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Moses as Equal to Pharaoh[1]

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Two of the least understood passages in the otherwise rather straightforward account of the Israelites in Egypt are Exodus 4:16, 7:1:

Exodus 4:16 והיה הוא יהיה לך לפה ואתה תהיה לו לאלהים
"And it will be, he will be to you as a mouth, and you will be to him as a god"

Exodus 7:1 ראה נתתיך אלהים לפרעה ואהרן אחיך יהיה נביאך
"Look, I have set you as a god to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet"

Some translations of the Bible and most commentaries to the book of Exodus misunderstand the true sense of these verses.[2] The plain meaning of אלהים, of course, is "god" (with upper case "G" or lower case "g") and thus it should be understood in these two verses as well.

The background for comprehending the import of these passages is the very essence of Egyptian religion. Unlike other cultures in the ancient Near East, where kings were considered human (serving as human agents of the gods, but human nevertheless),[3] in Egypt the Pharaoh was

1. This article represents a portion of my research on Exodus 1-15 in the light of Egyptian literary and magical texts conducted at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies of the University of Pennsylvania during the 1997-98 academic year. My thanks to all associated with the center for the warm reception and for an environment that is extremely conducive to scholarly pursuits. In addition, an oral version of this paper was presented to the Hebrew University Bible Department Symposium in December 1998; my thanks to my colleagues in Jerusalem for their feedback.

2. See, e.g., the compromising terms in JPSV "in God's stead," and in NJV "the role of God."

3. The few exceptions from Akkad, Sumer, and Hatti do not disprove this general statement. For a recent treatment about Hatti, see T. P. J. van der Hout, "Tutḫalija IV. und die Ikonographie hethitischer Grosskönige des 13. Jhs.," *BO* 52 (1995): 545-73 (reference

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considered divine.[4] This unique position of the Pharaoh clearly was known to the Israelites, and thus the author of Exodus describes Moses in the unique position of having achieved divine status as well. Hierarchy in ancient Israelite religion can be schematized as per Figure 1:[5]

FIGURE 1

God	——	Yahweh/Elohim
Prophet	——	Moses
Priest	——	Aaron

The highest level that any human being can achieve in Israelite religion is prophet, one who receives direct communications from God. Beneath this rank is the rank of priest, one who receives communications through the more indirect method of Urim and Thummim. In other ancient Near Eastern cultures, ordinary human beings can achieve the level of the divine in very special cases. The best known example from Egypt is the great sage Imhotep, who was deified by later generations;[6] and the best known example from Mesopotamia is the legendary hero Gilgamesh.[7] Parallel cases from Greece include Herakles and Prometheus.[8]

In Israel the elevation of a human being from human status to divine

courtesy of Gary Beckman). For Sumer, with brief reference also to Naram-Sin of Akkad, see J. Klein, "Shulgi of Ur: King of a Neo-Sumerian Empire," *CANE* 2:846-48; as well as his contribution to the present volume.

4. For general treatment, see the excellent essays in D. O'Connor and D. P. Silverman, eds., *Ancient Egyptian Kingship* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995). For a recent study devoted to one aspect of the Pharaoh's divine status, see F. Abitz, *Pharao als Gott in den Unterweltsbüchern des Neuen Reiches*, OBO 146 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995). Some Egyptologists are more reserved in their remarks; see, e.g., E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 140-42; and R. J. Leprohon, "Royal Ideology and State Administration in Pharaonic Egypt," *CANE* 1:274-75. The basic point remains, however, that statements such as "Long live the Horus, Strong Bull who causes the Two Lands to live . . . Horus of Gold . . . King of Upper and Lower Egypt" present the Pharaoh in unambiguous terms as divine. The cited passage is relatively standard; see, for example, H. W. Fairman and B. Grdseloff, "Texts of Ḥatshepsut and Sethos I inside Speos Artemidos," *JEA* 33 (1947): 21-22.

5. I first heard the general point being made here, and was shown the accompanying graphic depiction of the point, from my mentor Cyrus H. Gordon when I was a graduate student at New York University in the late 1970s. As far as I know, Gordon never published the idea. I am happy to present the point as the springboard to this article and to expand upon it with much additional material.

6. On the sage Imhotep, see conveniently D. Wildung, "Imhotep," *LÄ* 3 (1980): 145-48.

7. For a survey of the data, see J. M. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 13-14.

8. See conveniently A. Schachter, "Heracles," and K. Dowden, "Prometheus," both in S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 684-86 and 1253-54 respectively.

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status certainly was heretical. For while the covenant concept in ancient Israel meant that the relationship between man and God was extremely close, the gap between the two could never be bridged. Paradoxically, the other cultures in the ancient Near East viewed their gods as distant, operating in their own world replete with theogony and theomachy,[9] and yet the larger gap could be bridged. The standard theology of the Bible, however, is set aside in the case of Moses's appearance before Pharaoh. The summit conference between the two leaders of the two peoples demands that the two appear as equals.[10] Accordingly, since Pharaoh was understood to be a god by his people, for the purposes of this story, Moses is elevated to divine status. This is the plain meaning of the two passages cited at the outset.[11]

Thus, Moses the prophet par excellence is elevated to god, and consequently Aaron the priest par excellence is elevated to prophet (the latter notwithstanding the fact that the priesthood of Aaron is an element not stated until much later in the book of Exodus [28:1-3, etc.]; however, this may serve to explain the presence of the word הלוי "the Levite" in Exodus 4:14).[12] In the words of the two verses, Aaron will serve Moses as his "mouth" (the metaphorical usage in 4:16) and his "prophet" (the more direct usage in 7:1). Figure 1 above may be altered to portray these promotions in the manner of Figure 2:

9. See, e.g., the succinct remarks of M. Weinfeld, "Israelite Religion," in M. Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 7:481.

10. As with nations today: when one country sends a head of state, the other does likewise; when one country sends a foreign minister, the other follows suit; and so on.

11. If this were simply a case of Aaron serving as a spokesperson for his brother Moses encumbered by a speech impediment or with difficulties speaking, as some scholars have suggested, then one would be ready to accept the words פה "mouth" and נביא "prophet" figuratively, with no further discussion necessary. But the application of the term אלהים to Moses in these passages informs us that something much grander is present, namely, promotion to divine status, and thus one needs to understand the epithets attributed to Aaron literally: they notify the reader that he too has been elevated in rank, to the level of prophet. The only other place in the Bible where the word "God" is applied to a human being confirms the point. I refer to Isaiah 9:5 with the expression אל גבור "God Hero" as one of the elements of the name of the king (Psalm 45:7 is subject to varying interpretations). This entire section of Isaiah is heavily indebted to the Egyptian coronation ritual, as seen first by G. von Rad, "Das judäische Königsritual," *TLZ* 72 (1947): 211-16, and recently confirmed by J. J. M. Roberts, "Whose Child Is This? Reflections of the Speaking Voice in Isaiah 9:5," *HTR* 90 (1997): 115-29. My thanks to Israel Knohl of the Hebrew University for reminding me of the importance of this passage as a support for the main point being argued herein and for sending me to the Roberts article.

12. Interestingly, Abraham ibn Ezra understood that Aaron's promotion to prophet must entail a concomitant promotion for Moses. However, the great medieval commentator could not countenance Moses' elevation to divine status, and therefore he inferred that Moses was elevated to an angel. See ibn Ezra's comments at Exodus 4:16.

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FIGURE 2

These promotions, of course, are only temporary. They are for the specific instance of appearing before Pharaoh. And while the Bible never states explicitly that Moses is reduced to prophet and Aaron to priest, this is implicit from the major traditions of the Torah (for Moses, see Deuteronomy 34:10; for Aaron, see Exodus 29). Here we may note that temporary promotion of this sort has an analogy in the modern military, as the famous cases of George Custer and Orde Wingate illustrate.[13]

These passages truly are remarkable. They indicate the extent to which the biblical author was willing to reflect the Egyptian background of the story. Literary flavor overrides biblical theology. If the exigency of the moment calls for Moses's elevation to the divine plane, even if this position violates a basic tenet of the ancient Israelites, the biblical author was ready and willing to present the episode in just such a manner.

The depiction of Moses as the equal to Pharaoh is not limited to these two verses. Rather, as we shall see, there are a number of instances where the biblical author portrays Moses in this manner. We begin our survey with the birth story of Moses in Exodus 2:1-10. Virtually every treatment of the story in the secondary literature discusses this story as an example of the "exposed-infant motif,"[14] and further notes the particularly close parallel between this episode and the birth legend of Sargon of Akkad.[15] But the nature of biblical literature suggests that we should look not to Mesopotamia to explain a feature in a story set in Egypt, but rather to

13. George Custer was elevated from the rank of captain to brigadier general at the battle of Gettysburg in 1863, then to major general later in the Civil War, but after the war received his regular commission of lieutenant colonel. Details may be found in the standard biographies, e.g., J. Monagahn, *Custer: The Life of General George Armstrong Custer* (Boston: Little Brown, 1959); and J. D. Wert, *Custer: The Controversial Life of George Armstrong Custer* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). Orde Wingate received several temporary promotions during his remarkable career in the British army, first as lieutenant colonel in Sudan in 1941, then as major general in Burma in 1943. A recent biography is T. Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995).

14. The most detailed treatment of Exodus 2:1-10 is that of B. Childs, "The Birth of Moses," *JBL* 84 (1965): 109-22. For a general treatment of the exposed-infant motif, see D. B. Redford, "The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child," *Numen* 14 (1967): 209-28.

15. For translation with notes, see B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1996), 2:803-4; and B. R. Foster, "The Birth Legend of Sargon of Akkad," in W. W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 1:461. The most extensive treatment is B. Lewis, *The Sargon Legend*, ASORDS 4 (Cambridge, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1980).

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Egypt.[16] Accordingly, it is more apposite to consider the birth account of Horus from Egyptian tradition, especially, as we shall see below, since this story alone includes a crucial factor present in the Moses story. But first we need to discuss the role of Horus in the religion of ancient Egypt.

As with most ancient pantheons, the essence of any particular god is very fluid. But the one element that remains with Horus throughout the course of ancient Egyptian history (from the Old Kingdom through the Ptolemaic and Roman periods) is his role as the god of kingship represented by a falcon. The Pharaoh, in turn, is seen as the living embodiment of this god, that is, as Horus incarnate.[17] Accordingly, any myth about Horus is in essence a story about the Pharaoh as well.

The account of Horus's birth is recorded in true story form only in Plutarch's *Isis and Osiris*, and in very abridged form in P. Jumilhac dated to the Ptolemaic period. Because the latter is a native Egyptian text (while the former is not), and because the latter is curt in its exposition, it is preferable to utilize P. Jumilhac to present the germane material. A large section of the papyrus is concerned with the origin of various divine names. When the text reaches the name Anubis, we read as follows:[18]

> Another version: Seth was ranging about looking for Horus when he was a child in his birthplace at Khemmis. His mother hid him in a papyrus-thicket, and the coverlet of Nephthys was over him. She hid him as "the royal-child (*inpw*) who is in the papyrus-thicket," and so his name Anubis (*inpw*) came into being, and Mehet-imy-wet became his cult image.
>
> Another version: He was sailing about in a boat (*inp*) of papyrus, and Isis said to Thoth, "Let me see my son who is hidden in the marshes." Thoth said, "See him." And Isis said, "Is that him (*in p3y pw*)?" And that is how his name Anubis (*inpw*) came into being, a name which on that account is given to every royal-child (*inpw*).

The aforementioned fluidity of the pantheon is reflected in this text: note that there is an attempt to identify Horus and Anubis, two gods who are otherwise distinct in Egyptian religion. But the main point is clear:

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16. Mesopotamian literary texts should serve to illuminate sections of the Bible with a Mesopotamian context; see, e.g., P. Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 719-37. Similarly, Persian material is relevant to the book of Esther; see, e.g., C. H. Gordon, "The Substratum of Taqiyya in Iran," *JAOS* 97 (1977): 192.

17. For a survey, which also extends the discussion to include later developments such as the divinity of Jesus, see J. K. Hoffmeier, "Son of God: From Pharaoh to Israel's Kings to Jesus," *Bible Review* (June 1997): 44-49, 54.

18. J. Vandier, *Le Papyrus Jumilhac* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1962), 117.

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Horus the son of Isis was hidden by his mother in a papyrus basket among the marshes to protect him from his wicked uncle Seth.[19]

The basic story of Horus is as follows, for which see also Figure 3 with the family tree representing the *dramatis personae* of the myth. In a battle between the two brothers Seth and Osiris, the former, representing the forces of evil and chaos,[20] kills the latter, representing goodness. Osiris thus becomes the god of the dead. Osiris's wife, Isis, was pregnant with Osiris's seed before this battle occurred. The widowed Isis now flees to the Delta where she is able both to hide from Seth and to give birth to Horus. Here Isis suckles the child and protects him. On occasion Isis must leave the newborn Horus unprotected, and at times he is attacked by snakes and scorpions, but always he survives, especially when other deities, most prominently Isis's sister Nephthys, serve as guardians and protectors of the young Horus. At myth's end, Horus reaches adulthood and is ready to fight against Seth in order to avenge the death of his father Osiris.

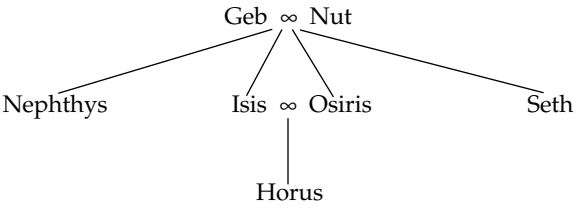

FIGURE 3: Family tree of the principle Egyptian deities involved in the myths of Horus.

19. Because this text is known only from the very late period, Redford ("The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child," 221-24) proposed that the Egyptians borrowed this specific version of the exposed-infant motif during the Greco-Roman period "when literary cross-fertilization had been going on for a long time" (p. 223) with the result that "Egypt had been sufficiently exposed to both Hebrew and Classical literature for influences from those sources to have crept into the age-old myths" (pp. 223-24). See also his brief statements in an earlier article: D. B. Redford, "Exodus i 11," *VT* 13 (1963): 415. But elements of the Horus-Seth conflict and the Isis-Horus relationship appear already in the Pyramid Texts from the Old Kingdom and in the Coffin Texts from the Middle Kingdom; for documentation, see J. G. Griffiths, *The Conflict of Horus and Seth* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1960), 1-27; for brief treatment, see D. Meeks and C. Favard-Meeks, *Daily Life of the Egyptian Gods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 85-86. For a direct response to Redford's 1963 article, see W. Helck, "Tkw und die Ramses-Stadt," *VT* 15 (1965): 48. The only element of the Horus birth story that appears for the first time in late texts is the specific mention of the papyrus basket. In short, there is little or no basis for Redford's contention.

20. For general introduction, see H. te Velde, *Seth, God of Confusion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967).

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Above I noted that the Horus story alone shares a crucial factor with the Moses story, as opposed to the main theme of the other exposed-infant accounts from antiquity. In the typical version of this motif, the goal is for the parents to be rid of the child that is exposed to nature.[21] This clearly is not the case in the Moses and Horus birth stories. Only in these two versions do the parents (or to be more specific, the mother) seek the salvation of the child, rather than its destruction. Moses's mother, Jochebed (see Exodus 6:20; her name is not given in Exodus 2:1-10), seeks to protect her newborn son from the wicked machinations of the Pharaoh; just as Horus's mother, Isis, seeks to protect her newborn son from the machinations of the child's wicked uncle Seth. This point has not been taken into account in the scholarly literature about the folkloristic parallels to the Moses birth story. In light of this important connection, we may conclude that the biblical story has its closest parallel by far, if not its only true parallel, in the Horus birth story.

Still other parallels may be cited. The role of the mother is emphasized in both stories:[22] with Horus, Osiris is dead of course, and Isis is forced to act on her own; with Moses, the mother is the active participant, and the father appears only in Exodus 2:1 and never again in the story. The mother's hiding of the child is present in both versions: with Isis this is an important element in the story;[23] in Exodus 2:2-3 this is noted with the twofold use of the root צפן "hide." A second female appears in both stories as a protectress of the newborn: with Horus, it is his aunt Nephthys; with Moses, it is his sister Miriam (again, not named in Exodus 2:1-10, but prominently present). In both stories an emphasis is placed on the suckling of the child: for Isis and Horus the best representation is in the artwork (for one of many examples, see Figure 4[24]); in the biblical account, see Exodus 2:7-9 where Miriam arranges for Jochebed to nurse Moses.

The sum of the evidence is clear: not surprisingly, a biblical story set in Egypt echoes a well-known and popular myth from Egypt. Further-

21. This point has been noted by N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken, 1986), 29-31; and N. M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 267-68. Sarna did not take into consideration the similarity between the Moses and Horus stories to be noted presently.

22. Admittedly, this is true of the Sargon birth story as well.

23. Again, see the brief treatment in Meeks and Favard-Meeks, *Daily Life of the Egyptian Gods*, 85-86.

24. Walters Art Gallery (Baltimore) 54.416. For an additional illustration, see S. Quirke and J. Spencer, *The British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1994), 68.

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FIGURE 4: Bronze statuette of Isis nursing Horus (WAG 54.416). Courtesy The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

more, the biblical writer utilized the venerable Horus myth in order to present Moses as the equal to Pharaoh. The young Moses is akin to the young Horus, the latter a mythic equal of the living Pharaoh. At the same time, the Pharaoh of the biblical story has been transformed from his Egyptian mythological position of the persecuted, that is, Horus, to that of the persecutor, that is, Seth.

The next episode in the Moses story that demands our attention is Exodus 4:1-5. Atop Mt. Horeb (see Exodus 3:1), Moses is informed by God that he will be the leader of the Israelites in their efforts to gain freedom from Egyptian bondage. Moses issues a series of objections as to why he is unqualified for this position.[25] One of the objections is that the people will not believe him, but rather they will say לא נראה אליך יהוה

25. The last of these objections, in fact, is Moses' inability to speak, a point which serves as the springboard for the verse with which I began this article, namely, Exodus 4:16.

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"Yahweh did not appear to you" (Exodus 4:1). In response to Moses's objection, God empowers Moses with the ability to turn his shepherd's staff into a snake and back again into a staff (vv. 2-4). When Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh several chapters later, they accomplish this act, though now the text reads תנין "crocodile" instead of נחש "snake" (Exodus 7:9-10). There has been some debate on the meaning of the word תנין, but "crocodile" must be the intended animal, as the descriptions in Ezek 29:3-4, 32:2 indicate quite clearly.[26] Support for this conclusion comes from the Middle Egyptian story of the Wax Crocodile, a portion of the Tales of Wonder cycle preserved on P. Westcar dated to the Hyksos period. In this story, the magician-priest Webaoner fashions a wax crocodile seven fingers long, turns it into a real crocodile seven cubits long, and then converts it back into the wax crocodile. At the same time, however, we have evidence for snake-staffs (see immediately below), and thus we conclude that the two interrelated biblical pericopes (Exodus 4:1-5 and Exodus 7:8-12) echo an important aspect of Egyptian culture, namely, the belief that select individuals could transform inanimate objects into animate reptiles (and back again).

I append here several notes to this discussion. First, note that the Egyptian magician-priests are able to duplicate this "trick" in Exodus 7:11-12 without difficulty. Of course, an important distinction is present in the biblical text. Moses and Aaron are able to accomplish this task, and the following plagues as well, simply because they have been so empowered by God, whereas the Egyptian magician-priests must resort to their magical spells (בלהטיהם), consistent with our knowledge of ancient Egyptian magic.[27] Second, note that Aaron's staff swallows the staffs of the Egyptian magician-priests, in accord with the common Egyptian reference to swallowing as an indication of control and power.[28] Third, on the question of the snake of Exodus 4:1-5 versus the crocodile of Exodus 7:8-12, from a unified literary point-of-view (in contrast to a source-

26. For full discussion, notwithstanding a contrary opinion, see C. Cohen, "Ha-Muvan ha-ʾAḥer shel ha-Tannin ha-Miqraʾi—'Naḥaš ' ʾo 'Timsaḥ'?" in B. Z. Luria, ed., *Sefer Prof. H. M. Y. Gevaryahu: Meḥqarim ba-Miqraʾ u-ve-Maḥshevet Yiśraʾel*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Ha-Ḥevra le-Ḥeqer ha-Miqraʾ be-Yiśraʾel, 1991): 75-81.

27. On Egyptian magic in general, see R. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993), and G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

28. A particularly interesting example is found on the exterior right panel of Tutankhamun Shrine III, where the snake portrayed is called "he who swallows the forms"; see A. Piankoff and N. Rambova, *The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, Bollingen Series XL/2 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955), 89 and figure 32 = plate 36. For other examples and brief discussion, see S. B. Noegel, "Moses and Magic: Notes on the Book of Exodus," *JANES* 24 (1996): 45-59.

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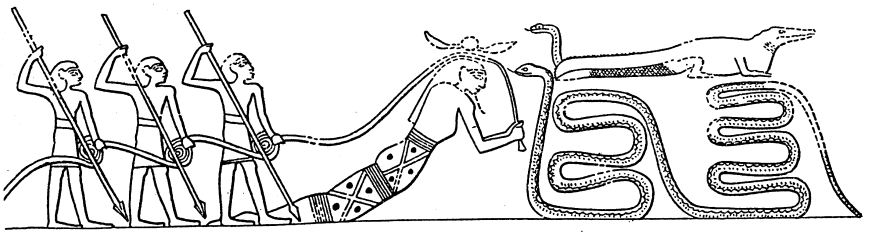

FIGURE 5: Line drawing of The Spearers of Apopis, from the tomb of Rameses VI in the Valley of the Kings. Reproduced from A. Piankoff and N. Rambova, *The Tomb of Ramesses VI* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), p. 200, figure 60, with kind permission of Princeton University Press.

critical approach), it is possible to see in the latter pericope an "upgrade." Note that in Exodus 4 Moses appears as God to Aaron and a snake is involved; whereas in Exodus 7 Moses appears as God to Pharaoh and a crocodile is involved. In addition, note the collocation of the two creatures in the following passage from the hand of Sarenput I, the mayor of Elephantine during the 12th Dynasty: *iw.i r.f m msḥ ḥr mw m ḥf3w m t3 m ḫfty m ḫrt-ntr* "I shall be against him as a crocodile on the water, as a snake on the land, and as an enemy in the necropolis."[29] Furthermore, on occasion Egyptian artwork presents a combination creature, as seen, for example, in Figure 5 taken from the tomb of Rameses VI in the Valley of the Kings at the west bank of Thebes.[30] In short, most likely an ancient reader of these sections was not distracted by the difference between נחשׁ and תנין, certainly not to the extent that modern commentators appear to be bothered by the different words.

Most of the documentation discussed thus far comes from Egyptian literary remains, though the last example serves as an excellent segue into the field of Egyptian art. For with the next item to be discussed, namely, snake-staffs, the evidence comes wholly from Egyptian artwork. I use the term "snake-staff" to refer to a staff held in the hand like any other staff, but one which has the features of a snake. A comprehensive presentation of the material is both unnecessary, because snake-staffs appear so ubiquitously, and impractical, since space concerns allow for only a sampling of the evidence. An entire series of snake-staffs may be seen on the upper

29. L. Habachi, *The Sanctuary of Heqaib*, Elephantine 4 (Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 1985), 36-37.

30. A. Piankoff and N. Rambova, *The Tomb of Ramesses VI* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), fig. 60 on p. 200.

31. For general description of the stela, see L. Kákosy, "Metternichstele," *LÄ* 4 (1982): 122-24; and J. F. Borghouts, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Egypt," *CANE* 3:1781.

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FIGURE 6: Back of the Metternich Stele (MMA 50.85), with registers two through six presenting a series of individuals (most likely, gods) each holding a snake-staff. Courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund, 1950.

portion of the back of the Metternich stela from the 30th Dynasty (see Figure 6), with registers two through six presenting a series of individuals (most likely gods) each holding a snake-staff.[31] Another example appears on the funerary papyrus of Muthetepi, chantress of Amun, from Thebes during the 21st Dynasty (P. BM 10010), specifically at the vignette accompanying Spell 182 of the Book of the Dead, where four different gods are portrayed holding snake-staffs.[32]

The above material places the story of Exodus 4:1-5, 7:8-12 within the context of Egyptian culture, but it also suggests that Moses (and Aaron too) is presented in the image of an Egyptian magician-priest. This is true in other places as well, and I plan to write a follow-up article on this image in the book of Exodus.[33] But now I wish to return to Moses as equal to Pharaoh, and thus I put forward here a specific use of the snake-staff, namely, its presence in the ceremony of the Pharaoh driving the calves. This ritual has been studied in detail by A. Egberts, with the following summation: "The scenes depicting the rite of driving the calves are attested from the early Vth Dynasty to the beginning of the Roman

32. See R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, ed. C. Andrews (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 178-79.

33. Here I have in mind not only the Wax Crocodile parallel, but, among others, parallels from the Setne Khamwas cycles (especially the reference to three days of darkness in P. BM 604 verso) and from the Boating Party incident from the Tales of Wonder text of P. Westcar (in particular, the separating of the waters). For other items of interest, see Noegel, "Moses and Magic: Notes on the Book of Exodus."

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period. Throughout this long history the vignettes of the scenes remained essentially the same. The king holds a straight rod in his right hand. The rod is kept in a more or less horizontal position. The end of the rod is often shaped like a snake's head, especially from the Ramessid period onwards."[34] See Figure 7 for an example.[35] A typical accompanying text, such as the following from Edfu, reads: "Ptolemy VII, the beneficent god, Horus with careful mind, guarding his small cattle, watching over his calves when treading the threshing-floor. Long live the good god, who holds fast the rope and brandishes the stick behind the calves."[36] The

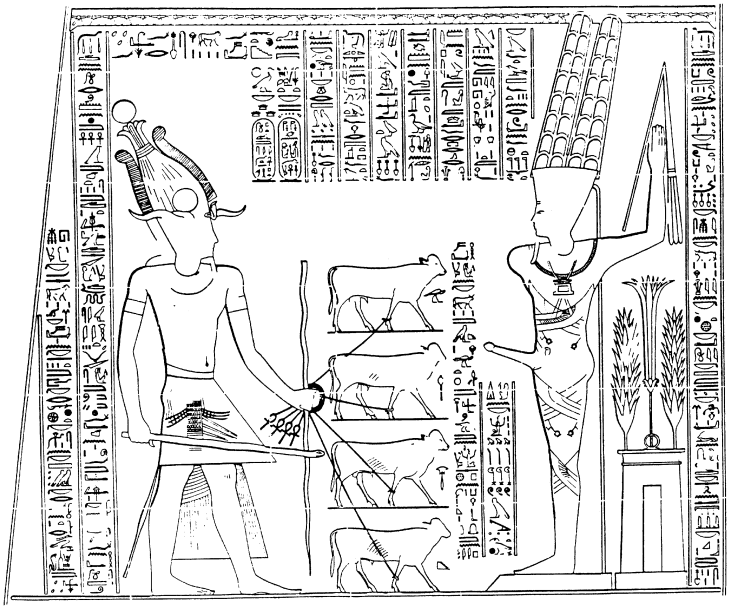

FIGURE 7: Line drawing of a scene depicting the Driving of the Calves, from Karnak Temple. Originally appeared in P. Clère, *La porte d'Euergète à Karnak II, Planches* (Mémoires publiés par les Membres de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire LXXXIV) (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1961), Plate 44. See also A. Egberts, *In Quest of Meaning: A Study of the Ancient Egyptian Rites of Consecrating the* Meret-*Chests and Driving the Calves* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1995), vol. 2, plate 109. Reproduced here with kind permission of the Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo.

34. A. Egberts, *In Quest of Meaning: A Study of the Ancient Egyptian Rites of Consecrating the* Meret-*Chests and Driving the Calves* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1995), in particular vol. 1, p. 437.

35. This scene is from Karnak; reproduced from Egberts, *In Quest of Meaning*, vol. 2, plate 109.

36. A. M. Blackman and H. W. Fairman, "The Significance of the Ceremony *ḫwt bḥsw* in the Temple of Horus at Edfu," *JEA* 35 (1949): 98-112, in particular 105.

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ancient Egyptians appear to have understood this ceremony in a variety of ways, one of which was pastoral. The passages which accompany the vignettes (dating mainly from the Greco-Roman period, as in the text just cited, but in some cases from earlier exemplars) "stress the capacities of the king as herdsman."[37] The portrayal of the king as herdsman is not limited to Egypt, of course; it is a common motif found throughout the Near East.[38] But what makes the connection between the Pharaoh as depicted in the ceremony of driving the calves and Moses as portrayed in the book of Exodus especially close is the emphasis on the staff, especially a staff which is at once both staff and snake. In short, the Egyptians commonly portrayed the Pharaoh wielding a staff in an act of animal husbandry, and thus the Bible incorporates this motif into its presentation of Moses. The staff is mentioned first in Exodus 4:2, where it clearly is nothing more than the staff with which Moses had been shepherding the flocks of his father-in-law Reuel/Jethro.[39] (Note, incidentally, that the difference between the Pharaoh's cattle and Moses's sheep is an accurate reflection of the difference between the bovines in the Nile Valley and the caprids among the denizens of the eastern desert, Sinai, etc.).

The account in Exodus 4:1-5 includes another detail that is well illustrated in Egyptian artwork. Once the staff has been turned into a snake, God instructs Moses שלח ידך ואחז בזנבו "send forth your hand and grab (it) by its tail" (v. 4). Obviously, the usual manner of grabbing a snake is by the neck behind the head, but in this case Moses is instructed to grab the snake by the tail. This feature of the biblical story parallels the portrayal of Horus on the many amuletic stelae that have been found from ancient Egypt. Of the many examples that could be utilized, I present here the famous British Museum example (EA 36250) dated to the 6th-3rd centuries B.C.E. (Figure 8), and the front of the aforementioned Metternich stela (Figure 9).[40] These objects d'art consistently portray Horus (in fact,

37. Egberts, *In Quest of Meaning*, 438.

38. See, e.g., the statement in "Shulgi, King of the Road": "I am a shepherd, the pastor of the 'black-headed [people],'" translation of J. Klein, *Three Shulgi Hymns* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1981), 85.

39. See S. E. Loewenstamm, "Maṭṭeʰ," *ʾEnṣiqlopedya Miqraʾit* 4 (1962): 828.

40. Both examples appear in many standard works. For the former, see, e.g., P. Montet, *Everyday Life in Ancient Egypt* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), plate XIII (facing p. 282); and Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, 20. For the latter, see, e.g., Borghouts, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Egypt," *CANE* 3:1781. For an illustration of an additional example, see Quirke and Spencer, *The British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt*, 84. For general treatments, see P. Lacau, "Les statues 'guérisseuses' dans l'ancienne Égypte," *Monuments et mémoires: Fondation Eugène Piot* 25 (1921-22), 189-209; K. C. Seele, "Horus on the Crocodiles," *JNES* 6 (1947): 43-52; and L. Kákosy, "Horusstele," *LÄ* 3 (1980): 60-62.

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FIGURE 8: British Museum EA 36250, a magical stela depicting the young Horus handling snakes by the tail. © Copyright The British Museum, and reproduced here with their kind permission.

FIGURE 9: Front of the Metternich Stele (MMA 50.85), with the young Horus handling snakes by the tail. Courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund, 1950.

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the young Horus) handling most prominently snakes but also other creatures (scorpions, etc.) by the tail. When we recall once more that the Pharaoh is Horus incarnate, we understand the biblical story's goal of presenting Moses as the equal to Pharaoh. Furthermore, note that in the ceremony of the driving of the calves discussed above, the Pharaoh is consistently portrayed holding the staff-with-snake's-head at the very end (again, see Figure 7).

One must be careful not to push evidence too far, and so with all due caution I take the opportunity to point out another feature in the biblical story that may be germane. At the moment when Moses and Aaron are ready to appear before Pharaoh, the text stops to inform us of the ages of the two heroes. Moses, we learn, is 80 years old at this point (Exodus 7:7). No doubt there is an attempt here at an internally consistent chronology, since the wandering period lasts 40 years and Moses dies at the age of 120. But the very fact that Moses's age of 80 years is noted immediately before his appearance before Pharaoh is significant,[41] I believe, in light of the following. One of the classic texts that relates the struggle between Horus and Seth is the Late Egyptian story called "The Contendings of Horus and Seth" preserved on P. Chester Beatty I (recto) dated to the 20th Dynasty. In the course of the story, Thoth writes a letter to Re-Atum in which he states "What shall we do about these two people, who for eighty years now have been before the tribunal, and no one knows how to judge between the two?"[42] As I remarked above, the Moses birth story places Moses in the traditional role of Horus, and it transforms Pharaoh into the traditional role of Seth. As the Exodus narrative progresses from the birth account to the initial appearance of Moses before Pharaoh, 80 years have passed. I admit that this item may be coincidental (and thus mark my words at the start of this paragraph), but given the other material surveyed above and the echoes of Egyptian texts throughout these chapters, I am inclined to see the reference to Moses's age of 80 years in Exodus 7:7 as yet another reverberation of Egyptian literature and mythology. Moses and Pharaoh have struggled for 80 years, à la Horus and Seth; and it is now time for the climactic event.

In the above pages I have noted a number of topoi shared by the story in Exodus 1-15 and Egyptian art and literature. An overarching theme may be noted as well. A well-known genre in Egyptian literature is the *Königsnovelle*, the basic elements of which are as follows: "The pattern

41. Moses already has appeared (with Aaron) before Pharaoh in Exodus 5:1-5, but this is a brief scene only. The long uninterrupted narrative of Moses before Pharaoh commences at Exodus 7:8.

42. Translation of M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 2:215.

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became a stereotyped one: first, the motivation is given for some royal activity, often of a ritual or military nature, and is frequently received through the medium of a dream; next, the king's plans are outlined to a gathering of courtiers and officials, who are usually sceptical and hesitant; and, finally, the exploit is successfully accomplished."[43] Siegfried Herrmann sought to observe the *Königsnovelle* in biblical material that relates the history of David and Solomon.[44] But most biblical scholars have not been convinced by his analysis.[45]

As far as I am able to determine, no one has suggested the Moses story as an example of *Königsnovelle*. But if any segment of biblical literature is to be seen as related to this Egyptian literary genre, it certainly is the Moses narrative viewed as a whole. Moses has a task to undertake, namely, the freeing of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. There are major obstacles in his path, but most noteworthy is the fact that the situation gets worse before it gets better. I refer to the setback caused by Moses's first appearance before Pharaoh (Exodus 5), an audience that resulted in the king's command that the Israelites produce the same daily quota of bricks but without the Egyptians supplying them with the straw necessary for the manufacturing process. This leads to the people (or at least the Israelite foremen) vilifying Moses (and Aaron) for making matters worse (Exodus 5:21). Only after this initial setback does the situation improve, à la the pattern of the *Königsnovelle*, eventuating in the achievement of the goal, the liberation of the Israelites from slavery.

There is one final item in the account of Moses's life that parallels the Egyptian portrayal of the Pharaoh. I refer to one of the most enigmatic passages in the Torah, Exodus 34:29-30 קרן עור פניו, an expression which has engendered much discussion throughout the centuries.[46] Most mod-

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43. R. J. Williams, "Egypt and Israel," in J. R. Harris, ed., *The Legacy of Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 273. The *Königsnovelle* genre was identified first by A. Hermann, *Die ägyptische Königsnovelle*, Leipziger ägyptologische Studien 10 (Glückstadt: J. J. Augustin, 1938).

44. S. Herrmann, "Die Königsnovelle in Ägypten und in Israel," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl-Marx-Universität Leipzig* 3, *Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe* 1 (1953-54): 51-62.

45. For a convenient summary of the different opinions, see P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel*, AB 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 212-15.

46. For an extremely thorough review of the Forschungsgeschichte on this expression, see W. H. Propp, "The Skin of Moses' Face—Transfigured or Disfigured?," *CBQ* 49 (1987): 375-86. A more popular version of this article appeared as "Did Moses Have Horns?" *Bible Review* 4, no. 1 (1988): 30-37, 44. My thanks to Ted Lewis for bringing these two articles to my attention. In addition, Propp offered his own suggestion concerning the phrase, positing that קרן עור פניו refers to the skin of Moses's face becoming dry and hard. This is an original proposal, but I do not believe that the evidence mustered by Propp is sufficient support for his interpretation. My own proposal follows presently.

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FIGURE 10: Head of Amenhotep III with erased horn of Amun, from the Luxor Temple. Photograph by Lanny Bell, appearing originally in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 44 (1985), p. 266, Figure 4. Reproduced here with kind permission of Lanny Bell.

ern translations read something like "the skin of his face was radiant" (thus the NJV), in accordance with ancient Jewish interpretation: Targum Onqelos and Targum Pseudo-Yonatan understood the verse this way (both use the noun זיו "radiance"), and Sifre Zuta 27:20 says plainly שקרנים היו יוצאין מפני משה כקרנים שיוצאין מגלגל חמה "the 'horns' that came out from the face of Moshe were like the 'rays' that come out of the disk of the sun." But I am not sure that this is the original intent of the verse.[47] Instead, I propose that we return to the idea expressed in Jerome's Vulgate, the source for Michaelangelo's famous sculpture of Moses, and translate this phrase as "the skin of his face was horned." In support of this rendering, I point to an Egyptian parallel of great potential. Various pharaohs of the 18th and 19th Dynasties are portrayed with "a ram's horn curled around the king's ear and onto his cheek," representing, it appears, either the deification of the king or the pharaoh's *ka*-aspect.[48] For examples, see Figure 10, a picture of Amenhotep III, and Figure 11, a picture of Rameses II, both from the walls of the Luxor Temple.[49] In light of this trend among New Kingdom pharaohs, we should accept the biblical

47. There is no case of the verb קרן "shine," either in biblical Hebrew or in post-biblical Hebrew. The Hiphʿil form in Psalm 69:32 can mean only "send forth horns"; and B. Hullin 60a refers to the same verse. As to the noun קרן "ray, beam," scholars often look to קרנים in Habakkuk 3:4 for help, claiming that it means "rays" there, collocated with נגה "brightness" and אור "light." But note that the form is in the dual, which makes the meaning "horns" almost certain. Moreover, the context of Habakkuk 3:4 is that of the horned demon Hebyon; see C. H. Gordon, "*Ḥby*, Possessor of Horns and Tail," *UF* 18 (1986): 129-32. The earliest source for the noun קרן "ray, beam" is the passage from Sifre Zuta cited above, followed by later midrashim, Shemot Rabba 47 and Tanḥuma Ki Tissa 37. The earliest sources for the verb קרן "shine" are still later piyyutim.

48. L. Bell, "Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal *Ka*," *JNES* 44 (1985): 251-94, esp. 268-69 (see nn. 84-85 for detailed bibliography). I am indebted to David O'Connor of the New York University Institute of Fine Arts for calling this parallel to my attention.

49. Bell, "Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal *Ka*," 266-67.

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FIGURE 11: Head of Rameses II, with the horn of Amun, from the Luxor Temple. Photograph by Lanny Bell, appearing originally in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 44 (1985), p. 267, Figure 5. Reproduced here with kind permission of Lanny Bell.

statement at face value, understand "the skin of his face" as the cheek,[50] and interpret the passage as a final reference to Moses as the equal to Pharaoh.

I have attempted to show in this essay that the author of the Exodus narrative patterned his portrayal of Moses after the Egyptian understanding of the Pharaoh, thus presenting the former as the equal to the latter. This suggests that not only did the Israelite author possess a knowledge of ancient Egyptian motifs, both textual and artistic, but also that the author could assume a reasonable level of understanding by his readership. Accordingly, one may wish to ask: by what means and at what period did such knowledge enter the Israelite general population? We cannot delve into this important question with any detail here at article's end. But we can point out—and I take the opportunity to do so because not all scholars of the ancient world realize the obvious—that the relationship between Egypt and Israel/Canaan was continual. We have a large amount of documentation for the period of Israel's emergence, that is, the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. In the one direction there is ample evidence for Israelites and others from Canaan living in Egypt, specifically in the eastern Delta, for extended periods.[51] In the other direc-

50. I do not venture into a discussion here of the unique word מסוה occurring in Exodus 34:33-35. The standard interpretation is "veil," but "mask" also is possible. For the latter, see A. Jirku, "Die Gesichtsmaske des Mose," *ZDPV* 67 (1943): 43-45.

51. For general discussion, see G. A. Rendsburg, "The Early History of Israel," in, *Crossing Boundaries and Linking Horizons: Studies in Honor of Michael C. Astour on His 80th*

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tion we may note the Egyptian presence in Canaan during the New Kingdom period and/or the process of "elite emulation" by local peoples in Canaan.[52] But even in the later period, that is, the early and mid-1st Millennium during which time the majority of the Bible was written, there is continued contact with Egypt. References such as 1 Kings 3:1; 10:28-29; 11:40; 12:2-3; 2 Kings 17:4; Hosea 7:11; etc., are all well known and need no elaboration here.[53] The bottom line is that at no time in ancient Israelite history would its population, especially the literati and the intelligentsia, have lacked the knowledge to create and appreciate the biblical account with its remarkably accurate reflection of Egyptian religion.

Birthday, ed. G. D. Young, M. W. Chavalas, and R. E. Averbeck (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1997), 433-53. In addition to the material adduced there, note also the linguistic evidence, collected by J. E. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

52. See, e.g., C. Higginbotham, "Elite Emulation and Egyptian Governance in Ramesside Canaan," *TA* 23 (1996): 154-69.

53. Even Donald Redford, a scholar who sees little of historical value in the biblical record ("Some day evidence may be produced on Solomon's trade in horses or on his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter. Until then these must remain themes for midrash or fictional treatment"), admitted that "Nevertheless, there is good evidence that both Judah and Israel communicated regularly with Egypt." See D. B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 311, 335 for the two quotations respectively. The linguistic evidence which supports the second of Redford's statements is collected in Y. Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords in North-West Semitic*, SBLDS 173 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999). For a review of Redford's book, with critique of his treatment of the biblical material, see G. A. Rendsburg, "Review Essay of Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, new series, vol. 7, ed. J. Neusner, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 110 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 203-14. In addition, there is mounting archaeological evidence to support the claim that Israel had continued contact with Egypt throughout the Iron Age. For a comprehensive treatment of a single corpus of data, see C. Herrmann, *Ägyptische Amulette aus Palästina/Israel*, OBO 138 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994). The Egyptian material found in Canaan continues to grow with each season of excavation; see, e.g., R. Arav and M. Bernett, "An Egyptian Figurine of Pataikos at Bethsaida," *IEJ* 47 (1997): 198-213; and D. Sweeney, "The Man on the Folding Chair: An Egyptian Relief from Beth Shean," *IEJ* 48 (1998): 38-53.

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Text, Artifact, and Image

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