

---

# ALL ROADS GO TO EGYPT

**Petar Grujić\***

*Institute of Physics, POB 57, 11080 Belgrade, Serbia*

(Received 1 November 2011, revised 29 June 2012)

---

## Abstract

Exodus from Egypt has been considered as an essential episode in the biblical narrative, crucial for forging Jewish religion and nation. Much of the alleged events before and during Exodus have remained obscure and of a suspicious nature. We argue that the pre-Exit narrative points toward interpretations much different from the orthodox exegesis. In particular, the story of seven cows in Pharaoh's dream was inspired by the old Egyptian myth of the Pleiades constellation. Also, we devote some attention concerning the real cause of Jewish wish to leave Egypt without any convincing explanation. We argue that the enormous increase of the Jewish population may be attributed to an extensive absorption of the local population into Yahwehism. In addition, the story of seven fertile and seven famine years may have been referring to Jewish involvement into wheat business, with storing surplus of annual crops and then reselling it at the high price. If historical, these instances may have resulted in expulsion of the intruder population from the Egyptian state.

*Keywords:* Bible, Egypt, religion, mythology, Exodus

---

## 1. Introduction

As noted by many scholars, Bible appears an important, but not reliable source for tracing the history of Israelis [1]. (In the following, we shall be referring to the Jewish Bible, unless otherwise stated). The Bible appears a mixture of myths, historical records, belle lettre, ethical codes, fairy tales, etc. It is not an easy task to disentangle all those ingredients and get a convincing picture of the real historical events and personalities. In the present work, which may be considered a sequel to the one previously published on a similar subject [2], an attempt has been made to re-examine a number of instances from the biblical narrative of Exodus and offer some novel interpretations of the common ones.

It is interesting (and somewhat surprising) that critical exegesis of the biblical narrative has appeared only relatively recently [3]. Previous interpretations of the Exodus (and Bible generally) could be classified as: (i) Semitic (as exemplified by the work of Joseph Flavius [4]) and (ii) anti-Semitic (we use the term in Wagner's sense, as different from the usual usage, which should be rather termed Judeophobia (Judenfeind)), as illustrated by Apion's

---

\* e-mail: [grijic@ipb.ac.rs](mailto:grijic@ipb.ac.rs), Phone: 381 11 3713 179, Fax: 381 11 3713 190

works, quoted in 'Against Apion' [4, p. 784]. Critical exegesis may be exemplified by well known Freud's book [5], which has inspired, to some extent, the present work. Freud's book, which was published almost posthumously and thus resembles much the Copernicus' case [6], was a bold attempt to provide a logical interpretation of the alleged historical events of Exodus, in particular the true personality of Jewish lawgiver Moses. The latter was considered by faithful, 'people of the Book', as a taboo, what explains Freud's postponement of publishing his ideas on the subject. His treatise stays somewhat apart from the rest of his opus and is rarely published within the collection of his books. It should be regarded as a scientific work to the same extent as his other works on the human psyche, which many scholar regard to be pseudoscience, as the case with Marx' theory on human society structure and development appears [7].

Of course, when attempting to provide new interpretations of the biblical narratives one is faced with the question of opportunity of dealing with interpretation with so longstanding tradition, as the case with Bible appears. Never the less it is in the best scientific methodology (and tradition) to examine all possible interpretations of particular instances, regardless from their possible impact from the ideological and emotional viewpoints.

Two episodes of the alleged stay of Israelites in Egypt are described in details in the biblical chapter of Exodus (*Quelesmoth* in Hebrew) [8]: the arrival of Josephus and departure under Moses. In [2] we paid particular attention on the latter episode, whereas in the present work the emphasis is on the Josephus saga and possible logical connection of this period with the final stage of Israelites' stay in Egypt. In the following chapter we examine the Egyptian stage on which biblical narrative is set up and then an attempt is made to supply a logical explanation of this seemingly irrational, if not absurd, behaviour of both pharaoh and Israeli alleged fugitives. In the third chapter we discuss some new ideas concerning the true content of the Second God's commandment. In the fourth chapter a general discussion of the possible Israelis' stay in Egypt is given, as well as some general implications of various interpretations of the biblical content, both from ideological and epistemological viewpoints.

## 2. Exodus – myth or history

### 2.1. Joseph in Egypt

The biblical story about Joseph's adventures in Egypt appears more or less a clear case of a myth(olog)ema. The narrative pattern goes like this: Our hero arrives at royal court, wins the favour of the king and usually gets the princes as a reward for his exploit at the end of the story. Biblical account of the end is different for the obvious reason. As all serious authors recognize the essential feature of the Israelites to be *collective autism*, intermarriage appears out of question. (In the ending episode of Exodus, infant Moses will be protected even from sucking milk from a non-Jewish nurse!).

Biblical narrative goes like this. Joseph is asked to interpret pharaoh's dream, which consists of seven fat cows, which are then swallowed by seven meagre cows. Joseph explains that it is an allegory, what we would term it now, for seven fertile years, with abundant harvest of wheat, to be followed by a severe drought. Joseph's advice to pharaoh was to save wheat from the rich harvests for the incoming bad periods, what pharaoh accepts and saves his nation from starving, allotting to Joseph a high court position in return.

Before we go on, a brief discussion of the episode seems in order. First, it is indicative that name of the pharaoh does not appear, as it appears in any other biblical text either, as noted by the scholars. This fact calls for interpretation. We offer here three possible explanations.

- (i) The narrative was composed long time after the event and the name was forgotten.
- (ii) The entire story was invented by 'common people', what makes the narrative a sort of fairy tale.
- (iii) It is a common (though not universal) feature of the biblical text to belittle the significance of the 'nations' (*goyim*), to the extent of ignoring them, as another illustration of the attribute of Israelites, we mention before, that of *autism*. Pharaoh serves in our episode as an allegory, not as a historical figure. As a 'collateral gain' the omission of the pharaoh's name prevents us to identify the date of the alleged events. Accounting the high level of the contemporary Egyptian civilization, including the administrative (bureaucratic) organization, the presence of the corresponding record would be fatal for the historicity of the entire Exodus story. This situation resembles much the analogous lack of the records concerning Jesus of Nazareth New Testament narrative, within the highly developed Roman administration, as noted by many scholars. In particular, silence of another Joseph, Flavius, whose most detailed account of events in the Herod's and post-Herod time fails to mention Jesus' activities (Except for a single paragraph in [4], 18.3, for which there is a consensus that it was inserted by a Christian copyist (see, e.g. [9] and references therein; see, also 18.5 in [4]), appears more than indicative.
- (iv) Concerning the question of veracity of the narrative, it should be noted that the same mythema (*mutatis mutandis*) appears in the Book of Daniel, which has been generally recognized as a purely literal work. In this episode, Daniel not only hints the meaning of king's dream, but first reveals himself the content of very dream. Given that Book of Daniel was composed in 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC [10], Daniel's prophesy appears a clear case of *vaticinium ex eventu*.

*Belshazzar's feast*, the episode appearing in the same Book of Daniel, elaborates further the 'dream miracles', by making the message to be interpreted visible to other people present by the miracle. It should strengthen the veracity of the point, just as Christ's appearance after Resurrection and Ascension to his disciples was intended to give credit to the miraculous Jesus' escape from his grave.

Before we pass to the mythological arena present in Egypt at the alleged time, let us mention the point of mythemas within the context of possible interpretations. We note first the link between Joseph and Moses, beyond the genealogical one. Both personalities possess, at the infantile age, exceptional beauty, as stressed in the narrative. It is intriguing, besides, to notice the ‘amazing’ similarity between the Exodus narrative concerning Joseph and the fate of Joseph Flavius, as ‘recorded’ by himself in the book *The Jewish War* ([4], 4.10.7; see, also, footnote *e*, p.694). This episode casts doubt on many of other assertions Joseph Flavius made in his account of contemporary events, particularly those concerning his own role.

## **2.2. The cattle cult**

Upon reading the episode of Josephus, a number of questions pose themselves: Who sent the (allegorical) message to pharaoh? Why cows? Why seven? We shall ignore the first question and turn to two others. We shall see the answer is written on the sky.

### *2.2.1. Animal cults*

Prehistoric societies cultivated animal cults, for a number of reasons. First, it is an integral part of the animistic world outlook, when *homo sapiense* did not consider himself much different (if any) from the living world around him. Second, living on animals, wild or domestic alike, he felt an obligation to worship them, albeit in an allegorical sense. Third, possessing a curious, yet principally correct, concept of evolution, man came to consider himself as a descendant of animals, usually single one, which was ascribed to his tribe as totem [11].

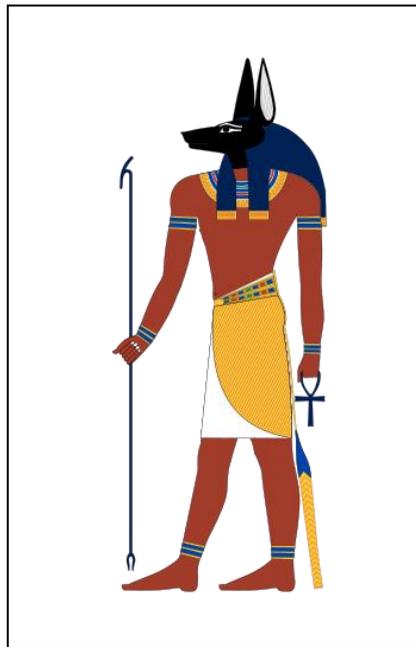
### *2.2.2. Sahara – the fertile desert*

The climate of our globe is subject to periodic variations, with a number of distinct periods, of the order of magnitude of 10.000 years, as estimated by Serb geophysicist Milutin Milanković (see, e.g. [12] for a popular account). Ice ages repeat approximately after 26.000 years. Our present civilization is situated between the extremes of the ice ages and we are subject to this long-term periodicity, which dictates the climate we are experiencing. But besides these global (periodic) changes, there exist climate changes which affect huge, but no global areas. One of them affects North Africa, more precisely Sahara area, Arabic peninsula and (to a lesser extent) Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan.

Recent investigations have revealed that about 8.000 year Sahara was not arid, but green area, inhabited by nomadic people, who lived on hunting wild animals and domesticated cattle [12]. Investigations of the area of Nabta Playa region, west from the present day Abu Simbel, show that about 5.500 BC nomadic people from the Western Sahara region settled there and subsequently

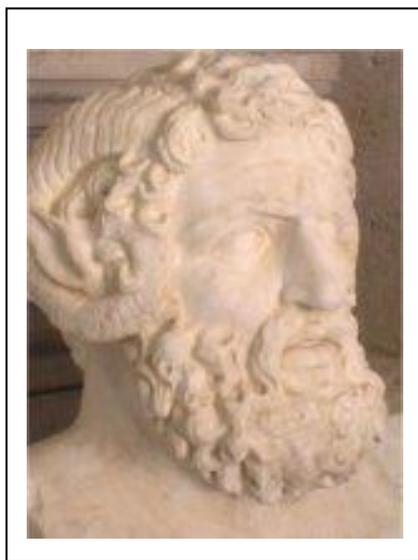
mixed with Nile indigenous populations. Generally, Sahara desiccation ceased around 10.000 BC and there is evidence that the area was populated by people whose social structure was superior to their Nile Valley counterpart. Both populations were in close contact and when Sahara started to desiccate again, its population moved to the Nile Valley and was assimilated into the local inhabitants. According to this picture, Egyptian civilization was not just ‘gift of the river Nile’, but a complex product of interference of a pastoral and agricultural way of life, as evidenced in the so called Badarian culture. In particular tumuli with animal graves, found in the Sahara desert, appear paralleled in Nile Valley, with frequent remains of *Bos Taurus*, a descendant of Saharian wild *Bos primigenius*, (aurochs) domesticated during Late Neolithic. As Brass emphasizes [13]: *“Prolonged contact with desert pastoralists led to the first socially complex society in the Nile Valley, the Badarian. It introduced a new religious and socio-economic element into the life of the Upper Egyptians, namely ownership and burial of domestic cattle. Bos burials are found in Nagada period settlements, in clearly ceremonial contexts. As pastoralism became increasingly fused in the Nile Valley economy with agriculture, religious associations evolved between the cow goddess and the king. These aspects became codified in the artefactual representations dating from the time of Unification.”*

From now on Egyptian human-like gods will share its appearance with animals, in particular by possessing their heads, as the case with Anubis illustrates (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Anubis, god of the afterlife and mummification, with head of chackal.

Moreover, one of the most venerated deities was *Apis*, the sacred bull, a sort of divine incarnation on Earth. (The procedure for selecting *Apis*'s incarnation resembles much that of choosing Dalai Lama on Tibet.) Bull appears a prominent animal or divine effigy in many religions, like that of Mithraism. Minotaur may be considered another remnant of the ancient, prehistoric cults, too [14], Not to mention Spanish *toros* (bullfight). One of curious remnants of the animal cult appears the biblical description of Moses while descending from Horeb (or Sinai) mountain, with horns on his head [8, p. 368], after the encounter with Yahweh. Even if we accept the orthodox exegesis that it was a mistranslation of the word *beam*, the very fact that such a mistake could have passed the authorization of *Septuagint* speaks for itself. (Michelangelo did not accept this revision, as his famous statue of Moses in Florence testifies.) The god Ammon was usually represented having ram horns, as shown in Figure 2. Alexander the Great was frequently depicted on coins with ram horns, with obvious allusion to his pretence (sic) to be God's son.



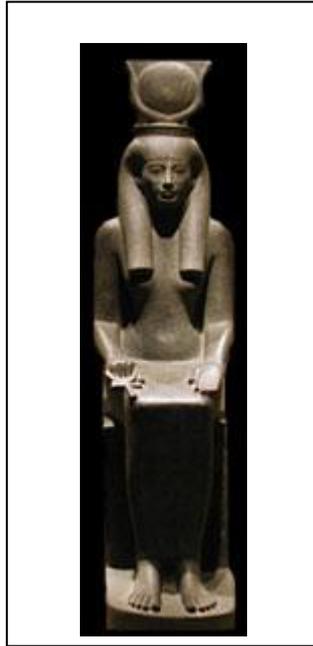
**Figure 2.** God Ammon, the supreme deity of the Egyptian religion, with ram horns.

### **2.3. Hathor and Pleiades**

The open constellation Pleiades appears one of the most prominent clusters on the sky. It contains a great number of stars, with 7 visible by naked eye (though the seventh is rather faint). This compact constellation consists of mutually close stars, and is not an optical coincidence, unlike other starry constellations. Significantly, the group is part of the larger constellation, *Taurus* (*Bull*), with the first magnitude star *Aldebaran*, which in Arabic means *he who follows*, indicating that Taurus is pursuing Pleiades. The name is derived from *plei*, 'to sail', indicating that they rise at the beginning of the sailing season [14,

I, p. 154]. According to Pindar's variant *Peleiades* it represents a flock of doves. Orion's (the hunter) vain pursuit of Pleiades reflects their rising over horizon just before the reappearance of Orion constellation.

Pleiades play prominent role in many mythologies and religions, including prehistorical societies, as evidenced from the extant cave paintings (see, e.g. [A.C. Sparavigna, *The Pleiades: the celestial herd of ancient timekeepers*, arxiv:0810.1592v1, 2008] for a comprehensive account). In particular, in the Egyptian mythology Pleiades appear an important seasonal marker. Egyptians calendar distinguished the principal seasons, one of which was that of inundation, on which the entire life was dependent, as noted by Herodotus. As Amelia Sparavigne [*The Pleiades: the celestial herd of ancient timekeepers*, arxiv:0810.1592v1, 2008] stresses, the last month of this season is called *Athir*, a variant of the goddess *Hathor* ('house of Horus' in the Zodiac), the Heavenly Cow (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Goddess Hathor, with horns of cow and Sun disc.

It was evidently a part of the cattle cult, introduced by the nomadic element from Sahara, we mentioned earlier. Cow has always been one of the most precious domestic animals, for good reason. It provides milk, meat, skim, horns and droppings. The latter are used as fertilizer, but as a fuel too particularly in the ambient deprived of wood. As Sparavigne emphasizes [*The Pleiades: the celestial herd of ancient timekeepers*, arxiv:0810.1592v1, 2008] Hathor takes place of the earlier bovine goddess, Bat. Pleiades are worshiped as Seven Hathors, represented as seven cows, which, together with the accompanying bull, provide nourishment, like bread and beer, in the

Underworld. Hathor is considered able to foretell the future, in particular Nile inundation and thus the abundance of grain harvest, the principal crop in Egypt.

#### **2.4. *Pharaoh's dream***

We now turn to the biblical narrative. How to interpret the obvious coincidence between the Egyptian belief and the story of Joseph's hint? We shall, first, assume that the narrative speaks truth. Further, it is reasonable to assume the pharaoh was acquainted with the role Hathor played in the Egyptian religious system. The crucial point here is whether Joseph was familiar with the local interpretation of the Pleiades on the sky and their link with the goddess Hathor. If so, he could easily hint the meaning of the dream. But in this case the question arises: why local dream interpreters fail to render such an obvious explanation? Even the very pharaoh should have been able to guess the significance of his dream. Hence, it is reasonable here to opt for another possibility: that the story was invented, outside Egypt, as a part of the biblical theological system. The author(s) was acquainted with Egyptian system of beliefs and implemented the mythical picture into the biblical text.

Of course, even in the absence of the pre-story the very appearance of the biblical (sacred) number (7) would raise suspicion concerning historicity of the episode. (Whenever we read 7, 12, 40 we face in all probability what one may call numerical mythemas.) The very repetition of the same number of cows points towards fairy-tale construction. We note in passing that one is tempted to trace the six-day Creation to the number of Pleiades prominent stars, with the faint seventh ascribe to God's resting after exhausting act of Creation. The very Creation story testifies the fairy-tale nature of the many 'august' instances with God as principal protagonist.

Apparently, this episode from Exodus does not help us resolving the central question of Exodus narrative: did Israelis stay in Egypt during pharaonic times or not? We turn now to this issue.

#### **2.5. *Escape or banishment the question is now***

All interpretations of the nature and even reality of the biblical Jewish exodus (Exodus) from Egypt may be classified in to categories:

- (i) It refers to a historical event, albeit in an allegorical, metaphorical or other manner.
- (ii) The event is a product of an imagination.

We shall examine both possibilities here and weigh their respective probabilities.

### 2.5.1. *Exodus*

#### 2.5.1.1. Exodus as rescue

Let us take the biblical narrative at its face value and assume it refers to a number of historical events, at least similar to those described in the Bible. The latter asserts Joseph and his folk arrived to Egypt in a reasonable small number. They brought with them the belief, or at least concept, of a tribal God, to be identified later as Yahweh or Elohim. In theological terms, Jews entered Egypt and Sinai with their faith, to exit the latter with (Moses') religion. They were received with welcome, but later pharaohs imposed a harsh regime on them, forcing Jews to do hard manual work. In principle, the latter need not necessarily be considered as oppression. We know that Egyptians used to be employed for building pyramids, which is hard work by all standards. Yet they did not complain, as far as we know and took voluntarily their common duties as normal. The feeling of oppression can, therefore, arise only on the assumption Jews did not consider themselves an integral part of the Egyptian society and felt exploited. This syndrome of 'staying apart' will follow Jewish population throughout their history.

Now, the Bible states the number of Jews rises to an enormous amount, relative to the local population [8, p. 209]. The first question one is to ask is: how it came that an oppressed subpopulation has such a big natality? We know in the state of captivity birth-rate drops, both for human and animals, sometimes to zero. The large natality speaks of welfare, not of downtrodden. (The same remark holds for ethnic Albanians at Serbian province Kosovo and Metohia, currently under occupation by NATO.) Obviously, if there was an exodus, it could not be explained by Egyptian oppression.

#### 2.5.1.2. Exodus as banishment

Possibility that Hebrews were expelled from Egypt changes radically the entire perspective of the question. Banishments are the constant phenomena accompanying Jewish history for the last three millennia. How much we can learn from the history so as to conceive a reliable picture of the Exodus, taken as the precedent?

- (i) If pharaoh decided to banish his Hebrew citizens, what was the cause of this radical measure? We mentioned that, according to Bible, Hebrews brought with them their faith. This was strictly tribal, not yet developed into a proper religion, but never-the-less an esoteric belief, with very pronounced racial flavour. But could we assume that the leaders of the Hebrew intruders decided to spread their faith onto the local population? If so, the enormous increase of the Jewish population might have resulted from the new faith encompassing the local population. In other words, why we should not consider the situation which we know from the first century CE in Europe, when Jews banished from Palestine spread their religion over the entire

region of Roman Empire, in the form of Christianity. We know what was the response of the Greco-Roman world to the appearance of the new religious paradigm – Judaic faith. It is reasonable to assume that autochthonous Egyptian population reacted similarly as the European did during I-IV centuries CE. The pharaoh, then, found himself in the same position as the emperor Constantine in 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. The latter chose to resolve the temptation by succumbing to it and adopted the new religious paradigm, but Egyptian ruler might have decided to banish the intruders together with their religion instead.

- (ii) In the absence of any reliable source from the alleged time of event, it is reasonable to exploit other possibilities, maintaining still the assumption that there was group of Hebrew population living for some time in the pharaonic Egypt. What might other reason for the assumed expulsion, beside the above mentioned religious one? We return, therefore, to the Joseph and pharaoh's dream. Could the entire episode be a metaphor for some other historical event, as we meet the same case many times in the Bible?

Before we examine this possibility, let us go to the imperial Rome in the first century CE. As Joseph Flavius inform us [4, 18.5], a group of corrupt Roman Jews took purple and gold from a Roman lady, Judaist proselyte, allegedly as a donation for the Jerusalem temple, but sold it and took the money for themselves. When Tiberius was informed by lady's husband about the fraud, he ordered 4000 Jews to be banished to Sardinia and the rest of the Jewish population, who refused to be recruited for the army, to be punished. "Thus were these Jews banished out of the city by the wickedness of four men", writes Joseph.

- (iii) We mention this episode recorded by the Jewish apologist, as an example that not all troubles, in particular expulsions of Jews were the consequence of anti-Semitism. Now, could it be that the banishment of Hebrews from Egypt, if historical, was caused of some misdeed from the side of Hebrews, settled in Egypt? The narrative of seven fat and seven meagre cows, could it be interpreted as referring to the economic activities of this foreign population? We know that Jews practiced trade in all countries where they were settled down. The trade as such has always been considered as almost dishonest way of making living, in particular in Christian countries. We now imagine Hebrews buying grain in Egypt and store it until the harvest fails and then sell it with high price. We recall, in this context, the well known episode with Ionian philosopher Tales and olives, which might well be invented, but the point remains. We stress here that it might concern not all Hebrews, but even a small part of the population and even this might comprise a relatively short period. In the episode with Emperor Tiberius we saw that it was no the extent of the crime that matted, but the moral significance of the delict. In the context of the presence of an alien population, which differs radically from the indigenous population and sticks fanatically together, any crime from their side could trigger a violent

reaction from the environment, as many examples from the recent history illustrate, like that of the so-called *Crystal night* in Nazi Germany. We recall here that the original meaning of the term *crime* (κρίμα) was *damage*.

Another possible source of incident could be the business of tax farming. As described by L. Greenspoon [10, p. 319-350] a wealthy Jewish family, Tobiad, used to collect tax from the local population in Transjordan for generations. This was very unpopular occupation, as illustrated in New Testament, almost as despised as usury. In the Egyptian case, something similar might have happened, this time with grain instead of money. As usual with mixed ethnical population a social revolt turns easily into ethnical conflicts, when an unpopular social activity is linked with a particular, distinct ethnical group. As we know from history this syndrome has been accompanying Jewish minorities throughout the history, what used to result in expulsions and pogroms, including Holocaust.

### 2.5.1.3. Exodus as fugitiveness

According to the biblical narrative, Hebrew exodus was caused by the ‘harsh time’ they had under the pharaonic rule. As we argued above, it is not easy to justify such an explanation, considering what was of life of Egyptian inhabitants at the time and their working duties and habits. One ‘collateral remark’ from the biblical exodus might shed some light on another possible cause (or incident), that of collecting (or ‘collecting’) from Egyptian neighbours “jewels of gold and jewels of silver”, together with raiments, for which Jehovah induced Egyptians to give them to fugitives as farewell gifts [8, p. 258], (Exodus, 12. 35, 36). Taken at face value, this episode appears but a sort of ‘retrospective optimism’. What might be the meaning of this alleged generosity from the side of people Jews were running from? First of all we note Hebrews did not ask for food supplies or something that would be helpful in the desert they were fleeing to. For they could not expect, with jewellery, duty-free shops in the Sinai. Two possibilities come to mind here.

First, this episode might refer to the common plunder (despoilment), just before the start of the collective escape, as a sort of revenge to the people who, allegedly, oppressed them. Or simply as an opportunity to take advantage of being under the protection of the God, supposedly superior to the domestic, Egyptian ones. Finally, could it be another allegory on the long-term practice of usury, exercised by Jews during their stay in the land of Pharaohs? The orthodox exegesis renders an explanation of the Egyptians’ generosity stemming from the fear of a foreign god (the God of Hebrews). The entire Bible (not only the Jewish one) talks of God whose status (and power) oscillates between the Almighty (who creates the Universe) and tribal gods (Yahweh being just one of them), who contest which other. This confusion should not bewilder us, since the chronological order of writing the Bible does not follow the ‘ontological order’, that is the logic of the narrative. Exodus books were evidently written after the Genesis and reflect the state of affair at the time of writing, just as Homer’s Iliad

describes Greece around 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Similarly, Yahweh behaves as *deus otiosis*, who pops in occasionally to help and protect his 'chosen people', otherwise he 'forgets them' [4, XII].

#### 2.5.1.4. Hycsos

The question arises whether one could find reasonably reliable historical record that could shed light onto this biblical episode. In the absence of primary historical sources (which only Egyptian documents would provide), one must be satisfied with the secondary sources. And there is one, at least. This is the Egyptian history, written down by the Egyptian priest and scholar, Manetho(n), at the order of the Ptolemy Soter, the first Greek pharaoh of the post-Alexandrian Egyptian dynasty.

The conquest of Egypt by Hycsos is rather well described by the available historical records. These people who came to Egypt from the East, possibly Palestine, ruled Egypt for five centuries, until they were expelled by Egyptians and returned, presumably, to their native country. Here it is what we read in Josephus [4, *Against Apion*, I, 14. (82)], who quotes Manetho: "(82) *This whole nation was styled Hycsos – that is, shepherd-kings: for the first syllable, Hyc according to the sacred dialect, denotes a king, as is Sos a shepherd, but this according to the ordinary dialect; and of these is compounded Hycsos. But some say that these people were Arabs... These people, whom we before named king and called shepherds also, and their descendants kept possession of Egypt five hundred and eleven years. ... That the kings of Thebais and of the other parts of Egypt made an insurrection against thee shepherds, and that a terrible and long war was made between them... That under a king, whose name was Alisphragmuthosis, the shepherds were subdued by him and were indeed driven out of the other parts of Egypt, but were shut up in a place that contained thousand acres: this place was named Avaris... That the shepherds built wall round all this place, which was a large and strong wall, and this in order to keep all their possessions and prey within a place of strength (this episode resembles much the case of Masada from the Wars of the Jews [4, VII,8]); but that Thummosis, the son of Alisphragmuthosis, made an attempt to take them by force and by a siege, with four hundred and eighty thousand men to lie round about them; but that, upon his despair of taking the place by that siege, they came to a composition with them that they should leave Egypt, and go, without any harm to be done them, whatsoever they would; and that after this composition was made, they went away with their whole families and effects, not fewer in number than two hundred and forty thousand, and took their journey from Egypt, through the wilderness, for Syria; but that, as they were in fear of the Assyrians, who had then the domination over Asia, they built a city in that country which is now called Judea, and that large enough to contain this great number of men, and called it Jerusalem... That this nation, thus called Shepherds, was also called Captives, in their sacred books.*"

“And this account of his is the truth”, comments Josephus: “for feeding of sheep was the employment of our forefathers in the most ancient ages; and as they led such a wandering life in feeding sheep, they were called Shepherds”.

## 2.5.2. *Deportation*

### 2.5.2.1. Manetho's account

So far we have carried out our exegesis with the premise that Exodus consists of a group of non-Egyptian people entering Egypt, spent some time there and then left the country for one or other reason. This is what follows from the biblical account. As we have seen, the latter has not been confirmed by any historical record, at least to a reasonable extent that would verify the biblical narrative. Here is what Joseph writes [4, *Against Apion*, I, p.788]: “(233) Manetho adds: *How this namesake of his told him that he might see the gods, if he would clear the whole country of the lepers and of the other impure people; (234) that the king was pleased with this injunction, and got together all that had any defects in their bodies out of Egypt. And their number was eighty thousand; (235) whom he sent to those quarries which are on the east side of the Nile, that they might work in them, and might be separated from the rest of the Egyptians. There were some of the learned priest that were polluted with the leprosy; (236) but that still Amenophis, the wise man and the prophet, was afraid that the gods would be angry at him and at the king, if there should appear to have been violence offered them; who also added this farther [out of his sagacity about futurities] that certain people would come to the assistance to of these polluted wretches, and would conquer Egypt... After those that were sent to work in the quarries had continued in that miserable state for a long while, the king was desired that he would set apart the city Avaris, which was then left desolate of the shepherds, for their habitation and protection; which desire he granted them. Now this city, according to ancient theology, was Thrypho's city. (238) But when these men were gotten into it, and found the place fit for a revolt, they appointed themselves a ruler out of the priests of Heliopolis, whose name was Osarsiph, and they took their oaths that they would be obedient to them in all things. (239) He then in the first place, made this law for them, that they should neither worship Egyptian god, no should abstain from any one of those sacred animals, which they have in the highest esteem, but kill and destroy them all; that they should join themselves to nobody but to those who wee of this confederacy.”*

Manetho further describes how Osarsiph invited shepherds from Jerusalem, who devastated the country and destroyed the images of the gods. He then writes: “(259) *It was also reported that the priest, who ordained their polity and their laws, was by birth of Heliopolis, and his name Osarsiph from Osiris, who was the god of Heliopolis; but that when he was gone over to those people, his name was changed, and he was called Moses.”*

Well, this is a part from Manetho's account. How does it compare with the biblical narrative? First of all, is it to be compared at all? For this there must be some common points, otherwise there is no rationale for comparison at all. On the other hand, a complete match would make the entire issue redundant. We note two points. First, the lepers appear outcasts, as expected, what could explain the autistic features of Hebrews, which attribute they will possess for millennia. Second, Moses appears originally an Egyptian priest, what would explain its prominent position among outcasts. Besides, his monotheistic ideology points towards the Akhenaton's religious reform, whose adherent Moses surely was.

Apion adopted this testimony, what made him Joseph's principal adversary regarding the origin of Hebrews, as testified by the treatise *Against Apion*, we have already quoted. Apion appears as the first militant *anti-Semite* (in Wagnerian sense), with some signs of *Judeophobia*. On the other hand, if Joseph's apologetic book *Jewish Antiquities* may be considered as the literary expression of *Semitism*, his polemical treatise *Against Apion* should be classified as *anti-antisemitism*.

One point which perplexes attentive reader is the connection which Manetho makes with the case of Hycsos (see 2.5.1.4). Why should Moses call shepherds from Jerusalem to rescue his community? Is it not just another allusion on the perennial struggle between nomadic and sedentary population, as described, *albeit* in an allegoric form, by the episode with Cain and Abel? In fact, mixing of the Sahara nomadic people and the Nile population, we mentioned above, need not necessarily have been much friendly. This syndrome, frequently represented by the opposition highlanders *versus* plane people, has been invoked by Silberman [15], who argued that Israelites were, in fact, highlanders who used to plunder occasionally the plane (Canaanite) people from the surrounding mountains. This picture was offered mainly as a support of the claim of the autochthonous status of the Jewish population in Palestine, and denial of the historicity of Exodus, which thesis was further developed in [16].

#### 2.5.2.2. Freud's interpretation

Freud adopted a variant that lies somewhat between Manetho's and biblical narratives. Moses was a high priest of the forbidden Akhenaton's monotheistic religion, who leads a group of Egyptians into Sinai. Israelis thus were interpreted as an Egyptian religious minority group. The intermediate stage, that of leprosy, was omitted, what appears understandable considering Freud's ethnical origin.

Leprosy appears a unique disease in many respects, indeed. It is lethal, but affected may live for a long time, with incubation from one to thirty years. It is a contagious disease, transmitted by direct contacts, but not as disastrous as plague, for instance, which used to decimate entire population on a continental scale, as the case with medieval Europe was. What made the disease socially

repulsive was the skin deformations of the affected, which made the unfortunate victims freaks. It was for all these aspects that lepers were rejected by the rest of the population, and as a rule isolated, as outcasts. It was this feeling of rejection that affected the victims emotionally the most, as a sign of a sort of divine punishment. The latter goes always together with a feeling of guilt, at least in a highly religious society. In this sense plague was more acceptable than leprosy in antique and medieval times. Lepers start with biological handicap, what results then in the social isolation.

As an illustration we quote here from Pausanias the case of Eleon town on Peloponnesus, called Lepreos [17]. “The city is supposed to have got its name from its founder Lepreos son of Pyrgeos, ... I have in the past heard people attributing the foundation of Lepreos to Pyrgeus’ daughter Leprea, but there are some who say the first settlers in this territory contracted leprosy and the city took its name from that tragedy”.

It is no hard to imagine that the inhabitants of the Lepreos tried to conceal the past of the town, by inventing stories of their foundation. Considering the nature of leprosy, in particular its latent phase during long incubation, any (part of) society suspect of carrying the pending disease, would be considered dangerous, or at least, undesirable for communication.

If leprosy is a divine curse, what would be the best cure of the disaster? The answer is simple – turn the handicap into advantage. If a curse is divine choice, then let the choice be with opposite sign. Freud’s interpretation was a middle way out: Israelis were *chosen people*, but not by Yahweh but by Moses. The latter needed new followers of the new (Ikhnaton’s) religion, which was threatened to vanish with its (deceased) founder.

Formally speaking Freud’s choice was made between Scylla and Haridba of the ethnical pride. From one side, he sacrificed the concept of the ethnical uniqueness of Israelites, which is the quintessence of the biblical ideology. On the other hand, by ascribing to Hebrews Egyptian origin, he linked Israelis to the most ancient nation, whose civilization may be traced back at least 7 millennia in the (pre)historical time.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Egyptologist and scholar, Gerald Massey, in his extensive and profound research [18], grossly neglected by the modern historians of religion, maintains that the black Africa was the cradle of the world civilization, and that Egypt was the channel through which African civilization was spread all over the globe. (Just as geneticists claim at present that Africa was the cradle of *homo sapiense*, with biblical-like Eve (pra-mother) appearing in the Eastern Africa some 150.000 year ago, probably in Ethiopia.) In particular Massey argues that almost entire Bibles, both Jewish and Christian ones, are derived (if not plagiarism), from the Egyptian mythology and religion. The question we are facing now is: does it imply that Israelis were a part of the Egyptian society, at least for a period sufficient to assimilate some traits of the Egyptian civilization, including their religious beliefs?

We can not dwell on this issue here, but shall address one particular instance, which might shed some light on question, that of the circumcision rite.

### 3. Circumcision

The circumcision is practicing in modern time by a number of ethnical and religious groups, including (practicing) Jews and Muslims. The latter have adopted their practice from Jewish ritual, whereas the former claim it is their original rite, stemming from the Israelis' covenant with Yahweh. In ancient times, according to Herodotus, only Egyptians, Ethiopians and Colchians practiced circumcision. It is believed that the latter (modern Georgians) are of the Egyptian origin. It is indicative that Copts, who are regarded as descendants of pharaonic Egyptians, practice circumcision too. Flavius states [4, Against Apion, II, 141]: “[Accordingly], these priests are all circumcised and abstain from swine’s flesh; nor does anyone of the other Egyptians assist them in slaying those sacrifices they offer to the gods.”

This reprimand, which Flavius addresses to Apion, who derides Hebrews for some customs, is supposed to be an argument *ad hominem*. We distinguish three points in the above citation:

- (i) Circumcision was in Egypt, accordingly, reserved for clergy.
- (ii) Porkophobia was present in the pharaonic Egypt, at least within the clerical circles.
- (iii) It is tempting to see in this ritual rule for sacrificing the origin of the Jewish *kosher* food.

When Macedonians under Alexander occupied Palestine they introduced a number of Greek practices, including gymnastics. Jewish boys were eager to participate in the athletic competitions, but were ashamed of their circumcise genitals. Later, as citizens of the Roman commonwealth, some Jews had their genitals restored to the natural state by surgical intervention. For some anthropologists circumcision was a remnant of the prehistoric rite of castration, which was supposed to foster the overall fertility of the soil.

There have been attempts to interpret the Second Commandment as referring to the circumcision ritual. We quote it here: “*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.*”

The interpretation of the first sentence is easy: it serves to prevent mixing of Israelites with surrounding nations, who were practicing *ido(lo)latria*. Of course, nobody on Earth believed that images and effigies *were* gods, as today hardly anybody believes that gods (and the God, for that matter) reside on heaven (or Heavens), that is on sky. But it is the second part of the Commandment which is of interest to us here.

The central point is “visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those *who hate Me*”. One interpretation could be that Lord visits fathers and punishes them for the iniquity they have done on their own children. Which iniquity? According to some exegetes it may only be the rite of circumcision. Four generations are quoted for there were not more in a family. This interpretation could hold in particular considering the terms used in the first part, which could not be judged but as awkward (at least), were it not for the underlined part, which refers to those who do not recognize the God. He human attributes, like *jealousy*, testify what was known to ancient Greeks already that it was not gods who made people, but the other way round. It is not by accident that the term Lord accompanies God, Judaic and Christian alike. The Second Commandment is nothing but threat, but it is a common feature of all religions, which are, as a rule, based initially on fear.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

The historicity of the biblical narrative concerning Exodus, still remains a highly controversial subject. We have not tried to provide a definitive answer to many questions as to the veracity of the current interpretations and reliability of the biblical account, but have examined a number of possible explanations. Our principal goal has been the inference into the biblical assertions in the light of the emergence of the pivotal role of the Egyptian civilization within the Western society. Another guiding line has been the historical records from the later history, which has been better documented and may be used as retrospective expectations. Also our analysis has an essentially holistic approach, which includes, beside the purely religious aspects, social, political, ideological, physical geography and other relevant aspects. As already noted by many researchers some seemingly purely religious dogmas were contrived for practical, political aims, as the case of the question of the possible Hebrews stay in pharaonic Egypt and the issue of the originality of the ideology we call Judaism appears.

With the recovery of some earlier investigations, a new picture of the evolution of the Western civilization gradually emerges, as the case of the seminal work of Gerald Massey illustrates. It becomes ever more evident that both Old and New Testaments owe much more to the Egyptian culture, in particular religion (better to say religions), than we have dared to admit. The next step to make along these lines would be uncovering the role of the Ethiopian society, which seems to be the transmission vehicle between the African and Egyptian cultures. A new Toynbeeian, if not Spenglerian picture might well emerge, which would furnish further evidence of the importance of the African *homo sapiens* to the human evolution.

Accounting for the evolution of the topography of the river Nile, there might turn out necessary to expand Herodotus' dictum to the assertion that *civilization is the gift of the river Nile*.

## Acknowledgements

I am much indebted to Simone Lefebvre and Vladan Pankovic for supplying me with relevant references. My thanks go also to my wife Ljiljana, whose support and help has been instrumental for the work on the subject.

## References

- [1] W. Keller, *The Bible as History*, Bantam Books, London, 1988.
- [2] P. Grujić, *Humanicus*, 4-5 (2010) 71.
- [3] J.W. Rogerston, *Old Testament*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, J.W. Rogerston and J.M. Lieu (eds.), 2008, 5-26.
- [4] J. Flavius, *Josephus Complete works*, Nelson & Sons, London, 1859.
- [5] S. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, The Hogarth Press And The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, The Garden City Press Limited at Letghworth, Hertfordshire, 1939.
- [6] N. Copernicus, *On the Revolutions of Heavenly Spheres*, Running Press, Philadelphia, 2002.
- [7] K. Popper, *Unended Quest; An Intellectual Autobiography*. Fontana, London, 1976.
- [8] J.H. Hertz (Ed.), *Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary*, Soncino Press, London, 1967.
- [9] K. Kautsky, *Foundations of Christianity: A Study of Christian Origins*. International Publishers, New York, 1925.
- [10] L. Greenspoon, *Between Alexandria and Antioch*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, J.W. Rogerston and J.M. Lieu (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, 340.
- [11] S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, Image Publishing, London, 1942.
- [12] J. Rial, *Science*, 285 (1999) 564.
- [13] M. Brass, *Tracing the Origins of the Ancient Egyptian Cattle Cult*, in *A Delta-man in Yebu*, A.K. Eyma & C.J. Bennett (eds.), Occasional Volume of the Egyptologists' Electronic Forum, no.1, 2003.
- [14] R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Penguin, Hammondsport, 1966.
- [15] N.A. Silberman, *Archaeology*, 45(2) (1992) 22.
- [16] I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman, *La Bible Devoile*, Bayard, Paris, 2002, 361.
- [17] \*\*\*, *Pausanias Guide to Greece*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1979, 207.
- [18] G. Massey, *The Natural Genesis*, Black Classic Press, Baltimore, 1998.