

The Joseph Story between Egypt and Israel

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The prepress production of this book and the eBook were published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation.

ISBN 978-3-16-160153-8/ eISBN 978-3-16-160154-5
DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-160154-5

ISSN 2698-4520 / eISSN 2698-4539 (Archaeology and Bible)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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The book was typeset by Martin Fischer in Tübingen using Minion typeface, printed on non-aging paper by Laupp & Göbel in Gomaringen, and bound by Buchbinderei Nädle in Nehren. Published by Mohr Siebeck Tübingen, Germany. www.mohrsiebeck.com

Printed in Germany.

How “Persian” or “Hellenistic” is the Joseph Narrative?

Thomas Römer

There are very few things about which scholars agree in regard to the biblical story of Joseph in Gen 37–50. A majority would probably agree that the Joseph story is quite different from the foregoing narratives about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and also that we have here an impressive piece of narrative art and storytelling, as pointed out by Gerhard von Rad but also by the Egyptologist Donald B. Redford: “No piece of prose elsewhere in the Bible can equal the literary standard attained by the Joseph story of Genesis 37–50.”¹

But as soon as the question of the literary unity of the story arises, opinions diverge.² Moreover, interpretive positions differ even further when one discusses the reconstruction of the original story and its date and historical setting.

1. *The Literary Coherence of the Joseph Narrative*

Every attentive reader of the book of Genesis notices the differences between the narrative about Joseph and the one about the patriarchs in Gen 12–36. Whereas the stories about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their wives are patchworks of a sort, combining former independent narratives or smaller cycles, the narrative about Joseph and his brothers is a straightforward story, not a combination of former independent units. The theology is also quite different: whereas Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob receive divine speeches telling them what to do or informing them about future events, Joseph never enters in any direct communication with God. In the Joseph narrative, there is no cultic etiology, nor are Yhwh and *'elohîm* used interchangeably (with the exception of Gen 39). Differences with the Exodus have also been observed, most notably that in Genesis the Pharaoh is depicted positively and Egypt seen as a place of sojourn.

Von Rad was one of the first to highlight the literary unity of the Joseph story and its wisdom flair in contrast to the Patriarchal narratives. Although praising

¹ D. B. REDFORD, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 423.

² For an overview of the recent history of research see C. PAAP, *Die Josephsgeschichte Genesis 37–50. Bestimmungen ihrer literarischen Gattung in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (EHS.T 534; Frankfurt a. M. et al.: Peter Lang, 1994) and F. W. GOLKA, “Genesis 37–50: Joseph Story or Israel-Joseph Story?,” *CBR* 2/2 (2004), 153–177.

the literary artistry of the Joseph story, he still postulated a J-version and an E-version of the story that later redactors combined.³ This was due to a certain “Systemzwang,” already acknowledged by Julius Wellhausen, who said that there must be a Yahwistic and an Elohist strand to narrative, otherwise the whole Documentary theory would collapse.⁴ The separation of the Joseph-story into a Yahwistic and an Elohist version still has its supporters even today,⁵ but no one ever succeeded in reconstructing two coherent independent narratives.⁶ First of all, the classical criterion of the Documentary hypothesis, namely the use of different divine names, does not work at all for this narrative (the tetragrammaton only appears in Gen 39).

Second, there are indeed many cases of “doublets” (e.g., Joseph’s dreams, the dreams of the prisoners and Pharaoh’s dreams all go by two; Joseph is taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelites and Midianites; the brothers travel to Egypt two times where they meet Joseph twice; twice Joseph is hiding something in his brothers’ sacks, etc.).

Several times there are double interventions of Reuben and Judah, especially in Gen 37 in order to protect Joseph’s life and later in order to convince Jacob to let Benjamin descend with them to Egypt. The Patriarch has two names, he is mostly called Jacob, but sometimes Israel. But some of these repetitions are part of the author’s narrative strategy and are necessary for understanding the plot of the story,⁷ whereas other doublets could indeed be explained not by the

³ G. VON RAD, “Josephsgeschichte und ältere Chokmah” in *Copenhagen Volume. Copenhagen 1953* (VTSup 1; Leiden: Brill, 1953), 120–127; see also IDEM, *Das erste Buch Mose. Genesis* (9th ed.; ATD 2/4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 283–284.

⁴ J. WELLHAUSEN, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (4th ed.; Berlin: Reimer, 1963), 52: “es ist zu vermuten, dass dies Werk hier wie sonst aus J und E zusammengesetzt sei; unsere früheren Ergebnisse drängen diese Annahme auf und würden erschüttert werden, wären sie nicht erweisbar”. This quotation was recently reminded by J. L. Ska in his foreword to M. C. GENUNG, *The Composition of Genesis 37* (FAT 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), VIII.

⁵ See for instance L. SCHMIDT, *Literarische Studien zur Josefsgeschichte* (BZAW 167; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1986); L. RUPPERT, “Zur neueren Diskussion um die Josefzählung in der Genesis,” *BZ.NF* 33 (1989), 92–97; J. S. BADEN, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (ABRL; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 34–44. See also H. SEEBASS, *Genesis III: Josephsgeschichte (37,1–50,26)* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 2000), who however is much more cautious as some of his colleagues. He emphasizes that the Joseph story is “wegen ihrer formalen Geschlossenheit im Pentateuch singular” (6) and admits an important post-priestly redaction (210–211).

⁶ Despite the statement of B. J. SCHWARTZ, “Compiler” (see n. 67).

⁷ See already B. JACOB, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1934), passim, who however rejects any diachronic analysis. Very influential was the essay of H. DONNER, *Die literarische Gestalt der alttestamentlichen Josephsgeschichte* (SHAW.PH 2; Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1976); cf also R. N. WHYBRAY, “The Joseph Story and Pentateuchal Criticism,” *VT* 18 (1968), 522–528 and G. W. COATS, “Redactional Unity in Genesis 37–50,” *JBL* 93 (1974), 15–21.

compilation of two parallel documents, but – contra Wellhausen – through a model of successive complementation.

2. Reconstructing the Original Joseph Story

There is some agreement about the assumption that ch. 38, 46–48, and 49, are not an original part of the Joseph story. The case of Gen 38 is widely accepted. Gen 38 is a story about Judah, who, in contrast to the Joseph narrative, is already a quite old and married man. The tribal sentences in Gen 49 are originally unrelated to the Joseph narrative.⁸ Gen 46 and 48 are insertions, the aim of which is to strengthen the link with the foregoing Patriarchal narratives and to prepare the Exodus story.⁹ The passage where Joseph invents capitalism and makes the Egyptians into slaves of Pharaoh (47:13–26) is also an addition,¹⁰ because it does not fit well with the context of the Joseph narrative: it does not mention Joseph’s brothers and contradicts Joseph’s advice to Pharaoh as well as his actions in 41:25–56*.

The story of Potiphar’s wife in Gen 39 is probably also a case of (twofold) supplementation, as I have tried to show elsewhere.¹¹ This is the only story in which the name of Yhwh appears. At the end of Gen 39 Joseph gains a prestigious

⁸ J.-D. MACCHI, *Israël et ses tribus selon Genèse 49* (OBO 171; Fribourg and Göttingen: Presses universitaires and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 235–243.

⁹ See E. BLUM, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 246–254. See also E. BLUM and K. WEINGART, “The Joseph Story: Diaspora Novella or North-Israelite Narrative,” *ZAW* 129/4 (2017), 501–521, here 507–510.

¹⁰ H. SEEBASS, *Geschichtliche Zeit und theonome Tradition in der Joseph-Erzählung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1978), 58–61; P. WEIMAR, “Gen 47,13–26 – ein irritierender Abschnitt im Rahmen der Josefsgeschichte,” in *Auf dem Weg zur Endgestalt von Genesis bis II Regum: Festschrift für Hans-Christoph Schmitt zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (ed. M. Beck and U. Schorn; BZAW 370; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 125–138. For this passage see below.

¹¹ T. RÖMER, “Joseph and the Egyptian Wife (Genesis 39): A Case of Double Supplementation,” in *Supplementation and the Study of the Hebrew Bible* (ed. S. M. Olyan and J. L. Wright; BJS 361; Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2018), 69–83. For the secondary character of Gen 39 see B. D. EERDMANS, *Die Komposition der Genesis* (Alttestamentliche Studien 1; Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1908), 66–67; D. B. REDFORD, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50)* (VTSup 20; Leiden: Brill, 1970), 147; N. KEBEKUS, *Die Joseferzählung: Literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Genesis 37–50* (Münster: Waxmann, 1990), 31–45; K. D. LISEWSKI, *Studien zu Motiven und Themen zur Josefsgeschichte der Genesis* (EHS.T 881; Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 2008), 321–324 speaks of a “Fremdkörper”. Other authors envisage a revision of an older story in Gen 39: P. Weimar, “‘Jahwe aber ward mit Josef’ (Gen 39,2). Eine Geschichte von programmatischer Bedeutung,” in *Studien zur Josefsgeschichte* (SBA 44; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2008), 61–124; C. LEVIN, “Righteousness in the Joseph Story: Joseph Resists Seduction (Genesis 39),” in *The Pentateuch* (ed. T. B. Dozeman et al.; FAT 78; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 225–240, here 229–230 reconstructs an original text in which Yhwh is not mentioned.

position in prison, but in Gen 40 he is serving two prisoners. Moreover, the conclusion of this chapter is not completely satisfying from a narrative point of view, because the misdeed of Potiphar's wife remains undiscovered and unpunished.¹² Perhaps, then, Gen 39 was an independent (Joseph?) story modeled on the Egyptian Tale of the Two Brothers that was inserted into the original story in two or three stages.¹³

Additionally, Gen 50:24–25 is a late passage that combines a Pentateuchal and a Hexateuchal redaction. V. 24 connects with Deut 34:4 with the theme of the oath to the Patriarchs and provides an overall frame for the Pentateuch. It also appears that v. 25 belongs to a Hexateuchal redaction introducing the motif of Joseph's bones that are buried in Josh 24:32.¹⁴

Finally, there is also the question of the "competition" between Reuben and Judah, the main characters and spokesmen among Joseph's brothers. This competition has led to the assumption that one should distinguish between a "Reuben version" and a "Judah version" in the Joseph narrative, or that that the original story contained only Reuben and was later revised with the introduction of Judah¹⁵ in order to present the Joseph narrative as a story showing the reconciliation between the North (Joseph) and the South (Judah).¹⁶ But yet another option is still possible: the Judah layer belonged to the original story, because his personal guarantee as well as his speech in Gen 44:18–34 are necessary for the scene of reconciliation in ch. 44.¹⁷ The Reuben layer would then have been added by a later redactor¹⁸ who wanted to clear all brothers of blame

¹² J.-L. SKA, *Introduction à la lecture du Pentateuque: clés pour l'interprétation des cinq premiers livres de la Bible* (trans. F. Vermorel; Le livre et le rouleau 5; Bruxelles: Éditions Lessius, 2000), 206–207.

¹³ RÖMER, "Wife" (see n. 11); REDFORD, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (see n. 11), 147; SKA, *Introduction* (see n. 12), 206–207.

¹⁴ See BLUM, *Vätergeschichte* (see n. 9), 255–257; T. RÖMER, *Israels Väter: Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Freiburg and Göttingen: Universitätsverlag and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 561–566; T. RÖMER and M. Z. BRETTLER, "Deuteronomy 34 and the Case for a Persian Hexateuch," *JBL* 119 (2000), 401–419, here 410.

¹⁵ W. DIETRICH, *Die Josephserzählung als Novelle und Geschichtsschreibung: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Pentateuchfrage* (BThSt 14; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989), 20–22; KEBEKUS, *Joseferzählung* (see n. 11), 231–336, who distinguishes a Reuben basic layer, a Reuben redaction and a Judah redaction. See also MACCHI, *Israël* (see n. 8), 127–128 and SKA, *Introduction* (see n. 12), 207.

¹⁶ For this interpretation see G. FISCHER, "Die Josefsgeschichte als Modell für Versöhnung," in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (ed. A. Wénin; BETHL 155; Leuven: University Press and Peeters, 2001), 243–271, here 270–271.

¹⁷ K. SCHMID, "Die Josephsgeschichte im Pentateuch," in *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (ed. J. C. Gertz, et al.; BZAW 315; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 83–118, here 105.

¹⁸ See especially H.-C. SCHMITT, *Die nichtpriesterliche Josephsgeschichte: Ein Beitrag zur neuesten Pentateuchkritik* (BZAW 154; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 26.

by presenting a positive image of the firstborn.¹⁹ As several authors have noted, it is not easy to reconstruct an older story that contains only the interventions either of Reuben or of Judah. As an example, one may quote the latest diachronic analysis of Gen 37 by Franziska Ede and Matthew Genung. Ede postulates that the figure of Reuben was added later than Judah,²⁰ whereas Genung defends the theory according to which the original narrative of Gen 37 contained only Reuben’s proposal to throw Joseph into a well.²¹

This ongoing lack of consensus invites to explore an alternative hypothesis according to which the original narrative contained both characters, an assumption that does not exclude some revisions.²²

One could perhaps explain the shift from Reuben to Judah in a way similar to Num 1–2. In Num 1–2, the census of Israel’s tribes starts with the tribe of Reuben, the first-born, but, when it comes to the organization of the camp, the east side led by Judah is mentioned first, which is a subtle way to emphasize Judah’s importance.²³ The Joseph narrative may be crafted along similar lines: the author presupposes an audience familiar with the list of the twelve tribes or Jacob’s twelve sons, according to which Reuben is the first-born. As first-born, he has to play an important role. Yet, the author also wanted to show the importance of Judah, who ends up becoming a more central figure than Reuben.

According to the previous analysis we can conclude that the original Joseph story culminated with the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers, and that after ch. 45 we should imagine only a short notice about the descent of the father to Egypt and Joseph’s death.

To summarize, we may construct the original Joseph narrative *grosso modo* as contained in Gen 37*; 40–45*;²⁴ 46:28–33; 47:1–12; 50:1–11,14–21,26. There are certainly many more revisions and additions, but we will deal with some of those during our investigation.

¹⁹ SCHMID, “Die Josephsgeschichte im Pentateuch” (see n. 17), 105.

²⁰ F. EDE, *Die Josefsgeschichte: Literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Entstehung von Gen 37–50* (BZAW 485; Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 65–67.

²¹ GENUNG, *The Composition of Genesis 37* (see n. 4), 70–83.

²² PAAP, *Josephsgeschichte* (see n. 2), 168–169 and in a detailed way K. WEINGART, *Stämmevolk – Staatsvolk – Gottesvolk?: Studien zur Verwendung des Israel-Namens im Alten Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 247–251.

²³ See also D. T. OLSON, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch* (BJS 71; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 60–61.

²⁴ According to some authors as DIETRICH, *Novelle* (see n. 15), 40; KEBEKUS, *Joseferzählung* (see n. 11), 149–152; R. G. KRATZ, *Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 281–286, Gen 45* would have been the end of the original narrative. However, Gen 45:5–8 prepares 50:18–21 Joseph’s speech in 50:19–21 and is the necessary conclusion of Gen 37: Joseph’s brothers are now falling down before him, but in a situation in which they respect his position.

3. Dating the Joseph Narrative and Explaining Its Northern Connections

The different proposals for dating the Joseph narrative cover almost thousand years, spanning from the thirteenth century (Joseph Vergote)²⁵ to the Seleucid period.²⁶ This can give the impression that “anything goes,” but here we should recall with Umberto Eco “the limits of interpretation.” In his collection of essays, he emphasized that an interpretation is only tenable if it is confirmed by other passages of the text. If it is contradicted by other observations it must be corrected.²⁷ That means that Vergote’s idea that the original narrative arose in Mosaic times and von Rad’s and others’ theory of an origin in the “Solomonic enlightenment”²⁸ cannot stand in the light of internal and external evidence.

I have discussed these theories elsewhere,²⁹ and will myself restrict here to the question of a “Northern” origin of the Joseph narrative.

The name Joseph appears several times in the Hebrew Bible as a designation for the North; in a “neutral” way as “house of Joseph” in Judg 1:22–23,35; 2 Sam 19:20; 1 Kgs 11:28; in prophetic oracles of destruction and rejection in Am 5:6,15; Obad 18; Ps 78:67; in postexilic announcements of restoration in Ezek 37:16,19; 47:13; 48:32; Ps 77:15. Thus, several scholars are in favor of a Northern origin for the Joseph narrative.

This is, among others,³⁰ the case Erhard Blum³¹ and his student, Kristin Weingart, have made and developed.³² Blum depends on Frank Crüsemann’s idea, that the main theme of the Joseph story is dominion.³³ The question of the

²⁵ J. VERGOTE, *Joseph en Égypte: Genèse chap. 37–50 à la lumière des études égyptologiques récentes* (OBL 3; Leuven: Peeters, 1959).

²⁶ B. J. DIEBNER, “Le roman de Joseph, ou Israël en Égypte: Un midrash post-exilique de la Tora,” in *Le livre de traverse: De l’exégèse biblique à l’anthropologie* (ed. O. Abel and F. Smyth; Patrimoines; Paris: Cerf, 1992), 55–71 (he seems even to think of the Roman period); J. A. SOGGIN, “Notes on the Joseph Story,” in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honor of George Wishart Anderson* (ed. A. G. Auld; JSOTSup 152; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 336–349; A. CATASTINI, “Ancora sulla datazione della ‘Storia di Guiseppe,’” *Hen.* 20 (1998), 208–224; A. KUNZ, “Ägypten in der Perspektive Israels am Beispiel der Josefsgeschichte (Gen 37–50),” *BZ* 47 (2003), 206–229.

²⁷ U. ECO, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Advances in Semiotics; Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).

²⁸ VON RAD, “Josephsgeschichte” (see n. 3), followed by Seebass, *Zeit* (see n. 10), 102.”

²⁹ T. RÖMER, “The Joseph Story in the Book of Genesis: Pre-P or Post-P?,” in *The Post-Priestly Pentateuch: New Perspectives on its Redactional Development and Theological Profiles* (ed. F. Giuntoli and K. Schmid; FAT 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 185–202.

³⁰ For other proposals to locate the Joseph Story in the North see DIETRICH, *Novelle* (see n. 15); KEBEKUS, *Joseferzählung* (see n. 11).

³¹ BLUM, *Vätergeschichte* (see n. 9), 239–44.

³² WEINGART, *Stämmevolk* (see n. 22). A Northern origin is also postulated by SKA, *Introduction* (see n. 12), 207.

³³ F. CRÜSEMANN, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum: Die antiköniglichen Texte des Alten Testaments und der Kampf um den frühen israelitischen Staat* (WMANT 49; Neukirchen-Vluyn:

brothers in Gen 37:8 ("Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?") thus indicates that the theme of the narrative is Joseph's kingdom in Israel.³⁴ Weingart suggests that one should read the Joseph narrative as a "Ringens um Benjamin."³⁵ The story insists on the close relation between Joseph and Benjamin: "Die auslösende Frage ist daher nicht, ob Benjamin zu Joseph gehört, sondern wie er zu Joseph kommt."³⁶

The Joseph narrative should therefore be understood as "political propaganda" for the Israelite kingdom (when exactly?) because it shows that Benjamin belongs to Joseph/Israel.³⁷ However, this kind of "historical allegory" is problematic. If one wants to read the story as a conflict about Benjamin, one could also and perhaps should think of the situation after 722 BCE when Benjamin came to Judah.

4. Which Role for Benjamin

One could then perhaps read Judah's defense of Benjamin as an indication that Benjamin belongs to Judah.³⁸ Yet, in my view, a close reading of the Joseph story reveals a rather different role for Benjamin. The question is not at all whether he belongs to Israel or to Judah, but rather how the brothers will behave towards him. The author uses plot symmetry and constructs Benjamin as a "second Joseph":³⁹ he becomes the new preferred son of Jacob, and he is also singled out by Joseph, who gives him a much bigger portion of food (43:34) but then accuses him to be a thief (44:1-13). In contrast to what the brothers did to Joseph, however, they accept Jacob's and Joseph's preferential treatment of Benjamin, and even stand in solidarity when the latter is accused by Joseph. This change of behavior leads then to the reconciliation described in Gen 45. The plot is therefore not about the destiny of Benjamin per se, but about the possible reconciliation of the whole family.

A Northern setting and a preexilic date for the Joseph story also fails to give a satisfying explanation for the forced descent of Joseph to Egypt and for the fact that Joseph stays there until his death. If Joseph's story is "political propaganda"

Neukirchener, 1978), 143-155. See also C. WESTERMANN, *Genesis 37-50*, Vol. 3 of *Genesis* (BK I/3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), 29-30.

³⁴ BLUM, *Vätergeschichte* (see n. 9), 242; WEINGART, *Stämmevolk* (see n. 22), 245; BLUM and WEINGART, "The Joseph Story" (see n. 9), 501-521; 518-519.

³⁵ WEINGART, *Stämmevolk* (see n. 22), 252.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 254.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 262-266. See also BLUM and WEINGART, "The Joseph Story" (see n. 9).

³⁸ Y. LEVIN, "Joseph, Judah and the 'Benjamin Conundrum'," *ZAW* 116/2 (2004), 223-241, here 239-240.

³⁹ J. LAMBERT, *Le Dieu distribué: Une anthologie comparée des monothéismes* (Patrimoines; Paris: Cerf, 1995), 51.

(K. Weingart) for the Northern kingdom, why would one locate the story in Egypt and leave the hero in this land at the end of the story?

For Weingart, it shows that the Joseph narrative was conceived from the very beginning as a “Zwischenstück zwischen Erzelternerzählungen und Exodus,”⁴⁰ an assumption difficult to maintain.⁴¹ There is no doubt that the author of the narrative is keen to give details about Egyptian names and customs, and even attributes a cup of divination to Joseph (44:5). But if narrative necessity is the only reason for the location of the story in Egypt, why should the author tell us that Joseph married the daughter of an Egyptian priest (41:45), so that his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, are half Egyptian (41:50–52)? Or why would he relate the fact that Joseph was embalmed like an Egyptian high officer after his death (50:3)?

5. A Late (Post-P) Story

There are internal and external reasons for favoring a late date of the Joseph narrative. As often observed, there are no allusions to the Joseph narrative in the Hebrew Bible, except Ps 105, which is definitely a psalm from the Persian or Hellenistic period.⁴² The burying of Joseph’s bones in Josh 24:32 belongs to a Persian period Hexateuchal redaction, and the mention of Joseph in Exod 1:6–7 belongs to a late (P or post-P) redaction that aims at creating a link between the Joseph narrative and the exodus story.

It is often argued that the Joseph-story must be earlier than P, but as I have showed elsewhere the priestly document or priestly strata do not presuppose the Joseph story.⁴³ If one takes those passages which are traditionally assigned to P (Gen 37:1–2a; 41:46a; 46:6–7⁴⁴; 47:27b–28; 48:3–6; 49.1a,28b–33; 50:12–13; Exod 1:1–5,7)⁴⁵ one has to admit that they do not constitute by any means a coherent

⁴⁰ WEINGART, *Stämmevolk* (see n. 22), 265.

⁴¹ As mentioned above, E. Blum and others have demonstrated, that texts like Gen 48 and 50:24–25 were inserted into the Joseph narrative in order to integrate it into the broader context of the Penta- or Hexateuch: this is an indication that the original Joseph story was not intended as a bridge between the Patriarchs and the Exodus.

⁴² S. RAMOND, *Les leçons et les énigmes du passé: une exégèse intra-biblique des psaumes historiques* (BZAW 459; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 155–159.

⁴³ See already RÖMER and BRETTNER, “Deuteronomy 34” (see n. 14), and in a more detailed way RÖMER, “Joseph Story in Genesis” (see n. 29); see further SCHMID, “Die Josephsgeschichte im Pentateuch” (see n. 17); GENUNG, *The Composition of Genesis 37* (see n. 4), 137–168 and 208.

⁴⁴ The list in 46:8–27 is generally considered as P^s.

⁴⁵ This reconstruction is inspired by the synopsis of P. P. JENSON, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 221–222, who compares the reconstruction of P by Martin Noth, Karl Elliger, Norbert Lohfink, Peter Weimar, and Heinrich Holzinger. See similarly SCHMID, “Die Josephsgeschichte im Pentateuch” (see n. 17), 92, with more literature, and R. J. LUX, *Der Auserwählte unter seinen Brüdern* (Biblische Gestalten 1; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001), 150–151, who adds especially 47:5–11*. A different approach is taken by L. SCHMIDT, “Die Priesterschrift in der Josefsgeschichte (Gen 37;

text. This is a very different situation compared to the P version of the Abraham and Jacob narratives. So, why would P have acted in such a different way with the Joseph-story?

The best explanation is that P did not know the Joseph story or at least not refer to it. For P, the link between the time of the Patriarchs and the Exodus-narrative was made by the descent of 70 members of Jacob’s family to Egypt, where they then became a numerous people.

This matches the descent of Jacob and his family mentioned in Deut 26:5; Num 20:15; 1 Sam 12:8, or Ezek 20:5. In these texts, the settlement of the ancestors in Egypt is not related to a Joseph narrative. That means that the priestly texts of the end of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus (37:1; 46:6–7; 47:27b–28; 49:1a, 28b–33, 50:12–13; Exod 1:1–5a,7,13) do not show an awareness of a Joseph narrative.

6. A Diaspora Novella

It is easiest to explain the attention given to describing the Egyptian integration and career of Joseph if one assumes that the Joseph narrative is a “diaspora novella” and was composed as a story reflecting on the possibilities of a life outside of the land. Arndt Meinhold was one of the firsts to suggest this theory⁴⁶ and to point out the structural parallels in the stories of Esth, Dan 2–6 and Gen 37–50*

The theology and the exclusive use of *’elohîm*⁴⁷ also point to a late date for the Joseph story. Interestingly, the narrator never suggests any divine intervention. All comments about God’s involvement appear on the lips of the protagonists (Joseph, Jacob, Pharaoh, the brothers). Therefore, one can read the story in a totally “profane” way, or accept the theological interpretations given by Joseph or other actors. This brings the Joseph story close to the massoretic form of the book of Esther, which is also very discreet about divine intervention.⁴⁸ Finally, Joseph and Pharaoh have no theological confrontation when speaking about

39–50),” in *Auf dem Weg zur Endgestalt von Genesis bis II Regum: Festschrift für Hans-Christoph Schmitt zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (ed. M. Beck and U. Schorn; BZAW 370; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 111–123 and A. GRAUPNER, *Der Elohist: Gegenwart und Wirksamkeit des transzendenten Gottes in der Geschichte* (WMANT 97; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002), 316–379, who add important passages in order to reconstruct a more or less coherent narration without giving any clear reasons why the passages should be attributed to P. This looks very much as a “Systemzwang”; see also the critical remarks of SCHMID, “Die Josephsgeschichte im Pentateuch” (see n. 17), 92, n. 54.

⁴⁶ A. MEINHOLD, “Die Gattung der Josephsgeschichte und des Estherbuches: Diasporanovelle I & II,” *ZAW* 87– 88 (1975–1976), 306–324; 72–93.

⁴⁷ If one accepts the hypotheses that Gen 39* did not belong to the original Joseph story (see above).

⁴⁸ There is a major difference with the story of David’s ascension to the throne in which the narrator insets comments that “Yhwh was with David” (comparable to Gen 39).

God. In Gen 41:25–45, Joseph interprets the king's dreams by stating that "God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do" (v. 25), and Pharaoh answers to Joseph that "God has shown you this" (v. 39).

The theology of the Joseph narrative could be labeled as "anti-deuteronomic:" mixed marriages are accepted, as are contacts with "pagan" religions and integration into the Egyptian culture. In contrast to the book of Esther, there is no emphasis on the danger that can occur in a diaspora situation, although there are some hints about the fact that integration cannot or should not be complete. One sees it, for example, in the fact that Joseph's family is settled in the land of Goshen,⁴⁹ separated from the Egyptians,⁵⁰ and also in the note of 43:32: "They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians." This note has sometimes been compared to Herodotus' information about the segregation of the Egyptians from the Greeks: "This is the reason why no native of Egypt, whether man or woman, will give a Greek a kiss, or use the knife of a Greek, or his spit, or his cauldron, or taste the flesh of an ox, known to be pure, if it has been cut with a Greek knife." (Histories II,41).⁵¹

The situation described there reflects the Diaspora situation: Joseph, representing the Diaspora finds himself between his brothers and the Egyptians. Do we have here an allusion to Egyptian xenophobia,⁵² or even the beginning of some anti-Judean resentments in Egypt?⁵³ The same expression, "abomination (*to'eba*) for the Egyptians", appears in the Hebrew Bible again in Gen 46:34 and Exod 8:22. In both cases, the Hebrews use it in order to separate themselves from the Egyptians.⁵⁴ These verses may therefore reflect the fact that integration in another culture has its limits.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ T. RÖMER, "Goshen," *EBR* 10 (2015), cols 671–672.

⁵⁰ Goshen appears in the Joseph narrative (Gen 45:10; 46:28.34; 47:1.4.6.27; 50,8), in Exod 8:22; 9:26, and in Josh 10:41; 11,16. (Cf. also Jdt 1:9 (Gesem). The Egyptian terme *gesem* is attested in an inscription from the Ptolemaic period as a place in proximity to Avaris. LXX has *Gesem Arabia(s)* ou *Herôou polis* (=Pitome; Gn 46:28s.). In the Papyrus Revenue Laws (Ptolemy II, 283–246), the twentieth nome is called Arabia. Apparently the term designates a border territory between Egypt and the Levant.

⁵¹ Translation: G. RAWLINSON in <http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.2.ii.html>. Accessed 01/14/2021.

⁵² REDFORD, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (see n. 11), 235, evokes racial tensions in the Saïte and Persian period. See also the discussion in T. RÖMER, "Deux repas 'en miroir' dans l'histoire de Joseph (Gn 37–50)," in *Fête, repas, identité: Hommage à Alfred Marx à l'occasion de son 70e anniversaire* (ed. C. Grappe; RHPHr 93; Strasbourg: Université de Strasbourg, 2013), 15–27, here 22–24.

⁵³ J. YOYOTTE, "L'Égypte ancienne et les origines de l'antijudaïsme," *RHR* 163 (1963), 133–143.

⁵⁴ J. EBACH, *Genesis 37–50* (HTK.AT; Freiburg: Herder, 2007), 472–473. For a somewhat different interpretation see A. PINKER, "Abomination to Egyptians' in Genesis 43:32, 46:34, and Exodus 8:22," *OTE* 22 (2009), 151–174.

⁵⁵ C. LEVIN, *Der Jahwist* (FRLANT 157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 297.

If the Joseph narrative is to be understood as a “Diaspora novella”⁵⁶ then one must ask again why the hero “Joseph” is a character from the North.⁵⁷ First of all, there are internal, “narratological” explanations. The author of the Joseph story knows the Jacob cycle, including the birth of Jacob’s sons. According to this story, Joseph and Benjamin are the (only) sons of Rachel, Jacob’s favorite wife. It is therefore quite logical for the author of the Joseph story to choose these two sons in order to construct his plot about the problem of preferred sons in a family. Second, the Northern character of Joseph could also be explained by the hypothesis that the Joseph story has a “Northern” origin. Genung argues that the Joseph story was composed in Samaria “nonetheless in communication with the Egyptian Diaspora community,”⁵⁸ written as an independent narrative after P and before the LXX.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, it is still possible that the Joseph story originated in the Diaspora. One could, for instance, locate the author(s) of the story in Elephantine,⁶⁰ a colony, which may have had Northern origins.⁶¹ Although this Aramean speaking and writing community was mainly composed of soldiers, mercenaries, and peasants, there is evidence of literacy as shown by the important numbers of administrative and economic documents, in addition to the Aramaic version of the Ahiqar story discovered in Elephantine.

But it is also possible to locate the origin of the Joseph story in the Delta, which would also fit to the Northern character of Joseph.

According to Flavius Josephus there were also Samaritans living in Egypt during the Hellenistic time and perhaps even since the end of the Persian era (*Ant.* 11.321–322; 12.710). He also reports that under Ptolemy VI (180–145) there was a conflict between Jews and Samaritans living together in Alexandria over the question of whether the temple of Jerusalem or the sanctuary at Gerizim had been built according to the prescriptions the Torah (13.74–79). Andronicus, speaking for Jerusalem, “persuaded the king to decide that the temple in Jerusalem had been built in accordance with the laws of Moses” (13.79). If those tensions between Judeans and Samaritans arose only in the second century BCE, we might assume that there was a quite peaceful cohabitation of both groups in Egypt in late Persian and early Hellenistic times. If this were the case the Joseph story could have originated in a Samaritan Diaspora context.

⁵⁶ So also B. U. SCHIPPER, “Joseph, Ahiqar, and Elephantine: The Joseph Story as a Diaspora Novella,” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 18 (2018), 71–84.

⁵⁷ SCHMID, “Die Josephsgeschichte im Pentateuch,” 110.

⁵⁸ GENUNG, *The Composition of Genesis 37* (see n. 4), 210.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁶⁰ M. FIEGER and S. HODEL-HOENES, *Der Einzug in Ägypten: Ein Beitrag zur alttestamentlichen Josefsgeschichte* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 373–375.

⁶¹ K. VAN DER TOORN, “Anat-Yahu, Some Other Deities, and the Jews of Elephantine,” *Numen* 39 (1992), 80–101.

The Northern Joseph who reconciles with his “southern” brothers, especially Judah, which is one of the major themes of the narrative,⁶² may reflect a cohabitation between Northern and Southern “Israelites,” and also the collaboration between the authorities of Samaria and Jerusalem. The documentation from Elephantine shows that the Israelite-Judean Diaspora living there wrote simultaneously to the governors of Jerusalem and of Samaria concerning the question of the rebuilding of the Yahu-Temple. They received as an answer a common statement of Bagavahyah, governor of Judah, and of Delaiah, the son of the governor of Samaria, Sanballat. This suggests a friendly relationship between Samaria and Jerusalem at the end of the fifth century BCE,⁶³ at a time where the sanctuary on Gerizim probably already existed. Apparently the Yahu-worshippers in Elephantine thought that the leaders of Judah and Samaria both had influence over the rebuilding of the Yahu-Temple and other cultic concerns. These observations indicate a close collaboration between Jerusalem and Samaria, between the North and the South, that may be reflected in the Joseph narrative.

The theme of the Joseph story also fits a “pan-israelite” ideology corresponding to post-exilic prophetic texts, which announce a restoration of “Joseph” and “Judah” (Ezek 37:19; Zech 10:6).

7. A Persian or Hellenistic Period Setting of the Joseph Story

There are compelling arguments for understanding the Joseph story as a “late” text, perhaps even one of the latest writings of the Pentateuch. The question, which we will explore with some examples that follow, is whether the Joseph story reflects the context of the Persian or the Hellenistic period. The *terminus ad quem* for the dating the Joseph story, including later additions, is the translation of the Pentateuch into Greek, which is often situated in the first half of the third century BCE,⁶⁴ but this date depends on the letter of Aristeas and may be

⁶² See FISCHER, “Versöhnung” (see n. 16) and also P. WEIMAR, “Josef – Eine Geschichte vom schwierigen Prozeß der Versöhnung (1995),” in *Studien zur Josefsgeschichte* (ed. P. Weimar; SBAB 44; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2008), 9–26.

⁶³ G. GRANERØD, *Dimensions of Yahwism in the Persian Period: Studies in the Religion and Society of the Judaean Community at Elephantine* (BZAW 488; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 41–44.

⁶⁴ A. VAN DER KOOIJ “The Septuagint and Scribal Culture,” in *XIV Congress of the IOSCS Helsinki, 2010* (ed. M.K.H. Peters; SCS 59; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013), 33–39; E. TOV, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (3rd ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 131; M. TILLY, *Einführung in die Septuaginta* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 26–37. Cf. also T.H. LIM, *The Formation of the Jewish Canon* (The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 74–88.

challenged, so that a later date, such as the end of the third or the beginning of the second century (fragments of Leviticus and Deuteronomy; Rahlfs nos. 801, 819, and 957),⁶⁵ is possible.

And indeed, there are some passages in the Joseph story that fit better in the Ptolemaic period than they do in the Persian period.

7.1. Joseph's Second Dream

37:9 He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, "Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, "What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?"

Joseph's second dream is somewhat redundant in regard to the first one. The difference is that the first was only concerned with Joseph's brothers and provided an explanation for their jealousy. The second dream introduces the father and also the mother, who according to the narrative context of the story, does not exist anymore. Whereas the first dream has an agricultural setting, the second has a cosmological one.

There is no other example in the Hebrew Bible that sun, moon, and stars are under the control of a human being. Several biblical texts stress the fact that these celestial beings are under divine control and that they are part of Yhwh's celestial army.

In Ezra's prayer in Neh 9:6, we read:

"You are Yhwh, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, ... To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven prostrates before you."

According to Joseph's second dream, sun, moon, and the stars prostrate before him as if he were God. The best parallel for this occurs in the Syriac version of the Ahiqar tradition (which was also known, in Aramaic at Elephantine) where Sennacherib is compared to "the god of heaven" who "commands thunder and lightning, the sun, the moon, and the stars."

The confusion between "God" and Joseph is a topic, that is taken up in other parts of the Joseph narrative. For instance, in Gen 40:8, after the two high-ranked prisoners have communicated their dreams to Joseph, he tells them: "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me." And he then gives the interpretations that belong to God. Similarly, Joseph tells Pharaoh that not he, but *'elohim* will explain his dreams, but he himself provided the interpretation (Gen 41:15–16 and 25). Finally, in Gen 50, when the brothers ask Joseph to forgive them, he answers: "am I in the place of *'elohim*?" (50:19). In a way the question remains open, and one may indeed read the narrative as a story about divine

⁶⁵ LXX fragments of Genesis are from the first century BCE.

providence, or as the story of a powerful manipulation organized by Joseph in Egypt.

In the Ancient Near East and Egypt, the celestial bodies are associated or identified with deities. In Gen 37, sun and moon are apparently meant to represent Joseph's father and mother. Thus if one looks at the "gender" of these celestial bodies in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the sun (Ra/Shamash) and the moon (Thot/Sin) are male; at Ugarit, the sun (Shapshu) is female and the moon is male (Yarihu); in the Hebrew Bible, the sun (Shemesh) can be male or female, the moon (Yareah) is male. The only mythological context where the image of Joseph's second dream would fit is the Greek one: Helios (the sun, male) and Selena (the moon, female).

All this could thus suggest a Hellenistic setting for Joseph's second dreams. Although, Konrad Schmid has tried to show how this second dream makes perfect sense in the context of the Joseph narrative,⁶⁶ many scholars consider this passage as a later expansion of the original text.⁶⁷ If this is the case, one could imagine a revision of the narrative in the Hellenistic period.

7.2. Joseph's Departure from Hebron

Gen 37:14 So, he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me." So, he sent him from the valley of Hebron. He came to Shechem.

According to Gen 37:14 Jacob is located in the vicinity of Hebron whereas in 33:1–20, after the reconciliation with his brother, he settles down in the vicinity of Shechem. The distance between Hebron and Shechem as the crow flies is about 75 km, which does not seem to be a very logical distance for pasturing a flock. It is therefore plausible to consider the mention of Hebron as an addition,⁶⁸ probably due to an effort of combining the Joseph narrative with the priestly document according to which Jacob moves to Mamre-Hebron (35:29) where he is buried (50:13).

The mention of the valley of Hebron is also intriguing since the Iron Age Hebron, which is to be identified with Tel Rumeida/Gebel er-Rumede, was located on a mountain. Apparently during the Persian period this site was unsettled

⁶⁶ K. SCHMID, "Josephs zweiter Traum. Beobachtungen zu seiner literarischen Funktion und sachlichen Bedeutung in der Josephsgeschichte (Gen 37–50)," *ZAW* 128/3 (2016), 374–388.

⁶⁷ See for instance GENUNG, *The Composition of Genesis 37* (see n. 4), 129–133; EDE, *Josephsgeschichte* (see n. 20), 48–49.

⁶⁸ H. GUNKEL, *Genesis* (4th ed.; HKAT I/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1917), 391; A. DE PURY, *Promesse divine et légende culturelle dans le cycle de Jacob. Tome I et II* (Études bibliques; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1975), 564–565; SEEBASS, *Zeit* (see n. 10), 77–78; B. J. SCHWARTZ, "How the Compiler of the Pentateuch Worked: The Composition of Genesis 37" in *The Book of Genesis. Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (ed. C. A. Evans et al.; VTSup 152; FIOTL 6; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 263–278, here 266–267, n. 10; GENUNG, *The Composition of Genesis 37* (see n. 4), 194.

and in the Hellenistic period Hebron resettled to a new location (Wadi el-Halil/Nahal Hebron).⁶⁹ Joseph’s departure from Hebron may therefore best be understood against the backdrop of the Hellenistic period.⁷⁰

7.3. Pharaoh’s Birthday

Gen 40:20 On the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, he made a feast for all his servants, and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. 21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand; 22 but the chief baker he hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted to them.

The conclusion of the narration about Joseph’s interpretation of the dreams of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker finds its fulfillment at the occasion of the king’s birthday (יום הולדת). As pointed out by Redford the celebration of Pharaoh’s birthday is not attested before the Ptolemaic period.⁷¹ The Rosetta Stone (197 BCE) mentions the birthday of Ptolemy V, which is related to an amnesty: “whereas those who were in prison and those who were under accusation for a long time, he has freed of the charges against them”, in addition to the killing of impious people.⁷²

If one does not want to relate v. 20 to the Ptolemaic period one would need to view the “anniversary” as the anniversary of the king’s ascent to the throne, but this theory is not very plausible because of the specific Hebrew term that is used. One could however imagine that the mention of the birthday is a later insertion in the original story.

It is also noteworthy that hanging is not used as a death penalty in Ancient Egypt: the current method of this rare practice was impalement.⁷³ Does this mean that the author is not aware of Egyptian practices, or does he write in a time, where hanging has become more popular (see Esth 5:14, 6:4, 7,9–10, 8:7, 9:13–14, 9:25)?

7.4. Pharaoh’s Dreams and the Famine

The so-called Famine Stele, discovered in 1889, on the Sehel Iland in the Nile near Aswan presents a close parallel to Pharaoh’s dreams and their interpretation by Joseph. The text presents itself as having been written in the eighteenth year of

⁶⁹ D. JERICKE, *Die Ortsangaben im Buch Genesis: ein historisch-topographischer und literarisch-topographischer Kommentar* (FRLANT 248; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 16–35.

⁷⁰ See also GENUNG, *The Composition of Genesis 37* (see n. 4), 215–216.

⁷¹ REDFORD, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (see n. 11), 205–206.

⁷² English translation of the Greek section: <http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/texts/rosettastone.htm>; see also http://rosettastone.hieroglyphic-texts.net/whole_text_with_ids/. Accessed 01/25/21.

⁷³ Oral communication by Youri Volokhine, Geneva.

king Djoser, who is presented at the top of the stele with three Egyptian deities, but the text was actually written during the reign of Ptolemy V (around 187) as a legitimation of the priesthood of Khnum over Egypt.⁷⁴ Like the Joseph story, the famine stele mentions seven years of hunger, which is the situation of the land when the dream revelation occurs, in which the deity promises Pharaoh to bring the famine to an end. As a sign of gratitude, the king makes a grant to the temple of Khnum in Elephantine. The parallels between both texts are numerous:

	Joseph	Famine stela
Threat of famine	7 years to come	7 years of famine have exhausted the land: "Hapy had failed to come in time, in a period of seven years."
Mention of grains	7 good years, 7 thin years	"Grain was scant, kernels were dried up."
Revelation	Dream	Dream "I shall make Hapy gush for you, no year of lack and want anywhere ... Gone will be the hunger years, ended the dearth in their bins."
Deity	(Ha-)Elohim	Khnum
Mediator	Joseph	Imhotep
	Ha-elohim has decided everything	Reconstruction and cult of Khnum in Elephantine

Recently Bernd Schipper has drawn attention to papyrus BM 10565 from the Roman period which mentions the failed flooding of the Nile and seven years of the Nile's abundance of water, as well as the papyrus Berlin 23071 which, although dating to the first or second century, may contain an older text from the Persian or Ptolemaic period.⁷⁵ The Berlin papyrus also mentions a famine of seven years, a dream of the pharaoh, and an overseer appointed by the king to resolve the problem. The Berlin papyrus mentions the temple of Heliopolis, and in the Joseph story (Gen 41:45), Joseph marries the daughter of a priest of On (Heliopolis). These texts belong to the "Book of the Temple" tradition that was widely distributed in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, and may have influenced the famine stele. According to Schipper the tradition of seven years of famine could be dated to the late Persian period, so that the story of Pharaoh's dream may have been composed during that time.

⁷⁴ B. U. SCHIPPER, "Joseph, Ahigar, and Elephantine" (see n. 56).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

7.5. Joseph’s Invention of Capitalism⁷⁶

¹³ Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. ¹⁴ Joseph collected all the money to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh’s house. ¹⁵ When the money from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan was spent, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, “Give us food! Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone.” ¹⁶ And Joseph answered, “Give me your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone.” ¹⁷ So they brought their livestock to Joseph; and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. That year he supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock. ¹⁸ When that year was ended, they came to him the following year, and said to him, “We cannot hide from my lord that our money is all spent; and the herds of cattle are my lord’s. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. ¹⁹ Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate.” ²⁰ So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. All the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh’s. ²¹ As for the people, he removed them to the cities from one end of Egypt’s border to the other. ²² Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh, and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore, they did not sell their land. ²³ Then Joseph said to the people, “Now that I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you; sow the land. ²⁴ And at the harvests you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones.” ²⁵ They said, “You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh.” ²⁶ So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth. The land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh’s.

Many scholars would agree that Gen 47:13–26 does not belong to the original Joseph story. Joseph’s brothers and father are not mentioned, and the whole story is concerned with showing how Joseph brings all economic power into the hands of Pharaoh: money, livestock, the lands of the Egyptians, and the Egyptians themselves, who become slaves of the king.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ For the following passage see my detailed treatment in T. RÖMER, “Joseph, inventeur du capitalisme (Gn 47,13–26): enjeux économiques et politiques dans un ajout à l’histoire de Joseph,” in *Bible et Politique: Hommage au Professeur Olivier Artus pour son 65ème anniversaire* (ed. S. Ramond and P.J. Titus; Bangalore: ATC Publishers, 2019), 17–34.

⁷⁷ See among others, H.-C. SCHMITT, *Die nichtpriesterliche Josephsgeschichte: Ein Beitrag zur neuesten Pentateuchkritik* (BZAW 154; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 64–65; WESTERMANN, *Genesis 37–50* (see n. 33), 186; H. SEEBASS, *Genesis III: Josephgeschichte (37,1–50,26)* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 2000), 142–143; LEVIN, *Jahwist* (see n. 53), 306; According to WEIMAR, “Gen 47,13–26” (see n. 10), here 137 this passage belongs to one of the latest texts in the Pentateuch. See similarly EDE, *Josefsgeschichte* (see n. 20), 393. For the discussion whether the passage was written by one redactor, or whether one should distinguish two or more hands see the discussion in RÖMER, “Capitalisme” (see n. 76).

It is possible that this passage reflects economic changes at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period. First of all, it is interesting that v. 13–15 mention the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan (Joseph also collects money in Canaan!). This may reflect the incorporation of the Levant into the Ptolemaic kingdom under Ptolemy Soter I (around 320–315). According to the MT of v. 21⁷⁸ Joseph transfers the people to cities, which may reflect urbanization under the Ptolemaic rulers. According to Flavius Josephus (*Ant* 12:7), Ptolemy, having laid siege to Jerusalem in 312, deported an important number of the habitants to Alexandria. This was part of the process of urbanization in Egypt, which affected also Memphis and Canopus.⁷⁹

Finally, one may compare the acting of Joseph in this passage to the strategies of Cleomenes of Naucratis as an administrator and builder of Alexandria. When there was a scarcity of grain in Alexander's empire, which was less severe in Egypt than in the neighboring countries, he first forbade its export from Egypt. Later he allowed export but placed heavy taxes on it.⁸⁰

In a way, Joseph acts in Gen 47:13–26 as a dioecete, which after the Ptolemaic king was the most important person. This passage was probably also written when the Joseph story was already conceived as an introduction to the Exodus story,⁸¹ because it contains ironic allusions to the latter. It shows that before the Hebrews became slaves of the Pharaoh, a Hebrew (Joseph) made all the Egyptians slaves of their king.

8. Conclusion

The Joseph narrative, now integrated into Gen 37–50, was originally an independent narrative. It was inserted at the end of Genesis *after* the integration of the P-texts,⁸² by redactors who wanted to construct a Hexa- or a Pentateuch and give some space also to a voice of the Diaspora.

The Joseph narrative can be characterized as a “Diaspora novella.” Its ideology reflects the situation of the Diaspora as known from the Elephantine texts (double

⁷⁸ LXX and Sam: “as for the people, he made slaves of them from one end of Egypt to the other.” This is a correction of the somewhat complicated Hebrew text.

⁷⁹ For the process of urbanization under the Lagides see A. AYMARD and J. AUBOYER, *L'Orient et la Grèce antique* (Histoire générale des civilisations; Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963), 452; A. BOWMAN, “Ptolemaic and Roma Egypt: Population and Settlement,” in *Urbanization and Population* (ed. A. Bowman and A. Wilson; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 317–358, here 326–327.

⁸⁰ G. LE RIDER, “Cléomène de Naucratis,” *BCH* 121 (1997), 71–93, here 74.

⁸¹ EDE, *Josefs-geschichte* (see n. 20), 393.

⁸² Theoretically the Joseph narrative could have been written down earlier than the composition of P, and P would have ignored it. But if P is to date at the beginning of the Persian period, then it seems more logical that the Joseph narrative is younger than P.

names, intermarriages, etc.). Its author perhaps originated from the North and wanted to show the importance of the Diaspora for "all Israel."

The date of the original narrative can be the late Persian period, and while there are several passages that fit better into a Greek, Ptolemaic context, most of these passages belong to later revisions.