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Review: Osman, "Stranger in the Valley of the Kings"

Author(s): Deborah Sweeney

Source: *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 82, No. 3/4 (Jan. - Apr., 1992), pp. 575-579

Published by: [University of Pennsylvania Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1454900>

Accessed: 22/01/2011 23:51

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OSMAN, *STRANGER IN THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS*\*

Ahmed Osman, an Egyptian writer now living in England, presents a challenging theory: he equates the biblical and qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ānic Joseph with Yuya, the father-in-law of Amenhotep III.

The keystone of Osman's theory is his equation (p. 16) of Gen 46:8, where Joseph, now vizier of Egypt, reassures his brothers that "it was not you that sent me here, but God, and he has made me a father to Pharaoh," with Yuya's unusual title *jtj ntr n nb t3.wjj*, "God's Father of the Lord of the Two Lands [the King of Egypt]."

Osman combines archaeological data and material from ancient texts with extracts from the Bible, the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān, and midrashic literature. He begins by describing the excavation of Yuya's tomb in the Valley of the Kings (as the king's father-in-law, he was granted the unusual privilege of burial in the royal cemetery) and his splendid tomb equipment (chap. 1). Next, Osman surveys the patriarchal narratives in the Bible (chaps. 2-3), and the story of Joseph in the Bible and the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān (chaps. 4-5). The biblical material is generously supplemented by extracts from midrash.

Osman argues for a late Eighteenth Dynasty setting for the story of Joseph (chap. 6). Joseph would have interpreted the dreams of Tuthmosis IV (whose interest in dreams is known from the stela which he erected describing the vision that came to him at the site of the Great Sphinx). The Israelites would have lived in Egypt during the Amarna period, and the Exodus would have taken place in the early Nineteenth Dynasty. The brief reign of Ramses I is suggested as the period of the Exodus, leaving a couple of years for the plagues before Pharaoh's death at the Sea of Reeds (p. 119).

Most scholars date the descent of the Israelites into Egypt to the period of Hyksos rule in the Delta, on the grounds that these Semitic rulers would have been more likely to allow a fellow-countryman to rise to power at their court than the native-born Egyptian kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty, who after the expulsion of the Hyksos became antagonistic to all things Canaanite. Osman argues (chaps. 7-10) that most of the Egyptian detail of the biblical story of Joseph does not appear before the Eighteenth Dynasty, or that the attitudes attributed to the Egyptian rulers of the story of Joseph are inappropriate for the Hyksos.

Before considering Othman's arguments, I shall comment briefly on his methodology.

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\* Ahmed Osman. *Stranger in the Valley of the Kings: Solving the Mystery of an Ancient Egyptian Mummy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1987. Pp. 171.

The alliance between sacred texts and ancient historical or archaeological data has often been not entirely happy when the sacred texts are the dominant partner and the archaeological or textual data are brought in to “prove” the sacred texts. The problem is inherent in the nature of these texts and in the purpose for which they were written—to explain and celebrate the relationship between God and the believing community, or between God and the believing individual, rather than to present a coherent historical treatise in terms of accurate topographical and chronological detail.

In synthesizing a consistent historical narrative from sacred texts, scholars inevitably end up stressing those elements in the text which harmonize with their theory, at the expense of those which clash, which are rejected. Osman has further complicated this methodological problem by working with two much later corpora of sacred texts, the Qurʾān and the body of midrashic literature, far removed in time from the events they describe. Their retelling of the Joseph story, far from being a reliable historical source, reflects the concerns of the believers of their time with the Joseph story’s message about man’s relationship with God.

Osman’s equation of Yuya with Joseph forces him to add certain elements to the biblical account and to delete others. Most dramatically, Yuya’s daughter Tiy, the queen of Amenhotep III, becomes Joseph’s daughter (pp. 63–65. I find it surprising that, unlike Joseph’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh, this daughter is *not* mentioned in the Bible, despite her brilliant marriage to Pharaoh!).

Osman suggests that the name Yuya is an effort to reproduce the Tetragrammaton in hieroglyphs (pp. 121–124). This seems implausible to me—despite the New Kingdom’s openness to foreign gods, the name Yuya is not known elsewhere from religious texts of the period. Incidentally, it is extremely rare to find a person with a divine name. Many Egyptians have theophorous names, but most are in the form of X-god or god-X. Very few (except the redoubtable General Djehuti [Thoth] of P Harris 500) have divine names alone, without any other element.

The complexities and contradictions of the Exodus chronology are an infuriating maze for scholars to wander through. Osman cuts his way through the hedges by emending the four hundred years (Gen 15:13) or four hundred and thirty years (Exod 12:30) of the sojourn in Egypt in favor of the four-generation time span mentioned in Gen 15:16. He jettisons the biblical life spans of these generations to fit them into the 50 years or so between Tuthmosis IV and Ramses I (p. 120). Counting back from Tuthmosis IV, this would set the patriarchs in Canaan in the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty. I find this implausible, however, since the patriarchal narrative makes no reference to the Egyptian military presence in Canaan in this period, or, for instance, to the wars of Tuthmosis III. Abraham wanders through the length and breadth of Canaan without meeting a single Egyptian.

One of Osman’s most daring suggestions is that Isaac is not Abraham’s son but Pharaoh’s (pp. 36–37), conceived when Abraham and Sarah came to Egypt to avoid famine, and Sarah was taken into Pharaoh’s household. On the one hand, Osman suggests that this would justify the birthright of Esau, son of Isaac, to

Canaan as the heir of Pharaoh (pp. 38–42); on the other, Osman thinks it would explain Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac as an attempt to be rid of a child who would be thought to be someone else's son. According to the midrashic source, Isaac did not even resemble Abraham (pp. 36–37).

Here Osman revamps the biblical text drastically, annulling Isaac's place in God's covenant with Abraham (which, from the biblical viewpoint, is presented as the basis for Isaac's birthright). Osman reinterprets the whole narrative of Isaac's conception (Gen 18:1–15; 21:1–7), which clearly takes place many years after Abraham's return from Egypt (in Gen 12:20. Were I to follow Osman's line of reasoning, I might cheerfully argue that Isaac is the son of Abimelech of Gerar! A story similar to Gen 12:10–20 is told in relation to Abimelech in Gen 20, just before Isaac is conceived!). I find Osman's use of midrash here selective: he omits the texts (such as in *Midrash Bereshit Zuta*<sup>2</sup>) which stress that Pharaoh was not able to lay a hand on Sarah.

It seems to me that Osman's suggestion is also inappropriate for Egyptian foreign policy of that period. The Egyptian rulers of the New Kingdom did not send their own children to rule in Canaan, but brought up the children of the Canaanite kinglets at the Egyptian court until, on their father's death, they could be sent back home as puppet rulers with the backing of Egyptian military government (cf. *Urk* IV 690.2: "The children and brothers of the chiefs were brought to put them in strongholds in Egypt. When one of the princes died, His Majesty set his son in his place"). It seems unlikely that Isaac could have based his birthright on being Pharaoh's child (and would the Canaanites themselves have accepted any such claim?).

Osman has to reconcile the presence of Yuya's mummy in Egypt and the biblical account of Joseph's reburial in Canaan. Osman interprets the story of the reburial as an interpolation (pp. 133–136). He raises the interesting point that Joseph, like Jacob, could have asked his sons to bury him in Canaan directly after his death (and indeed to leave the country directly rather than wait for the oppression [p. 134]).

However, I think that some of the details that disturb Osman can be explained. Although he feels that the Israelites could have had problems locating Joseph's tomb to remove his body at the Exodus, tombs of important men were identified and visited by pilgrims.<sup>1</sup> As Osman points out, the term "bones" in Gen 50:25, Exod 13:19; Josh 24:32 does seem an inaccurate description for the mummy of Joseph. However, it could be understood as an Israelite term rather than an Egyptian one, although the Egyptians themselves sometimes use the term "flesh and bones" for a body or corpse.<sup>2</sup> In any case, the biblical text stresses at several points that Joseph was reburied in Canaan. Given the importance attached to places of burial in the Hebrew Bible, this seems to be a significant detail.

<sup>1</sup> D. Wildung, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 1:766–767.

<sup>2</sup> R. Caminos, *A Tale of Woe* (Oxford, 1977), p. 40.

Some of the egyptological theories on which Osman rests his arguments have now been disproved, such as the view that during the Eighteenth Dynasty the right to inherit the throne descended in the female line, and the Pharaoh thus had to marry the royal heiress to become king (p. 14).<sup>3</sup> One would also expect to see some reference to the major excavations of Professor Manfred Bietack of the Austrian Archaeological Institute at Tell ed-Daba<sup>c</sup> (now identified as the Hyksos capital Avaris), which have been under way since 1966.

Many of Osman's attempts to establish the Eighteenth Dynasty as a terminus post quem for the Joseph story are not accurate. Osman claims that one cannot talk about slavery in Egypt till the New Kingdom (pp. 84–85), but in fact Asiatic slaves *were* found in large numbers in Egypt before that time.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Osman's assertion that it would be unsuitable for the Pharaoh to have married his cherished vizier to the daughter of the priest of Re<sup>c</sup> of Heliopolis, given the Hyksos' hatred of the god Re<sup>c</sup> (pp. 91–92), is based on P Sallier I, a tendentious Ramesside text which portrays the Hyksos as hostile to Re<sup>c</sup>. This story is mere propaganda. The Hyksos rulers, like all Egyptian kings, entitled themselves "Son of Re<sup>c</sup>," and many of them had personal names in honor of the god Re<sup>c</sup>—"Great is the might of Re<sup>c</sup>," "Re<sup>c</sup> is lord of the scimitar," etc.<sup>5</sup>

In establishing the Eighteenth Dynasty as a terminus post quem for many of the details of the text Osman ignores the question of whether these details are even later than that—Late Period, as Redford claims—and whether they reflect a late date of composition for the story,<sup>6</sup> or whether anachronistic local color is combined with an earlier historical narrative.

What about the linchpin of Osman's theory? Usual as it may seem at first sight, Yuya's title "God's father of the Lord of the Two Lands" is simply a more elaborate version of "God's Father," a title which was held from the Old Kingdom to the Nineteenth Dynasty by a number of people related by blood or by marriage to the king (= the "god" of the title), and from the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty also by royal tutors and certain priests.<sup>7</sup> The title cannot equate Yuya with Joseph. In

<sup>3</sup> See G. Robins, "A Critical Examination of the Theory that the Right to the Throne of Egypt Passed through the Female Line in the 18th Dynasty," *GM* 62 (1983): 67–77.

<sup>4</sup> See P. Brooklyn 35. 1446, which lists forty-two Asiatic slaves in a typical small landowner's household of the Thirteenth Dynasty (W. C. Hayes, *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom in the Brooklyn Museum* (Brooklyn, 1955); W. Helck, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Wiesbaden, 1984), 5:982–987, and the Twelfth Dynasty royal inscriptions from Memphis published by Sami Faraq, "Une inscription memphite de la XIIe dynastie," *RdE* 32 (1980): 75–82, which lists hundreds of Asiatics brought back as slaves from raids (1554 Asiatics, line 16 + x).

<sup>5</sup> T. Säve-Söderbergh, "The Hyksos Rule in Egypt," *JEA* 37 (1951): 65.

<sup>6</sup> D. B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden, 1970), p. 191.

<sup>7</sup> L. Habachi, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 2:825–826.

fact, even Yuya himself only uses it twice, on a shawabti figure and on a funerary papyrus. Normally he appears as “God’s Father.”<sup>8</sup>

Other features of Yuya do not fit the biblical Joseph, notably his devotion to gods other than the God of his fathers. He held a priesthood of the god Min, and administrative responsibilities for the property of Amun and Min. In his tomb was buried a Book of the Dead, envisaging his afterlife in conventional Egyptian terms amongst the many gods of the Egyptian afterworld. Yuya’s son Anen also held priestly office, this time as second “prophet” of Amun and Greatest of Seers in the temple of Re<sup>c</sup> Atum.<sup>9</sup>

I find Osman’s equation of Yuya with Joseph unconvincing. I say this with some discomfort, because Osman stresses repeatedly that he undertook his research in the hope of finding the roots of the Israeli/Egyptian conflict. As an Egyptologist living in Israel, relations between our two countries are very close to my heart. I hope that despite the problems of this one particular theory of his, he will continue to pursue his worthy aim.

Hebrew University, Jerusalem

DEBORAH SWEENEY

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<sup>8</sup> C. Aldred, “The End of the El-<sup>c</sup>Amārna Period,” *JEA* 43 (1967): 35.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.