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Genesis 39 and the Composition of the Joseph Narrative

The following article argues that the story of Joseph and the Egyptian wife does not belong to the original Joseph story. It was inserted in order to present Joseph as a model of wisdom. A later redactor added the theological comments according to which "Yhwh was with Joseph" in order to strengthen the idea that the whole Joseph story is a story about divine providence.

Keywords: Joseph, Potiphar, tale of two brothers, wisdom tradition, prison

There is a paradox in scholarly opinion about the Joseph story in the book of Genesis. A majority of scholars would probably agree that this tale differs from the foregoing narratives about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They would also probably agree that the Joseph story is an impressive piece of narrative art and story-telling, as pointed out in publications by Hermann Gunkel and Gerhard von Rad, along with others.[1] The Egyptologist Donald B. Redford wrote, "No piece of prose elsewhere in the Bible can equal the literary standard attained by the Joseph story of Genesis 37–50."[2] But on questions about the story's literary unity, composition, and date, the opinions diverge.[3]

1 H. Gunkel, *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt* (4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1917); G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose. Genesis* (4th ed.; ATD 2–4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972); see also *idem*, „Josephsgeschichte und ältere Chokmah," in *Congress Volume. Copenhagen 1953* (VT.S 1; Leiden: Brill, 1953), 120–127.

2 D. B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 422.

3 For an overview of the 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 am Main: P. Lang, 1994); F. W. Golka, "Genesis 37–50: Joseph Story or *Israel*-Joseph Story?," *CBR* 2 (2004): 153–177; M. C. Genung, *The Composition of Genesis 37: Incoherence and Meaning in the Exposition of the Joseph Story* (FAT II/95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 1–24.

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The Literary Coherence of the Joseph Narrative

While praising the literary artistry of the Joseph story, Gunkel and von Rad still followed Julius Wellhausen and postulated a J and an E version of the story that later redactors would have merged into one narrative.[4] This was due to a certain "Systemzwang," already acknowledged by Wellhausen, who argued that there must be a Yahwistic and an Elohistic strand in the Joseph narrative, otherwise the whole Documentary theory would collapse.[5] The separation of the Joseph-story into Yahwistic and Elohistic versions still has supporters today,[6] but no one ever succeeded in reconstructing two coherent, independent narratives. First of all, the classical criterion of the Documentary hypothesis, namely the use of different divine names, does not work at all for the Joseph narrative, since the tetragrammaton only appears in the narrative of Genesis 39 and a few other texts like Genesis 38 and 46, which are often deemed secondary. Second, as Herbert Donner rightly observed,[7] the repartition of J and E started with the observation of parallels in Genesis 37 and, from there, was postulated for the entire Joseph narrative.[8] To be sure, Genesis 37–50 contains many cases of "doublets" (e. g.,

4 Gunkel, Genesis, 396–397, and *passim*; von Rad, "Josephsgeschichte und ältere Chokmah," 120–127; see also *idem*, *Das erste Buch Mose.* 283–284.

5 J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments (1899)*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 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."

6 See for instance L. Schmidt, *Literarische Studien zur Josefsgeschichte* (BZAW 167; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986); L. Ruppert, "Zur neueren Diskussion um die Joseferzählung in der Genesis," *BZ.NF* 33 (1989): 92–97; J. S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (ABRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 34–44. See also H. Seebass, *Genesis III. Josephgeschichte (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 singulär" (6) and admits an important post-priestly redaction (210–211).

7 H. Donner, *Die literarische Gestalt der alttestamentlichen Josephsgeschichte* (Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philologisch-historische Klasse, Abh.2; Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1976), 13–14. Donner's critical view on the separation of the Joseph story in J and E was anticipated by P. Volz and W. Rudolph, *Der Elohist als Erzähler ein Irrweg der Pentateuchkritik? An der Genesis erläutert* (BZAW 63; Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1933), 143.

8 A recent example is 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.*; VT.S 152, FIOTL 6; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 263–278. For a critique of his reconstructed "sources," see E. Blum and K. Weingart, "The Joseph Story: Diaspora Novella or North-Israelite Narrative," *ZAW* 129 (2017): 501–521, 508, n. 28 and Genung, *Composition*, 102–105.

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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.). There are double interventions by Reuben and Judah, especially in Genesis 37, in order to protect Joseph's life and to convince Jacob to let Benjamin descend with them to Egypt. Joseph's father has two names: He is mostly called Jacob, but sometimes Israel.

At first glance, these doublets could speak for parallel documents brought together by a redactor or a compiler, but no one so far has been able to reconstruct a coherent J narrative and a coherent E narrative.[9] Some of these repetitions could be part of the author's narrative strategy and are necessary for understanding the plot of the story,[10] whereas other doublets would indeed need a diachronic explanation. But this explanation can hardly be achieved with the documentary hypothesis, nor with the idea that the Patriarchal stories of Genesis 12–36 and the Joseph novella[11] have the same origin and history of composition.

Any attentive reader of the book of Genesis notices the differences between the tale about Joseph and the narratives about the patriarchs in Genesis 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 forms 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 Genesis 39). Contrary to Genesis 12–36 the narrator is not omniscient, and, again with Genesis 39 as the exception, he does not tell the audience that the deity intervenes directly in the destiny of the protagonists. There are also clear differences with the Exodus story, most notably that in Genesis the Pharaoh is depicted positively and Egypt is seen as a place of sojourn. However, one should note that in Genesis and

9 Cf. also the remarks of F. Ede, *Die Josefsgeschichte. Literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Entstehung von Gen 37–50* (BZAW 485; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 13–14.

10 See already B. Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora. Genesis übersetzt und erklärt* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1934), *passim*, who however rejects any diachronic analysis. Cf. also R. N. Whybray, "The Joseph Story and Pentateuchal Criticism," *VT* 18 (1968): 522–528; G. W. Coats, "Redactional Unity in Genesis 37–50," *JBL* 93 (1974): 15–21.

11 One of the first to characterize the Joseph narrative as a "novella" was Gunkel, *Genesis*, 397.

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Exodus alike, the kings of Egypt do not bear names, but appear more as prototypes that represent the power of Egypt.

Reconstructing the Original Joseph Story

At least in European scholarship, the recent trend is to emphasize the narrative coherence of the Joseph narrative,[12] but also to admit redactional revisions. However, the importance of revisions and layers differs greatly. The recent publication about the formation of Genesis 37–50 by Franziska Ede,[13] who follows quite closely the ideas of her supervisor Reinhard G. Kratz,[14] is a multi-layered model with a short narrative kernel. In her *Fortschreibungsmodell*, she postulates for each chapter five or more layers that are not always the same from one chapter to another.[15] This model of the "Göttingen school"[16] raises a methodological problem. According to Ede the first written edition of the Joseph novella presupposes the fall of Jerusalem and Judah in 587 B.C.E., and most of the revisions and addition are pre-priestly. If we date the first version of the story around 580 B.C.E. and P around 520 B.C.E.,[17] it would allow around 60 years for approximately twenty revisions of the Joseph narrative. If one considers that each revision (unless the addition of some words) requires the writing of a new scroll, such a model does not seem very plausible. I would therefore advocate a more "moderate" model of complementation of the original Joseph narrative.

There is some agreement on the assumption that the majority of Genesis 38, 46–48 and 49, are not an original part of the Joseph story. The case of

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12 J. Ebach, *Genesis 37–50* (HThK.AT; Freiburg: Herder, 2007); and R. Lux, *Josef: der Auserwählte unter seinen Brüdern* (2nd ed.; Biblische Gestalten 1; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2014), both insist on a "synchronic" reading of Genesis 37–50. They admit the possibility of redactional inserts and revisions but are not interested in reconstructing those.

13 Ede, *Josefsgeschichte*.

14 R. G. Kratz, *Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments. Grundwissen der Bibelkritik* (UTB 2157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 282–286; English translation: R. G. Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

15 Ede, *Josefsgeschichte*, 1.

16 The same model is advocated for the formation of Exodus 1–15 by C. Berner, *Die Exoduserzählung. Das literarische Werden einer Ursprungslegende Israels* (FAT 73; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

17 See for instance A. de Pury, "P^g as the Absolute Beginning," in *Les dernières rédactions du Pentateuque, de l'Hexateuque et de l'Ennéateuque* (ed. T. Römer and K. Schmid; BEThL 203; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 99–128.

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Genesis 38 is widely accepted. Genesis 38 is a story about Judah, who, in contrast to the Joseph narrative, is already an older, married man and the text has no immediate connections to the Joseph narrative. The tribal sentences in Genesis 49 are originally unrelated to the Joseph narrative.[18] Genesis 46* and 48 are insertions, the aim of which is to strengthen the link with the foregoing Patriarchal narratives and to prepare for the Exodus story.[19] The passage where Joseph invents capitalism and transforms the Egyptians into slaves of Pharaoh (47:13–26) is also an addition,[20] because it does not fit well with the context of the Joseph narrative: It does not mention Joseph's brothers and it contradicts Joseph's advice to Pharaoh, as well as his actions in 41:25–56*.

Additionally, Gen 50:24–25 is a late passage that combines a Pentateuchal and a Hexateuchal redaction. Verse 24 connects with Deut 34:4 through the theme of the oath to the Patriarchs and provides an overall frame for the Pentateuch. Verse 25 belongs to a Hexateuchal redaction introducing the motif of Joseph's bones that are buried in Josh 24:32.[21]

The case of Genesis 39 seems more complicated. Whereas some scholars want to consider it as part of the original Joseph novella,[22] others think that the story about Joseph and the Egyptian women is a late insertion into the story.[23]

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18 Jean-Daniel Macchi, *Israël et ses tribus selon Genèse 49* (OBO 171; Fribourg: Presses universitaires, 1999), 235–243.

19 See E. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 246–254. See also Blum and Weingart, "Joseph Story," 507–510.

20 H. Seebass, *Geschichtliche Zeit und theonome Tradition in der Joseph-Erzählung* (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1978), 58–61.

21 See D. B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50)* (VTSup 20; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 24, and 186; Blum, *Vätergeschichte*, 255–257; Thomas Römer, *Israels Väter. Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1990), 561–566. For a diachronic differentiation between v. 24 and v. 25 see also Ede, *Josefsgeschichte*, 503–504.

22 Ebach, *Genesis 37–50*, 158–160; followed by Blum and Weingart, "Joseph Story," 510 with footnote 35; K. Schmid, «Die Josephsgeschichte im Pentateuch,» in *Abschied vom Jahwisten. Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (ed. J. C. Gertz, K. Schmid and M. Witte; BZAW 315; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 83–118, 105; P. Dubovsky, «Genesis 39 and the Tale of the Two Brothers,» in *Bible et Terre Sainte. Mélanges Marcel Beaudry* (ed. J. E. Aguilar Chiu, K. J. O'Mahony and M. Roger; New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 47–61.

23 These scholars will be mentioned in the following section.

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The Case of Genesis 39[24]

In the context of the Documentary hypothesis, Genesis 39 was considered as being part of the J document, since it is one of the few texts in Genesis 37–50 mentioning the tetragrammaton. Therefore Gunkel ascribed Genesis 39* to J and Genesis 40* to E.[25] He explained the fact that one finds the term *'elohim* in Genesis 39 with the idea that J could of course also use *'elohîm*, especially when Joseph speaks to the Egyptian woman,[26] whereas Wellhausen considered the verses 6–19 as belonging to the Elohist.[27] Wellhausen's solution recognizes that the core narrative about the Egyptian woman who wants to have sex with Joseph, and her false accusations that land him in jail (v. 6–20), is framed by two passages that emphasize Joseph's ascent: firstly in the house of his master who puts him in charge of his whole household (v. 1–6); and secondly in the jail where he becomes supervisor of all the prisoners (v. 21–23). All the mentions of Yhwh occur in these frames; the parallel between v. 1–6 and v. 21–23 is reinforced by the use of the root *ṣ-l-ḥ* in vv. 2, 3 and 23, as well as through the use of the substantive *ḥen* in vv. 4 and 21. In its present form, Genesis 39 therefore presents a triptych of ascent, descent and new ascent, anticipating in a way Joseph's destiny in Egypt.

But there are several indications that the story is a later insertion into the original narrative. After the accusation of the Egyptian woman, her husband throws Joseph into prison, probably in order to await judgment.[28] But in v. 21–23, because of Yhwh's intervention, Joseph finds favor in the sight of the chief jailer who places everything under his authority so that Joseph is bestowed with a position similar to what he received in v. 4, where his Egyptian master established him "over his house." Neither scenario fits with the beginning of chapter 40. In this narrative where Joseph interprets the

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24 The following takes up, in a somewhat modified form, ideas that I published in 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; Brown Judaic Studies 361; Providence: Brown University Press, 2018), 69–83.

25 Gunkel, *Genesis*, 420.

26 Gunkel, *Genesis*, 424.

27 J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments (1899)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963), 54–55.

28 The idea of a prison as a punishment for a crime is not attested in Egypt before the Ptolemies. See R. Müller-Wollermann, *Vergehen und Strafen: zur Sanktionierung abweichenden Verhaltens im alten Ägypten* (Probleme der Ägyptologie 21; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 217; and already J. Vergote, *Joseph en Egypte: Genèse chap. 37–50 à la lumière des études égyptologiques récentes* (Orientalia et biblica Lovaniensia 3; Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1959), 37–40.

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dreams of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, he is neither a prisoner (as in 39:19–20) nor the supervisor of the jail (as s in 39:22–23). According to 40:4, Joseph is a servant of the "chief of the guard," who charges him with the royal prisoners in order to wait on them (*šrt*). Curiously, the chief jailer bears here the same title (*śar haṭṭabbaḥim*) as the Egyptian man who, according to 39:1, acquires Joseph when he is brought to Egypt. For this reason some commentators have argued that the "chief of the guard" in chapter 40 should be the same person as the one who buys Joseph and makes him the overseer of his house.[29] In a way, this is true in regard to the original narrative. Another indication for the later insertion of Genesis 39 is the theme of the dreams that structure the first part of the Joseph narrative. In Genesis 37 Joseph's two dreams are immediately followed by the two dreams of the royal prisoners, who anticipate the two dreams of Pharaoh. If this observation is right, we have to clarify how Genesis 40* could directly follow Genesis 37*.

Gen 39:1, an Introduction to which Narrative?

39:1: "Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, 'eunuch' of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there."

Genesis 39:1 refers back to the end of 37:36, a verse that, together with 37:28, frames the scene about the brothers' presentation of Joseph's robe to Jacob. The relation between the three verses is not easy to define. In the present context, 37:36 and 39:1 frame the story about Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38, and Gen 39:1 can be read as a *Wiederaufnahme* of 37:28, 36 after the insertion of Genesis 38. The mention of the Ismaelites in 39:1 refers back to 37:28b, whereas the mention of the Medanites[30] is related to Midianite merchants in 37:28a. If the Midianites are a gloss in Gen 37:28, 39:1 could be older than 37:36.[31]

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29 For instance, Ebach, *Genesis 37–50,* 207–208; Lux, *Josef*, 119.

30 The Massoretes' vocalization in 37:36 is strange. Probably they tried to identify Midiantes and Ishmaelites as suggested by Abraham Ibn Ezra. See the discussion in Ebach, *Genesis*, 110.

31 The appearance of both groups in Genesis 37 has been explained by the conflation of two parallel accounts (J/E). A better solution could be to understand the mention of the Madianites as a gloss that wanted to identify Ishmaelites and Midianites (cf. Judg 8:22–24 where Midianites and Ishmaelites seem to have been identified; see also Ede, *Josefsgeschichte*, 38.). If one considers indeed 37:28aα1 as an insert, then one obtains a smooth story according to which the brothers, following Judah's advice, sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite. This is clearly the original scenario as presupposed in 45:4 where Joseph

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The name *Potiphar* (פוֹטִיפַר) is clearly of Egyptian origin; it means, "he whom Re gives" (Pꜣ-dî-pꜣ-Rʿ) and is attested from the Saite to the Ptolemaic period.[32] Curiously, Joseph's father in law, the priest of Heliopolis (Gen 41:45, 50 and 46,20[33]) bears exactly the same name. The MT tries to differentiate in writing the priest's name as פוֹטִי פֶרַע but LXX always uses for both cases the same transliteration Πετεφρης, an indication that both persons have the same name. In Genesis 39 the name Potiphar only appears in v. 1. In the narrative Joseph's Egyptian master is mostly referred to as his "lord" (*'adôn*),[34] also in regard to his wife. One may therefore conclude that originally Joseph's owner had no name and that the name Potiphar in 39:1 (and 37:36) was inserted by a later redactor who was looking for a proper name and took the one he found in chapter 41.[35]

Also, the term *saris* occurs in Genesis 39 only in verse 1. It is used in 40:2 and 7 to designate the hierarchical status of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. It is disputed whether the etymology of the word indicates castration.[36] In any case the title more generally denotes the status of a high official in whom the king trusts. One may suspect that the redactor in 39:1 took over the term from Genesis 40, in order to suggest for Joseph's lord the same hierarchal rank as the one of the chief cupbearer and chief baker.[37]

The title *śar haṭṭabahim* (literally "chief of the butchers") is also used in 40:3 and 4 as a title for the overseer of the jail, so that a translation as "chief

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tells his brothers: "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt." 37:36 presupposes the introduction of the gloss in 37:28 and may therefore be later than 39:1 (see E. Blum, "Zwischen Literarkritik und Stilkritik. Die diachrone Analyse der literarischen Verbindung von Genesis und Exodus – im Gespräch mit Ludwig Schmidt," *ZAW* 124 (2012): 492–515, 500). It is however also possible that both texts have been reworked simultaneously in regard to the characterization of Joseph's Egyptian master, who is described exactly in the same way in both verses.

32 D. B. Redford, *Study*, 228.

33 This verse is a late insert in a priestly (P^s) genealogy.

34 Twice as "the Egyptian" in v. 2 and 5.

35 Maybe he wanted also to suggest that Joseph already stayed in the house of his future father-in-law. The identification of the priest Potiphar with Joseph's master is common in the Jewish and Christian traditions; see already Jub 40:12, Test Joseph 18; for more references see L. Ginzberg, *Bible Times and Characters from Joseph to the Exodus*, Vol. 2 of *The Legends of the Jews (*Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977 [orig. 1910]), 43 with footnote 100 in Vol. 5, 337.

36 See the discussion in R. Peter-Contesse, "Was Potiphar a Eunuch?," *BT* 47 (1996): 142–146.

37 But maybe there was some intended irony: If Joseph's master were indeed a eunuch, one could easily understand why his wife would be sexually frustrated (*Bereshit Rabba*, Par 86).

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of the (royal) bodyguard" seems to be appropriate.[38] Since this title also occurs only in Gen 39:1, one could equally consider it to be a redactional insert and claim that the original story, with no elaboration, spoke only of an anonymous Egyptian (cf. v. 2 and 5) who bought Joseph as his servant.[39] Yet if one considers the fact that, according to Gen 40:3–4 and 41:12, the "chief of the guard" seems to be a known person, one may conclude that the original version of Gen 39:1 was the introduction to the story in Genesis 40* about the dreams of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. That would mean that Joseph's buyer in 39:1* was originally the overseer of the jail, mentioned in Genesis 40. Or in other words, Gen 39:1 in its primitive form was originally the introduction to the story of Joseph's encounter with the two royal prisoners in Genesis 40 and his interpretation of their dreams. Since Joseph's function according to 40:3 is to serve (*šrt*) the royal prisoners, and Gen 39:4a describes his activity in his master's house with the same root *šrt*, it is possible that 39:4a belongs with 39:1* to the oldest story.[40]

The transition between Genesis 37 and Genesis 40 can be reconstructed as follows:

39:1*: Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. The captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. 39:4a: Joseph found favor in his sight and waited him. 40:1aα: Some time after this[41], 40:2 Pharaoh became angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, 40:3a: and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard[42]. 40:4: The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he waited on them.

Due to the integration of the story about Joseph's harassment by the Egyptian woman, the reader must understand Joseph's situation in prison (in Genesis 40) to be not that of a servant, but of a prisoner. But through the

38 In 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 39–40, the same expression is used to describe the closest officer to the Babylonian king.

39 C. Levin, *Der Jahwist* (FRLANT 157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 278.

40 See similarly Ede, *Josefsgeschichte*, 103 and 111, who wants to assign the entirety of verse 4 to the oldest narrative. V4b however presents Joseph as *'al habbayît*, a title that denotes a very high position (the second in the house) which fits well with Genesis 39, but not to Joseph's role in Genesis 40.

41 It is clear that 40:1aßb is a supplement introduced by a redactor who wanted to explain why the Pharaoh became angry against his officers by claiming that they both "sinned" against the king of Egypt. Note also that this verse omits the lexeme *śr* when speaking of the cupbearer and the baker.

42 40:3b presents Joseph as "captured" in the prison and belongs therefore to the same revision of chapter 40, which was made when the story of the Egyptian wife in Genesis 39 was introduced into the Joseph story; see also N. Kebekus, *Die Joseferzählung. Literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Genesis 37–50* (Internationale Hochschulschriften; Münster: Waxmann, 1990), 48.

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integration of Genesis 39, the chief of the prison appears to be a different person from the Egyptian "chief of the guard" in whose house Joseph stayed in 39:1*. For that reason, a redactor in 39:21–23 also introduced a new title for the figure responsible for the royal prisoners, *śar bēt hassohar*, in order to emphasize the distinctiveness between Joseph's master whose wife assaulted him and the chief jailer in whose house he is in Genesis 40.[43]

Further Reasons to Consider Genesis 39 as an Addition to the Joseph Narrative

The above diachronic analysis of 39:1 shows that this verse was originally conceived as an introduction to the story of the royal prisoners' dreams in Genesis 40. In addition to these observations, one may add that Genesis 39 displays some stylistic particularities in comparison with the other parts of the Joseph novella: the preposition *k* followed by an infinitive occurs in the whole Joseph story 5 times in Genesis 39, and only twice elsewhere (44:30–31).[44] Furthermore 50 % of all usages of *wayyehî* are concentrated in Genesis 39[45] and the preposition *ba'ašer* ("because") only occurs in Gen 39:9, and 23;[46] in the other parts, the author uses *ka'ašer* (12 times).

One may add that, in the context of the Joseph novella, the story of Joseph's encounter with the Egyptian woman lacks a conclusion, because the lie of the woman remains undiscovered and unpunished, in contrast to the crime committed by Joseph's brothers. And finally, in the whole Joseph narrative the episode of Genesis 39 is never referenced.[47]

The Origin and Intent for Including the Narrative of the Egyptian Wife

The narrative about Joseph's resistance to the sexual advances of the Egyptian woman in 39:7–20 is a unified story, where some repetitions are stylistic

43 This title only occurs in Gen 39:21, 22, 23. The repetition indicates a strong will to make clear that Joseph is now under the custody of someone else.

44 Redford, *Study*, 43. In other chapters the construction appears with the preposition *b*.

45 See the list in Redford, *Study*, 53.

46 The other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible are Qoh 7:2 and 8:4, further indicating a "late Biblical Hebrew."

47 See K. D. Lisewski, *Studien zu Motiven und Themen zur Josefsgeschichte der Genesis* (EHST XXIII/881; Bern: Lang, 2008), 323. Even in 40:15, which may belong to a later revision, Joseph explains that fact that he is in jail by the comment that he has been kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews and that he had done nothing that they should have put him into the "pit" (*bôr*), an allusion to the pit in Genesis 37.

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and do not indicate several revisions (i. e., twice, she attempts to have sex with Joseph; she repeats her accusation first to the servants and then to her husband).[48]

The motif of the spurned wife is quite common in folktales and other stories and occurs, among many others, in the legends of Bellerophon and Hippolytus.[49] The closest parallels to Genesis 39 can be found in the Egyptian tale of the Two Brothers, of which only one manuscript is conserved (i. e., the Oberney papyrus).[50] Although older research was reluctant to admit any direct dependence of Genesis 39 on this tale, newer investigations have made such borrowing plausible.[51] Both contain the motif of the clothes (although used differently).[52] In the Egyptian tale the woman speaks to Bata, the younger brother, similar to how the Egyptian woman speaks to Joseph in Genesis 39, where she tries to grasp him: "She got up, took hold of him, and said to him: Come let us … sleep together." Bata delivers a similar speech as Joseph, qualifying the woman's proposal as "this great wrong that you said to me," and like the woman of Genesis 39, the woman in the tale of the Two brothers perverts the events in the presence of her husband by taking up Bata's speech as if she would have protested.[53]

In contrast to Genesis 39, the tale of the Two Brothers is a complicated and long mythological text, which legitimates Bata as pharaoh. The author of Genesis 39 has only taken over the first part of the tale, though it can be

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48 This has in particular been suggested by C. Levin, "Righteousness in the Joseph Story: Joseph Resists Seduction (Genesis 39)," in *The Pentateuch, International Perspectives on Current Research* (ed. T. B. Dozeman *et al.*; FAT 78; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 223–240, who speaks of a "Righteousness Edition"; and F. Ede, *Josefgeschichte*, 93–102, 105–106, who postulates a "gesetzesorientierte Bearbeitung." The only reference to law that one can find is Deut 22:25 but even here there is no indication of a quote. Adultery is stigmatized as well in Egypt as in the ancient Levant and Mesopotamia. The expression "great wickedness" and sin against the deity refers more to the episode of Abimelech who wants to sleep with Sarah in Gen 20:9 and to the Egyptian tale of the Two Brothers. The "quotations" are stronger in regard to this tale as to biblical texts (see below). And the doublets are not bare repetitions; on the contrary, the apparent redundancy introduces subtle changes (see Ebach, *Genesis*, 183–185).

49 Redford, *Study*, 92.

50 See the analysis of this tale in W. Wettengel, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern: der Papyrus d'Orbiney und die Königsideologie der Ramessiden* (OBO 195; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 2003), who also discusses the parallels with Genesis 39.

51 H. Ringgren, „Die Versuchung Josefs (Gen. 39)," in *Die Väter Israels. Beiträge zur Theologie der Patriarchenüberlieferungen im Alten Testament. Festschrift Für Josef Scharbert zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. M. Görg and A. R. Müller; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989), 267–270; P. Dubovsky, "Genesis 39," 47–61.

52 The motif of clothes also fits in the context of the Joseph story, where after Genesis 37, Joseph gets into trouble because of his clothes.

53 For further thematic and verbal similarities, see Dubovsky, "Genesis 39," 50.

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argued that the Joseph story is also about Joseph's ascent.[54] Contrary to Genesis 39, Anpu the elder brother learns that his wife has cheated him and thus kills her.

If one postulates that the author-redactor who inserted the first version of Genesis 39 was familiar with the Tale of the Two Brothers, one has to explain how he could know this tale that exists only in one copy from the New Kingdom. But this cannot be used as an argument to claim that Genesis 39 must be very old, since allusions to Bata and his castration are also mentioned in the Papyrus Jumilhac which was written in the Ptolemaic period. This means that the tale was still known in Persian and told in Hellenistic times.[55]

If the author had access to this tale, it seems likely that he was familiar with Egyptian literature. He used the tale of the Two Brothers for several reasons. First, with this story, he transforms Joseph into a model of loyalty and chastity by presenting him as the ideal young lad who follows the exhortations of the first part of the book of Proverbs, which constantly warns against the "foreign" woman:

Proverbs 7: "13 *She seizes him* and kisses him, and with impudent face she says to him: … 16 I have decked my couch with coverings, colored spreads of *Egyptian* linen; … 18 Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with love. 19 *For my husband is not at home*; he has gone on a long journey. … 21 With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. …23 … He is like a bird rushing into a snare, not knowing that it will cost him his life. 24 And now, my children, listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth. 25 Do not let your hearts turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths. 26 for many are those she has laid low, and numerous are her victims.

If the author of Genesis 39 was familiar with this text,[56] which dates from the late Persian[57] or early Hellenistic[58] period, we would have an indication

54 Some scholars think that Genesis 39* existed first as an independent oral (and written) tradition before it was inserted as a supplement (Redford, *Study*, 181–182; H.-C. Schmitt, *Die nichtpriesterliche Josephsgeschichte. Ein Beitrag zur neuesten Pentateuchkritik* [BZAW 154; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980], 84–85). The fact that the story has no real ending shows however that the redactor conceived it as a "prologue" to Genesis 40.

55 See J. Vandier, *Le Papyrus Jumilhac* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1962), 46–47, 105, 114–15. This shows that this tale was certainly known in the Persian and Hellenistic periods. I thank my colleagues Bernd U. Schipper (Berlin) and Nicolas Grimal (Paris) for their help with this question.

56 The author may also allude to the story of 2 Samuel 13, where Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar. Both stories share several expressions and motifs (the beauty of the person who is sexually harassed; the seizing; the order to "sleep with me"; and the shouting). See Y. Zakovitch, "Through the Looking Glass: Reflections/Inversions of Genesis Stories in the Bible," *Biblical Interpretation* 1 (1993): 139–152, 149–151; Lidewski, *Studien*, 328–331.

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for dating the insertion of Genesis 39 into the Joseph novella around the end of the 4th century B.C.E.

In light of this text, Joseph appears as a model to follow for the young male audience of the story.

Whereas the original Joseph story is about his integration into Egypt and his reconciliation with his brothers,[59] the redactor who inserted Genesis 39* introduced a new topic into the narrative, making his Diaspora audience aware that life in the diaspora can also have some dangers and that one must behave in an absolutely loyal way. This more "realistic" picture of relations between the Egyptians and the "Hebrews" living in Egypt occurs in some other texts in Genesis 37–50, which may also belong to a later revision of the Joseph narrative (the fact that Joseph's family is settled in the land of Goshen, separated from the Egyptians;[60] see also the note of 43:32, according to which eating together with the Hebrews is considered an "abomination," *to'eba*; cf. also Gen 46:34 and Exod 8:22). These verses may reflect the fact that integration into another culture has limits.[61]

The "Yahwistic" Revision in Genesis 39

The story of Joseph and the Egyptian woman is framed through verses 1–6 and 21–23, where the tetragrammaton is used several times. These mentions of the divine name Yhwh may indicate a later revision of the original story. Verse 4 comes indeed somewhat late after verses 2–3, which describe how Joseph succeeds in the house of his master because of Yhwh's assistance. Similarly, verse 6 makes better sense when directly following v. 4.[62] That

57 G. Baumann, *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1–9: traditionsgeschichtliche und theologische Studien* (FAT 16; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 272; A. Müller, *Proverbien 1–9: der Weisheit neue Kleider* (BZAW 291; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 314–315; B. U. Schipper, *Hermeneutik der Tora: Studien zur Traditionsgeschichte von Prov 2 und zur Komposition von Prov 1–9* (BZAW 432; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 266–270.

58 M. V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18A; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 5–7.

59 See our remarks about the genre and date of the Joseph novella below.

60 Goshen is mentioned in the following biblical texts: Gen 45:10; 46:28, 34; 47:1, 4, 6, 27; 50:8; Exod 8:22; 9:26 and Josh 10:41; 11:16. Cf. Jdt 1:9 (Gesem); for the link with an Egyptian name, see T. Römer "Goshen," *EBR* 10 (2015): cols 671–672.

61 Levin, *Jahwist,* 297.

62 See also D. M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster, 1996), 209–210; 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, 92–94.

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means that the original introduction to the story of Joseph's encounter with the Egyptian woman were verses 1*, 4 and 6,[63] whereas v. 2–3, 5 and 21–23 were added by a Yahwistic redactor.

This redactor was eager to correct the absence of an immediate divine intervention in the Joseph story. By supplementing Genesis 39 through mentioning the name of the god of Israel eight times, he emphasizes that in contrast to the original Joseph novella (and the original story of Genesis 39) Yhwh was present in Egypt from the very beginning and not only protected Joseph, but also blessed the Egyptians who were friendly toward him. The Yahwistic supplementation was perhaps triggered by the integration of Genesis 38 in its present context.[64]

Genesis 39 in the Context of the Formation of the Joseph Novella

It has become clear that the story contained in Genesis 39 was not part of the original Joseph narrative, according to which Joseph, after being sold by his brothers to merchants on their way to Egypt, was bought by an Egyptian official, the "captain of the guard," who was in charge of royal prisoners. He employed Joseph to wait on the royal prisoners (Gen 39:1*, 4a; 40:1*, 2–3a, etc.), whose dreams he interpreted.

The question of the extent of the original Joseph narrative cannot be discussed here in detail. Recently, Ede has taken up an idea from earlier research according to which the oldest Joseph story ended with Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams and his ascent to became the vizier of Egypt[65] (Gen 37*; 39–41* [in this version the story of the Egyptian woman did not exist yet][66]). According to Ede, this first edition presupposes an Egyptian diaspora, and can be labeled "Diaspora novella": "Israel lebt, und zwar … in seinem Lieblingssohn Josef und im Exil erfolgreich fort."[67] But the reconstruction of such a short novella is not convincing, because it does not tell of any encounter between Joseph and his brothers after he was brought to

63 The author-redactor of Genesis 39 integrated the older transition in 39:1* and 4a.

64 In this chapter the term Yhwh is used twice and this may have inspired the redactor who framed the narrative in Genesis 39. The juxtaposition of both stories also creates an opposition between Judah, who sleeps with his daughter-in-law, whom he takes for a prostitute and Joseph, who resists the Egyptian woman.

65 Ede, *Josefsgeschichte*, 137–140. See also Carr, *Fractures*, 289, Kratz, *Komposition*, 283; H. Strauß, „Weisheitliche Lehrerzählungen im und um das Alte Testament," *ZAW* 116 (2004): 379–395, 381. These authors think of a preexilic (oral?) tradition about Joseph, contrary to Ede.

66 Only 39:1 and 4 as an introduction to Genesis 40*.

67 Ede, *Josefsgeschichte*, 140.

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Egypt. And unfortunately, Ede does not explain why a post-587 B.C.E. diaspora novella would focus on the "Northern" Joseph.

According to Ede, the second stage of the formation of the Joseph narrative would be Genesis 37–45*, which now focuses on the conflict and reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers and is no longer interested in Egypt. This story, which contained the first version of Genesis 39 and ended in 45:26–27,[68] is interested in the question about the successor of the patriarch Jacob / Israel, arguing in favor of Joseph.[69]

It is certainly right that the reconciliation with the brothers is the culmination of the novella, but it is difficult to postulate an ending without telling the encounter between Joseph and his father and his descent to Egypt.[70] The original Joseph narrative could then roughly be reconstructed as follows[71]:

Gen 37: 2 (starting with יוסף בן־שבע־עשרה שנה היה רעה את־אחיו without את־בני בלהה ואת־בני זלפה נשי אבי) 3–13, 14* (without מעמק חברון), 18–20, 23–27, 28b, 31–35. **39**: 1* (without פוטיפר סריס פרעה שר הטבחים), 4a. **40**: 1aα, 2, 3a, 5a, 6–14, 16–19, 20* (without יום הלדת את־פרעה). **41**: 1–26, 28–33, 37–45, 47, 49, 53–54, 57. **42**: 1a, 2–4, 6, 8–21, 23, 34, 26, 38. **43**: 1–16, 24–34. **44**: 1a, 2abα, 3–26, 34. **45**: 1–2, 3aα* (ויאמר יוסף אל־אחיו), 4b, 5, 8–9, 11–28. **46**: 6b. **47**: 7a, 10, 11a, 12, 28a, 29–31. **50:** 1–8a, 10, 14–21, 22a, 26.

This story may indeed be labeled a "diaspora novella." Arndt Meinhold was one of the first to suggest this theory[72] and to point out the structural parallels between the stories of Esther, Daniel 2–6, and Genesis 37–50*. The narrator of the original story uses exclusively *'elohîm* when speaking of the deity so that Joseph and Pharaoh have no theological confrontation when speaking about God. There is no direct 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 Masoretic form of the book of Esther, which is also discreet about divine intervention.[73] The theology of the Joseph narrative is sometimes labeled as "anti-deuteronomistic":

68 W. Dietrich, *Die Josephserzählung als Novelle und Geschichtsschreibung. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Pentateuchfrage* (Biblisch theologische Studien; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989), 53–66; and Kratz, *Komposition*, 255.

69 Ede, *Josefsgeschichte*, 141 and 514–516.

70 K. Schmid, "Josephsgeschichte," 94–105.

71 This reconstruction is based on my lectures about the Joseph narrative at the Collège de France; cf. https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/thomas-romer/p19612741351026748_content.htm.

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

73 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 Genesis 39).

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mixed marriages are accepted, as are contacts with "pagan" religions and integration into Egyptian culture.

If the Joseph narrative is to be understood as a "Diaspora novella,"[74] then one must ask again why the hero "Joseph" is a character from the North. 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 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. In a recent study, Matthew Genung argues that the Joseph story was composed in Samaria, but was "nonetheless in communication with the Egyptian Diaspora community,"[75] having been written as an independent narrative after P and before the LXX.[76]

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[77], a colony, which may have had Northern origins.[78] Although this Aramean speaking and writing community was mainly composed of soldiers, mercenaries, and peasants, there is evidence of literacy in the important numbers of administrative and economic documents, as well as 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 the Northern character of Joseph. According to Flavius Josephus there were also Samaritans living in Egypt during the Hellenistic

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74 This understanding of the Joseph narrative has been vehemently rejected by Blum and Weingart, "Joseph Story." But I cannot find in this article any new arguments, and their proposal to date the Joseph novella around the 8th century B.C.E. in the Northern kingdom fails to explain the Egyptian setting of the narrative, especially Joseph's integration including his marriage with the daughter of an Egyptian priest and his stay in Egypt until his death. The diaspora character of the narrative has recently been highlighted again by B. U. Schipper, "Joseph, Ahiqar, and Elephantine: The Joseph Story as a Diaspora Novella," *JAEI* 18 (2018): 71–84.

75 Genung, *Composition*, 210.

76 Genung, *Composition*, 212. I have myself argued for a post-priestly insertion of the Joseph novella into the Pentateuch, cf. 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), 185–201.

77 M. Fieger and S. Hodel-Hoenes, *Der Einzug in Ägypten. Ein Beitrag zur alttestamentlichen Josefsgeschichte* (ATiD 1; Bern: Lang, 2007), 373–375.

78 K. van der Toorn, "Anat-Yahu, Some Other Deities, and the Jews of Elephantine," *Numen* 39 (1992): 80–101.

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time, perhaps even since the end of the Persian era (Ant. 11.321–22; 12.7–10). He also reports that under Ptolemy VI (180–145 B.C.E.) 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 B.C.E., we might assume that there was a peaceful cohabitation of both groups in Egypt in late Persian and early Hellenistic times. If this was the case, the Joseph story could have originated in a Samaritan Diaspora context.

The Northern Joseph who reconciles with his "southern" brothers, especially Judah, which is one of the major themes of the narrative, may reflect a cohabitation between Northern and Southern "Israelites," and also the collaboration between the authorities of Samaria and Jerusalem. 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).

It is difficult to know when Genesis 39 was inserted into the Joseph narrative. This probably happened after the Joseph novella was integrated into the priestly Proto- Pentateuch[79] and after the insertion of Genesis 38. The integration of Genesis 39 took place during the late Persian or early Hellenistic period.[80] To some extent, the author wanted to correct the positive view of Egypt in the original Joseph narrative in preparation for the Exodus narrative, where Egypt is portrayed negatively.

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79 There is a debate whether the Joseph narrative was from the very beginning conceived as a Fortschreibung of the patriarchal narrative as claimed by C. Levin, "Abschied vom Jahwisten?," in *Verheißung und Rechtfertigung: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament II* (ed. C. Levin; BZAW 431; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 43–58, 49; Berner, *Exoduserzählung*, 432–433 ; Ede, *Josefgeschichte*, *passim*, or whether it was conceived as an independent narrative although its author knew the Patriarchal narratives. For the latter see with convincing arguments Schmid, "Josephserzählung," 93–95; Genung, *Composition*, 210–212.

80 Since the author uses the Egyptian tale of the Two Brothers, one may speculate whether he lived or had lived in the Egyptian diaspora.

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