup> with rabbinic Judaism in late antiquity using a semiotic approach.<sup>2</sup> The semiotics of vision is one overarching theoretical model that makes Egyptian and rabbinic viewers similar, although they existed in a different historical and cultural setting of seeing and the seen. The premise of this statement is based upon the idea that a specific culture trains the eye to see in specific ways. In such a semiotic system the various appearances of the divine eye serve as signs functioning within the religious realm.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 Shmaryahu Talmon, "The 'Comparative Method' in Biblical Interpretation – Principles and Problems," *VT* 29 (1977), 320-56. Talmon wrote: "Comparisons can be drawn therefore, between any two (or more) cultures and social organisms which exhibit some familiar features, though they be far-removed from one another in time and space," 320. In this chapter I contend that there may be an interdependency in the understanding and application of the same phenomenon in two radically diverse religious systems; however, they may merely coincide conceptually. For instance, echoes of other, "by-gone cultures" such as Mesopotamian and Canaanite myths, are present in rabbinic literature (Michael Fishbane, "'The Holy One Sits and Roars': Mythopoeisis and the Midrashic Imagination," in *The Midrashic Imagination: Exegesis, Thought, and History* (ed. Michael Fishbane; Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 60-9).
  - 2 Umberto Eco is probably the most significant contributor to the study of semiotics. Eco writes: "A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands for it." (Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976], 7). A semiotic approach to present attestations of the powerful eye was presented by Michael Herzfeld, "Meaning and Morality: A Semiotic Approach to Evil Eye Accusations in a Greek Village," *American Ethnologist* 8 (1981), 560-74.
  - 3 Herzfeld, "Meaning and Morality," also describes the function of the evil eye from a cultural perspective.

This method was chosen because the eye is a graphic, as well as a linguistic sign. In order to express religious concepts the eye was depicted in graphic illustrations, while linguistic terms referring to the eye were used as well.<sup>4</sup>

Generally, the eye in the Ancient Near Eastern world represented an all-seeing and omnipresent divinity. The divine eye served as the focus of varied myths relating to the visually perceivable. Frequently, a deity was reduced to an eye, and the form of the symbol suggested a specific meaning to the viewer or religious practitioner. In semiotics, when the eye is transformed into language, an ocular icon becomes a verbal icon.<sup>5</sup> As will be seen, when this transpires the concept of the eye assumes a profoundly religious connotation. In the literary genres in which the eye appears it is often a "symbol," i. e., a sign that is representative and accentuates a commonality between the object and its representation as a symbol. Consequently, the eye could symbolize the whole body of an Egyptian deity or the power of God in rabbinic texts. The eye is a sign that seems to be better adapted to express correlations on the level of abstractions than other signs, because the eye retained its symbolic functions in a religious context.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes the representation of the eye went beyond the graphic or linguistic sign and was made into a physical object, e.g., in the form of an amulet that was shaped like an eye.<sup>7</sup>

In general terms, the eye is the chief organ by which visual power is transmitted, notwithstanding if the eye belongs to a god, a human being, or a natural phenomenon, such as the sun.<sup>8</sup> In visual communication on the religious level the relationship between an image and its

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4 The aesthetics of the depiction of the eye in Egyptian texts will not be addressed in this context, because there is no comparable rabbinic material available. In regard to the aesthetic function of concepts, see Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 69.

5 There are differences in deciphering these two types of icons. A verbal icon limits the act of viewing; it merely tells how one speaks about the images that one has seen. For example, the ocular icon of a deity sitting on a throne is vastly different than its verbal description.

6 Umberto Eco and Costantino Marmo, eds., *On the Medieval Theory of Signs* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1989), 157.

7 Erik Hornung, *Das Tal der Könige: Die Ruhestätte der Pharaonen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), 158.

8 E.g., the sun as the "eye of the sky" is found in many diverse cultures. (Incidentally, in Indonesia the sun is called *Mata hari*, "eye of the sky." I am grateful to Miki S. Kern for this observation). A survey of the eye concept in many additional cultures is found in the work of Siegfried Seligmann, *Der böse Blick und Verwandtes. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Aberglaubens aller Zeiten und Völker* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1985, repr. of Berlin, 1910).

object is of lesser significance than the relationship between an image and its content. For example, the content would indicate whether the eye is benevolent or destructive, while the object would only reveal the eye itself. An eye in a religious text is rarely a physical eye; rather, it represents something else. Practitioners do not worship an eye, but the divinity represented by it. This is evidenced in the Egyptian religion and rabbinic Judaism, which both envisioned a power radiating from eyes.

## 2. Some Aspects of the Egyptian Eye Concept: The Sun as an Eye in Ancient Egypt

In Ancient Egypt the reliance upon the eye for religious purposes was expressed in many visual and written formats. The visual form of the eye was known as *'ir.t<sup>9</sup>* and the written expression of the eye was *'yn*;<sup>10</sup> additionally, there was a physical representation of the eye as an eye amulet, as mentioned above. According to an Egyptian supposition,<sup>11</sup> the sun (*t\*h.nj*)<sup>12</sup> and the moon (*d\*s'rt*)<sup>13</sup> were considered to be the eyes of the great god<sup>14</sup> who created the world and sustained it.<sup>15</sup> The sun was the right eye and the moon the left eye (*m3tj*)<sup>16</sup> of this otherwise invisible god (Fig. 27).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>9</sup> WÄS, 1,106. In respect to Egyptian terms for the eye, see Constant de Wit, "Les Valeurs du Signe de l'Oeil dans le Système Hiéroglyphique," in *Festschrift Elmar Edel* (ed. Manfred Görg and Edgar B. Pusch; Studien zur Geschichte, Kultur und Religion Ägyptens und des Alten Testaments 1; Bamberg: Manfred Görg, 1979), 446-55.

<sup>10</sup> WÄS, 1, 189; de Wit, "Les Valeurs," 448, states: "Le 'jn (sémétique pour "oeil") semblerait provenir 'n dans 'ntjw, myrrhe, et des mots signifiant beau ou oeil..."

<sup>11</sup> The dating of the origination of myths is almost impossible; however, many Egyptian myths were certainly present in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE.

<sup>12</sup> WÄS, 5,394.

<sup>13</sup> WÄS, 5,617.

<sup>14</sup> *Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, s. v. "Sonnenauge" and "Mondauge."

<sup>15</sup> In a hymn from the Old Kingdom (2665-2155 BCE), Harsiese is Horus of the sky, whose eyes are the sun and the moon, or the rising and setting sun (Hermann Kees, "Ein alter Götterhymnus," ZÄS 57 (1922), 92-114, 92ff.

<sup>16</sup> WÄS, 2,12; 107, 10. For the concept of Horus as the sky-god and his two eyes as the sun and the moon, see Hermann Kees, *Der Götterglaube im Alten Ägypten* (Berlin: Akademieverlag, 1979; repr. of Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1941), 103, 108 ff. On the other hand, the "eyes in the sky" are thought to have derived from the blind Horus of Le-topolis, who gave both of his eyes as the sun and the moon (p. 235). The eye was also understood as a boat, which could have involved an interpretation of the natural shape of the eye. The right eye was the boat of the evening and the left eye the boat of the morning (Pyr. T., 1266). These texts date from the Old Kingdom, beginning with the 5<sup>th</sup> (2480-2320 BCE) and 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty (2320-2155 BCE), but they are based

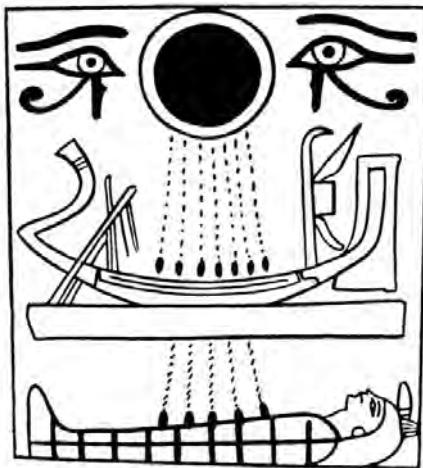


Fig. 27. The sun, which is depicted in the middle of the two eyes, is sending out rays; from the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty (1080-946 BCE).

In the subsequent evolution of Egyptian theology the same god does have a physical form. The form of this sky-god is assumed either by Horus or by Ra'.<sup>18</sup> Sethe<sup>19</sup> presumes that this god is the sun god Ra' as found in a teaching that was prevalent in Egypt, even in prehistoric times (c. 4000 BCE). The sun in this case is not the embodiment of the entire body of this god, but only a representation of one of his eyes. Ra' is superseded by the god Horus in the form of a falcon; this manifestation of Horus became the protective god of the Egyptian king.

In Edfu, Horus of Behdet was saluted in the morning in the following way: "Thy Living Eyes which emit fire, thy Healthy Eyes which lighten darkness, awake in peace, so thy awakening is peaceful."<sup>20</sup> Later

upon an older *Vorlage* from around the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE. With regard to the sun boat, see Manfred Görg, *Die Barke der Sonne: Religion im alten Ägypten* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2001).

- 17 Alexandre Piankoff and N. Rambova, *Mythological Papyri* (Bollingen Series XL, 3; New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), pt. 1, p. 22, fig. 58. See also Hornung, *Das Tal*, 183.
- 18 In the multifaceted syncretism of Ancient Egypt, there is another notion of the two eyes of the sky. In the cult of Harmeti, Ra' and Thoth are the two eyes of Horus, the sky-god; Thoth represents the left eye of the sky.
- 19 Kurt Sethe *Zur Altägyptischen Sage vom Sonnenauge, das in der Fremde war* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964, repr. of "Zur Sage vom Sonnenauge." Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ägyptens V/1; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912), 26-35.
- 20 Alexandre Piankoff, *The Litany of Re: Translated with Commentary* (Bollingen Series XL, Egyptian Religious Texts and Representations, vol. 4; New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 47.

Ra' and Horus were combined and this sun god was depicted as a falcon-headed man. The notation "the eyes of Horus" for the sun and the moon shows this combination.<sup>21</sup> If the texts speak about "the eye of Ra'," they usually refer to the sun, whereas the "eye of Horus" (*wrt*)<sup>22</sup> refers to the moon. It should be noted that the moon was the watchful night-eye that was called "the sun of the night," which further underlines the relationship between the sun and the moon. The eye of the sky is the overall concept used by the Egyptians to refer to the great power above (*s'bk.t*).<sup>23</sup> In a separate myth Seth swallows the eye of Horus and then returns it to the sun god; subsequently, the eye of Horus became a symbol for all "good things."<sup>24</sup> Thus, when the expression "the eye of Horus" is found in Egyptian texts, it is understood to allude to positive imagery.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the eye in this case evolved from being a physical object to a symbol of goodness. In the language of semiotics, this change can be described as the transformation of a sign; the original frame of reference is lost or forgotten and the sign itself is used on a different level of expression including a different frame of reference.

The eye of the sun became a separate god emanating from Ra' (Fig. 28).<sup>26</sup>

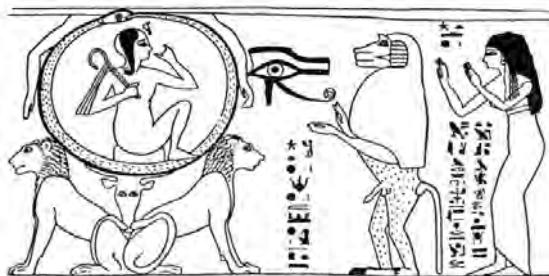


Fig. 28. A detached eye.

21 Kees, "Ein alter Götterhymnus," 103, 108f.

22 WÄS, 5,332, 5. This is not always the case; the appearance of the bright "eye of Horus," which was in Heliopolis, referred to the dawning of a new day.

23 WÄS, 4, 94, 13-14.

24 Sethe, *Zur Altägyptischen*, 6, n. 3; Françoise de Cenival, *Le Mythe de l'Oeil du Soleil* (Demotische Studien, Bd. 9; Sommerhausen: Gisela Zauzich, 1988).

25 A related concept is the "victorious," invincible eye (see Joris F. Borghouts, "The Victorious Eyes: A Structural Analysis of Two Egyptian Mythologizing Texts of the Middle Kingdom" in *Studien zu Sprache und Religion Ägyptens*, vol. 2 [Göttingen: F. Junge, 1984]), 703-16.

26 Based upon Piankoff and Rambova, *Mythological Papyri*, pt. 1, p. 60, fig. 47. In this instance, there is a detached eye in the center of the picture.

Although this object was still perceived as the eye of the sun by the Egyptians, it now attained an additional religious function in that it was understood to be an independent god. In this process the eye developed into an additional sign in that a new meaning of the former sign existed independently. Again, the original frame of reference was lost. In a further differentiation of the eye of the sun, the eye of Ra' became also known as the uraeus snake (the cobra) (Fig. 29).<sup>27</sup>

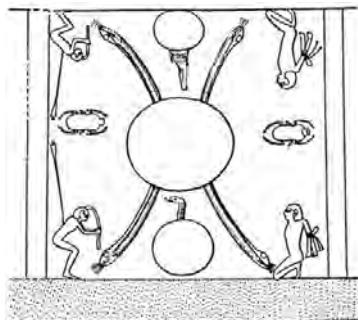


Fig. 29. Snakes are emanating from the sun; from the tomb of Ramesses VI (1142-1135 BCE).

It was perceived to be one of the snakes spitting poison against their enemies. Such a snake was supposed to be on the head of the sun god or in the alternative on the sun-disc of the sun god, from where it emitted fire (Fig. 30).<sup>28</sup>

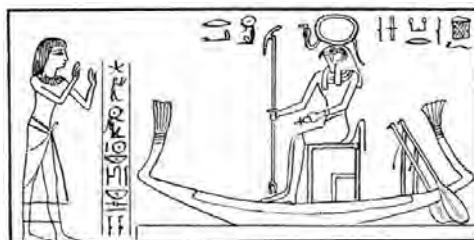


Fig. 30. The sun god Ra' is sitting on a throne on his boat, and the uraeus snake is on the top of his head, curled around a sun-disk.

27 Based upon Alexandre Piankoff and N. Rambova, *The Tomb of Ramesses VI* (Bollingen Series XL, 1; New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), pt. 1, p. 437, fig. 141. See also Hornung, *Das Tal*, 156.

28 Othmar Keel, *Die Welt der Altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament* (Zürich: Benziger and Neukirchen-Vluyn: Erziehungsverein, 1984, copyright Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (Göttingen), 4<sup>th</sup> printing, p. 36, fig. 39.; see also Hornung, *Das Tal*, 104.

This cobra snake derives its aggressive nature and protective powers directly from the source, the sun god himself, as in the following passage: "Re measures the whole land with his two uraei (i.e., his eyes)."<sup>29</sup> This passage means that the god Ra' measures the earth with his two eyes, which are in the form of cobra snakes. The poisonous snake is another expression of the numinous potency of the eye. This snake was on the head, on the forehead or on the hair-partition of the sun god. The same image is found in respect to depictions of the Egyptian king, who was also wearing the uraeus snake on his forehead.

A variation of the eye of the sun is the fire spitting snake (uraeus) that appears on the forehead of the sun god and that is the protective god of the Egyptian king and of Lower Egypt (Fig. 31).<sup>30</sup>



Fig. 31. The king wears the *nemes* scarf and a protective uraeus is placed in the middle of his forehead.

The concept of the uraeus is ancient, dating from the time of the pyramids.<sup>31</sup> Sometimes the king's uraeus is referred to as "his eye," which may be explained as a retranslation (reversion) of a sign into its original semiotic system, i. e., the power of fire or the sun. The basic function of the eye of the sun as a fire spitting, poison exhaling snake is to destroy the enemies of its master. In the language of semiotics, this type of eye

29 Piankoff and Rambova, *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, 166.

30 Keel, *Die Welt*, 319, fig. 443.

31 Sethe, *Zur Altägyptischen*, 10. The pyramids of the Old Kingdom were constructed approximately between 2665-2155 BCE.

metaphor can be traced back to a subjacent chain of metonymic connections. These connections of meaning include the fire, the rays, the shape, and the radiance of the sun, which constitute the framework of the code of communication between divinities and human beings.

The semantic field of the eye in the Egyptian religion is based upon factors discussed in the preceding pages. The detached, separate eye, which is in the form of a sun disc, and which transforms itself into a snake, is related to the eye of a god and has the same properties of sending out fiery rays as the sun (*irt h.r.*).<sup>32</sup> The sun god could send his eye on a mission of destruction. The eye has the task to destroy those Egyptians that have committed evil deeds against the sun god. One text describes the process as “the eye of the sun which is sent away to destroy the sun’s enemies or the clouds.”<sup>33</sup> According to this myth, the eye of the sun god, which is shaped into the form of the uraeus on his forehead, could leave and return. Sometimes the daughter of the sun god is called “his eye” or “his uraeus;” a comparison between a daughter of the sun inhabiting a lion’s body and the eye of the sun is found in early historic times in Egypt (third millennium BCE).<sup>34</sup>

The goddess Hathor is also called ‘*irt R*’ (“the eye of Ra”); she wears a sun-disc between her cow horns, thus carrying the eye of the sun.<sup>35</sup> Through Hathor, Isis became the “eye of Ra” (from the 19th dynasty onward)<sup>36</sup> and bestowed light upon and enlightened the two lands, Upper and Lower Egypt, in her dual function as uraeus and as a star. The eye in this context can be seen as a sign that needs to be distinguished as to whether it originates from a divine dispatcher or a natural source, such as the sun itself. Some signs that are produced in order to perform a given function can be understood as signs in the following manner:<sup>37</sup> they are chosen as representatives of a whole class

32 WÄS, 1, 107, 13. G. Eglund, “The Eye of the Mind and Religious Experience in the Shu Theology from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom,” in *Being Religious and Living Through the Eyes: Studies in Religious Iconography and Iconology in Honour of... Jan Bergman* (ed. Peter Schalk and Michael Stausberg; Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Hist. rel., 14; Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 1998), 90, mentions that Atum sent out his sole eye, which was the eye of the creator of mankind, “In the Shu theology the eye of Atum plays a decisive role in creation. It is said that Atum sent out his sole eye in quest of Shu and Tefnut, his first-born twin children ...”

33 Sethe, *Zur Altägyptischen*, 36.

34 Sethe, *Zur Altägyptischen*, 28.

35 Hathor carries the “eye of Re” (Pyr. T., 705a).

36 1305-1196 BCE

37 See Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 177.

of objects (e.g., the eyes of god)<sup>38</sup> or they are easily recognizable as forms that elicit a given function, precisely because their shape suggests – and therefore means – something specific, such as “all-seeing” and “watching.”<sup>39</sup>

There are basically two visual concepts in the Ancient Egyptian religion relating to the divine eye: the eye of the sun and the eye of the moon, which is Horus. The second concept is “the eye of the moon (Horus) which is ripped out by an enemy (Seth) and which is returned to him by Thoth, the carrier of the eye.”<sup>40</sup> In a myth, Seth discards the eye of Horus and its pieces are reassembled to create the moon. The resulting healed eye<sup>41</sup> was used as an amulet with apotropaic powers by the Egyptians,<sup>42</sup> which protected against negative influences. This amulet, (*udjat*) *wd3-t* eye,<sup>43</sup> was presented by the king to the sun god (Fig. 32).<sup>44</sup>

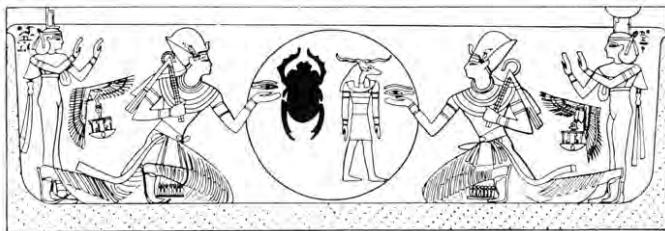


Fig. 32. Two amulets are presented to the sun god by the king in parallel images.

38 See de Wit, “Les Valeurs,” 447, writes: “tous les mots qui représentent l’oeil ou les yeux du soleil et la lune sécrivent avec le signe de l’oeil.”

39 According to Papyrus Harris (7:6), some Egyptian divinities had multiple eyes and ears.

40 See *Book of the Dead*, 17:71; see also *Coffin Texts*, de Buck and Gardiner ed., 7, 379c. Coffin texts mainly date from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty (2160-1567 BCE).

41 WÄS, 1, 401, 12; J. Gwyn Griffiths, “Remarks on the Mythology of the Eye of Horus,” *Chronique d’Egypte* 33.66 (1958), 182-93. Veronica Ions, *Egyptian Mythology* (London: Hamlyn, 1982), 19ff.

42 *Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, 473; Jane M. Cahill, “‘Horus Eye’ Amulets,” in *Excavations at the City of David. Final Report. Varia (Qedem, Vol. 35)*, (ed. Donald T. Ariel; Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University, 1996), 291-97. Cahill dates the eye amulets from that particular excavation to the 7<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.

43 Cahill, “Horus Eye,” 293, mentions that the *udjat*-eye is a compound, consisting of *wd3*, “to be sound, to be prosperous, to be whole,” and “eye,” thus “the sound eye;” the amulet probably represents a human eye adorned with the facial markings of a falcon.

44 Based upon Piankoff and Rambova, *Mythological Papyri*, pt. 1, p. 31, fig. 12. Hornung, *Das Tal*, 198, depicts two of these amulets, which are presented to the sun god by the king in two parallel images. As one may note, there are two figures in the circle in the center. The dark scarab (beetle) on the left represents the morning sun, and the figure with the ram’s head on the right represents the setting sun.

Horus eye amulets were also present in Greco-Roman Judaism.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, they appeared in the third century Dura Europos Synagogue.<sup>46</sup> (See Fig. 33)

In contrast to the eyes of heaven, the land of Egypt itself was visualized as an eye that was called the eye of the earth.<sup>47</sup> The pupil of this eye was understood to watch the sky. Still another variation of the eye concept in Ancient Egypt was that Egypt was called "his eye," referring to the eye of a divinity, usually Ra' and sometimes Osiris.<sup>48</sup> The fertile region of the land of Egypt was called the "black land" (*Kemet*)<sup>49</sup> and this land was perceived to be the eyeball of a god. Specifically, the pupil of the eye of Osiris was understood to be the land. The black land thus had a pupil, whereas the sun, the moon, as well as the stars and planets were the eyes of gods. In Hellenistic Egypt, the goddess Isis was considered the "Pupil of the World's Eye."<sup>50</sup>

The concept of the eye was also important in the cult of the dead in Egypt. In the Book of the Dead,<sup>51</sup> Thoth repairs the eyes of the deceased, since complete function of all body parts was important in the afterlife. An eye, the above-mentioned udjat eye, is found in tombs, sarcophagi,<sup>52</sup> boats and temples. For instance, the astronomical ceiling of the Temple in Dendera,<sup>53</sup> has astronomical depictions in which the eye is above the Zodiac sign of Pisces. Approximately after the 18th

45 See E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman World*, 12 vols. (Bollingen Series 37; New York, 1953-68), 2, 229, who discussed an amulet with Jewish inscriptions that also depicts a Horus eye; see also *idem*, vol. 3, fig. 1065 and 1066.

46 See Carl H. Kraeling, *The Synagogue* (The Excavations at Dura-Europos conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters, Final Report, VIII, part I, reprint with new foreword and indices, New York: Ktav, 1979), p. 48, fig. 11, p. 49, fig. 12. Two of the remaining ceiling tiles of the third century Dura Europos synagogue contain the eye symbol.

47 Eberhard Otto, "Auge," LÄ, 1, 559-661.

48 Wolfhart Westendorf, "Zur Etymologie des Namens Osiris: \*W3S.T-JR.T 'die das Auge trägt,'" in *Form und Mass. Festschrift Gerhard Fecht* (ed. J. Osing and G. Dreyer; Ägypten und Altes Testament 14; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987), 446-56. The term "eye" (*jret*) is part of the name of Osiris (*ws.t-jr.t*).

49 See the Edfutext (Papyrus Ebers, 225; W. Wreszinski, *Der Papyrus Ebers, I: Teilmsschrift* [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913]); Plutarch, *Is. Os.*, 23).

50 G. R. S. Mead, *Thrice-Greatest Hermes. Studies in Hellenistic Theosophy and Gnosis*, 3 vols. (Detroit: Hermes, 1978; repr. of 1906 ed.).

51 Beginning with the New Kingdom (1555-1080 BCE), the deceased was frequently provided with a papyrus scroll containing the Book of Dead.

52 The eye supposedly facilitated the animation and the revival of the deceased (Pyr. T., 578).

53 This temple was built under the Roman emperors Domitian, Nerva and Trajan.

dynasty<sup>54</sup> the eyes that were depicted on coffins were transformed into actual amulets.<sup>55</sup> The dead were believed to be able to look out through the eyes on their coffins. The eye amulets that were placed on the body during the process of embalming had the function to guide the soul of the deceased through the darkness of the nether world to the light; they also watched over the deceased.

The concepts of a protective or punishing eye in Ancient Egypt all relate to the sun god - the power ultimately emanated from him. Although these ocular powers were not called "evil eye" in their punitive, destructive missions,<sup>56</sup> their manifestations were comparable to the later notion of an evil eye that, once it was sent on its destructive mission by simply glancing at the object, it could not be recalled.

One of the great snakes in the underworld, Apopis, could possibly be characterized as possessing such an evil eye.<sup>57</sup> The term "evil eye" is also related to the sun-god, since the Hebrew term [נָעַר] in the Bible often signifies Ra'. Several biblical passages may refer to the Egyptian sun-god;<sup>58</sup> e.g., Exod. 10:10 (*And he said to them, Let the Lord be with you, if I will let you go, and your little ones. Look, evil רֵעַה is before you*). In midrash, this connection was recognized in medieval texts.<sup>59</sup> However, only in later Egyptian texts from the Saitic,<sup>60</sup> Persian<sup>61</sup> and Ptolemaic<sup>62</sup> eras, one detects the concepts of an evil eye.<sup>63</sup> In these texts a god was involved,<sup>64</sup> who either had to withdraw the evil eye or destroy the evil

54 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty, approximately 1555-1305 BCE.

55 The two eyes on the coffins were apotropaic (*Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, 854-56).

56 This eye is often identified with the wild lion goddess (*Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, 733ff.).

57 Joris F. Borghouts, "The Evil Eye of Apopis," *JEA* 59 (1973), 114-50.

58 See chapter 8. Already Umberto Cassuto cited the evidence for this connection. (Umberto Cassuto, *ספר שמות על פרישת ישראל* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1965; repr. 1982], 72f., trans. Israel Abrahams, *A commentary on the book of Exodus* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997, Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem]).

59 Yal. I, 15 Yehoshu'a (Yal. I, 372 Ki Tissa); Rashi on Exod. 10:10; see chapter 8.

60 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty (664-525 BCE).

61 27<sup>th</sup> dynasty (525-404 BCE).

62 332-30 BCE.

63 Wilhelm Spiegelberg, "Der böse Blick im altägyptischen Glauben," *ZÄS* 59 (1967), 149-54. This type of evil eye is powered by envy and a wish for destruction and has to be distinguished from the two evil eyes that seal the door of the tomb (Pyr. T., 1266).

64 The name of the demon "Rhyx Phtheneoth" in the Testament of Solomon (18:25) supposedly cast an evil eye (see James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* [New York: Doubleday, 1983], 1, 981); this could refer to the Egyptian god

eye. In this context the goddess Neith and the god Chons, who annihilated the evil eye, are mentioned.

According to Spiegelberg, the evil eye concept is rarely found in Egyptian literature; he found most of the occurrences in female names that contain some references to the evil eye.<sup>65</sup> However, in the so-called book catalogue from Edfu (Upper Egypt) there are some incantations against the evil eye. In the Christian period<sup>66</sup> the phrase the "evil eye"<sup>67</sup> carried the meaning of jealousy in Coptic.<sup>68</sup> However, these late attestations of the evil eye in Egypt were possibly related to a foreign religious-cultural sphere, which believed in the verifiable relationship between what the eye saw and the objects it observed.

The concept of the eye as a powerful agent was certainly also found in Greek and Roman culture. Through Hellenistic culture,<sup>69</sup> the authors of the Egyptian texts of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods – and possibly the rabbis of late antiquity – knowingly or unknowingly might have syncretized their symbols of the eye.

In summary, the religious concept of the eye in Ancient Egypt sometimes represented a beneficent power that was highly protective; at other times the eye was harmful and destructive when it pursued a divine mission of punishment. The notion that the bright sun<sup>70</sup> was considered to be a powerful eye of divine origin<sup>71</sup> is comparable to the theological understandings of the powerful eye in other religious sys-

Ptah, which was also noticed by Gundel (W. Gundel, *Dekane und Dekansternbilder* [Studien der Bibliothek Warburg xix; Glückstadt: J. J. Augustin, 1936], Charlesworth, *ibid.*, note n). In addition, Ptah was sometimes referred to as the "carrier of the eye."

<sup>65</sup> Spiegelberg, "Der böse Blick," 150.

<sup>66</sup> After 200 CE.

<sup>67</sup> Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, lists "evil eye;" "one who casts an evil eye" (1939, 39b) and "take, receive an evil eye" (40a).

<sup>68</sup> Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 39b.

<sup>69</sup> Philo, *Abr.*, 150ff., mentions that human eyes have the capacity to reach out and act upon objects. J. Wiesner, "Göttliche Augen," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte, Kultur und Religion des Alten Orients* (ed. M. Lurker; Baden-Baden: V. Koerner, 1971), 181-88, compares expressions of the eye in Egypt and Greece.

<sup>70</sup> The brightness of God's eyes is a frequently mentioned motif found in ancient literature. In Sirach 23:19, God's eyes are said to be ten thousand times brighter than the sun. However, sun worship was not practiced in Judaism. Ezek. 8:16 records the idolatry of some men who worshipped the sun at the Temple of the Lord. The light metaphor, which was applied to the divine eye, was a common expression in the Near East (see Sethe, *Zur Altägyptischen*, 5). The attraction of the strong light of the sun, which was considered to be a positive radiance emanating from an eye, in combination with a stern eye that imposed judgment, might have contributed to the concept of a Sun of Righteousness in Coptic Christianity.

<sup>71</sup> WÄS, 1, 17, 1.

tems.<sup>72</sup> This constitutes a semiotic system of seeing and the seen that is crossing disciplinary boundaries.

### 3. Some Aspects of the Rabbinic Concept of Visual Power: God's Eye of Justice

The religious concept of the eye ('ayin) in formative Judaism was ultimately related to God.<sup>73</sup> The eye as an independent power is virtually non-existent in the Hebrew Bible; only metaphorical usages are attested on the religious level.<sup>74</sup> Vision is culturally constructed and the Hebrew Bible in general detested any concept that was directly related to Egyptian theology.<sup>75</sup> However, the Hebrews/Israelites in the Nile Delta region of Egypt would have been familiar with the Egyptian god Ra', since there were temples dedicated to him. The Hebrew Bible mentions the marriage of Joseph to the daughter of the priest Potiphera (Gen. 41:45; 41:50; 46:20), whose name defines him as a High Priest of Ra'.<sup>76</sup> The presence of the god Ra' can be asserted for several passages in the Bible, e.g. Exod. 10:15; several biblical expressions refer to Ra': "the eye of the whole land."<sup>77</sup>

If biblical Judaism can be viewed as an inversion<sup>78</sup> of an admittedly distant Egyptian religious expression that obsessed about visual icons, it is understandable that the rabbis, the interpreters of biblical Judaism, were only interested in the verbal aspect of icons, i. e., the written me-

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72 Compare a mystical text, 3 Enoch 9:4 (Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, 1, 263): "He fixed in me 365,000 eyes and each eye was like the Great Light" (Metatron's speech); 3 Enoch 18:25: "The eyes of the one are like the sun in its strength; the eyes of the other like the sun in its strength."

73 Anthropomorphic theology is discussed by Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *HTR* 87 (1994), 171-95.

74 Rivka Ulmer, *The Evil Eye in the Bible and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1994). Some metaphorical usages refer to the sun as an eye (2 Sam. 12:11; see also 3 Bar. 8).

75 The interrelationships between the biblical concept of the "seeing" God and Egyptian notions of a similar nature are numerous (see, for example, Jan Quaegebeur, "Textes Bibliques et Iconographie Égyptienne," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 20 (1989), 49-73; Emma Brunner-Traut, "Der Sehgott und der Hörgott," in *Fragen an die Altägyptische Literatur: Studien zum Gedenken an E. Otto* (ed. Jan Assmann; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977), 124-45; Cahill, "Horus Eye."

76 See Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Egyptian Sun-God Ra in the Pentateuch," *Hen* 10 (1988), 3-15, and the literature cited there.

77 Rendsburg, "The Egyptian Sun-God," 7.

78 Jan Assmann, *Moses, the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

dium to express their explorations into religious matters. The problem of representing God in a physical medium derives mainly from the biblical prohibition,<sup>79</sup> although in some biblical passages, God is represented as the sun god.<sup>80</sup> The religious concept of the eye ('ayin) in Judaism can be viewed as an image that carried with it various ideas in formative rabbinic Judaism. By acknowledging that the eye image served to communicate between God and Israel, the rabbis, the creators of the formative and definitive Jewish texts of late antiquity, were able to define and establish their own religious concepts during a relatively short period of time (2nd - 5th century C. E.), when Judaism was under assault from within and from without.

To be sure, the existence of a belief in the imminent power of the eye reaches far back in time before rabbinic Judaism developed.<sup>81</sup> It was found in areas that are in close geographical proximity to the Land of Israel and Babylonia, which were the main areas in which most rabbinic texts were created.<sup>82</sup> However, the pre-existence of the concept of a powerful eye does not necessarily imply that the documents of the rabbis in any way mirrored the belief found in another culture. In addition, the influence that a concept from another culture might have had over the discussions of the rabbis of the formative period is of consequence to the particular mode of its appearance in the rabbinic texts.

One fact that is relevant to our discussion is the existence of the belief in the power of the eye as an icon in the religious-cultural milieu that the rabbis crafted. If the eye is viewed as an iconic sign, it is understood to be any sign that bears similarities to what it signifies. However, to the best of our knowledge in rabbinic texts the eye terminology is strictly verbalized and encoded into linguistic terms; no depictions of

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79 Exod. 20:4; Deut. 5:8.

80 See Paul-E. Dion, "YHWH as storm-god and sun-god: the double legacy of Egypt and Canaan as reflected in Psalm 104," *ZAW* 103 (1991), 43-71; Rendsburg, "The Egyptian Sun-god."

81 The belief in the power of the eye is found in all Near Eastern religions. In Eastern Syria remnants of an edifice referred to as the "Eye Temple" were excavated at Tell Brak, whose latest version dated to about 3000 BCE (O. G. S. Crawford, *The Eye Goddess* [Oak Park, Ill.: Delphi, 1991; repr. of London, 1957]). This temple was probably dedicated to the worship of the goddess Innana (or Ishtar) from Mesopotamia. The eye could be a religious representation of an all-seeing and omnipresent female divinity (Michael Meslin, "Eye," *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. Mircea Eliade; New York: Macmillan, 1987), 5, 236-39. In Mesopotamia, the moon was called "the eye of the sky and of the earth."

82 V. Garrison and C. M. Arensberg, "The Evil Eye: Envy or Risk of Seizure? Paranoia or Patronal Dependency?" in *The Evil Eye* (ed. Clarence Maloney; New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 287-328.

an eye are found. This is in opposition to Egyptian texts that contain visual icons or pictorial “illustrations” in addition to the linguistic signs. By acknowledging the power of the eye, as it was perceived in the Near East, the rabbis were able to define and establish some of their own religious concepts, e.g., God’s eye of justice; the punitive power of the eye which was utilized by righteous people or by charismatic religious leaders; the eye in the fulfillment of God’s *mitzvot* (commandments); the Land of Israel as an eye-ball; and Jerusalem as the pupil of this eye.

One of the concepts in rabbinic Judaism is the eye of God, which expresses the concept of God’s omniscience. God’s power is described in ocular terminology; thus, the attribute of justice, *middat ha-din*, was ascribed to one of God’s eyes, and it is implied that the attribute of mercy, *middat ha-rahamim*, is God’s other eye. In respect to judging human beings, God looks at people with His two eyes and the two attributes ascribed to God’s eyes have to be in equilibrium. In a midrashic text set forth below the place name ‘En Mishpat is taken in its literal meaning: “Eye of Justice” and, alternatively, as the “Source of Justice.” The Hebrew term *ayin* has several connotations:<sup>83</sup> one is “eye” and the other is “well” or “source.”<sup>84</sup>

God invokes justice and intervenes in human affairs, because His friend Abraham sojourns in an area that is under attack. According to this midrash, the attacks were directed against the whole world order that was established by God. The midrash uses the expression “Eye of Justice” to refer to God. By using the eye in this metaphoric sense of judging, the rabbis maintain that God exercised providential care over the events in Abraham’s life. This midrashic denotation is made possible by explaining the place name *Qadesh* (Gen. 14:7) to mean “holy.” According to Gen. 14:7, *En Mishpat* is identified with *Qadesh*. The question could be raised, why should there be two names for the same place? The underlying reason, according to the rabbis, must be that, since the names are not synonymous, the terms therefore require an explanation that is found within God’s actions in respect to Abraham’s enemies. The verse Gen. 14:7 says in its midrashic reading: “And they returned and came upon the Eye of Justice (*En Mishpat*), which is holy (*Qadesh*) ...”

<sup>83</sup> Eco writes: “As far as ‘connotation’ is concerned, if denotation has an extensional scope, it becomes the equivalent of intension, that is, of meaning as opposed to referent.” (Eco and Marmo, *On the Medieval Theory*, 43)

<sup>84</sup> This is also the case in most Semitic languages. Furthermore, in rabbinic literature, one finds the idea that a well and an eye are comparable, because water gushes forth from a well in the same manner as tears flow from the human eye (b. Sanh. 68a).

Esth. Rab. 7:2,1: R. Tanhumah and R. Hiyya the Elder state the following, as does R. Berekhiah in the name of R. Ele'azar: We brought the following exegetic rule from the exile. Any scriptural passage in which the words and *it came to pass* appears is a passage that relates misfortune .... R. Shmu'el b. Nahman said: There are five such passages. *And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel [King of Shinar ... They made war with Bera, King of Sodom]* (Gen. 14:1-2). The matter<sup>85</sup> may be compared to the friend of a king who came to live in a province. On his account the king felt obligated to protect that entire province. Barbarians came and attacked him. When the barbarians came and attacked him, the people said: Woe, the king does not want to protect the province in the same way he used to. In the same way, Abraham, our father, was the ally of the Holy One, blessed be He, [as it says] *and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed* (Gen. 12:3), and in your seed. And because of him, the Holy One, blessed be He, was obligated to protect the whole world. This is written: *And they turned back and came to En Mishpat, that is Qadesh [and smote all the countries of the Amalekites]* (Gen. 14:7). They sought only to attack the orb of the Eye of the World. The eye that had sought to exercise the attribute of justice in the world did they seek to blind: *That is Qadesh (ibid.)*.<sup>86</sup>

God's eye protects Abraham and the righteous, but God averts His eyes from the wicked.<sup>87</sup> The transgression of a *mitzvah*, a commandment mandated by God, causes God to avert His eyes from the transgressors. Averting the eyes is the opposite of watching over something. In semiotic terms, this is the reversal of a sign, which causes the opposite effect of the original sign. Providing hospitality to travelers is considered a *mitzvah*, and the biblical Micah (Judg. 17:1-18:31) is saved from punishment on account of the fulfillment of this *mitzvah*. Conversely, the Ammonites and Moabites were alienated from Israel, because they did not act hospitably towards the Israelites who were on their way out of Egypt.<sup>88</sup> God's reaction is stated in a dictum of Rabbi Yohanan:

b. Sanh. 104a: It causes His eyes to be averted from the wicked, and made the Shekhinah<sup>89</sup> to rest even on the prophets of Baal ...

85 This refers to Abraham who is defending the local rulers.

86 See also Gen. Rab. 42:3; Lev. Rab. 11:7.

87 b. Sanh. 104a; according to this passage, the failure to display hospitality "... causes the eyes of God to look away from the wicked."

88 Deut. 23:4-5: *An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord ... because they met you not with bread and water in the way, when you came forth out of Egypt.*

89 God's Presence in the world.

#### 4. The Staring Eye in Midrashic Texts

The staring eye, which is also known as the evil eye, is sometimes comparable to God's attribute of justice, because both eyes have the power of punishing evil people. One text emphasizes that it is impossible to avoid God's attribute of justice, just as it is impossible to avoid the power of the evil eye.<sup>90</sup> This rabbinic construct brings to mind the Egyptian concept of a "detached" eye that reaches out in a punitive mission. In the following rabbinic text, a common practice is related. Usually children are not taken to public places because of the fear of the stare of a harmful eye to which children are especially susceptible.<sup>91</sup> The epitome of a public place, according to this text, would be a battlefield. This is the underlying reason that children could be harmed by the eye in the tumult of a battle. In a midrash set forth below, the children of Saul are killed by the divine attribute of justice in the battle that Saul was fighting. The rabbis claim that Saul and his three sons died on the battlefield because God, with His attribute of justice, wanted them to die. The midrashic explanation of the verse 1 Sam 28:19 (*And the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines; and tomorrow shall you and your sons be with me; the Lord also shall deliver the camp of Israel into the hand of the Philistines*) provides a larger context to Samuel's necromantic speech to Saul, in which Abner, captain of the host, and Amasa, captain of the host under Absalom, ask Saul about the prophecy. Saul knew that he was going to die, and he recognized that his death was the divine will, and he therefore accepted the punishment.

Lev. Rab. 26:7: [Saul] took three sons and went out to war. R(abbi) Sh(im'on) ben Laqish said: At that moment the Holy One, blessed be He, called the ministering angels and said to them: Come and look at the being that I have created in My world! In the way of the world, if a man goes to a feast he does not take his children with him fearing the eye;<sup>92</sup> yet this man goes out to battle and although he knows that he will be killed, he takes his sons with him and faces gladly the attribute of justice which overtakes him.

The text emphasizes that it is impossible to avoid God's attribute of justice, just as it is impossible to avoid the power of the evil eye. It was not only King Saul who was judged by God's eye, but also Hezekiah, King of Judah, who was also despised in God's eyes and was eventually punished by God's justice. This judgment is based upon the scriptural verse: *In whose [God's] eyes a vile person is despised* (Ps. 15:4). Through

<sup>90</sup> Lev. Rab. 26:7 and parallels.

<sup>91</sup> This is prevalent in virtually every culture in which the belief in the evil eye is present.

<sup>92</sup> Midr. Ps. 7 reads "evil eye." This could be a later interpolation.

a simple deictic device, by pointing at someone, the verse is applied to Hezekiah (b. Mak. 24a).

In another rabbinic text, God watches over humans or destroys them with His eye of justice. The difference between two scriptural verses that speak about God's eyes that look at the earth is discussed in the Talmud. In one instance, God is said to be using His punishing eye (Ps. 104:32) and in the other case His merciful, protective eye (Deut. 11:12). An additional explanation found in this passage would suggest that God used His destructive eye to cause earthquakes in order to destroy Roman institutions that were built on the ruins of His Holy Temple, which had been destroyed by the Romans, using His eye of justice against the perceived enemies of the Jewish people.

y. Ber. 9, 13c<sup>93</sup>: Elijah of blessed memory asked R. Nehorai: Why do earthquakes occur? He said to him: On account of the sins of heave-offerings and tithes. One verse says: *The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it* (the Land of Israel) (Deut. 11: 12). And a second verse says: *God looks upon the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke* (Ps. 104:32). How can one reconcile the two verses? When Israel obeys God's will and properly separates tithes, then *the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year* (Deut. 11:12) and the Land cannot be damaged. But when Israel does not obey God's will and does not properly separate tithes then *He looks upon the earth and it trembles* (Ps. 104:32). He said to [Nehorai]: My son, by your life, what you say makes sense! But is this the main reason? When the Holy One, Blessed be He, looks down on the theaters and circuses that sit secure, serene and peaceful on the ruins of the Temple, He shakes the world to destroy it.

The Land of Israel will suffer severe punishment if the *mitzvot* (divine precepts) concerning the Land, such as tithing, are not observed. This text could imply that humans in their relationship to God have the power to keep God, who is a cosmic God in this instance, from making the earth tremble. The question that is posed by the prophet Elijah at the outset is, why do earthquakes occur? There is a perceived tension between God's eyes that watch and protect and God's stare that rocks the earth. According to some rabbinic views of God, not only earthquakes, but also rainfalls are dependent on God who keeps His eyes upon the Land of Israel. Sometimes His eyes are on the land for good and at other times for evil, as is illustrated in the following passage, which is an interpretation of Deut. 11:12, in regard to blessing and keeping the land.

b. Roš. Haš 17b: Another objection was raised: *The eyes of the Lord your God are upon it* (Deut. 11:12) – sometimes for good, sometimes for evil. How sometimes for good? If Israel is in the (class of the) completely wicked at

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93 See also Midr. Ps. 104.

New Year, and scanty rains were decreed for them, and later they repented, God cannot increase the supply of rain for them, because the decree has been issued. The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore sends down the rain in the proper season on the land that requires it, all according to the district. How sometimes for evil? If Israel was in the (class of the) completely virtuous on New Year, and abundant rains were decreed upon them, and afterwards they went back to their old ways, it is impossible to diminish the rains, because the decree has been issued. The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore sends them down not in their proper season and on land that does not require them. Now, for good at any rate, let the decree be rescinded and let the rains be increased? There is a special reason [in this passage] that [sending the rain in the proper place and time] is sufficient.<sup>94</sup>

Based upon the divine judgment that people receive at the beginning of the year, the life-sustaining rain is meted out onto the Land of Israel. The petition for rain, a seasonal prayer, is implied in the above text, which asks God's blessing over the land.<sup>95</sup>

Some prayers include the notion of God's protective eye; e.g., when passing through a dangerous place while traveling one asks for God's eyes to be merciful (*Tefillat Ha-Derekh*). In the above rabbinic text, God's eyes can look in different ways at the earth. God can watch over humans in a providential manner. Alternatively, God can destroy people with His eye of justice; this power is similar to the attribute ascribed to the Egyptian sun god who sends his eye on a destructive mission. In the language of semiotics, in this rabbinic text, as well as in the above mentioned Egyptian texts, a code generates factual messages of either beneficence or destruction, which are interpreted as religious experiences. The fact that the code, in referring to predictable religious outcomes, nonetheless allows us to assign new semiotic meanings, such as an explanation for the causes of natural phenomena like earthquakes and rainfall, is unique to that feature of a code that Eco calls a "rule-governed creativity."<sup>96</sup> In short, in both the Egyptian and rabbinic sources, a semiotic code in respect to the divine eye can be found. This code is a system of signs that communicates consistent messages on the religious level in respect to the eye, in that the effects of the power of the eye are usually predictable. Nevertheless, in response to new and diverse experiences, the "code" on occasion does adopt new meanings, which are inconsistent with previous usage. This premise explains the

<sup>94</sup> There are three categories of sinners who are being judged on Rosh Ha-Shanah: complete, medium and guilt-free.

<sup>95</sup> Rivka Ulmer, "Consistency and Change in Rabbinic Literature as Reflected in the Terms 'Rain' and 'Dew,'" *JSJ* 26 (1996), 55-75.

<sup>96</sup> Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 67.

fluctuation in the role of the eye of God between benevolence and retaliation.

In rabbinic literature the concept of a God with powerful eyes extends from the time of creation to the world to come. Only God has seen both the Garden of Eden and the world to come. In comparison, the eyes of an idol were deemed powerless, or, conversely, one tried to avoid the eyes of an idol by destroying them.<sup>97</sup> There is also a noted difference between the visions of the prophets and the vision of God. In a rabbinic text (b. B. Qam. 79b),<sup>98</sup> the following three scriptural verses are read in conjunction:

*Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, who sees us? And who knows us? (Isa. 29:15), Yet they say, the Lord shall not see, nor regard it (Ps. 94:7), and For they say, the Lord has left the earth and the Lord does not see (Ezek. 9:9).*

This conjunctive reading supports the point that there are people who claim that God has lost His power of the eye and does not see their wickedness (b. B. Qam. 79b). In its larger religious context, this text describes people who do not fear God. It is considered a sin to disregard the eyes of God.

The “eye of below” can be used in a sign reversal for “the eye of above,” i.e., for the powerful eye of God. Sometimes there is a dichotomy between the “eye of above” and the “eye of below,” referring to the eye of God and the eye of human beings respectively (Mek. Mishpatim 15).

To express complex relationships between Israel and God, the rabbis had to rely upon a series of semiotic codes that assigned a given content to various expressions concerning the eyes of God. The codes had to be comprehensible to the students of the texts. For example, Israel is referred to as “the apple of His eye”<sup>99</sup> (Zech. 2:12), which signifies a close relationship with God. The word “His” in this expression is emphasized in a midrash; only Israel can be called the apple of God’s eye (Sif. Num. 84). The eye metaphor thus expresses God’s watchful

<sup>97</sup> A rabbinic text does not go into further details in regard to this idol; we do not know which deity it represented (y. Mo'ed Qat. 3, 83d). The text does not explain why the eyes of an idol had to be blinded, but we may speculate that it was done to disrupt any power from its eyes and to render the statue impotent. If the eyes are powerful, the idol becomes a god who demands obedience. Without the powerful eyes, the statue is not a deity, but a block of stone. Generally, Judaism eschewed the representations of God, not only in figurative art and synagogue decorations, but also by avoiding anthropomorphisms in written text.

<sup>98</sup> See also Avot 2:1.

<sup>99</sup> See for example T. J. Finley, “The Apple of His Eye (Babat Eno) in Zechariah II:12,” *VT* 38 (1988), 337-38.

presence over Israel. The concept that God can oversee the whole world<sup>100</sup> and that nothing is hidden from His eyes<sup>101</sup> is an old concept that is already present in the Hebrew Bible: ... *the eyes of the Lord, they run to and fro through the whole earth* (Zech. 4:10) and is re-emphasized in midrashic literature. Furthermore, the expression “eye of the world” is an epithet of God (Gen. Rab. 21:5).<sup>102</sup> By applying a substitution for this sign, the Temple in Jerusalem was also called “the eye of the world” (b. B. Bat. 4a).

Furthermore, in some rabbinic texts the world is called an eye because, according to some ancient concepts, the earth was similar to an island surrounded by primordial waters. The center of the world was Jerusalem, as the center of the eye is the pupil.<sup>103</sup> The Temple in Jerusalem as the eye of the world reinforces the notion of a guiding, spiritual center for the entire world. It should be noted from earlier in this chapter that Egypt was perceived to be the eyeball of a god. As can be seen, both the Egyptian and the Jewish traditions viewed their respective lands as the center of the world by using eye imagery.

Der. Er. Zut. 9: Abba Isi b. Yohanan said in the name of Shmu'el Ha-Qatan: This world is compared to the human eyeball; the white of the eye is the ocean, which surrounds the whole world. The iris is compared to the world. The pupil of the eye is Jerusalem. The face in the pupil is the Temple. May it be rebuilt speedily in our days and in the days of all Israel, Amen.

By extension of its original meaning, the “eye of the world” could refer to the sages or to the Temple. The Temple in Jerusalem and the sages were called “the eye of the world” in a dialogue between Herod and Bava b. Buta; the text mentions that Herod killed all the rabbis except this particular rabbi.<sup>104</sup> The text calls the rabbis “the light of the world.” These expressions referring to eyes and light support the notion that

<sup>100</sup> The eye that sees from one end of the world to the other is also mentioned in Hekhalot literature (Peter Schäfer et. al., eds., *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur* [TSAJ 2; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1981], # 376). The power of God's eyes is alluded to in different ways. R. Yishma'el, who looks at the appearance of the *merkavah* – the heavenly chariot – is dazzled by the radiance when he enters the seventh *hekhal* – heavenly hall – and God admonishes the Cherubim and Ofanim to cover their eyes before R. Yishma'el (# 2). The radiance of God's eyes and the splendor of his throne are so bright that no eye can look at it. Consequently, no evil eye can rule over it (# 371).

<sup>101</sup> Melanie Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes. Textstrategie im Hiobbuch* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament, 25; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1999) found that Job was never left out of the sight of God's eyes.

<sup>102</sup> See also b. Bek. 16a; b. Sanh. 108a.

<sup>103</sup> Der. Er. Zut. 9.

<sup>104</sup> b. B. Bat. 4a.

Israel receives both insight and guidance. In particular, R. Ele'azar of Modi'in was referred to as the "right eye of Israel."<sup>105</sup> The Sanctuary in Jerusalem was understood to be the enlightened center of the world from which spiritual guidance could emanate.<sup>106</sup> To see and to be seen by God meant to be spiritually transformed.

As a religious symbol, the eye signifies clarity and light.<sup>107</sup> The eye is the most important organ as far as religious insights and human enlightenment are concerned. The eyes are not only an expression of physical beauty, but also of intelligence and the ability to learn (b. Git. 58a). In the wilderness, Israel was able to perceive God's kindness through their eyes; even the future Messiah was said to have beautiful eyes (Tg. Neof. on Gen. 49:12).<sup>108</sup> Some terms, such as the eye, can be understood on the metaphorical level, but there is another level, the individuation of the concept, which becomes a component of a particular religious system. In such a case the concept of the eye assumes a unique meaning in Judaism. The "beyond" that is produced by the sign of the eye has a meaning that transcends its surface structure, as Levinas writes: "the power to conjure up illusions which language has must be recognized, but lucidity does not abolish the beyond of these illusions."<sup>109</sup>

105 y. Ta'an. 4:6 (5).

106 In later mystical literature, the eye again symbolizes the world, with Jerusalem as its center (Zohar I, 226a).

107 See Otto Schmalstieg, "Das andere Sehen. Systematisches Interesse an hebräischer Tradition," in *idem, Aktualität des Alten Testaments* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 259-67, 261, who writes in reference to the Bible: "Die hebräische Visualität umfasst Sachverhalte, die in der theologischen Systematik als zentrale Begriffe und ordnende Topoi wirken ..." and W. A. Schulze, "Das Auge Gottes," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 68 (1957), 149-52.

108 The idea that the eyes supply an indication of the human mind is found in Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, 11.145-146). The eyes vary in respect to their glance, which ranges from kind to fierce. In short, the eyes are the abode of the human mind in antiquity. Or, in post-modern terminology, "Sight would be by essence attached to a body, would belong to an eye. The eye would not be the more or less perfected instrument in which the ideal enterprise of vision, capturing, without shadows or deformation, the reflection of being would be realized empirically in the human species." (Emanuel Levinas, "Meaning and Sense," in *Collected Philosophical Papers* [trans. A. Lingis; Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1964], 75-80, 80). This perspective of Levinas was based upon M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960; trans. R. C. McCleary, *Signs* [Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy Evanston: Northwestern University, 1964]).

109 Levinas, "Meaning and Sense," 79.

## Conclusion

Generally, the eye in both traditions, Ancient Egypt and rabbinic Judaism in late antiquity, represented an all-seeing and omnipresent divinity. In Egypt the eye was part of the visual and literary religious canons. The power of the eye usually emanated from the sun god, but there was a broad spectrum of the eye concept in Egyptian culture. The religious concept of the eye in rabbinic Judaism can be viewed as an icon that denotes a discerning God, who ultimately differentiates between good and evil. By incorporating the eye as an icon as it was perceived in the Ancient Near East for centuries before them, the rabbis were able to establish their own religious concepts in a purely textual medium. The tentative interrelationship of Egyptian and rabbinic icons in respect to the eye may be explained in terms of the transformation of a pictorial icon into a verbal icon in rabbinic literature.

This transformation of an icon sheds light upon the general tendencies of rabbinic thought to adapt, transform and define concepts in their own way. This was a process that was so much part of the Mediterranean world of antiquity. Because the rabbis, the creators of rabbinic culture, conflated, and often misunderstood concepts from other cultures, when they utilized these concepts without regard to their historical context, we find a limited eye concept in rabbinic literature. Additionally, a precise dating of the introduction of a religious concept in Judaism is rarely possible. However, it is important to study what rabbinic Judaism had to say about Egypt and how rabbinic Judaism continued the biblical practice of differentiating Judaism from Egyptian religious practices. One factor that is highly relevant to our discussion is the existence of the eye belief as an icon in the religious-cultural milieu, which the rabbis encountered.

If the eye is viewed as an iconic sign, it is understood to be a sign which bears similarities in some ways to what it denotes. For example, the eyes may serve as a religious symbol signifying clarity and light. However, to the best of our knowledge the eye terminology in rabbinic texts was strictly verbalized and encoded into linguistic terms; no depictions of a divine eye are found in the earliest existent manuscripts of rabbinic texts. This was in opposition to Egyptian texts, which contained icons or pictorial “illustrations” of divine eyes, in addition to their linguistic signs. Moreover, there seem to be no depictions of divine eyes in the antique synagogues of the Land of Israel. However, the

Diaspora synagogue at Dura Europos had eye depictions;<sup>110</sup> the apotropaic eye is labeled IAO (Fig. 33), the Divine name.

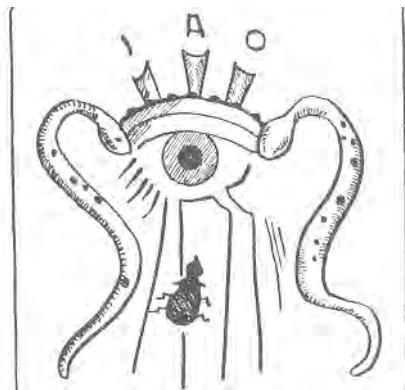


Fig. 33. Eye depiction, Dura Europos Synagogue.

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110 In respect to the presence of the Horus eye symbol in the Dura Europos synagogue, see n. 46 above. In Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 2, 60f., 221; 4, 79ff., it is mentioned that the lights of the menorah might be representations of the eyes of God.

# Chapter Ten: The “Finding of Moses” in Art and Text

## 1. Introduction

Returning to the figure of Moses in Egypt, we may note that the biblical scene of the Finding of Moses by Pharaoh's daughter (Exod. 2:5-6) is frequently represented in didactic religious images in Jewish and Christian art, from frescoes to illuminated manuscripts to European art and Haggadot. The iconography of this scene raises the following issues: (1) Is Moses in an ark or a basket? (2) The type of hand gesture of Pharaoh's daughter; (3) Who enters the Nile to fetch Moses? (4) The number and the gender of the “handmaids;” (5) What role, if any, is assigned to the river Nile? (6) The presence or absence of Egyptian artifacts. Some of the choices in the depictions were influenced by different Bible translations, Jewish interpretive literature and Christian texts, as well as earlier Roman, Jewish and Christian depictions. The representations of the Finding of Moses scene are linked by inter pictoriality and intertextuality, i.e., visual and textual traditions influenced shared depictions in works of art and texts. In particular, there is an unquestionable connection between some Christian depictions of the Finding of Moses in some European art and early Jewish interpretation, which was mediated via the writings of the first century historian Josephus and the painter Poussin, who studied Josephus and who served as a model for subsequent painters of the scene.

The location of the Finding of Moses is the bank of the river Nile. In antiquity the Nile was equivalent to Egypt and the river was a major contributor to the development of Egyptian religion, culture and civilization.<sup>1</sup> In both Judaism and Christianity, Egypt and the Nilotic landscape are remembered as the location of the biblical Exodus as well as a place of refuge. The rabbis who created midrash “painted” scenes of Egypt and the Nile in their biblical interpretations, which enlivened the scenes in the visual imagination of those who studied the texts or lis-

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1 See chapter 2 and Rivka Ulmer, “Visions of Egypt in Midrash: The Nile as the Landscape of the Other,” in *Discussing Cultural Influences: Text, Context, and Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism. Proceedings of a Conference on Rabbinic Judaism at Bucknell University* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2007), 193-237.

tended to the texts being read. Furthermore, homiletic rabbinic interpretation, as well as Christian thought, integrated the memory of the Nilotic landscape with transcendental notions of the Nile and its waters. Essential elements of the conceptual world of Egypt maintained their presence in midrash through the end of the era of midrashic activity in medieval Europe.

The earliest retrievable Jewish depiction of the rescue of Moses from the Nile scene is located in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Dura Europos synagogue which was built during a time of intense Jewish-Christian polemics (e.g., Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* and Origen’s *Contra Celsum*). According to a rabbinic opinion, in the middle of the 3rd century CE it was not prohibited to “paint” walls, i.e., to use creative decorations.<sup>2</sup> Focusing upon select icons in the Finding of Moses scene, one may notice a similarity between ancient Jewish Bible interpretation and Jewish and Christian art as late as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. I attempt to trace the textual tradition of the Finding of Moses scene, as well as the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century depictions of the scene, and I subsequently focus upon several *Haggadot* (Venice Haggadah with Judeo-Italian Translation, 1609; Amsterdam Haggadah, 1695; a Bohemian Haggadah, 1728) and select European paintings: “Pharaoh’s Daughter Finding Moses,” (1638) by Nicolas Poussin; “The Finding of Moses” by Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671), and “The Finding of Moses” (c. 1570) by Veronese.<sup>3</sup> It is submitted that the above cited depictions echo late antique Jewish bible interpretation.

- 2 R. Yohanan in y. ‘Abod. Zar. 3:3, 42d; “In the days of R. Yohanan people started to paint the walls and he did not stop them.” In regard to floor decorations, Targ. Ps. Jon. Lev. 26:1 states: “but you may have a floor covered with representations and you may have pictures on the floors of your holy places...” A 4<sup>th</sup> century Rabbi is referred to in y. ‘Abod. Zar. 3:1, 42d: “in the days of R. Avun people started to make mosaics and he did not prevent it.”
- 3 The collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, owns a plethora of artwork that depicts Nilotic scenes, e.g., “The Nile Flooding,” an etching by Jacques Callot (1592-1635) refers to the Nile inundation, which was well known in antiquity and in rabbinic literature. The Nile is often transformed and placed into more familiar landscapes, e.g., an aquatint entitled “The Nile” (1992) by Pat Steir shows the Nile in a Western landscape. A survey of additional artwork relating to Egypt was compiled by Jean-Marcel Humbert, Michael Pantazzi, and Christiane Ziegler, eds., *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art 1730-1930: Paris, Musée du Louvre, 20 January-18 April 1994, Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 17 June-18 September 1994, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 16 October 1994-29 January 1995* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada; Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994).

## 2. Methodology

The interrelationship between rabbinic texts and the iconography in art has been recognized by Joseph Gutmann, whose analysis of artistic expressions found evidence for the existence of texts that are no longer extant. The support for his conclusions were found in early Jewish, Christian and Islamic art, and, additionally, in late medieval quotations.<sup>4</sup> Like Gutmann, I also will discuss the interrelationship between ancient texts and the above-mentioned paintings. By analyzing the textual and formal substructure of these media I am willfully stepping over the gap of historical time.<sup>5</sup> My observations concerning the Finding of Moses episode are grounded in the theory of iconography, which is applicable to both the textualized scenes in rabbinic and other texts and to various works of art. In this chapter I rely upon the definition of iconography by Robin Jensen: "Iconography, the symbols and images that visually express or reflect the religious impulses of a group of people, has a powerful dual significance for historical study ... [to] demonstrate inner workings of a belief system ... showing how a faith is embedded in its cultural context ..." <sup>6</sup>

In order to facilitate one's visual experience it may be necessary to construct a heuristic device to orient one's interpretations. The heuristic device in this chapter is the iconography that constructs an icon of Moses, which is viewed as essential to Jews and Christians alike. For example, in the Jewish context, Moses is the main subject of six of the twenty-six frescoes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Dura Europos synagogue in Sy-

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- 4 Joseph Gutmann, "The Illustrated Midrash in the Dura Synagogue Paintings: A New Dimension for the Study of Judaism," *PAAJR* 50 (1983), 91-104.
- 5 Michael Ann Holly, "Past Looking," in *Vision and Textuality* (ed. S. Melville and B. Readings; London: Macmillan, 1995), 67-90, 81 writes: "Historians, particular cultural historians who begin their study of the interconnectedness of an age by looking at its works of art, are not only the distant analytic observers on the other side of time that they so often wistfully claim to be. The moment they begin to plot their studies upon a formal substructure of relationships that resonates with the formal architectonic of the works ... they have stepped over the gap of historical time."
- 6 Robin M. Jensen, "Moses Imagery in Jewish and Christian Art: Problems of Continuity and Particularity," *SBLSP* 31 (1992), 389-418, 389. Jensen remarks that there are direct relationships between art and text vs. mediated ones; this applies to all later depictions of the Nile and Moses that are discussed in this chapter. Jensen states: "While Moses is, for Jews, the founder of the faith, for Christians, he is either the antetype or antithesis of Christ" (394-95). The life of Jesus in the NT is purposely paralleled with that of Moses (see below). Furthermore, Paul saw himself as the New Moses, as explained below.

ria,<sup>7</sup> which Gutmann firmly dates to 256 CE or 257 CE.<sup>8</sup> Among many scenes from the life of Moses, on the surviving west wall of this synagogue is the scene “Moses Drawn from the Nile,”<sup>9</sup> which is one of the largest murals in comparison to the massive murals of the Exodus scene.<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 34 and Fig. 35)<sup>11</sup>

Among the multiple approaches in art history I chose to focus upon the tendency for reading artworks as texts;<sup>12</sup> this approach presents the “reader” or viewer with a series of evaluations. The critic is the central authoritarian voice in this process.<sup>13</sup> Other major approaches to visual art focus upon gender relations and power.<sup>14</sup> Gender and power are rather obvious in the depictions under discussion, since Pharaoh’s daughter is powerful enough to defy Pharaoh’s decree to kill all the Hebrew male children. Additionally, the entire narrative concerning the infant Moses is a story about courageous women. A different contemporary approach to art utilizes the term “colonial;” if we focus upon the exotic imagery in the three European paintings mentioned above,<sup>15</sup>

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7 Among the numerous discussions of the Dura Europos synagogue, see Joseph Gutmann, “The Dura Europos Synagogue Paintings and Their Influence on Later Christian and Jewish Art,” *Artibus et Historiae* 9, 17 (1988), 25-9; idem, *The Dura-Europos Synagogue: A Re-evaluation (1932-1992)* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); idem, “The synagogue of Dura-Europos: a critical analysis,” in *Evolution of the synagogue: problems and progress* (ed. Howard Clark Kee and Lynn H. Cohick; Harrisburg: Trinity, 1999), 73-88; idem, *Sacred Images: Studies in Jewish Art from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, (Northampton: Variorum, 1989), 9, 434-38; Carl H. Kraeling, *The Synagogue (The Excavations at Dura-Europos conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters, Final Report, VIII, part I)*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956; reprint with new foreword and indices, New York: Ktav, 1979), in particular “The Infancy of Moses,” 169-77; Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *Ancient Jewish Art: East and West* (Secaucus, NJ.: Chartwell Books, 1985); Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert L. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies XXVIII; Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990,), 29-31.

8 Gutmann, “The Synagogue of Dura-Europos: A Critical Analysis,” 73, relates the date to the fact that Sura was captured by the Sassanians at this time.

9 See Weitzmann, *The Frescoes*, 30-1.

10 Elizabeth L. Flynn, “Moses in the Visual Arts,” *Interpretation* 44,3 (Jul 1990), 265-76, 267.

11 Kraeling, *Synagogue*, plates LXVII, LXVIII, figure 11.

12 Nigel Whiteley, “Readers of the lost art: visuality and particularity in art,” in *Interpreting Visual Culture: Explorations in the Hermeneutics of the Visual* (ed. Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell; London: Routledge, 1999), 99-122.

13 Whiteley, “Readers of the lost art,” 100.

14 Whiteley, “Readers of the lost art,” 102.

15 Whiteley’s view criticizes the denigration of the visual that “reduces art to the mere signifier of meaning” (“Readers of the lost art,” 105). The new art history challenges the idea that art is purely a visual experience and is not shaped by language. Ano-

we may notice a slight resemblance to a colonial perspective in some of the Nilotc landscapes presented. This colonial perspective may be found in the 19<sup>th</sup> century artistic rendering of the Moses cycle by William Blake.<sup>16</sup> A further approach to art carries the analysis of a painting into the wider social and cultural context. In this approach the paramount questions are: who is looking at the painting and who is being looked at in the painting?<sup>17</sup> This is important because some of the scenes involving Moses are didactic; Moses is being looked at and the viewer is looking at the scene from his or her own religious perspective.

### 3. Depictions of the Infant Moses at Dura Europos and Their Cultural Dependencies

The scenes depicting Moses in the Dura Europos synagogue may have been influenced by their specific cultural context in addition to the biblical text and its textual interpretation. According to Kurt and Ursula Schubert,<sup>18</sup> there are two early recensions of the Finding of Moses scene; one in the synagogue of Dura Europos (3<sup>rd</sup> century) and one in

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ther approach is based upon "particularity and formal analysis" (p. 107) in which it is emphasized that colors support forms. Rather, one should scrutinize the painting and the reader/viewer should no longer just note or glance at the painting, but see what is there and how the painting is put together (Whiteley, 104).

- 16 William Blake's 1805 watercolors of the life of Moses include scenes depicting the compassion of Pharaoh's daughter (Victoria and Albert Museum) as well as "The Hiding of Moses" (Huntington Library). In these paintings we find Egyptianizing elements such as the geometry of the pyramids, a sphinx on the lower step of a step-wall, palm trees and reeds that hide Moses from the Egyptians, but not from the viewer; the Nile is depicted in zigzag lines. From an Egyptological perspective, we may speculate that the zigzag lines refer to a determinative Hieroglyphic sign that points to water-related words.
- 17 A so-called "judgment and judgementalism" [sic] approach is also put forward by Whiteley, "Readers of the lost art," 109; the value of this method is defined by the extent to which it illuminates cultural and political conditions; in my opinion, this is not worth applying to the material under discussion in this chapter: quality and ideological impositions as well as the politics of the artworks considered are not always accessible. Overall, anti-visualness and criticism of intellectualism deal less and less with the direct experience of art, according to Whiteley, whereas I refer to the direct experience of the art presented here.
- 18 Kurt Schubert and Ursula Schubert, "Die Errettung des Mose aus den Wassern des Nil in der Kunst des spätantiken Judentums und das Weiterwirken dieses Motivs in der frühchristlichen und jüdisch-mittelalterlichen Kunst," in *Studien zum Pentateuch: Walter Kornfeld zum 60. Geburtstag* (ed. Georg Braulik; Vienna: Herder, 1977), 59-68, 60.

the frescoes of Via Latina (4<sup>th</sup> century) in Rome. Dura Europos shows Persian and Hellenistic late antique influence,<sup>19</sup> which is absent in the Via Latina. Gutmann differs from Weitzmann, who states that the scenes at Dura are based upon Alexandrian illustrated Octateuchs. Gutmann rejects this perspective, since no manuscript evidence antedating the 5<sup>th</sup> century is known.<sup>20</sup> I agree with Gutmann, who is convinced that the iconography primarily reflects Land of Israel, not Egyptian Jewish literature. However, I see a possible secondary influence, namely interpretations found in Jewish literature from Hellenistic Alexandria in Egypt, such as interpretations expressed in Ezekiel the Tragedian<sup>21</sup> and in Philo of Alexandria, whose interpretations were utilized in the Land of Israel.

At Dura Europos there are some sketchy reeds on the bank of the Nile which refer the viewer to the location of the Finding of Moses scene; however, in comparison to the fully executed human figures, the river is narrow and whitish, which is in contrast to the width and blackness of the actual Nile River.<sup>22</sup> Moses’ ark is in the water; Weitzmann remarks that it is shaped like a small sarcophagus with a gabled roof,<sup>23</sup> although this is a possibility this form could also indicate an ark. Pharaoh’s nude daughter is in the Nile<sup>24</sup> and presents Moses to the viewer with her left hand; her right hand points to two women on the bank of the river. Two additional women standing in the background are wearing identical garments.<sup>25</sup> Based upon a midrashic reading that I

19 Compare Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 176-78.

20 Gutmann, “The Illustrated Midrash,” 100f.

21 Folker Siegert, “Hellenistic Jewish Midrash I: Beginnings,” in *Encyclopedia of Midrash* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1, 199-220, 207, views Ezekiel’s presentation as midrashic. Siegert views the possible dangers involved in retelling the Exodus story in Egypt as the main reason for the creation of an alternative Exodus story by Egyptian Jewish writers who attempted to construct a more sympathetic presentation of their religion and history to the Egyptians.

22 Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 170, describes the river as “a broad white band.”

23 Weitzmann, *The Frescoes*, 28.

24 Robin Jensen, “The Dura Europos synagogue, early-Christian art, and religious life in Dura Europos,” in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period* (ed. Steven Fine; London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 174-89, 184, mentions that the dresses and the veils found in a Christian building bear close resemblance to the women rescuing Moses, whereas the nude daughter of pharaoh resembles the figure of Venus.

25 Schubert and Schubert, “Die Errettung des Mose,” 61, refer to b. Sotah 11b, in which two sages of the 3rd century discuss the identity of the biblical midwives, Shiphra and Puah, who are assumed to be Jochebed and Miriam. From the perspective of Egyptology, one may add that there are numerous depictions of two midwives assis-

will discuss below, one could argue that the hand of Pharaoh's daughter is "outstretched" in this mural;<sup>26</sup> one could further argue that the handmaids and other figures are also depicted with outstretched arms. It appears that the reason the women are wearing identical garments is that this mural is an action scene in which the same person appears several times.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, this mural of the Finding of Moses in the Dura Europos synagogue may be viewed as an unfolding drama; on the right there is a glimpse of the killing of the Hebrew children, which leads into the middle scene of Pharaoh's daughter taking a bath in the Nile and rescuing Moses.<sup>28</sup> On the left the infant Moses has been drawn out of the Nile and is swaddled by two female figures. Stylized drapery (curtains) in the upper part of the mural emphasize and organize each scene; between these scenes the artist placed connecting elements showing one of Pharaoh's two scribes and two women in the background in the second "break." These connectors are similar to intermissions between

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ting the queen giving birth (e.g., at Hermontis, Cleopatra was depicted as giving birth).

- 26 Kurt Schubert and Ursula Schubert, "Die Errettung des Mose," 60, additionally refer to Gerald Friedlander [trans.], *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great* [New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1981, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.; 1<sup>st</sup> ed., London, 1916], 318f., and to the passages in which her arm was made longer. Schubert and Schubert also mention, p. 67, several Haggadot: a 14<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Haggadah (Pierpont Morgan Library [A reproduction may be viewed in Weitzmann, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue*, fig. 39, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Cod. M724]); the Golden Haggadah (Brit. Mus. Ms. Add. 27210, fol. 9r), 14<sup>th</sup> cent., which depicts Pharaoh's nude daughter and two nude handmaids; the Kaufmann Haggadah (Ms. A 422 Budapest, Academy of Sciences), second half of 14<sup>th</sup> cent., Spanish, which shows two nude girls pulling the ark from the water, Pharaoh's nude daughter and an additional girl are also in the water; the Nuremberg Haggadah, 15<sup>th</sup> century Germany, which presents the arm of Pharaoh's daughter as being very long. Schubert and Schubert, "Die Errettung des Mose," *ibid.*, also discuss bible manuscripts. Some repetitions of these points, as well as some new aspects, are applied to a 16<sup>th</sup> cent. Haggadah and the Pamplona Bibles in Ursula Schubert, "Die Auffindung des Mosesknaben im Nil durch die Pharaonentochter sowie die Darstellung der vierten Plage in den beiden Pamplonabibeln im Licht der jüdischen Ikonographie," in *Aachener Kunstblätter* 60 (1994), 285-92. She discusses Cod. 1164 (Jew. Hist. Institute Warsaw), a 16<sup>th</sup> century Haggadah, which depicts the nude daughter of Pharaoh and three nude maids.
- 27 See Joseph Gutmann, "Programmatic painting in the Dura Synagogue," in *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology, and Architecture* (ed. Joseph Gutmann; New York: Ktav, 1974), 210-32.
- 28 Weitzmann, *The Frescoes*, 29, describes the painting as a case of extreme condensation; four different actions are conflated. According to Jensen, "Moses Imagery," 399, Dura Europos conflates two narratives: first, the finding and the fetching and then, the handing over.

the acts of a theatrical performance. The dramatic scenes, which transform single lemmata from the biblical narrative into a spectacle, are repeated in later illustrations in the Haggadah for Passover.<sup>29</sup> It is significant that similar to biblical commentaries or in particular to midrashic interpretations, the artists of the Dura Europos synagogue focus upon a word or phrase (lemma) from the biblical texts, when creating the unfolding drama of the rescue of the infant Moses in their own narratives of the event.

The earliest extant post-biblical textual record of Pharaoh's daughter standing in the Nile with her outstretched arm is found in a pseu-

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29 Passover as a festival commemorating the Exodus is mentioned in Exod. 12:11-14a; Deut. 16:1, 3; these passages may be viewed as part of the historization and centralization process under King Josiah. The Haggadah is based on a compilation that began to be assembled in the Second Temple period; several central parts were in place by 200 CE (Baruch M. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984]). The Passover meal was modeled upon Greco-Roman meals (S. Stein, “The Influence of Symposium Literature on the Literary form of the *Pesah Haggadah*,” *JJS* 8 [1957], 13-44). Clemens Leonhard, “Die Pesachhaggada als Spiegel religiöser Konflikte,” in *Kontinuität und Unterbrechung: Gottesdienst und Gebet in Judentum und Christentum* (ed. Albert Gerhards and Stephan Wahle; Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005), 143-71, emphasizes that in rabbinic literature the Passover Seder was not understood as the setting to talk about the Exodus. The Haggadah from the Land of Israel utilizes the text of the Mishnah from the Land of Israel (p. 150). Leonhard states that the origin of the Haggadah may have been the Land of Israel of the early Geonim or possibly the late rabbinic era (*ibid.*); *idem*, “Die Älteste Haggada: Übersetzung der Pesachhaggada nach dem palästinischen Ritus und Vorschläge zu ihrem Ursprung und ihrer Bedeutung für die Geschichte der christlichen Liturgie,” *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 45,2 (2003) 201-31, 215) argues that generally, it is necessary to differentiate between the date of the Seder (the Passover meal) and the date of the text of the Haggadah. The Haggadah was composed as a new text on the basis of the Mishnah. This implies, according to Leonhard, that the Haggadah could not have been part of the liturgy of the Passover Seder during Amoraic times. Louis Finkelstein, “The Oldest Midrash: Pre-Rabbinic Ideals and Teachings in the Passover Haggadah,” *HTR* 31 (1938), 291-317; and *idem*, “Pre-Maccabean Documents in the Haggadah,” *HTR* 35 (1942), 291-352; 36 (1943), 1-38, claimed that the key passages of the Haggadah are political statements relating to the time of the Maccabees. The text is said to refer to the time of the Egyptian reign over the Land of Israel and therefore the conflict between Israel and Egypt was played down (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE). The celebration of the Paschal meal is confirmed in Second Temple apocryphal texts that provide “incidental details,” although the earliest comprehensive description of the meal and the acts is found in the Mishnah (Joseph Tabory, “The Passover Haggadah,” in *The Literature of the Sages: Second Part* (ed. Shmuel Safrai et al.; Amsterdam: Royal Van Gorcum, 2006), 327-38, 328. Judith Hauptman, “How Old is the Haggadah?” *Judaism* 51 (2002), 5-18, maintains the primacy of the Tosefta version.

depigraphical text by Ezekiel the Tragedian,<sup>30</sup> who wrote about the Exodus from Egypt for Alexandrian Jews in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, approximately 500 years before Dura Europos.<sup>31</sup> This text specifically mentions that Pharaoh's daughter picked up Moses, which is not found in the Hebrew Bible; the New Testament may imply this.<sup>32</sup> In Ezekiel's dramatization Moses explains his rescue as follows:

Ezekiel the Tragedian: (19) The sovereign's daughter, with her maidens, then (20) came down to bathe her limbs, as was her want [alternative trans.: came down to cleanse her flesh with washings]. (21) And straightway seeing me, she took me up.

An alternative tradition concerning this rescue scene is set forth in the previously mentioned Via Latina frescoes in which Pharaoh's daughter stands on the banks of the Nile with outstretched arms and Moses lifts up his arms in her direction. It has been noted that this gesture of Pharaoh's daughter may very well be dependent upon the Jewish biblical interpretation that is found in the Aramaic translation of the Bible, as well as in rabbinic midrash. These sources change the biblical "she sent her maid" into "she stretched out her arm."<sup>33</sup> Weitzmann states: "... the nudity of Pharaoh's daughter in Dura [is] all the more conspicuous as a deviation from the Septuagint tradition."<sup>34</sup> The claim that the nudity of Pharaoh's daughter is primarily based upon Hellenistic-Persian influence upon the cultural context of the Dura Europos synagogue should be revised; the depiction of nudity may derive from the Jewish targumic-midrashic tradition. According to the Jewish textual tradition, Pharaoh's daughter needed to be cured from leprosy and cleansed herself, which would imply that she was "nude," since she immersed herself for purification purposes.

<sup>30</sup> The text set forth below is from James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 809. Gutmann, "The Illustrated Midrash," 94, refers to Ezekiel the Tragedian as preserved in Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* IX.28.437 c and III.467. Folker Siegert, "Hellenistic Jewish Midrash, III," in *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, 1, 232-50, argues that it is debatable whether Ezekiel's *Exagôgê* was a drama or a comedy. Ezekiel portrayed Moses' miracles and the Egyptian plagues and "He thus wrote a midrash with a Hellenistic outlook" (p. 239). Ezekiel's biblical interpretation is close to homiletic authors and to homiletic midrash.

<sup>31</sup> Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 204-5, summarizes the biblical recreations in Hellenistic literature and refers to the rescue of Moses in Artapanus, in which the daughter of Pharaoh, who adopts Moses, was named Merris.

<sup>32</sup> Acts 7:20: "Pharaoh's daughter took him."

<sup>33</sup> Targ. Onk. Exod. 2:5; Targ. Jonathan 1, ad. loc.; Exod. Rab. 1:27; Tanhuma, pr. ed., Shemot 7; Pirqe R. El. 48. The authors of Acts 7:21 are aware of the foregoing narrative. The Qumran text in 4QExod<sup>b</sup> is the same as the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>34</sup> Weitzmann, *The Frescoes*, 30.

Another art historian, Kogman-Appel, asserts that the changes in the depictions of the rescue scene are the result of midrashic elements. Kogman-Appel lists several examples of perceived midrashic influences: Via Latina from the 4<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>35</sup> the Vienna Genesis from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the Ashburnham Pentateuch, which is a Vulgate from the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> These citations establish that Jewish biblical interpretation was accepted in some Christian art.

With regard to the 4<sup>th</sup> century Via Latina frescoes in Rome that include a scene entitled “Moses found by Pharaoh’s daughter,” Robin Jensen states that “Moses being rescued from the water of the Nile, [is] unknown in earlier Christian art.”<sup>37</sup> According to Jensen, a new concept of Moses appears. I presume that this new concept is based upon the Pauline interpretation of the Exodus, which places Paul in the position of Moses<sup>38</sup> and which later became popular in medieval European Art. Allegedly, Paul presented himself as the new Moses, who was called to preach a new covenant.<sup>39</sup> Moses was important to Christians as a figure reflected in Jesus and in Paul. Furthermore, Moses was revered as a saint in Coptic Christianity.<sup>40</sup> The so-called “Tomb of the Exodus” (4<sup>th</sup> century) at Bagawat in Karga Oasis, Egypt, contains biblical scenes; however, these Coptic paintings are not very well preserved.<sup>41</sup>

35 Jensen, “Moses Imagery,” 399, mentions that in the Via Latina catacombs, in the frescoes dated between 320 and 380 CE, there is a new Moses imagery, and that Moses was formerly seen as Peter. Jensen states that “... the fresco [Via Latina] shows only the baby floating in a little oval ark, three women standing on a reedy bank ... and a larger, seated woman ...” The Via Latina catacomb fresco is depicted in Pierre du Bourget, *Early Christian Painting* (New York: Compass, 1965), fig. 122, and in Weitzmann, *The Frescoes*, fig. 37.

36 Katrin Kogman-Appel, “Die Modelle des Exoduszyklus der goldenen Haggada (London, British Library, Add 27210),” in *Judentum – Ausblicke und Einsichten: Festgabe für Kurt Schubert zum siebzigsten Geburtstag* (Judentum und Umwelt, 43; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993), 269–99, 270; see also Ursula Schubert, “Egyptian Bondage and Exodus in the Ashburnham Pentateuch,” *Journal of Jewish Art* 5 (1978), 29–44.

37 Jensen, “Moses Imagery,” 399.

38 This is somewhat related to 2 Cor. ch. 3, which mentions the new covenant.

39 Archer St. Clair, “A New Moses: Typological Iconography in the Moutier-Grandval Bible Illustrations of Exodus,” *Gesta* 26, 1 (1987), 19–28, 22, states that the Pauline interpretation of the Exodus became increasingly popular in the Middle Ages.

40 See Stefan Timm, “Der heilige Moses bei den Christen in Ägypten,” in *Religion im Erbe Aegyptens: Beiträge zur späantiken Religionsgeschichte zu Ehren von Alexander Böhlig* (ed. Manfred Görg; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988).

41 A. Fakhry, *The Necropolis of El-Bagawat in Kharga Oasis* (Cairo: Government Press, 1951; Egyptian deserts), *non vide*.

Additionally, in medieval churches Moses is paired with Jesus;<sup>42</sup> it is interesting to note that the original plan for the Sistine Chapel was designed to present a spatially balanced depiction of Moses and Jesus.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the significance of Moses is also evident in Christian art, although obviously for different reasons than in Judaism.

#### 4. The Finding of Moses in Jewish Texts

In Judaism, midrashic readings of the Finding of Moses surface in the literature that is dedicated to the remembrance of the Exodus during the celebration of the Passover festival and its accompanying reciting and teaching of the story of Passover through the medium of a liturgical text, the "Haggadah."<sup>44</sup> Famous examples include the Spanish Golden Haggadah from Barcelona, 1320,<sup>45</sup> in which the illustrations are separate and precede the text.<sup>46</sup> In this Haggadah there are three nude girls in the water next to the ark that holds Moses. In contrast, the Kaufmann Haggadah (14<sup>th</sup> century) has four girls, including Pharaoh's daughter, but one of the other girls brings the ark.<sup>47</sup>

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42 Flynn, "Moses," 270, discusses the medieval church Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, 1248, erected by Louis IX: "In several scenes he is paired with Christ ...", she also insists that there is a sense of unity of design.

43 Flynn, "Moses," 272f., refers to the Sistine Chapel in Rome, 1471-1484, the "fresco cycle was to include scenes from the life of Moses and of Christ" – among them the Finding of Moses. Furthermore, the entire program of the Sistine Chapel is a typological program, which is understood "not as story-telling but as a continuation and fulfillment" of the "Old Testament" (i.e., the Hebrew Bible) in the New Testament. The humanistic studies of the Renaissance are theologically as well as visually expressed in a program of mathematical balance, colorful harmony and logically perceived space – the scenes depicting Moses and Jesus display parallel courses within this aesthetic program. See also William Johnstone, "Interpictoriality: the lives of Moses and Jesus in the murals of the Sistine Chapel," in *Sense and Sensitivity: Essays on Reading the Bible in Memory of Robert Carroll* (ed. Alastair G. Hunter and Philip R. Davies; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 416-55, 435.

44 The Passover Haggadah is midrashic.

45 Zefira Gitay, "The Image of Moses in the Spanish Haggadot," in *From Iberia to Diaspora. Studies in Sephardic History and Culture* (ed. Yedida K. Stillman and Norman A. Stillman; Brill's Series in Jewish Studies, xix; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 515-24. Overall, based upon the textual and visual evidence, I do not agree with most of what Gitay states, e.g., that Moses is "depicted as a human being with no specifically heroic or symbolic features," 524. The biblical narrative contains numerous elements, in which Moses is portrayed as a hero.

46 See Kogman-Appel, "Die Modelle," 269.

47 See Schubert and Schubert, "Die Errettung des Mose," 67.

The work of the first century historian Josephus is considered to have been the source of the Harburg codex of the Bible in which the middle girl (Pharaoh’s daughter) is labeled “Tarmuth,” although this name of Pharaoh’s daughter may be closer to the name given in the Book of Jubilees.<sup>48</sup> Alternatively, in the Jewish tradition Pharaoh’s daughter was referred to as Bityah.<sup>49</sup> Tarmuth is the one who lays her hand on the box containing Moses, thus implying that this follows the model of Pharaoh’s daughter stretching out her hand. As a rule, the text of the Haggadah does not mention the finding of Moses, probably because the figure of Moses is intentionally omitted from the text. The reason for the elimination of Moses in the Haggadah is possibly because in some limited texts he was portrayed with god-like qualities.<sup>50</sup> The Haggadah emphasizes that God, not Moses, led the Israelites out of Egypt with an outstretched arm (*zero'a netuyah*).<sup>51</sup>

- 48 Josephus, *Ant.* 2.224. According to Josephus, the name of Pharaoh’s daughter was Thermuthis; *Jub.* 47:5 has Tharmuth. As mentioned above, 1 Chr. 4:18 and rabbinic literature refer to her as Bityah. Gutmann, “The Dura Europos Synagogue Paintings and Their Influence on Later Christian and Jewish Art,” 25, mentions the following inscriptions in the depiction found in the Pamplona Bible, Spain, c. 1200, Harburg Collection Prince Oettingen-Wallerstein, MS I,2, lat. 4, fol.49: “the daughter of Pharaoh [accompanied by] her maidens cleanses herself [in the Nile] ...” See also Kogman-Appel, “Die Modelle,” 278, 273, n. 22 (“Sammlung Öttingen-Wallerstein, MS I, 2 Lat 40”).
- 49 Pharaoh’s daughter has a name, Bityah, in the reworking of biblical history by the Chronicler: And his wife Jehudijah bore Jered the father of Gedor, and Heber the father of Soco, and Jekuthiel the father of Zanoah. And these are the sons of Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh, who Mered took (1 Chron 4:18). The name Bityah is also found in midrashic texts, e.g., in Pesiq. Rab. 17.  
R. Avun said in the name of R. Judah b. Pazzi, Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh, was a first-born. By what merit did she escape death? Through the merit of Moses’ prayer for her; it is written about her: she noticed that he, who was called a *goodly child* (Exod. 2:2), was a shield, and that therefore *her lamp does not go out by night* (Prov. 31:18). Since it is not written *laylah* but *layil*, the verse is to be read in light of another verse: *It was a night [layil] of watching for the Lord* (Exod. 12:42) – this refers to the night when the the first-born of Egypt were smitten. Therefore it is assumed that Bityah’s lamp did not go out – that her life was spared.  
Richard C. Steiner, “Bitté-Yâ, daughter of Pharaoh (1 Chr 4,18), and Bint(i)-cAnat, daughter of Ramesses II,” *Biblica* 79,3 (1998), 394-408, attempts to identify two daughters of Pharaoh that are mentioned in the Bible.
- 50 Exod. 4:16; 7:1; Philo, *Mos.* 1.158; Deut. Rab. 11:4.
- 51 This has nothing to do with the outstretched arm of Pharaoh’s daughter; the Hebrew roots and terms are entirely different. In respect to God’s hand, see Rachel Hachlili, “The Hand of God in Ancient Jewish and early Christian art,” in *Case Studies in Archaeology and World Religion: The Proceedings of the Cambridge Conference* (ed. Timothy Insoll; Oxford: Archaeopress, 1999; BAR International Series 755), 59-60.

If the depictions of the “Finding of Moses” are perceived as Bible illustrations, one has to investigate the biblical text in the Hebrew Bible and its translations into Greek, Latin, Syriac and Aramaic that may have influenced different visions of the same story. The oldest version of the story of the Finding of Moses is in the Hebrew Bible:<sup>52</sup>

Exod. 2:3-6: *And when she [Moses' mother] could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark made of reeds, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child in it; and she laid it in the rushes by the river's brink. And his sister stood far away, to see what would be done to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child; and, behold, the baby wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.*<sup>53</sup>

The literal reading of the above biblical text implies that the Egyptian princess sent a handmaid to retrieve the ark from the river Nile. The motivation of Pharaoh’s daughter to take a bath and her interaction with the handmaids was interpreted by Philo<sup>54</sup> and in rabbinic literature, as illustrated in the following midrashic text:

Exod. Rab. 1:23: *[And the daughter of Pharaoh came down] to wash herself at the river* (Exod. 2:5) – to cleanse herself of her father’s idols. *And her maidens walked [holkhot] along etc.* (Exod. 2:5) R. Yohanan said: The “walking” here means nothing else but death, as it is said: *Behold I am going [holekh] to die* (Gen. 25:32). They said to her: Our Mistress, it is the custom of the world that when a king makes a decree, though everybody else does not obey it, at least his children and the members of his household obey it, but you transgress your father’s decree. Immediately Gabriel came and smote them to the ground.

*She sent her maid* נָמָתָה [amatah] *to fetch it* (Exod. 2:5) – R. Judah and R. Nehemiah: one said [that the word means] “her hand” and the other said [that it means] “her maid.” The one who said that it means ‘her hand’ did so because it is written *AMTH*; the one who said that it means “her maid” did so because it is not written *yadah*. According to the one who said that it

52 According to the Masoretic text. 4Q422 shows a reworking of the Exodus narrative.

53 Exod. 2:7-10: *Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call for you a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses; and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.*

54 Philo, *Mos. 4.14*: “... she went forth with her handmaidens down to the river, where the infant was lying. And there, as she was about to indulge in a bath and purification in the thickest part of the marsh, she beheld the child, and commanded her handmaidens to bring him to her.” On Philo see Louis H. Feldman, *Philo's Portrayal of Moses in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), 87ff.

means “her handmaid,” Gabriel must have spared one maid when he smote them to the ground, because it is not the manner of a princess to remain unattended.

The question was asked: According to him who says that it means “her hand,” why does it not [explicitly] write “her hand [*yadah*]”? This does not refute him; *amatah* is used on purpose because her arms were lengthened. We have learned, thus you will find: *You have broken the teeth of the wicked [shibbarta]* (Ps. 3:8); do not read *You have broken [shibbarta]*, but *You have lengthened [sheribbavta]*.

A midrashic assertion in the above text is that Pharaoh’s daughter was a “conscientious objector” in the sense that she was a rebel willing to defy the decree of the Pharaoh and additionally to cleanse herself of idol worship. According to the midrashic text, the handmaids, who questioned her loyalty to Pharaoh’s decree, were immediately slain by the angel Gabriel. In the Hebrew Bible there is a shift from the plural (handmaids) to the singular (a handmaid) and the rabbis assumed that only one handmaid survived.

It is important to note that the Hebrew for “handmaid” (*amah*) can also mean “the hand” or “the arm of her [mistress].” It is this interpretation of the term of “her hand” or “her arm” in the verse in Exodus that impacted numerous Christian and Jewish works of art. In addition, the midrash provides that the arm of Pharaoh’s daughter was lengthened. This reading and the idea that Pharaoh’s daughter went into the Nile is also found in *Targum Onkelos*,<sup>55</sup> an Aramaic rendition and expansion of the Hebrew Bible that was utilized in Jewish worship, which also renders the biblical term “her maid” as “her arm.” Thus, the painting at Dura Europos may reflect synagogue liturgical practice.<sup>56</sup> The outstretched arm of Pharaoh’s daughter is again mentioned by the medieval commentator Rashi *ad Exod. 2:5*: “her handmaid – the sages interpret this as ‘hand.’” Rashi confirms that the late antique Jewish interpretation of the “lengthened arm” of Pharaoh’s daughter continued into the medieval period.

<sup>55</sup> “She stretched out her arm and took it;” see also Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 177. Gutmann, “The Illustrated Midrash,” 94, refers to Targ. Ps.-Jonathan, Exod. 2:5: “And the Word of the Lord sent forth upon the land of Egypt burning sores and inflammation of the flesh; and the daughter of Pharaoh, Bithiah, came down to refresh herself at the river. And her handmaids were walking along the bank of the river, and see saw the ark among the reeds and stretched out her arm and took it and was immediately healed of the burning and inflammation.”

<sup>56</sup> Gutmann, “The Synagogue of Dura-Europos: A Critical Analysis,” 81, states: “These paintings must be understood as theological advertisements or religious propaganda perhaps intended to win converts. They also served as visual accompaniments to the ongoing audial prayers ...”

The 3<sup>rd</sup> century rabbis cited in the extended text of the above passage construed that Pharaoh's daughter was required to go down to the Nile to cleanse herself, because she was leprous – a well-known *topos*.<sup>57</sup> As soon as she touched the ark, she was instantaneously healed. She also identified with the Hebrews at the location of their suffering, namely the Nile, and cleansed herself of Pharaoh's corrupted policies. For this reason she is portrayed as having compassion and great love for the infant Moses.<sup>58</sup> A further assumption in this midrashic text is that Pharaoh's daughter became a convert to Judaism, since an immersion in a body of water is part of the conversion process in Judaism. Her spiritual transformation transpired as the result of her immersion in the water of the Nile. The potent water of the Nile also resonates with Christian interpreters who implied that Moses in the Nile was a model for the baptism of Jesus.<sup>59</sup>

Another recasting of the biblical Moses in Egypt is found at the Ben Ezra synagogue<sup>60</sup> in Foustat (Old Cairo), which is, according to local legend, situated on the banks of the river Nile at the very spot where Pharaoh's daughter found Moses. This synagogue has an inscription that states that it was the location of a prayer by Moses; the slightly damaged inscription includes a partial citation of Exod. 9:33:

אנדרה בפי תושבי העיר תספר כי במקום הזה התפלל משה רבינו ע"ה ועל מקום זה כתוב  
בתורה ויצא משה את העיר ופרקosh כפז אל ה" ובכלה בידס ... במקום הזה השם תפילתו

A narrative tradition (*agadah*) of the inhabitants of the city relates that Moses, our teacher, prayed to the Lord at this location; and concerning this place it is written in the Torah: *And Moses went out from the city [from Pharaoh,] and spread out his hands to the Lord* (Exod. 9:33) and they have a tradition ... that the Lord received his prayer at this location.

<sup>57</sup> Alfred Hermann, "Der Nil und die Christen," in *JAC* 1 (1958), 30-69, 48, mentions that bathing in the Nile was considered to be cleansing. In contrast to the cleansing powers of the Nile, Exod. Rab. 1:34 states that Pharaoh bathed in the blood of the slain Hebrew children to cure himself of leprosy

<sup>58</sup> b. Sotah 12b; this passage in the Babylonian Talmud is midrashic rather than discursive; it is an edited parallel of an exegetical midrash (Exod. Rab. 1:23f.).

<sup>59</sup> See Franz J. Dölger, "Nilwasser und Taufwasser. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Auseinandersetzung," *Ach* 5 (1936), 153-87.

<sup>60</sup> The Ben Ezra synagogue was built, destroyed and rebuilt throughout history. This synagogue is the location of the Cairo Genizah that yielded medieval documents. The inscription concerning Moses is on a monument from the 19<sup>th</sup> century; however, the legend about this synagogue as the exact location of both the finding of Moses and the recitation of a prayer by Moses is very old, probably from late antiquity. For Philo of Alexandria, who lived in Egypt about three hundred years after Jewish houses of prayer had been established in Egypt, the synagogue was an ancient institution, and he traced its origins to the time of Moses (*Mos.* 215f.; see also Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.175 who dated synagogues back to Moses).

## 5. Poussin’s “The Finding of Moses” and “The Finding of Moses” by Sébastien Bourdon

There are numerous paintings and sketches by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1669) that depict the Finding of Moses.<sup>61</sup> In these pictorial versions, the location and the importance of the Nile, the number of attendants, and the Egyptian artifacts, as well as allusions to the architecture of Rome, vary, although there are significant similarities that relate to Roman artifacts and Jewish interpretations of the Bible. In regard to the depictions of the life of Moses by Poussin, Todd Olson states that “... the multiple archeological layers of Judeo-Christian and pagan antiquity were represented by the sculptural remains of the Roman imperial past.”<sup>62</sup> Poussin’s “The Finding of Moses,” 1638 (Fig. 36)<sup>63</sup> is replete with Egyptian artifacts, such as a sphinx and pyramids. A nude old man on the left represents the Greco-Roman Nile god, Nilos. “The Finding of Moses” by Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671), a student of Poussin’s, also has the nude Nile god in his painting (Fig. 37).<sup>64</sup> These two painters insert male figures into the biblical story, which exclusively focuses upon courageous women, who kept alive and rescued the savior, Moses.

It has been established that Poussin was influenced by the writings of Josephus in his interpretation of the scene, especially in the addition of a male figure; Olson states that Josephus, who served as a crucial link between Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman historiography, was utilized by Poussin.<sup>65</sup> Malcolm Bull notes that Poussin painted scenes of Moses that are not contained in the Bible, but are contained in the writings of Josephus. The male figure of the attendant is based upon “[t]he conjunction of a narrative detail from Josephus with a possible visual

61 For example, “The Exposition of Moses” (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), “The Finding of Moses” (1638; National Gallery, London), “Moses saved from the Water” (Louvre, 1647) represent versions of the scene. On the last cited painting, see, e.g., Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 171-83, “A Gaze Rewarded, or Moses Saved from the Water;” however, Marin seems to be unaware of the full textual background of this painting and mainly refers to the gaze of the viewer and of Pharaoh’s daughter.

62 Olson, Todd, *Poussin and France: Painting, Humanism, and the Politics of Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 68.

63 “The Finding of Moses” by Nicolas Poussin, 1638 (“Moyse sauvé des eaux” in: Pierre Marie Gault de Saint Germain, *Vie de Nicolas Poussin, considéré comme chef de l’école françoise, suivie de notes inédites* [Paris: Didot Lainé, 1806], plate 20).

64 “The Finding of Moses” by Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671) (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1961.9.65).

65 Olson, *Poussin and France*, 64.

source for the composition ..."<sup>66</sup> According to Josephus, Thermuthis, Pharaoh's daughter, sent swimmers to bring the cradle to her:

The king had a daughter, Thermuthis. Playing by the river bank and spying the basket being borne down the stream, she sent off some swimmers with orders to bring that cot to her. When these returned from their errand with the cot, she, at the sight of the little child, was enchanted at its size and beauty ... (Josephus, *Ant.* 2.224).



Fig. 36. "The Finding of Moses" by Nicolas Poussin, 1638.

The Poussin painting "The Baby Moses trampling on Pharaoh's crown" (1645; Duke of Bedford collection, Woburn Abbey) may serve as a further example of the use of antique Jewish Bible interpretations by Poussin.<sup>67</sup> It should be emphasized that Josephus frequently included motifs

<sup>66</sup> See Malcolm Bull, "Poussin and Josephus," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 139 (April 2002), 331-38, 334.

<sup>67</sup> According to Exod. Rab. 1:26, when Moses was in his third year, Pharaoh was dining one day with the queen at his right hand, his daughter Bityah with the infant Moses in her lap at his left hand, when Moses took the crown from the king's head and placed it upon his own head (see also Sefer Ha-Yashar, 131b; Divre ha-yamim shel mosheh rabbenu (*Bet ha-Midrash* [ed. A. Jellinek, Jerusalem, 1967, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.], vol. 2, 1-4).

and interpretations that are also found in rabbinic literature, in particular in midrash; therefore, via Josephus there is a connection between early Jewish interpretation from the Land of Israel and the European painter Poussin, who served as a model for subsequent painters.

Poussin is known for his Egyptian scenes; he carefully integrated historicizing Egyptian elements,<sup>68</sup> a procedure known from Jewish bible interpretations in Josephus that also surfaced in midrash. Poussin apparently understood Moses as the Egyptian god Osiris, and alternatively as the Roman god Bacchus.<sup>69</sup> Both Poussin and Bourdon exemplify how the view of the Nile in European art has been influenced by the understanding and transformation of the Nile that is evident in classical Roman writers and Roman art,<sup>70</sup> as well as in Jewish interpretation of the Bible.

Among the details of the Nilotic landscape in Poussin’s “The Finding of Moses” (Fig. 36) are reeds that are visible in the Nile on the left; they grow close to the river’s bank. A midrash explains the location of the “reeds by the river’s bank” found in a phrase in Exod. 2:3 as the “Sea of Reeds.” This midrash creates a religiously significant connection between the location chosen by the mother of Moses to save her son and the location of the future salvation of the “Hebrews,” who escaped from Egypt via the Sea of Reeds.<sup>71</sup>

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Josephus, *Ant.* 2.232-336; see Louis H. Feldman, “Moses,” in *idem, Josephus’s Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 374-442.

68 Charles G. Dempsey, “Poussin and Egypt,” *The Art Bulletin* 45 (June 1963), 109-19.

69 See Malcolm Bull, “Notes on Poussin’s Egypt,” *The Burlington Magazine* 141, 1158 (Sept. 1999), 537-41, 538, 539f., with regard to this painting.

70 For example, the Roman mosaic from Palestrina.

71 Josephus, *Ant.* 9:4, emphasizes the river Nile as the one receiving the child. Moreover God’s providence is invoked as well: “they made an ark of bulrushes, after the manner of a cradle, and of a bigness sufficient for an infant to be laid in, without being too straitened: they then daubed it over with slime, which would naturally keep out the water from entering between the bulrushes, and put the infant into it, and setting it afloat upon the river, they left its preservation to God; so the river received the child, and carried him along. But Miriam, the child’s sister, passed along upon the bank over against him, as her mother had bid her, to see whither the ark would be carried, where God demonstrated that human wisdom was nothing, but that the Supreme Being is able to do whatsoever he pleases: that those who, in order to their own security, condemn others to destruction, and use great endeavors about it, fail of their purpose; but that others are in a surprising manner preserved, and obtain a prosperous condition almost from the very midst of their calamities; those, I mean, whose dangers arise by the appointment of God. And, indeed, such a providence was exercised in the case of this child, as showed the power of God.”

Exod. Rab. 1:21: *She put the child into it and laid it into the reed by the river's bank* (Exod. 2:3). R. Eleazar said: The Sea of Reeds, since the Sea of Reeds reaches as far as the Nile.<sup>72</sup>

Like Poussin, Bourdon<sup>73</sup> shows the outstretched arm of Pharaoh's daughter that was initially portrayed in Jewish interpretive literature. Alternatively, this may be understood as a noble gesture; Moses is also depicted with outstretched arms. Bourdon copied these gestures from his teacher, Poussin, who found many of his interpretations of biblical scenes in Josephus. For the European viewer the Nile in this painting is presented as an exotic location; the artist utilizes a set canon of Egyptian cultural icons including palm trees, pyramids, a statue of a pharaoh on a chariot (in the background) and bulrushes along the river. The painting also shows a man working on a boat, a woman laundering and another woman carrying a jug of water on her head. Water jugs were part of classical (Roman) Nilotc scenes;<sup>74</sup> one of the women in the Dura Europos rendition also holds a jug. In the background, on the left, there are two males in togas, which demonstrate the lasting influence of Roman art and culture upon the perception of the Nile in the western world. The smaller woman on the right, holding up a bouquet, may represent the sister of Moses, Miriam, or, alternatively, a dwarf, which again would refer to classical Nilotc scenes.<sup>75</sup> In the foreground there are six handmaids for Pharaohs' daughter. Moses is in a sturdy, square container with visible basket weaving which is presented to the princess, who is clearly marked by a tiara and a yellow dress. The garments of Pharaoh's daughter are indicative of her status. She is crowned and dressed like an empress in the earlier depictions of the scene.<sup>76</sup>

In Bourdon's painting, Moses' container is held by a man wrapped in an animal skin or some other form of rough clothing that may represent antiquity, possibly the god Pan. Alternatively, this man and

72 See also Exod. Rab. 1:1.

73 For additional literature on the Bourdon painting discussed in this chapter, see [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov), s.v. Bourdon.

74 See chapter 2.

75 Bull, "Notes," 540, states that the description of the Nile god by Philostratus includes that the Nile god gives flowers to the dwarves surrounding him. David Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings: A Study in Art-Historical Methodology* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 82, observes that "... the woman at the center is out of scale with her companion on her right, who is far too small. Since Poussin was a skilled painter, this large figure may be symbolic."

76 Weitzmann, *The Frescoes*, 29-30, mentions the depiction of Pharaoh's daughter in an Octateuch (Vat. Gr. 746). Her embroidered garments signify her royal status in the Via Latina mural and in another Octateuch (Vat. Gr. 747) in which she is shown in imperial dress.

his clothing could remind the viewer of John the Baptist (Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22; John 1:31-34; Matt. 3:13-16), if we connect the theme of immersion in water with the Christian tradition of viewing Moses as a “prefiguration” of being baptized by his submersion in the Nile.<sup>77</sup> This construction falls into the category of polemical, ideological, or apologetic biblical interpretations; for example, to defend Christian claims about Jesus and to Christianize the Jewish Bible. As an aside, midrashic texts on occasion do engage in polemics as well, for instance in the unfavorable comparison of the Nile to the river Jordan.<sup>78</sup>

Returning to the depiction in Bourdon’s painting, one may note that the river is broadly painted on the left and then disappears under a bridge on the right. There are no ripples or waves in the river; it is extremely serene. By depicting the Nile as peaceful, the role of the Nile is seen as critical in the Finding of Moses. Bourdon was a follower of



Fig. 38 Amsterdam Haggadah, Sephardic, 1695.

<sup>77</sup> Jensen, “Moses Imagery,” 404, addresses this aspect of the visual scenes of the Finding of Moses, which were rendered as types of baptism by the Church fathers (Origen, *Hom. Num* 26:4; *Hom. in Jesu Nav.* 4:1).

<sup>78</sup> See chapter 2.

Poussin,<sup>79</sup> and the exotic *ambiente* in Bourdon' rendition of "The Finding of Moses" was clearly influenced by his teacher's, Nicolas Poussin's, paintings that depicted the Finding of Moses.

Other examples of this type of portrayal of Pharaoh's daughter are found in multiple representations in Jewish art, such as the almost contemporary Sephardic Haggadah from Amsterdam, 1695 (Fig. 38), and a later Bohemian Haggadah (Fig. 39).<sup>80</sup> In both representations Pharaoh's daughter has a tiara and an outstretched arm. The Bohemian Haggadah, an illuminated manuscript from 1728/29 (MS 240, Jewish Museum Prague), illustrated by Nathan ben Shimshon of Mesrici, sets the Nile in a romantic Bohemian landscape; the city wall in each of these Haggadot is already found in the Dura Synagogue murals. The wall refers to Pharaoh's palace and the decree to kill the male Hebrew infants.<sup>81</sup>

## 6. Returning to Egypt

Moses had to be brought back to Egypt to fulfill his divinely ordained destiny, since the narrative of the Hebrew Bible provides that Moses fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian (Exod. 2:12). In a midrashic passage, the divine command to Moses to return to Egypt<sup>82</sup> serves as an introduction to a dialogue between Moses and his brother Aaron, who is adamantly opposed to the journey back to Egypt.

*Mek. de-Rabbi Yishmael, 'Amaleq 3:* At the time when God said to Moses: Go and bring out my people, the Israelites, from Egypt, as it is said: *Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh* (Ex 3:10). At the same time Moses took his wife and his two sons and led them to Egypt, as it is said: *And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt* (Exod. 4:20).

The textual passage about Moses going back to Egypt (Exod. 4:20) is also depicted in art.<sup>83</sup> As mentioned above, some Christian texts com-

79 Todd Olson, *Poussin and France*, 204, maintains that Bourdon in particular emulated Poussin's depictions of scenes interpreting the life of Moses.

80 Bohemian Haggadah, an illuminated manuscript from 1728/29, illustrated by the artist Nathan ben Shimshon of Mesrici (MS 240, Jewish Museum, Prague).

81 See Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 170.

82 Kogman-Appel, "Die Modelle," 283, points out that this scene of Moses and his family going down to Egypt (Exod. 4:20) is a common theme in art.

83 For example, The Golden Haggadah (c. 1320, Spain, British Library, Add. MS 27210), provides "and he was met by Aaron," the illustration depicts Moses' wife holding the two infant sons riding on a donkey; Augustin Hirschvogel, "Moses Returns to Egypt from Midian" (1549), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

pared Jesus to Moses, e.g., in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>84</sup> *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (c. 1510) by Gerard David<sup>85</sup> (Fig. 40)<sup>86</sup> shows Mary and Jesus in Egypt. The flight into Egypt of an individual in danger is a common *topos* in both Jewish and Christian literature. Going down to Egypt as a place of refuge or food is mentioned numerous times in the Hebrew Bible. Whereas in Christian literature Jesus is taken to Egypt in order to be saved from persecution by King Herod in the Land of Israel under Roman occupation, the biblical Moses goes back to Egypt in order to liberate his enslaved people. Additionally, the New Testament casts King Herod as a new Pharaoh, who attempts to kill new born children (Matt. 2:16). The flight of the infant Jesus to Egypt, mentioned in Matt. 2:13-15, is elaborated upon in Coptic Egypt and in Christian apocryphal literature, particularly in the Infancy Gospels. It can be argued that it was theologically necessary for the infant Jesus to be taken to Egypt in order to facilitate his comparison with Moses.

In Gerard David’s painting the references to the Finding of Moses include the basket at Mary’s feet. In the Hebrew Bible the infant Moses is placed into a container; the Bible utilizes a particular word for ark, *teva*, based upon the Egyptian *db3.t*.<sup>87</sup> This same term links three critical biblical passages, the story of Noah’s ark (Gen 6:14), the ark in which Moses was placed in the Nile river (Exod. 2:5) and the Ark of the Covenant (Num. 10:35). For example, God’s command to Noah in Gen. 6:14: *Make an ark of gopher wood; rooms shall you make in the ark, and shall pitch*

84 For example, just as Pharaoh killed all the male children of the Hebrews, and only Moses is saved (Exod.1:22-2:10), so did King Herod kill all the male children in Bethlehem, and only Jesus is saved (Matt. 2:13-18); when Moses is in danger, he flees from Egypt, but is instructed to return to Egypt (Exod. 4:19); when Jesus is in danger, he goes to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-21); just as Moses goes up to a mountain to receive the Law (Exod. 19:3), so also Jesus goes up to a mountain to give a new law (Matt. 5:1); just as Moses fasts for forty days while on the mountain, recording God’s Law (Exod. 34:28), so also Jesus fasts for forty days (Matt. 4:2). Moses is explicitly mentioned in Matthew (8:4; 17:3-4; 19:7-8; 22:24; 23:2), parallel in Mark; the Matthean Jesus upholds the law of Moses (Matt. 5:17-20; 22:35-40; etc.). On Jesus as the new Moses, see Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993). Drawing parallels between Moses and the Messiah is also found in rabbinic texts (e.g., Ruth Rab. 40:5); Moses was the expected Messiah to the Samaritans.

85 The website of the National Gallery of Art provides a bibliography for this painting ([www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov) s.v. Gerard David).

86 “The Rest on the Flight into Egypt” (c. 1510) by Gerard David (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1937.1.43).

87 See Abraham S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in its Relation to Egyptian*, v. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 205.

*it inside and outside with pitch.* However, in the Christian tradition that is based upon the Septuagint, the ark of Moses has become a basket.

LXX Exod. 2:5: Now Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river to bathe and her attendants were walking beside the river. And when she saw the basket in the marsh, she sent her attendant and she picked it up.<sup>88</sup>

The Greek term for Moses' "basket" is θύβν instead of κυβωτόν, which is the word for ark (LXX Gen 6:14). However, the LXX is an anthology of translations and revisions, which makes any definitive statements about the wording of a verse difficult. The Syriac translation of the Bible, utilized by early Christians, also has Moses in a basket:

Peshitta, Exod. 2:5f.: Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe at the river. Her maidens walked along by the riverside. She saw the basket among the reeds, and she sent her handmaid to get it.

In Gerard David's painting, Mary and her typological blue and red cloaks are at the center; her cloak covers the Nile, which is barely recognizable in the background. Her head has become part of the sky and her face blocks out much of the Nile; as a result the Nile becomes a minor, although meaningful, detail of Egypt. Gerard David's painting presents the Nile as an incidental detail in a story focused upon Mary and Jesus in Egypt. In the same painting a man is harvesting chestnuts. Although this is borrowed from European agriculture, it may refer the viewer to the fertility of the distant land of the Nile. Additionally, the chestnut tree may refer to the miracle of the palm tree in Egypt that fed Mary and her entourage in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew.<sup>89</sup> Within Christian parameters, the man harvesting the chestnuts is Joseph, who is attempting to feed Mary while the infant Jesus performs the miraculous feeding of his mother.<sup>90</sup> By contrast, Poussin completely Egyptia-nized his painting of the "Holy Family in Egypt" (St. Petersburg, Hermitage), depicting Mary as Isis, providing an Egyptian temple of Serapis and a funeral procession as well as deleting the need for Joseph to work for food and the food miracle performed by the infant. Instead

88 LXX Exod. 2:3 also has "basket."

89 For example, the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, ch. 20, states: "O tree, bend thy branches, and refresh my mother with thy fruit And immediately at these words the palm tree bent its top down to the very feet of the blessed Mary; and they gathered from its fruit, with which they were all refreshed ..."

90 For further details, such as the symbolism of grapes, see the literature cited in respect to this painting on the website of the National Gallery of Art. Another painting that depicts the flight into Egypt is Roelandt Savery's "Landscape with the Flight into Egypt (1624); this painting is dominated by a ruin in which Mary and the child are resting. The Nile is on the left and is depicted as a murmuring European brook. On the extreme right the Nile emerges again as a quiet river. Allusions to Egypt include some exotic birds that are hidden in the forest.

he depicted friendly Egyptians who provide nourishment in the form of dates.<sup>91</sup> The Nile is hidden in the background. However, most importantly this painting proves that Poussin had access to Roman Nilotic mosaics.

## 7. The Finding of Moses (c. 1570) by Veronese

The Nile in Veronese's painting (Fig. 41)<sup>92</sup> is barely visible on the left and its role in the narrative seems to be diminished; it is partially covered by two wading women, who have gathered the hems of their skirts. There are two dark skinned people, one of them a dwarf; they lend a taste of the exotic to the scene, reminding the viewer that this event takes place in a distant land. It is unclear if the dwarf in this painting is Miriam, the sister of Moses. In other depictions, Miriam is similarly small, but in some renderings such as in Dura Europos she is a very large figure because of her significance. Therefore, it is uncertain if the dwarf is Miriam or an element borrowed from Roman Nilotic scenes. Pharaoh's daughter, the princess in the picture dressed in an elaborate brocade garment, is merely looking on, while the child Moses is presented to her by another woman. In contrast to the biblical versions, including the Vulgate, Exod. 2:5, in this painting the daughter of Pharaoh appears not to take an active role. Moses is raising his hand and two women on the right are raising their hands; these may represent Miriam and Yocheved, sister and mother of Moses respectively. These two women may be attempting to convince the princess of their ability to serve as babysitter and wet-nurse. The Nile is fully integrated into an Italian landscape with a bridge. A similar process of integrating the Nile and the Finding of Moses into a familiar European landscape is found in the Venice Haggadah (Fig. 42), which was published almost contemporaneously to the Veronese painting.

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91 Elizabeth Cropper, *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 122, refers to the Palestrina mosaic, (a Roman Nilotic mosaic), “Poussin himself wrote that he had painted ... ‘the natural and moral history of Egypt...’” (p. 27). Cropper notes that the priests, sparrow-hawks, ibis, coffin of Serapis in a different Poussin painting, are “all taken from the Nilotic landscape represented on the mosaic floor of the ancient Temple of Fortuna at Palestrina” (p. 29, fig. 3 in her book depicts this scene from the mosaic). This mosaic was on view and available to Poussin. On the Egyptian scene in this painting and the mention of this mosaic, see also Dempsey, “Poussin and Egypt,” 111.

92 “The Finding of Moses” (c. 1570) by Veronese (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1937.1.38).



Fig. 42. Venice Haggadah with Judeo-Italian Translation, 1609.

## 8. Conclusion

The depictions of the Finding of Moses demonstrate the reliance upon separate textual and pictorial traditions. In the Jewish tradition Moses is in an ark, whereas the Christian tradition, relying upon the Septuagint, places Moses in a basket. In both traditions, Pharaoh's daughter is either in the Nile and fetches Moses herself or she is out of the water and sends her attendants. Based upon early Jewish Bible interpretation, Pharaoh's daughter, who was given a name, simply stretches out her arm or, alternatively, she sends her maid or several maids or her male attendants to rescue the child. Several of these elements derive from the Jewish interpretation of the Bible as found in the Septuagint, in Josephus and in targumic and midrashic literature. With regard to the Egyptian scenes, a common source of the midrashic interpretation and of some of the painters is the Roman model of Egyptianizing depictions. The Nile is presented as the river god, Nilos, or as a serene river that participated in the rescue of the infant Moses. Similar to midrashic interpretations, the artists focus upon a word or phrase (lemma) from the biblical texts when creating their own narratives that may relate the art to the perceived gaps in the biblical events.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> The “gaps” in the biblical Moses narrative have been pointed out by Jacques T.A.G. M. van Ruiten, “The Birth of Moses in Egypt according to the ‘Book of Jubilees’ (Jub. 47.1-9),” in *The Wisdom of Egypt* (ed. Anthony Hillhorst and G. H. van Kooten; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 43-65, 47-8. Gap-filling is a global expression that is often utilized to

This “lemmatization” of the biblical Finding of Moses scene is already evident in the Dura Europos depiction. In the European depictions of this scene, there are also additions to the biblical texts that are derived from the historian Josephus; for example, the male figures in the paintings and the increasing number of female attendants. There is some evidence of cultural transfer in that Christian art is partially based upon the Jewish interpretive tradition that was mediated through shared religious figures. Conversely, Jewish art was influenced by the transformation of the Nile into a river in a European landscape and the transformation of Pharaoh’s nude daughter into a fully dressed European princess, as may be seen in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Venice Haggadah. The depiction of the Nilotic landscape of Egypt was largely dependent upon the cultural and religious knowledge, as well as the perspective of the artist. The visual represents a critical resource for interpretation; it is fixing in time the part of the narrative the artist wants to focus upon in his rendition of a biblical scene. Focusing upon certain aspects of a biblical sequence is similar to the lemmatization of biblical verses in midrashic texts that create new connections and present cultural information from a self-constructed canon of images.

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explain the onset of midrash; rather, in my opinion, midrash may be explained as a sophisticated hermeneutic enterprise.

## Figures

(Color plates are shown with an asterisk.)

- Fig. 1\* Statue of Ramses II, Memphis.
- Fig. 2\* Karnak, Bubastite Portal, Shoshenq.
- Fig. 3\* Cows in the Tomb of Nefertari.
- Fig. 4\* Hapy, Abydos, Temple of Ramses II.
- Fig. 5\* Ma'at, Abydos, Temple of Sety I.
- Fig. 6 Alexandria, Kom el Shuqafa, main tomb, emperor crowned with a solar disc holds the Ma'at to Ptah.
- Fig. 7\* Depiction of the god Min, Luxor Temple.
- Fig. 8\* Nile festival building, Sepphoris, detail.
- Fig. 9 Mosaic from Bet She'an, the House of Kyrios Leontis.
- Fig. 10\* Heka, Tomb of Ramses I.
- Fig. 11\* Edfu, ambulatory, Horus spearing Seth, depicted as a hippopotamus.
- Fig. 12\* Horus spearing crocodile, Ptolemaic, c. 300-30 BCE.
- Fig. 13 Philae, Tomb of Osiris.
- Fig. 14 Philae, Tomb of Osiris.
- Fig. 15\* Anubis, Cairo Museum.
- Fig. 16 Kom el-Shuqafa, main tomb, central niche, illustration of the mummy.
- Fig. 17\* Mummy portrait, Metropolitan Museum, New York, Portrait of the Boy Eutyches, 100-150 CE.
- Fig. 18\* Tomb stela of a young man, Oxyrhynchos, Ikonen-Museum Recklinghausen.
- Fig. 19\* Mummy mask from Hermopolis Magna.
- Fig. 20\* Tomb of Menna, Luxor West, Flogging.
- Fig. 21\* The location of the Serapeum and Pompey's column, Alexandria.
- Fig. 22\* Nile mosaic, Sepphoris.
- Fig. 23\* Cleopatra and Caesarion, Dendera.
- Fig. 24\* Serapis and Isis, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien.
- Fig. 25 Apis, Kom el-Shuqafa, main tomb, a Roman emperor venerates the Apis bull, Isis is watching.
- Fig. 26\* Tomb of Ramose.

- Fig. 27 The sun in the middle of the two eyes is sending out rays  
21<sup>st</sup> dynasty.
- Fig. 28 A detached eye.
- Fig. 29 Snakes are emanating from the sun, Tomb of Ramesses VI.
- Fig. 30 Ra' sitting on a throne on his boat, the uraeus snake is on the top of his head, curled around a sun-disk.
- Fig. 31 The king wears the "*nemes*" scarf and a protective uraeus.
- Fig. 32 Two amulets are presented to the sun god.
- Fig. 33 Eye depiction, Dura Europos Synagogue.
- Fig. 34\* Dura Europos Synagogue, west wall, "Moses Drawn from the Nile."
- Fig. 35\* Dura Europos Synagogue, west wall, "Moses Drawn from the Nile."
- Fig. 36 "The Finding of Moses" by Nicolas Poussin, 1638.
- Fig. 37\* "The Finding of Moses" by Sebastien Bourdon (1616-1671) (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC).
- Fig. 38 Amsterdam Haggadah, Sephardic, 1695.
- Fig. 39\* Bohemian Haggadah, 1728/29.
- Fig. 40\* "The Rest on the Flight into Egypt" (c. 1510) by Gerard David (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC).
- Fig. 41\* "The Finding of Moses" (c. 1570) by Veronese (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1937.1.38).
- Fig. 42 Venice Haggadah with Judeo-Italian Translation, 1609.

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- Fig. 8: Courtesy of Prof. Zeev Weiss, *The Sepphoris Expedition*, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Photo: G. Laron.
- Fig. 9: Nehemiah Tzori, "בית ליאונטיס בביית-שאן," *Eretz Israel* 11 (1973), 229-47, p. 232, fig. 4.
- Fig. 12: 22.39 "Horus Spearing the Enemy, Anonymous, Egyptian, 332-27 BC, limestone." Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum.
- Fig. 17: Metropolitan Museum, New York; Portrait of the Boy Eutyches, Panel painting, Roman period, 100-150 CE, Gift of Edward S. Harkness, 1918, 18.9.2. This image was provided by The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Fig. 18: Kop 0511, Ikonen-Museum Recklinghausen.
- Fig. 19: Egyptian Museum, Turin.
- Fig. 22: Nile Mosaic, Sepphoris (Zippori, Israel), Courtesy of Yigal Feiliks.
- Fig. 24: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien, Antikensammlung, 2nd century CE. (Gemme: Die Büsten des Serapis und der Isis gegenüberstehend [ANSA IX b 286]).
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Fig. 33, Fig. 34, Fig. 35: © Carl H. Kraeling, *The Synagogue* (The Excavations at Dura-Europos conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters, Final Report, VIII, part I; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), plates LXVII, LXVIII, figure 11).

Fig. 37: "The Finding of Moses" by Sebastien Bourdon (1616-1671) (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1961.9.65).

Fig. 39: MS 240, Jewish Museum, Prague.

Fig. 40: "The Rest on the Flight into Egypt" (c. 1510) by Gerard David (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1937.1.43).

Fig. 41: "The Finding of Moses" (c. 1570) by Veronese (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1937.1.38).

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## Plates





Fig. 1. Statue of Ramses II, Memphis



Fig. 2. Karnak, Bubastite Portal, Shoshenq

Plate II



Fig. 3. Cows in the Tomb of Nefertari



Fig. 4. Hapy, Abydos, Temple of Ramses II.



Fig. 5. Ma'at, Abydos, Temple of Sety I.

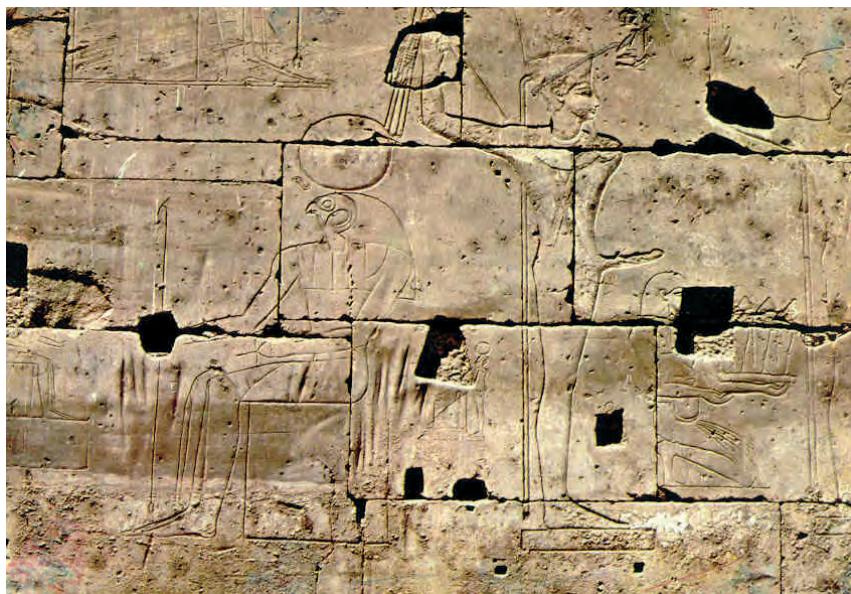


Fig. 7. Depiction of the god Min, Luxor Temple

Plate IV



Fig. 8. Nile festival building, Sepphoris, detail



Fig. 10. Heka, Tomb of Ramses I.

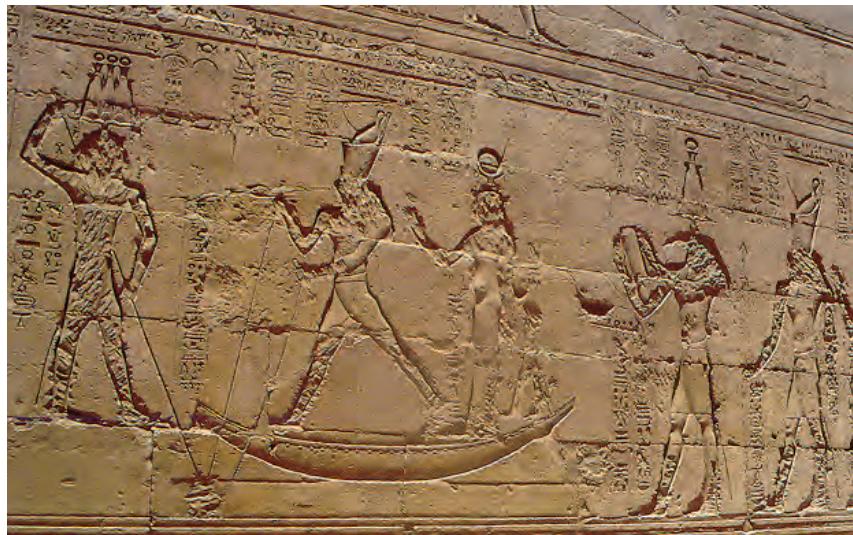


Fig. 11. Edfu, ambulatory, Horus spearing Seth, depicted as a hippopotamus

Plate VI



Fig. 15 Anubis, Cairo Museum



Fig. 12 Horus spearing crocodile, Ptolemaic,  
c. 300-30 BCE

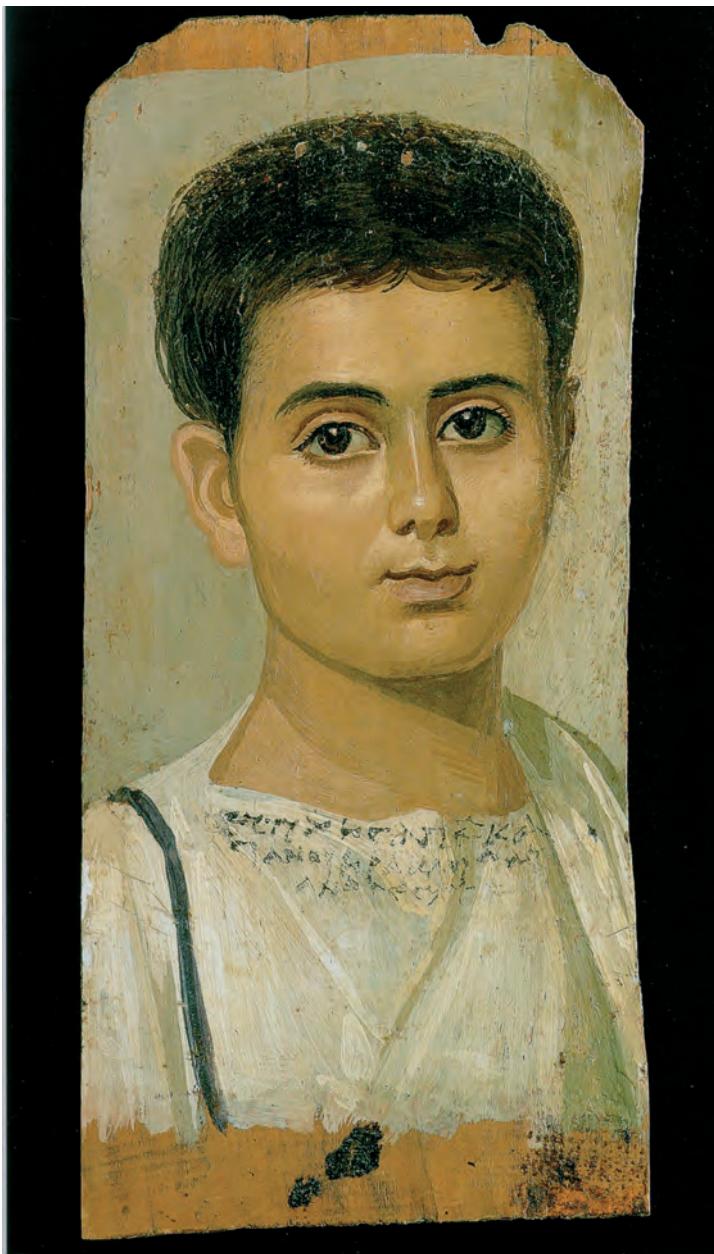


Fig. 17. Mummy portrait, Metropolitan Museum, New York,  
Portrait of the Boy Eutyches, 100-150 CE

Plate VIII



Fig. 18. Tomb stela of a young man, Oxyrhynchos,  
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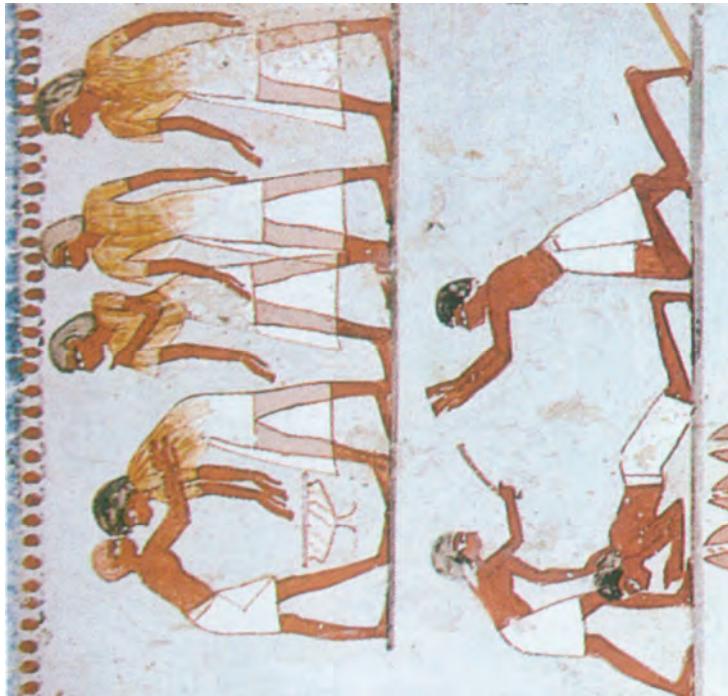


Fig. 20 Tomb of Menna, Luxor West, Flogging



Fig. 19 Mummy mask from Hermopolis Magna

Plate X



Fig. 21. The location of the Serapeum and Pompey's column, Alexandria



Fig. 22. Nile festival mosaic, Sepphoris

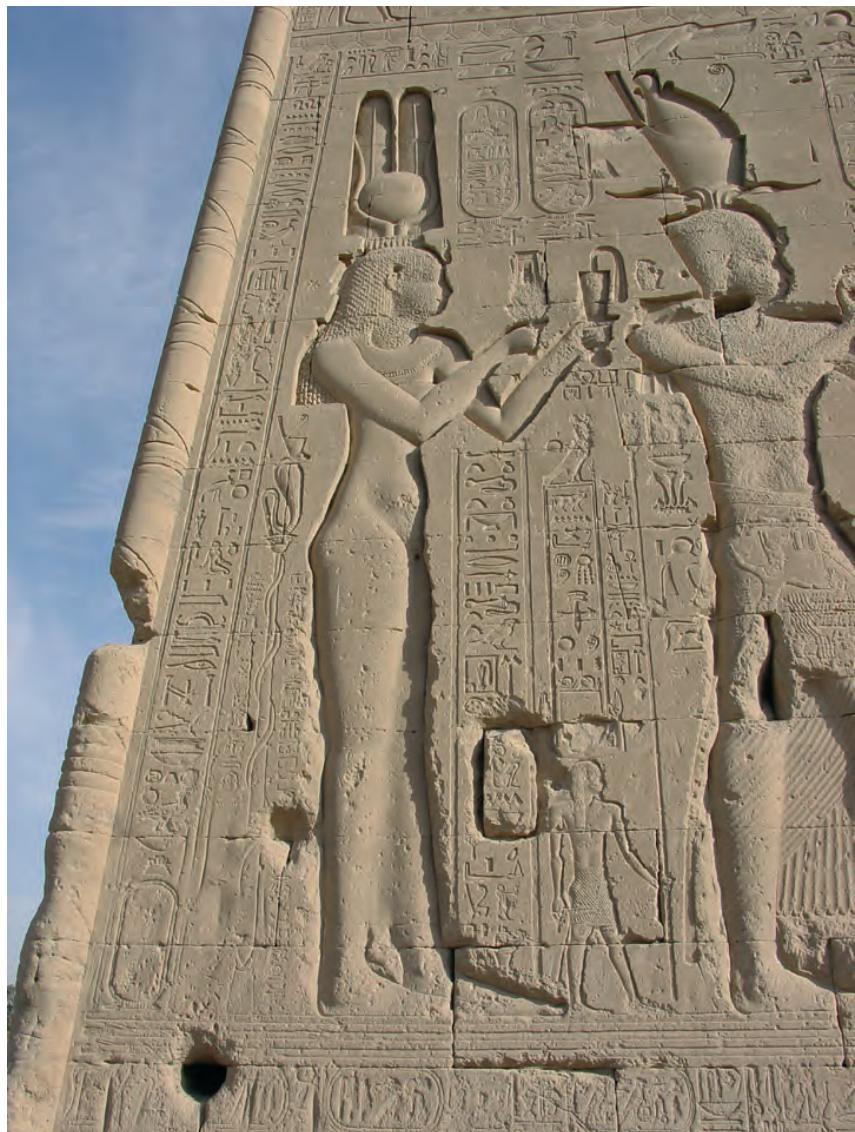


Fig. 23. Cleopatra and Caesarion, Dendera

Plate XII



Fig. 24. Serapis and Isis, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien



Fig. 26. Tomb of Ramose



Fig. 34 Dura Europos Synagogue, west wall, "Moses Drawn from the Nile."

Plate XIV



Fig. 35 Dura Europos Synagogue, west wall, "Moses Drawn from the Nile."



Fig. 37. "The Finding of Moses" by Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671) (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC)



Fig. 39. Bohemian Haggadah, 1728/29

Plate XVI



Fig. 40. "The Rest on the Flight into Egypt" (c. 1510) by Gerard David (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC)



Fig. 41. "The Finding of Moses" (c. 1570) by Veronese (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1937.1.38)