

THE EGYPTIAN SUN-GOD RA IN THE PENTATEUCH*

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If we take the Bible on its own terms, one-sixth of the Israelite nation is descended from an ancient Egyptian priest of the sun-god Ra, perhaps even a high priest of Ra. I refer of course to Gen 41:50-52, where Joseph marries Asenath daughter of Potiphera priest of On. That Joseph's father-in-law was a priest of Ra is indicated by two items: his name and his city. The personal name Potiphera is to be parsed as Egyptian *p3-di-p3-r'*, "He whom Ra gives"¹ or the like, which naturally indicates that the bearer of the name is a devotee of Ra.²

The place name On is clearly a Hebraized form of the Egyptian city *iwnw*,³ the center of the Ra cult.⁴ The Israelites alternatively called the place Beth-Shemesh, "house of the sun(-god)", in Jer 43:13, and the Greeks referred to it as Heliopolis, "city of the sun(-god)".⁵

Alan Rowe, an Egyptologist, has suggested raising the status of Potiphera

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1 D.B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970) 228; and K.A. Kitchen, "Joseph", *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 2.1128.

2 The Bible reader will want to compare such Hebrew names as Jonathan, "he whom Yahweh gives", and Nethanel, "he whom Elohim gives".

3 N.M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1966) 221; and A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptische Sprache* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1926-31) 1.50.

4 A. Rowe, "The Famous Solar-City of On", *PEQ* 94 (1962) 133-42; A. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (London: Oxford University, 1961) 84-5; and J. Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1956) 88, 209, 222-3.

5 For all the names by which the city has been known, see Rowe, "On", 133.

even further by identifying him as the *wr-m3*, "greatest of seers"⁶ or high priest of On. He wrote, "an ordinary priest would not have had the city-name included in his title nor, further, would his daughter have been socially high enough to marry an important personage like Joseph".⁷

Now, I do not for a moment believe that one-sixth of the Israelite nation actually was descended from this Ra priest, whatever his hierarchical status. Obviously, the development of the nation is presented in an idealized fashion.⁸ But the Bible does inform us that Joseph married the daughter of Potiphara and the two sons produced by this union, Ephraim and Manasseh, developed into two of the twelve tribes. So although I would not aver that one-sixth of Israel is authentically descended from Potiphara, the Biblical statement can be understood to indicate that a substantial portion of Israel was of Egyptian origin or at least was fully conversant with Egyptian ideas through some type of syncretistic acculturation.

The dominant form of Egyptian religion which the Hebrews in the Delta would have become familiar with is the cult of Ra. Noted above is an attested contact with a priest of Ra from On/Heliopolis. Another individual mentioned in the Joseph story bears the variant name Potiphar, suggesting he too worshipped mainly the sun-god. The dating of Joseph and the Israelite sojourn in Egypt is, to say the least, a complicated and thorny issue, but it is clear that the 18th and 19th Dynasties are the general period. During this era, Ra's fortunes were at their height. Although the 18th Dynasty was centered in Thebes in the south where Amon held sway, the city which prospered in the north was On/Heliopolis with its cult of Ra.⁹

Even under Akhenaton the worship of Ra continues, although he is equated with Aton.¹⁰ With the rise of the 19th Dynasty, Ra becomes even more important.¹¹ Names with the Ra theophore become more common than

6 See Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, 1.329. For a detailed treatment of this title see M.I. Moursi, *Die Hohenpriester des Sonnengottes von der Frühzeit Ägyptens bis zum Ende des Neuen Reiches* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1972) 130-7.

7 Rowe, "On", 134-5.

8 Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 196-9.

9 Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*, 185, 209.

10 *Ibid.*, 222-3.

11 *Ibid.*, 228, 239.

ever among the Pharaohs,¹² and of course we now encounter the all-important nomen Rameses. The capital city is renamed Rameses after Rameses II,¹³ and is so designated in Exod 1:11 (cf. Gen. 47:11). All of this demonstrates that whatever contact or syncretism occurred in the Delta between Israelites and their religion, on the one hand, and Egyptians and their religion, on the other, must have been centered on Ra.¹⁴ Accordingly, it is not surprising to find a variety of reflections of Ra in the Biblical story of the sojourn in Egypt and in the Exodus and Wandering accounts thereafter.

We begin our survey with allusions to Ra in the story of the Ten Plagues, where several times the author punned on the Hebrew word *ra' / rā'āh*. In these passages it not only bears its usual meaning "evil, bad", but also is to be understood as Ra, the Egyptian sun-god. Let us illustrate this technique.

Exod 5:19

ויראו שטרי בני ישראל אתם ברע

the Israelite foremen saw themselves in *ra'*

U. Cassuto already noted this instance and wrote that *ra'* may "express two thoughts simultaneously: they saw themselves in an *evil* plight because they had been delivered into the hands of the worshippers of the god *Re'*".¹⁵

Exod 10:10

ויראו שטרי בני ישראל אתם ברע
פניכם תגד

~~ויראו שטרי בני ישראל אתם ברע~~

see that *rā'āh* is before you

12 See Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 445.

13 Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*, 251. For a description of the city see K.A. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant: The Life and Times of Rameses II, King of Egypt* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1982) 119-23.

14 There were, of course, other cults with a strong presence in the Delta (Osiris, Horus, Set, Neit, etc.), but the Biblical record indicates contact most of all with Ra. The name of Joseph's wife, *'osnat* = *ns-nt*, "belonging to Neit" (see Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 229), so there is one reference to Neit.

A.S. Yahuda ("The Osiris Cult and the Designation of Osiris Idols in the Bible", *JNES* 3 [1944] 194-7) has argued for the influence of the Osiris cult over the Israelites, but here the evidence is not compelling.

15 U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 72.

Modern exegetes have proposed seeing a reference to the Egyptian sun-god here since 1930. J. Seliger, J. Bloch, and S. Rosenblatt all suggested this about a half-century ago,¹⁶ though among more recent commentators it appears only Cassuto has accepted this notion¹⁷. Pharaoh is telling Moses and Aaron that the day he lets them leave with their women and children, be warned that Ra shall be before you. Or as Cassuto put it: "The sense is: know that the power of my god will oppose you".¹⁸

In this particular case, we have the additional support of Jewish legend. The Midrash Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah 15a-15b reads: "Pharaoh said, 'I see that the unlucky star by the name of Ra will meet you, and this indicates blood'". This passage is quoted by Rashi as well. A later source, the Midrash Leqah Tov (on Exod 10:10), says that Pharaoh's words were "My god Baal-zephon will oppose you in the way, and hinder you on your journey". In other words, the midrash agrees that *rā'āh* in Exod 10:10 is a deity, specifically Baal-zephon. The identification of Ra and Baal-zephon presents difficulties from the

16 *Kitve ha-Rav Dr. Joseph Seliger* (ed. L. Seliger; Jerusalem: Ha-Ivri, 1930) 190 [unavailable to me]; J. Bloch, "Is the Egyptian Sun God Re Mentioned in the Bible?", *JSOR* 14 (1930) 57; and S. Rosenblatt, "A Reference to the Egyptian God Re' in the Rabbinic Commentaries on the Old Testament", *JBL* 60 (1941) 183-5. The works by Seliger and Bloch evoked criticism from B. Gunn, "On the Supposed Mention of the Egyptian God Rē' in Exodus", *Egyptian Religion* 1 (1933) 33-4. Gunn's major opposition to the theory is that although *r'* was bisyllabic as late as the 19th Dynasty (as known from the transcription *ri-a* in Amarna and Boghazkoy cuneiform records), by the time of the Bible's authorship the pronunciation had become monosyllabic (as indicated by the Hebrew Potiphara/Potiphar). But it is presumptuous of us to claim that we know when any particular Biblical story was originally formed or when it achieved its present form. Also, in the passages I cite herein, sometimes the form is *rā'āh*, other times *ra'/rā'*. I assume that the play on words would have been recognized by the Hebrew reader, with either form and regardless of how Egyptian *r'* was pronounced at any particular time. Puns do not always have to sound perfectly alike to elicit the desired response. Gunn also noted that from about 1400 B.C.E. onward, the definite article *p* (=p₁) had become virtually inseparable from the noun *r'*, resulting in the use of *p-r'* (=p₁-r') which incidentally is witnessed in Potiphar/Potiphara. But this is not necessarily so. W. Erichsen (*Demotisches Glossar* [Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1954] 242) states that both *r'* and *p₁-r'* are attested in Demotic in all periods. Professor Meltzer informs me that at least in some cases there is a distinction here between classical and vernacular usage.

17 Cassuto, *Exodus*, 126.

18 *Ibid.*

Egyptological point of view,¹⁹ but the general sense of the midrash is accurate.

Immediately following this crucial statement of Pharaoh's that the Israelites should be leery of Ra, we read of the eighth, ninth, and tenth plagues. These three plagues can all be interpreted as attacks on the Egyptian sun-god Ra. The eighth plague is locusts about which we read, first "and when it was morning the east wind brought the locusts" (10:13) and then "they covered the eye of the whole land, so that the land was darkened" (10:15). In other words, the author has specifically informed us it was morning, when Ra would normally shine forth brightly, but that the locusts had blotted out the sun. To the Egyptians, this would have been a bad omen, the eclipse of Ra. Incidentally, the Hebrew verb used in this passage, *hšk*, is collocated elsewhere in the Bible with the word *šemeš*, "sun", e.g., Isa 13:10, Qoh 12:2. Accordingly, this interpretation of the eighth plague, with the locusts darkening Ra, would not have been lost on the ancient Hebrew reader. This conclusion gains support from recognizing, as A.S. Yahuda did, that the expression *'ên kol ha'āres*, "the eye of the whole land", refers to Ra who was so termed in Egyptian literature.²⁰ The Egyptian phrase is *ir.t r'*, "eye of Ra", used to designate the sun and, by extension, Egypt too.²¹

Next comes the ninth plague, which is darkness itself, most certainly an attack on Ra.²² Again, the lexical root *hšk* is used: "there was deep darkness in the whole land of Egypt" (10:22).

The tenth plague continues the blows to Ra, as the death of the firstborn occurs "at midnight" (11:4, 29). At this time in the 24-hour day, Egypt would feel itself most defenseless, the point at which Ra is most distant from his daily rule. The message of the author is: Yahweh can defeat Egypt and its chief deity whenever he so desires, during the day when Ra is present or at night when he is not. At this juncture we realize how fateful a statement the Pharaoh made in 10:10 and how he would learn to regret ever having mocked

19 But see Rosenblatt, "The Egyptian God Re' in the Rabbinic Commentaries", 185.

20 A.S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in its Relation to Egyptian* (London: Oxford University, 1933) 62-3.

21 Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, 1. 107.

22 Cassuto (*Exodus*, 129) already noted that the ninth plague is a reaction to Pharaoh's words in Exod 10:10, but he appears not to have recognized this for the eighth and tenth plagues.

the god of Israel.

Scholars have noted that a number of the plagues can be interpreted as attacks on Egyptian gods,²³ and the above analysis of the last three plagues is in keeping with that approach. Moreover, we may note a build-up from petty plagues aimed at lesser gods, such as the first plague involving Hapy, god of the inundated Nile, and the second plague involving Heqet, frog-goddess of childbirth, until we climactically reach the eighth, ninth, and tenth plagues aimed at Ra.

Finally, the last act of Yahweh visited upon the Egyptians continues the theme. The parting of the Reed Sea takes place also at night and the drowning of the Egyptians at dawn (14:21, 24, 27). Just as Ra was beginning to shine, which the Egyptians would have viewed as the time of their salvation, Moses brings the waters back together and drowns the Egyptians.

Other uses of the Hebrew word *ra' / rā'āh* in the greater Exodus story also include allusions to the Egyptian sun-god.

Exod 32:12

למה יאמרו מצרים לאמר ברעה הוציאם
why should the Egyptians say, *bērā'āh* he brought them out

This passage has been pointed out previously by Cassuto.²⁴ Moses is pleading with God not to destroy the people of Israel as punishment for their sin of the Golden Calf. He appeals to a number of reasons, including God's love for his people and the merit of the patriarchs. But he also suggests that God's desire was that the Egyptians should come to recognize Yahweh, and why should they now conclude that the Exodus was accomplished *bērā'āh*, i.e., through Ra.

Exod 32:22

אתה ידעת את העם כי ברע הוא
you know this people, that they are *bērā'*

23 See, e.g., S.E. Loewenstamm, *The Tradition of the Exodus in Its Development* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1972) 49-51 [in Hebrew].

24 Cassuto, *Exodus*, 126.

When Moses descends and asks Aaron what has happened, the latter defends his action with the statement that the people are *bērā'*.

This is usually interpreted to mean that the Israelites are inclined towards evil, which is here not denied. But we should also see here another polysemy where the Egyptian sun-god is again meant. If this be the case, then we learn that the calf (or better "young bull"; see also Ps 106:20 where *'ēgel* is parallel to *šôr*, "bull") is intended as a symbol of Ra. This accords quite nicely with the Egyptian view that "the incarnation of the solar god of On was a sacred bull named Mer-wer (Mnēvis)."²⁵

Furthermore, we possess several references from the 18th and 19th Dynasties where Ra or Amon-Ra is described as a bull.²⁶ In the Nesi-Khonsu papyrus, Amon-Ra is called "the young bull with sharp pointed horns".²⁷ The famous Hymn to Amon-Ra (Papyrus Boulaq 17) refers to this deity as "the bull residing in On", "bull of his mother", and "the beautiful bull of the company of the gods".²⁸ The first of these epithets, "the bull residing in On", is used of Ra elsewhere too, e.g., in a liturgical piece from the tomb of Hatshepsut²⁹ and in the Contendings of Horus and Set.³⁰ Finally, the Pharaoh, considered the son of Ra as well as the human incarnation of Ra, is termed *k3 nht*, "the mighty bull", in Egyptian literature.³¹

Further support for understanding the Golden Calf as an Egyptian deity is

25 Rowe, "On", 140. For samples of the Mer-wer/Mnēvis cult in connection with Ra, see Moursi, *Hohenpriester des Sonnengottes*, 55, 60. In general see E. Otto, "Stierkulte", *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ägyptens* 13 (1938) 34-40; and E. Otto, "Mnevisgraber bei Heliopolis", *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings* (eds. B. Porter and R.L. Moss; Oxford: Clarendon, 1927-51) 4.39.

26 I do not wish to intend that only the calf or young bull or bull was used in the iconography of Ra, for the falcon, the scarab beetle, and the solar disk itself (winged or otherwise) are often more prominent. But as noted, bovine imagery for Ra is quite sufficient to link the Golden Calf with the Egyptian sun-god.

27 E.A.W. Budge, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (London: British Museum, 1895) xciv.

28 *Ibid.*, cxxvii; see also ANET, 365.

29 See J. Assmann, *Liturgische Lieder an den Sonnengott* (Berlin: Bruno Hessling, 1969) 124.

30 ANET, 14-15.

31 Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, 5.95

again forthcoming from midrashic literature. In several places Jewish legend records that the magicians Jannes and Jambres appeared before Aaron and said, "The Egyptian were wont to carry their gods about them, to dance and play before them, that each might be able to behold his gods; and now we desire that you should make us a god such as the Egyptians had."³² We should add, moreover, that in two places, Josh 24:14 and Ezek 20:7-8, the Bible refers to Israelites worshipping Egyptian gods and idols. In light of these converging lines of evidence, I am quite sure that the author of Exod 32:22 intended double meaning with his use of the word *rā'* intimating that the people were up to no good in their desire to idolize and venerate Ra.³³

32 Quoted from L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909-38) 3.120-1 (for the quotation), 6.51, n. 264 (for the references). See also L. Smolar and M. Aberbach, "The Golden Calf Episode in Postbiblical Literature", *HUCA* 39 (1968) 111, n. 26.

33 Bovine symbolism is not unique to Ra in Egyptian religion. I am, of course, well aware of the Apis bull, the Hathor cow, and the application of the epithet "bull of his mother" to Min. Past studies have in fact sought to relate the Golden Calf to the first two of these cults. R. Pfeiffer ("Images of Yahweh", *JBL* 45 [1926] 217-8) saw the Golden Calf as a representation of Apis; and E. Danelius ("The Sins of Jeroboam Ben-Nabat", *JQR* 58 [1967] 95-114, 204-23) related it to Hathor. But there are difficulties with both identifications, especially the latter because of the sex differentiation between the feminine Hathor and the plainly masculine 'ēgel of Exodus 32; see R.A. Cole, *Exodus* (London: Tyndale, 1973) 214; and L.R. Bailey, "The Golden Calf", *HUCA* 42 (1971) 102, n. 30. Moreover, I would again argue that none of these deities receives any mention in the Bible, neither through allusion nor by incorporation into personal names (see above, note 14). Secondly, this connection between the Golden Calf and Ra is not meant to discredit the correlation between the Golden Calf of Exodus 32 and the golden calves of Jeroboam in 1 Kgs 12: 28-29. I would argue that there was an actual historical event of the Israelite worship of the Golden Calf at Sinai, the result of their contact with the Ra cult. Later on it may have been understood otherwise, e.g., as a reflex of Canaanite bull/calf worship, and the event was related to Jeroboam's erection of the two golden calves at Bethel and Dan. On the interdependence of Exodus 32 and 1 Kgs 12: 28-29, see M. Aberbach and L. Smolar, "Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves", *JBL* 86 (1967) 129-40. On connections between Exodus 32 and Canaanite mythology, consult S. Loewenstamm, "The Making and Destruction of the Golden Calf", *Biblica* 48 (1967) 481-90; but see also the response by L.G. Perdue, "The Making and Destruction of the Golden Calf - A Reply", *Biblica* 54 (1973) 237-46, as well as J.M. Sasson, "The Worship of the Golden Calf", *Orient and Occident* (ed. H.A. Hoffner; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1973) 151-9. Bailey ("The Golden Calf", 97-115) has argued for equating the Golden Calf with the Mesopotamian moon-god Sin. But in a story set in Sinai concerning "a people come out of

Numb 11:1

וַיְהִי הָעָם כַּמְתָּאֲנִים רָע

the people were complaining *ra'*

This passage introduces a long series of episodes of Israelite complaints, the main purpose of which is to return to Egypt. The expression *mit'ōnēnîm ra'* has never been perfectly understood, though it clearly implies that the Israelites were once again a dissatisfied lot. Martin Noth commented, "this strange expression has perhaps a particular meaning which it is no longer possible to discover".³⁴ I am not going to claim that I have solved this crux forever, but I would like to propose seeing these two words as allusions to Egyptian religion. The second word *ra'* once again puns on the chief god of the Egyptian pantheon. The first word *mit'ōnēnîm*, usually translated "complained", alludes to the center of the Ra cult, On. Thus in an ingenious play on words our author 1) conveys the message that the Israelites were renewing their rebellion against Moses and God, and 2) creates a literary foreshadowing anticipating statements immediately below (11:5, 11:18-20) and later in this cycle (14:2-3, 16:13) which speak of the people's desire to return to Egypt.

Specific passages which pun on the word *ra'* are only one type of evidence which indicates an Israelite awareness of the Ra cult. Other phrases in the Pentateuch can also be analyzed afresh in light of the Egyptian background of the story. Among them is the extremely enigmatic passage in Exod 3:13-14 where Moses asks God for his name and then receives the answer *'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh*, "I am that I am" or "I will be that I will be". These verses are a classic *crux interpretum*, one which has baffled scholars since as early as Talmudic times. This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of these verses,

Egypt" (Num 22: 5, 11) we should be on the lookout for Egyptian influences and not Mesopotamian ones. Furthermore, regardless of which pagan god we see influencing the Israelites in Exodus 32, we should not lose sight of the fact that the Golden Calf can and probably does symbolize Yahweh. There is certainly enough Biblical evidence to equate calf/bull imagery and iconography with Yahweh; see R. de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) 457. The issue here is through which avenue did this syncretism at Sinai occur, and I am suggesting the Ra cult.

34 M. Noth, *Numbers* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 84.

but I would like to point out that some Egyptian evidence which heretofore has not been utilized can shed some light on the problem.

There exists a story which Egyptologists are all familiar with, called Ra's Unknown Name of Power,³⁵ which Biblical scholars generally have neglected. The myth, which was used as a snake charm against scorpion bites, details how the wise goddess Isis approached Ra with the request to learn his secret name. Ra desisted from divulging his name, so Isis prepared a poisonous snake to bite Ra and thus weaken him. Isis continues to press Ra for the name, which she desires to know to make her magical skills more efficacious, and Ra grows weaker and weaker. Eventually, Ra is forced to tell Isis the name, after which she exorcises the poison and Ra recovers. Most importantly, the reader never learns the name, though we do learn that Isis uncovers it.

Moses' request to learn God's name takes on a new understanding in light of this Egyptian story. The accounts are similar enough – in both instances there is a desire to learn the name of the supreme deity. Moreover, by highlighting the differences between them, we can recognize in the Biblical story a polemic against Egyptian concepts concerning Ra. Moses' request to God is quickly answered; Ra desists until forced to reveal the name. God is not demeaned in any way whatsoever; Ra is weakened to the point of near exhaustion. And the Hebrew reader learns God's secret name; but the Egyptian reader remains in the dark as to Ra's mysterious name. Our Israelite author has cleverly utilized the same motif as the Egyptian myth, but is informing us that magic has no role to play in the religion of Yahweh. There are no secrets that cannot be divulged to God's people. This is quite similar to the presentation of the turning of the staff into a snake and to the first two plagues. Moses' and Aaron's actions are easily duplicated by the Egyptian men. But when Moses and Aaron perform these acts it is God's work executed by his human agents. With the Egyptians, however, we are told that it is accomplished through magic.

Perhaps more problematic than Moses' question is God's answer. We will probably never unlock all the secrets of this enigma, but I would like to revive a suggestion made by Cyrus Gordon ten years ago that we compare the

35 See *ANET*, 12-14.

epithet of Amon-Ra in the Report of Wenamon. Here the chief deity is referred to as *pꜣ nty wn-w-f*, a difficult expression but which can be translated as "The one Who Is Who He Is".³⁶ In other words, when Moses reported back to Egypt that he had been sent by 'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh, his words would presumably have been intelligible to his audience. I would not claim that these parallels solve all the problems of Exod 3:13-14, but they deserve serious consideration in working out whatever difficulties may remain.

Parenthetically, I would like to reiterate another suggestion of Gordon's made fourteen years ago. In a discussion of deified numbers, or numerical epithets for different deities, Gordon proposed that 'ehād in the Shema in Deut 6:4 be understood as a name of Yahweh.³⁷ Moreover, he compared the Egyptian use of *w' w'*, "the one One", as a title of Amon-Ra in texts of the 18th and 19th Dynasties. Now it is true that Anu in Mesopotamia was also described as the divine One (written *dī*) and the Greeks had the concept from the 6th Century B.C.E. onward. But it should be noted that, regardless of the problem as to when and where Deuteronomy was written, its author is attempting to portray the material as Moses' words to a people having come out of Egypt. Accordingly, he has included references to Egypt where we might not otherwise expect them, e.g., the rationale for the observance of the Sabbath in Deut 5:15. Thus we should give due consideration to the notion that יהוה אחד means "Yahweh is One" in a way that Amon-Ra was "One".

A final *crux interpretum* which can be approached anew is the difficult *qāran 'ôr pānāw* in Exod 34:29,30 (cf. 34:35) describing Moses. Some years ago Jack Sasson published a stimulating article on bovine symbolism in Exodus, with this passage presented as important evidence thereof. The words *qāran 'ôr pānāw*, he said, should be rendered "the skin of his face became

36 C.H. Gordon, "He Is Who Is Who He Is", *Joshua Finkel Festschrift* (ed. S.B. Hoenig and L.D. Stitskin; New York: Yeshiva University, 1974) 61-62. For other attempts to translate this expression see *ANET*, 27; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973-80), 2.227; and H. Goedicke, *The Report of Wenamun* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1975) 87. For the hieroglyphic transcription, see A.H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* (Brussels: Fondation égyptologique Reine Elisabeth, 1932) 69, line 13 (=Wenamun 2,27).

37 G.H. Gordon, "His Name Is 'One'", *JNES* 29 (1970) 198-9.

horned", and not "became shiny" as usually translated.³⁸ But if we combine the two elements in the worship of Ra, depicted as the sun and yet idolized as a bull, we can see where the word *qāran* could have two simultaneous meanings. Two chapters earlier, the Israelites have replaced Moses with the Golden Calf (see especially Exod 32:1), which as we have seen is to be equated with Ra. Now, as Moses descends Mt. Sinai a second time, the author informs us that far from Moses having been replaced by Ra, he himself is replacing Ra. The word *qāran* is to be translated "became horned", as Sasson noted, but also "shined forth". Polysemy is a feature of Hebrew literature which only recently has come to be appreciated.³⁹ This passage represents a most interesting use of this device.

To summarize, we have seen that the Israelites who left Egypt were conversant with Egyptian views of Ra or Amon-Ra. The Biblical authors took full advantage of the coincidence that the word *ra'* means "evil, bad" in Hebrew and punned on the term on a number of occasions. They also worked into the account of the Slavery and the Exodus several themes from Ra mythology. That Israelites were influenced by Ra worship, in one way or another, may also be indicated by a brief onomastic note. One important Israelite of the generation which left Egypt was the Naphtalite prince Ahira ben Enan (Numb 1:15 etc.). The final element in this name can only be Ra, the Egyptian sun-god, so that Ahira means "brother of Ra", "my brother is Ra", or the like. This is seen more clearly by forwarding the comparable names Ahijah, Ahimelech, etc., where Yah(weh) or Melech acts as the theophore. For this reason, Ahira can hardly mean "my brother is evil" as is usually offered as an explanation.⁴⁰ In other words, an Israelite leader during the Exodus period bore a name which identified him or at least his parents as a Ra worshipper.⁴¹

38 J.M. Sasson, "Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative", *VT* 18 (1968) 380-7, especially pp. 385-6.

39 See G. Rendsburg, "Double Polysemy in Genesis 49:6 and Job 3:6", *CBQ* 44 (1982) 48-51, especially the bibliography cited in p. 48, n. 1.

40 Cf., e.g., BDB, 27.

41 Reuel, the name of the Midianite father-in-law of Moses and of others in the Bible, comes to mind as another possibility where the Ra theophore may be present. But this name is consistently transliterated in the LXX as 'Ραϋουλ, pointing to Proto-Semitic *rgw* as the root. See J. Blau, *On Polyphony in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy

This should not be surprising at all, for the Biblical record is clear in this regard. We have already suggested that the Golden Calf incident is a return to Egyptian worship. The people consistently seek to return to Egypt. And as late as Josh 24:14, at the covenant renewal at Shechem, Joshua pleads with the people to cease worshipping Egyptian gods. Beyond doubt, the Egyptian deity who was foremost in their minds was Ra.⁴²

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Résumé

Dans cet article, il s'agit des références au dieu égyptien du soleil Ra dans le Pentateuque. Dans Exod 5:19, 10:10, 32:12, 32:22, Nomb 11:1, 20:5, Deut 9:18, le mot hébreu rā'(āh) est compris comme un calembour bilingue ayant la double signification de "mal" et du nom propre "Ra". Exod 3:13-14 est compris dans le contexte de l'histoire égyptienne "Le Nom inconnu du pouvoir de Ra". Dans Deut 6:4 le mot 'ehad est comparé à l'expression égyptienne w' w'. Dans Exod 34:29 le mot énigmatique qāran est expliqué par rapport aux images de Ra dans la littérature et l'iconographie égyptiennes. L'anthroponyme Ahira est expliqué comme "frère de Ra". Des matériaux supplémentaires concernant le culte de Ra sont présentés pour démontrer la familiarité que les Israélites avaient avec Ra.

of Sciences and Humanities, 1982) 35. Ahira, on the other hand, appears in Greek as Αχ(ε)ρα. The zero consonant on the end reflects Egypto-Semitic ' . Compare LXX 'Ραυραων = Hebrew רַאֲוִי = Egyptian r' mss.

42 This paper has been limited to the Pentateuch. This is not to say that later authors could not have alluded to Ra as well. Fr. Bonaventure Hayes plausibly forwards Ps 121: 6-7 as another instance where the word ra' is punned upon (note its collocation with šemeš). Robert Dentan reminds me of Yahweh's description as "the sun of righteousness with healing in its wings" in Mal 3:20. The imagery here is very similar to that of Ra; cf. R.C. Dentan, "Malachi", *IB* 6 (1956) 1142-3. I am grateful to both of these scholars for their oral communications.

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