

# 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

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What a man is shown [in his dream] is only his own fantasy.  
(Bavli, *Berakhot* 55b)

## Introduction

It is a commonplace that dreams have existed from the earliest times wherever people dwell. Information about dreams has come down to us from the entire ancient Near East: from Mesopotamia, Hatti, Mari, Ugarit, Deir 'Ala, and right down to Egypt. Much material, perhaps the greater part, is to be found in Egypt. About twenty stories about dreams, and collections of hundreds of dream-omina, reflect an ancient tradition, beginning in the second millennium B.C.E. and still flourished in the Persian-Hellenistic period. This tradition was long-lasting and left its mark on the Greek and Arabic dream literature as well. The Egyptian influence on these is evident in the perception and content of the dream, and in its formulation (analogy and word plays).<sup>1</sup>

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- AEO* A. H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1947).  
*ARE* J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 5 vols. (London, 1988) (1905).  
*Gr.* A. H. Gardiner "Lists of Hieroglyphic Signs," *Egyptian Grammar* (London, 1966<sup>3</sup>), 438–543.  
*KRI* K. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions: Historical and Biographical* (Oxford, 1970–1990).  
*LÄ* W. Helck and W. Westendorf, eds., *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Wiesbaden, 1972–1989).  
*OEAE* D. B. Redford, *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 2001).  
*RÄR* H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin and New York, 1971<sup>2</sup>).  
*Urk. IV* K. Sethe, *Urkunden der 18 Dynastie*, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1927–1930). W. Helck, Heft 17–22 (Berlin, 1955–1958).  
*Ward, Index* W. A. Ward, *Index of Egyptian Administrative and Religious Titles of the Middle Kingdom* (Beirut, 1982).  
*Wb.* A. Erman and H. Grapow, eds., *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, 7 vols. (Berlin and Leipzig, 1926–1963).

1. For the influence of the Egyptian dream on the dreams of other nations, see: A. Volten, *Demotische Traumdeutung* (Copenhagen, 1942), 66–78; S. Sauneron, "Les songes et leur interprétation dans l'Égypte Ancienne," in idem, ed., *Les songes et leur interprétation* (Paris, 1959), 52.

Nor was the dream absent from ancient Israel. It emerges from the Bible that the dream was conceived principally as a means of conveying a divine message to humans (cf. Job 33:15–18; Joel 3:1). God is revealed in dreams to the patriarchs (twice to Jacob [Gen. 28:12–15; 31:10–13]), to gentiles (Laban [Gen. 31:24] and the Midianite soldier [Judg. 7:13–14]), to kings of Israel (Solomon [1 Kgs. 3:5–14]), and to kings of other nations (Abimelech [Gen. 20:3–7] and Nebuchadnezzar [Daniel 2 and 4]). God also appears before the prophet in a “vision” and in a “dream” (Num. 12:6[J]), and in 1 Samuel (28:6) the dream is noted, together with inquiring of Urim and of prophets, as a legitimate way of communicating with God.<sup>2</sup>

In the light of this the following question arises: Is the Egyptian influence also evident in the dreams of the Bible, particularly in those presented as dreams of Egyptians, namely the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh related in the story of Joseph (Genesis 40–41)? This question is particularly important because the story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50, excluding chaps. 38 and 49) is replete with Egyptian features and elements referring to various levels of life, e.g., offices and ceremonies in the Egyptian king’s court, burial and funeral customs, proper names, toponyms, and Egyptian words and expressions, as I have shown elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the dream motif in the narrative of Joseph also bears the mark of the ancient Egyptian dream tradition. Indeed, only a glance is needed to show that these dreams are exceptional, differing from the dreams that precede them in the Book of Genesis: in the dreams of Abimelech, Jacob, and Laban, God appears to the dreamers directly, and the message is expressed in a vocal declaration; occasionally it is also accompanied by a visual message (28:6–31). In these cases the dream is self-evident and needs no interpretation. Therefore, the features of the obscure symbolic dream—conceptual and verbal associations (see below)—meant to facilitate its solution, are missing. A different picture arises from the Egyptian dreams in the Joseph story. No god appears in the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh, which are ambiguous to them. The message is not transmitted vocally but is present in a vision and a picture, interwoven with symbols and words plays. The interpreter is not a god but a charismatic sage, the god’s messenger.<sup>4</sup> Parallels to these dreams appear only in the Book of Daniel (chaps. 2 and 4),<sup>5</sup> these being the dreams

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2. Reservations about dreams appear in the Bible only later: “a dreamer of dreams” is a term of derision for a false prophet. See Deut. 13:2–6; Jer. 23:25–32; 29:8–9. Cf. W. Richter, “Traum und Traumdeutung im Alten Testament,” *BZ* 7 (1963), 217–18; R. K. Gnuse, “Dreams in the Night—Scholarly Mirage or Theophanic Formula? The Dream Report as a Motif of the So-Called Elohist Tradition,” *BZ* 39 (1995), 28–58; E. Baruch, *The Prophetic Dream and Its Rejection by the Deuteronomist School* (M.A. thesis, University of Haifa, 1987), 89–92, 96–104 (Hebrew).

3. N. Shupak, “The Joseph Story: Between Legend and History,” in M. V. Fox et al., eds., *Texts, Temples and Traditions: A Tribute to M. Haran* (Winona Lake, 1996), 125\*–33\*, 412; idem, “Burial and Funeral Customs in the Joseph Story,” in L. Mazor, ed., *Joseph’s Tunic of Many Colors: The Story of Joseph in the Bible and in the Mirror of the Generations* (Jerusalem, in press; Hebrew).

4. For more features specific to these dreams see section III below, paragraphs 2 and 3.

5. The dream of the Midianite soldier in Judg. 7:13–14 is only a partial parallel. It is indeed a symbolic dream, but it is easily interpreted by another soldier, and there is no need for a charismatic messenger of God to reveal its meaning. Similarly Joseph’s dreams in Genesis 37, which are intelligible to the dreamer and to his listeners.

of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel's interpretation of them. But it has already been said that Daniel and his deeds are only a mirror of the story of Joseph, and perhaps even a satire on it, for "everything Joseph does, Daniel does better."<sup>6</sup>

Our discussion in the following pages accordingly focuses on whether in the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh the influence of the Egyptian dream can be discerned, in the following areas: the perception and nature of the dream; its types; the structure of the dream, methods of interpreting the dream; and its interpreters. I shall begin with a description of the Egyptian material (sections I and II), then compare it with the Egyptian dreams in the story of Joseph (sections IIIff.). This part of the discussion also reviews relevant Mesopotamian material, so as to highlight the uniqueness and features of the Egyptian dream. The analysis of the biblical material in association with the Egyptian sources relates not only to the dream motif but also strives to locate additional Egyptian features and elements in these passages that may attest to the presence of an Egyptian coloration in the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh (sections IV and V). I end with a summary and conclusions.

### *I. The perception and nature of the dream in ancient Egypt*

In Semitic languages a connection exists between the term for dream and sleep (in Akkadian *šuttu* "dream" is derived from *šittu* "sleep") or seeing (in Aramaic, Arabic, Ugaritic, and perhaps also Hebrew).<sup>7</sup> By contrast, the Egyptian common word for dream is *rsw.t* (*Wb.* II 452), depicted by the determinative of an open eye and derived from the root *r(i)s*, "to wake, to be watchful."<sup>8</sup>

According to the Egyptian understanding, the dream is in fact part of the real world, because the mind even of the sleeper is awake (cf. Song 5:2, "I slept, but my heart was awake"). This perception finds expression not only in the script and etymology of the Egyptian term denoting "dream" but also in the Egyptian mythological and wisdom literature. In myth the sleeper is likened to the sun in its diurnal cycle. Like the sun, which every evening sinks into the ocean of primal water, the *nun*, the dreamer too sinks in his sleep, into the *nun*; like the sun, which makes its way through

6. Cf. A. Wildavsky, *Assimilation Versus Separation* (New Brunswick and London, 1996), 126–29; J. M. Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World* (Sheffield, 1995), 118–21, 166.

7. This sense of the root *hlm* in Hebrew is given by A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Philadelphia, 1956), 226. R. Fidler, who disagrees with this interpretation, assumes that the basic meaning of *hlm* is to be strong. See Fidler, "Dreams Speak Falsely?" *Dream Theophanies in the Bible: Their Place in Ancient Israelite Faith and Traditions* (Jerusalem, 2005), 17–18, nn. 84–85, 20, n. 96 (Hebrew). But the connection between *hlm* meaning "to dream" and *hlm* "to be strong" is subject to controversy. *KBL*, which Fidler follows, links the two roots and holds that there was a semantic development from "to be strong" → to attain to puberty → to have sexual dreams → to dream generally. *TDOT* 4.427 and *BDB*, 321, are more cautious and distinguish the two roots *hlm* "to sleep" and *hlm* "to be strong." For a detailed discussion of the etymology of *hlm* see S. Bar, *A Letter That Has Not Been Read: Dreams in the Hebrew Bible* (Cincinnati, 2001), 10–13.

8. Cf. R. O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, 1964), 152. A less common term for dream is *qd* which derived from the word sleep. When *qd* means "sleep" it is followed by the sign for bed, but when it means "dream" it uses the same open eye sign as *rsw.t*. Cf. R. Hannig, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen: Grosses Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2800–950)* (Mainz, 1995), 447; K. Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes: Dreams and Nightmares in Ancient Egypt* (Swansea, 2003), 15–21.

the night hours in the underworld, a man too in his sleep reaches the next world and joins up with the gods and the dead alike;<sup>9</sup> and like the sun, which each morning is born anew, so a man awakes from his sleep refreshed, ready for the coming day. In wisdom literature the creation of the dream is ascribed to a god, who gave it to humankind as an apotropaic means to prevent evil and also as an instrument to foretell the future. In the *Instruction Addressed to Merikare* of the late third millennium B.C.E. it is said: “He (the god) made for them magic as weapons to ward off what may happen and dreams by night as well as day” (ll. 136–37), i.e., the dream is likened to magic, which serves a person as a weapon to fight evil events.<sup>10</sup> This early notion recurs centuries later in Pap. Insinger of the third century B.C.E.: “He created remedies to end illness . . . he created the dream to show the way to the dreamer in his blindness.” (32, 12–13). That is, the dream, which sometimes predicts the future, is created to direct a person on his life’s path, to guide him along the way he takes.<sup>11</sup>

The dream that derives from a god is usually good, telling of ascent to the royal throne, military triumph, remedy for illness, and so on (see examples below). But since in his dream the sleeper reaches not only the world of the gods but also the dangerous world of the dead and demons, the Egyptian also acknowledges bad dreams, nightmares. Thus Sinuhe, the Egyptian fugitive of the second millennium B.C.E. who found refuge in Canaan, describes his flight from Egypt as a nightmare: “It was like a dream: as when a Delta-man sees himself in Yebu (Elephantine), a marsh-man in Nubia” (B 224–25). Dreams of this kind belong to the domain of magic, and magical means are applied to fight them, such as smashing figurines (in the Execration Texts), keeping the face covered when asleep (*The Instruction of Ptahhotep* 358–59), oaths, prayers, and rituals. The most interesting of these rituals is rubbing the face with herbs dipped in beer (Pap. Chester Beatty III, recto 10, 10–19).<sup>12</sup>

The Egyptian dream, then, is caused by external forces—gods, the dead, demons, and does not stem from an internal psychic reality<sup>13</sup> (as maintained by modern psy-

9. K. Zibeliuss-Chen, “Kategorien und Rolle des Traumes in Ägypten,” *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 15 (1988), 283; Volten, *Demotische Traumdeutung*, 45–46; A. Oepke, “övap,” *TDNT*, 5.225.

10. This is also Volten’s comment; see Volten, *Demotische Traumdeutung*, 40–41. By contrast, J. M. A. Janssen, “Egyptological Remarks on the Story of Joseph in Genesis,” *JEOL* 14 (1955–56), 65, maintains that the “dream” in this passage is parallel to “evil events,” and therefore the meaning of the verse is that magic serves as a means of protection from evil events. This interpretation is also possible in light of the ancient Egyptians’ custom of resorting to various magical measures to prevent the negative effects of bad dreams (see below). Lichtheim translates “Guarding them by day and night” because she reads here *rsi* “to guard” and not *rswt* “a dream”; see M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1973–1980), 1.106 and n. 31; Similarly, J. F. Quack, *Studien zur Lehre für Merikare* (Wiesbaden, 1992), 79.

11. For translations of the majority of the texts dealt with in the present study, see Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 185–201.

12. See A. H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, Third Series: Chester Beatty Gift* (London, 1935), 1.19. On various magical devices used against nightmares, cf. K. Sethe, *Die Ächtung feindlicher Fürsten* (Berlin, 1926), 72–73; S. Israelit-Groll, “A Ramesside Grammar Book of Technical Language of Dream Interpretation,” in S. Israelit-Groll, ed., *Pharaonic Egypt, the Bible and Christianity* (Jerusalem, 1985), 81–85; R. K. Ritner, “Dream Oracles,” in *COS*, 1.52/E, 54 n. 27; idem, “O. Gardiner 363: A Spell against Night Terrors,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 27 (1990), 25–41; Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 159–80.

13. See Zibeliuss-Chen, “Kategorien,” 280; Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 19–21.

chological research). Unlike the dream in the Bible, which belongs almost exclusively to God,<sup>14</sup> the dream in Egypt also has an affinity with the world of the dead and demons. In sum, two features important for our discussion stand out in the perception of the Egyptian dream: The conception that the dream is an instrument to convey a divine message, a notion present as early as the end of the third millennium B.C.E.; and the belief that it is possible, by various means, to prevent the realization of a bad dream.

## *II. Types of dreams*

In the Egyptian sources, as in the Mesopotamian, two patterns of dreams may be discerned: (a) stories about dreams, which can be divided into three kinds:<sup>15</sup> a message dream (theorematic), which is clear and needs no explanation; an obscure symbolic dream (allegoric), which requires interpretation; and an incubation dream; (b) collections of (symbolic) dreams (omina) and their interpretation.

Incubation dreams, which were widespread in Egypt especially in the Hellenistic period, are distinct from the rest by their being initiated dreams, not spontaneous, created artificially by people in distress. These people customarily made a pilgrimage to a holy place in the hope that there a god would appear to them in a dream and would utter a solution to their troubles. Since the dreams in the story of Joseph do not belong to this category, I shall not dwell on it.<sup>16</sup> As for the other categories, tales of the dreams of kings and heroes abound in the ancient Near East. Gilgamesh, the legendary hero of Sumer, was prone to dreaming, as was his comrade Enkidu. The god Ea appears in a dream of the hero of the Babylonian flood Utanapishtim, and gods are also revealed in the dreams of the Assyrian kings Assurbanipal (7th century B.C.E.) and Nabonidus (6th century B.C.E.). The heroes of Ugarit too, Keret and Danel, are among the dreamers, as are Hattushili king of Hatti (15th century B.C.E.) and a variety of seers in Mari.<sup>17</sup> They usually experience distinctly message-type dreams, although there are a few symbolic dreams too. Together with the stories about dreams, collections of dream-omina have also been discovered in Mesopotamia. The earliest belongs to the Old Babylonian period, at the start of the second millennium B.C.E., and the latest is of the time of Assurbanipal, in the seventh century B.C.E. It appears that from the Neo-Babylonian period, and possibly earlier, the Mesopotamians preferred to predict the future by other omnia: the flight of birds, the innards of sacrifices,

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14. In the Bible the dream is perceived as a divine message, and it is treated positively except in passages belonging to the Deuteronomic school; cf. n. 2 above.

15. The definitions of the types of dreams set out below are those accepted in research. In this framework the problems connected with these definitions and the question of the classification of the dreams raised recently in Fidler's study (*Dreams Speak Falsely?*, 23–29), are not discussed.

16. On incubation dreams see J. D. Ray, *The Archive of Hor* (London, 1976); and compare a spell of an invocation of a dream in Pap. Leyden of the 3rd century C.E. in F. L. Griffith and H. Thompson, *The Leyden Papyrus: An Egyptian Magical Book* (New York, 1974), 191 (verso, col. XVII). See also Husser, *Dreams and Dreams Narratives*, 69–71. M. H. Maurer, "Traum und Traumdeutung im pharaonischen Ägypten," *Kemet* 14/2 (2005), 39–41.

17. On seers at Mari see Baruch, *The Prophetic Dream*, 50–55; Fidler, *Dreams Speak Falsely?*, 347–52, and additional bibliography there.

and so on, and not from dreams. In Egypt, by contrast, the custom of oneiromancy and foretelling the future through dreams prevailed. It is reflected in the existence of collections of hundreds of dreams, spread over a long period from the second millennium B.C.E. to the second century C.E. The earliest collection is Pap. Chester Beatty III, which contains about 200 dreams and belongs to the Ramesside period (13th century B.C.E.), but its composition is assumed to date to the Middle Kingdom, namely the second millennium B.C.E.<sup>18</sup> Several collections of dreams are known from the Demotic period (7th century B.C.E. onward), the most complete being Pap. Carlsberg XIII and XIV, with about 250 dreams. This papyrus is of the second century C.E.,<sup>19</sup> but its structure and content betray the influence of the ancient Pap. Chester Beatty III collection.

These collections include dream-omina, and their purpose is to make their explanation more accessible to the oneirocritics or to the dreamers. The structure of the dreams contained in these collections is similar to prescriptions appearing in Egyptian medical books.<sup>20</sup> They are written in abbreviated and condensed language, and include the following parts: a description of the dream as the protasis, determination of whether the dream is good or bad, and a statement of its interpretation formulated as the apodosis. For example:

[If a man sees himself in a dream] seeing a large cat (*my* '3), good; it means a large harvest (*smw* '3) will come to [him] (Pap. Chester Beatty III, recto 4,3).

[If a man sees himself in a dream] eating the flesh of a donkey (*iwfn* '3), good; it means his promotion (*s'3.f*) (*ibid.*, 2,21).

[If a man sees himself in a dream] seizing wood belonging to the god in his hand, bad; finding misdeed in him by his god (*ibid.*, 9,26)

The subjects of dreams are usually everyday matters that are on the Egyptian individual's mind. Examples are property theft, loss of position, want, an enemy, short life, and unnatural coition. The similarity in content of the later dream collections to the earlier attests to an ancient tradition, also connected with the institution of the Egyptian dream interpreters, the *hry ḥb hry tp* (Hebrew *ḥarṭōm*), an institution unique to the land of the pharaohs. Another unique detail of the Egyptian dream collections is the division of the dreamers into two categories: people who belong to the entourage of Horus, who are positive people, and people who belong to the circle of the god Seth, who are negative people. Here for the first time appears the belief that the solution

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18. This is the opinion of Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum*, 1.11, which has recently been refuted by Szpakowska, who assumes that the initial compilation of the text derived from the New Kingdom. For the publication and translation of the text see Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri*, 1.9–23 and 2, pls. 5–12. For more translations and studies see Ritner, *COS* 1.52–54; *ANET*, 495; Israelit-Groll, "A Ramesside Grammar," and C. Leitz, "Traumdeutung im Alten Ägypten nach einen Papyrus des Neuen Reich," A. Karenberg and C. Leitz, eds., *Heilkunde und Hochkultur I: Geburt, Seuche und Traumdeutung in antiken Zivilisationen des Mittelmeerraumes* (Münster, 2000), 221–46; Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 66–114.

19. Published by Volten, *Demotische Traumdeutung*.

20. Cf. Israelit-Groll, "A Ramesside Grammar," 73. For physicians and medical books in Egypt see N. Shupak, "'And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father' (Gen. 50:2): On the Physicians in the Joseph Story," in *Illness and Healing in Ancient Times* (Haifa, 1996), 7–13, and additional bibliography there.

of a good person's dream is different from the solution of a bad person's.<sup>21</sup> This notion was adopted later by the Greeks<sup>22</sup> and forms the foundation of the modern oneirology, which examines the dreamer's personality, profession, traces of his past, and so on, to produce the interpretation of his dream.<sup>23</sup> Together with this pattern of omnia, which was common in ancient Egypt, another pattern appears, stories about dreams, the earliest of which is from the Middle Kingdom.<sup>24</sup> These stories contain message dreams, which do not need an interpretation, and vague symbolic dreams, which do. The dream stories have a uniform structure, prevalent in Mesopotamia as well as Egypt, consisting of the following elements: the dreamer's identity, the circumstances of the dream, its place, its content, an indication of its conclusion, the dreamer's reaction, and an account of the dream's realization.<sup>25</sup> In symbolic dreams the interpretation is inserted before the declaration of its realization.

Egyptian message dreamers are usually kings, in whose dream a god or another divine creature appears, announcing or requesting something. The purpose of these dreams is to emphasize the special relationship between the king and his god, as emerges from the subjects on which they focus:

1. The choice of the king for his kingship by a god, for example, the dream of Thutmosis IV before he became king. It tells of the slumber that descended upon him while hunting at the base of the Sphinx. In his dream the prince is asked by the Sphinx to dust the sand off it, and in return he is promised the throne.
2. Assurance of victory in battle: such is the dream of King Merenptah, before whom the god Ptah appears and foretells his triumph in battle; a similar promise is made in a dream to Amenophis II by the god Amun.
3. The submission of a request to the king by the god: this request is about concern for the god's statue, as in the dream of the Sphinx outlined above, or concern for the god's ritual; such is the request by the goddess Satet to Sesostris I.<sup>26</sup>

As Zibelius-Chen has shown, the royal dream is most probably a propaganda device of the Egyptian monarchy,<sup>27</sup> and as in other literary genres—poems of victory, myths about the king's birth, and so on—it is meant to strengthen the monarchist ideology. Whether or not one accepts this view, the Egyptian royal dream is mostly

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21. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri*, 9–10; Israelit-Groll, "A Ramesside Grammar," 74. On the possibility that the division into people of Horus and people of Seth is intimated in a 2nd-century B.C.E. text of the invocation of a dream (incubation dream), see Ray, *The Archive*, 73, n. DD.

22. Volten, *Demotische Traumdeutung*, 53–54.

23. Cf. S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. J. Crick (Oxford, 1999), 126–27.

24. The oldest dream is that of King Sesostris I. According to the inscription that survived in the temple of the goddess Satet in Elephantine he was commanded in his dream to renew the ritual of this goddess. The text was reconstructed by W. Schenkel, "Die Bauinschrift Sesostris' I im Satet-Tempel von Elephantine," *MDAI* 31 (1975), 109–25. See also the study by W. Helck, "Die Weihinschrift Sesostris I am Satet-Tempel von Elephantine," *MDAI* 34 (1978), 69–78. However, Schenkel has recently reconstructed the text again, and according to his new reading it does not contain any reference to dream; see n. 26 below.

25. Cf. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation*, 187.

26. This reference, however, is uncertain because the relevant text in the inscription of Sesotris I is dubious. See Szpakoska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 58–59, n. 41.

27. Zibelius-Chen, "Kategorien," 288–91.

a clear-cut message dream, and only rarely do symbolic royal dreams appear, like those of Pharaoh's in Genesis 41. In fact, we know for certain of only one such dream throughout Egyptian history:<sup>28</sup> the dream of the Ethiopian prince Tanutamun, of the 25th Dynasty, who ruled from 664 to 656 B.C.E. In his dream the prince saw two upright serpents, one to his right and one to his left. The vision was inexplicable and the king required an interpretation, which was given to him by members of his entourage: the two serpents were uraeuses (cobras), which denoted the two parts of the land, Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. The interpretation was that Tanutamun would rule over all Egypt.<sup>29</sup> The dream presented in the Sehel inscription, which as we shall see is the closest in content to the dreams of Pharaoh in Genesis 41, is likewise an explicit message dream. In it the god Khnum appears to the king and tells him of the rise of the Nile after seven years of drought and famine.

The picture that emerges from the Bible is the opposite: unlike the transparent Egyptian royal dream, in which the divinity presents a clear and distinct message to the king, the dreams of gentile kings in the Bible, including those of Pharaoh in Genesis 41, are symbolic and obscure. I shall attempt to ascertain the reason for this in the following.

### *III. Comparison of the dreams in the Egyptian sources with the "Egyptian" dreams in the story of Joseph*

#### *A. A description of the dreams in Genesis 40–41*

The use of the root *hlm* as noun, verb, and a combination of the two is characteristic of the Joseph cycle, especially chapters 40–41 (in which it features 27 times out of its 39 occurrences in the entire story).<sup>30</sup> The dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh are symbolic so that the dreamer needs an interpretation. They are arrayed in pairs, where the good dream (in the officials' dreams) or the good symbol (in Pharaoh's dreams) precedes the bad one. Pharaoh's two dreams carry the same meaning: in Joseph's words,

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28. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation*, 206–7, includes the dream of the prince Bakhaton among the symbolic dreams. Bakhaton, when sojourning away from Egypt, saw in his dream a golden falcon (the symbol of Horus) taking flight, and soaring towards Egypt. He interpreted this as the wish of the god Horus that he return to Egypt. My view is that this is not a symbolic dream because the dream is understandable to its dreamer, and he does not need an interpreter (cf. the dreams of Joseph in Genesis 37).

29. It is difficult to explain why Tanutamun's dream is the only instance of a royal symbolic dream found in the Egyptian sources. Szpakowska relates it to the change in the political status of Egypt, i.e., the losing of its independence during the Late Period. The feeling of insecurity led to a demand for increased divine guidance including oracular dreams. Thus the divine message dream of Pharaoh, the meaning of which was comprehensible to the dreamer, was placed by the occurrence of a symbolic dream—a dream whose meaning was enigmatic and required a third party for interpretation, namely the priest of Amun. See Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 55–56, and idem, "Through the Looking Glass," in K. Bulkeley, ed., *Dreams: A Reader on the Religious, Cultural, and Psychological Dimensions of Dreaming* (New York, 2001), 36–37. Another explanation may be Kushite influence. The Kushite kings were elected by means of oracular announcements; see F. Breyer *Tanutameni: Die Traumstele und ihr Umfeld* (Wiesbaden, 2003), 279–81; L. Török, *The Kingdom of Kush* (Leiden-New York, 1977), 241–46.

30. The root *hlm* appears often in the story of Joseph, more than in any other biblical text: the noun *hālôm* appears here 28 out of 66 times altogether in the Bible (about 40%), while the verb form occurs eleven out of the total 26 times in the Bible (about 42%). Cf. R. K. Gnuse, *Dreams Reports in the Writings of Josephus* (Leiden, 1996), 70.

“The dream is one” (41:25). The doubling of a dream—usually a symbolic dream—is known from the ancient Near East and is meant to verify and emphasize the message, particularly when the dream’s interpretation is not understood by the dreamer (cf. Joseph’s clarification, “the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass”; 41:32).<sup>31</sup> For example, Gilgamesh is informed of the advent of his friend Enkidu in two dreams of different visions; and two more dreams, also distinguished in their content, show that he and his comrade are to overcome their foe Humbaba. Gudea has three dreams about building a temple to the god Ningirsu, and the Babylonian “righteous sufferer” (*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*) is told in three dreams about his recovery from illness.<sup>32</sup> Let us begin with the description of the dreams in Genesis 40–41.

*Gen. 40:5–22: the dreams of the officials*

- Vv. 5–8: The dreamers’ reaction: they do not know the meaning of their dreams, and so their faces are downcast.
- Vv. 9–11: The chief butler’s dream: he sees a vine with three blossoming branches and ripe grapes which he presses into Pharaoh’s cup. The imaginary nature of the dream is emphasized in the un-interrupted and unrealistic continuity of the plant’s blossoming and bearing fruit, with no interval between.
- Vv. 12–13: Interpretation of the chief butler’s dream: within three days “Pharaoh will lift up *your head*” and will reinstate him.
- Vv. 16–17: The chief baker’s dream: he sees himself carrying three baskets of *ḥōrī*, (see below) on his head, and birds eat from the uppermost basket “all sorts of baked foods for Pharaoh,” namely an assortment of bakes to be set on the king’s table.
- Vv. 18–19: The interpretation of the chief baker’s dream: within three days “Pharaoh will lift up *your head from off you* and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat the flesh from you.”
- Vv. 20–22: The realization of the dreams.

*Gen. 41:1–8, 17–32, 53–57: Pharaoh’s dreams*

- Vv. 1–7: The relating of the dreams. Dream 1 (1–4): Out of the Nile come seven cows, sleek and fat, and they feed on the reed grass. After them follow seven more cows, gaunt and thin, and they eat up the seven sleek ones. Dream 2 (5–7): Seven ears of grain, plump and good, grow on one stalk. And seven thin ears, blighted by the east wind, sprout after them and swallow them.
- V. 8: The dreamer’s reaction. Pharaoh awakes in troubled spirits. He sends for the dream interpreters. The following passage (9–24) does not belong to the basic structure of the dream. Because of the helplessness of the dream interpreters Pharaoh turns to Joseph for an interpretation. He repeats his dreams to Joseph in the first person (17–24).

In the two stories of the dreams actions recur that would be impossible in the real world: gaunt cows and thin ears of grain swallow their sleek and plump counterparts. The danger and threat in the dream are more emphasized in the version laced with hyperbole which Pharaoh tells Joseph. Here details absent from the first telling are added: “such as I had never seen in all the land of Egypt” (19) and “no one would have known that they had eaten them . . .” (20).

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31. Cf. Y. Amit, “Repeated Occurrence: A Poetic Principle in the Design of the Story of Joseph,” *Te’udah* 7 (1991), 58 (Hebrew).

32. For a translation and the contents of these dreams see Oppenheim, *The Interpretation*, 245–50; Baruch, *The Prophetic Dream*, 10–11; Fidler, *Dreams Speak Falsely?*, 341–43, 346–47.

Vv. 25–32: Interpretation of the dream. These are two dreams with one meaning: “The dream of Pharaoh is one” (25). Seven years of plenty will come, and after them seven years of famine, which will cause the seven preceding years of plenty to be forgotten.

Vv. 47–57: Realization of the dream. An account of the seven years of plenty (47–49) and the seven years of famine (53–57).<sup>33</sup>

Again, I turn to the fundamental issue of our discussion: do the dreams outlined above possess any features indicating an Egyptian influence or setting?

### *B. The structure of the dream*

Richter studied the structure of the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh as part of his discussion of the literary genre of the dream and the history of its development.<sup>34</sup> Like other scholars, he distinguishes symbolic dreams, which among others include the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh,<sup>35</sup> from dreams containing a verbal message only, such as the dreams of Abimelech (Gen. 20:3) and Jacob (Gen. 31:11–13). In his view these two types of dream differ in more details: symbolic dreams are based on a real experience while the verbal message dreams are merely a “stylistic device” (the work of the Elohist author, who wished to pass on the divine message in this way). Symbolic dreams likewise have a characteristic structure, which is evident in the “Egyptian” dreams in the Joseph story and consists of the following parts:

1. A report of the dream, stated as “X dreamed” (41:1, 5); “in my dream” (40:9, 16; 41:17).
2. The opening formula: *wehinnēh* “and behold” (40:9, 16; 41:1, 5 [twice]).
3. A description of a picture or a scene in motion: the chief butler sees the vine and himself pressing wine; the chief baker carries baskets with baked foods on his head; Pharaoh sees cows grazing on reed grass and ears of grain growing on one stalk; these respectively eat up the cows and the ears that come after them.
4. The dream’s interpretation: it has a clarifying formula such as “This is its interpretation” (40:12, 18) or “The dream of Pharaoh is one” (41:25–26); identification and explanation of the symbols appearing in the dream (40:12–13; 18–19; 41:26–32).
5. The realization of the dream (40:20–23; 41:47, 53–57; 47:13).

A sixth part may be added to these, namely the reaction to the dream: “downcast,” “your faces are grim” (40:6–7), and “his spirit was troubled” (41:8).

The basic structure of the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh is thus similar: “I dreamed, and behold (*wehinnēh*)” + an account of the dream with a nominal clause + a narrative clause (*wayyiqtol*) + “and this is its interpretation” (with the officials’ dreams) + the (nominal clause) is / are ((*hū’ / hēm, hēnāh*) + nominal clause.

33. Here I do not treat the description of the famine and Joseph’s reform related in Gen. 47:13–26. Most scholars hold that this passage is a separate unit and does not belong to the story of Pharaoh’s dreams, whether it is a repetition stemming from the use of two different sources (chaps. 40 and 41 belong to E, and chap. 47 to J: E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB [New York, 1964], 353), or an expansion of chap. 41 (G. von Rad, *Genesis*, OTL [London, 1972] 408–9); or a later, tendentious addition (C. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50* [Minneapolis, 1986], 176–77).

34. Richter, *Traum und Traumdeutung*; see also Gnuse, “Dreams in the Night,” 33.

35. Richter places in the category of symbolic dreams also the dream of the Midianite soldier in Judg. 7:13–14, the dreams of Joseph in Gen. 37:6–9, and the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 2:1–45, 3:31–4:34. For my view of this issue see n. 5 above.

A comparison with the structure of the omnia in the Chester Beatty III collection (see p. 108 above) shows that in fact this is just an expansion of the structure there: the dreams in the Joseph story have in addition a narrative clause, the phrase “this is its interpretation,” and a repetition of the picture of the dream (a nominal clause). The similarity is especially close to the second part of the Egyptian omen (the apodosis), which contains the interpretation and is composed of a gerund/noun + the Egyptian word *pw*, which is equivalent to *hēm* (they are) in the interpretation of the officials’ dreams (40:12) and to *hēnnāh* (they are) in the interpretation of Pharaoh’s (41:26–27).<sup>36</sup>

This likeness between the structures led Husser to think that perhaps in ancient Israel too a deductive oneirocritics existed, based on an inventory of omnia.<sup>37</sup> We should note, however, that even if a common basic structure existed for the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh reverting to the pattern of the Egyptian omen, Pharaoh’s dreams contain other elements, missing from the officials’ dreams but present in the pattern of the Egyptian royal dream. These elements are the time of the dream: “After two whole years” (40:1); the place of the occurrence: “he was standing by the Nile” (41:1); indication of the dreamer’s waking (41:4, 7, 21); and lastly the assertion that the dream was extraordinary: “gaunt such as I had never seen in all the land of Egypt” (41:19) and “no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were still as gaunt as at the beginning” (41:21). Hence, Pharaoh’s dreams are constructed not only in the basic pattern of the Egyptian omnia collections; they are also akin to the pattern of the Egyptian royal dream, one common in the other cultures of the ancient Near East as well. In the royal dream too the place of occurrence is indicated, and stress is laid on the dreamer’s waking from his sleep and on the unusual quality of his vision. Pharaoh’s dreams are in particular similar to the symbolic dream of the Ethiopian prince Tanutamun mentioned earlier.

In sum, the dreams of the officials and the dreams of Pharaoh are symbolic, distinct on the one hand from the auditory message dreams that precede them in Genesis<sup>38</sup> (here a picture, there a voice [sometimes accompanied by a picture]; here a symbol requiring decipherment, there a clear verbal message; here the dream interpreter is a human being, there a manifestation of God, delivering a message by his own mouth), and similar on the other hand to the structure of the Egyptian omnia and royal dream.

### *C. Significance of the dream’s interpretation, principles of its formulation, and methods of its deciphering*

The dream collections, which furnish the interpretations of the dreams together with their omnia, were in fact meant to protect the person against the dream. In

36. Israelit-Groll, “A Ramesside Grammar,” 87–100.

37. Husser, *Dreams and Dreams Narratives*, 171.

38. Also the dreams of Joseph in Genesis 37, which precede the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh, have been defined in research as symbolic dreams (cf. n. 31 above); but I am of the opinion that they should not be included in this category because their interpretation is clear to the dreamer and to his listeners. Thus they differ from the dreams in Genesis 40–41 and from the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2 and 4 (cf. n. 5 above).

Mesopotamia dreams not told, and especially dreams forgotten, were considered dangerous through being uninterpreted. Therefore various means were adopted to eliminate the pernicious effect; some would relate their dream to a clod of earth that was afterwards crumbled in water and some would tell it to a reed that they then set alight.<sup>39</sup> In Egypt, as we have seen, there were oaths, incantations, and rituals to dispel the evil influence of nightmares, and also to invoke good dreams. Traces of fear of an unclear or a bad dream are still apparent in the Talmud (Bavli, *Berakhot* 55b). To solve this problem elaborate measures are suggested,<sup>40</sup> reminiscent of the magical methods followed in the ancient Near East.

Clearly, the ancients ascribed great importance to solving the dream. In the story of the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh the act of dream interpretation is indicated by the root *ptr*, present in the Bible only in these chapters (seven times each in chapters 40 and 41). The etymology of this root is not clear. Scholars tend to connect it to the Akkadian term *pašāru*, literally “to loosen, to untie a knot, to free,” and when applied in matters of dreams its sense is dual: telling the details of the dream, and releasing and dissipating its evil consequences.<sup>41</sup> In Oppenheim’s words “The verb *pašāru* . . . refers to the translation of the symbols of the dream into an unequivocally worded message or announcement . . . which alludes to the fact that the evil implications of the mystery contained in such a ‘symbolic’ dream have been dissolved.”<sup>42</sup> In this connection it is also of interest to compare the use of the parallel term in Egyptian *whʿ* (ⲟϣⲱⲓ in Coptic: *Wb.* I 348), whose literal meaning is “to loosen, to untie a knot,” and when applied in matters of dreams, “to solve, to explain.”<sup>43</sup>

In the light of the meaning of the terms equivalent to the root *ptr* in Akkadian and Egyptian, is the use of *ptr*, which as stated appears only in these chapters in the

39. See Oppenheim, *The Interpretation*, 301–7.

40. Some examples from tractate *Berakhot* on the means adopted against a nightmare are these: the dreamer states repeatedly before three people that he saw a good dream. These will repeat after him that the dream is good, and will quote verses from the Bible that will help to convert the nightmare into a good dream. Another way is that the dreamer appeals to God at the time of the Blessing of the Priests to convert the bad dream into a good one.

41. For a different view see Sperling, who inclines to separate the verbs *pašāru* and *ptr* though he admits that they correspond semantically: S. D. Sperling, *Studies in Late Hebrew Lexicography in the light of Akkadian* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia Univ., New York, 1973), 53–92.

42. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation*, 218–20; Gnuse, “Dreams in the Night,” 72; A. de Silva, *La symbolique des rêves et vêtements dans l’histoire de Joseph et de ses frères* (Montreal, 1994), 100–104. The cognate in Aramaic for *ptr* in Hebrew and *pašāru* in Akkadian is *pšr*, which appears only in Daniel. See *BDB*, 1109, and cf. Bar, *A Letter*, 79–80.

43. The word *whʿ* does not in fact occur in the Egyptian sources in the context of dream interpretation, but its parallel in Coptic ⲟϣⲱⲓ (J. Černý, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary*, [Cambridge 1976], 222) serves in the Sahidic translation of the Bible to render *ptr* in Gen. 41:8ff. (W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*, [Oxford 1962], 508). For the use of *whʿ* as a wisdom term, see n. 121 below. In this context it is interesting that the term *w3h* “to answer” in Demotic, when related to dream means to respond by a dream (in the phrase *dd w3h*, “to tell a dream”). Cf. W. Erichsen, *Demotisches Glossar* (Copenhagen, 1954), 77, and see Ray, *The Archive of Ḳor*, 38, text 8, recto 8, 10; 44, text 9, verso 7; 51, text 12, recto 1; etc. Cf. also *ibid.*, 187. *w3h* in Egyptian is semantically parallel to the Hebrew *ʾnh*, which is used similarly in biblical language: see “And the Lord did not answer him (‘*ānāhū*), either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets” (1 Sam. 28:6, 15; cf. Jer. 23:35, 37) and possibly also Gen. 41:16: “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer (*yaʾaneh*)”; see E. Ehrlich, *Der Traum im Alten Testament* (Berlin 1953), 78.

Bible, accidental or deliberate? Perhaps behind this use there is a confrontation with the pagan notion that wove the dream in with the world of the dead, seeing it as an expression of dangerous forces. This idea is totally at odds with the Hebrew belief that regards the dream as an exclusive divine message. Joseph asserts before the officials that the interpretation of the dream lies in God's hands: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (40:8); still more emphatic is his statement to Pharaoh: "God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer" (41:16). May not these utterances disguise a polemic against these pagan forces? Joseph means that it is God who will attend to Pharaoh's well-being by releasing him from the ill effects of the dream, and not a human interpreter (*ḥry ḥb ḥry tp* in Egyptian or *šā'ilu* in Akkadian) or an act of magic, like those found in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Whatever the answer, the question will always be shadowed by uncertainty. By contrast, more definite information exists about the methods of interpreting the Egyptian symbolic dream. These methods are complex, and founded on the principles of the dream's formulation, which are a conceptual or verbal association, such as the use of symbol, analogy, ironic inversion, repetition, and wordplay.<sup>44</sup> At times the one dream combines the use of two means. These principles also prevail, albeit less, in the Mesopotamian dream collections, especially as regards wordplays. Below several examples are given (from Mesopotamian dreams as well).

1. *Symbol*: The dream contains symbols taken from various areas of life. These symbols are familiar to the members of the society to which the dreamer belongs:

- Tanutamun, the Ethiopian prince, sees two serpents in his dream. These are uraeuses, cobras, which represent the two parts of Egypt, Upper and Lower. In this context they signify that the prince is to reign over all of Egypt in the future.
- Another serpent symbolizes the goddess of agriculture and hence denotes plenty when appearing in the following dream: "[If a man sees himself in a dream] seeing a serpent . . . , good; it means food" (Pap. Chester Beatty III, recto 2, 15).
- Underlying another dream, an image common not only in Egypt but also in the ancient Near East in general, is the presence of the god or the leader as a shepherd, guiding the people, his flock: "[If a man sees himself in a dream] bringing in the cattle, good; the assembling of people for him by his god" (ibid., 6,3).

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44. After completing this paper I obtained the article by Leitz, "Traumdeutung im alten Ägypten," principally dealing with the dream collection of Pap. Chester Beatty III, which in Leitz's opinion contains only symbolic dreams (except for one message dream: 7,16). Leitz divides these dreams into three categories: (a) dreams in which an event contrary to reality is described (ironic inversion, in our discussion); (b) dreams in which a connection exists between the account of the dream and its interpretation through word play (word association, in our discussion); (c) allegorical dreams (dreams founded on a symbol, in our discussion). Leitz's innovation lies in his including in the second group not only dreams in which there is an obvious word play (similar sound recurring in the dream account and in its interpretation), but also two more types of dream, in which there is a concealed wordplay: dreams in which only one word appears, which arouses an association with another word (Leitz, *ibid.*, 229–30; cf. nn. 50 and 54 below); or dreams in which no word appears, but there is a conceptual link between it and the account of the dream, and this word is linked to the dream interpretation through wordplay (*ibid.*, 230). Leitz does not distinguish conceptual from word association, and does not deal with the various types of wordplays either. For a comprehensive study of the linguistic devices and the cultural associations of Pap. Chester Beatty III, see Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 66–114.

- The magic custom of breaking vessels on which are written the names of enemies, which is evinced in the Execration Texts of the second millennium B.C.E., is well reflected in this dream: “[If a man sees himself in a dream] breaking a pot with his feet, bad; it means fighting” (ibid., 10,9).<sup>45</sup>
- Mesopotamia: “[If in his dream] he has put on a seal and somebody took [it] away: either his son or his daughter will die.” “[If in his dream somebody] has given him a seal with his name [on it]: he will have a name and offspring.” The symbolism is obvious: the seal-cylinder, on which appears a man’s name, signifies his continuity, beyond time and physical entity, just as his son does. The analogy between the man’s name and his son is also reflected in that in Akkadian one term (*šuma*) denotes both (Oppenheim, *The Interpretation*, 241).

2. *Analogy*: By this means, what happens to the person in reality is inferred from his condition in the dream:

- “[If a man sees himself in a dream] looking into a deep well, bad; putting him in prison” (Pap. Chester Beatty III, recto 8,5).<sup>46</sup> The content of this dream brings to mind the experiences of Joseph, who at first was cast into the pit by his brothers (Gen. 37:24) and ended up imprisoned in Egypt (40:15). A typological similarity?
  - “[If a man sees himself in a dream] binding fast his legs, good; it means sitting among his townsfolk” (ibid., 4, 14).
  - “[If a man sees himself in a dream] sitting in an orchard in the sun, good; it means pleasure” (ibid., 5, 13).
  - “[If a man sees himself in a dream] his penis becoming large, good; (it means) his property will increase” (ibid., 2, 11).
- Compare also ibid., 2,12; 4,11; 4,16; 4,18; 5,19; 8,13; 8,17.

3. *Ironic or analogous inversion*: By this means, a good situation in reality is inferred from a bad situation or event in the dream: dreams involving a funeral and death are usually interpreted to the good in Egypt as well as in Mesopotamia:

- “[If a man sees himself in a dream] dead, good; a long life before him” (Pap. Chester Beatty III, recto 4,13).
- “[If a man sees himself in a dream] burying an old man, good; it means prosperity” (ibid., 6,1).
- Compare an Akkadian dream book: “If he descends to the nether world: his days will be long. If [he] to the ‘Country-of-no-return’: [his days] will be long (Oppenheim, *The Interpretation*, 267).
- “[If a man sees himself in a dream] sailing in a boat, good; it means sitting among his townsfolk” (Pap. Chester Beatty III, recto 4,23). Compare also ibid., 2,13; 3,2; 5,24.

4. *Repetition and word play*: These tropes are particularly favored by the Egyptian dreamers or the authors of their dreams. They are the repetition of an identical word, the expression of words with a similar sound, homonyms, or ambivalent terms. There is also a tendency to paronomasia (use of an identical root for words of different grammatical function). These tropes are based on the Egyptian recognition that the language is sacred, so the similarity of words is not accidental but reflects a mystic connection.<sup>47</sup>

45. Cf. also 2,6 Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 79; 2,22 ibid., 82; 4,7 ibid., 87; 4,9 ibid., 88; 5,11 ibid., 91; 5,16 ibid., 92; 7,11 ibid., 98; 9,3 ibid., 107.

46. Volten, *Demotische Traumdeutung*, 61, shows this to be a fine example of a concealed wordplay: the vision of the well of water in the dream arouses an association with drawing of water, *itj* in Egyptian, a word also signifying a prison; therefore, the interpretation of the dream is: the dreamer will be sent to prison.

47. Cf. Volten, ibid., 60; R. K. Ritner, “Dream Books,” *OEA* 1.411.

The use of word association, especially with words sounding alike, also appears in Mesopotamia, but less.<sup>48</sup>

Examples of dreams of Mesopotamia:

- “If he goes to Laban: he will build a house.” Here the place name Laban is associated with *labānu*, meaning to make bricks, namely to build a house (Oppenheim, *The Interpretation*, 268).
- “If he eats a raven (*āribu*): income (*irbu*) will come [in]” (ibid., 272).
- “If he gives him *miḥru*—wood: he will have no rival (*māḥiru*)” (ibid., 277).<sup>49</sup>

The Egyptian dreams abound in variety of word associations as the following examples show:

a. Repetition of an identical word:

- [If a man sees himself in a dream] killing (*s'm3*) an ox, good; killing (*s'm3*) his enemies” (Pap. Chester Beatty III, recto 4,8).
- [If a man sees himself in a dream] seeing (*m33*) a dead ox, good; it means seeing (*m33*) (the death?) of his enemies” (ibid., 3,13). Compare also ibid., 2,1; 2, 19; 4,1; 8,7.

b. Repetition of a similar sound:

- “[If a man sees himself in a dream] seeing a large cat (*mi3w '3*), good; it means a large harvest (*šmw '3*) will come to [him]” (Pap. Chester Beatty III, recto 4,3).
- “[If a man sees himself in a dream] eating the flesh of a donkey (*iwf n '3*), good; it means his promotion (*s' '3.f*)” (ibid., 2,21). Compare also ibid., 2,3; 2,9; 2, 23; 4,4; 4,17; 6,19; 6,20; 6,25; 7,28; 8,4; 8,16; 10,6.

c. Paronomasia:

- “[If a man sees himself in a dream] being given victuals (*'nhw*) belonging to the temple, good; (it means) the bestowing of life (*'nh*) upon him by his god” (ibid., 4,22).
- “[If a man sees himself in a dream] being given white (*hdi*) bread, good; it means something [at which his face] will light up (*hdi*)” (ibid., 3,4). Compare also ibid., 8,2.

d. Homonyms or ambivalent terms:

- “[If a man sees himself in a dream] munching . . . *d3is* (a kind of grass), bad; it means hostility (*d3is*)” (ibid.,7,9). See also the following example.

5. Sometimes *two devices* may serve in one dream, as in the following case where conceptual association (analogy) appears together with word association (ambivalent term):

- “[If a man sees himself in a dream] uncovering his own rear (*pḥwy*), bad; he will be an orphan in the end (*hr pḥwy*)” (ibid., 9,10).

48. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation*, 241. By our account, about 12.5% of the decipherable dreams detailed in Pap. Chester Beatty III are constructed on the principle of repetition and wordplays. Excluded from the calculation are dreams with concealed wordplay of the kind noted by Leitz; see n. 44 above.

49. For more examples of wordplays in Mesopotamian dream collections, see Oppenheim, *The Interpretation*, 269, 279 n. 87; and C. Saporeti, “Paranomàsia nell’Oniromanzia Assirq,” *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 18 (1995), 183–91. Cf. also E. Greenstein, “Hermeneutics in the Biblical World: From Dream Interpretation to Textual Exegesis,” *Mo'ed* 13 (2003), 70–72 (Hebrew).

Here, on the one hand, is a conceptual analogy between exposing and poverty, and on the other hand a word play with the ambivalent term *phwy*, meaning both “backside” and “end,” “finis.” Compare a similar usage of analogy and word play *ibid.*, 4,1; 6,25.<sup>50</sup>

The criteria for the interpretation of the Egyptian dreams in the Joseph story are identical to those of the interpretation of the Egyptian dreams. Here too conceptual association (analogy, symbol, and possibly also ironic inversion) and word association (repetition and wordplay) are used. Below the dreams are analyzed with respect to these means.

#### *The chief butler's dream*

1. *Analogy*: His future may be inferred from his dream, in which he fulfils his role as in past times; Pharaoh will restore him to his place as formerly. This analogy is perhaps reinforced by the picture of the blossoming vine, alluding his coming good fortune.
2. *Symbols*: The number three plays an important part in this dream: three branches of the vine symbolize three days, the interval after which the dream is to be realized. Three appears again with the ripening process of the vine, which has three stages: “Budded . . . blossoms shot forth . . . its clusters ripened” (40:10). In parallel, the chief butler's activity is divided into three deeds as well: “I took . . . I pressed . . . I placed the cup” (40:11). The name Pharaoh is also mentioned three times in this passage.<sup>51</sup>
3. *Wordplay*: repetition of identical words. The number three recurs in the dream's description and interpretation.

#### *The chief baker's dream*

1. *Analogy*: In his dream he does not perform his task properly. Birds, unimpeded, eat the baked foods from the basket “on my head” (40:16). From this, his approaching end may be inferred—the birds are to eat his own flesh: “the birds will eat the flesh from you” (40:19).

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50. For wordplays in the Egyptian dream see also Volten, *Demotische Tramdeutung*, 60–64, and Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 77–114. The principles applied in the formulation of dreams in Egypt recur in the Talmud, which was composed centuries later. The following are some examples from tractate *Berakhot*, chap. 9 (trans. J. Neusner, *The Talmud of Babylonia*, vol. 1 [California, 1984]): conceptual association (a) analogy: “He who in his dream sees that he goes up to a roof will go to high position. If he sees that he goes down, it means that he will go down from his high position” (*ibid.*, 57a, trans. 384); “He who in a dream sees himself tearing his clothes will find that a decree against him has been torn” (*ibid.*). (b) ironic inversion: “He who in dream is arrested by the police, may know that a protection has been arranged for him” (*ibid.*, 384); “[If someone dreams that there is] a corpse in the house, it means that there will be peace in the house” (*ibid.*, 57b, trans. 388). Word association: “(If he is) gored by an ox [in his dream], he will have sons who are great gorers in Torah-study” (*ibid.*, 56b, trans. 380); “He who sees a cat in a dream in a place in which they call it *shunra*, will find that a lovely song (*shira na'ah*) has been prepared for him. If it is a place where it is called *shinra*, a bad change has been prepared for him” (*ibid.*, trans. 381); “One who sees an elephant (*pil*) in a dream, will find that wonders (*pela'ot*) will be done for him” (*ibid.*, 391).

51. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 75.

2. *Ironic inversion*: In his dream the chief baker sees himself apparently performing his role as in past times, but the interpretation describes the opposite situation. Not only will he not be restored to his position, he will be hanged. The irony is also reflected in the use of the phrases “on + head” (*‘al rô’š*), “head + on” (*rô’š ‘al*): in his dream he lifts the basket “on my head (*‘al rô’šî*)” (40:16) but in its interpretation Pharaoh will lift his head “from off you (*mē‘āleykhā*),” namely, will execute him (see below).
3. *Symbols*: (a) the three baskets symbolize three days, the interval after which the dream is to be realized; (b) birds eating symbolize an impending catastrophe, not necessarily in the Egyptian sphere but in the Semitic sphere.<sup>52</sup>
4. *Repetition of identical words (a–c) and wordplay (d)*:
  - (a) The number three recurs in the dream’s description and interpretation.
  - (b) The phrases “on head” or “head on,” and also “ate” and “birds,” recur in the dream’s description and interpretation. In the dream, the birds eat from the basket on his head; in the interpretation Pharaoh is to lift “your head from off you and the birds will eat your flesh from you” (40:19).
  - (c) The phrase “lift the head” serves as a key term in this dream: (i) There is a hidden word play between “carry (*nś’*) a basket on the head” and “lift (*nś’*) your head from off you.” Although the verb *nś’* is not mentioned in respect of the basket, the picture of the basket on the chief baker’s head prompts an association with the expression “lift the head,” which comes in the dream’s interpretation.<sup>53</sup> (ii) The phrase “lift the head” links the chief baker’s dream

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52. Birds are a bad sign in the biblical view as well as in other ancient cultures, especially birds of prey that feed off carcasses; cf. Gen. 15:11, where the vulture, which is eager to eat of the flesh of sacrifices, is driven off by Abraham; and also in a dream set forth by Artemidorus: “An eagle perched on the dreamer’s head portends his death” (D. Artemidorus, *The Interpretation of Dreams [Oneirocritica]*, trans. and comm. R. J. White [New Jersey, 1975], book 2, chap. 20, 101–2). The image of a bird eating the flesh of a carcass is bound up here with the common notion throughout the ancient Near East that non-burial of a body was a great disgrace (cf. Josh. 8:29; 2 Sam. 21:12). Among the curses in the Assyrian contracts and in an Aramaic inscription from Sefire is the threat that one who violates the contract will not have a burial and his flesh will become food for the eagle and the wolf (or the eagle and the vulture). See M. Weinfeld, “The Vassals Treaties of Esarhaddon—An Annotated Translation,” *Shnaton* 1 (1975), 113, ll. 519–20; 108, ll. 425–27 (Hebrew); S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (Helsinki, 1988), 46, ll. 425–27; 51, ll. 519–20; *ANET*, 288, ii, 37–iii, 49; D. R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (Rome, 1964), 68. A similar curse is characteristic of the Deuteronomist passages in the Bible, e.g., Deut. 28:26: “And your dead body (the carcass of the people) shall be food for all birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth”; cf. the prose sermons in Jer. 7:33; 8:2; 14:16; etc.; 1 Kgs. 14:11; 16:4; etc. See Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*, 69; and M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomist School* (Oxford, 1972), 131, 139, 349.

One more interesting detail is that the Assyrians commonly beheaded their defeated enemies and impaled the heads on trees or pickets around the city or the palace; see *ANET*, 288, ii, 37–iii, 49; cf. *ibid.*, 291, i, 9–54; A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Wiesbaden, 1976), 2.126, 132. Punishments of decapitation and hanging were also prevalent in Egypt; see N. Shupak, “Two Word-plays in the Dreams of the Officials of Pharaoh (Genesis 40:5–22),” S. Vargon, ed., *Studies in Bible and Exegesis* (M. Garsiel *Festschrift*; in press). This custom is perhaps hinted at in Gen. 40:19, “Pharaoh will lift up your head from off you and hang you on a tree” (although we would expect “and hang it,” referring to the head, not “you”). See also n. 54 below.

53. Cf. the wordplay in the Mesopotamian dream about building a house, p. 117 above, or the Egyptian dream about looking into a well, p. 116 above, and n. 50 above.

to the foregoing chief butler's dream (40:13), and on the other hand connects it to the portrayal of the dream's realization: "and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and the chief baker among his servants" (40:20).<sup>54</sup>

- (d) On a possible wordplay between the terms *ḥōrî* and 'elyôn see pp. 132–33 below.<sup>55</sup>

### *Pharaoh's dreams*

1. *Analogy*: The thin cows eat up the sleek cows and the thin ears swallow up the plump ears; this is interpreted as the advent of seven years of famine that will erase the memory of the preceding seven plenteous years (41:31).
2. *Symbols*: The seven sleek and fat cows and the seven plump and full ears signify seven years of great plenty; the seven gaunt and thin cows and the seven ears blighted by the east wind symbolize seven years of famine. For more symbolism in the visions of seven cows and seven ears of grain associated with Egyptian myth and religion, see the following section (IV).
3. *Repetition and wordplay—repetition and similar sound*: The number seven recurs in the dreams' descriptions and interpretations. Also, the word *šeba'* (seven)

54. The expression *nāšā' rō'š* appears three times in the officials' dreams: twice in a positive context (40:13, 20) and once in a negative context (40:19). The use of the expression in v. 19, "Pharaoh will lift up your head from off you and hang you on a tree and the birds will eat the flesh from you," is difficult for several reasons. (a) The phrase *nāšā' rō'š* appears twice more in the Bible, and it concerns Jehoiachin king of Judah, who was freed from prison by Evil-merodach, king of Babylon (2 Kgs. 25:27; Jer. 52:31). Here too, as in Gen. 40:13, 20, the context is positive, and not negative as in 40:19. (b) The phrase "lift the head" with the preposition "from off (*mē'al*)" is unique, and appears only in v. 19. (c) A problem of logic: according to the plain meaning, Pharaoh is going to behead him; so why should he go on then to hang him? A double execution? The usual solution in research is to drop "from off you (*mē'āleykā*)" in the first part of v. 19 on grounds of dittography, since the word recurs in the second part of the verse (e.g., Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 77; also J. Skinner, *Genesis, ICC* [Edinburgh, 1963], 463–64). Support for this proposal is found in biblical versions where *mē'āleykā* is omitted (in the Vulgate and in two Hebrew manuscripts), and also in Akkadian, where the equivalent to the Hebrew *nāšā' rō'š* is *riša našū*, which means "to pay attention," "to pay heed," and is a term without a negative or positive connotation. In this light, the meaning of "lift your head from off you" is as shown by D. Marcus ("Lifting up the Head": On the Trail of Word Play in Genesis 40," *Prooftexts* 10 [1990], 17–27): Pharaoh will turn his attention to you, the king will reconsider the verdict on the prisoner (ibid., 21–22). This way, it also fits the Peshitta rendition, פרעה נהדרך פרעה "Pharaoh will remember you." See N. M. Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia, 1989), 278–80; E. A. Speiser, "Census and Ritual Expiation in Mari and Israel," *BASOR* 149 (1958), 17–25. Still, I do not find this explanation, which proposes dropping *mē'āleykā* from the first part of v. 19, acceptable. The difficulty can be resolved without emending the Masoretic Text, which is also followed by the Septuagint. Even if the original meaning of "lift the head" is positive, the biblical author makes ironic use of it; twice, in vv. 3 and 20, he applies it with the usual meaning of "to pay attention to," and a third time in association with "lift off," "carry," i.e., the chief baker carries (*nôšē'*) baskets on his head, so the king will lift (*yiššā'*) his head from off him, namely take away, remove, his head from off him. The use of this kind of wordplay, in which the word is not mentioned in the dream, but a conceptual connection exists between it and the description of the dream, and it is involved in the dream's interpretation, is usual in Egypt: see Leitz, "Traumdeutung im Alten Ägypten," 229–30.

55. For another possible wordplay is between *ḥōrî* (white bread) and Pharaoh's *ḥarah* (heated anger); see S. Noegel, "Dreams and Dream Interpreters in Mesopotamia and in the Hebrew Bible," in Bulkeley, ed., *Dreams*, 56.

sounds similar to *šābā'* (plenty), in “the years of plenty.” The use of the word *pārôt* (cows) may likewise be a play on words with the *prh*, “to flourish, to grow.”<sup>56</sup>

In sum, the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh evince great similarity to the Egyptian dreams. It is reflected in the structure of the dreams with their various parts, and also in the conceptual and word associations that appear in them and facilitate their interpretation.

#### IV. Egyptian features in the dreams

The contact between the officials' dreams and Pharaoh's with the Egyptian setting is also evident in the Egyptian features integrated in them. These features contain elements taken from the world of Egyptian religion and mythology, details involved in the geography and nature of the land of the Pharaohs, functions and procedures common in the Egyptian king's court, and finally Egyptian words and terms borrowed by the biblical author. Raba said: “People are not shown in dreams (such impossibilities as) either golden palm tree or an elephant going through the eye of a needle” (Bavli, *Berakhot* 55b), namely in his dreams a man envisions objects with which he is familiar. Likewise, in the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh details drawn from their daily surroundings arise.

##### A. Elements taken from the world of religion and mythology

###### *Seven cows*

1. In the Greco-Roman period the Egyptian word for year (*rnpt*) was written by the drawing of a cow (*Wb.* II 429). Vergote notes that this form belongs to the cryptographic writing used as early as the Middle or New Kingdom.<sup>57</sup> This argument accords well with the identification of cows with years in the dream's interpretation. It is flawed, however, by its being based on a backward projection of a later form of writing, which is not confirmed by earlier findings.<sup>58</sup>
2. The seven cows are the seven cows with a bull frequently depicted on the walls of tombs and temples,<sup>59</sup> and associated with the belief in the world to come. Their

56. This is Husser's suggestion; see *Dreams and Dreams Narratives*, 111. Another wordplay is to be found in Pharaoh's dreams if we accept the assumption that the seven ears of grain symbolize the Egyptian god of corn Npri (see p. 123 below), which with transposition of letters is *rnpt*, “year” in Egyptian.

57. See J. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte* (Louvain, 1959), 57; Volten, *Demotische Traumdeutung*, 70; Leitz, “Traumdeutung im Alten Ägypten,” 229; cf. Oepke, “Ovap,” 229, who notes that in Persian also the cow symbolizes a year.

58. To the best of my knowledge, this form of writing the word for “year” does not appear in Egyptian sources before the Hellenistic period; for references see F. Daumas, *Valeurs phonétiques des signes hiéroglyphiques d'époque Gréco-Romaine* (Montpellier, 1988), 219, n. 157. For reservations on this see D. B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph Genesis 37–50, VTSup* 20 (Leiden, 1970), 205.

59. For an illustrated realization of the seven cows and the bull, taken from Pap. Ani of the New Kingdom period, see E. A. W. Budge, *The Book of the Dead* (London, 1974), 480; R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (London, 1985), 142–43. See also E. A. W. Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection* (New York, 1973), 399.

role was to provide sustenance to the deceased, as stated in the Book of the Dead: “I know the names of the seven cows and their bull who give bread and beer, who are beneficial to souls and provide daily portions; may you give bread and beer and make provision for me.”<sup>60</sup> The function of these cows matches that of the seven cows that appear in Pharaoh’s dream in the context of fertility and plenty.<sup>61</sup> The difficulty in this explanation, as was shown by Vergote, is the mismatch between the number of the beasts in the Egyptian sources (eight) and that in Pharaoh’s dream (seven).<sup>62</sup>

3. The image of the cow originates in the celestial cow, which daily gives birth to the sun. This cow is called *mḥ.t wr.t* (*Wb.* II 122), that is, “the great deluge,” and it realizes the primal ocean, the Nun, which is the source of the waters of the Nile; furthermore, it is identified with Hathor, the goddess of fertility and love.<sup>63</sup> By this explanation, the cows that come out of the Nile in Pharaoh’s dream signify the economic condition of Egypt. The fat cows denote the Nile in full flood and the thin cows signify its low level. Support for this explanation may be found in an Arabic dream book, which, as Volten indicates, has ancient Egyptian deposits. It too contains the tradition of fat cows as a sign of a time of prosperity and thin cows as a sign of famine and drought.<sup>64</sup> At first sight this explanation is the best because it harmonizes with the subject of the dream: years of plenty and years of famine. Yet it does not clarify the use of number seven, a central motif of the dream. But this problem, too, can be resolved if we assume that seven is a typological number, a number for wholeness (see the discussion of typological numbers below).

Whether we accept the second or the third proposal for interpreting the motif of the seven cows in Pharaoh’s dream, this motif, which is alien to the Bible and appears nowhere except in the story of Joseph, fits the Egyptian setting well. In addition to the examples given above from the world of myth and religion, cows are commonly present in the Egyptian magic literature in the positive context of nutrition, protection, or remedy: a sacred cow appears in a spell to drive off a child’s hunger; and in

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60. The translation is taken from Faulkner, *Book of the Dead*, 137, spell 148.

61. This is Janssen’s explanation (“Egyptological Remarks,” 66). A. S. Yahuda (*The Accuracy of the Bible* [Kingswood, 1935], 8) identifies the seven cows with the seven cows of Hathor, which symbolize the seven districts in which the goddess was worshipped. The problem with this view is the fact that those appear as seven women with cow’s horns, and not as actual cows. Similarly, those women are usually engaged in foretelling the future of the newborn babe, an occupation far removed from the function fulfilled by the cows in Pharaoh’s dream which is about fertility, plenty. On the seven Hathors see E. A. W. Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians* (New York, 1969), 433–34; RÄR, 282; W. Helck, “Hathoren, sieben,” *LÄ* (1977), 2.1033.

62. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, 56.

63. This suggestion was made by H. J. Heyes, *Joseph im Ägypten* (Münster, 1921), who was followed by Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, 57; cf. also Y. M. Grintz, *The Book of Genesis: Its Uniqueness and Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1983), 112 (Hebrew); de Silva, *La symbolique de rêves*, 126. On the nature of this goddess and her connection with the goddess Hathor, see also C. J. Bleeker, *Hathor and Thoth* (Leiden 1973), 31–35.

64. See Volten, *Demotische Traumdeutung*, 70.

another spell, meant to cure the body, the seven Hathors are present (seven women with horns on their heads, representing the cow-like goddess Hathor).<sup>65</sup>

### *Seven ears of grain*

The seven ears of grain in Pharaoh's dream are also interpreted in the setting of the ancient religion of Egypt. The identifying sign of Npri, the god of corn, mentioned as early as the Pyramid Texts (*Wb.* II 249, 6), is seven ears of grain present on his head or his body.<sup>66</sup>

### *B. Geographic background, climate, economy, and daily life*

Even if one rejects the assumption made in the foregoing section that Pharaoh's dreams contain symbols taken from the world of Egyptian religion and myth,<sup>67</sup> one is bound to admit that the pictures appearing in these dreams fit in with the natural surroundings of the Nile delta. The sight of cows splashing in the Nile waters is typical of Egypt to the present day. The Egyptian sources aver that in antiquity too cowmen customarily spent a part of the year herding the cattle in the delta swamps. Its lush vegetation was ideal grazing for the livestock.<sup>68</sup> Cattle-raising was prevalent in Egypt, while breeding sheep was one of the most important economic enterprises in the Land of Israel.<sup>69</sup> The picture of the ears of grain growing close to the Nile also suits Egypt's landscape: Egypt was ever a land of cereal growing and of produce export. Pharaoh standing on the Nile bank would certainly wish to indulge in the popular sport of the Egyptian aristocracy, hunting birds and fishing in the river's mass of waterplants.<sup>70</sup>

The following details that embellish Pharaoh's dreams are likewise typical of the climatic conditions, economy, and way of life of ancient Egypt.

### *Ears "blighted by the east wind" (41:6, 23, 27)*

The depiction of the ears as "blighted by the east wind," namely scorched by that wind, is difficult; the term *qādîm*, "east wind," does not suit the Egyptian environment. The east wind is the hot *hamsin* in the Land of Israel, but in Egypt the hot wind blows from the south. In any event, mention of "wind" in this context is interesting

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65. On the connection between a cow and the number seven see also Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, chap. 52, where he mentions the procession of a sacred cow. The beast (on 23 December) circles the temple of Helios seven times; this procession was called "the search for Osiris"; cf. *Plutarch: Über Isis und Osiris*, trans. T. Hopfner (Darmstadt, 1967), 2.31.

66. See Janssen, "Egyptological Remarks," 66. Npri is identified with Osiris, the god of vegetation, who dies in the summer with the rise of the Nile water and is reborn with the coming of spring.

67. See, e.g., von Rad, *Genesis*, 375.

68. Cf. Pap. Sallier I, 4, 8–9 trans. R. A. Caminos, *Late Egyptian Miscellanies* (London, 1954), 307. See also E. Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, trans. H. M. Tirard (New York, 1971), 439.

69. Y. Felix, *Fauna of the Bible* (Tel Aviv, 1955), 17, 19 (Hebrew).

70. This picture appears on the walls of the tombs of the Egyptian officials from the Old Kingdom period onwards, and it is widespread in the New Kingdom, especially under the 18th Dynasty: the deceased standing in a papyrus boat, is fishing with a harpoon and hunting birds by throwing a boomerang; beside him in the boat are his wife and children. See Vergote, *Joseph in Égypte*, 61.

as it fits in well with the Egyptian notion of the rise and fall of the Nile. According to this, the north wind brings blessing and high flood, while the south wind causes aridity and want. In *The Prophecies of Neferti*, an Egyptian composition of the second millennium B.C.E., the reason for the drought is given as follows:

The river of Egypt is empty,  
 One can cross the water on foot,  
 One will seek water for the ships to sail on.  
 Its course has become a riverbank,  
 The riverbank will be water,  
 What is in the water place will be riverbank.  
 Southwind will combat northwind,  
 So that the sky will lack a single wind (26–29).<sup>71</sup>

In light of this perception of the south wind in Egyptian sources we would expect from the biblical text this language: “Ears of grain blighted by the south wind.” This is yet another example of the manner of reworking of the text by the Hebrew scribe, adapting the Egyptian material to the local language and experience of the Land of Israel. He has replaced the south wind, the hot wind accompanied by sandstorms in Egypt, with the east wind typical of the Israelite landscape known to his readers.

In any event, the sight of parched ears of grain certainly matches a description of drought in Egypt. This opinion is reinforced by the Egyptian terminology denoting the semantic field of famine. This terminology, studied comprehensively and thoroughly by Vandier,<sup>72</sup> contains words whose basic meaning is dryness. For example, “The two lands (Egypt) in dryness (*wsr*).”<sup>73</sup> Particularly interesting is the description on the Sehel stele (see discussion below), which has an almost literal parallel to our verse: “The seeds dried up (*wsr*)” (l. 2).<sup>74</sup>

### *Famine*

The biblical texts do not refer to the cause of the famine in the time of Joseph. It emerges from Egyptian sources that the factors could have been diverse, natural forces as well as human ineptitude. This subject cannot be expanded on here. Significant for our concern is the familiarity with famine in Egypt from the earliest times. This is attested by the many terms in Egyptian relating to famine and by the manifold mentions of this phenomenon in private and royal inscriptions. In his research, referred to above, Vandier lists thirty terms for famine. Of special note is the existence of semantic parallels for some of these terms in the description of the famine in our story. The phrase “years of famine” (41:27, 30, 36, 54) is parallel to *rnptw ḥkr* in Egyptian (where *ḥkr*, famine in Egyptian, may be replaced by synonyms

71. For the text, see W. Helck, *Die Prophezeiung des Nfr-tj* (Wiesbaden, 1970), 20–25. For the translation see N. Shupak, “The Prophecies of Neferti,” *COS*, 1.108.

72. J. Vandier, *La Famine dans L'Égypte Ancienne* (Cairo, 1936), 59–97.

73. *Ibid.*, 73, B, a.

74. For the text and the translation of the Sehel stele see *ibid.*, 132–39 (excerpts only); P. Barguet, *La stèle de la famine à Séhel* (Cairo, 1953); *ANET*, 31–32. The translation here is according to Lichtheim, *COS*, 1.130–34. For research on the stele see also K. Zibelius, “Hungersnot Stele,” *LÄ* (1980), 3.84; cf. also the use of the word *nsr*, “flame,” to denote dryness: Vandier, *La Famine*, 73.

such as *snb-ib*, *šwit*, *ksnt*); the verse “so the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished by reason of the famine” (47:13) matches the use of the term *gb* “weak” in Egyptian to describe the debilitation resulting from famine: *gb n hkr* (*Wb.* V 161, 9). There is also the phrase *rnpt gb*, “a weak year, a year of famine,”<sup>75</sup> and “weak” is juxtaposed to “famine” in a papyrus from the time of Rameses II from the necropolis in Thebes. There it is stated that the laborers struck because they were “hungry” and “weak.”<sup>76</sup>

The first visual testimony to famine comes from the pyramid complex of Unas of the fifth Dynasty (2375–2345 B.C.E.), where a depiction of emaciated desert people dying of hunger appears. From the 11th Dynasty (2nd millennium B.C.E.) onward the members of the upper class pride themselves for distributing produce to their subjects in times of drought:

When years of famine (*rnpt hkr*) came I plowed all the fields of the Oryx nome, as far as its southern and northern boundary, preserving its people alive and furnishing its food so that there was none hungry therein. I gave to the widow as (to) her who had a husband; I did not distinguish the great from the small in all that I gave. Then came the great Hapy (inundation) the lord of grain and all things (Inscription of Ameni, Beni Hasan, 12th Dynasty).<sup>77</sup>

Such declarations recur later also: a woman asked at a trial of tomb robbers (20th Dynasty, 12th century B.C.E.) about the source of her money answers, “I exchanged the produce . . . when there was famine,” that is, she sold the produce for money.<sup>78</sup>

Is there a particular period known in Egypt when a famine lasted seven years, like the famine described in the Joseph story? The document closest to our tale is a stele from the Ptolemaic period (2nd century B.C.E.) discovered on the island of Sehel near the city of Elephantine. The inscription tells of a famine that prevailed in the land at the time of the King Djoser of the Third Dynasty (2667–2648 B.C.E.): The famine lasted seven years and the king called the chief lector priest, the sage Imhotep,<sup>79</sup> and asked him the reason for the low level of the Nile. The sage perused the holy books and told the king that the god Khnum, whose residence was Elephantine, was responsible for the flow of the Nile. Khnum appeared to the king in a dream and promised to restore the river to the arid land. In return the king granted the priests of the god Khnum a tract of land in the region of the first cataract in Lower Nubia.

The originality of the Sehel inscription is subject to controversy. Most scholars maintain that it is an apocryphal text, a late and tendentious forgery from the time of the Ptolemies. It was meant to empower the priests of the temple of Khnum at

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75. *Ibid.*, 77, 79.

76. *Ibid.*, 79.

77. For text and translation see *ibid.*, 17 and 114.

78. For more evidence on famine in the Egyptian sources, see *ibid.*, 1–79, 99–149; J. Janssen, “Bemerkungen zur Hungersnot im Alten Ägypten,” *Biblica* 20 (1935), 69–72. For Egyptian parallels to the steps taken by Joseph to avoid the effects of the drought—storing produce in granaries during the time of plenty and distributing grain at the time of famine, and also for the functions of “He who is over the house” and “He who is over the granaries,” involved in these actions, see Shupak, “The Joseph Story,” 129\*–30\* and *ibid.*, nn. 14 and 18.

79. Some maintain that the king did not consult Imhotep but his priest-*ḥartôm*. See Lichtheim, *COS*, 1.131, n. 5; Barguet, *La stèle*, 16.

Elephantine (Lichtheim) or to give legitimacy to the annexation of the southern provinces to Egypt by Ptolemy V (Zibelius-Chen, Barguet). Some go farther, indicating the possibility that the Egyptian composition was written under the influence of the Joseph story, which reached the Egyptian author through the Jewish settlement at Elephantine.<sup>80</sup> Others hold that even if it is a later composition it still contains archaisms, attesting that it is based on an ancient source. In other words, the Sehel inscription is a later reconstruction of an early source (Sethe, followed by Vandier and Wildung).<sup>81</sup>

To decide whether the Sehel stele is an elaboration of an actual ancient event or not is difficult; especially since the tradition of seven years of famine appears not only in Egypt but is widespread in the ancient Near Eastern literature. For example, in the tale of Gilgamesh the goddess Ishtar importunes the god Anu to create an ox that will destroy humankind and cause seven years of drought; in Ugarit the motif of seven years' drought appears as punishment for the death or illness of gods and heroes (Ba'al, Ashtar, Aqhat, and Keret);<sup>82</sup> and an Aramaic contract from Sefire contains a curse threatening with seven years of famine.<sup>83</sup> Remnants of this tradition also appear elsewhere in the Bible, for example, 2 Kgs. 8:1–2 (cf. 2 Sam. 24:13).<sup>84</sup> But even if the motif of seven years of famine was general in the ancient civilizations the similarity of the Sehel stele to the story of Joseph is quite extraordinary. This similarity is expressed in the following details:

1. A famine that lasts seven years.
2. The king taking counsel with a wise man, Imhotep, known as “the wise,”<sup>85</sup> while Joseph is called by Pharaoh “discreet” and “wise” (41:39).
3. The priests possessing excessive privileges: in the Sehel stele the king grants plots of land to the temple of the priests of Khnum, and in the reform undertaken by Joseph not only does the priests' land remain their property, but they also are excused payment of a tax (47:22).
4. Measures taken to prevent or end the famine.
5. The Egyptian king has a dream that allows him indirectly or directly to overcome the famine, or bring it to an end.

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80. See Vandier, *La Famine*, 42–44.

81. Wildung's arguments are especially convincing. See D. Wildung, *Imhotep und Amenhotep Gottwerdung im alten Ägypten* (München and Berlin, 1977), 151.

82. For a discussion of the relevant Ugaritic literature see A. S. Kapelrud, “The Number Seven in Ugaritic Texts,” *VT* 18 (1968), 494–99. For examples from Mesopotamian literature see C. H. Gordon, “Sabbatical Cycle or Seasonal Pattern?” *Orientalia* 22 (1953), 79–81.

83. The wording of the curse from Sefire is: “For seven years may the locust devour and for seven years may the worm eat, and for seven years may *tavi* (an agricultural plague) come upon the face of its land. May the grass not come forth so that no green may be seen . . .” See Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 123–24.

84. In Fidler's view 2 Sam. 24:13 concerns revelation bordering a dream; see Fidler, *Dreams Speak Falsely?*, 273. C. Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle and the Seven-Year Famine in Egypt,” *Biblica* 80 (1999), 224–39, raises an interesting notion: The laws of the Torah on the Sabbatical and on the Jubilee years are based on the story of the seven years of the Egyptians' bondage to Joseph. The purpose of these laws is to direct the Children of Israel not to behave like the Egyptians.

85. See p. 136 below.

In sum, the manifestation of famine, as described in Genesis 41, accords with the picture emerging from the Egyptian sources. Likewise some of the terms and expressions that appear in this context in the biblical text are parallel to the Egyptian terminology concerning famine. Even the method adopted by Joseph to solve the problem of the famine, storing produce in granaries and then distributing it, accords with what was customary in ancient Egypt, as I have shown elsewhere.<sup>86</sup>

#### *Baked goods and carrying a basket on the head*

In his dream the chief baker carries three baskets on his head containing various baked foods for Pharaoh's table: "All sorts of baked food for Pharaoh" (40:17). Bread was a staple in Egypt and the diet included a range of bakes. We have abundant information on this subject based on textual, iconographic, and plastic sources, and on archaeological finds of different types of bread discovered in tombs.<sup>87</sup> The Egyptian dictionary (*Wb.*) lists 38 types of cake and 57 types of bread; Pap. Harris I from the time of Rameses III notes about 30 varieties of bread, while the *Onomastica*, also of the Ramesside period, details 40 types of baked goods.<sup>88</sup> Some examples of these foods are pita bread, made of water and flour, loaves of notched bread (perhaps so that a side dish could be placed in it—beans or an egg), bread of finer taste through the addition of oil, milk, or eggs, or sweetened with fruit, honey, or date paste. The shapes of the bread were also diverse—half-moon, triangular, conic, square, round, or in the form of animals. Similarly varied were the ways of baking these pastries: some were prepared in a *tabun* oven, others were fried or baked in clay molds, and so on. The most detailed illustration of preparation of baked foods appears in the tomb of Rameses III.<sup>89</sup> Not surprisingly, then, provisions for the king's palace included a huge amount of grain. For example, the daily supply to the palace in Memphis in the time of Sethos I (13th century B.C.E.) was 100–180 sacks of barley and 2000–4000 loaves of bread.<sup>90</sup>

The custom of carrying things on the head was also characteristic of ancient Egypt, although of course not exclusively. It would not be mentioned here if it did not conform well with other particulars of the Egyptian setting. In iconography and sculpture many figures appear, especially young serving girls bearing objects on their heads. So this is another detail of the daily life of ancient Egypt.

#### *Viticulture and winemaking*

The main theme in the chief butler's dream is a vine in blossom whose fruit ripens; it ends with the dreamer's pressing grapes into Pharaoh's cup. This dream also reflects

86. See Shupak, "The Joseph Story," and Janssen, "Egyptological Remarks," 71–72.

87. Some of the research published on this subject is the following: W. von Wreszinski, "Bäckerei," *ZÄS* 61(1926), 1–15; H. Wilson, *Egyptian Food and Drink* (Aylesbury, 1988), 11–19; S. Ikram, "Food for Eternity, What the Egyptians Ate & Drank, Part II," *KMT, A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt* 5 (1994), 56–57; S. Delwan, "Bread," *OEA*, 1, 196–98, and additional bibliography there.

88. *AEO*, 2.228\*–33\*. Cf. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, 37; R. Hannig, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen: Grosses Handwörterbuch Deutsch-Ägyptisch (2800–950)* (Mainz, 2000), 234–37, 470–72, 759–60.

89. For a drawing see Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, 191.

90. See B. J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt, Anatomy of a Civilization* (London, 1989), 222–23.

well the Egyptian reality, this time involving cultivation of the vine and winemaking, trades practiced in Egypt from the time of the Old Kingdom. The wine industry developed particularly under the New Kingdom, and indeed, in the Onomastica of Amenemope, of that era, there are eight terms for wine, and it is noted that five more are mentioned in an offerings list from the Old Kingdom.<sup>91</sup> The range of terms associated with wine attests to the importance of this beverage in ancient Egypt. The wide scope of winemaking in Egypt is substantiated by Pap. Harris, from the time of Rameses III. It lists 433 vineyards belonging to the temples of Thebes. In addition to that region in the south, vineyards are known in the delta region in Lower Egypt and in the oases in the west.

Wine was an expensive drink, and drinking it was a privilege enjoyed by members of the upper class. In tombs, scenes frequently appear of winemaking or wine drinking as a mark of the good life. Another common subject in the tombs of the Thebes aristocrats is the depiction of banquets, with drunkards vomiting.

Wine was considered a valuable offering to the dead, and became the nectar of gods and kings. In particular wine was linked with the following gods: Osiris, known as “lord of the wine,” whose blood was identified with wine and his resurrection with grapes; Hathor, deemed “the lady of drunkenness”; the desert god Seth, adored in the vine-growing region in the desert oases, was perceived as the one who had bestowed wine on humankind; even Thot, the god of wisdom, appears as “lord of the wine.” Appeals by kings to the gods to fulfill various desires (such as ensuring the throne, granting power, or giving land) was accompanied by a wine offering, so wine became a means for strengthening the link of the Egyptian kings to their gods.

Wine drinking and its offering as a libation were thus a part of the life of the Egyptian king’s court, like the items to be discussed next.

### *C. Positions in the king’s court*

Two of the office-holders in the king’s court, the chief butler and the chief baker, are the protagonists of the first pair of dreams in our story. Presumably, these functions existed in all the kings’ courts in the ancient Near East. The question before us is whether the descriptions in Genesis 40 contain features connecting these positions precisely to Pharaoh’s court.

#### *The chief butler*

The parallel term *wb3* in Egyptian derives from the verb *wb3*, “to open,” denoted by the ideogram of a tool for piercing beads (*Gr.* U26). To signify the adjective, which appears from the time of the Middle Kingdom, sometimes a determinative of a jug of wine or beer appears (*Wb.* I 292). The literal meaning of *wb3* is therefore “he who opens (the jug of wine or beer).” In Pap. Leiden 384 (verso, 10,5) the phrase *wb3 dp irp*, “butler tasting wine,” appears. Therefore, scholars assume that the function of the

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91. *AEO*, 2.235\*–36\*. M. C. Poo, who recently published a comprehensive study on wine culture in Egypt, *Wine and Wine Offering in the Religion of Ancient Egypt* (London and New York, 1995), lists nine terms for wine. He maintains that only five of them refer to different types of wine while the rest are words denoting wine in general. On grape growing and winemaking in Egypt see also: Wilson, *Egyptian Food*, 27–32; Ikram, “Food for Eternity,” 58–59.

*wb3* was, among other things, to open the jug of drink and taste it before serving it at the king's table.<sup>92</sup> Various *wb3* are known to have served in the king's court, but the parallel title to chief butler in our story is apparently *wb3 n swt*, "the *wb3* of the king" (*Wb.* I 292, 3,5,6) or *wb3 stp-s3*, "the *wb3* of the palace."<sup>93</sup>

An unusual detail stands out in the account of the chief butler's dream. This is his pressing the grapes into Pharaoh's cup (40:11). As far as we know, wine was made by the treading of grapes with the feet, not by squeezing in the hands. Of course, this detail could be ascribed to the dreamer's colorful imagination, but it might indicate a special service rendered to the king. This assumption is confirmed by the title *w<sup>c</sup>b* 'wy, "clean of hands," which sometimes accompanies *wb3* in the inscriptions (mainly those of the 18th Dynasty) (*Wb.* I 281, 16; *AEO*, 1, 43\*).

From iconographic finds it transpires that the Egyptian "chief butler" was not only in charge of the king's drink but also oversaw the preparation of the royal beverages and meals. In the tomb of Deḥuty, of the time of Hatshepsut, he is described as supervisor of a large number of eating utensils and of servants preparing drinks.<sup>94</sup> In the period of the New Kingdom this official's status grew more powerful, and he served in various priestly positions as well as important political roles, such as king's counselor, royal secretary, and the king's attendant on his military expeditions.<sup>95</sup> His importance grew in particular in the Ramesside age, when he was placed directly by the king in charge of the execution of special projects, e.g., royal burial, overseeing the construction of various buildings in Nubia and turquoise mining in Sinai, and representing the king at the trial of tomb robbers (in the time of Rameses IX).<sup>96</sup> In this period these officials frequently head the list of the royal bureaucracy.<sup>97</sup>

### *The chief baker*

Above we noted the Egyptians' special expertise in making pastries. In light of the range of these products the presence of bakers of various types with titles according to their specialty<sup>98</sup> is not surprising. From the time of the Old Kingdom a plain baker was called *rth* (*Wb.* II 459, 13), which later, under the Middle Kingdom, became *rthty* (*ibid.*, 14; Ward, *Index* §860). The ideogram for this term is apparently an implement for taking bread out of the oven (?) (*Gr.* U31).

92. For translation of Pap. Leiden 384 see Caminos, *Late Egyptian Miscellanies*, 498, 500. Cf. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, 36. On the function of the *wb3* in Pharaoh's court, see also Grintz, *The Book of Genesis*, 104–5; *AEO*, 1.43\*–44\*; W. Helck, *Zur Verwaltung des Mittleren und Neuen Reichs* (Leiden and Köln, 1958), 269–76. On his mentions in the time of the Middle and New kingdoms, see also Ward, *Index*, 702–6; *ARE*, 5.51.

93. Hannig, *Handwörterbuch Deutsch-Ägyptisch*, 872.

94. N. de G. Davies, "Tehuti: Owner of Tomb 110 at Thebes," in *Studies Presented to F. L. Griffith* (London, 1932), 285, pl. 44b.

95. Cf., e.g., *ibid.*, esp. 281, 283; also the tomb monument of Mntw-iywy, the chief butler of Amenhotep II (*Urk.* IV 1466–67) and of his colleague Nfr-prt-R' (*ibid.*, 1020, 7ff.).

96. A. H. Gardiner, T. E. Peet, and J. Černý, *The Inscriptions of Sinai*, 1 (London, 1952), no. 302; 2 (1955), 194; *ARE* 3.213–14, § 496; for his participation in the inquiry of tombs robbery see Pap. Abbott, pl. 1,5 (translation in *ARE*, 4.253, § 511).

97. See, e.g., Wadi Ḥamamat inscription no. 12, line 13 (M. M. Couyat and P. Montet, *Les inscriptions Hiéroglyphiques et Hiératiques du Ouâdi Hammâmât* [Caire, 1912], 37) and Pap. Harris I, 76, 5 (W. Erichsen, *Papyrus Harris I* [Bruxelles, 1933], 92; cf. also *KRI*, 5, 17,5 and 18,5).

98. See Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, 37.

From the time of the New Kingdom an expert in baking a certain dish was called *ps*, an adjective derived from the verb *psi*, to cook (*AEO*, 1, 64\*–65\*; *Wb*. I 552); for example, *ps š<sup>c</sup>.t*, “cake baker.” Sometimes *psi* is replaced by *irw*, meaning “maker,” for example, *irw bit*, “maker of *bit* bread” (*AEO*, 1, 65\*). The parallel title to “chief baker” in the Joseph story may be *imy r ‘mr imy r htmti* in Egyptian, namely “he who is over the bakery of the king’s court,” or *hry rhtyw*, “the highest of the bakers,” “master baker.”<sup>99</sup> The chief baker was in charge of the supply of a variety of bread products for the needs of the king’s table and palaces, and also for the rituals of the gods (in the temples) and of the dead (through the priests of the dead).<sup>100</sup>

In sum:

1. The art of baking was highly developed in Egypt and included dozens of types of pastries.
2. Viticulture and winemaking were known in Egypt from ancient times. The wine industry flourished especially under the New Kingdom.
3. Wine was an expensive and valuable beverage. It was perceived as the nectar of gods and kings, and the king customarily offered it as a libation to the gods as an “incentive” to fulfill his requests.
4. In this setting the importance of the positions of chief butler and chief baker in the Egyptian king’s court becomes clear. Often, some of these office-bearers (especially the chief butler) enjoyed powers exceeding their specific function, mainly in the domain of political administration. This detail is perhaps intimated at the beginning of chapter 40: “the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker offended (*hāte’û*) their lord the king of Egypt” (v. 1). The verb *hṯ*’ when referring to a human object frequently indicates “to assault,” “to rebel against” someone.<sup>101</sup>

From the above discussion it appears that the offices of chief butler and chief baker also are among the Egyptian elements and features woven into the Joseph story.

#### D. Typological numbers

In the Egyptian dream collections dreams about numbers are notable.<sup>102</sup> Among them is a dream concerning the number seven: “(He who dreams about) seven—they will rebuke him” (Pap. Carlsberg XIII a, 2, 1). But there are no dreams where numbers qualify objects (as in our story: seven cows and seven ears of grain) and serve as a key term for interpreting the dream.

Still, the perception of the numbers three and seven as typological numbers in ancient Egypt is important for our purposes. They were of major significance mainly

99. Hannig, *Handwörterbuch Deutsch-Ägyptisch*, 127.

100. W. A. Ward, “Egyptian Titles in Genesis 39–50,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 114 (1957), 44–45.

101. Saul, wishing “to put David to death,” is perceived as a sinner “against his servant David” (1 Sam. 19:4–5; cf. *ibid.*, 26:21). Likewise Shim’i the son of Gera, who cursed David and wished that his son Absalom reign in his stead (2 Sam. 16:5–12), is deemed one who “sinned” against David (*ibid.*, 19:21). Hezekiah king of Judah, who rebelled against Sennacherib king of Assyria, refers to his own deed as a “sin” in his appeal to the Assyrian ruler (2 Kgs. 18:7, 14).

102. Cf. the passage in Pap. Carlsberg XIII a, 2ff. in which dreams about numbers and their interpretation appear; see Volten, *Demotische Traumdeutung*, 80–81.

in the circles of magic, medicine, ritual, and myth, fields with which the preoccupation with dreams had an affinity. Several examples follow of the use of the numbers three and seven as typological numbers in these circles.

Seven was the favorite number, or one of the favorite numbers, in Egypt. Seven stones are to be taken as a cure; seven times one must recite a spell or perform a certain magic ceremony; seven measures give the size of the divine monkey or some other legendary creature; for seven years someone seeks something in the legends; seven cows and an ox meet the deceased in the next world; seven scorpions accompany Isis in her wanderings in the delta; the underworld has seven gates, and according to legend seven Hathors (women with cows' horns on their heads, representing the goddess Hathor) come to prophesy the future of a newborn babe.

Three was a sacred number in Egypt as well. The trio of primal gods, Osiris, Isis, and Horus, form the basic model of Egyptian families of gods created again and again throughout Egyptian history. This number is of special importance in ritual: worship of the god was performed according to the division of the day into three parts, morning, noon, and evening; three times a day the priests purified themselves, prayed, and offered sacrifices to the god. Likewise it was customary to repeat various magical deeds three times.<sup>103</sup>

The numbers three and seven serve as typological numbers in the Bible also. Three is usually the number of times that acts are repeated: Aaron is commanded to bless the people with a triple blessing (Num. 6:22–26); in his sanctification Isaiah cries out *qādôš* three times (Isa. 6:1–3); and Elijah stretches himself over the dead child's body three times (1 Kgs. 17:21). Three also serves in the religious and ceremonial sphere: God offers David three afflictions, of which he must choose one (1 Chr. 21:9–14); three times yearly the people go up to Jerusalem on the pilgrimage festivals: Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles.

The number seven is more common in the Bible than three. Seven passages of time emphasize the importance of an event: for seven days unleavened bread is eaten, and the people dwell in tabernacles. The days of Creation are seven; so are the days of mourning (over Jacob: Gen. 50:10; over Saul and his sons: 1 Sam. 31:13) and of a wedding (Jud. 14:12). Jacob labors for Rachel seven years; every seventh year is a Sabbatical, and every seven times seven years is a Jubilee. Seven also appears in connection with ritual and sanctity: seven are the sacrifices or vessels of the ritual, defilement of one by the dead lasts for seven days (Num. 19:16), and Zechariah sees a lampstand with seven lamps (Zechariah 4). As in Egypt, the number seven appears often in matters of miracle and magic: the Israelites circle the city of Jericho seven times until it falls; a person bathes in a river seven times as a cure for illness (2 Kgs. 5:9–10); Samson's strength lies in the seven braids of his hair. Nor is seven absent from building: the house of wisdom has seven pillars (Proverbs 9).<sup>104</sup>

Thus the appearance of the numbers three and seven in the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh may be understood in the Egyptian setting as well as the biblical.

103. For more examples of the typological use of the numbers three and seven in Egyptian, see RÄR, 873–75; K. Sethe, *Von Zahlen und Zahlworten bei dem alten Ägyptern* (Strassburg, 1916), 33–38.

104. On typological numbers in the Bible, see B. A. Tsarfati, "Mispar," *Encyclopedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1968), 5.181–85 (Hebrew); L. Stalnaker, *Mystic Symbolism in Bible Numerals* (Philadelphia, 1952); on the numbers three and seven see *ibid.*, 31–40, 53–119.

Nevertheless, I would assume that these numbers too are to be explained in light of the Egyptian framework, not the Hebrew, especially when appearing in the unique collocations “seven cows” and “seven ears of grain”; these are bound up with Egyptian religion and belief and appear nowhere else in the Bible.

*E. Egyptian terms (in the order of their appearance in the biblical texts)*

Even those who reject the existence of authentic Egyptian features in Genesis 40 and 41 cannot deny that the story is flavored with Egyptian words, borrowed by the Hebrew scribe who wove them in Hebrew transliteration into his tale. These words are the following.

*par‘ōh*

This is the transliteration of the Egyptian term *pr ʿ3*, “the great house.” *pr ʿ3* originally referred to the king’s palace, but from the time of Thotmosis III, of the 18th Dynasty (15th century B.C.E.), it became the title of the king of Egypt.<sup>105</sup>

*hōrī*

The chief baker carries “three *hōrī* baskets” on his head (40:16). *Hōrī* appears only once more in the Bible, written in full, *hōrāy*; this is in a rebuke against Egypt in Isaiah 19, this passage too replete with Egyptian features: “The workers in combed flax will be in despair, and the weavers of *hōrāy*” (v. 9).<sup>106</sup> Here *hōrāy* is in parallelism with “combed flax,” and by the context this presumably is a kind of fiber, thread, or fabric. A variety of explanations have been put forward for the obscure *sallê hōrī*. The main proposals are listed below.

1. The term, referring to the contents of the basket, derives from *hwr*, to be pale, white, and is a name for bread—white, quality bread, made from wheat flour.<sup>107</sup> This meaning also matches the translations (Septuagint: “baked food”; Peshitta: “white bread”; Aquila: “wheat flour,” and similarly the Vulgate and the Targum of Jonathan), and is confirmed by the find in Eblaite published by Dahood.<sup>108</sup> In Eblaite the word *ha-ri* apparently signifies bread made of white flour. Görg recently showed that the parallel term in Egyptian is *hrt*, which makes its appearance in the New Kingdom period and perhaps as early as the Middle Kingdom.<sup>109</sup> This term may have

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105. Researchers commonly accept that the use of the epithet Pharaoh in the Bible reflects an original Egyptian usage. For the forms of this usage in the Bible, parallel to the stages of development of the title in Egypt, see N. Shupak, “Pharaoh,” *Encyclopaedia Hebraica* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1976), 28.409 (Hebrew); Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, 45–48.

106. In my view, the terms in Genesis 40 and Isaiah 19 are identical; on the interchangeability of *hōrī* and *hōrāi*, see GKC §86i, and cf. also *BDB*, 301. Others, by contrast, hold that *hōrī* in Gen. 40:16 is a *hapax legomenon*; see Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 72; *KBL*, 339; Redford, *A Study*, 49.

107. This is the interpretation of the Ramban, Abraham ibn Ezra, and Skinner in their commentaries to Gen. 40:16 and likewise *KBL*, 333; *BDB*, 301, and Y. Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loan Words in North-West Semitic* (Atlanta, 1999), 244.

108. M. Dahood, “Eblaite *ha-ri* and Genesis 40, 16 *hōrī*,” *BN* 13 (1980), 14–16; in Eblaite too the meaning of the word is not clear, but Dahood explains it according to the context.

109. M. Görg, “Ein eblaitisches Wort in der Josephserzählung?” *ibid.*, 29–31. Görg notes that the term appears in a list of foodstuffs prepared in honor of Pharaoh in Pap. Anastasi IV, 13,12: “*hrt* bread from *irt* flour (farina),” and perhaps also in an unclear text from the time of Thotmosis III, mentioned in *Wb.* III 130, 22; and cf. R. Hannig, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen Grosses Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2800–950 v. Chr.)* (Mainz, 1997), 556.

infiltrated Egyptian from Semitic, or perhaps this is an international coinage, shared by Semitic and Egyptian. This explanation also suits *hōrāy* in Isaiah 19 if we accept the suggestion of *BDB*, which renders 'ōregīm *hōrāy* as “weaving white stuff.”<sup>110</sup>

2. The term *hōrī* refers not to the contents of the basket but to its form, and it derives from *hrr*, “to make holes,” that is, these are wicker baskets or baskets with holes in them. This explanation is supported by Arabic.<sup>111</sup> This meaning also suits Isa. 19:9, in which *hōrāy* is the plural form, namely “holes,” and 'ōregīm *hōrāy* means that they are occupied with the work of plaiting, weaving nets.<sup>112</sup>

Both proposals for explaining *hōrī* are acceptable. However, as Genesis 40–41 and Isaiah 19 are set against an Egyptian background, the first proposal seems more likely. The term *hōrī* would therefore mean white bread, quality bread, a term that existed in Egyptian too. If this assumption is correct yet another word play may well be present in the text, based on two like-sounding words in Egyptian, namely *hrt*, a kind of bread, and *hry*, “uppermost,” a nisbe adjective derived from the preposition *hr*, “on.” The first word is reflected in the biblical text in the word *hōrī*, the second in the word 'elyōn (40:17) and in the preposition 'al, which occurs frequently in the chief baker's dream and its interpretation: “Three baskets of white bread *on* ('al) my head . . .” (40:16); “And in the *uppermost* ('elyōn) . . . *on* (mē'al) my head . . .” (v. 17); “your head from *off* you (mē'āleykhā) . . . and will hang you *on* ('al) a tree and the birds will eat your flesh from you (mē'āleykhā)” (v. 19).

Thus the Hebrew author might have made ironical use here of two Egyptian words of similar sound and different meaning.

*ye'ōr*

The Egyptian term is *itr* (*Wb.* I 146, 10 ff.) meaning river, and it appears from the time of the Old Kingdom. Its etymology is unknown.<sup>113</sup> From the 18th Dynasty the *t* was dropped, and in Coptic the word is written EIOOP.<sup>114</sup> This later spelling is reflected in the word *ye'ōr* in the Bible, usually as a name for the Nile.<sup>115</sup> The Egyptian language had another term for the Nile in flood, *h'py*. *H'py*, which became a god, was described as an androgynous figure with a beard, chest, and protruding belly; sometimes its body is covered by blue zigzag lines symbolizing water, and meal offerings or water plants sprout out of its head. The god Hapy is indeed not mentioned in the story of Pharaoh's dreams. But his-her role as being responsible for the Nile flood is perhaps alluded to in the mention of the place where the dreams

110. *GKC* §86; *BDB*, 301. In Westermann's view, this interpretation is problematic because it is not possible that *hōrī* in v. 16b refers to the basket's contents, which also appear in the next verse, 17a: “all sorts of baked foods for Pharaoh”; see Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 77. This qualification is easily refuted in light of other examples in the Bible in which the particular precedes the general; cf., e.g., Gen. 1:21; Exod. 22:9.

111. This is the explanation of Rashi, Rashbam, David Kimḥi, Speiser, and Westermann.

112. Cf. *GKC* §87g. Yahuda suggests understanding *hōrī* as derived from the Egyptian *H3r(w)* the land of Israel-Syria, the land of the biblical Horites; by this suggestion, *sallē hōrī* are baskets made in Horite style, or of Horite importation. See A. S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in Its Relation to Egyptian* (Oxford, 1944), 1.91–92.

113. According to K. W. Butzer, “Nile,” *OEA*, 2.550, its basic meaning is the “seasonal.”

114. J. Černý, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary* (Cambridge, 1976), 48.

115. Except in Job 28:10, where *ye'ōrīm* stands for the springs welling up from the ground, and Dan. 12:5–7, where *ye'ōr* appears as a name for the Tigris.

occurred: “In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile” (41:17; cf. 41:1). In this context it is of interest that also the expression “on the banks of the Nile” appears literally in Egyptian, *ḥms ḥr spt itrw*, “Would that you were seated on the banks of the Nile!” (Pap. Anastasi I 3, 8).<sup>116</sup>

### 'āḥû

The term appears once again in the Bible in parallelism to *gōme*, “papyrus,” in Job 8:11: “Can *gōme* grow where there is no marsh? Can 'āḥû flourish where there is no water?” By the context, the term presumably indicates some kind of vegetation. Vergote in fact showed that it is borrowed from Egyptian, where the word *3hy* (*Wb.* I 18,8), which begins to appear from the New Kingdom period, signifies marshland or a thicket of papyrus (*fourre de papyrus*).<sup>117</sup> Cows grazing in the reed grass and soaking in the water of Nile marshes is a familiar picture to anyone visiting Egypt still today.

Another term, *ḥarṭummîm*, also belongs to this list, but it merits a separate section.

### V. Ḥarṭummîm and interpreters

At the beginning of the discussion it was stated that information on dreams has come down to us from all over the ancient Near East, and that these dreams include not only distinct message dreams, which do not need an interpreter, but also obscure symbolic dreams. Not surprisingly, this kind of dream, which requires an interpreter, led to the creation of a class of professional oneirocritics. In Mesopotamia, alongside the readily accessible or non-professional dream interpreters (e.g., a sister or mother), were professional dream interpreters, the *bārû* and the *šā'ilu*.<sup>118</sup> In Egypt these were the *ḥarṭummîm* (in Egyptian *ḥry ḥb ḥry tp*: see below), so renowned in the ancient world that even the kings of Assyria saw fit to engage some of them in their royal court.<sup>119</sup> By contrast, in Israel, at least according to the evidence of the Bible, there were *no* professional dream interpreters.<sup>120</sup> The *ḥarṭummîm*, to whom Pharaoh turned

116. See A. H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Hieratic Texts I* (Leipzig, 1911), 18; H. W. Fischer-Elfert, *Die Satirische Streitschrift des Pap. Anastasi I* (Wiesbaden, 1986), 37, line 109.

117. This term describes also the Khemmis woods, where Isis hid Horus from Seth. For a wide-ranging study of 'āḥû, see Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, 59–66, who assembled the relevant Egyptian sources, and cf. Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names*, 238. The word also appears in Ugaritic ('*ah šnk* in the Epic of Baal 76: II 9) and in 8th-century B.C.E. Aramaic inscriptions from Sefire; cf. *ibid.*, 280–81.

118. See Oppenheim, *The Interpretation*, 221–25; *idem*, “Mantic Dreams in the Ancient Near East,” in G. E. von Grunbaum and K. Cailliois, eds., *The Dream and Human Societies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996), 350.

119. In Akkadian the *ḥarṭummîm* are called *ḥarṭibî* (*Ahw.*, 328b). The use of the Egyptian term shows that an identical profession did not exist in Mesopotamia. The *ḥarṭibî* appear in sources from the time of Ashurbanipal and Esarhaddon (8th–7th centuries B.C.E.): on a tablet from the time of Ashurbanipal two groups of *ḥarṭibî* are mentioned, together with Egyptian scribes among the “conjunction priests, diviners (*barû*), scribes . . . exorcists (*kalû*) and augurs”; while in Esarhaddon’s inventory of booty taken from Egypt they are among such professionals as veterinarians, scribes, cartwrights, shipwrights, and singers. See Oppenheim, *The Interpretation*, 238, and Gnuse, *Dream Reports*, 49.

120. From 1 Sam. 28:6 it is possible to conclude that applying to God by means of a dream existed. The use of the root *s'l* in this verse may intimate the existence of professionals in Israel too, because in Mesopotamia professional dream interpreters were called *šā'ilu*.

for help in interpreting his dreams in Genesis 41, were thus a manifestly Egyptian institution.

*Ḥartummîm* appear again in other Bible passages with an Egyptian setting. In the episode of the Ten Plagues they perform marvelous feats of magic in competition with Moses and Aaron (Exod. 7:11, 22; 8:3, 14–15; 9:11). In one place only are they mentioned not in an Egyptian context, namely the story of Daniel, in which the term *ḥartummîm* is borrowed to describe a similar functionary in the court of the king of Babylon (Dan. 1:20; 2:2, 27). In these passages the term *ḥartummîm* is parallel or in conjunction with *ḥakhāmîm* (wise men) (Gen. 41:8; Exod. 7:11; Dan. 2:27),<sup>121</sup> *mekhaššefîm* (sorcerers) (Exod. 7:11; Dan. 2:2), and *'aššāfîm* (“enchanters”) (Dan. 1:20; 2:2, 10, 27).

In these passages the *ḥartummîm* are ascribed two qualities: the ability to interpret dreams and the ability to perform acts of magic and sorcery. These occupations match the information stemming from Egyptian sources about the priest known as *ḥry ḥb ḥry tp*, literally “he who is in charge of the ceremony” or “chief lector priest” (*ḥr tb* in Demotic). In the view of Quaegebeur, this lengthy title was abbreviated very early to *ḥry tp*, which in the course of time became *ḥry tb* and later still *ḥry tm*, and in this form it was inserted into the biblical texts.<sup>122</sup> The *ḥry tm*, sometimes known as the “scribe of the papyrus scroll” or the scribe of the “House of Life”<sup>123</sup> was a member of the staff of the Egyptian House of Life. This institution served both as a university and a scriptorium. Here the foremost of the sciences were studied, such

121. In Egyptian sources also, the *ḥry tp* are often called “learned men” (*rh iht*). See, e.g., Pap. Chester Beatty IV from the Ramesside period, which lists among the eight “learned scribes” (*sšw rh iht*) of Egypt Imhotep and Neferti, who hold the title *ḥartôm*. Cf. N. Shupak, “‘Canon’ and ‘Canonization’ in Ancient Egypt,” *BO* 58 (2001), 537–41. Also idem, “Egyptian ‘Prophecy’ and Biblical Prophecy: Did the Phenomenon of Prophecy, in the Biblical Sense Exist in Ancient Egypt?,” *JEOL* 31 (1989–1990), 26–27; cf. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, 66. In this context it is interesting to note that the verb *whꜥ*, which in Egyptian serves to signify an interpretation of a dream (see n. 43 above), is a wisdom term, whose primary meaning is “to untie a knot,” and when it has an object referring to a matter of wisdom its meaning is to interpret a text. See N. Shupak, *Where Can Wisdom Be Found? The Sage’s Language in the Bible and in Ancient Egyptian Literature*, *OBO* 130 (Fribourg and Göttingen, 1993), 63–65.

122. Quaegebeur, “On the Egyptian Equivalent of Biblical *Ḥartummîm*,” in S. Israelit-Groll, ed., *Pharaonic Egypt, the Bible and Christianity* (Jerusalem, 1983), 162–72. Quaegebeur believes that as early as the pre-Demotic period a displacement occurred from *ḥry tp* to *ḥry tb*; therefore, the time of the penetration of the term into the Bible should not be dated as late as the 7th–6th century B.C.E., as asserted by Redford, *A Study*, 203–4. Cf. H. P. Müller, “*ḥartôm*,” *TDOT*, 5:176–77; and Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names*, 245.

H. Goedicke, “*Ḥartummîm*,” *Orientalia* 65 (1996), 24–30, disputes this etymology. In his view, the source of the term *ḥartummîm* in biblical language is *ḥry tmꜥ* in Egyptian, literally “the one over the mat,” that is, “the one on duty.” These are ministers or officials in the king’s entourage whom he also consults on matters of dreams, but they are not professional dream interpreters. His argument is not acceptable: (a) according to the Egyptian sources there is no doubt that the *ḥry ḥb* were associated with matters of dream interpretation (see discussion below); (b) as we saw above (n. 112), they appear in the Assyrian king’s court not as ordinary officials but are on the lists of various *professionals*, most of whom are connected, like the *ḥartummîm*, with magic, medicine, and foretelling the future.

123. Cf., e.g., *sš mdꜥt*, “scribe of the scroll,” in Pap. Westcar (K. Sethe, *Ägyptische Lesestücke. Texte des Mittleren Reiches* (Hildesheim, 1959), 26,9–10. The Coptic (Bohairic) translation also uses the term *sphraneš* which is a corruption of the phrase *sš pr ḥnh*, namely “scribe of the House of Life,” in Egyptian—to render *ḥartummîm* in Gen. 41:8, 24; cf. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, 74; K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* (New York and Oxford, 1997), 88.

as astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and embalming, and magical and ritual texts were composed, copied, and learned. These included dream books.<sup>124</sup> The *ḥarṭôm*, who from the Old Kingdom period appears in the Egyptian king's court, was engaged in matters of ritual and magic.<sup>125</sup> His work included administering religious ceremonies, especially those of embalming and burial (the ceremony of opening the mouth), which were accompanied by reading from the Book of the Dead, and also interpreting dreams.

Three such priests are found as early as Pap. Westcar, composed apparently in the time of the 12th Dynasty (2nd millennium B.C.E.). It is told that king Cheops, of the 4th Dynasty, was bored, so his sons entertained him with a tale of a *ḥarṭôm* who in the past had performed amazing acts of magic; they also brought in a contemporary *ḥarṭôm*, and he too, like his colleague from the past, amused the king with his wonders. Some of these acts are very similar to the feats of Pharaoh's *ḥarṭummîm* in Exodus. Of another *ḥarṭôm*, called Neferti, it is told that the king Snefru, also of the 4th Dynasty, was listless, and at his request Neferti told him "what will happen," namely foretold the future. Two of these *ḥarṭummîm* were revered as exceptionally wise men, and in the course of time became gods: one is the famous scribe and chief architect of the king Amenhotep III (18th Dynasty, 15th century), Amenhotep son of Apu; the other is Imhotep, vizier and architect of Pharaoh Djoser (4th Dynasty), who also served as his advisor in the famine crisis in his time (see discussion on the Sehel stele, pp. 125–26 above). Imhotep was renowned as one who knew the mysteries of the holy books of the House of Life of the temple of Thot at Hermopolis, and as possessor of extraordinary encyclopedic knowledge. This knowledge included the names of gods, ores, and minerals.<sup>126</sup> Most information about *ḥarṭummîm* who functioned as dream interpreters is from later periods (the Hellenistic period onwards), when incubation dreams were popular and every temple employed professional dream interpreters. In the archive of the priest Hor at the Serapeum of Memphis, in the 2nd century C.E., mention is made of *ḥarṭummîm* who offer their services as dream interpreters to people attending the temple.<sup>127</sup>

The depiction of the *ḥarṭummîm* in Genesis and Exodus is therefore reliable and realistic, and conforms with the image of the *ḥry tp* in the Egyptian sources. Joseph

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124. A. H. Gardiner ("The House of Life," *JEA* 24 [1938], 157–70) and R. J. Williams ("Scribal Training in Ancient Egypt," *JAOS* 92 [1972], 214–21) maintain that the "House of Life" was only a scriptorium, but others disagree. It has in fact been proven that the House of Life was a school for higher education, which also included a scriptorium and a library. See Volten, *Demotische Traumdeutung*, 17–36, and Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, 74–80, who follows him. Vergote also attempts (*ibid.*, 80–94) to determine the place of the *ḥarṭummîm* in the staff of the House of Life, and concludes that they were among the *w'bw* priests, who belonged to the minor priesthood. Remnants of the building of the House of Life were discovered at Tel El Amarna and at Edfu, and it is assumed that this institution also existed at Elephantine. See G. Burkard, "Bibliotheken im alten Ägypten," *Bibliothek Forschung und Praxis* 4 (1980), 79–115.

125. On the connection between the *ḥarṭôm* and magic see Ritner's study, "O. Gardiner 363," 40.

126. For a comprehensive study of these wise men and their apotheosis see Wildung, *Imhotep und Amenhotep*; also *idem*, *Egyptian Saints: Deification in Pharaonic Egypt* (New York 1977). Cf. also Shupak, "Canon," 543–44 and n. 31.

127. See Ray, *The Archive of Hor*, esp. 134–35. The sparsity of information on *ḥarṭummîm* as dream interpreters may be because the interpretation of dreams was part and parcel of daily life in Egypt, so the need to mention it on monuments did not arise. See Zibelius-Chen, "Kategorien," 286.

succeeds where the *ḥarṭummîm* do not—in interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams. His success earns him recognition with the title *ḥākām*, wise man, an appellation usually associated with *ḥarṭummîm*: “There is none as discreet and wise as you are,” says Pharaoh (41:39).<sup>128</sup>

But Joseph’s wisdom differs from the professional wisdom of the *ḥarṭummîm*. They acquired their knowledge through study at the House of Life, no doubt by studying dream collections such as Pap. Chester Beatty III; while Joseph’s wisdom is endowed, a gift of God: “the Spirit of God is in him” (41:38 cf. 40:8 and 41:16). The confrontation in Genesis 41 is between representatives of the pagan religion and the charismatic emissary of God; and as in the other Bible stories involving *ḥarṭummîm*, here too God’s messenger has the upper hand.

### *Summary and Conclusions*

The dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh are exceptional in Genesis. These are symbolic, enigmatic dreams, requiring interpretation. Thereby they differ from the preceding message dreams, which contain a clear verbal message (except for the dreams of Joseph [Genesis 37], which although symbolic are understood by the dreamer and his hearers and need no explanation). The structure of these dreams is distinctive too; there is nothing similar in Genesis, yet it is close to the structure of the omnia in the Egyptian dream collections on the one hand, and to the pattern of the Egyptian royal dream on the other.

The pattern of the Egyptian dream is reflected in the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh not only in the structure of their various parts but also in the principles of the dream’s formulation and the ways of its interpretation. These ways are the use of conceptual association—analogy, ironic inversion and symbolism, and word association—repetition of an identical word, insertion of words sounding alike, and use of ambivalent words (in Mesopotamian dreams wordplays are used also, but not to such an extent).

Against this background mention of *ḥarṭummîm*, the Egyptian priests—who were charged with interpreting dreams of this kind—is apt. Also, the Egyptian notion of the nightmare as an expression of dangerous forces is evident in these passages, as reflected in these details:

1. Awareness that it is possible to prevent the evil consequences of the dream by taking certain steps—not, indeed, magical acts (oaths, prayers, breaking of clay vessels, etc.), as we find in Egypt, but actual deeds: storing produce in the years of plenty for the years of famine, and the like.
2. If the assumption is correct that *ptr* in the biblical language, like its parallel terms *pašāru* in Akkadian and *whʿ* in Egyptian, means release from the bad outcome of the dream, it is possible that belief in the negative, dangerous, element of the dream also finds expression in the use of this root, which appears in the Bible in these chapter alone.

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128. Cf. n. 121 above. My view regarding *ḥarṭummîm* differs from that of Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 65, who argues that they were not dream interpreters but should be considered either as wise men, magicians, or priests.

Egyptian shadings are evident not only in the dreams' structure, the ways of their interpretation, and recognition of their negative aspect, but also in their content. The motifs of the dreams are drawn from various areas of life in ancient Egypt: life in the king's court—office-bearers, banquets and wine offerings, and the range of baked foods; landscape and nature—the Nile, cows pasturing in the reed grass, and grain growing on the river banks; economy—the rise and fall of the Nile, famine, husbanding cattle, and winemaking; belief, religion, and magic—seven cows and seven ears of grain, typological numbers (three and seven), and the *ḥartummîm*. Particularly astonishing is the great similarity of the account of Pharaoh's dreams and their interpretation by Joseph to the Egyptian inscription from Sehel, which also tells of seven years of famine, of the king's dream, and of a counselor gifted with extraordinary wisdom. Egyptian terms, interspersed in the stories of the dreams and written in Hebrew transliteration, are quite conspicuous: *par'ôh*, *ḥôri*, *ye'ôr*, *'āḥû*, and *ḥartummîm*.

There can be no doubt, therefore, that the stories of the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh, like the other chapters of the Joseph story (apart from 38 and 49), contain authentic Egyptian features and elements. The biblical text cannot be properly understood without recognition of the Egyptian setting that I have unfolded in the foregoing pages.

Finally, the question arises as to the goal of the biblical author in integrating the stories of the dreams of the officials and of Pharaoh into the story of Joseph. The answer is clear: the Hebrew writer wished to emphasize the triumph of God's messenger over the representatives of the pagan faith, the *ḥartummîm*. "Do not interpretations belong to God?" Joseph asks the officials (40:8); later he states, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer" (41:16)—only God has the power to care for Pharaoh's welfare. This means that it is not within the power of human interpreters or magical deeds, like those practiced in Egypt, to save Pharaoh. Only God can attend to the wellbeing of Pharaoh and "free" him from the dire consequences of his dream.

This intention of the Hebrew writer to exalt the Hebrew God, and to highlight his supremacy over the gentile godhead, is substantiated in yet another detail. While the Israelite dreamers enjoy the direct revelation of God, who speaks clear words to them, this is not the case with Pharaoh, the Egyptian king-god (and also Nebuchadnezzar). God does not appear to Pharaoh in his dream, and the message is transmitted to him not by a clear vocal annunciation but by recondite symbols requiring interpretation. The importance of this detail is immeasurably greater when Pharaoh's dream in the Joseph story is compared with the royal dream in Egypt. As we saw above, a characteristic of the royal Egyptian dream is the direct revelation of a god to the king. The appearance of a god, or another holy being, in the king's dream expresses the firm connection between the kings of Egypt and their gods. It strengthens the ideology of the Egyptian monarchy, one of whose foundation stones is the belief that the king is the physical son of a god. The biblical text comes out against this ideology, which it undermines. Not only is Pharaoh "a man and not a god" (cf. Isa. 31:3), he is inferior to ordinary mortals of the Children of Israel to whom God appears in a dream, and speaks a clear message, without a picture and enigmatic visions.