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The Story of Joseph in the Light of Recent Discoveries.

The most important problem which during the last century has occupied Old Testament scholars has been whether we have in the Pentateuch a unitary work, created by one man at a definite time, or whether it is a product of many centuries, developed gradually, and reflecting various religious currents and social tendencies.

The most striking proof in support of the view that the development of Hebrew into a literary language from the Canaanite dialect spoken by the Hebrews was effected in an Egyptian environment is that the Joseph and Exodus narratives, in which Israel is shown in direct contact with Egypt, reflect clearly the spirit of an Egyptian environment and display visible traces of Egyptian influence.

In the description of the sojourn of the Hebrews in Egypt a great deal of Egyptian life is illustrated with a detail that could have been derived only from first-hand knowledge and exact observation at close quarters.

A merely superficial examination reveals a whole series of Egyptian words and modes of speech permeated with the spirit and usage of Egyptian language. The foreign nature of the words was so little felt by the Hebrew author that in one verse alone (Ex. 2, 3) no fewer than four Egyptian words are employed, namely, *teba*, for ark; *gome*, for bulrushes; *soof*, for reeds; and *yeor*, for river.

That is a phenomenon only conceivable in a time when the Hebrews were in an Egyptian environment, speaking their own language, but being intensely dominated by that of the Egyptians.

Birth of Hebrew as a Literary Language.

But these borrowings are merely external marks. The true relationship between Hebrew and Egyptian can be appreciated only when we penetrate deeply into the psychology of the Egyptian language and the fibers of its structure.

It is then that we obtain a complete insight into the intimate knowledge which the author of the Pentateuch possessed of the literary language of Egypt. Only then can we realize how his language, though dependent on Egyptian, was able to develop the highest degree of elasticity and individuality and display a fascinating elegance in all its linguistic niceties and *nuances*.

I can do no more than allude here to these philological questions.

1. The patriarchs took with them from Babylonia to Canaan an Aramaic dialect, strongly sprinkled with Assyrio-Babylonian elements. This influenced the Canaanite dialect which they then adopted, inasmuch as reminiscences of Babylonian myths and Assyrio-

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Babylonian expressions, reflecting Babylonian conditions, passed into that dialect.

Through its assimilation by the patriarchs with their Aramaic dialect it reached a higher stage of development and began to rise above the level of primitive expression. This was the moment when Hebrews and Canaanites parted ways and when out of the Canaanite a separate dialect began to develop among the Hebrews—as the Hebrew language.

2. This language was retained by the Hebrews in Egypt and was gradually developed under the influence of the Egyptian language. It grew constantly, expanded, enriched, and embellished in such a degree as to create the necessary conditions under which the literary language could mature and be brought to perfection.

Let us now illustrate the Joseph and Exodus narratives from both the linguistic and the archeological points of view.

Old Testament Narrative of Joseph in Egypt.

No sooner does he start telling the story of Joseph than the narrator plunges deeply into Egyptian life. He approaches his readers, not as one conveying something almost unknown, coming from a remote country. Rather, he assumes a complete acquaintance with land and people.

The incident of Potiphar's wife and Joseph reveals the Egyptian background, with all its local coloring.

As for the butler and the baker, we can refer to reliefs depicting those high officials when functioning. In a relief of the middle kingdom we see a butler pouring a drink into the cup of his great lady while she is undergoing the strain of a hair-dressing toilet. In another we see the chief butler receiving his accounts. Other reliefs show bakeries at full work, the men carrying on their heads baskets heaped with cakes, exactly as did the chief baker in the presence of Pharaoh.

No English reader will find anything unusual in that Joseph was shaved as soon as he was freed from the dungeon. It nevertheless points to a characteristic feature in Egyptian conceptions of cosmetic and hirsute propriety which radically differed from that of Joseph's homeland, Canaan. Only Semitic "barbarians" allowed their beards and hair to grow, because in their eyes the beard was a mark of dignity, long hair being the ornament of warriors and heroes. Prisoners and slaves alone were shaved, as a sign of humiliation and dishonor. This appears from passages like 2 Sam. 10, 4.

The Egyptian held an exactly opposite view. The first thing every Egyptian of standing was anxious to do, as soon as he came

of age, was to deliver his head and face to the razor. He grew beard and hair only when mourning for near relatives.

Thus Joseph was made to appear before Pharaoh, not as a barbarian and in foreign garb, but as a well-dressed and well-shaven Egyptian gentleman.

The Seven Kine.

As for the dream of the seven fat and lean kine, Gen. 41, 2, it was pointed out several years ago by others that such a story was only conceivable in Egypt, where the goddess Hathor was worshiped in the form of a cow. And there were seven districts, each having its own Hathor cow; hence the seven kine.

In the tomb of Nefretiti, the beautiful wife of Rameses II, the seven cows are seen accompanied by the bull-god, as if they were marching in solemn procession. And in a papyrus in the British Museum, containing a "Book of the Dead," we see the seven kine ranged above the bull-god in the hall of Ra, or Osiris, all of them having offerings in front of them. Of a similar nature was the picture which appeared to Pharaoh in his dream.

What so much disturbed him and confused his magicians was not the appearance of the seven kine in itself, but the accompanying details—fat and lean kine, followed by seven full and seven empty ears of wheat. The magicians could not but think of all kinds of eschatological connections with the nether world. And that was where Joseph's wisdom came in. He eliminated every connection of the kine with the beyond, but regarded the dream as a prognostication of happenings in the land itself. He saw in the ears of wheat a relation to the food conditions of the country and accordingly interpreted the seven kine and seven ears as "years of plenty" and "of famine."

Here, too, the language testifies to the close relations between Hebrew and Egyptian; for the expression "years of famine" (Gen. 41, 30) is a genuine Egyptian expression, *renep-yaadet*, and the Hebrew presents nothing but a translation of the Egyptian. That the word *akhu*, Gen. 41, 2, is an Egyptian word has long since been established; only it does not mean meadow, but overflowed fields by the sides of the Nile.

Even ordinary phrases of deference, such as might be in vogue at any court, are here highly typical of Egyptian etiquette and only become clear in their right meaning in the light of Egyptian court ceremonial and the Egyptian conception of good breeding. A characteristic formula is the phrase recurring in several passages "to the face of Pharaoh" (Gen. 47, 2, 7; 41, 46), meaning "in the presence of Pharaoh." This corresponds completely with hierarchic court custom, whereby one might not speak to his Majesty (*r heme-f*), but only "to the face of," or "before the face of, his Majesty" (*m her heme-f*, or *hefet her heme-f*).

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Moreover, the particulars given Gen. 41, 42 of Joseph's honors which accompanied his installation as vizier with solemn ceremonies perfectly coincide with Egyptian usages. They could not be better illustrated than by the Egyptian inscription and graphic representations in tomb reliefs.

The Golden Neck Chain.

Dressed in garments of fine linen, the distinctive garb of kings and high personages, Joseph received the royal signet, and he was invested with the gold neck chain. The latter was not a mere present, but indicates a special ceremony, showing the investiture of a high state dignitary in a spectacular manner amid the plaudits of the people. It was known as the conferment of the "Gold of Praise," or simply of "the Gold."

In special cases it was the king himself who showered the golden necklaces upon his servants, as we can see from the splendid reliefs in the Tomb of Eye, the favorite of Akhenaton-Amenophis IV (1375—ca. 1355 B. C.).

Royal Favors.

In these pictures we have a description of the conferment of the gold neck chain on Joseph, as given in Gen. 41, 42. But Joseph was the recipient of a greater distinction. For it was the king himself who placed his signet-ring upon Joseph's finger and put the golden chain round his neck. Joseph also was driven in a chariot through the streets, the runners shouting out before him, "*Abrek!*" which means in Egyptian, "Mind to thee!" as our "Look out!" — an expression which has survived all changes of the ages in Egypt and can still be heard in its Arabic adaptation in the crowded streets of Cairo, namely, "*Balak, Balak,*" i. e., "Mind to thee! Mind to thee!" Often there is added, "*Shemalak,*" "Thy left-hand side," or "*Yemsenak,*" "Thy right-hand side."

The brevity with which these details are given by the Hebrew narrator reveals that such ceremonies were assumed to be familiar to his readers, and therefore he did not deem it necessary to embark upon any exhaustive description, just as to-day complicated and lengthy court ceremonies are generally alluded to in a few words.

Thus the words "And he [Pharaoh] put a gold chain about his neck" (Gen. 41, 42) was interpreted by them just as such words as "His Majesty invested somebody with the insignia of the Garter" would be interpreted by us to-day.

A. S. Yahuda, in the *London Daily Telegraph*.