

The Joseph Story: Diaspora Novella – Patriarchal Story – Exodus Narrative

Part II: Historical Reflections

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Following Franziska Ede's explanation of the literary stratigraphy of the Joseph story, I will try to say something about the possible historical context. This can be no more than scholarly speculations because the text, like all texts on Israel's pre-monarchic period, makes no reference to the time period in which this literature originated. From the contents and the conceptual profiles, we can only infer a possible historical situation in which the Joseph story could have been created and imagine a possible audience for whom the story might have had meaning. In this article, I would like to focus on one particular aspect of the story, namely Joseph's residence in Egypt. Other aspects, such as family relations, the relationship between the brothers, or the connection to the exodus will only be mentioned in passing.

1. Joseph

Before we turn our attention to the subject of Joseph in Egypt, we must first ask: who or what is Joseph? The name, which in Gen 30:24 is correctly interpreted from the situation of the birth as "he (Yhwh) may add," is rare in the pre-exilic onomasticon. Unlike the names of Joseph's ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and also unlike the name Moses, it is, however, documented epigraphically at least once in pre-exilic times, namely in a bulla found in Jerusalem dating from the seventh century BCE. The Hebrew inscription reads: $\text{לְסָאֵל בֶּן יוֹסֵף}$ "to the S'L son of Joseph."¹ It is not found in the onomasticon of Al-Yahudu and Elephantine, which takes us to Babylonian and Persian times. In Romano-Hellenistic times the name was quite common and documented many times both epigraphically as well as in the literature, such as in dedicatory inscriptions at the sanctuary on

¹ W. RÖLLIG, "Siegel und Gewichte," in *Materialien zur althebräischen Morphologie*, Vol. II/2 of *Handbuch der Althebräischen Epigraphik* (ed. J. Renz and W. Röllig; Darmstadt: WBG, 2003), 81–439, here 323, n. 15.1.

Mount Garizim (in both forms יִסְרָאֵל and יְהוּסָרָא),² and in a (lost) Aramaic inscription, dated to the 23rd March 252 BCE, which was transcribed and published by M. Lidzbarski in 1927.³ The name is also attested in Maccabees and Judith.⁴ Despite the extremely sparse testimony in ancient times, we can still conclude that we are dealing with a common Hebrew personal name, which perhaps only became more widespread in later times.

In the Hebrew Bible, the situation is more complex since the name of Joseph is more than a personal name. Apart from the Joseph in the Joseph story the name is found almost exclusively in later, post-exilic texts as a name for individuals.⁵ Otherwise, it always stands for a collective, the “tribe of Joseph,” the “sons of Joseph” Ephraim and Manasseh, as well as the “House of Joseph,” which includes both the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh and encompasses the entire northern kingdom of Israel,⁶ as well as finally, alongside “Jacob,” all of Israel.⁷

In the Joseph story, Joseph is one of twelve sons of father Jacob-Israel – Reuben, Simeon, Benjamin, and Judah are also mentioned by name – and is the father of Ephraim and Manasseh. This means that here he primarily represents the “tribe of Joseph” and the tribal groups Ephraim and Manasseh arising from it. In opposition to Judah and Benjamin, this also implies the role as progenitor of the “House of Joseph,” i. e., the northern kingdom of Israel. As an individual Joseph acts only in the role of a courtier in Gen 39–41.

When, in the following, we are enquiring about a possible historical context for Joseph in Egypt, we are thus enquiring about the residence in Egypt of the representative of a collective – the tribe of Joseph, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the northern kingdom of Israel. Only in chapters 39–41 of the book of Genesis are we concerned with the historical context in which a person of Hebrew birth (Israelite or Judean) enjoys an unprecedented career at the court of Egyptian Pharaoh.

² Y. MAGEN *et al.* (ed.), *The Aramaic, Hebrew and Samaritan Inscriptions*, Vol. 1 of Mount Gerizim Excavations (JSP 2; Jerusalem: Staff Officer of Archaeology – Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria, Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004), 26.265.

³ See B. PORTEN and A. YARDENI (ed.), *Ostraca & Assorted Inscriptions*, Vol. 4 of Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt (The Hebrew University Department of the History of the Jewish People, Texts and Studies for Students; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 205 D8.13.

⁴ 1 Macc 5:18, 56, 60; 2 Macc 8:22; Jdt 8:1.

⁵ Num 13:7; 1 Chr 25:2, 9; Ezra 10:42; Neh 12:14.

⁶ See Josh 17:17; Ezek 37:16, 19; Zech 10:6.

⁷ Ps 77:16; 81:5f.

2. Israel in Egypt (Gen 37–50)

I will begin with the final shape of the Joseph story in Genesis 37–50, in which Joseph represents one of the twelve tribes of Israel, and at the end all of Israel moves to Egypt, from where, in the book of Exodus, it moves out again. Finding a possible historical anchor point for this version of the Joseph story proves to be the most difficult task.

If we want to date the narrative in the place to which it is assigned in the biblical history, in other words between Patriarchs and Exodus, then we have to refer to the various Egyptian witnesses from Asian peoples, in particular the Shasu and 'Apiru, who wandered back and forth between Palestine and Egypt at the end of the second millennium BCE.⁸ But since these witnesses make no mention of whole ethnicities crossing the borders, they cannot carry the burden of proof. In addition, they are contradicted by the oldest documentation of the name "Israel" which is found in the Merneptah Stele dated around 1200 BCE.⁹ This has a distinct ethnic group in mind, that at this point of time is not found wandering the road between Palestine and Egypt, nor residing in Egypt, but is settled somewhere in middle-Palestine. We cannot make use of the Merneptah Stele either for Joseph in Egypt or for "Israel" in the Exodus narrative. We could perhaps argue that this "Israel" is identical with Joseph's father, Jacob, who is named "Israel" in the oldest version of the Joseph story, which, of course, would presuppose the renaming of Jacob in "Israel" in Gen 32. He must have been in Egypt with his entire clan earlier and then returned to Palestine. But this assumption is based solely on a merging and harmonisation of epigraphical and literary (biblical) sources and is highly unlikely. On the other hand, there are absolutely no grounds for a literary fiction of an eisodos and an exodus of the Israelites at the end of the second millennium BCE.

For this reason, scholars have moved down some centuries and dated the Joseph story either in the time of Solomon¹⁰ or in the period of the splitting of the united monarchy under Rehoboam and Jeroboam I.¹¹ According to this

⁸ See M. WEIPPERT, *Historisches Textbuch zum Alten Testament* (GAT 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 171–173.179–198.

⁹ WEIPPERT, *Textbuch* (see n. 8), 168–171; the full text (in German translation) is to be found in U. KAPLONY-HECKEL, "Ägyptische Historische Texte," in *Rechts- und Wirtschaftsurkunden – Historisch-chronologische Texte*, Vol. 1/6 of *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* (ed. D. Conrad et al.; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1985), 544–552.

¹⁰ G. VON RAD, *Das Erste Buch Mose: Genesis* (12th ed.; ATD 2/4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 357–358; see also IDEM, "Josephsgeschichte und ältere Chokma," in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (4th ed.; ed. G. von Rad; TB 8; München: Kaiser, 1958), 272–280; IDEM, "Die Josephsgeschichte," in *Gottes Wirken in Israel. Vorträge zum Alten Testament* (ed. O. H. Steck; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), 22–41.

¹¹ F. CRÜSEMANN, *Widerstand gegen das Königtum: Die antiköniglichen Texte des Alten Testaments und der Kampf um den frühen israelitischen Staat* (WMANT 49; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978); W. DIETRICH, *Die Josephserzählung als Novelle und Geschichts-*

theory, there is historical evidence in the temporary flight to Egypt of Jeroboam I, an Ephraimite and overseer of corvée labour in the “House of Joseph” (1 Kgs 11:40, 12:2). Like Hadad the Edomite before him (1 Kgs 11:17f) Jeroboam found refuge in Egypt with Pharaoh Shishaq (Shoshenq I) and returned after the death of Solomon to become king over the northern kingdom of Israel, the “House of Joseph.” The epigraphically testified campaign of Shoshenq I to Palestine in 925 BCE is readily associated with this event.¹² All the more so because it is stated in 1 Kgs 14:25 that Shoshenq (spelled in two different ways, Qere: *Shishaq*, Ketiv: *Shwshaq*) attacked and robbed Jerusalem, which, however, is not confirmed by Pharaonic sources. Some scholars find this political situation reflected in the story of Joseph. The dreams of Joseph in Gen 37 suggest that they are dealing with questions of political dominance: according to this argument, the special role of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh, Jeroboam’s country of origin), Benjamin (the home country of Saul), and Judah (the territory of the Davidic dynasty) best fits the situation at the splitting of the united monarchy under Rehoboam and Jeroboam I.

However, on closer examination, this argument does not make sense for a number of reasons. To begin with, the historical reconstruction is by no means certain. The news in 1 Kgs 11–14 is both meagre and unreliable. Jeroboam may indeed have once sought refuge in Egypt, but we do not know anything more about it. Furthermore, scholarship has dismissed more or less the idea of a Davidic-Solomonic empire and an outright splitting of this empire under Rehoboam and Jeroboam I. The opposition of “Joseph” (the northern territories of Israel) and Judah with Benjamin in the middle characterises the entire period of monarchy to 722 BCE, and certainly the time that follows, in which first “Joseph” (Samaria) and then Judah lost their sovereignty and both became rival provinces courting the favour of the respective foreign powers. Whether Shoshenq’s Palestinian campaign really took place on Jeroboam’s behalf and included Judah at all is more than questionable.

Secondly, literary evidence also speaks against a dating in the early (or later) monarchy. Most of the evidence that can be found in 1 Kgs 11–14, not least the polemic against the golden calves, which attributes the deliverance from Egypt to Jeroboam, is the result of Deuteronomistic and post-Deuteronomistic redaction and is therefore to be dated much later.¹³

schreibung: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Pentateuchfrage (BThSt 14; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989).

¹² For the textual evidence for Shoshenq’s campaign, see WEIPPERT, *Textbuch* (see n. 8), 228–241.

¹³ See R. G. KRATZ, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 165; German original version: *Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 168 f.

Finally, the narrative set-up within the Joseph story, such as the role of the other brothers or tribes (namely Ruben and Simeon), Joseph's political activities in and for Egypt or Joseph's supremacy over Judah and the other brothers, also do not comply with the assertion that the Joseph story should be read as a kind of political allegory of the power relations under Rehoboam and Jeroboam I. Erhard Blum has already objected to this and modified the thesis along the lines that the Joseph story should be seen on the one hand as a conceptual, but not literary, bridge between Patriarchs and Exodus and, on the other hand, more generally, as a desire to represent the supremacy of the "Joseph" kingdom over Judah, a position that it has taken many times in the course of the ninth and eighth centuries BCE history since Omri. As place and date of origin of the story he therefore suggests the vicinity of the northern Israelite court in the eighth century BCE.¹⁴

It seems to me that in pointing out the bridge between the Patriarchs and Exodus Blum has indeed offered the most appropriate solution, especially to the second part of the Joseph story in Gen 46–50. But if this is the case, then dating depends not least on when the two formerly independent traditions of the patriarchal history and the Exodus narrative merged. Also, the interpretation which stresses the status of the "Joseph" kingdom in "Israel" in general seems to me to be highly appropriate, although this issue is not restricted to the era of the two kingdoms, but could also have been adopted later, to clarify the relationship of the province of Samaria to the kingdom or the later province of Judah, respectively. We cannot simply deduce the date of origin from the content or the assumed intention of a biblical narrative. As far as the intention is concerned, it is an open question whether the Joseph story is in keeping with the official reasons of state of one of the two kingdoms or – in contrary – is targeting commonly accepted ideas in Israel and Judah.¹⁵ Above all, however, it is those aspects of the story which cannot be easily explained by the bridging function in the (biblical) sacred history of the people of Israel, or which even contradict this function, such as the stable long-term existence and traditional governing activities of Joseph in Egypt, which dissuade us from dating the Joseph story in the pre-exilic monarchic times.

¹⁴ E. BLUM, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 234–244.

¹⁵ On the necessary distinction between the historical situation and the specific views of the biblical narrative dealing with this situation, see R.G. KRATZ, *Historical and Biblical Israel: The History, Tradition, and Archives of Israel and Judah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); German original version: *Historisches und biblisches Israel: Drei Überblicke zum Alten Testament* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

3. Joseph is Alive (Gen 37–45)

This now brings me to the first part of the Joseph story in Gen 37–45, in which, according to the analysis of Franziska Ede, we can identify an older version of the Joseph story.¹⁶ This version also deals with Joseph and his brothers, and thus with representatives of the people of Jacob-Israel, which stands for the northern kingdom. The main point of this version is that Joseph, sold by his brothers into Egypt and declared dead, is alive and carving out a career in Egypt. The suspense in Gen 37 is resolved with the reunion of the brothers and the message to Jacob-Israel that Joseph is not dead but alive. Only, he is not living with his family in the same country, but in Egypt. No-one at this point seems to be considering an eisodos or exodus of the people of Israel.

Likewise, finding a possible concrete historical anchor point for this point of the story is not easy. However, we can at least say that the older version of the Joseph story in Gen 37–45 presupposes a historical situation in which large sections of the people of Israel, in particular those from the North, are living in Egypt. We have some, but not many, testimonies and literary reflections supporting this: a comment in the Letter of Aristeas (13), according to which Jews were sent to Egypt to serve in the army of Pharaoh Psammetik (it is not clear whether I or II), which takes us to the early sixth century BCE. The Jeremiah narratives report the flight of many Judeans to Egypt immediately after the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and following the murder of the governor Gedaliah (Jer 41–44). This, too, indicates the sixth century BCE. Both witnesses could shed light on the pre-history of the well-documented military colony on Elephantine, which, according to the evidence of papyri, already existed under Cambyses and survived up to the time under Darius II around 400 BCE, after which we lose trace. Numerous sources exist for the Hellenistic period and I need only to mention Alexandria and Leontopolis.

Thus, we can assume a Jewish diaspora in Egypt since the sixth century BCE. However, since the northern kingdom of Israel no longer existed at this time, it seems likely that this diaspora consisted mainly of Judeans not Israelites. This assumption is confirmed by the colonists on Elephantine, who referred to themselves as “Judeans” or “Arameans.”¹⁷ On the other hand, there is also evidence of numerous Samaritan Yhwh-worshippers in the Egyptian diaspora in the Hellenistic period. Also, the settlers on Elephantine maintained contact not only to moth-

¹⁶ F. EDE, *Die Josefsgeschichte. Literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Entstehung von Gen 37–50* (BZAW 485; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016).

¹⁷ On this, see R.G. KRATZ, “Arameans and Judaeans: Ethnography and Identity at Elephantine,” in *Israel in Egypt: The Land of Egypt as Concept and Reality for Jews in Antiquity and the Early Medieval Period* (ed. A. Salvesen et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2020), 56–85. German version: IDEM, “Aramäer und Judäer: Zur Ethnographie Elephantines in achämenidischer Zeit,” in *Persische Reichspolitik und lokale Heiligtümer* (ed. R. Achenbach; BZAR 25; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019), 163–184.

erland Judah, but also to the province of Samaria. From this we may perhaps be able to assume that also in the pre-Hellenistic period there were already Yhwh-worshippers from the province of Samaria among the members of the diaspora in Egypt. In a biblical perspective, Judeans and Samaritans could have been identified with “Israelites” from the Northern region, the “House of Joseph.”

Against this background, we can read the older version of the Joseph story in Genesis 37–45 as a literary reflection on the Samaritan-Judean diaspora in Egypt, which – perhaps from the Samaritan, but perhaps also from the Judean, anti-Samaritan perspective – was identified with the former Northern Kingdom and thus was regarded as the legitimate part of “Israel.” For the author, Joseph did not continue to live in the province of Samaria, but in the Egyptian diaspora. That this part of “Israel” was given precedence over Judah (and the other brothers) is surprising but may reflect a view that predominates in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, especially in Jeremiah and in the book of Ezekiel regarding the stance of the (first) Babylonian Golah towards those that remained in the country and those that emigrated to Egypt. I will come back to this point again later in section 5.

It is almost as impossible to detect a concrete historical anchor point in the history of the Jewish diaspora in Egypt for this view of things, as it is for the esteem in which the Jewish exiles were held in the history of the Babylonian Golah. As the texts of Al-Yahudu have shown recently, the Judean exiles in Babylon had as much or as little to do with the biblical view of the Babylonian Golah as the Samaritan-Judean diaspora in Egypt – according to the authentic, epigraphic sources such as the Elephantine papyri and others – has with the image of Joseph in the Joseph story.¹⁸ In both cases we are dealing with literary (biblical) constructions, which take historical circumstances, here the existence of a Jewish diaspora in Babylon and Egypt, as the subject-matter on which to give a contemporary and, at the same time, interest-oriented form to the biblical ideal of the people of “Israel.” One possibility for the time frame is the (outgoing) Babylonian, Persian or early Hellenist eras, in which the role of the Babylonian and Egyptian diaspora increasingly became the subject of biblical and para-biblical literature. Based on the relative chronology in the stratification of the Pentateuch, I suspect the outgoing Babylonian or Persian era for the older version of the Joseph story and the subsequent elaboration of the story as a bridge between the Patriarchs and Exodus.

¹⁸ On the situation at Elephantine and Al-Yahudu, see KRATZ, *Israel* (see n. 15), 137–153 (German version 186–213), with further references to the relevant editions and secondary literature.

4. Joseph at the Court of Pharaoh

If we take a closer look at Gen 39–41, we can confirm this later dating. As Rüdiger Lux and Franziska Ede have shown, the Joseph story does not exist outside the narrative horizon of the patriarchal history in Gen 12–36 – whether as a literary link or as a conceptual one.¹⁹ It is all the more striking that at the centre of the older version of this additional “patriarchal story” in Gen 37–45 lies neither the people of Israel nor the tribe to which Joseph belongs and which he represents, but the fate of the Hebrew Joseph in the foreign country of Egypt where he was sold to by his brothers. The subject is taken up again in a later passage of the story in Gen 47 and developed further.

If we turn our attention to this feature of the story, then the question of historical context is focussed on the situation and fate of one Hebrew individual in Egypt. Such a situation could, theoretically, have occurred at any period of time. If we take into consideration the testimonies of the Asians and, in particular, the Israelites or Judeans in Egypt to which we referred earlier, then the time period ranges from the late second into the late first millennium BCE, in other words, over the entire history of ancient Israel.

We can, however, restrict this period to the second half of the 1st millennium on the basis of the story’s genre. Its substance around Gen 39–41 (and 47) carries typical features of a court tale. We are familiar with these features from the Aramaic *Ahiqar*, the stories about Daniel, the book of Esther, and the book of Tobit, all of which deal with the fate of a foreigner (Aramean, Israelite or Judean) at a foreign court. The story of Sinuhe relates a reverse case of an Egyptian among Canaanites in Palestine.²⁰ We are also able to cite an Egyptian parallel, the tale of two brothers, for the story of seduction in Gen 39.²¹

What do these parallels contribute to the dating of the Joseph story? The story of Sinuhe is an exception and originated in the early second millennium BCE; the story of *Ahiqar* reflects on the circumstances of the Neo-Assyrian empire in the seventh century BCE but was found in the vicinity of the Jewish colony on Elephantine, which leads us into the Persian era around 400 BCE. Biblical parallels of court tales (Daniel, Esther, Tobit) also originated in the Persian or Hellenistic eras, even if they reflect older (Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian) circumstances. Unlike the Sinuhe and *Ahiqar* stories, biblical court tales are also always stories of diaspora, that either presuppose the downfall of Samaria and the Assyrian

¹⁹ R. LUX, *Josef: Der Auserwählte unter seinen Brüdern* (Biblische Gestalten 1; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001); EDE, *Josefsgeschichte* (see n. 16), and her contribution to this volume.

²⁰ See WEIPPERT, *Textbuch* (see n. 8), 51–62.

²¹ C. PEUST, “Das Zweibrüdermärchen,” in *Ergänzungslieferung*, Supplementary Vol. of *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* (ed. M. Dietrich *et al.*; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 147–165.

exile (according to Tobit, where also the Ahiqar story is adopted), or the downfall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile (according to Daniel and Esther). For this reason, Arndt Meinhold classifies the Joseph story in the genre of “diaspora novellas,” with the difference that Joseph is not set in the Assyrian, Babylonian or Persian diasporas, but in the Egyptian.²²

Even if the classification as a “diaspora novella” certainly does not fit the entire Joseph story, it is apt for chapters Gen 39–41 (and 47) and means that we are once more in the Babylonian era at the earliest, but more likely in the Persian or Hellenistic eras. From these eras we have evidence not only of the existence of a Samaritan-Judean diaspora in Egypt, but also of the possibility of individuals rising to key positions in Egypt or elsewhere under Persian or Ptolemaic rule. For substantiation, I need only recall the Zenon papyri and the role of the Tobiades, which can be traced back to a progenitor named Joseph, and the exiled High Priest Onias (III or IV), to whom, after his expulsion from Jerusalem, Ptolemy VI assigned the “land of the Onias” in Leontopolis for the construction of a temple and a military colony.²³

Following this path, Horst Seebaß believes he has detected a concrete historical anchor point for the Egyptian career of Joseph in Gen 39–41.²⁴ He compares the Joseph story with the “Famine Stela” from the Sehel Island, south of Elephantine. This stela dates from the Ptolemaic period (the exact date is unclear). *It describes a seven-year drought, caused by the non-flooding of the Nile, which was resolved through the assistance of the Khnum temple on Elephantine.* With reference to the Egyptologist Dietrich Wildung,²⁵ Seebaß dates the story of the famine stela (including the motif of the drought) back to the Persian era on the basis of traditional history and perceives a polemic created by the Khnum priests in Elephantine against the cultic centre of Philae. In the same milieu Seebaß locates Joseph’s invention of resource management in Gen 41 and the story of the seduction in Gen 39, which was inserted secondarily. According to his hypothesis, both stories address anti-Jewish tendencies in the Egyptian population on Elephantine and were only later inserted into the – significantly older – Joseph story of the already combined sources J and E. But no matter how attractive the parallels and the historic combination with the Judeans on Elephantine may be, the evidence is insufficient to see here a historical anchor point for Joseph’s career in Egypt in Genesis 39–41 (and 47). The only direct point of contact is the

²² A. MEINHOLD, “Die Gattung der Josephsgeschichte und des Estherbuches: Diasporanovelle I,” ZAW 87/3 (1975), 306–324; “II,” ZAW 88/1 (1976), 72–79.

²³ See KRATZ, *Israel* (see n. 15), 39 f. 42 (German 49 f. 52 f).

²⁴ H. SEEBASS, *Geschichtliche Zeit und theonome Tradition in der Joseph-Erzählung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1978), 26–41.

²⁵ D. WILDUNG, *Posthume Quellen über die Könige der ersten vier Dynastien*, Vol. 1 of *Die Rolle ägyptischer Könige im Bewusstsein ihrer Nachwelt* (MÄSt 17; Berlin: Bruno Hessling, 1969), 85–91.

seven-year famine, whose mention is apparently unique in Egyptian literature. Everything else is based on pure, if not to say idle, speculation.

5. Why Joseph in Egypt?

Now that I have, with great regret, had to disappoint not only the editors of this volume, but also its readers because I can say almost nothing about the historical background of the Joseph story in the Egyptian diaspora, I would however like to close by at least presenting an idea on the possible reason for the emergence of the Joseph story. It is no more than an idea or an observation, but one that might at least be worthy of a mention and perhaps further consideration.

If we read the history of the Jews as a diaspora novella from the post-exilic period, two features are surprising: one is the choice of Joseph as the representative of the northern tribes and kingdom, and the second is the choice of Egypt as the diaspora's location. In all other diaspora novellas, it is either all the ten tribes of the north which are displaced to Assyria (Tobit), or the Judeans, who live in the Babylonian or Persian diaspora (Daniel, Esther). And so, the question arises: why Joseph, and why Egypt?

I have no ready answer and certainly no historical explanation for this phenomenon. But perhaps there is no historical explanation, but only a clue in the biblical tradition for a literary construction. Following the examination of the connecting points to the patriarchal history by Franziska Ede,²⁶ I would like to add another possible external impulse: the narratives of Jeremiah in Jer 36–45.

As Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann has shown, the Jeremiah narratives represent a Babylon-friendly and Golah-oriented stance.²⁷ They are about life and death: all those who submit to Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon will live, all those who rise up against Babylon or flee to Egypt will perish completely. Nowhere else do those who move to Egypt come off as badly as here. In ch. 42 Jeremiah prays for the people of Judah in the land and receives the instruction from God that, under no circumstances, they should flee to Egypt; and in ch. 43–44 Jeremiah turns to Egypt and the Egyptian Golah and prophesies the total demise of both. The polemic is undoubtedly for contemporary and political reasons, but here it is ideologically charged. The position is not only in alignment with the programme of the Golah-oriented redaction in ch. 24, but also with the dispute between Hananiah and Jeremiah in ch. 27–28 and the letter to the Babylonian Golah in ch. 29, who are advised to “seek the welfare of the city (of Babylon).”²⁸

²⁶ See her contribution to this volume.

²⁷ K.-F. POHLMANN, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch: Ein Beitrag zur Entstehung des Jeremiabuches* (FRLANT 118; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978).

²⁸ See R. G. KRATZ, *Translatio imperii: Untersuchungen zu den aramäischen Danielerzählungen und ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Umfeld* (WMANT 63; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukir-

If we read the older version of the Joseph story in Gen 37–45 against the background of the Jeremiah narratives, we almost get the impression that it is written as a refutation: Joseph is not dead, but alive, and he is in fact in Egypt where he seeks the welfare of the country in which he is residing.

But why Joseph? Here, too, there is an interesting, albeit very puzzling passage in the Jeremiah narratives. In Jer 41 it is reported how, after the murder of Gedaliah, 80 men from Shiloh and Samaria, in other words, from the north, came to Judah to mourn. They are ambushed by Ismael, the son of Nethaniah, a man of royal descent who had already slain Gedaliah. Most of the men are killed. Only ten men are spared because they promise to offer their stores to Ismael. Ismael then flees to the Ammonites, which distantly recalls the Tobiades, the remaining Judeans (including, most likely, the ten spared men from Shiloh and Samaria) are taken to Egypt by Johanan, son of Kareah. In whatever way we explain the strange passage in the context of Jeremiah, it is a clear indication that Samaritans were suspected to be among the Judeans who migrated to Egypt. And the polemic against the cult of the “Queen of Heaven” in Jer 44 (and Jer 7) reminds us not only of Judah, but also of Samaria, as well as the religious circumstances in the Judean colony on Elephantine.

The relationship between the Joseph story and the Jeremiah narratives is little more than circumstantial evidence. I do not want to construct a historical context from it, but I do find it to be remarkable. Thus, the Joseph in the Joseph story is not only representing the former northern kingdom, but also the Yhwh-worshippers in the province of Samaria, who are coming increasingly to our attention because of recent archaeological and epigraphic findings. The fact that Joseph as a representative of this group in opposition to Judah and Benjamin was the subject of theological reflection and literary production attested not least by the Joseph texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q371–373).