Joseph and his amazing dreams of many cultures

A study of the historical and cultural context of dreams in the Joseph narrative

Janneke Kobus, s0348732

Supervisor: Dr. Aren Wilson-Wright

Second reader: Prof. dr. H.L. Murre-van den Berg, Dean Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies

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Hereby I, Janneke Kobus, declare and assure that I have composed the present thesis with the title: 'Joseph and his amazing dreams of many cultures. A study of the historical and cultural context of dreams in the Joseph narrative', independently, that I did not use any other sources or tools other than indicated and that I marked those parts of the text derived from the literal content or meaning of other Works – digital media included – by making them known as such by indicating their source(s).

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Abstract

In the ancient Near East, dream interpretation was seen as means to have direct communications with the divine. Divine spirits or gods would send dream messages containing future events or fates. These dream messages were understood to be either clear messages, or symbolic messages filled with symbols or omens. Dream messages needed to be interpreted and dream interpretation was regarded as a professional skill. Professional interpreters used dream books which listed all the different symbols and omens with their outcomes. In Genesis 37-50, the Joseph story, three pairs of symbolic dreams appear. Instead of needing the help of a professional dream interpreter, Joseph, a commoner, is able to understand and explain the dream messages. This is a break with the comprehension of dream interpretation from the surrounding ancient Near Eastern regions. In this thesis I will examine the relationship between the dream narratives in the Joseph story and the dream interpretations of surrounding cultures. I will show that the ancient Israelite dream messages and dream interpretation differs from other ancient Near Eastern dream interpretations, whilst at the same time is influenced by surrounding cultures and traditions. I will do so by analyzing various aspects of the six dreams in the Joseph narrative and comparing them with ancient Near eastern parallels. The dream accounts in the Joseph story show certain similarities with common dream features from surrounding cultures, but at the same time the narrative surrounding the dream elements is composed to show the superiority of the God of Israel over the Egyptian gods. The Egyptian elements in the Joseph narrative play an important part in comparing the dream elements with ancient Near Eastern parallels, and to be able to place the Joseph narrative in its historical context, I will also examine the dating of these Egyptian elements in the Joseph narrative. I will argue for a composition of the Joseph story in the late post-exilic period as a diaspora novella, by analyzing the function and contexts of certain elements and comparing these with ancient Egyptian parallels.

Preface

This thesis started a while back and it almost feels unpleasant to finish it and hand it in. It is done, no more paragraphs to write or lines to tweak. No more evenings spending hours on drawing a set-up for a chapter or defining the overall structure of the thesis. I have spent months with my head buried in the ancient Near East and pondering over the narrative of Genesis 37-50. The thing about it all that struck me the most is the fact that it never stopped luring me in. I must have read the narrative for a hundred times by now, but the story never ceases to enchant me. Every time I read it, I can find something new or different in it. The ancient Near East is a very intoxicating world, and it is a place that is hard to leave behind. Finally stepping out of the storylines of Genesis 37-50 therefore feels like a loss. But it also feels like the beginning of something new. I now understand why I chose this narrative as the topic for my thesis, and why the ancient Near East appeals to me so much. And just like Joseph, I have started dreaming of bigger things.

Writing a thesis or research project is never a solo undertaking. Many people and factors contributed to the finished result, either in a small or in a big way. I can never fully break it down to every single person, but there are three people who I want to express my gratitude to.

I would sincerely like to thank Prof. dr. Ellen van Wolde for being a source of inspiration to me. When I entered the pre-master Religious Studies, I had lost my sense of direction. Through her classes on the different texts of the Hebrew Bible and its ancient Near Eastern setting, I felt excitement and joy coming back to me. Every class felt like a small expedition, part of a bigger journey. Her enthusiasm, wealth of knowledge, and zest for travelling, greatly influenced my own lust for adventure which had been dormant for many years. For this, and her encouraging way of teaching, I am very grateful.

I would also wish to thank Prof. dr. Daniela Müller. Through her classes on Christianity, I was taught to write academically. I learned that history is always a reconstruction of a construction, and this helped me put things in a much broader perspective. All her feedback on assignments and papers, combined with the discussions during classes encouraged me to think analytically and to break down research projects in steps. She wants her students to think critically, but I cannot think of any points of critique on her teaching methods. Her passion for the history of Christianity is very infectious and her concern for her students makes every class feel like you are coming home. I thoroughly enjoyed her lectures and even in a dark and difficult Corona year, I looked forward to every Zoom-session. Even more importantly, she made me feel that I was part of something, that I belong.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Aren Wilson-Wright. Supervising my thesis cannot have been an easy task, but he managed to steer me in the right direction every single time. I want to

thank him for his genuine apprehension, his encouragement, and guidance. He remained very patient and gave me all the feedback I needed to take my thesis to a higher level. He shared his knowledge generously and he is a true expert in his field. Every time I stumbled on an obstacle, he managed to provide another insight and literature to expand my horizon and forget all about stumbling in the first place. Above all, he is a truly kind man, and I could not have wished for a better supervisor.

All these influences have made a lasting impression on me, and I am very grateful for that. But it also did something else: it made me proud of what I have achieved.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

'Dreams are nothing more than wishes.
And a wish is just a dream you wish to come true.'
From: 'The Puppy Song', Harry Nilsson, 1973

We all have dreams. We spend a big part of our life sleeping and dreaming. Sometimes we can even dream during the hours that we are awake. If we are lucky, our dreams can give us insight into our waking life. Or maybe our dreams can help us understand the future. We can wake up and have forgotten the dream we were having completely, or we might be able to recall every little detail of it. The realm of dreams is a very mysterious place, and we do not seem to be able to understand much of it, even though we visit it almost every single night. Trying to understand dreams and their possibly hidden messages and meanings, is a not a only contemporary pursuit. Ancient civilizations were also occupied with the interpretation of dreams. Records of dream interpretations have been found in dream-books, written documents, papyri, and inscriptions, from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. These artifacts and archaeological finds show that recalling dreams and trying to interpret them was as much a part of daily life in these ancient civilizations, as it is in ours.

Many scholars in the last hundred years or so, have pursued the art of dream interpretation, or oneirology [1], but their research was predominantly focused on the psychological aspect of dreams. The major influence for this clinical treatment of dreaming came from psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and his colleagues. In the twentieth century research into dreaming became very popular and Sigmund Freud published his famous work *Die Traumdeutung.*[2] Freud's work represented the pinnacle of scholarly research into dreams and their connection to our unconsciousness of that era. According to Freud, our dreams are an expression of desires, wishes, and even sexual drives that are deemed unacceptable in real life. Events that we are not able to experience in our daily life, are transported to our unconsciousness and form the setting of our dreams.[3] With this psychoanalytic explanation of the workings of dreams, Freud disconnected the interpretation of dreams from the supernatural realm. Prior to Freud, dream interpretation and the study of dream divination had been a part of the religious domain for centuries and was predominantly done by religious specialists. Of course, dream interpreters thousands of years ago did not have the same technological resources to study and investigate the phenomenon of dreaming as Freud did. But since the publication of Freud's work,

[1] Oneirology, or the study of dreams and their interpretation and reception, is derived from the Greek word όνειρολογία.
[2] English translation of Sigmund Freud's work *Die Traumdeutung (1899)*: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, translated by Abraham Arden Brill (Ingram Publisher Services US, reprinted in 2010).
[3] See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* Chapter III: The Dream as Wish-Fulfillment.

dream interpretation has been a part of psychoanalysis. However, one aspect of dream interpretation that has remained the same during several millenniums, is the significance people assign to dreams. From ancient civilizations and populations to our own society, people are still looking for explanations of their dreams.[4] The ancient Israelites were no exception and their approach to dream interpretation also entered the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, which is the focus of this thesis. The authors of the biblical texts used dreams, for instance, to connect the narrative to the supernatural or the divine dimension. Or they used dreams to convey a message or even to foreshadow an event. Often the use of a dream-scene in a narrative seems like a simple tool, but the dreams play an important and integral part of the narrative. The dreams are what sets the narrative apart and gives it several layers of additional depths.

One scholar who focused on the role of dreams in Biblical narratives was Adolf Leo Oppenheim. Oppenheim published his work *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* in 1956, in which he gave a detailed account of ancient dream literature. Oppenheim compared dream literature from all the archaeological sites and available dream texts of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt.[5] Oppenheim focused on the form and stylistic aspects of the dreams, and he concluded that there were certain general patterns within the dream-scenes that were common in all ancient dream literature. According to Oppenheim every dream-scene has the same stylistic attributes that are linked to each other and in the end confirm the presence of the supernatural and divine dimension within the narrative.[6] These stylistic attributes are: the plot of the narrative and the setting, the dream itself, the conclusion of the plot, and the fulfilment of the dream.[7] By putting the emphasis on finding general patterns and stylistic forms and structures, Oppenheim did not see dream-scenes as an added perception or inspiration from the author, but as part of a more general way of storytelling in the ancient Near East. Oppenheim, however, did not distinguish between different cultures and his approach seemed to be more focused on the cultural value of the stylistic forms, than on the religious value of the dreams themselves.[8] The historical, cultural, and social context of each written dream-scene plays an important role in the interpretation of dreams. Each ancient civilization had its own different set of cultural and social values and norms, which affected the approach of ancient authors to dream interpretation.

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[4] See for example the recent publication of Shequita Hanks, *Dream Manual: Dreamers of Dreams* (Independently published, July 24, 2020), Kindle edition; which seeks to educate students in how to understand the language of the spirit during dream encounters.

[5] For the complete list of ancient dream texts from the Ancient Near East that Oppenheim has used in his work, and the general dream patterns he discerned, see A.L. Oppenheim, "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East. With a Translation of an Assyrian Dream-Book." *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, vol.3,* no.3, (1956): 179-373.

[6] Marina Hofman, *Dream Type-Scene in Old Testament Narratives: Structure and Significance* (University of St. Michael's College: University Press, 2014), 13-36.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid. p. 15-16

Putting dream-scenes in their cultural and social settings lies at the heart of this thesis. Because dream interpretation played such a vital and important part in ancient civilizations, it would be a mistake to pull the dreams out of their corresponding context and look at them through the lenses of our 21st century perspective. In order to understand the message and purpose of the dreams, we need to look at the context first and try to understand what the dreams would have meant for people living thousands of years ago. What role did dreams play in their daily life? How were they able to make sense out of them and decipher their messages? It is also important to understand that each ancient civilization did not exist in a vacuum. Tradition and cultural continuity influence every civilization. Nor was any ancient civilization isolated from its neighbors. The concept of dreaming and putting dream-scenes into the written narratives served a special function, and this function is linked to the manner in which the art of dreaming, and dream interpretation was conceptualized in ancient times. To understand the message and function of a dream in a biblical passage, we need to look at the way dreams were interpreted and conceptualized in earlier periods and how the author of the biblical passage may have been influenced by previous notions of dreaming and interpreting dreams.

Within the Book of Genesis there are several dream passages that serve a prominent role. The dreams function as a direct link to the divine dimension in which some sort of communication is possible with God, or a divine spirit like an angel. In these dreams the main character goes to a sacred place, encounters the divine, or receives a divine message, or a divine revelation. In Genesis 20:3, for example, God comes to Abimelech in a dream, and in Genesis 31:24 the same thing happens to Laban. In these dreams God appears in different forms to the humans. Jacob has a more elaborate dream in Genesis 28:12-13, in which angels were moving on a ramp that reached to heaven, and God stood next to him. The dreams that Joseph receives differ from the other dreams in the Book of Genesis. God does not appear in Joseph's dreams, nor is his voice present.

Many scholars have regarded the Joseph story, which runs from Genesis 37 till Genesis 50, as one section that can be seen as a separate novella from the rest of the Book of Genesis.[9] These thirteen chapters, narrate Joseph's life story, using a variety of stylistic forms and techniques to evoke the setting and underscore the importance of the plot. The setting of the story is ancient Egypt, and the author describes the Egyptian environment in great detail. The message from this story, is conveyed through dreams. There are six different dreams in the Joseph story. These dreams are a vital part of the story and they both guide the reader through the different phases of the plot and evoke the emotions that Joseph has to work through. The dreams in the Joseph story, however, are different from other dreams in Genesis. Where God appears in some shape or form to the main character in other dreams in the Book of Genesis, he is absent from the dreams in the Joseph story. Joseph does

[9] John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

not receive a revelation or vision in which he has direct contact with God, or in which God speaks to him.[10] Instead, the dreams consist of a specific image or scenario that Joseph then must decipher. Joseph has to interpret the various dreams instead of receiving a direct message that he can adhere to. This manner of dream interpretation resembles the ancient profession of dream interpretation as it was practiced in the ancient Near East. The intention of this thesis is to discover how strong this connection is and to uncover the cross-cultural influences on the dream narratives of Genesis 37-50. The central question that this thesis seeks to answer, is therefore:

To what extent and in what ways do the dream narratives in the Joseph story reflect the dream interpretations of surrounding cultures?

To answer this research question, I will use a combination of narrative and literary criticism, as well as discussing the historical and cultural features of the Joseph story. Narrative criticism focuses on the narrative structure of the text, and it studies how different narrative techniques communicate a message to the reader, and what that message might be.[11] Narrative criticism assumes that the author wants to convey a message to their audience. The setting of the narrative is an important part of the analysis of the message, and is especially relevant for my research question since it focuses on the different settings of dream interpretation in various ancient civilizations. Literary criticism, by contrast, focuses on the stylistic features of a text.[12] Looking at distinct sections of the narrative, such as the dreams of the Joseph story, and how their form relates to the message of the text, ultimately leads to a better understanding of the text itself. By combining narrative and literary analysis with the historical and cultural features of different dream interpretations that could have influenced the author of Genesis 37-50, a more complete comprehension and perception will emerge. The historical approach and treatment of dream interpretation and the dreams within Joseph's story, however, is not to be confused with source criticism.

Aim of the thesis

Scholars have produced a vast amount of literature on the Book of Genesis and Genesis 37-50 in particular. There is also an equal amount of scholarly work to be found on the art of dream

[10] Nihil Shupak, "A Fresh Look at the Dreams of the Officials and of Pharaoh in the Story of Joseph (Genesis 40-41) in the Light of Egyptian Dreams." *Perchance to Dream: Dream Divination in the Bible and the Ancient Near East,* vol. 21, (2018): 103-108.

[11] For a complete overview and explanation of narrative criticism, see Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987).

[12] K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and the Old Testament* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1966).

interpretation in the ancient Near East. This thesis is by no means a new undertaking, but it does endeavor to put a fresh perspective on the various cultural overlapping within the profession of dream interpreting in the ancient Near East and how this also features in the Joseph story. This thesis puts the dreams of the Joseph story into their cultural and historical context. With this goal, this thesis is also defending the perspective that the author of Genesis 37-50 was inspired and influenced by other surrounding or preceding civilizations, the main argument for this being that the author was part of the spirit of the time and no country or society at that time existed in a vacuum. Questions like: What are the sources of the dreams? How do the dreams relate to dreams of other surrounding civilizations? How can these dreams be interpreted? Do these interpretations overlap and in what way?, will be the guideline for this research and will ultimately defend the forementioned perspective and aim. In the end this thesis will hopefully contribute another point of view to the widespread discussion on Genesis 37-50.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter contains the general introduction to the thesis and articulates the research question. It also explains my methodology, as well as the central aim of the thesis. The second chapter will provide an introduction to the Joseph story: each separate chapter of Genesis 37-50 will be briefly discussed, and the general themes and plot line will be touched upon. The third chapter will focus on the dreams that have survived from ancient Mediterranean civilizations. Starting with ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, this chapter will cover the most prominent written documents and sources that have survived from ancient times, and it will end with biblical and ancient Jewish Literature that features dreams or dream-scenes. It will also explore the different dream interpretations that were common in the distinct ancient civilizations. Chapter four will be devoted to the six dreams in Genesis 37-50. Each dream will be discussed and an overview of the dream characteristics within Genesis 37-50 will be given. This chapter will also discuss the interpretation of the dreams within the Joseph story in connection with common dream interpretations in other ancient cultures. Chapter five will examine various Egyptian elements within the Joseph narrative. This chapter will also discuss the dating of these elements, as well as the dating and origins of the dreams in the Joseph story. The final chapter, chapter six, will present a summary of the discussed dream interpretations and it will also highlight the significance of the dreams in the Joseph narrative and the Hebrew Bible in the context of ancient civilizations. This chapter will in the end reach a conclusion which will provide an answer to the main research question, which in turn will hopefully enhance the understanding of the relationship between written texts and their cultural and historical contexts.

Chapter 2

Joseph's Story

2.1 Introduction to Joseph and Genesis 37-50

The story of Joseph is one of the most emotional and vivid stories of the Bible. Not only because the emotions, which the main character Joseph goes through, are raw human emotions, but also because of the minimal descriptions of the situations and happenings in the narrative. There are several gaps in the story, and this leaves a lot of room for the imagination. These gaps also allow scholars to discuss the Joseph narrative and all its angles, and to examine the narrative along the source-critical lines. Over time the narrative has been widely examined on its internal coherence and its place within the Book of Genesis.[13]

The Book of Genesis holds many narratives, but the narrative of Joseph can be seen as different. It shares the same problems and conflicts with other narratives in the Hebrew Bible, like the conflicts and arguments between brothers and the reconciliations[14], but there is another layer to the Joseph Story. In other narratives, God speaks directly, whereas in the Joseph narrative the voice of God is only sparsely present. In previous narratives within Genesis, God's voice could be heard in dreams or God would impart his plans for the main characters and their descendants through visions, but the dreams within the Joseph narrative are different. These chapters do not tell how God rewarded one of the patriarchs for acting in a certain way. Many scholars argue that there is a distinct feature missing from the Story of Joseph and therefore these chapters should be regarded as a separate narrative within the Book of Genesis.[15] This feature can be described as the Abrahamic promise. God's promise of land and many descendants to Abraham is a recurring theme in the other narratives within the Book of Genesis, but it does not feature as a major theme in the Joseph narrative. Where the other narratives in Genesis have definite endings and list of the main characters' descendants, the narrative of Joseph does not have a clear ending. It reads as the beginning of something, building up the tension

[13] For an account of the source-critical approach to the Story of Joseph, see R. de Hoop, *Genesis 49 in Its Literary and Historical Context* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 366-450. This work however focuses primarily on the historical context of the Story of Joseph, and its source, and not so much on the literary analysis of the text itself.

[14] See B. Lang, *Joseph in Egypt: A Cultural Icon from Grotius to Goethe,* (Yale: University Press, 2009). Lang devotes much of his work to shining light on the structure of the Story of Joseph and the effect the style and literary nuances has on the impact of the narrative.

[15] See C. Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers: Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 128-130.

and anticipation of something great and new.[16] Genesis 50 is not the ending of the narrative; it is the beginning of a new one.

In the following pages, I will examine the Joseph story. These pages, however, will not discuss the source(s) of Genesis 37-50, nor will they strive to come to a conclusion or statement concerning additional layers or chapters that might have been added to the story at a later date. Each chapter of Genesis 37-50 will be discussed separately, as well as the main scholarly assumptions about the source of several chapters. These short discussions are merely included to provide an overview of the Joseph novella as a whole, with the objective of relating the setting in which the dreams occur. Without the complete setting of the narrative, the correlation of the dreams with the events and outcomes of the narrative would be lost.

Joseph's story
Genesis 37

The narrative of Joseph begins with a *toledoth*[17], which is a Hebrew term for the telling of the generations. Each narrative in Genesis begins with a *toledoth*, an introductory line that states that the narrative will contain the history of the descendants of a main character. In Genesis 37, the *toledoth* tells the reader that the following narrative will contain the history of the descendants of Jacob.

The reader meets Joseph as a seventeen-year-old boy.[18] Joseph is occupied with herding sheep and goats and helping out his brothers. The narrator immediately points out at the beginning of this story, that Joseph is Jacob's favorite son. Jacob gave Joseph a special coat to mark him as his most loved son, which sparked the envy of his brothers. This favoritism of Jacob will turn out to be a very important part of the narrative later on, but it already causes problems for Joseph in the beginning of

[16] It can be argued that the placing of the Joseph narrative within the Book of Genesis is deliberate and serves as an explanation of how the Israelite people came to live in Egypt and how, in the end, Egypt can be seen as the Promised Land. Without the vital narrative of Joseph, and in this narrative the connection of the Hebrews to and with the Egyptians, the narratives of the Book of Exodus would have been filled with gaps and would have made no sense at all. The narrative of Joseph functions as the glue that binds the two books together and offers the reader an insight into the relationship between the two nations of Israel and Egypt.

[17] The story of Joseph begins at Gen. 37:2, after the final *toledoth* of Genesis. The Book of Genesis contains twelve narratives that all (except the first one) begin with a toledoth. The *toledoth* in Genesis 37 is the final one and marks the end of the Book of Genesis. It also marks the beginning of something new and possibly bigger, because the Book of Exodus does not start with a *toledoth*, but continues with the storyline that started in Genesis 37-50. The Book of Exodus follows the line of Genesis 37-50 and this could indicate that the Joseph narrative was the final important *toledoth*. After that, no *toledoth* was used to emphasize the importance of the history of the descendants. Since the Joseph narrative also presents the history and making of the twelve tribes of Israel, the setting for the Israelites would have been complete. The history of the twelve tribes would then surpass the use of a *toledoth* since every Israelite would automatically be a descendant of one of the twelve tribes.

[18] The birth of Joseph is described in a previous narrative: Genesis 30.

the narrative. Joseph is very much disliked by his brothers.[19] After the narrator has set the scene and hinted at the future problems within the family structure, he starts the actual story of Joseph.[20] Joseph experiences two dreams that leave him puzzled. Joseph tells his family about these dreams, but this adds only more fuel to his brothers' hatred of him. His father, Jacob, however, understands more, even though he is angered by the dream. Genesis 37:11 says that Jacob kept thinking about the dreams. The second dream, the one he tells Jacob about, seems to be more significant because it states a specific number. In the dream, the sun, the moon and eleven stars bow before Joseph (Gen. 37:9), which correspond to hist father, mother, and eleven brothers. But Joseph is given no explanation of this dream, and he can only discern part of its meaning from Jacob's reaction. Jacob immediately interprets this dream and tells Joseph that neither he nor the rest of the family will bow before Joseph. But Jacob's beloved wife Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, had already died, so Jacob's interpretation of the dream was not right. It could have not been the foreshadowing of things to come. Even though Jacob keeps the dreams in mind, he disapproves of them and expresses sharp criticism towards Joseph, which sets Joseph even more apart from his family.

Joseph is then sent by his father to go to Shechem and search for his brothers. Joseph gets redirected to Dhotan, but on his way there he is spotted by his brothers. His brothers express their hatred for him, and they to set up a scheme to kill him. All the brothers are in agreement and are ready to put the murderous plan into action.[21] Only Reuben tries to protect Joseph and he suggests another plan that will get rid of Joseph but will not kill him.[22] And this is how Joseph ends up in the pit.[23]

A little while later, during diner, the brothers spot a caravan of tradesmen, and this is the start of Joseph's journey into Egypt. Judah convinces his brothers to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite tradesmen and he saves Joseph's life with this move. Not only did this move get rid of the person the brothers hated, but it also made them a profit. The only brother who was unaware of this change of plans, was

[19] Joseph's only full brother Benjamin is not mentioned at all within the first chapters of the narrative. Whenever the hatred of Joseph's brothers is mentioned, Benjamin is left out. In the final chapters of the narrative, he is also not given a voice, so it is unclear what his feelings towards his brother Joseph are and whether he shared his brothers' hatred for Joseph. Because of Jacob's favoritism for his wife Rachel, and because Benjamin was Rachel's son, the reader, however, is led to understand that Benjamin was also favored by Jacob. This would also indicate that Rachel's two sons formed a separate part of the large family, and that Benjamin would not feel any hatred against his own full brother, nor was a part of the hateful actions against Joseph by his half-brothers.

[20] Joseph is painted as an outsider within his own family and he even wears a special coat, made especially for him, to emphasize his special role as an outsider.

[21] The brothers are mentioned as a group and not separately by name. It is not clear whether Benjamin was also part of this group. But since he is also favored by Jacob and a younger brother, one can reasonably assume that Benjamin is left with his father in the Valley of Hebron, and that Joseph only finds his 10 half-brothers in Dhotan.

[22] Reuben is the eldest son of Jacob by his wife Leah. Reuben has an alternative motive for putting Joseph in the pit instead of killing him. Reuben longs for the approval of his father and he intends to bring Jacob's beloved son back to him unharmed (Gen. 37:22). Reuben's primary concern here seems to be his own position within the family and not the fate of his brother Joseph.

[23] When Joseph ends up in the pit, he is also stripped of his special coat.

Reuben. The narrator describes Reuben returning to the pit and being in a state of alarm because Joseph was no longer there (Gen. 37: 29-31).[24] Without being given the explanation for the absence of Joseph, Reuben and his brothers slaughter a goat and submerge Joseph's special coat in the goat's blood. The brothers return to their father in the Valley of Hebron and show him the bloody coat. They ask Jacob whether he recognizes this coat, and upon seeing it Jacob immediately believes that a wild animal killed Joseph, and he slips into a deep state of mourning. Jacob states that he will be in mourning for his beloved son until he joins Joseph in Sheol (Gen. 37: 35).[25] The final line of Genesis 37 tells the reader of Joseph's fate: he is sold to the Egyptian officer of the Pharaoh, Potiphar. This final line is where Joseph's new life in Egypt begins.

Genesis 38

This chapter of Genesis contains the story of Judah and seems to be a separate short narrative within the Joseph narrative. The primary subject of this chapter is Judah and his descendants. Judah undergoes a character change and this change in his behavior plays an integral part in the narrative of Joseph. None of the other brothers are mentioned. Many scholars see this chapter as a later insertion into the Joseph narrative, but an important chapter nonetheless because it completes the history of the twelve tribes of Israel.[26] Even though it could have been a later addition to the Joseph story, the narrative of Judah is filled with details that play an important role and some of these details recur in later chapters.[27] The placing of this narrative of Judah in chapter 38 also holds a certain purpose. The end of chapter 37 leaves Joseph at the age of seventeen years old, and the beginning of chapter 39 starts with Joseph having already placed himself in a good position within the household of Potiphar, thus a certain amount of time has passed. Placing the history of Judah and his descendants between these two different times in the narrative of Joseph could therefore be seen as a deliberate placing in order for Joseph to grow up and continue his narrative at a later point in his life when he was no longer just a boy of seventeen years old.[28]

Genesis 39

Genesis 39 is the first chapter of the Joseph narrative that concentrates on Joseph's life as a slave in Egypt. Joseph has already arrived in Egypt and is working in the household of Potiphar. This whole

[24] Again, Reuben seems to be only concerned with himself. He does not even ask his brothers about what happened to Joseph. His concern is the failure of his own plan to receive the respect and admiration of his father.
[25] Sheol is the place where the dead dwell, in the lowest part of the earth.
[26] See R. Longrace, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence* (Winona Lake, United States of America: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 21; in which he argues that the Joseph narrative and the Judah narrative are two separate stories that are all part of the bigger narrative of Jacob's history.
[27] Judah's past actions and behaviour, for instance, comes up in the blessing that Jacob gives him in Genesis 49.
[28] See W. Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1982) for a broader explanation of this notion.

chapter concentrates on what happens to Joseph during his time working in Potiphar's house. Even though Joseph has been treated very badly by his own family, he now seems to have found a new place inside Potiphar's household and has earned the respect and trust of Potiphar, who places Joseph at the top of his household and entrusts him with running the household (Gen. 39:4). For a Hebrew boy who was sold as a slave, Joseph could have ended up in a more unfortunate place. The narrator adds in Genesis 39:3 that Joseph's rise in position within the household of Potiphar was aided by God, who was with him. But just as Joseph was in a favorable position with his father, he is now in the same favorable position with Potiphar, and the narrative takes follows the plot of Genesis 37 in which Joseph is taken down from that position by no fault of his own.[29] Potiphar's wife wants Joseph to lie with her (Gen. 39:7), which is a set-up by the narrator to again strip Joseph of his position. Just as in Genesis 37 Joseph is only seen as a threat when he is in a high position. In Genesis 37, his brothers only act on their hatred when Joseph occupies a favorable position within the family and at an age that he can be seen as a threat to his brothers. Now in Potiphar's house Joseph is only seen as a threat when he again is in a high position and when he can be regarded as a man. Potiphar's wife only noticed him (Gen. 39:7) when he was in charge of the household and not when he was in a lower position. Joseph refuses the advances of Potiphar's wife and remains loyal to Potiphar. This is of course not the response that Potiphar's wife desired, and she starts to scheme against Joseph and tries to convince him to lie with her. Then just as in Genesis 37, where Joseph was sent alone to look for his brothers, Joseph is now alone in the house of Potiphar when Potiphar's wife makes a move on him. And again, Joseph leaves, but without a piece of clothing.[30] This piece of clothing is also used against him as evidence, just like his special coat smeared with the blood of a goat was used as evidence to give Jacob the message that something terrible had happened to his son. It sems to be very hard for Joseph to keep his position, even though he is loyal and is falsely accused of wrongdoing. It seems even harder for him to leave a scene with his outfit still intact. Potiphar's anger and trust in the wrong person then lands Joseph in prison.

Again, Joseph has to start all over again and is put into the lowest position imaginable. But he again is not alone, God is by his side (Gen. 39:21). Being led by God puts him in a favorable position with the prison guard. The same patterns as in the household of Potiphar then occurs, and Joseph is given a leading role within the prison environment. Joseph is now in charge of all the prisoners, just as he oversaw all the slaves in the house of Potiphar.

[29] See W.L. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study* (Colombia: University of South Carolina, 1988), 23.

[30] In contrast to Genesis 37 where Joseph was forcefully removed by his brothers, Joseph leaves on his own accord in Genesis 39:12.

Genesis 40

Genesis 40 continues the narrative with Joseph's life in prison. Joseph is joined by the chief cupbearer and the chief baker who have angered the Pharaoh (Gen. 40:1). Joseph is given the responsibility of looking after them. The narrative then shifts to the perspective of the two prisoners in Joseph's care, who tell Joseph their dreams. Even though the chief cup cupbearer and chief baker do not know that Joseph has a special gift of explaining for dreaming dreams, they both feel comfortable enough to tell Joseph their dreams. They also must have felt the dreams represented some kind of message, otherwise they would have not felt the need to tell Joseph about them and would have not be distraught by them (Gen. 40:7).[31]

The chief cupbearer tells his dream to Joseph (Gen. 40:9-11) and Joseph interprets the dream, with the help of God, and explains the positive message of the dream to the chief cupbearer. The chief cupbearer will be restored into his former high position with the Pharaoh. Joseph then asks the chief cupbearer to remember him when he is restored in his high position, so that the chief cupbearer will help him to change his fate and prove his innocence (Gen. 40:14-15). This is the first time that Joseph speaks about his misfortunes and how he has been treated in the past. It also seems that he does not have enough faith in God anymore to make such a request to the chief cupbearer, even though the narrator repeatedly mentions that God is with Joseph and is blessing him.[32] Joseph mentions that he is innocent to the chief cupbearer which puts a greater emphasis on the fall he has fallen from a high position in Potiphar's household to the life of a prisoner.[33] After the positive interpretation of the chief cupbearer's dream, the chief baker also feels that he should tell his dream and receive a positive interpretation. However, the chief baker's dream holds a different message and is not in favor of the baker at all. According to Joseph, the chief bakers dream foretells his imminent death. There is no clue in this chapter as to why the chief cupbearer got to live and the chief baker had to die, and what terrible deed the baker had done to deserve a tragic death. The chief cupbearer was restored three days later to his former position, but he did not keep his promise and forgot all about Joseph. Whether this was a punishment for Joseph because he did not have enough faith in God's plan is unclear.

[31] This could also be because the chief cupbearer and the chief baker see that Joseph is blessed by God and that this blessing extends to the people Joseph gets into contact with.

[32] For a repetition of this pattern and explanations of the themes and motives for the paired set of dreams and their significance, see V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50* (Grand rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

[33] Although one could argue that having a high-ranking position within the household of Potiphar still made Joseph technically a slave and that this life was not much different from being a high-ranking prisoner, since in none of these positions Joseph was able to determine his own life.

Genesis 41

This is the last chapter of the narrative in which Joseph is a slave. The chapter begins with a change in perspective and narrates the dream of the Pharaoh. The first line states that two years later the Pharaoh received a dream. This line means that Joseph has been left in the prison for two more years. These years have again given him time to grow. Interpreting the dream of the Pharaoh is a bigger task than interpreting the dreams of two other prisoners, and this extra time would have given Joseph a more mature outlook on the task.

The Pharaoh receives two dreams.[34] The first dream of the Pharaoh is told in Genesis 41:1-4 and recounts the Pharaoh standing close to the Nile and seeing seven thin cows eating seven fat cows. How this could happen and how it is possible for a cow to eat another cow, is left to the imagination of the reader. The following lines recount the second dream of the Pharaoh in which seven full ears of grain swallow seven withered ears of grain. Again, how this would work and what it would look like is left to the imagination. The dreams left the Pharaoh feeling very uneasy and this is very understandable given the strange events of the dreams. He sends for his wisest men and religious specialists to interpret the dreams, but none of them is able to make sense out of them. And this is the point where the narrator shifts to the narrative of Joseph again. The chief cupbearer suddenly remembers his fellow prisoner who correctly interpreted his dream. The Pharaoh then send for this Hebrew prisoner and after three years Joseph is finally out of prison.

Joseph is given fresh new clothes and his face is shaved (Gen. 41:14).[35] He then appears before the Pharaoh. Nothing is mentioned about his journey to the Pharaoh, but the change in clothing could be seen as a new opportunity to rise again in position and to a complete change in Joseph's life. The Pharaoh asks Joseph to interpret his dreams and Joseph is willing to do this and explains that he is able to interpret the dreams because God is blessing and guiding him (Gen. 41:16). The Pharaoh repeats his dreams to Joseph and tells him that none of the wise men or magicians were able to explain them. This part emphasizes the greatness of God who is with Joseph and gives Joseph the ability to help the Pharaoh.[36]

Joseph starts his explanation of the dreams and tells the Pharaoh that he actually dreamed the same dream twice. Both dreams carry the same message. The seven cows and the seven ears who ate up their companions, are a representation of the same thing. They represent the seven years of famine and struggle that will come to Egypt after seven years of prosperity. Joseph also explains that God has given the Pharaoh a message about what is to come and the fact that he gave his message twice,

[34] The dreams in the Joseph Story always appear in a set of two. Joseph receives two dreams in Genesis 37, and in Genesis 40 the second pair of dreams appear.

[35] The reference to the shaving of the face adds realism to the story, since it is a very Egyptian thing to do.

[36] None of the Egyptian gods were able to guide the Pharaoh or give an explanation for his dreams through the voice of magicians or wise men.

means that God will act soon and that his plan is set (Gen. 41:37). The prosperity of the land will soon be forgotten, and famine is to come immediately after the seven good years. In Genesis 40 Joseph only interpreted the dreams, but in this chapter, Joseph takes on another role. His years in prison have matured him enough that he can take on the role of advisor and give the Pharaoh advice on how to deal with the coming famine.

Genesis 42

This chapter starts with the severe famine that has reached the Valley of Hebron. Jacob calls upon his sons to go down to Egypt to buy grain there so that the family may live and not die of famine. All but one of Joseph's brothers journey to Egypt. Jacob is not willing to let his youngest son, Benjamin, go with his brothers. Benjamin has now taken on the role of the favored son, since Joseph had been lost to his father.[37] The brothers set out to Egypt where Joseph is in a high position of power and oversees the selling of grain. In this function Joseph meets his brothers again after many years. He recognizes them, but the brothers are unaware of his identity. The brothers bowed before him, which had been foretold in the dreams of Joseph. But one brother was missing. Joseph wants to know what happened to his youngest brother and he accuses his other brothers of being spies intent on seeking out the weaknesses of Egypt. His brothers all deny these accusations, but Joseph is not satisfied until he sees his youngest brother as well. Joseph wants them to return with Benjamin to prove that they are not spies. Only one brother is allowed to travel to Canaan and then to return with the youngest brother, the other brothers will be held captive for three days.[38] On the third day Joseph has a new proposal for them and allows the brothers to all go home with enough grain for their families, only if one of the brothers will stay behind in Egypt and if they all return with their youngest brother. Joseph then picks Simeon to stay behind in prison and he lets the other brothers leave.[39] Joseph becomes emotional during these moments, but he succeeds in hiding it, and the brothers still have no idea who Joseph really is. Joseph then orders his servants to place the pieces of silver of each brother back into the sacks which are now filled with grain. The brothers return to the Valley of Hebron and their father and they relate to him what had happened. Upon opening their sacks of grain, they find their pieces of

[37] Benjamin would have been a grown man at this point in the narrative, since Joseph's disappearance was 22 years ago.

[38] The three days of imprisonment for the brothers relates to the three years that Joseph himself had spent in prison because of false accusations.

[39] This happens after Joseph overhears the conversation between the brothers in which Reuben comments on the actions they had taken against Joseph 22 years ago. Joseph also learns from this conversation that Reuben had tried to save him, but Joseph does not know Reuben's egocentric reasoning behind this.

silver, and become afraid. Upon hearing the story, Jacob is afraid that he will lose all his children, and he refuses to let Benjamin go with his brothers to Egypt.[40]

Genesis 43

Eventually, the grain from Egypt runs out. Jacob tells his sons to go and buy more grain from Egypt, but Judah reminds him of the words Joseph had spoken and that they are not able to travel to Egypt without Benjamin. Judah convinces Jacob to let Benjamin come with them to Egypt and he ensures Benjamin's safe return to his father. Jacob orders his sons to take several gifts with them to bestow on Joseph and also to return the silver pieces they found in their sacks of grain the first time. The brothers arrive with their gifts and Benjamin in Egypt and they are taken to Joseph's house. The brothers are still afraid because they are once again singled out. Joseph's steward welcomes them into Joseph's home, and during the wait for Joseph the brothers tell the steward of the discovery of the silver pieces last time. But the steward assures them that all is well, he reunites the brothers with Simeon. When Joseph arrives, all the brothers bow down to him and he again asks them about their father.[41] After seeing Benjamin, Joseph has to retract himself from the scene because he is overcome with emotions. The brothers are invited to eat with Joseph and Joseph arranges their seating all according to their birth, which puzzles the brothers. The brothers all are given food and drinks, but Benjamin is singled out and he receives five times the amount his brothers are served.[42] Genesis 43 ends with the sentence that the brothers became intoxicated with Joseph.

Genesis 44

Joseph puts his brothers through another test in this chapter. He orders his servants to place their silver pieces in their food sacks.[43] On top of that, he also orders his servants to place his own silver cup in the sack of Benjamin. When the brothers leave Joseph's home and start their journey back to Canaan, Joseph orders his steward to go after the brothers and search their sacks. The brothers claim that they know of no wrongdoing and they exclaim that if the silver cup is to be found in one of their sacks, the owner of that sack will die, and all the brothers will become slaves. The silver cup is then found in Benjamin's sack and the brothers all return with their clothes torn to Joseph's home. The brothers offer themselves as servants to Joseph, but Joseph only wants Benjamin to be his servant.

[40] Jacob says that he has already lost Joseph and that only one is still alive, meaning Benjamin. Comments like these could have sparked a negative treatment of Benjamin by his other brothers, but there are no verses hinting at a similar negative attitude toward Benjamin. Comments like these would, however, be unpleasant and harsh to hear for the other brothers.

[41] With the addition of the youngest brother the fulfilment of the dreams of Joseph is now complete.

[42] The Egyptian custom was to eat separately from foreigners, and in Genesis 43 Joseph's brothers are also served separately from the Egyptians and Joseph.

[43] The silver pieces play an important part, since Joseph was sold by his brothers for 20 silver pieces.

Judah tells Joseph that they cannot return to their father without the youngest brother. Their father would not survive this second loss. Judah pleads with Joseph to let him take Benjamin's place because he promised Jacob the safe return of Benjamin. Judah explains that losing Benjamin would cause his father to enter Sheol.[44] This defending of Benjamin and offering up his own life to facilitate the safe return of his brother, is an enormous change from the way they treated Joseph 22 years earlier. The brothers have witnessed the grief they had put their father through, and they understand more grief would be unbearable for him. The brothers now take full responsibility for Benjamin and the emotional state of their father.

Genesis 45

After Judah delivers his speech to Joseph, Joseph finally breaks down, and he orders his staff to leave the room. Joseph then lets his emotions run freely and he tells his brothers of his real identity. He asks if his father is still alive. He convinces his brothers that he really is their lost brother whom they sold to Egypt. He tells them he bears no grudges because it was all part of God's plan. God had planned for him to take care of his father, brothers, and their families, and he was now in the position to do so. Joseph tells his brothers that God had sent him to Egypt, not them. The brothers do not respond, they remain without words.[45] Joseph assures them that they are safe and that he will take care of them. He also tells them that the land will have five more years of famine and that they should go back to Canaan to gather all their belongings and families and live in the land of Goshen, near Joseph. Joseph explains his position within Egypt to his brothers, and he asks them to bring their father to him.[46] When the Pharaoh hears that Joseph's brothers have arrived in Egypt, he offers them the best land of Egypt. He wants the brothers and their families to reside in Egypt, but his motives for offering this could be more selfish than Joseph's motives.[47] When the brothers have returned and informed Jacob that his favorite son is still alive, Jacob does not believe them. But after hearing the words of Joseph and seeing all the gifts, he is convinced and wants to be taken to Joseph.

[44] During this speech of Judah, Joseph hears what has happened to his father after he was sold. Joseph hears of the enormous grief his brothers had put his father through and how he was mourned by Jacob. Undoubtedly, this must have been very hard for Joseph to hear.

[45] The brothers are still afraid that Joseph will have them put into prison, or worse, put them to death for what they have done to him, and because they have been found carrying stolen goods twice.

[46] Joseph is longing to see his father again, and now he is in the position to provide for his whole extended family and have them live near to him. But Joseph has been in a privileged position for some years now. He could have made the journey back to the Valley of Hebron to see his father years earlier, or he could have sent his steward to tell his father that he was still alive and honored in Egypt. Joseph could have spared Jacob years of grief.

[47] The Pharaoh could be doing this out of gratitude for the services of Joseph. But he could also fear that Joseph now wants to return with his family and live with his father again in the Valley of Hebron, which would mean that he loses his dream interpreter and advisor. If he invites the whole family of Joseph to stay and live in Egypt, he is still able to keep Joseph as his advisor.

Genesis 46

This chapter begins with a different narrative than the Joseph narrative. In the first four lines, Jacob comes to Beersheba and God speaks directly to him in his visions. These lines are the only ones in which God directly speaks and tells part of his plan within the Joseph novella. God spoke to Jacob in Genesis 35, and the author of these lines in Genesis 46 seems to want to make the connection between the two narratives. After Jacob is reassured by God, he sets out with his whole family and their belongings to journey to Egypt. What then follows in this chapter is a complete list of all the descendants of Jacob. The total number of his extended family is seventy persons, including Joseph and his children in Egypt. Judah is sent ahead of the travelling family to let Joseph know that they are on the way. Joseph finally meets his father again in Goshen. What follows is an emotional scene between Joseph and Jacob and Jacob exclaims that he can finally die now after having seen Joseph again. Joseph then tells his brothers that he will announce their arrival to the Pharaoh. But he also warns his brothers not to tell the Pharaoh that their occupation is being a shepherd, since the Egyptians detest shepherds.[48]

Genesis 47

Joseph announces the arrival of his family to the Pharaoh, and he chooses five of his brothers to present themselves to the Pharaoh.[49] Of course, the Pharaoh asks the brothers what their occupation is. They answer him with the words: 'Your servants are shepherds, as our ancestors were'.[50] This is not what Joseph told them to say, but they follow it up by making the same request of Pharaoh as Joseph did: to let them settle in the land of Goshen and attend to their flock there. The Pharaoh responds to Joseph's request and the brothers are allowed to settle in Goshen. But the Pharaoh also gives Joseph the task of putting his brothers in charge of his livestock. This is gesture of respect towards Joseph, but it could also be a matter of convenience to the Pharaoh since capable shepherds would now attend to his livestock and let it prosper. By settling in the land of Goshen, the family of Joseph is not living amongst the Egyptians, and they now have an important role as well.[51]

It is then Jacob's turn to be presented to the Pharaoh, and Jacob immediately blesses the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh has no other questions for Jacob but the inquiry of his age, which Jacob answers

[48] This Egyptian detail is another element added by the author(s) that adds realism to the story.
[49] The names of the five brothers are not mentioned.
[50] Genesis 47: 3
[51] This could also be another motive of the Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to live in Goshen, where they would be disconnected and detached from the Egyptians but could carry on with their profession of shepherding and caring for the livestock of the Pharaoh at the same time. They would have a legitimate purpose for living there and being shepherds and the Egyptians would not be able to disapprove of this set up. Joseph's family would not be bothered in this arrangement.

with 130 years of age. Another blessing is bestowed upon the Pharaoh and then Joseph settles his family and all their livestock in the land of Goshen.

When the famine grows severe, the people of Egypt came to Joseph for food. Joseph first let the people bring their livestock to them in exchange for food, and after this, he bought all the land from the people and the people sold themselves to be slaves to the Pharaoh as well. This arrangement meant that Joseph had bought all there was in Egypt and made it all submissive to the Pharaoh. Joseph then sets up another strategy whereby the people are able to sow the land but will pay a part of the harvests to the Pharaoh.[52] Again, Joseph is able to make sure that the Pharaoh prospers and that the land is filled with food.

After dealing with the severe famine, the author moves back to the narrative of Jacob. Jacob is now 147 years of age and he knows death is upon him. He summons Joseph and makes him promise that he will not bury his father in Egypt, but with his ancestors.[53]

Genesis 48

Genesis 48 continues with the coming death of Jacob. Jacob is ill and Joseph takes his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to see him. Jacob tells Joseph and his sons of the promise that was made to him by God that he was to become fruitful and the ancestor of a company of peoples.[54] God promised him that his offspring would be given land. Jacob claims Manasseh and Ephraim as his own sons, but he places the younger son Ephraim above the older son Manasseh. When Joseph tries to correct this, Jacob tells him that Ephraim will be greater than his older brother. Jacob blesses Joseph and his sons, and he tells them that Joseph will receive the portion of land that Jacob himself took from the Amorites. The blessing also entails the promise to Joseph that God will bring him back to the land of his ancestors, back to the Promised Land.[55]

Genesis 49

Following the blessing of Joseph and his two sons, Jacob then summons all his sons to tell them what will happen to them in the future.[56] Each of the brothers is addressed separately and given his own prediction of the future.[57] All the predictions are a reflection of the characters of the brothers and the

[52] The lands of the priests were an exception to this rule because they lived on an allowance from the Pharaoh.
[53] After seeing Joseph alive, Jacob no longer fears his death and Sheol, as he did in Genesis 37 and 44. He can now die in peace without the burden of grief.
[54] Genesis 48: 4
[55] Genesis 48: 21
[56] None of the brothers are given words here to react to the foretelling of the future, even though some of the predictions are quite negative. The author also leaves out the information of whether all the brothers showed up to hear the predictions for them of the future. Since some of the predictions are negative, it is reasonable to suggest that some of the brothers did not want to hear their future fate.
[57] Simeon and Levi share a prediction.

actions that they have undertaken in the past. None of them is spared the assessment of their character and all will have to face the consequences of their past actions, whether good or bad. This section of the narrative clearly shows that no one is able to escape the ramifications of their actions, it will shape the future. Each of the brothers receives a separate and tailored blessing, with Jacob finishing his blessings by stating that his sons are the twelve tribes of Israel.[58] Jacob then tells his sons that he will be with his ancestors soon and he gives his sons detailed instructions for his burial. Jacob tells them exactly where he wants to be buried: in the cave where his forefathers are buried and where he himself buried his wife Leah. After this long speech, Jacob dies.

Genesis 50

From all the brothers that are present at the death of Jacob, only Joseph is shown to be emotional. Joseph wept for the death of his father and he commands his staff to embalm his father.[59] Even though Joseph occupies a very high position of power in Egypt, he has to make a request to the Pharaoh for taking his father back to the land of Canaan and burying him there. The Pharaoh's answer is very short, and Joseph is given permission to leave for Canaan. He is accompanied by all the elders of Egypt, and his brothers and their households.[60] The children and all the livestock were left behind in Egypt.[61] Joseph carries out the wishes of his father and buries him with his ancestors. After this he and his brothers, and the rest of the company, return to Egypt.

The next section of this narrative shows the fear of the brothers for Joseph after their father has died. Jacob is no longer there to act as an intermediary between the brothers and Joseph, and the brothers are now fearful that Joseph will repay them for the horrible way they treated him in the past. The brothers go up to Joseph and offer themselves as slaves and beg Joseph for forgiveness. Again, Joseph becomes emotional, and he assures them that God had planned for it to be so and that the brothers have nothing to fear. Joseph reassures them that he will look after them and provide for them.

Joseph's story is drawn to a close by his death. Joseph remained and thrived with his brothers and their families in Egypt, and at the age of 110 years old, Joseph speaks for the last time to his brothers. He tells them that God will come to them and that he will take them back to the Promised

[58] Genesis 49: 28

[59] Embalming is also another Egyptian detail that the author(s) used to add to the Egyptian setting of the narrative and the realism.

[60] Genesis 50: 7-9

[61] This could be because the journey for the children would be too long, but it could also be the reassurance for the Pharaoh that Joseph and his brothers would return to Egypt. All the elders of Egypt had gone with Joseph because of his high position, so it would not be unthinkable that the Pharaoh needed some kind of security to make sure that they would all return.

Land. Joseph makes them swear that they will take his bones with them to Canaan, so that he can also return to the land of his ancestors.[62] Joseph then dies and is embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

[62] Genesis 50: 24

Chapter 3

Ancient civilizations and dream interpretation

Dreams play an important role in the Joseph story. However, dream accounts were not only a stylistic or linguistic feature in the biblical tradition, they were also important in the surrounding cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt. The earliest written accounts of dreams originate from the ancient Near East, in particular ancient Mesopotamia, the area that now comprises modern Iraq.[63] As early as the third millennium B.C.E., humankind regarded dreams to be very important and to contain messages.[64] Dreams were a method to receive or participate in divine communication. Within the Mesopotamian cosmos, every form of life had a specific function that was predestined.[65] Fate and fortune were determined by the gods. These gods played an active role in the lives of humans. They directed and orchestrated the events relating to individual people and lives, as well as the bigger affairs of state and wars with surrounding nations. The gods communicated their directions and intentions to humans through various ways. Divine interferences and foretelling of the future were passed on through omens and dreams. To understand and read an omen, an interpreter was needed. This interpreter was skilled in discerning meaning from omens and drawing conclusions on what would be happening in the future, based on earlier observations of these omens. The inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia believed the outcome of events and affairs to be predetermined, and a person was unable to change the intentions of the gods. The only option left for humans, was to ignore the omens, but this often resulted in a terrible or negative outcome or receiving the scorn of the angered gods. But the omens were hard to understand and interpret, and long lists of earlier omens and their outcomes would be needed to compare and understand the meaning of an omen. Dreams were a more direct way of communication with the gods. Some dreams could be directly interpreted by the dreamer, other dreams needed a skilled interpreter to dissect the message. These messages or glimpses of the future played an important part in ancient Mesopotamian society. Dreams and allusions to dream interpreters feature in almost all genres of ancient Mesopotamian texts.[66] However, it is important to note that dreams

[63] Unfortunately, the evidence for dream interpretation is fragmentary, and very geographically and chronologically spread out.

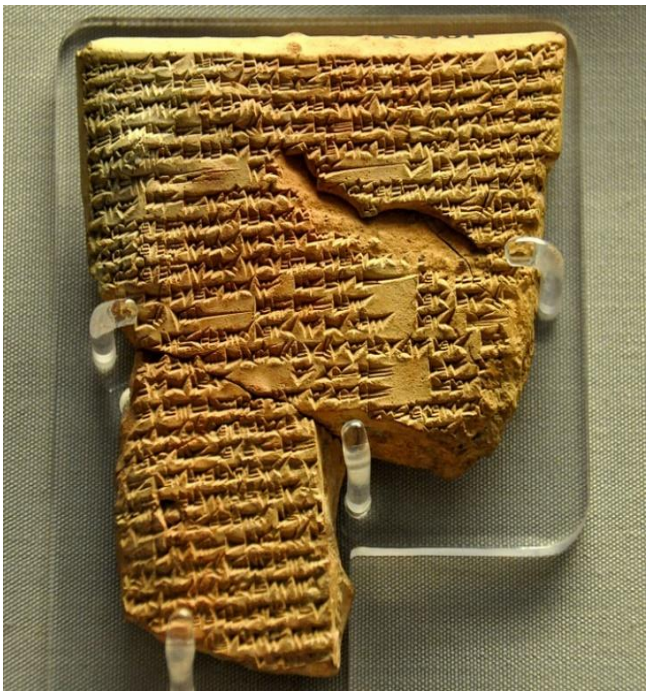
[64] Dream interpretation in ancient times is very different from the modern western interpretation of dreams. In ancient times dreams were used to foretell the future, whereas in modern western times, dreams are part of psychoanalysis.

[65] See A.L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago: University Press, 1964), 198-205.

[66] 'Dreams often featured in ancient Mesopotamian literary compositions as well as in historical narratives, letters, ritual and technical divinatory texts.' Quote from: Metcalf, Christopher, "Horn and ivory: Dreams as Portents in Ancient Mesopotamia and Beyond," *Perchance to Dream. Dream Divination in the Bible and the Ancient Near East. Ancient Near East Monograph,* No. 21 (2018): 9.

recorded in literary texts or inscriptions from ancient worlds, formed a part of the narrative, but could be far removed from practice or dreams in everyday life. Dreams in texts or inscriptions served a narrative purpose.

The oldest surviving Mesopotamian dream account can be found on the Stele of Vultures. This sculptural relief dates from the Early Dynastic III period, roughly between 2600 and 2350 B.C.E.[67] The relief relates the story of Eannatum, the ruler of Lagash, who was in conflict with the ruler of Umma, a neighboring state. According to the Stele of Vultures, the victory of Eannatum over the ruler of Umma was foretold and aided by the appearance of the god Ningirsu in a dream to Eannatum. Another ancient Mesopotamian dream account can be found in the Sumerian Legend of Sargon, king of Akkad, who reigned from 2334 to 2279 B.C.E. The legend, found on cuneiform tablets, tells the story of Sargon who was a cupbearer for the ruler of Kish, King Urzababa.[68] Sargon received a dream with a troubling message and imagery of a young woman drowning King Urzababa for the sake of Sargon. Sargon related his dream to the king, and the king understood that Sargon would replace him. The king understood that Sargon was chosen by the gods to replace him, and, in the end, Sargon did. Sargon's message dream became the basis of the authorization for his rule. He was chosen by divine intervention and this made his rule legitimate. Another example of how important dream accounts were in ancient Mesopotamia can be observed in the Epic of Gilgamesh. This epic poem, whose earliest version dates from ca. 2100 B.C.E., conveys the story of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk in the Neo-Sumerian Empire.[69] The dreams within this story play a vital part in describing and illustrating the unfolding of events. The main characters, Gilgamesh and Enkidu, both receive message dreams that aid them in reaching their goals and the dreams foreshadow important events. Omens



Cuneiform inscription of the birth of Sargon. Neo-Assyrian period, 7th century B.C.E. (The British Museum. London).

[67] For a detailed description and analysis of the Stele of Vultures see: I. Winter, "After the Battle Is Over: The "Stele of the Vultures" and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Arts of the Ancient Near East," *Studies in the History of Art.* Vol. 16 (1985): 11-32.

[68] The cuneiform writing was a system developed around 3500-3000 B.C.E by the ancient Sumerians.

[69] There are several versions of this epic poem. The earlier Sumerian versions from ca. 2100 B.C.E., are not fully complete. Later Babylonian tablets from ca. 1800 B.C.E. contain the first complete version of the poem. There are also several versions of the poem found on Akkadian and Assyrian cuneiform tablets, but these were incomplete as well. The old Babylonian tablets have been used to fill in the gaps of the incomplete versions.

and signs from the dreams were interpreted and unfolded as a positive influence and intention from the gods. The dreams were set up to prepare the main characters for the coming events. The Epic of Gilgamesh also shows the strong beliefs in predestination the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia held, since both Gilgamesh and Enkidu were unable to divert the course of events, even though both men held high positions and were in a position of significant power.[70]

Important dreams in ancient Mesopotamia contained a message from the divine. These messages from the gods depicted mainly near future events impacting the lives of the dreamers. Trying to change the outcome of events would be pointless, so the interpretation of these dreams was equally important in preparing oneself for the imminent events. In order to make sense of the different aspects of dreams, scholars A. Leo Oppenheim and Sally Butler divided the dreams found in Mesopotamian sources into two main categories: foretelling dreams and symptomatic dreams.[71]

Prognostic dreams

The category of foretelling dreams, also labelled as prognostic dreams, consist of three further subcategories: message dreams, symbolic message dreams, and dreams with omens.[72] The first subcategory can be regarded as the simplest one. In this first subcategory clear message dreams could be found. These dreams contained a message that needed no further interpretation. The outcome of events was completely clear to the dreamer and no mistake could be made in its interpretation. The second subcategory consisted of symbolic message dreams. These dreams contained similar messages as the dreams from the first subcategory, but interpretation was needed to unravel the symbolic meanings. The third subcategory contained the dreams filled with omens. These omens needed a lot of interpretation and decoding, for which Dream Books were used.

Message dreams

Dreams with a very clear message were regarded by the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia as a clear form of communication with the gods. A prerequisite for a clear message dream would be the appearance of a deity. The deity could also send a messenger, but the dream should consist of a very clear message from a deity directed to a human. The message could be conveyed through several means, the dreamer could, for example, see a written message in the dream, but the interpretation of

[70] See for a more detailed report on the Epic of Gilgamesh: Shin-eqi-Unninni, "Gilgamesh," *The Norton Anthology of World Literature, Vol A: Beginnings to A.D. 100.* Eds. Sarah Lawall et al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003): 10-41.

[71] Dreams that explained the current state of affairs without a reference to the future, or dreams that processed the day's events, were, according to Oppenheim, seen as insignificant by the inhabitants of Mesopotamia.

[72] The categories and subcategories are described in Oppenheim's work *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization,* and have been adapted and extended with broader explanations based on later archaeological finds by Sally Butler in her work *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals.*

the message had to be very clear and to stand out. The dreamer also had to be a figure of social importance, or someone who would rise to a powerful position in the future. Sargon, the cupbearer for King Urzababa, receives a dream that foretells his rise to power.

> There was a single young woman, she was high as the heaven,
> she was broad as the earth.
> She was firmly set as the [bas]e of a wall.
> For me she drowned you in a great [river], a river of blood.[73]

Sargon relates his dream to the king, and the king immediately understands that Sargon will replace him. The message in the dream informs the king that Sargon is chosen by the gods to be the future king.

Receiving a clear message dream was regarded as a privilege and therefore could only be obtained by individuals with a social significant role.[74] More often than not, the message dream would come to the dreamer in a time of difficulty. The dreamer is usually at a crossroads and significant changes are imminent. The dreamer also receives the message without arguing or trying to change the outcome. To receive a message dream is special, since it portrays a direct connection with the gods, and therefore the message should not be questioned but simply be accepted. Ignoring the message would be unwise, because the outcome would not be changed and trying to fight it, could anger the gods. The deities were in charge of the fates and fortunes of humans, so ignoring their messages would be a sign of disrespect and this could result in a negative outcome.

Symbolic message dreams

Symbolic dream messages are a common feature in Mesopotamian epic texts and poems.[75] In the Sumerian epic poem "Dumuzi's Dream", the South Wind bestows the god Dumuzi with a symbolic message dream.

> An owl had caught
> a lamb in the sheepcote,
> A falcon had caught
> a sparrow in the reed of the fence…
> The churns lay on their sides,

[73] Translated by W. Heimpel and J.S. Cooper, "The Sumerian Sargon Legend," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103 (1983): 67-82.
[74] See: Sally A. Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals.* Chapter three: The Classification of Mesopotamian Dreams (Darmstadt: Weihert-Druck, 1998), 15-31.
[75] See J. Donald Hughes, "Dream Interpretation in Ancient Civilizations," *Dreaming, vol. 10*, no 1 (2000): 9.

poured out no milk,
The cups lay on their sides,
Dumuzi lived there no more,
The winds only swept the fold.[76]

Dumuzi feared that this symbolic dream showed him a future in which he no longer lived, and his sister interpreted the dream in the same way: Dumuzi's death was imminent. After trying to outrun and change the outcome of the dream, Dumuzi is unable to escape his fate and he dies.

In symbolic message dreams the gods are not directly in contact with the dreamer, they do not appear or send a messenger to relate the message. Instead, they show their messages and intentions through symbols. The dreamer sees different kinds of objects in the dream, or people acting out certain things. The symbols are usually taken from daily life, objects, or actions that the dreamer is familiar with. The symbols, however, needed to be interpretated. Considering that most of the symbols also existed in the reality of the dreamer's daily life, a mistake in interpreting the symbols could easily be made, and only a skilled interpreter was able to string the symbolic meanings together to a coherent message from the gods.

Dreams with omens

The gods could freely choose how to deliver a message to humans, and the method that would need interpreting the most, was sending a message through omens. These omens had the same meaning for all dreamers, which meant that there needed to be a concise list of omens and their meanings to be able to interpret and decipher the omens. These lists of omens were recorded in Dream Books.[77] Just like the message dreams and the symbolic message dreams, dreams with omens meant that a change to the dreamer's situation would be coming soon. This could either be a positive change, or a negative one. In any case, the outcome could not be changed.

Symptomatic dreams

When a human disrespected the gods, or asked for too many favors, the gods could decide to stop protecting them, which would make room for negative powers to enter their dreams. The dreams of this human would be no longer protected from ambush by evil powers who would create troublesome dreams or night terrors for a long period of time. These negative symptomatic dreams would not be

[76] Translated by T. Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once… Sumerian Poetry in Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 30-31.

[77] The oldest known collection of dream omens, named Zaqiqu, originally stems from the Old Babylonian Period (ca.2003-1595 B.C.E.) and was found in the archive of Assurbanipal.

the result of the psychological state of the dreamer, but the result of evil forces entering the realm of dreams. Symptomatic dreams could also be the result of an illness that the dreamer is unaware of. The gods would then repeat the same dream or aspects of the dream until the message about the illness was made clear.[78] The inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia did not believe the dreams to be a reflection of the physical state of the dreamer, or a result of a psychological disorder. The dreams were divine interventions and all causes for these dreams lay outside the influence and will of the dreamer. Not all symptomatic dreams, however, were experienced as negative or troubled dreams. A reoccurring dream could also point the dreamer to a certain problem or situation which the dreamer was unable to pick up on during his waking hours. The symptomatic dream would then simply serve to cause awareness to the dreamer. Positive dreams or dream aspects could also reoccur in multiple dreams, and humans could appeal to the gods for pleasant dreams.

Both prognostic and symptomatic dreams could be used to underline an action or event by showing that it carried the support and intentions of the gods. It was all planned that way and therefore it was legitimate. Many of the discovered cuneiform tablets relate how the history of a king or legendary figure was predestined by the gods and foretold in dreams. Adding a dream to a history could have been part of political techniques or ways to establish the power of a king or socially significant person. It is, however, important to point out that dreams and dream interpretation played a very different role within the ancient Mesopotamian society and culture, compared to our modern-day societies and cultures. For the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia it was part of their daily life and religious beliefs.

Ancient Egypt

Dream interpreters and the dreams of the pharaohs have played an important part in the ancient Egyptian society, and dreams were regarded as a positive affair.[79] This positive attitude towards dreams could have been a result of the stability of the Egyptian society, and the strong geographical setting of the country. Egypt's climate was relatively stable and the Nile provided fertile lands, as well as important trade routes to Nubia, Libya, and the Levant. These factors accounted for more social stability within the different dynastic periods, which was reflected in their positive attitude towards dreaming. The positive connotation of dreaming carried through in the Egyptian word for dreaming, *resut,* which means 'awakening', and it is accompanied by the open eye determinative. The meaning and writing of this word indicates a situation between being awake and sleeping, in which the state of

[78] See: B. Kilborne, On Classifying Dreams. *Dreaming: Anthropological and Psychological Interpretations.* School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 171-193.
[79] See: Robert Karl, Gnuse, *Dreams and Dream Reports in the Writings of Josephus. A Traditio-Historical Analysis.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 62-71.

mind would be open to receiving messages. The dream messages had to be interpreted as well, however, in contrast to the customs of ancient Mesopotamia, magic was performed and required to avert the danger and to fend off negative future events. Unfortunately, magic often failed in preventing a negative outcome of dreams and ancient Egyptians were unable to change what was decided by the gods.

Dream interpretation was a skilled profession in ancient Egypt. Men were trained in interpreting dreams to aid the high officers at the royal court or the pharaoh himself.[80] In order to train and interpret dreams, literature on dreams had to be available. The oldest known Egyptian recording of dreams were discovered in the 'Letters to the Dead'.[81] These letters come from the First Intermediate Period, 2181-2040 B.C.E., and were addressed to deceased members of the family or associates. The letters mostly consisted of asking for favors or guidance and they were left in the tomb of the deceased. These letters were a means to communicate with the dead, who inhabited the underworld known as 'Duat' in the Egyptian ancient language. In this underworld, the deceased lived alongside several deities, and this realm was believed to be ruled by the god Osiris. The dreams, and writings to ask for a message in a dream, were an important link with the underworld and the spirit of the deceased and gods. The 'Letters to the Dead' were written by common people, with no special or high social ranking, which indicates that it was part of daily life to establish a connection with the dead or the gods.

Papyrus inscribed in Hieratic from the Late Period. Found in a tomb in Thebes, Egypt. The inscription is a petition relating to an inheritance issue, from a temple worker to the god Amun (Brooklyn Museum).

From the period of the Middle Kingdom, 2040-1782 B.C.E., literature on dreams became more substantial. The earliest collection of dreams and omens stems from this period and is called Papyrus Chester Beatty III, and can be regarded as the first Dream Manual.[82] This papyrus contains two separate lists for two different types of dreamers. The first dreamer is depicted as the good and kind follower of the god Horus, and the second dreamer is portrayed as the undisciplined and unruly follower of the god

[80] See: Gnuse, 63.

[81] See: E. Wente, E., Letters from Ancient Egypt. *Society of Biblical Literature: Writings from the Ancient World, vol.1.* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

[82] This papyrus is part of a collection of manuscripts written on papyrus. The manuscripts were found near Thebes. Parts of it can be seen at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, as well as at the British Museum.

Seth. For each dreamer, all the different dreams and their positive or negative explanations and outcomes were listed. In total 139 dreams and omens with a positive outcome are listed, and 83 dreams and omens with a negative outcome, so this papyrus is a substantial collection on dreams and omens.[83]

If a man should see himself in a dream:

Submerging in a river	-	*Good, this mean purification from all evils.*
Burying an Old Man	-	*Good, this means flourishment.*
His bed catching fire	-	*Bad, this means driving his wife away.*
Shod with white sandals	-	*Bad, this means roaming the earth.*[84]

Omens and outcomes from Papyrus Chester Beatty III.

The dreams listed were arranged in a simple way, good dreams had good outcomes, and negative or bad dreams had negative or bad outcomes, and good or bad dreams could happen to each different type of dreamer. The Dream Manual was, just like the belief system of the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia, organized around the basic assumption that the outcomes of dreams were predestined and at the hands of the gods. Performing magic and worshipping the gods was the only way to prevent receiving negative dream messages or to ward off unfortunate future events. However, once a dreamer received a dream message, his fate was set in stone. Humans, or mortals, were unable to change the outcome chosen by the gods.

Dream Incubation

Papyrus Chester Beatty III ends with lines specifically referring to the practice of dream incubation, the process of waking up and using different herbs and bread to return to an awake state of mind. Dream incubation is the general collective term used for techniques, rituals and practices that people sought and applied to intentionally summon a dream containing a message or omen foretelling the future, or guidance during difficult times. Dream incubation is actively seeking communications with the gods about a certain subject, hoping that a solution or message during the dream will provide the answer to the conundrum. An individual would try to evoke an image of the deity or concentrate on setting up a connection with the deity, before going to sleep, with the desire of receiving a dream in which the

[83] See: K. Szpakowska, Dream Interpretation in the Ramesside Age' in Mark Collier and Steven Snape (eds.), *Ramesside Studies in Honour of K.A. Kitchen.* (Bolton: Rutherford Press, 2011), 509-517.

[84] Examples taken from the Papyrus Chester Beatty III, translation by A.H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, 3rd Series: Chester Beatty Gift,* (London, 1935), 9-27. Currently on display in the British Museum. The papyrus was found at Deir el-Medina (Thebes) in Upper Egypt.

deity would manifest itself and send a message. Various methods to seek this communication with the gods were applied. The methods varied from offering to the specific gods, actively asking the gods for a message before going to sleep, sleep guided by a professional incubator, sleeping at shrines for the gods, or even sleeping at temples for the deities. The earliest Egyptian record of dream incubation in which communication with a deity is actively sought, can be found on the Chester Beatty III Papyrus as well. The papyrus relates the manner in which the communication with the deity Bes is sought and what kind of rituals are performed to evoke a dream message from this deity. Dream incubation was closely connected to the healing powers of deities, and communication with the deity Bes was often sought to help with childbirth, fertility, or to protect women and children against illnesses. Many shrines turned into pilgrimage sites for the ill and the weak seeking help from the gods. Dream interpreters would also be active at these pilgrimage sites to interpret the dreams and set up the connection between the gods and humans, and to guide humans through the incubation process.

Messages

Just like in ancient Mesopotamia, the clear messages received during dreams, did not need an interpreter, and symbolic or omen dreams needed to be interpreted by a professional interpreter. However, unlike the recording of dreams in ancient Mesopotamia, the recording of dreams in ancient Egypt was predominantly restricted to the dreams of royalty.[85] This changed during the period of the New Kingdom, ca. 1570-1544 B.C.E., in which the importance of recording dreams of common individuals started to become apparent.[86] The difference between the dreams of the royals (pharaohs) and the common people, was the need of interpretation. The dreams of common people always needed interpretation.[87]

Egyptian Dream Books

Dreams were recorded by ancient Egyptians in various ways. Dream stories and interpretations have been found on ancient stelas, as well as in carved inscriptions in various tombs, and numerous papyri.[88] One of the ways to order and preserve dreams, omens, and their interpretations for future dream

[85] See: K. Szpakowska, Through the Looking Glass: Dreams and Nightmare in Pharaonic Egypt, in Kelly Bulkeley (ed.), *Dreams: A Reader on the Religious, Cultural, and Psychological Dimensions of Dreaming,* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 29-43.
[86] See: Szpakowska, 32.
[87] See: Gnuse, 65.
[88] One of the more recent discoveries (2018) at the site of Saqqâra, (an ancient burial ground in Lower Egypt) consists of several papyri relating and recounting dreams, as well as describing encounters with deities during dreams. So many evidence of dream interpretation has been found here, that it has led to a discussion between scholars whether dream incubation was practiced at this site. See for more information, visual stimulations as well as scholarly discussions on the purpose of the newly exposed site: 'Secrets of the Saqqara Tomb,' (2020) a British documentary on the discovery of a tomb in Saqqara, available through Netflix.

interpreters, was to store the dreams in Dream Books. These dream books were used as educational handbooks for dream interpreters, and were later labelled *oneirocritica* by scholars.[89] Dream books contained listings of various dream topics, followed by the corresponding interpretation. A distinction in the oneirocritica can be made between the hieratic dream books and the demotic dream books.

Hieratic Dream Books

Hieratic, a Greek term meaning 'priestly writing', was an ancient Egyptian cursive writing system based on hieroglyphics.[90] It was a widely spread writing system and it was used for documentation throughout Egypt and Nubia. Writing in hieratic was less time consuming than carving in hieroglyphics, and it originally evolved for religious writings. The hieratic writing system was used for common and religious purposes from ca. 2600 B.C.E. to 700 B.C.E. The earliest form of a dream book, the Chester Beatty III Papyrus was also written in hieratic script. It was found in the village of Deir el-Medina, in the proximity of the Valley of the Kings. This dream book has been dated to originate from ca. 1265 B.C.E., during the reign of Ramesses II (1279-1213 B.C.E.).[91] Each line on the papyrus represents a dream. After the topic of the dream is given, the dream is then classified as good or bad, and is given its interpretation, followed by the foretelling of the future of the dreamer. All the good dreams from the 'followers of Horus' are clustered together and come first, followed by the clusters of all the bad dreams. After this section, the same structure is used for the 'followers of Seth'. Even though this dream book is extensive with 108 recorded dreams, it is not organized by themes. One would have to search through the entire book to find a description of a specific dream and its either good or bad interpretation.[92] Two other dream manuals have survived from the Pharaonic period, Papyrus Berlin P. 29009 from the 24th dynasty, and Papyrus Berlin P. 23058 from the 30th dynasty, in which the pharaohs play a significant role.[93] Both of these manuals are fragmentary and incomplete, but they do show that the importance of dream recording and interpretation was carried through to the Late Period (525-332 B.C.E.).

[89] *Oneirocritica* (The Interpretation of Dreams) is an ancient Greek work by Artemidorus. It was written in the 2nd century C.E. and it comprises of five separate books on the subject of dreams and dream interpretation. This extensive work is still regarded as one of the most comprehensive treatises on dreams and dream interpretation.
[90] Hieratic stems from the Greek word *hieratika*. Scribes used the hieratic writing system to record daily information, write religious texts and letters.
[91] See: Szpakowska, Dream Interpretation in the Ramesside Age, 509-517.
[92] See: Luigi Prada, Luigi, *Classifying dreams, classifying the world: ancient Egyptian oneiromancy and demotic dream books.* (Oxford and Oakville: Oxford Books, 2011), 167-177.
[93] Both papyri are given the name Berlin as a reference to the place where they are preserved in the museum.

Demotic Dream Books

From the hieratic script a more 'popular' writing form developed, called the demotic script, derived from the Greek word *demotika*. Demotic script became the common form of writing between 700 and 500 B.C.E. It replaced the hieratic script in Upper Egypt, but the hieroglyphics and hieratic script kept being used. The demotic script became popular in administrative and judicial texts, and it was used for government records. Eventually the demotic script was replaced by Coptic.

The earliest demotic dream book is the Papyrus Jena 1209, dated from around the 4th-3rd century B.C.E. This papyrus contains a wide selection of dreams that are centered around the topic 'the means of suckling'.[94] All dreams concerning the suckling of children, people, or animals, are written down. The structure of the record of these dreams is similar to previous texts: the topic of the dream is mentioned, then followed by the classification of the dream (good/bad), followed by the interpretation and the prediction of the future. This Papyrus Jena 1209 is the only complete demotic dream book that has been found containing so many fragments about dreams. All other demotic dream writings related to dream interpretation date to the much later Roman Period, from which a great number of dream records have survived.

This example of the differences within the development of Egyptian script was taken from: "Sesh Kemet Egyptian Scribe," last modified August 12, 2013, https://seshkemet.weebly.com.

From all the Egyptian inscriptions and written records, it is evident that dream interpretation played a vital part in the life of ancient Egyptians. Dreams were considered to be messages from the gods or deceased relatives, and were received positively. A close connection with the deceased relatives or gods was sought after, and various ways of establishing connections with them in dreams were developed and recorded. Dream recording was present throughout Egyptian history and the importance of dream interpretation and recording carried through into the later writing of the Greco-Roman world.

[94] See: Prada, p. 170

The Greco-Roman world

The Greek and Roman literature on dreams, dream interpretation, and communication with the gods, was influenced by the Egyptians and Mesopotamian dream records, but the Greco-Roman literature became much more extensive in articulating dreams and placing them in a philosophical frame that supported the state religion.[95] Ancient authors like Homer and Virgil both illustrated their writings with divine dreams or divine messages, and they both adapted the view that dreams could be either true or false. According to their writings, dreams could come out of two gates: one gate was made from polished horn and the other gate was made from ivory.[96] Dreams that came through the gate made from polished horn carried the meaning of being true and fulfilling matters, while dreams that emerged from the gate made from ivory would be false, deceptive, and unable to lead to anything.

> *For two are the gates of shadowy dreams,*
> *and one is fashioned of horn and one of ivory.*
> *Those dreams that pass through the gate*
> *of sawn ivory deceive men, bringing words*
> *that find no fulfilment. But those that come*
> *forth through the gate of polished horn bring*
> *true things to pass, when any mortal sees them.*
> *But in my case it was not from there,*
> *I think, that my strange dream came.* Homer, Odyssey 19. 562-9.

Dreams played a vital part in determining one's physical state and frame of mind.[97] Dreams guided the Greeks and Romans in making decisions in everyday life, or in issues and matters of state. Dreams were there to guide them, to advise, to send a message, or to state a prediction. Within the Greco-Roman literature important events or life turning moments, are commonly preceded by a dream. Numerous reports of battles are accompanied by dream reports in which the protagonist receives guidance or aid from a deity, which help him secure a victory. Dreams provided a critical or decisive moment in Greco-Roman literature.

Egyptian and Mesopotamian dream incubation methods influenced the ancient Greeks and they developed 'temple sleeping'. Greeks that were ill or ailing, sought the help and healing powers of the god of health and medicine, Asclepius. Numerous temples and shrines were erected in honor of

[95] See Juliette Grace Harrison, *Cultural Memory and Imagination: Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire 31 BC – AD 200*, (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2009), 85-125.
[96] See: Homer, *Odyssey,* book 19, lines 560-569 and Virgil, *Aeneid,* book 6, lines 893-898.
[97] See: Harrison, *Cultural Memory and Imagination,* 107.

Asclepius and the Greeks would bring offerings to the god in the hope of receiving a dream. Larger sacrifices were made if the illness was more severe, and this entailed sleeping in the temple or sanctuary near a statue of Asclepius, in hopes of being cured or visited during the night by the god. Temple priest would in turn interpret the dream messages of Asclepius since only people with a high-ranking status were able to interpret the messages themselves, or could receive a clear divine message that needed no interpretation.

Dreams as a sign of the physical state

In ancient Greece philosophers were interested in defining the state between sleeping and being awake.[98] They believed parts of the soul could travel or could be visited by other souls before returning to the body. During sleep the dreams could be a reflection or mirror of the physical state of a person, for which the person would be in a different state of sleep and not be able to establish a connection with the divine. If a person were experiencing symptoms of a disease, these symptoms could also present themselves in dreams, or the dreams would contain more symptomatic information corresponding to the disease that aided the physicians in making their diagnosis. Recording the dreams of an ailing individual was therefore seen as an important part in discerning a diagnosis.[99] Hippocrates, the Greek physician regarded to be the founder of Western medicine, was the first around the end of the 5th century B.C.E., to discuss and write a rule about the connection between the dreams of patients and the symptoms of their diseases. Hippocrates' rule made a distinction between ordinary dreams and unusual dreams, whereby the latter were an indication of ill health. Unusual dreams would also trigger anxieties, which would in turn be able to sicken the body and soul during the waking hours. Hippocrates connected dreams to the mental state of a person. If a person were of good health, the dreams would reflect this in the same way as a person of ill health would suffer from abnormal dreams filled with anxiety or feelings of fear. Recording the dreams became an integral part of discerning diseases.

Aristotle disconnected the realm of dreams even more from the realm of the divine or the dead. In his discourse *On Dreams*, written ca. 350 B.C.E., Aristotle describes how dreams are a perception of the images obtained through sensory input during the waking hours. According to Aristotle, dreams are a succession of the lingering images from the waking hours that are left in the sensory system and are replayed and revisited during sleep. With his theory on sleep and dreaming,

[98] Pre-Socratic philosophers were interested in separating dreaming from the supernatural realm. They tried to seek natural causes behind the formation of dreams. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (a post-Socratic philosopher) wrote three extensive treatises in which he dissected the natural function of sleep and the rationality behind dreams, whilst Pythagoras reasoned that divine spirits were the cause of dream formation.

[99] See for an explanation on the connection between dreams and diagnosis: Harrison, Chapter five: *The Place of Dreams in the Cultural Imagination in the Second Century AD,* 269-274.

Aristotle detached the dream world from the realm of the gods. Dreams were now the result of the activities a person engaged in during the day and the dreams were guided by the perception of this person. Whereas the ancient Egyptians and inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia saw dreams as an influenced by a source outside the power of the dreamer, Hippocrates, and Aristotle both considered dreams as a result from sensory impressions.

Dreams and ethics

In his work *Republic,* written in 375 B.C.E., Plato connects dreams to the ethics of an individual. Plato perceived dreams as a mirror of the righteousness of a person.[100] Every single individual, socially ranked high or low, is filled with cravings or desires not suitable for daily life, but that would infiltrate dreams. Plato made a distinction between those who are rationally strong and those who are weak. The rationally strong individuals would be able to reflect on their desires and irrationally cravings from their dreams and this would give them the ability to transport them into their waking life, acting on the desires or cravings and making the dreams come true. Weaker individuals, however, were unable to see reason in their dreams and therefore their desires and irrational fantasies would remain irrational and in their dreams.[101]

Dream Messages

Messages in dreams arrived at a turning point in the life of the ancient Greeks and Romans.[102] The messages could come from the deceased, the gods, or from an unknown and concealed source. The first sort of message, from the dead, was a common form of dream messages. Receiving messages from deceased relatives was closely linked to different forms of dream incubation. Ancient Greeks would visit the graves of the dead and pray and offer to them in the hopes of receiving a message from them during the night. Messages from the gods were usually delivered by gods or messengers in the shape of a human. The gods only appeared in dreams to the humans when a decisive moment would occur, a moment that would define history. When a dreamer received a dream from an unknown source or an unknown person, the message would still be treated with the same importance. The gods had a way of sending messages through different intermediaries, so all the messages were treated equally and were contemplated.[103] Deceased relatives could also send messages to the gods from their loved ones who had visited their graves or asked for their help.

[100] See R.G.A. Van Lieshout, *Greeks on Dreams.* (Utrecht, 1980), 6-63.
[101] See Van Lieshout, *Greeks on Dreams,* 52.
[102] See: Harrison, *Cultural Memory and Imagination,* 139.
[103] See: Harrison, *Cultural Memory and Imagination,* 85-125.

Forecasting dreams

In the Greco-Roman world, dreams were seen as a reliable source of foretelling the future. Historical events, changes in climate, catastrophic events like natural disasters, the rise of an important historical figure or a significant person, could all be foretold by dreams. Not all dreams that related to the future were sent by the divine. Apuleius connected the art of divination through dreams to daemons in the 2nd century C.E. Daemons could be the source of the dreams that gave a glimpse of the future. This view is connected with the growing negative connotations that were attached to divination and astrology. Persian scholars had developed the discipline of astrology and divination, but since they were regarded as the enemy by the Greeks, the focus on dreams as prophecies shifted from a message of the gods to contact with daemons.[104] This shift of focus, however, did not change the amount of recorded dreams and prophecies.

Dreams as motivation

In Greek and Roman records and literature, dreams are often used as motivation for certain actions. The dreams are used as an explanation for the reason of events or the actions of a personage. Dream messages from the gods could be very useful in politics, since the source of actions and decisions are divine and not from the politician himself. A dream message could also not be labelled as untrue or false, it could not be proven or disputed. Any action taken after a dream, taken on the command of the gods, would be recorded, whether the outcome was good or bad. In case of either outcome, the dream would be used to provide the explanation. Dreams could explain unfathomable actions or events.

According to different Greco-Roman thinkers, dreams were indicative for several states in which the humans could find themselves. The dreams could be a reflection of their physical health, their lingering impressions of the daily happenings and activities, they could be a mirror of their ethics, or they were messages from the dead or deities. However, dreams, in various shapes and forms, would almost always accompany a turning point in the storyline and were therefore significant for the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Dreams in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Israelites

The Hebrew Bible contains several dream accounts that exhibit parallels with Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greek influences in using dreams almost as a literary tool to turn the storyline in another direction

[104] See: Edward Peters, *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law*. Chapter one: The Transformation of the Magus (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 1-20.

or to forge ahead the outcome of the plot. This turn of events would also be induced by divine interaction. Ancient Israelites considered dreams to be important since they believed that actual events and actions occurred in dreams, and therefore dreams needed to be treated with appreciation. Unlike the Greeks, the Israelites did not believe that the soul travelled during sleep, the soul was not able to leave the body, and the body could not be visited by another soul. Body and soul remained one during sleep, and combined the body and soul could experience a dream. The Israelites did not continue with the Greek and Egyptian practices of incubation. Dreams or revelations could not be induced, it was the choice of Yahweh to present a human with a dream.

Unlike the previous ancient civilizations, the ancient Israelites believed in and worshipped only one god. The monolatristic religious system of the early Israelites was centered around the god Yahweh, and it did not incorporate for other gods or divine beings that dwelled in an underworld.[105] This meant that there was no connection between dreams and messages from the dead or other gods. Dream messages could only come from one god, the god Yahweh, and therefore the dreams were considered to be of divine origin and were treated with the same consideration and respect as the dream messages in other ancient civilizations.

Dream accounts in the Hebrew Bible served several purposes. The fundamental purpose of describing a dream in the storyline is to underscore Yahweh's care and concern for his worshippers, to reinforce the belief in Yahweh as a patron god. Yahweh could manifest himself in dreams and relay a divine message or a prophecy. Yahweh could also choose to send messages or revelations through symbols, which required interpretation to be able to see the path Yahweh had set out, or to be able to make the right choice guided by Yahweh.

Prophetic dreams

Dream accounts in the Hebrew Bible are mostly set up in the same manner. The storyline begins with an introduction to the dreamer and the struggles he or she is faced with. When the storyline comes to the point in which a turn of events is needed, the setting of the dream is laid out. The reader is told exactly when and where the dream takes place. Whereas the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia could be visited by a deceased relative or deity during the hours of the day, the dreams in the Hebrew Bible predominantly occur during the sleeping hours in the night. When an Israelite received a message from Yahweh during the waking hours of the day, it was not labelled a dream, but a vision, which was

[105] I have chosen to define the religious belief system of the early Israelites as a *monolatry*, which refers to the worship of only one god and prohibits the worship lesser gods or deities, as described in: K.L. Noll, *Canaan and Israel in Antiquity. A Textbook* on *History and Religion.* Second edition (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), 188-189. However, not all groups in ancient Israel were monolatrous.

treated in a different way than a dream.[106] Whenever the dreamer receives a message from Yahweh during the night, the dreamer is submissive to Yahweh and compliant. Yahweh speaks and the dreamer has a passive role. The setting of the dreams is described in the storyline and also the happenings within the dreams, but the image of Yahweh is never given.[107] The purpose of the dreams is the same as in other ancient civilizations: to convey and pass on a message for the near, and sometimes far, future.

Even though the ancient Israelites worshipped only one deity, messages could be delivered by other divine creatures. These creatures were the angels commanded by Yahweh. The angels passed on messages from Yahweh and would also appear in dreams. Angels carried warnings or advice to the dreamer that would help the dreamer to find the way back to the right path. In later Hellenistic Jewish texts, like the writings of Josephus, the dead appear in dreams as well, but this does not occur in the Hebrew Bible.[108] Whenever the protagonist of the story finds himself at a crossroads in his life, dreams provide a glimpse at the different opportunities and options from which he must choose wisely. The messages from Yahweh, the angels, or the deceased, are always crucial to the development of the plot and provide the text with a clear turning point. The dreams could provide words of encouragement and give the protagonist a motivational boost to do the right thing, a warning of things to come, or the dreams would entail a personal promise made by Yahweh to the protagonist or his descendants.[109] The dreams serve a literary function in the storyline: the connection between the protagonist and Yahweh is made stronger by the dreams and it reinforces the protagonist's faith in Yahweh.

Symbolic dreams

Symbolic dreams are different from the prophetic dreams. In prophetic dreams, a manifestation of Yahweh is present, or an angel commanded by Yahweh conveys a message. Yahweh makes his presence known or he identifies himself to the dreamer. In symbolic dreams, however, Yahweh is absent. Yahweh does not speak to the dreamer, nor is an angel present who speaks in Yahweh's name. The dreamer is only given or shown a certain symbol. Just like in prophetic dreams, the setting of the dream and the importance of receiving a dream is made clear prior to the dreamer receiving the dream. The necessity of the dream is made obvious by the struggles the dreamer finds himself in. The

[106] See: S. B. Noegel, "Dreams and Dream Interpreters in Mesopotamia and in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)," *Dreams and Dreaming: A Reader in Religion, Anthropology, History, and Psychology.* (Hampshire, U.K.: Palgrave-St. Martin's Press,2001), 45-71.

[107] There are references to the whereabouts of Yahweh during the dreams, which is often standing beside the dreamer as, for example, in Genesis 28:13, where the Lord was standing beside Jacob at Bethel. But no description of what the Lord looks like is given in any dream account in the Hebrew Bible.

[108] See for example: Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 17. 339-18.0.

[109] The most common promise made by Yahweh to the protagonist is the assurance of numerous offspring, prosperity, and land.

symbolic dreams require a different description. The given symbol needs to be conveyed in detail in order for a correct interpretation. A symbol could have many different meanings and therefore also different outcomes for the dreamer, so all the significant information surrounding the symbol in the dream is important and could point to a certain interpretation. Another aspect of symbolic dreams is that the dreamer needs to realize that he is given a divine symbol in a dream. In prophetic dreams it is clear to the dreamer that he is in the presence of Yahweh, since Yahweh makes his presence known and speaks directly to the dreamer, but in symbolic dreams, Yahweh does not speak or make a sound. The symbolic dreams are without sound and the source of the symbol in unknown. It is therefore hard to distinguish between a symbolic dream with a divine source and a dream that represents the dreamer's own wishes, needs, fears, or anxieties. However, symbolic dreams and prophetic dreams are the same in their significance of foretelling the future, the symbolic dreams just need additional interpretation and the realization of the dreamer that a divine message has been sent.

The ancient Israelites differed from other ancient civilizations in their interpretation of dream messages. Whereas the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans believed that dream messages could come from either the gods or the dead, based on the evidence preserved in the Hebrew Bible, it seems likely that ancient Israelites believed that dream messages could only come from Yahweh. This meant that the interpreters of the dreams in the Hebrew Bible were represented more as prophets than as interpreters.[110] The dreamer in the narrative was given special powers or knowledge by Yahweh to be able to interpret the dream, and only Yahweh was able to enter dreams and send messages or provide encouragement through visions. Since only Yahweh had this power, no evil or demonic entities or powers were able to enter the realm of dreams. The realm of dreams was completely divine and belonged to Yahweh. This means that not only do the dreams in the Hebrew Bible provide a key element to turn the plot around, but they are also a vital ingredient in the storyline to strengthen the worship of Yahweh, to provide hope, and to reestablish the connection between Yahweh and his people.

[110] In Genesis 37-50, Joseph is able to interpret the dreams because 'the Lord was with him', alluding to the special knowledge or power that Yahweh had given Joseph to speak his words. Yahweh spoke through the words of Joseph.

Chapter 4

Dreams in Genesis 37-50

Dreams in Genesis 37-50

The Hebrew Bible offers two kinds of different dreams: message dreams, and symbolic dreams. The Book of Genesis delivers both of these different dream styles. The dreams of Abimelech, Jacob, and Laban are all deemed to be message dreams by scholars.[111] In these dreams Yahweh appears and is directly visible and present to the dreamer. Yahweh speaks to the dreamer and relates his plans or gives the dreamer a new sense of direction. The dreams are clear and do not need interpretation or an explanation. In Genesis 37-50, however, the dreams are not so clear. In this type of dream, Yahweh neither appears nor speaks. The dreams consist of symbols, scenes, and visions, and interpretation for them is needed.[112] This makes them unusual and different from the preceding dreams. The dreams in Genesis 37-50 also appear in pairs. It begins with the two dreams of Joseph, followed by the two dreams of the chief baker and the chief cupbearer, and it ends with the two dreams of Pharaoh. The dreams play a vital and integral part in the Joseph narrative and they create considerable tension and dramatic interludes. Due to the symbolic and cryptic way the dreams are narrated, these dramatic interludes prompt the reader to carry on reading to find out what the meaning and purpose of the dreams is, and whether they will come true.

Joseph's dreams

The first pair of dreams in the Joseph narrative are dreamed by Joseph himself in the first chapter of the Joseph narrative. The dream is shortly described in just two lines.[113]

He said to them, "Listen to this dream that I dreamed. There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf." [114]

[111] See, for example, the discussion on the differences between the dreams in the Book of Genesis: E. Lowental, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis: An interpretation* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1973), 20.

[112] The first pair of dreams are left without an interpretation by Joseph. However, the reader is given an interpretation of the dreams by Jacob, and at the end of the story this interpretation fits the events: Joseph's family bows before him. The interpretation is never stated in the narrative, but the events in the story confirm Jacob's interpretation of the dreams.

[113] All verses and lines from the Joseph novella are taken from The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Fifth Edition (Oxford University Press, 2018).

[114] Gen. 37:6-7

This dream depicts a reaping scene in which Joseph and his brothers are binding sheaves in the field. The setting of the dream is taken from the daily life of Joseph. He and his family are portrayed as shepherds and farmers, herding livestock, and working the land. The reader has had only a small introduction to the main character of the narrative at this point. The narrator tells the reader that Joseph is seventeen years old and that he is a shepherd. Two other pieces of information, which play an important role in the narrative, are given as well: Joseph brought a bad report of his brothers to his father, and Joseph is more loved by his father than any of his other brothers. His father even shows his favoritism of Joseph by making him a robe with long sleeves. Joseph's behavior and his favorable position evokes the hatred of his brothers. These pieces of background information on the family dynamics immediately builds the tension and hostile situation Joseph finds himself in. When Joseph relates the contents of his dream to his brothers, they straight away understands this dream to be about authority. The brothers answer with *"Are you indeed to have dominion over us?"* [115] As a result of Joseph telling his brothers this dream, he is now even more hated by them. Even though no interpretation of this dream is given, the message of the dream is quite clear and is confirmed by the reaction of Joseph's brothers.

Although Joseph evoked more hatred from his brothers towards himself by telling them about his dream, he decides to tell them about another dream:

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." [116]

The second dream carries the same message as Joseph's the first, and strengthens the reliability of the dreams as a pair. This time, his brothers do not react to his dream. It is his father, Jacob, who rebukes him. Jacob interprets the dream for the reader and states that neither he nor his wife will bow down to Joseph. His brothers already stated that they would not do this in their reaction to Joseph's first dream, so there is no need for them to state this again. But with his father and his brothers angered by the interpretation of the dreams, the plot of the narrative is complete, and the tension is further increased. The narrative does not relate whether preceding dreams of Joseph have come true, but his brothers, as well as his father, all believe the dreams of Joseph to be true and therefore they react in a strong manner.[117] They believe the dreams are a clear message from the divine, but they also think it to be improbable to come true due to the position of Joseph within the family.

[115] Gen. 37:8
[116] Gen. 37:9
[117] At this point in the narrative, Joseph's father and brothers are still unaware that Joseph's dreams will come true in the end. It could also be that Joseph's family reacts in such a strong manner because they believe Joseph to be arrogant.

The second dream is different from the first one in its setting. Where the first dream depicted a normal day-to-day situation, the second dream shows heavenly bodies. In the first dream Joseph was represented by his own sheaf, in the second dream he is not represented at all. The second dream only shows eleven stars, standing as symbols for his eleven brothers, and the sun and the moon represent his parents.[118] Joseph is not present in his second dream. The representation of humans as stars in dream messages is a common feature of the divine promises made to the main characters in the narrative, and this second dream of Joseph uses the same references to the heavenly bodies.[119] After Joseph relates his second dream to his father, it is made clear to the reader that the main character of the narrative is hated by his brothers, but favored by his father. This favoritism is the reason why Jacob kept the matter of the dream in his mind, to see if it would come true in the future. It is hard to understand why Joseph would relate another dream to his brothers after the way he was met with hostility from them after recounting the first dream. It seems that either Joseph was unaware of his brothers' feelings, or he enjoyed being the favorite son of Jacob and exploited his position in a childish way.[120] For Joseph, the dreams carry another message: hope. The dreams allow Joseph to see and feel how a position of authority would alter his life.

This pair of dreams are the only dreams dreamed by Joseph in the narrative. After Jacob's reaction to the second dream, the setting of the narrative goes back to the familiar scene of the brothers attending to their flock. Joseph is not with them; his job is to go and check on his brothers and report back to his father. Having already brought back a bad report of them in Genesis 37:2, this task Jacob sets for his favorite son, does not do Joseph any favors at all. The hatred his brothers feel towards him is only deepened:

> *They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams."* [121]

The brothers decide not to kill him, instead, they throw him in a large pit. When a caravan of Midianites and Ishmaelites travels past, the brothers sell Joseph as a slave and Joseph is taken to Egypt. The

[118] It is worth noting that in Joseph's first dream the number of sheaves is not recounted. The brothers assume that the sheaves stand for them, but it is not mentioned whether every brother is represented by a sheaf, or whether Jacob and his wife were also represented by a sheaf.

[119] See for similar use of the heavenly bodies as references to humans, for example: Genesis 26:4, in which Yahweh appeared to Isaac and delivered the message "… I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven…"

[120] See: Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50),* (E.J. Brill Publishers, 1970), 88-89.

[121] Gen. 37:19-20

brothers still have to explain to Jacob what has happened with his favorite son. For this, the brothers stick to their original idea of wanting Joseph to be dead. They deceive Jacob by telling him that an animal has killed Joseph, and indeed to the family Joseph is now dead and mourned by Jacob.

The dreams of Joseph in the first chapter of the narrative have different characteristics than preceding dreams in the Book of Genesis. The dreams do prepare the reader for a change in the plot, and the tension in the narrative reached a climax in the second dream. However, Joseph, as the dreamer, adds to the tension by relating the symbols of his second dream. Instead of seeking a solution to decrease the tension, Joseph builds on it. The outcome of the dreams is still unclear, and the reader is left wondering what will happen to Joseph now that he is sold as a slave. Throughout the narrative, every time Joseph seems to get closer to a position of power or authority, suspense is built up. The reader is waiting for the resolution of the dreams and wants to know whether his family will bow down to him in the end. Even though Joseph's dreams are only mentioned in the first few lines of the narrative, they are present throughout the whole story. All the actions in the following chapters of the narrative are related to the fulfillment of the dreams of the first ten verses. Although the ending of the narrative is foretold in the first lines, the reader can only see the completion of the cycle at the very end of the story.

The dreams of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker

The narrative takes the reader on the journey to Egypt with Joseph, who is now a slave. Initially, Joseph is able to work himself into a favorable position within the household of Potiphar. Even though Yahweh is with him, Joseph ends up in prison. In prison, Joseph meets the chief cupbearer and the chief baker of Pharaoh's court. The offense committed by these two men is not disclosed, but both find themselves in a powerless position.[122] Joseph's task and duty in this prison-life is to serve these men. The fact that the chief cupbearer and the chief baker are served by Joseph, is a reflection on their previous high position at Pharaoh's court.[123] After a while in custody, both the men receive a dream. These dreams form the second pair of dreams within the Joseph novella, but they differ from the first pair. The first pair of dreams saw the same interpretation: Joseph would rule, and his family would bow down to him. This second pair of dreams have opposite meanings: one stands for life, the other stands for death. Whereas Joseph's second dream embodied heavenly bodies, both dreams of the second pair are representations of the daily life of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. However, the first

[122] It is only mentioned in the narrative that 'the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt', Gen.40:1. No additional information about their dereliction is given.

[123] Some scholars have suggested the notion of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker being still under investigation by Pharaoh, and not serving a prison sentence yet. See for a broader explanation of this argument: Claus, Westermann, *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 73-74.

dream of Joseph could be interpreted literally, while his second dream carried a more symbolic interpretation. This pattern is repeated in the second pair of dreams. The first dream of the chief cupbearer is interpreted by Joseph in a literal fashion: the cupbearer will once again serve wine to the king, and his position will be restored. The second dream of the chief baker, however, is interpreted in a symbolic fashion: the baskets of food represent the baker himself, who will be eaten by birds who feed on the food in the dream. This second pair of dreams is also the only pair of dreams in the Joseph novella that is dreamed by two different characters.

The chief cupbearer and the chief baker experience a dream, but there is no professional dream interpreter present in prison who can instill meaning into the dreams. The dreams have startled both men, and they are anxious for an explanation and interpretation of the dreams. None of the guards or prisoners have prior knowledge of Joseph's ability to interpret dreams, yet somehow both the chief cupbearer and chief baker feel compelled to tell Joseph their dreams. Joseph tells them *'Do not interpretations belong with God?',* clarifying that Yahweh is with him and he is able to interpret their dreams for them.[124] The chief cupbearer seems to be fully convinced by Joseph's statement and he relates his dream to him:

In my dream there was a vine before me, and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms came out and the clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup into Pharaoh's hand.[125]

This dream is filled with depictions of the activities the cupbearer filled his daily life with before being sent to prison. The vine, grapes, wine, and Pharaoh are all objects that the cupbearer is very familiar with. The vines do grow at an unnatural speed, which could be seen as a representation of the short time the cupbearer has to wait before his situation will improve. The three branches are symbolic for the three days after which the cupbearer will be restored to his former position. Joseph interprets the whole dream in a favorable way to the cupbearer, and the cupbearer is convinced that he has received a divine message. Joseph did not receive any payment for his dream interpretation, he only asked to be remembered by the cupbearer when he is serving the Pharaoh again. The reader has been led to believe that Joseph had been wrongfully put into prison, and this positive interpretation of the dream offers some hope that Joseph's fortunes will change, and he will be freed from prison as well.

The chief baker heard the favorable interpretation of the cupbearer's dream and decides to tell Joseph about his own dream as well, anticipating the same kind of positive interpretation. Both the

[124] Gen. 40:8
[125] Gen. 40:9-11

cupbearer and the baker received the dream messages on the same night, and they are in the same powerless position. Assuming that his dream would be interpreted in the same positive manner as the dream of the cupbearer, he then tells Joseph:

I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head.[126]

This dream differs from the dream of the cupbearer. The baker is present in his dream, but he has a passive role. The cupbearer actively pressed grapes and he gave the cup with wine to Pharaoh. The baker is not active at all, the only action in the dream comes from the birds. The baker does not try to chase the birds away and stop them eating from the food. He does not protect the food he should be taking to Pharaoh. The baker is very passive in this dream and does not seem to care for his job. This may be the reason for Joseph's negative interpretation of his dream. The dream of the baker is also less detailed and shorter. Yet, the symbols in this dream are significant. The birds eating and picking the food from the basket stand for the birds eating the flesh of the body of the baker after his death. The three baskets on the head of the baker stand for the three days after which the baker will be hanged and eaten by the birds.

The first dream represents a divine promise, the second dream represents a divine warning. The author of Genesis 37-50 does not relate the reaction of the baker upon hearing the dream interpretation from Joseph. The baker is given his death warrant, but his reaction is unknown. The reader only catches up with the baker again on the third day, which presumably is the third day after Joseph interpreted the dreams. Both the chief cupbearer and the chief baker are taken out of prison and appear to Pharaoh. Just as Joseph had foretold them, the chief cupbearer was restored to his former position, and the chief baker was hanged by Pharaoh. These outcomes for the cupbearer and the baker reaffirm the notion that all events are guided and determined by divine will. Both the fates of the cupbearer and the baker are predestined by a divine power that showed them their fate in a dream message. The chief baker is unable to change the outcome even though he was warned three days before his death. Unlike Joseph's own dreams, the second pair of dreams come true very quickly.[127] Only three days pass between the telling and interpreting of the dreams, to the realization of the dreams. Joseph's own dreams have remained dormant for some years now. Another two years

[126] Gen. 40:16-17

[127] At this point in the narrative, the reader still is unaware of what will be the outcome of Joseph's own dreams. The dreams of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker have come true in just a couple of days, and this could have been added by the author(s) to heighten the tension and make the reader wonder when Joseph's own dreams would come true.

have to pass before the chief cupbearer remembers the dream interpretation skills of Joseph, and finally Joseph's future seems to change.

The dreams of Pharaoh

Two years have passed since the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker came true. Joseph is still in prison and the cupbearer has forgotten about him. Joseph's dreams are still unresolved. Then the plot of the narrative changes with the last pair of dreams. These final dreams of the Joseph novella are dreamed by the king of Egypt, Pharaoh. Without any further introduction Genesis 41 starts with the dreams of Pharaoh, announced by the narrator: *'After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed'.*[128] The narrator relates the first dream, after which Pharaoh woke up. In the same night, Pharaoh receives a second dream message. When Pharaoh awakens for a second time, he is troubled by the dreams and calls for all the dream interpreters of Egypt.[129] However, none of the wise men of Egypt are able to understand and interpret the dreams. It is at this very point that the chief cupbearer finally remembers the dream interpretation skills of Joseph. The cupbearer tells Pharaoh how both his dream and the dream of the baker were interpreted by Joseph, and how the events happened exactly as Joseph foretold them. Joseph is taken out of prison and after a shave and change of clothes, he appears before Pharaoh. Joseph points out that he is able to interpret the dreams because God is with him, and that God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer. Pharaoh then relates his dream to Joseph:

In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile, and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. Then seven other cows came up after them, poor, very ugly, and thin. Never had I seen such ugly ones in all the land of Egypt. The thin and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows, but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had done so, for they were still as ugly as before. Then I awoke. I fell asleep a second time and I saw in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good, growing on one stalk, and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouting after them; and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. But when I told it to the magicians, there was no one who could explain it to me.[130]

This is the second time in the narrative that both the dreams are mentioned. The narrator already related the dreams in the beginning of Genesis 41, and now the dreamer himself repeats the dreams in more detail. None of the magicians and wise men of Egypt could explain any part of the dreams to Pharaoh, but Joseph immediately understands the meaning of the dreams.

[128] Gen. 41:1
[129] In Genesis 41:8, the dream interpreters are referred to as magicians and wise men.
[130] Gen. 41:17-24

The dreams of Pharaoh differ from the preceding two pairs of dreams. Joseph's dreams and the dreams of the cupbearer and baker all referred to events in the personal life of the dreamer. Although the preceding dreams carried messages through various symbols, none of the symbols stood for something outside their personal life or affairs. For the cupbearer and baker, it stood for life or death in the very near future, and for Joseph the symbols referred to his position within his family. The symbols in the dreams of Pharaoh represent much more than just Pharaoh's personal life, they represent the problems of Egypt.[131] The focus of the dreams is on the lifeline of Egypt: the Nile river. Both dreams are situated at the banks of the Nile and Pharaoh is standing there watching the river flow. The dreams reflect the importance of the Nile in Egypt for its agriculture and irrigation of the land, as well as keeping cattle or livestock. The cows and ears of grain in the dreams were common sights for Pharaoh to behold on the banks of the Nile. The behavior Pharaoh witnessed of the cows in his dream, however, was not a common sight. Cows normally eat only grass and are not known to be carnivores. Seeing them eat other cows, would have been a very disturbing sight.

The second dream of Pharaoh relates the same story as the first dream: the cows are now replaced by ears of corn, but the pattern of the dream remains the same as in the first dream. Seven healthy cows are eaten by seven thin cows in the first dream and now, in the second dream, seven full and good ears are swallowed up by seven thin ears. Each dream starts with a scene in which everything is good and is featured in its natural normal setting: the cows are healthy and the ears are full. The dream then shifts to the natural objects performing extraordinary and unnatural acts. All that is good and full gets swallowed or eaten by all that is thin and ugly. Joseph immediately informs Pharaoh that both his dreams are in fact one dream, and both dreams therefore carry the same interpretation. Before Joseph interprets the dreams, he lets Pharaoh know that the dreams, as well as the interpretation, come from God: *'God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do'.*[132] Joseph then describes God's plan to Pharaoh: the seven healthy cows stand for seven good years, and the ugly thin cows stand for seven bad years. With the ears it is the same thing: the seven full ears stand for seven good years and the seven thin ears stand for seven years of famine. When Joseph interpreted the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker, the number 3 stood for three days. In this case Joseph interprets the seven cows and seven ears to a time unit of seven years. The unnatural behavior of both the ugly cows and the thin ears is symbolic for the severe drought and famine that is to come to Egypt, which will turn nature and animals against themselves to survive. When Pharaoh tells Joseph that *'when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had done so, for they were still as ugly*

[131] See: Jonathan, Grossman, "Different Dreams: Two Models of Interpretation for Three Pairs of Dreams (Genesis 37-50)," *Journal of Biblical Literature 135,* no. 4 (2016): 726.
[132] Gen. 41:25

as before', Joseph understands this scene also to have a symbolic meaning.[133] Nothing of the seven good years will be left after the seven years of famine. All the traces of the riches and the wealth of seven years of plenty, will be wiped away with seven years of severe drought and famine. Joseph again points out to Pharaoh that this is God's plan and that the doubling of the dream means that God's plan is set.[134] In Joseph's interpretation of the dreams, the animals and grain are representatives of humans. Humans will suffer from the drought and famine, and will be weak and thin as the seven cows and seven ears. The severity of the disaster that is coming to Egypt is pressed by Joseph when he urges Pharaoh to *'select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt'.*[135] Pharaoh is unable to change the outcome of the dreams, and therefore needs a plan so that his land will not perish through the famine. Luckily, Joseph is also able to deliver a divine plan to Pharaoh with which Pharaoh is able to save the land. Since no other wise man or magician had been able to explain Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph's plan is accepted. Even more so, Joseph is given full authority to carry out the plan. With this discission, the fear and distraught of Pharaoh are discernable.[136] Pharaoh also recognizes that he is powerless against the upcoming famine, and he understands that Joseph's role is also part of God's plan. He is willing to put Joseph in charge of a plan to store food in all of Egypt, even though Joseph has just been taken out of prison. With this decision, Joseph's fate seems to finally be changing into the symbolic meaning of his own dreams.

[133] Gen. 41:21
[134] Gen. 41:32
[135] Gen. 41:33
[136] Nihil Shupak argues that the impossible actions of the cows and the ears in the dreams emphasizes the danger and threat of the coming natural disaster to Pharaoh. See: Nihil Shupak, "A Fresh Look at the Dreams of the Officials and of Pharaoh in the Story of Joseph (Genesis 40-41) in the Light of Egyptian Dreams," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society,* 30*,* (2018): 111.

Chapter 5

Egyptian elements in the Joseph narrative and dream dating

The Joseph narrative holds a considerable amount of Egyptian segments and details that showcase the author's familiarity with Egyptian culture and customs.[137] Not only is the bigger part of the narrative set in Egypt, there are also several smaller elements in various parts of the story that portray a deep knowledge and understanding of Egyptian life, especially at court. These elements all refer to customs and practices that can be traced back to a certain era in the Egyptian history.[138] To understand the significance of the Egyptian elements in the narrative, it is imperative to place them in a specific time period.[139]

The history of Egypt can be separated into specific periods. These periods can be represented in different stages as follows: [140]

Period	***Dynasties***	***Date***
Early Dynastic Period	1-2	3000 - 2686 BCE
Old Kingdom	3-8	2686 - 2160 BCE
First Intermediate Period	9-11	2160 - 2055 BCE
Middle Kingdom	11-14	2055 - 1650 BCE
Second Intermediate Period	15-17	1650 - 1550 BCE
New Kingdom	18-20	1550 - 1069 BCE
Third Intermediate Period	21-25	1069 - 715 BCE
Late Period	25-31	715 - 332 BCE
Macedonian Era	-	332 - 304 BCE
Ptolemaic Era	-	304 - 30 BCE
Roman Era	-	30 BCE – 395 CE

[137] There is an ongoing discussion about the authenticity of the Egyptian elements in the Joseph narrative. Scholars disagree on the usefulness of these elements in their support of the authenticity of the narrative, and also on the manner in which they are used to date the story. The general consensus seems to be that the Egyptian elements were added not for the sake of the narrative itself, but to implement a historical layer into the story. See for example the description of the various different views on the authenticity of the Joseph narrative: Biderman, O. (2012) *The Joseph Story (Genesis 37-50): Its Date. Context and Purpose.* PhD dissertation, Tel Aviv University, pp. 120-196

[138] Scholars are still debating when parts of the Joseph narrative were added and for what reason. A consensus on the overall dating of the Joseph story has not been reached yet, with several scholars, like Donald B. Redford and Thomas Römer, disputing the dating of particular elements. Scholars do, however, seem to conclude that the narrative went through several layers of editing throughout the centuries and that the authors of the Joseph story had a considerable amount of knowledge of the Egyptian practices and customs. See for a detailed explanation of the added Egyptian traditions by the author: Shirley Ben Dor Evian, (2017) Israel and Egypt: The Never Ending Story, *NEA 80,* pp. 30-39

[139] Attempting to date the Egyptian elements will enable a comparison with the dating of specific elements of the dreams and it can also be of aid in determining the origin of the dream elements.

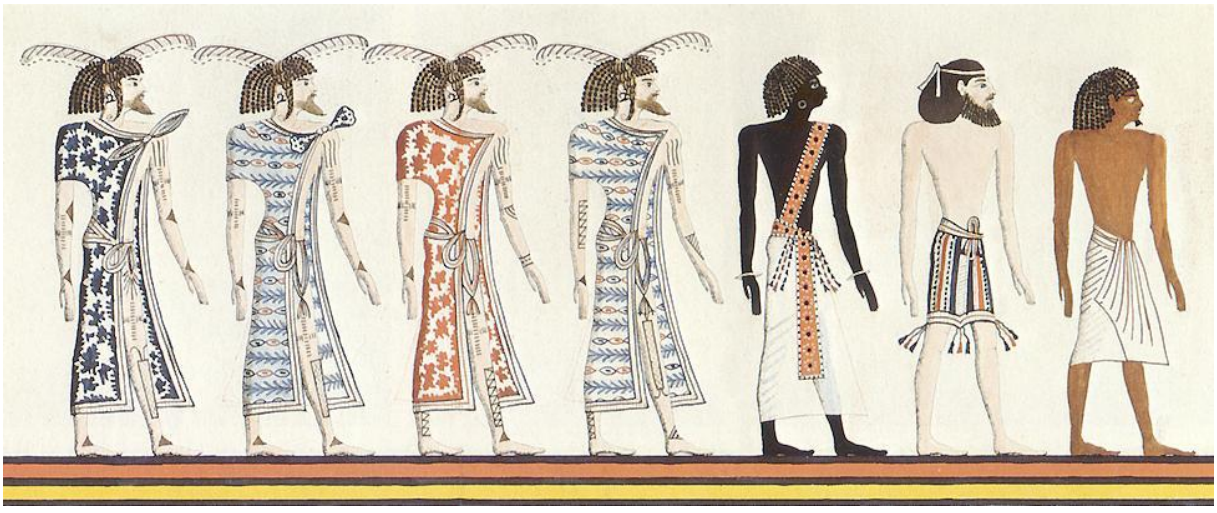
[140] The dates of the different time periods are taken from: Peter Fibiger Band and Walter Schneidel, *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

Most scholars place the date of the events depicted in the Joseph story between the two periods of the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period, two influential periods in Egypt's history.[141] The Middle Kingdom (2055-1650 BCE) saw a long period of unification and prosperity.[142] During this time Egypt was in the process of conquering Nubia (modern day Sudan), establishing important trade routes in Nubian territory, and building structures in the conquered areas. Under king Amenemhat III (1842-1797 BCE) Egypt became successful and very powerful in foreign trade, and Egypt prospered in material wealth. During the final reigns of the Middle Kingdom, Egypt grew weaker and lost its border control with Syria and this made it possible for Asiatics to enter northern Egypt and gain control over it, effectively ending the period of the Middle Kingdom.[143] The Egyptians referred to the Asiatics as the Hyksos when they established their rule in the north.[144] The second Intermediate Period, also referred

[141] For example: biblical scholar Charles Aling places the events of the Joseph story firmly in the Middle Kingdom and even disputes mainline contemporary scholarship that argues for a placing of the story in the Second Intermediate Period, whilst scholar James T. Moll argues that Joseph governed Egypt in the Hyksos Period based on the customs portrayed in the Joseph narrative. See Aling, Charles, 1981, *Egypt and Bible* History, Grand Rapids: Baker, pp. 20-23, and Moll, James, T. "Hyksos and Hebrews: Coexistence at its Finest," *The Hanover Historical Review,* Vol. 14, 2019, pp. 11-28

[142] See Hayes, W.C. (1964) *The Middle Kingdom of Egypt.* New York: Cambridge University, p. 34

[143] Egypt's foreign policies as depicted in their art categorized foreigners in three different groups: Asiatics, Nubians, and Libyans. Asiatics were the peoples of the Near East, Nubians were the peoples that lived in the land south of Egypt, and the Libyans were the peoples living to the west of Egypt. Asiatic men were depicted with fair skin, long beards, and wearing clothing with colorful patterns. Nubians were depicted with darker skin tones and curly short hair, wearing long skirts made from animal skins, whereas Libyans were depicted with yellow skin, long hair, wearing long rich cloaks. See for a more detailed description of these different foreigners: Butner, A. (2007) *The Rhetoric and the reality: Egyptian Conceptions of Foreigners during the Middle Kingdom (c. 2055-1650 BCE.)* Knoxville: University of Tennessee, pp. 2-7



Drawing by Heinrich von Minutoli (1820) depicting (from left to right) four Libyans, a Nubian, and Asiatic, and an Egyptian. Minutoli made a copy of this scene made by an unknown artist, which was discovered on a mural of the Tomb of Pharaoh Seti I.

[144] Hyksos is an Ancient Greek term meaning 'Rulers of foreign lands', derived from an Egyptian expression carrying the same meaning and translation. See: O Connor, David, (1997) 'The Hyksos Period in Egypt', in *The Hyksos: New Historical and Archaeological Perspectives*, Philadelphia: The University Museum, pp. 45-67.

to as the Hyksos Period, saw a weaker Egypt with the Hyksos controlling the delta region and only the south under Egyptian rule. It is in this period that many scholars have dated the Joseph story.[145] Reasoning for dating the narrative in this period is explained by the notion that the Israelites were considered to be Asiatics and therefore related to the Hyksos. In the narrative, Joseph is able to rise to a very high position within the setting of the Egyptian court, which would be more likely to have been possible if the Pharaoh had been a compatriot. However, the Hyksos never ruled all of Egypt and in the narrative Joseph is given the task to govern all of Egypt.[146] The dating of the narrative in the Second Intermediate Period therefore could be seen as to be not compatible.

The literature on the dating of the Egyptian elements in the Joseph narrative is extensive, but two scholars, Donald B. Redford and Thomas Römer, produced significant works that diverged from the mainline scholarship and date the narrative in later periods of Egypt's history. In 1970 Donald B. Redford came to a different dating of the Joseph story in his work *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph.*[147] In this influential work Redford dated the Joseph narrative to originate from a very specific period: the Saite Period in 664-525 BCE, named after Sais, the capital city of the ruling pharaohs. The Saite Period was ruled by the 26th dynasty of Egypt, and it was also the last Egyptian dynasty to rule over Egypt in the Late Period, before the Persians conquered Egypt in 525 BCE. Redford focused on the Egyptian elements in the Joseph narrative and concluded that many factors in the narrative point to the Saite Period as the earliest period in which the Joseph story could have taken place or originates from. A number of elements even point to later dates, but according to Redford none of the elements can be dated to as far back as the Middle Kingdom or the Second Intermediate Period. Some of the main factors and elements on which Redford bases his arguments are:[148]

- The products the Ishmaelites carried with them, mentioned in Genesis 37:25 (gum, balm, and myrrh) stem from the Ptolemaic Period.[149] Texts in the Ptolemaic temple at Edfu refer to these products, but no earlier texts have been found in which these specific products are mentioned as trade products. From the middle of the first

[145] See Aling, C.F. (1981) *Egypt and Bible History: From Earliest Times to 1000 B.C.* Baker Studies in Biblical Archaeology. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, pp. 130-145

[146] See Gen. 41:43. 'All of Egypt' can also refer to entirety of Pharaoh's dominion, which might not have included all of Upper and Lower Egypt. Joseph's family is allowed to live in the land of Goshen, 'for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians' (Gen. 46:34), which could indicate that Goshen was located in the Delta region of Lower Egypt. Pharaoh allowed them to live there, indicating that this part of Egypt was under his rule. There is no reference in the text made to areas of Upper Egypt. 'All of Egypt' therefore might not contain Upper Egypt.

[147] See Redford, Donald B. (1970) A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph. *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, Volume XX*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 187-253

[148] This is not a complete list of all the arguments and factors Redford discusses in his work before coming to his conclusion that the earliest dating of the Joseph story should be during the Saite Period (664-525 BCE).

[149] It is worthy to note that depending on the English translation of the verse, *gum* is translated as *spices*, and *myrrh* as *resin*. Redford explains his reasoning and origins of his translations of the products on pages 192-193.

millennium BCE, documentation of the trade in aromatic materials and products to the Near East has been found, with several clear examples stemming from the Ptolemaic Period.

- The name the author gives to the traders, the *Ishmaelites***,** does not appear in other texts of the Hebrew Bible. The Ishmaelites are only mentioned in the later texts of Judges, Chronicles, and Psalms. The Ishmaelites were also not inhabitants of the region east of the Jordan River before the Kingdom of Judah came to an end.
- The use of camels as domesticated animals for trade and transport became a widespread use as late as the ninth century.
- In Genesis 37 Joseph is sold as a slave to traders travelling to Egypt. In the New Kingdom Syrian and Palestinian slaves entered Egypt in large numbers, but this was the result of Egypt's military conquests, with the Syrians and Palestinians in essence not being slaves, but captives. During this period slave trade of single individuals, such as the sale of Joseph to the traders, did not take place. This started taking shape in the Late Period.[150]
- In Genesis 40:15 Joseph tells the chief cupbearer that he was kidnapped from 'the Land of the Hebrews'. This way of referring to Palestine cannot be found on any of the New Kingdom documents, it first appears in the Saite Period documents and texts.
- Joseph's second dream involves the moon and eleven stars. However, references to the Zodiac appear not earlier then in the first millennium BCE.
- The seven-year famine was a common feature in ancient Near Eastern texts, which makes the seven-year famine in the Joseph story impossible to date. A noticeable Egyptian reference to a seven-year famine, however, can be found on the Djoser inscription of Ptolemy V on the Famine Stela. This inscription is dated to originate from c. 187 BCE, and could provide a reference to the Joseph story, which would again place the narrative in the Ptolemaic Period.
- The Joseph story contains three Egyptian names (the name of Joseph's master, his father-in-law, and his wife), which can be traced back to their first appearance in Egyptian inscriptions on a stela originating from the Saite Period.

Redford's dating of the Joseph story differs with as much as 1300 years from the dating done by previous scholars. However, since the release of Redford's work (1970) numerous examinations and studies have been undertaken to reassess the more recently found archeological evidence and

[150] Redford bases his dating of the starting point of international slave trade on the Zenon Papyri, which shows the purchase of slaves from Transjordan and Palestine.

literature and placed the Joseph story in a renewed context. One scholar in particular puts the Joseph narrative in a completely different context. Scholar Thomas Römer argues in his work 'The Joseph Story in the Book of Genesis: Pre-P or Post-P?' that the Joseph story should be seen as a diaspora novella coming from a Jewish community living in Egypt.[151] Römer's main arguments for this dating are:[152]

- In Genesis 40:42 the chief baker is hanged by orders of Pharaoh. However, Römer points out that the punishment of hanging was not a custom for the Egyptians during earlier times, instead impalement was used. Hanging became a widespread custom as punishment for severe crimes and offenses during the much later Hellenistic period.
- Where Redford states that is impossible to date the seven-year famine in the Joseph story, Römer traces the famine to the reign of Pharaoh Djoser. For his reasoning Römer, just as Redford did, also refers to the stela, and agrees with Redford on the dating of the Famine Stela. The stela relates the story of a severe drought and famine during the reign of the Third Dynasty. Pharaoh Djoser consults a sagacious man called Imhotep, who has been linked to Joseph by previous scholars as well. But because the stela is located to originate from Sehel Island in the Nile, close to Aswan, Römer connects the stela with the Jewish community living at Elephantine. This would indicate that the Joseph story dates back to the late post-exilic period.
- The Joseph story does not entail any divine intervention. This is an uncommon feature, since God appears and intervenes in earlier chapters of the Book of Genesis. This absence of divine intervention does appear in later works such as the Book of Esther, and Ruth. In both these works, God does not directly intervene, and the reader is left to decipher God's actions and the divine message.

Even though scholars are still debating the dating of the Joseph story, it is clear that none of the Egyptian segments and details in the narrative can be precisely dated to have originated in a particular period. It is transparent that the author had an extensive knowledge about Egyptian traditions and customs and practices at the Egyptian court, but none of them seem to be coming from direct lived-through information. With several Egyptian elements contradicting the period of Egypt's history wherein the Joseph narrative could have taken place, it is most likely that the author(s) knew of the

[151] See Römer, Thomas, (2015), The Joseph Story in the Book of Genesis: Pre-P or Post-P?, *The Post-Priestly Pentateuch: New Perspectives on its Redactional Development and Theological Profiles,* Tübingen: Morh Siebeck, pp. 185-201

[152] This is also not a complete list of arguments. Römer discusses more examples from the Joseph narrative to show that the Egyptian segments can be traced to the late post-exilic period. The complete list of arguments can be found at pages 185-201 of his work 'The Joseph Story in the Book of Genesis: Pre-P or Post-P?'.

customs and practices through other sources. The connections between Genesis 37-50 and other sources can be identified in the narrative through the author's use of Egyptian elements like riding in a chariot, which is mentioned in Gen. 41:43. The manner in which the riding in the chariot occurs, has parallels in other descriptions surviving from the New Kingdom period, which could indicate a familiarity of the author(s) with literature stemming from this period. However, the genre of the narrative and the descriptions of life at court resemble elements from the Book of Esther or Daniel and the proceedings of courtly life that are described in these texts. This could indicate that the Joseph narrative has a main purpose of relating the life of a Hebrew boy who is able to rise to a powerful position and prosper in Egypt, to uplift and inspire the Hebrews in exile. Looking at the narrative from this perspective, it would date the Joseph story in the postexilic period. However, the Egyptian elements in the Joseph narrative are left vague and do not pinpoint directly to a passage in Egypt's history, which makes it very hard to date and it also leaves a lot of room for scholars to interpret all the elements of the story, and to propose contradicting dating.

There is, however, another parallel to discuss relating to the dating of the Joseph narrative. This parallel originates from Mesopotamia, and was discovered in 1907 on various sheets of papyri in Elephantine, an island in the Nile in Upper Egypt. These sheets contain the Aramaic tale of Ahiqar, a wise man living at the Assyrian royal court. Many scholars have examined the parallels between the story of Ahiqar and the story of Joseph, placing both of the narratives within the contexts of diaspora literature.[153] The story of Ahiqar is also set at court, just like the bigger part of Joseph's narrative.

Fragment of the damaged papyrus containing the Story of Ahiqar.

Ahiqar is a scribe at the Assyrian royal court during the 7th century BCE. Ahiqar is known as a wise and great man who gives advice to King Sennacherib of Assyria. The death of the king makes Ahiqar realize that he himself has no successor. He adopts his nephew Nadin, and grooms him for the position of adviser to the new king, Esarhaddon, Sennacherib's son. Nadin, however, is not a grateful character and plots against his uncle. The king orders Ahiqar to be executed, but the officer who has to carry out the execution

[153] See Schipper, Bernd U. Joseph, Ahiqar, and Elephantine: The Joseph Story as a Diaspora Novella. *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections, Vol. 18*, (June 2018), pp. 71-84

recognizes Ahiqar as the man who once helped him, and he decides to hide Ahiqar. This gives Ahiqar the opportunity to prove his innocence and to expose his nephew. When the king is in dire need of advice, Nadin is unable to live up to this task, and his plot against Ahiqar is divulged when it is revealed that Ahiqar is still alive. Ahiqar is restored to his former position and Nadin is punished and killed. In both the Ahiqar and Joseph narratives, a wise man first has to endure hardship, then prove himself when the king is in need of a solution or counselling, before finally being reinstated in a position of high power. In both the narratives, the king is unable to solve a situation and the protagonist is the only one able to come up with a solution. In both stories it is obvious from the set-up that the protagonist is the one in possession of wisdom or a divine connection which will ensure his elevated position at the end of the narrative. The theme of reconciliation is also present in both stories, with both main characters having to prove themselves against family members. Connecting the themes of the story of Joseph to the story of Ahiqar would place the Joseph narrative in the contexts of the Jewish diaspora living at Elephantine during the Late Period or possibly the centuries following this period.

The papyri found at Elephantine relating the story of Ahiqar are very fragmentary and in parts have survived poorly with barely a single line complete, but they do contain one important aspect: the collection of papyri is written by self-identified Judeans.[154] These Judeans were part of a military colony living in the southern part of Egypt serving as soldiers for the Achaemenid Empire, roughly around the 5th century B.C.E. The papyri found at Elephantine provides the oldest version of the Aramaic story of Ahiqar that has been found, and it has been dated to originate between 450 and 400 B.C.E., which places it in the same time period of the Jewish colony living at the Nile-island.[155] The story of Ahiqar and the Joseph story show a number of similarities. Both narratives relate the life of a wise man who has a number of ups and downs to work through, but in the end rises to a powerful position within the society. Both protagonists are also advisers to the king, their lives are mostly situated at the royal court of the king, and both Ahiqar and Joseph are able to solve the king's problem. One important difference is the magnitude of the king's problem. In the Joseph story this problem is presented on a much larger scale, it does not only involve the life of Pharaoh, but of all the people in his domain: the seven years famine. This existential problem is missing in the Ahiqar story. However, the seven years famine is mentioned on another papyrus found amongst the papyri of Elephantine: Berlin Papyrus 23071.

In Berlin's Egyptian Museum a papyrus originating from Elephantine relates the happenings and events centered around a famine. This papyrus is named Papyrus Berlin 23071. The texts found on this papyrus also survived very fragmentary, but the Hieratic text provides the oldest known version

[154] See Bledsoe, Seth (2015) *Wisdom in Distress: A Literary and Socio-Historical Approach to the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar.* Dissertation Florida State University, pp. 1-8.
[155] See Bledsoe, pp. 13-14.

of a narrative relating to seven years of famine in Egypt.[156] The texts recounts the severe draught and famine during the reign of Pharaoh Cheops. The Nile failed to flood the land for a period of time and as a result the population was starved of food. Just like in the Joseph story, Pharaoh Cheops receives a dream. The dream contains, amongst several instructions, a message to appoint a supervisor to help heal the land and feed the people. Pharaoh Cheops carries out all the instructions of the dream and the papyrus goes on to relate the restoration of the land. This dream narrative bears great similarities with the dream narrative of the Joseph story, as well as the corresponding famine. Looking at the similarities between the Berlin Papyrus 23071, the story of Ahiqar and the Joseph story, it is likely that the Joseph narrative was composed in Elephantine. Elephantine is the place where all these various elements converge. Joseph was an Israelite not living in Palestine, but in Egypt. He married an Egyptian woman, and he became a counselor to Pharaoh. Pharaoh receives two dreams which Joseph is able to decipher, and he is also able to solve the problem of the seven years famine, both of which are also related on the Berlin Papyrus 2307 and in the story of Ahiqar. Clearly, Elephantine is the middle ground where these stories meet, being the melting pot of Egyptian practices and customs and Jewish traditions, along with other influences from the surrounding different ethnicities that also lived at Elephantine. From this, it can be deducted that the Joseph story was written and composed for the Jewish community living at Elephantine, who had both access to Egyptian practices and customs and were familiar with Egyptian settings, as well as their own Jewish tradition. The Joseph story represents living a prosperous life in a diaspora, an existence out of the land of Israel, but still connected to it.

With the Egyptian descriptions in the Joseph story most likely to be stemming from the Late Period, or the late post-exilic period as a diaspora novella, what can be determined about the dating of the dream elements in the narrative?

Dream dating and origins

The dreams in the Joseph story differ from the previous dream accounts in the Book of Genesis. Not only do the second and third pair of dreams completely take place in Egypt, Joseph's dreams also come true in Egypt. For his dreams to come true, his family had to travel to Egypt as well, even though Joseph's dreams were dreamed in the land of Canaan.[157] Joseph's dreams are present throughout the whole narrative, but only establish themselves as a reality when Joseph is settled in a high position at Pharaoh's court and is effectively governing Egypt. The placement of Joseph's dreams at the very

[156] See Bob Becking, "Yehudite Identity in Elephantine," in Oded Lipschitz et al. (eds.), *Judah and the Judaeans in the Achaemenid Period* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 403–419
[157] See Gen. 37:1

beginning of the narrative builds the reader's hopes up for his elevated position at the end of the narrative. However, Joseph's dreams are not typical Israelite dreams.

The Book of Genesis relates the dreams of Joseph's father, Jacob, in previous chapters, and these dreams differ greatly in configuration from Joseph's dreams. Whereas Jacob's dreams are all clear message dreams, Joseph's dreams are symbolic.[158] Not only are Joseph's own dreams symbolic, the dreams of the chief cupbearer, the chief baker, and Pharaoh are all symbolic as well. Besides this clear distinction in form, the dreams in the Joseph narrative are all in need of an interpretation. This interpretation is not left to figure out by the reader, it is given by the main character of the story as well. Joseph is not only a dreamer, he is also a dream interpreter. The chief cupbearer, chief baker, and Pharaoh are all native Egyptians, and the scenes in their dreams take place in Egypt, but their dreams do not feature the common Egyptian element of a message that needs skilled or professional interpretation. Their dreams are interpreted by an Israelite who is without any dream interpreting skills, and to whom the interpretation of the dreams comes on the spur of the moment, which could be connected to the intention of the author(s) of the narrative to showcase the superiority of the God of Israel over the Egyptian dream interpreters aided by their Egyptian gods.[159] Joseph is able to decipher the messages in the dreams because God provides the interpretation for and to him, which makes Joseph stand out and unique since he had no previous experience with dream interpreting, and it alludes to his distinction as a leader.

The messages in the dreams of the Joseph narrative are all symbolic messages. From the three pairs of dreams, two of the pairs are dreamed by Egyptians. Joseph is the only Israelite who receives symbolic dreams in this narrative. Joseph receiving symbolic message dreams could be intended as a foreshadowing of his elevated Egyptian position later on in the narrative, his assimilation into the Egyptian culture and traditions.[160] The previous dream accounts in the Book of Genesis are all dreams in which God speaks to the dreamer or has a direct form of contact, which is absent from Joseph's dreams. This makes Joseph dreams not Israelite dreams. However, since the dreams in the narrative do not require a professional interpreter to decipher them, the dreams are not fully Egyptian either. The dreams are a mixture of both Israelite and Egyptian elements, with the dreams themselves closer connected to Egyptian dream elements than Israelite ones, whilst the interpretation and the consequences of the dreams on the other hand resemble Israelite dreams.

[158] All the previous dreams in the Book of Genesis are message dreams in which God has direct communication with the patriarchs. Only in Joseph's dreams is God absent.

[159] The ability of Joseph to decipher the dreams because God is 'with him', also fits well in the pattern of Joseph living in a foreign land, but at the same time still being connected to the land of Israel, and his Jewish identity. God's superiority over the Egyptian gods shows that it is possible to retain a Jewish identity and adhere to the Jewish traditions whilst living in a diaspora.

[160] See Redford, p. 90

Egyptian dream practices often included incubation, and this practice is absent from the dream accounts in the Joseph narrative. In ancient Israel, however, it was not necessary to actively seek communication with the divine. God gave a message freely to the ancient Israelites in the Book of Genesis, and therefore the ancient Israelites did not fear or dread dreaming, and they did not practice offering to the divine to encourage it to send a positive dream and outcome. Contrary to the ancient Egyptians and inhabitants of Mesopotamia, the ancient Israelites regarded receiving dreams positively and they were unsuspecting of negative or ill-fated divine messages. The ancient Israelite dreams also carried a divine warning or message that showed the path to the dreamers, but it was up to the dreamer to take notice of this message and to decide how to act upon it. The ancient Mesopotamian dream messages could not be changed, the outcome of the dreams could not be averted or avoided. The ancient Egyptian dreams were met by professional interpretation and then magic was practiced to try and prevent a negative outcome for the dreamer. In the Joseph narrative the dreams of Pharaoh are a message from God to show his divine plan for Egypt. The coupling of the two dreams means that God's plan is definitive and unchangeable. No magic is performed to change the outcome. Joseph interprets the dreams for Pharaoh and explains how Pharaoh could possibly act upon the divine warnings, after which Pharaoh immediately grants Joseph power to set his plan of action for Egypt in motion. These dreams are clearly divine warnings and even though the divine path cannot be changed, the dreamer is still able to determine how to act and decide his future. The dreams of Pharaoh carry no malicious content from the divine, God is showing his divine plan with good intentions. In the ancient Near East, gods could have malicious intentions with humans and send them negative dreams and set their ill fate in stone. The dreams would then directly warn the dreamer of their unfortunate future. However, Joseph's own dreams are full with the good intentions of God and God's promise that he will be lifted to a better and elevated position in life, even though he will have to endure hardship first. Again, the dreams of the Joseph story are neither completely Israelite because they do require an interpretation, nor completely Egyptian because it is up to the dreamer how to act upon the divine message. The dreams of the Joseph narrative are clearly a mixture of different dream cultures, whereby the ancient Egyptian and ancient Israelite features are more discernable than ancient Mesopotamian dream features. This mixture between the Egyptian and Israelite dream accounts would befit a dating of the dreams in the Joseph story as stemming from the post-exilic period quite well. A period in which a Jewish community was living in Egypt and their writings and dream accounts became a blur of the two most dominant cultures they were surrounded with. However, similar to the Egyptian segments and details in the whole Joseph narrative, it is hard to precisely date the various dream elements as well. The vagueness of all the elements in the narrative means that there is a lot of room for contradicting scholarly interpretations and this does not contribute to a precise dating of the dream elements, or a precise dating of the composition of the complete Joseph story.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In many ancient cultures dreams played an important role. Dreams afforded a bridge across space, time, and being. Dream literature and texts across the ancient Near East share similarities and common characteristics, but there are also distinct geographical variations on dream interpretation. However, the ancient Near Eastern comprehension of dreams seems to have influenced the surrounding areas as well as the authors of biblical texts. The ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia believed that dreams were given to humans by divine spirits, a very different understanding from our modern psychological concept of dreams. The source of dreams were divine spirits or gods and from this notion it followed that dreams were messages from the gods. Dreams were a means for direct communication with the divine. These messages needed to be interpreted and understood, since it was believed that the dream messages contained a glimpse into the future. Through dream messages, the gods were able to show humans their fate and future, of which humans were unable to change the outcome. Not all dreams contained a clear message, and when a dream consisted of omens or symbols, skilled dream interpreters were needed to dissect the message. Long lists of omens and symbols were created to help dream interpreters understand the message of the dreams. If a dreamer received a dream containing a warning for unfortunate events in the future, magic and rituals were practiced to avert the danger of these negative events. When a dream consisted of a clear message of an imminent death or unfortunate fate, the outcome could not be changed or averted by magic or rituals. Performing magic and worshipping the gods were seen as preventative measures to fend off negative dream messages. However, once the gods had decided on the fate of a human, the outcome could not be changed.

Contrary to the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, the ancient Israelites did not believe that their divine spirit, the God of Israel, would send dream messages containing an unfortunate or evil fate. The God of Israel sends warnings or guidance, but never with any harmful or malicious intentions. The receiver of the dream message is also able to interpret the dream himself, without the aid of a professional dream interpreter. Another divergence from the ancient Near Eastern understanding of dream messages, is that the ancient Israelites were able to act upon their dream messages. The dreamer is able to understand the warning or guidance given to him by God, and to change his behavior or actions in accordance with a positive outcome. Dreams with a negative or evil message were understood as warnings upon which the ancient Israelites could act in order to change it into a fortunate future or event. No magic or rituals were required to avert the danger of receiving negative dream messages. The ancient Israelites did not fear receiving a dream message from God,

and anyone could receive a dream message. Ancient Israelite dream messages were, in contrast with other ancient Near Eastern regions, not restricted to royalty, commoners or non-royalty could also receive divine messages. Whereas in ancient Near Eastern dream texts the dream messages all needed to be interpreted by professional dream interpreters, the dream accounts in Genesis 37-50 were interpreted by a common man without any known dream interpreting skills. Joseph interprets four different dreams, but the receivers of the interpretations are non-Israelites. These dreams were unable to be deciphered by skilled Egyptian dream interpreters, but the superiority of the God of Israel enables Joseph to understand and interpret the dream messages for them. Joseph's own two dreams were given to him by God and therefore they needed no interpretation by a skilled professional, Joseph could trust in the knowledge and superiority of God.

The setting of the second and third pair of dreams in Genesis 37-50 is Egypt. Not only do these dreams occur in the foreign land of Egypt, the Joseph story contains many other Egyptian elements as well. These Egyptian elements could aid in dating the origin of the composition of the Joseph story, since they could provide more information about the historical context. However, none of the Egyptian elements are described clearly, which leaves a lot of room for contradicting scholarly interpretations regarding the precise date of the composition of the Joseph story. It is clear that the author(s) of the Joseph story possessed extensive knowledge of Egyptian customs and life at the Egyptian court. Many of the Egyptian elements in the Joseph story are related in the context of ancient Israelites living in a foreign land and adjusting to foreign traditions and customs. The main character of the narrative is able to live and prosper in a foreign land without losing his connection to Israel and the God of Israel. The purpose of the Joseph story would then be to convey to Israelites, living outside the land of Israel, that living and prospering in a foreign land, without relinquishing the God of Israel and Israelite traditions, would be possible. In this light, the Joseph story can be interpreted as a diaspora novella, stemming from the late post-exilic period. Parallels with other ancient texts and inscriptions found in Egypt, point to a possible composition of the Joseph story in Elephantine, an Nile-island in Egypt where a colony of Judeans lived and mixed with the surrounding cultures. All the various elements and dream accounts in the Joseph story show that the author(s) became a part of the two most dominant cultures in the surrounding environment. Unfortunately, the mixture of different cultures and traditions are left vague, which does not contribute to a precise dating of the Joseph story. However, the same vague mixture of customs and various elements from different tradition does show the beauty of the merging of ancient Near Eastern cultures, and with that the Joseph story is still able to inspire readers from all over the world to this day.

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Afterword

August 2019

We arrived very late in the afternoon at Hurghada airport. It would be another 4,5 hours bus drive to Luxor, where our cruise ship awaited. There wasn't much time to freshen up from the long flight, and we were immediately immersed in the Egyptian culture. Our suitcases were thrown in the back of the bus by the bus driver, for which he demanded to be paid, and we were off. On our way to the marina of Luxor we were greeted by our guide for the week, and within the first 20 minutes we had already paid all the tips for the complete journey. With nothing to worry about anymore, we just sat back and enjoyed the scenery passing our clogged-up window. Travelling makes people clammy, so it took a little while for the aircon to cool off the entire group. My partner started to doze off, but I couldn't. I was too excited. I was finally in Egypt. Ever since I went to the cinema with my grandparents for my 16th birthday, the first and only time they ever went to the cinema, and watched DreamWorks' The Prince of Egypt, I was captivated by this exotic land. The story of Moses never left my mind. Till this day the soundtrack of that movie is permanently fixed in my audio system. Just like Moses, I would also arrive at the banks of the Nile and be taken away on this enormous river. Admittedly, my mode of transportation would be a little more comfortable. But still, I would finally see the bloodline of Egypt that features in so many ancient stories. What we had not considered was the fact that nightfall comes early in Egypt, and within an hour or so it was pitch black outside. We could only make out the shapes of a couple of hills and the road. But somehow this all added to my excitement. I could see so many stars. No lights coming from major cities or industrial plants that polluted the dark sky, only stars. The same stars Joseph would have seen if he had looked up thousands of years ago, when he was taken as a slave to Egypt. We arrived at our cruise ship, but since it was so dark, we had no clue as to what the river looked like. Diner was prepared for all the late arrivers and after a long day of travelling, we passed out in our cabin.

Next morning, we woke up to the sound of the crew members cleaning the hallway. We opened the curtains and to our surprise we were already sailing. Our cabin had a floor to ceiling window from which we could finally see the majestic Nile. However, it wasn't the wild river I had imagined from the stories in the Bible. We had even been sailing on it for hours without noticing it. We went upstairs to the sundeck, and there we could see the river in all her glory. We were in the middle of a vast water body that was very wide, but very quiet. The sun shone upon it and made it glister. On the far shore we could see kids swimming in the river and there were a few little boats tied up to poles sticking out from the reeds. Other than that, it was empty, except for the occasional cruise ship sailing by. On both sides of the river, we could see lush greenery, with some farm animals grazing in the shades. But that was it, just a couple meters behind that, the land looked dry and sandy with rocky

mountains in the far distance. This was the land of the mighty pharaohs, and I couldn't wait to see some of their finest contributions to the cultural history of this desert land. We received our itinerary for the coming week and after that we placed ourselves at the corner of the small swimming pool on the sundeck and just kept staring out over the river, fascinated by all the contradictions life on and beside the river showed us. Our real journey into ancient Egypt started the next day. During the night we had travelled further up the river deeper into Upper Egypt, on our way to Aswan. Our first stop was at the Temple of Kom Ombo. Nothing I had imagined about this country could have prepared me for this. We got off the ship and walked a few minutes before climbing up large ancient stone staircases, to arrive on a plateau upon which a magnificent proud temple stood. Overlooking the Nile, the Temple of Kom Ombo is certainly a statement to anyone who dares to question the rule of its makers. Built during the Ptolemaic dynasty, the temple is dedicated to the falcon god Horus, but also to the crocodile god Sobek. The temple therefore features a double entrance. Normally I would stick to the group and listen to the guide telling all about the temple, but this place was different. It made me less interested in history facts, but more interested in how the light was captured on the enormous pillars and how the colors kept changing from light brown into warm orange with the sunlight fading away. I wanted to touch history instead of listening to it. The stones felt warm and smooth. I sat down with my back against one of the pillars looking out over the river and it felt like I was being comforted by the warm stones of the temple. I understood how being at this temple would have given hope to its ancient worshippers. I could have stayed there for hours, but unfortunately, we had to go and visit the very dusty crocodile museum filled with mummified crocodiles. No matter how important Sobek was in ancient times, mummified crocodiles are one of the most disgusting things I have ever smelled, and I am pretty sure I might have offended the ancient river god more than a few times during my visit to this sanctuary for his family.

The next day we visited the Aswan Dam, which is this immense construction that is heavily guarded, and no tourists are allowed to casually admire it. Everything is scripted. You are only allowed to stand at a certain place for a very short amount of time without taking any pictures of the actual construction of the embankment dam or the people guarding it. Built in the 1960s, this structure, though very impressive, was far too modern for my liking, but my partner thought it was magnificent. I guess it is a guy-thing since all the men ended up standing on the platform taking pictures, whereas the women had already retreated to the airconditioned confinement of the touring bus. After this, we travelled on a small sailing boat to the island of Philae in the reservoir of the Aswan Dam. Now this little island has seen a lot of different rulers. It has been under Egyptian rule, Ptolemaic rule, Roman rule, and even Christianity was practiced here by the fourth century C.E. All of these influences are clearly visible when you walk through the temple complex. Coming up from the Nile and sailing towards the temple complex, the island looks petite and very sweet. However, when you enter the

temple complex you are greeted by vast rows of columns and the large entrance walls of the temple that are enriched with enormous carvings of the gods. It is impossible to be not impressed by all this grandeur. The carvings are so detailed that you can even see where the stonemason made his markings. Again, the stones are warm to the touch and the whole complex gives you the feeling that you don't have to worry. Sitting in Psamtik II's little kiosk makes you feel that you are cared for. Sailing away from this special island means going back to reality and undergoing an assault of the senses at the botanic gardens of Lord Kitschener. Filled with beautiful flowers and trees, but also the distinct smell of lavatories, this place is best to walk through at a sturdy pace. At the end of the gardens there is a little café where one can buy colorful scarves to cover the nasal area and park one's clammy behind in a hammock, in an attempt to avoid the stinging smell. Once I had lifted my feet and was almost in a comfortable position, an incredible sweet and scruffy cat jumped up to take my place, demanding to be pet. Not wanting to be sprayed by yellow affection, I obliged and even bought the creature some treats to worship it properly. Sensing my weakness, the cat demanded that I also bought some memorabilia to protect his future stream of food offerings, after which I received the final blessing of its tail before being left stunned by its miraculous disappearance. From this point on I felt my steps being lighter and a weight lifted from my shoulders. With a renewed self-assurance I made my way back to the sailboat to return to the cruise ship, even daring to step into the wobbly boat without any assistance. Unfortunately, this feeling lasted a mere minute before I was asked to sit on the other side of the dingy little boat to even out the weight distribution. In hindsight, of course, it were the numerous memorabilia I had bought that had caused the disruption of peace in the boat. Nevertheless, the day ended marvelously with a cool drink and my feet in the plunge pool at the sundeck. The cat's blessings already at work.

The following day we were up hours before dawn to be transported by bus to Abu Simbel. I have seen plenty of beautiful Roman and Greek temples and buildings, but nothing compared with the grandeur of Abu Simbel. Walking towards it, you are just looking at two large hills. When you finally reach the bended corner and you get the full view of two enormous rock-cut temples, you are left speechless. The only thing you can do is stand in awe of what is in front of you. How could people more than three thousand years ago build something like this? Even more so, how could these temples have been moved a hundred meters in the 1960s? It is too much for the mind to take in. Ramesses the Great truly deserved his name building temple complexes like this. The biggest temple flanked by four colossal statues is dedicated to the gods Ptah, Amun, and Ra. Unlike the previous visited sites, this complex is not about feeling secure or comforted. This complex is about showing the power and strength of the gods. Standing before it makes you feel tiny and humble. Inside there are even more enormous statues guarding the sacred spaces and warning the visitors to worship the gods with due respect. The walls are filled with all the military campaigns the Egyptian king fought against the Hittites,

aided by the gods. The carvings depict raw battle scenes, before turning into scenes of offerings to the gods. Only a short walk away, Ramesses the Great constructed a smaller temple dedicated to his wife Nefertiti and the goddess Hathor. This temple feels much more serene. Again, colossal rock-cut statues, six in total, form the entrance of the temple, but the aesthetics are much more feminine. The statues at the entrance of the king and queen are in equal size, portraying the importance of Nefertiti's role as the consort of the king. The inside of the temple is somewhat smaller, but equal dedication has gone into all the carvings. More scenes of offerings to the goddess grace the walls, but just like the bigger temple, this temple is also all about making a statement. No visitor is left wondering how powerful the Egyptian king and his queen were, it is clearly visible. You can touch it, and you can even feel the oppression of their reign in the compressed atmosphere of the inner chambers of the temples. It gets under your skin. Stepping outside again and back into the sunlight, feeling the breeze coming of Lake Nasser, it is hard to shake the uneasy feeling of being watched by the guardians of the gods.

Abu Simbel leaves you with an unforgettable impression of the capabilities of a mighty pharaoh and his consort. It also makes you wonder about your own insignificant existence compared to powerful gods and ruthless kings and queens. Luckily, the following day we were taken to the site where all the powerful rulers of ancient times found their final resting place. Powerful or not, we all meet the same end. However, the tombs of the ancient rulers in the Valley of the Kings almost form another dimension to this world. Instead of going up with a tower to reach the heavens, all the tombs are carved deep inside the mountain. From a distance it just looks like a regular valley, and nothing is visible of the special function of this valley. Even standing in the valley looking around, you can only see small holes with grated gates in the rocks. Nothing more. It looks insignificant. But then you enter one of those holes. It is almost impossible to describe the feeling you get when you venture inside the mountain and descent deeper and deeper towards the core of the earth. The air gets very stale and every plateau you reach seems to contain a warmer climate than the one before. The walls are lined with the most beautiful colored carvings and even though you are in a tomb, you are filled with more excitement the deeper you get. It is not a place of sadness; it is a place of joy. A life is celebrated on the walls and when the final burial chamber is reached, the atmosphere is peaceful and light. A massive stone sarcophagus is placed upon a large, raised platform, which is larger than the corridors through which you have travelled down to this burial chamber. Again, the beauty and enormity of what is there makes you question everything you know about building techniques and gravity. How is this possible? How could all of this have been hidden for so long? It also makes you want to dig into every heap of sand and rocks you see the moment you come up into the daylight again. There must be so much more still buried everywhere. Where do you start? Making a mental note of enlisting for some archeology courses, we visited several tombs, but we could not make out which one was the best. Each single tomb was different, special, and rich with details. It felt like going on several adventurous expeditions.

Standing in the middle of the valley looking at all the little gates and the masses of rocks still untouched, you feel completely energized. The only thing you can think of is to go off exploring everything. It still holds so many secrets, and the need to unveil them is intoxicating. The valley is a large burial ground, but it is much more than that. It is a magical place. It is a gate to another world.

Leaving the Valley of the Kings behind, we sailed downstream again towards Luxor. There was only one more day of excursions left, and two more important temples still to visit. We started off with the temple of Karnak. The site of this temple complex is massive. We were welcomed by rows of sphinxes guarding the complex and providing a royal atmosphere to the pathway. Once inside the complex, we were immediately overtaken by the colossal columns of the Hypostyle Hall. Now standing in the open air, these columns used to carry a massive colorful roof in ancient times. It is impossible to not be overwhelmed by the splendor of the complex. The construction of it must have been done by the gods, there is no other possible explanation for it. Mortals could have never produced such an immense structure. I had forgotten to bring offerings to the gods with me, but still they were indulgent and allowed me to receive a blessing. I did have to work for it though. I had to walk around the statue of a scarab for luck. Circling it three times would bring good luck, seven times would bring about marriage, and nine times would grant a pregnancy. Not wanting to push it, I circled the scarab statue three times and waited for my luck to arrive. However, I was told by our guide that I made the mistake of circling the statue in the wrong direction. Of course, I rectified my mistake immediately and circled the scarab statue twelve times, just to make sure. Nine times to receive all that was on offer and three times on top of that to rectify my earlier mistake. One cannot fool around with these kinds of things. No significant changes have yet occurred on any level, but I am expecting great things to happen soon. From the plains of the Karnak temple complex we walked to the Temple of Luxor on the opposite side. Here we were greeted again by our now old friend Ramesses the Great. Grand statues of him form the entrance to Luxor Temple, flanked by a large obelisk of which its twin now resides in Paris. This temple complex is smaller than Karnak, but it is still gigantic. You can get lost in the rows of columns. After seeing so many columns it still doesn't get boring. There is only one feeling you have when you walk through it all: amazement and admiration. We were ushered to stone stairs at the side of the temple and before we noticed what was going on, the steps were filled with tourists holding their cameras in the air. We saw the light changing and understood the purpose of the spot we were ushered to. The sun would disappear soon, and it would sink behind the temple. We quickly held our cameras in the air as well and waited. It all happened within a couple of minutes. The columns were lit up as if they were on fire and large shadows filled the temple. The stones became fiery orange and then we were surrounded in darkness. It was magnificent. Pure magic. The best end of our journey into ancient Egypt.

During our excursion on the little sailboat, I had put my hands in the water of the Nile, wanting to feel it and to cool off a little. Our guide told me that this meant that I would be returning. Touching

the Nile was a special thing to do, and not many tourists did this. The ones who did touch it, always came back. And I think he was right. Ever since I touched the water of the Nile, I have wanted to go back. I think part of the Nile now runs through my veins and it is longing to be reunited with the river. Once it is reunited, I believe the luck of the scarab will finally fall upon me. I just have to be patient.

It must be clear by now that I did not travel to Egypt alone. It can also not have escaped the attention that one significant person is missing in the preface. This person is my partner. I did not mention him in the preface because thanking him with a few lines is not a correct expression of my feelings. I am not grateful to him; it is much more than that. Since I started the premaster program of Religious Studies, we have been to many major religious places. We have been to Athens, Rome, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and many more. I have seen where the Eastern Roman Emperors were coronated and where Christianity started. I have been inspired by Bernini in St. Peter's Basilica and disgusted by smelling mummies in Luxor. And he took me to all these places. We have seen the same things and walked the same pathways. We climbed up mountains and we tumbled down into caves and tunnels. We have dived into the Atlantic Ocean and touched the weird salty water of the Dead Sea. We did it all together. We are on the same journey, and he is the only one I want to travel with. According to the Egyptian zodiac sign based on birthdays, I was born under the sign of Isis. My partner was born under the sign of Osiris. Since these two were Egypt's ancient mythological power couple, it must be our destiny as well that we travel through life together.