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Tracking Some “Censored” Moses Traditions Inside and Outside the Hebrew Bible

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Tracking Some “Censored” Moses Traditions Inside and Outside the Hebrew Bible*

This article deals with extrabiblical Moses traditions that have their provenance in Hellenistic times: Moses the leprous, the warlord, and the husband of an Ethiopian woman. The Hebrew Bible contains some allusions to these traditions (Exod 1:10; 4:6–7; Num 12:1; 21:4–9) that were probably inserted after the first publication of the Torah.

I. Gunkel versus Wellhausen, Tradition Criticism versus Redaction Criticism: the Difficult Quest for Oral (and Written) Traditions

The documentary hypothesis developed by J. Wellhausen and others was mainly devoted to the distinction of three major literary layers, which later compilers or redactors combined in order to create the Pentateuch or Hexateuch: J/E (Wellhausen expressed caution concerning the possibility of distinguishing between J and E), D, and P. For Wellhausen these three documents represented three steps in the evolution of the Israelite and Judean religion: J/E, the non-clerical and diversified cult of Yahweh during the monarchy; D, the centralization of the Judahite religion; and P, the ritualization and legalistic conception of the cult. I intend here not to comment on this quite negative view of Judaism, but to underline the fact that Wellhausen was not interested in investigating the different elements that made up J/E, D, and P. Although recognizing that J might have used some oral traditions,¹ Wellhausen did not pay much attention to the origins and social settings of those traditions. His younger colleague H. Gunkel took the opposite position.² At the end of the nineteenth century, the publication of Mesopotamian tablets containing stories of creation and flood sim-

* I express my gratitude to R.J. Thompson of Harvard University, who kindly revised the manuscript.

¹ See for instance J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (14th ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963), 7–8.

² H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. J. Nogalski; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997).

ilar to the biblical accounts prompted questions about the material that biblical authors or collectors had at their disposal. Gunkel initiated a growing interest and fascination for oral traditions, and some decades later most scholars accepted that almost all biblical narratives were based on old and oral traditions. This conception enabled scholars to claim a second-millennium origin for some of the Biblical traditions, especially those of the Pentateuch.³ The form-critical and tradition-historical methods were at the zenith of Biblical studies, and most scholars were very confident in the retrieval of the older *Vorlagen*.

At least in European scholarship, the collapse of the classical documentary hypothesis, which brought a number of scholars to move the date of the Yahwist from the early monarchy into the Babylonian exile or even to bid him "farewell,"⁴ has also produced new skepticism about the possibility of reconstructing oral traditions or other *Vorlagen* used by the authors of the Pentateuch. The work of H. Wahl on the Jacob narrative typifies this skepticism.⁵ He claims that one cannot clarify the contours of the oral traditions from which the Jacob narrative originated. According to Wahl, oral tradition fluctuates and therefore renders illusory the effort to track the traditions that inspired the authors and redactors of the Jacob story. On the basis of a wide-ranging review of oral tradition, he argues that oral tradition does not function as an efficient means to perpetuate a narrative substance, since memory does not last more than about fifty years. This negative assessment of the possibility to reconstruct older traditions also underlies the current emphasis on redactors in the discussion concerning the formation of the Torah. The shift of interest to the latest redactors of the Torah⁶ triggers models in which the text appears as a "rolling corpus," as W. McKane puts it.⁷ Thus a short written text undergoes constant increase and supplement by redactors. For C. Levin for instance, the only events originally told between the call of Moses and the crossing of the Sea consist of the following: "So Moses took his wife and his sons, put them on

3 See for instance the idea of a patriarchal age that was popular in commentaries on the book of Genesis until the 1960s and that still appears in the chronological tables of many modern Bible translations.

4 T.B. Dozeman and K. Schmid, ed., *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (SBL Symposium Series 34; Atlanta: SBL, 2006).

5 H.M. Wahl, *Die Jakobserzählungen. Studien zu ihrer mündlichen Überlieferung, Verschriftung und Historizität* (BZAW 258; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997).

6 T. Römer and K. Schmid, ed., *Les dernières rédactions du Pentateuque, de l'Hexateuque et de l'Ennéateuque* (BETHL 203; Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

7 W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, Vol. 1 (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), l–liii.

a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt ... (4:20) The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth ... (12:37) They set out from Succoth, and camped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness ... (13:20) When the Israelites looked back there were the Egyptians advancing on them (14:10)."⁸ In a way, the emphasis on redactional criticism in recent theories about the formation of the Torah⁹ obfuscates the investigation about the underlying traditions. Recent theories about the book of Numbers, which R. Achenbach¹⁰ elaborated and with which I am sympathetic, argue that most (if not all) of the book is to be understood as late *Fortschreibungen* and redactional activity. Of course, one admits the existence of some traditional material, but this material remains constantly blurred and its provenance unclear.

No doubt the reconstruction of an *Ur-Text* or an *Ur-Tradition* often appears hazardous. One should also recall that biblical literature, with few exceptions, stems not from the work of authors but is instead tradition literature. Therefore, one cannot oppose orality and written traditions, as D. Carr has shown.¹¹ Literariness, at least for narratives, is shaped by orality and traditions. Some cases allow for such a reconstruction. The most obvious case involves the reconstruction of the (oral) source of Jesus' sayings (the Q source) in the New Testament through a comparison of the Synoptic Gospels. The result of this investigation, as far as I can see, is accepted by a majority of NT scholars. In the Hebrew Bible, the books of Kings and Chronicles also allow for synoptic investigation. Traditionally, scholars have considered Chronicles a reinterpretation of the Deuteronomistic account in Samuel and Kings. G. Auld has challenged this view by reconstructing a shared text from which the contemporaneous redactors of Kings and of Chronicles drew.¹² Even if his reconstruction is not entirely

⁸ C. Levin, *Der Jahwist* (FRLANT 157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 76–77.

⁹ For a very critical evaluation of this trend, see J. Van Seters, *The Edited Bible. The Curious History of the "Editor" in Biblical Criticism* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006). In this book Van Seters integrates former articles (e. g. "The Redactor in Biblical Studies: A Nineteenth Century Anachronism," JNSL 29 [2003] 1–19) to which J.L. Ska, "A Plea on Behalf of the Biblical Redactors," *Studia Theologica* 59 (2005): 4–18 replied.

¹⁰ R. Achenbach, *Die Vollendung der Tora. Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Numeribuches im Kontext von Hexateuch und Pentateuch* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte 3; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003).

¹¹ D. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹² A.G. Auld, *Kings Without Privilege: David and Moses in the Story of the Bible's Kings* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994). See now also R.F. Person Jr., *The Deuteronomistic History and the Books of Chronicles: Scribal Works in an Oral World* (Ancient Israel and Its Literature 6; Atlanta: SBL, 2010).

convincing, it reflects a growing awareness that the book of Chronicles does not depend on the current text of Samuel–Kings but on a different textual base that one can, at least in some cases, rediscover approximately.¹³

II. Extrabiblical Moses Traditions

Unfortunately, the Hebrew Bible does not contain much other material useful for synoptic comparison outside of some doublets in Exodus–Numbers on the one hand and in the book of Deuteronomy on the other (especially Num 13–14 and Deut 1:19–45; or Exodus 32 and Deut 9:7–10:5). These texts have been frequently analyzed with different results¹⁴ and I do not intend to reopen this file. I would like instead to explore another direction: investigating some extra-biblical Moses traditions that may allow for a better understanding of some rather obscure texts of the Torah. If one takes seriously the present state of Pentateuchal research, a considerable number of texts appear to belong to the Persian period. This scholarly development makes some extrabiblical accounts about Moses almost contemporaneous with the canonization of the Torah. If this development is correct, it implies that, theoretically, these extrabiblical accounts may contain traditions as old as those that became part of the official story of Moses in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁵

No wonder, then, that authors like Hecateus of Abdera, Manetho, Artapanus, and Flavius Josephus are enjoying somewhat of a comeback in biblical scholarship. Some of the traditions conserved in the works of these authors can highlight the variety of traditions about Moses and the Exodus at the time of the gathering of the official Pentateuch traditions. We should remember, however, that we have access to most of these authors only through fragments gathered by much later authors. For instance, Manetho's original *History of Egypt* from the third century B.C.E. was probably altered several times by pro- and anti-Jewish editors before it came to be

13 D. Carr, "Empirische Perspektiven auf das Deuteronomistische Geschichtswerk" in *Die deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke. Redaktions- und religionsgeschichtliche Perspektiven zur "Deuteronomismus"-Diskussion in Tora und Vorderen Propheten* (ed. M. Witte et al.; BZAW 365; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 1–17.

14 The most recent work on this is V. Sénéchal, *Rétribution et intercession dans le Deutéronome* (BZAW 408; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010).

15 P.R. Davies, "Judeans in Egypt: Hebrew and Greek Stories", in L.L. Grabbe, ed., *Did Moses Speak Attic? Jewish Historiography and Scripture in the Hellenistic Period* (JSOT-Sup. 317; European Seminar in Historical Methodology; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 108–128.

known by Josephus in the first century B.C.E. and by Eusebius in the fourth century C.E.¹⁶ Artapanus is available to us through Eusebius' quoting of Alexander Polyhistor.¹⁷ The case of Hecateus, who must have lived at the end of the fourth century B.C.E., is also complicated because fragments of his work are only preserved in Diodorus Siculus' Library – which, in turn, is quoted by the Byzantine Patriarch Photius.¹⁸ We cannot be sure of the originality of these quotes. Nevertheless, we can retrace the content and in many places even the wording of these sources from Hellenistic times, which may in some cases reflect oral traditions from the Persian period. In what follows, I will take some intriguing passages from the biblical Moses tradition and try to show how extrabiblical traditions may shed new light on these texts.

1. Moses' Leprosy and Israel's War against Egypt

The biblical story of Moses' call in Exod 3:1–4:17 has undergone several redactions. Most scholars agree that 4:1–17 belongs to a late post-priestly redactor, as argued by E. Blum and others:¹⁹ Moses' new objections come

¹⁶ G.P. Verbrugge and J.M. Wickersham, *Berosos and Manetho Introduced and Translated: Native Traditions in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 108–128. It is also interesting to note that Josephus on one hand quotes Manetho positively in order to prove the historicity of the exodus and on the other hand attacks him on his stories about the leprosy and their leader.

¹⁷ C.R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors, Vol. 1: Historians* (Texts and Translations 20. Pseudepigrapha Series 10; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 189.

¹⁸ M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism, Vol. 1: From Herodotus to Plutarch* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974), 20–35. Recently, several works have argued that the frequently quoted passage on the Jews did not derive from Hecataeus, but from a later source. According to D.S. Schwartz, "Diodorus Siculus 40.3 – Hecataeus or Pseudo-Hecataeus," in *Jews and Gentiles in the Holy Land in the Days of the Second Temple, the Mishna and the Talmud* (ed. M. Mor et al.; Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2003), 181–197, Diodorus 40.3 does not preserve a fragment from Hecataeus. See also R.E. Gmirkin, *Berosus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch* (LHBOTS 433; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 33–71; also, C. Zamagni, "La tradition sur Moïse d' 'Hécatee d'Abdère' d'après Diodore et Photius" in *Interprétations de Moïse: Égypte, Judée, Grèce et Rome* (ed. P. Borgeaud, T. Römer, and Y. Volokhine; Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture 10; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 133–169, 162–169.

¹⁹ E. Blum, "The Literary Connection Between the Books of Genesis and Exodus and the End of the Book of Joshua" in *A Farewell to the Yahwist?* (ed. T.B. Dozeman and K. Schmid; SBL Symposium Series 34; Atlanta: SBL, 2006), (see n. 4) 89–106, 94–95; J.C. Gertz, *Tradition und Redaktion in der Exoduserzählung. Untersuchungen zur Endredaktion des Pentateuch* (FRLANT 186; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 305–327; T. Römer, "Exodus 3–4 und die aktuelle Pentateuchdiskussion" in *The Interpretation of Exodus: Studies in Honour of Cornelis Houtman* (ed. R. Roukema; CBET 44; Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 65–79. Traditionally this passage has been ascribed to the E

too late since Yahweh has already replied to Moses' first refusal by promising assistance and revealing his name (3:11-14). The new signs that God concedes to Moses apparently presuppose Priestly texts from the plague story. Therefore, J.C. Gertz ascribes 4:1-17 to the "Pentateuch redaction."²⁰ If one takes a closer look at this passage, however, it may not stem from one author or redactor. It has often been observed that the first sign in 4:1-5 (the transformation of Moses' staff into a snake) preludes Moses and Aaron's first miracle in Egypt in 7:8-13 (the transformation of Aaron's staff into a snake during the first encounter between Yahweh's messengers and the king of Egypt). This first encounter in Exodus 7 is followed in 7:14-25 by the changing of the Nile water into blood. Exodus 4:8-9 also comprises an allusion to the transformation of the Nile's water, reinterpreting the story of Exod 7:14-25.²¹ The sequence that contains the transformation of a rod into a snake and water into blood appears interrupted in Exod 4:6-7 by another sign: Moses' hand becomes leprous. This episode, clearly a later insertion, interrupts the sequence of Exodus 7 and creates a hiatus in the divine speech about the people's disbelief – a speech in which 4:8 appears clearly related to v. 5 (cf. למען יאמינו in v. 5 and ויהי אם-לא יאמינו לך in v. 8).

The temporary leprous infection of Moses' hand has puzzled commentators, since it constitutes a unique occurrence in the Bible, whereas all the other signs in Exodus 4 foreshadow episodes from the Exodus story. According to W. Propp, this episode was transmitted in order to show "that Yahweh wishes to prove, on Moses' person, his ability to send disease and healing."²² Other commentators point to the parallel in Num 12:10 (Miriam's leprous disease),²³ but the reason why Moses should prefigure Miriam's punishment in his body remains unclear.

Taking a look at Manetho's account about the Hebrews in Egypt, one can find a better explanation for these verses. Josephus quotes some fragments of his History of Egypt in his *Contra Apionem*. According to Josephus, Manetho knew a story of an Egyptian king, Amenophis, who wanted to purify Egypt from all lepers and sick people. He put them to work in stone-quarries east of the Nile and later transferred them to the city of Av-

document. But the existence of E is more than uncertain, and the passage clearly presupposes the late and post-priestly texts to which it alludes.

²⁰ Gertz, *Tradition* (see n. 19), 305-327.

²¹ This reinterpretation tries to answer the problem that arose through the conflation of different traditions in Exodus 7. According to one, only the river water is transformed into blood, but in the other the striking with the staff provokes blood all over Egypt.

²² W.H.C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18* (AB 2; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 209.

²³ The expression מצרפת כשלי appears also in Num 12:10 and furthermore in 2 Kgs 5:27.

aris, the former capital of the Hyksos (the “Shepherds”). A leprous priest named Osarseph headed the colony there and gave it new laws (239: “[T]hey should not worship the gods or show reverence for any of the animals regarded as sacred by the Egyptians.... They should sacrifice and use all of them, and they should have nothing to do with any person except those who shared the oath.”).²⁴ Then he formed an alliance with the Hyksos from Jerusalem, and together they fought against the Egyptian king who had to flee to Ethiopia and stay for thirteen years. Meanwhile, the lepers and the Shepherds burned cities and sanctuaries and destroyed statues of the gods. They were finally defeated by Amenophis and his army, who “killed many and pursued the rest as far as the borders of Syria.” At the end of the story: “250: It is said that the man who gave them their constitution and laws was a priest of the people of Heliopolis, named Osarseph²⁵ from Osiris the god of Heliopolis. When he changed his allegiance, he changed his name and was called Moses.” Whether Manetho himself reports this identification or whether it was added later has prompted some debate.²⁶ The identification of Osarseph and Moses, however, finds support by the biblical account in Exod 4:6–7. This passage, which represents a later insertion into a very late text, could function as a “counter history” reacting against an apparently important tradition that describes Moses as a man affected with leprosy. Apparently, Hecateus, who is often considered a main source for Manetho, knows a similar tradition inasmuch as he relates that a disease struck Egypt and prompted the Egyptians to expel the foreigners from the country. Among them was Moses, the founder of Jerusalem. Although Hecateus does not mention Moses’ leprosy, he does combine the theme of the expulsion of Moses and his followers with the theme of disease. A text such as Deut 7:15 may reflect such a tradition: “[A]ll the dread diseases from Egypt that you experienced he (Yahweh) will not inflict on you” (see also Deut 28:60). The biblical redactor opposes to the tradition of the lepers known by Manetho the affirmation that Moses’ leprosy was only momentary; it happened in the context of a transfer of divine powers to him.

²⁴ Translation according to Verbrugge and Wickersham, *Berosos and Manetho* (see n. 16).

²⁵ According to D.B. Redford (*Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* [Princeton: University Press, 1992], 415–416), Osarseph is a polemical name for Akhenaton; others think of a combination of Joseph and Osiris.

²⁶ See J.G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (SBL Monograph Series 16; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 113–118; E.S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 58–62.

Thus, the source for the strange sign related to Moses' leprous hand may be found in a tradition from the end of the Persian period. At a late stage, Exod 4:6–7 may have been inserted together with the *Wiederaufnahme* in 4:9aα (altering the announcement of 4:9aβb to a third sign), a move that may have occurred after the first promulgation of the Torah in order to counter anti-Jewish versions of the Exodus narrative.

Another difficult passage from the beginning of the book of Exodus can also be better understood in the light of the tradition related by Manetho, as J. Rückl convincingly suggests.²⁷ According to Exod 1:9–10, the new Pharaoh feared the Hebrews: He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and get them up out of the land." In the book of Exodus, the idea that Egypt is at war and that the Hebrews could join the enemies of Egypt represents a blind motif, since it is not taken up later. This passage has intrigued past and recent commentators and even provoked the idea that עלה נן should mean here "to seize upon," since the text seems odd otherwise.²⁸ But if one reads Exod 1:10 in the light of the tradition transmitted by Manetho, such an emendation becomes unnecessary. Manetho's account of the alliance of the "lepers" in Egypt with the "Shepherds" does not make sense as an amplification of the biblical passage, because it is quite difficult to imagine Manetho as an attentive reader of the Torah. One may hypothesize, on the contrary, that a redactor inserted Exod 1:10 in reaction to the tradition related by Manetho.

On the diachronic level, one can understand Exod 1:10b* as an insertion into the passage comprising Exod 1:8–12, which, according to K. Schmid and J. Gertz, is part of a post-priestly redaction in view of its presupposition of Exod 1:7.²⁹ This verse, which almost all scholars attribute to the Priestly writer or redactor, relates that the Israelites have become a numerous people. The following verses must therefore belong to the same literary level or to a later one. In 1:8–12, v. 10b* interrupts the transition between Pharaoh's statement in v. 10a and the "wise" measures that he

27 J. Rückl, "Israel's Alliance with the Enemies of Egypt in Exodus 1,10," in *La construction de la figure de Moïse – The Construction of the Figure of Moses* (ed. T. Römer; Trans-euphratène Supp. 13; Paris: Gabalda, 2007), 157–168.

28 For details see Rückl, 164–165.

29 K. Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus. Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments* (WMANT 81; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 233; J.C. Gertz, "The Transition Between the Books of Genesis and Exodus" in *A Farewell to the Yahwist?* (ed. T.B. Dozeman and K. Schmid; SBL Symposium Series 34; Atlanta: SBL, 2006), (see n. 4) 73–87, 82–83. In *Tradition* (see n. 19), 379, Gertz attributes 1:8–10 to the "final redaction".

wants to take. The late insertion in 1:10b may stem from the same hand as 4:6–7. The biblical redactor, operating again in a polemical way, took a tradition that previously ended with the expulsion of the Hebrews and turned it into a prophetic oracle where the king foresees Israel's exodus. The tradition found in Manetho, which places the exodus in the context of Egypt's war against the inhabitants of Canaan and Israel's alliance with them, probably stems from an older tradition (an allusion to it can be found in Jubilees 46:6–13, where the text may represent a midrash of Exod 1:10 or may result from some knowledge of such a tradition). J. Rückl thinks that Manetho's account may reflect the situation of the Persian occupation of Egypt in the fifth century B.C.E.,³⁰ but this question needs to remain open. In any case, Exod 1:10 provides another example of the way extra-biblical tradition can improve our understanding of some biblical accounts.

2. Moses' Wars, the Snakes, and his Ethiopian Wife

In the Hebrew Bible, Moses has a more or less demilitarized stance: he does not lead the people into the land and, according to the Deuteronomistic tradition, the military conquest becomes the work of Joshua, whom the text clearly presents as a warlord in the book of Joshua (as well as already in Exod 17). Nevertheless, some military traditions about Moses appear at the end of the book of Numbers and in the first chapters of Deuteronomy. He conquers the Transjordan territory, and Num 20:14 even mentions a "book of the wars of Yahweh,"³¹ which would have contained Moses' military exploits. One may therefore ask if the stories at the end of Numbers reflect a tradition of Moses as a conqueror. This tradition appears also in Hecateus and more extensively in Artapanus, who presents Moses as an excellent commander leading an Ethiopian campaign. Artapanus probably did not invent this tradition, since Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities* (2.238–256) offers a similar account. As several scholars have claimed, Josephus could theoretically depend on Artapanus, but a synoptic comparison of both accounts leads to the conclusion that they take over (in different ways) a common oral tradition that probably originated in the

³⁰ Rückl, "Israel's Alliance" (see n. 27), 166–167.

³¹ A text-critical problem arises here, since LXX read "the war of Yahweh" not as the title of the book but as a quotation from it.

Jewish (Egyptian) Diaspora.³² This tradition comprised the following themes:

- a) Moses wages war against the Ethiopians;
- b) He uses ibises to fight snakes in the wilderness;
- c) He sojourns in Ethiopia and marries an Ethiopian princess.

The latter theme does not appear in Artapanus. The notion that Josephus invented the story is improbable. It is more likely that Polyhistor censored Artapanus, whom Polyhistor only transmitted in fragments.

a) We can easily trace the origin of the theme of Moses' Ethiopian wars. The Egyptian Jews would have known about the antagonism between Egypt and Cush. Since the second millennium B.C.E., Egypt and Cush warred often. One may recall that around 728 B.C.E., the Cushite king Piankhy invaded Egypt, took over Memphis and Heliopolis, and proclaimed himself king. This Ethiopian occupation of Egypt, which ended only around 672 B.C.E. with the installation of Neco I after the Assyrian invasion, offers a fitting background to Artapanus' account (*Praep.* 9.27, 3).³³

During the Persian era, the topic of Ethiopian campaigns by the Pharaohs or other kings (Semiramis, Cambyses) became a literary motif³⁴ with which Jews in Egypt may have been familiar. The legend of Sesostris (Sesoosis) offers the most parallels to the tradition used by Artapanus and Josephus.³⁵ This figure apparently combines recollections about Sesostris who defeated the Ethiopians with recollections about Ramses II.³⁶ Herodotus (*Hist.* 2.102–110), Diodorus Siculus (1.53–57), and Strabo refer to this legend.³⁷ Sesostris, a brilliant legislator and an excellent head of state, organizes the land of Egypt in different departments (*Herodotus* 2.109; *Diodorus* 1.14,3). Artapanus says the same thing about Moses

32 For more details, see T. Römer, "Les guerres de Moïse," in *La construction de la figure de Moïse - The Construction of the Figure of Moses* (ed. T. Römer; Transeuphratène Supp. 13; Paris: Gabalda, 2007), (see n.27), 169–193.

33 Cf. D.B. Redford, *From Slave to Pharaoh: The Black Experience of Ancient Egypt* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004).

34 J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE - 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 129 and n. 9.

35 D.L. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (SBLDS 1; Missoula: SBL, 1972), 153–167; T. Rajak, "Moses in Ethiopia: Legend and Literature," *JJS* (1978): 111–122, 115.

36 C. Obsomer, *Les campagnes de Sésostris dans Hérodote: essai d'interprétation du texte grec à la lumière des réalités égyptiennes* (Connaissance de l'Égypte ancienne 1; Bruxelles: Connaissance de l'Égypte ancienne, 1989).

37 For a summary of this legend, cf. M. Braun, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature* (1938) (reprint; New York: Garland, 1987), 13–18. Braun situates its origin in the Egyptian resistance against the Persian invaders.

(*Praep.* 9.27,3).³⁸ He also claims that Moses introduced circumcision in Ethiopia, whereas Herodotus (*Hist.* 2.104) and Diodorus (1.55,5) mention circumcision in relation with Sesostris. But above all, Sesostris epitomizes a fine strategist and wages war against Ethiopia (Strabo, *Geographica*, 16.4,4.). According to Artapanus and Josephus alike, Moses likewise goes to war against Ethiopia.³⁹ Both authors report that Moses has to confront the hostility of the Egyptian court (*Praep.* 9.27,11–18; *Ant.* 2.254–256); the same holds true for Sesostris when he returns from his campaign accompanied by his wife (Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.107; Diodorus 1.57,7–8).⁴⁰ Therefore, one may plausibly assume that this legend inspired the tradition used by Artapanus and Josephus.⁴¹ If so, then this tradition constructed Moses as a Jewish Sesostris.⁴²

b) The relation between Moses and the ibises is a more difficult topic to investigate. According to D. Silver, this association could reflect an early syncretistic cult of the Egyptian Diaspora centering on Moses as healer and intercessor.⁴³ While this idea is speculative, it may find support from Artapanus, who identifies Moses with Hermes-Thoth in turn associated with the ibis. Herodotus (II, 75) mentions a cult dedicated to ibises because they repel the winged snakes of the desert: “the story goes that at the beginning of spring winged serpents from Arabia fly towards Egypt, and the birds called ibises meet them at the entrance to this country and do not suffer the serpents to go by but kill them. On account of this deed it is (say the Arabians) that the ibis has come to be greatly honored by the Egyptians.”⁴⁴ In the light of this tradition, one may ask if a (probably late) story about the snake plague in Num 21.4–9⁴⁵ could indicate an orthodox counter-history trying to show that only a decision coming from the God of Israel could stop the serpents. In any case, Numbers 21 shares the tradition about winged serpents in the wilderness with Herodotus and Artapanus.

³⁸ Both authors mention 36 names.

³⁹ Tiede, *Charismatic Figure* (see n. 35), 161.

⁴⁰ According to Herodotus and Diodorus, his brother wants to kill him through fire. Diodorus reports that the gods decided to save him. Herodotus tells a cruel plan of his wife: Sesostris' two sons perish in the fire, since Sesostris uses them as a bridge to cross it.

⁴¹ See also Tiede, *Charismatic Figure* (see n. 35), 164. However, Tiede is convinced that Artapanus invented the Mosaic version of this legend: “...[I]t appears likely that Artapanus had adapted a version of this legend and applied it to Moses.”

⁴² Cf. Exod 2:1–10, where he is constructed with the attributes of Sargon.

⁴³ D.J. Silver, “Moses and the Hungry Birds,” *JQR* 64 (1973): 123–153.

⁴⁴ Translation by G.C. Macaulay (<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/h/herodotus/h4 m/>).

⁴⁵ E. Aurelius, *Der Fürbitter Israels. Eine Studie zum Mosebild im Alten Testament*. (CB.OT 27; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988), 151–152, claims that this story was inserted only after the Pentateuch redactor.

c) The tradition about a marriage between Moses and an Ethiopian princess, which appears in Josephus' *Antiquities*, must have some relation in one way or another to the strange note in Num 12:1: "And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married; he had indeed married a Cushite woman." This verse is another *crux interpretationis*, since the following story switches to Miriam and Aaron's denial of Moses' superiority.⁴⁶ Traditional Jewish and Christian interpretation has already made several attempts to smooth out this passage, especially by identifying Cush with Madian and the Cushite woman with Zipporah.⁴⁷ It is difficult to imagine the whole tradition about Moses' Ethiopian woman – which Flavius Josephus had certainly not invented – as solely a midrashic amplification spun out of Num 12:1. The opposite solution appears more plausible. Numbers 12:1 was inserted at a late redactional stage (together with 12:10–15). Presupposing knowledge of the Moses-Ethiopian connection, the passage represents a discrete counter-history against the Deuteronomistic prohibition of mixed marriages as formulated in texts such as Deut. 7.1–6 or Ezra 10.

The Ethiopian-Cushite theme may have come from the Jews living in the military colony of Elephantine, where they found themselves in immediate contact with "Cush." The tradition of Moses' military successes in Ethiopia was especially fitting for Jewish mercenaries, some of whom probably had Ethiopian wives.⁴⁸ We may conclude that in the Persian period a (probably oral) tradition about Moses' military feats existed and included his marriage with an Ethiopian princess as well as the benefits that he provided for Egypt.⁴⁹ It is almost impossible to know whether Manetho reacted against such a tradition or whether the intended function of the tradition was to counter anti-Jewish stories in Egypt. What is clear, however, is the fact that the reconstruction of this tradition enables a better understanding of some passages in the Torah.

⁴⁶ Scholars often argue that Miriam's punishment with leprosy in verses 10–15 was the original continuation of her denial of Moses' wife. While this may well be the case, the Cushite woman receives no further mention.

⁴⁷ For a good overview on the history of interpretation, see Achenbach, *Vollendung* (see n. 10), 275–277. See also T. Römer, "Mose in Äthiopien. Zur Herkunft der Num 12,1 zugrunde liegenden Tradition" in *Auf dem Weg zur Endgestalt von Genesis bis II Regum. Festschrift für Hans-Christoph Schmitt zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. M. Beck and U. Schorn; BZAW 370; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 203–15.

⁴⁸ B.J. Diebner, "...for he had married a Cushite woman" (Num 12,1)," *Nubica I/II* (1990): 499–504.

⁴⁹ For a similar conclusion, see Rajak, "Moses in Ethiopia," 111–122; see also D. Runnalls, "Moses' Ethiopian Campaign," *JSJ* 14 (1993): 135–156.

III. Conclusion

The focus on redactional criticism sometimes obscures the quest for the provenance and meaning of traditions that the redactors used, inserted, or transformed. Scholars have often caricatured tradition history as a romantic pursuit of the oldest origins. The new state of Pentateuchal research that emphasizes the importance of the Persian period for the formation of the Torah allows for a modified investigation into the biblical traditions, which scholars can now, at least partially, retrieve from extra-biblical sources of the Hellenistic period. This interest in oral tradition does not mean that one should abandon investigation of the written text. On the contrary, it contributes to a better understanding of the complexity of the Torah, which still contains enough difficult passages to keep future generations of scholars busy.

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