

UDC 13

## The influence of Egyptian religion and culture on the Old Testament

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### Abstract

The author examines the cultural interaction of Ancient Israel and Ancient Egypt. Research hypothesis is the assumption that the Egyptian culture influenced the Old Testament in various fields, ranging from household and ending with the idea of polytheism. Based on the comparison of the data of archeology, literature, researches, the author comes to the following conclusions. Comparison of the mythology of creation provides a reasonable basis for concluding that ancient Egyptian mythology have had undoubted influence on the formation of the world picture of the Hebrew people. A comparison of attitudes monotheistic reforms of Moses and Akhenaten clearly show the internal unity of the doctrines. It is impossible to reject a major impact Egyptian literature of the Bible. Comparison of the customs and rituals of Egypt and Israel suggests reasonable proximity to the sacred and everyday traditions, including circumcision, dietary restrictions, aspects of worship, funeral rites.

### Keywords

Ancient Egypt, the Old Testament, Judaism, monotheism, Akhenaton, reform, customs, and mythology, Moses.

### Introduction

Questions of cultural influence in the Old Testament era still remain quite

controversial, as the study of intercultural communication processes faced insufficiency and difficulties in frames of archaeological data interpretation, as well

as data on Israel's' long-term dwelling in the Nile Valley in particular.

The History of the Moses law's "Egyptian roots" has enough supporters in history. Even the Apostle Paul wrote: "Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action". (Acts 7:22). And up to the present day the concept of Egyptian culture is considered to be almost opposite in comparison to the Old Testament culture: if according to some sources (I. Rak) the polytheism was typical of ancient Egypt (and in this case the Jewish monotheism could only be built on the Egyptian negative experience), then according to others (W. Budge) it was almost the pure monotheism, which could become a model for improving the image of Moses Yahweism.

Interpenetration of ancient Hebrew and Egyptian culture extend back over many centuries. The combination of Egyptian and Canaanite elements on different images discovered on the territory of pre-Israelite Canaan indicates deep interaction between two cultures: for example, there were found scarabs and print images of Urey, the Tauret goddess, winged solar disk, or falcon and figures with falcon's head, the *Ankh* sign, scenes of Egyptian mythology in

Palestine of medium – and post-bronze age<sup>1</sup>.

M. Korostovtsev notes that between the Egyptians and Jews, due to the spread of the Egyptian language and influence on Palestine over the period of many centuries" there was no language barrier for cultural exchange" and "the ancient and great power of East, Egypt, was basically a giving party, and the weak, barely established Israel – the host one"<sup>2</sup>. Further, as the researcher notes, there are undoubtedly many Egyptian words in the text of the Tanakh, including personal names, and calques. Thus, the basis for the cultural influence is doubtless.

In this article we consider the hypothesis expressed by the famous Czech Egyptologist M. Verner: "Read the Old Testament, and you will discover there many ideas borrowed directly from the

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1 Astapova, O.R. (2009), *The sacred realm and royal priesthood in religious and political traditions of the Ancient Near East: Egypt, Mesopotamia, Israel: dissertation* [Svyashchennoe tsarstvo i tsarstvennoe svyashchenstvo v religiozno-politicheskoi traditsii Drevnego Blizhnego Vostoka: Egipet, Mesopotamiya, Izrail': diss. ... k. istor. n.], Moscow, p. 264.

2 Korostovtsev, M.A., "Religion of Ancient Egypt" ["Religiya drevnego Egipta"], available at: [http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov\\_Buks/Relig/korost/26.php](http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov_Buks/Relig/korost/26.php)

Ancient Egypt"<sup>3</sup>. We will try to trace the path of cultural influences, conceding their historic possibility and, moreover, the probability.

### **Mythology of Egypt and Pentateuch**

Comparative or parallel mythology has a very long history dating back to a consistent typologization of any foreign pantheon under the usual forms by the Greeks and Romans. Nevertheless, the found evidences of typological similarities between mythological images of ancient Egypt and the Tanakh are indicative, at least, of the unity of the mythological basis on which religions were built, and which could affect the further borrowing. Observations on the similarity of biblical and Egyptian world's creation versions were made repeatedly. Let us consider the basic arguments which suggest the existence of borrowings or influences in this area.

Genesis (תּוֹשָׁעָה, "Genesis" – "In the Beginning") contains two basic narrative units telling us about the creation of the world.

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3 Verner, M. "The future of Egyptian archeology" ["Budushchee egipetskoi arkheologii"], available at: <http://maat.org.ru/interviews/0027/index.shtml>

These are the stories of Elohist (1:1 – 2:3) and Yahvist (2:4 – 24). Let us schematically represent the fable of creation according to these two versions. According to the first version, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth", the latter was empty, "and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters". Then, according to the behest ("And God said, Let there be ...") the light was created and separated from the darkness. Then the following was created: on the second day – the firmament called heaven; on the third day – the land and the sea, and plants, on the fourth day – the light and the stars, on the fifth day – birds and fishes, on the sixth – animals and a human. The human represented the apex of creation, blessed to dominate over the world of animals and plants.

Not water but vapor having risen from the earth and watered the whole face of the earth becomes the natural background in the second version of creation". Here the sequence is told differently: first a human was created and placed in the "garden in Eden in the East", and then the trees; after that the story tells about the four rivers of paradise and a prohibition on the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Then one tells about the creation of animals and birds, which were named by

the human, and only then a woman was created from the rib.

Given the role of Egyptian culture in the life of the ancient East, the question of the Egyptian influence within the cosmogonic myths of the Old Testament can be considered. The first story of creation may be associated with the image of the spill and drainage of the river: the influence of Egypt is not excluded if taking into account the most important role of the Nile in the life of the community, as reflected in the image of the God Hapi. In general, the God "over the waters" has a parallel in the Heliopolis version of the Egyptian cosmogony, where the first God (Atum Ra) appears over the primeval ocean (Nun, *Nwnw*).

Let us note a couple of important typological motifs combining Heliopole myth and biblical images of creation. This is primarily an indication of pre-binary order of things before creation: space was not divided into pairs of opposites, such as heaven and earth, light and darkness. Further, it is an indication that the primal matter was water, darkness and it had no form or entities.

Temporary inversions are used at the beginning of both the Egyptian and biblical version of creation: the myths tell about time before and after the creation (heaven and earth mentioned in

Genesis. 1:1, 2:4, etc.). The uniformity of poetic techniques i.e. telling about primal times in contrast to the current time is obvious.

Further, the important correspondence is the fact of creation actually from nothing, creation by word (coming out of the mouth). In the Egyptian text "All existences came into existence after I came into existence, and many creatures came out of my mouth". According to M.A. Korostovtsev, "the idea of the divine word as a creative tool of demiurge was neither accidental, nor transitory; it is deeply rooted in the religious consciousness of the ancient Egyptians"<sup>4</sup>. The Bible includes a recurring formula, "And God said, Let there be ... and it was so". As noted by the researchers of the ancient East, the identity of verbal models for the cosmogony of these two nations cannot be accidental<sup>5</sup>.

We also note that both in the Egyptian myth, and in the text of Genesis, a human is the last and highest creature of the demiurge. There is a purely stylistic conformity as well: poetic parallelism and circular composition and antithesis. In addition, important allit-

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4 Korostovtsev, M.A., "Religion of Ancient Egypt" ["Religiya drevnego Egipta"], available at: [http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov\\_Buks/Relig/korost/26.php](http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov_Buks/Relig/korost/26.php)

5 Ibid.

erations, consonances are used both in this Egyptian text and the phonological picture of Tanakh studied by Kabbalists. These tropes play their role in creating a mythological world picture.

The authors of the encyclopedia "Myths of nations of the world" note that "the biblical story of creation slightly differs from other cosmogonic myths not by what it includes but rather by what it excludes – motives of demiurgic marriage and demiurgic battle are strictly eliminated"<sup>6</sup>. At the same time these motives are also negated in the mentioned Egyptian texts. It suggests a significant typological unity between mythological images of creation.

Thus, even on the basis of a brief analysis of the matched texts, we see that at various levels: narrative, figurative, chronotopic, stylistic one – they are very similar and show a remarkable uniformity, although there are obvious differences due to the diverse religious image of the world specific for Ancient Egypt and Israel. Nevertheless, it is thought that the question about the influence of Heliopolis cosmogony (obviously the older one) on the cosmogony of Genesis can be answered positively.

<sup>6</sup> *Myths of the peoples of the world. Encyclopedia. In 2 vols. [Mify narodov mira. Entsiklopediya. V 2-kh tomakh]*, Sovetskaya entsiklopediya, Moscow, 1988, Vol. 2, p. 586.

Along with the observed mythological images and motifs, the subjects of comparative consideration may also be flood myths (in both traditions its purpose is "to purify" the people and land), the fight against the chthonic serpent (Apep and Leviathan), winged Hora and the "wings" of Yahweh often mentioned in Old Testament, Ra and Yahweh "councils" helping them to solve important problems of human existence in particular. These more private mythologies with the above analyzed texts provide a reasonable basis for concluding that the undoubted influence of ancient Egyptian mythology on the formation of the mythological image of the world specific for the Hebrew took place, which became the basis for building a theological concept of Yahweism.

### **Question of the Jewish monotheism roots**

There is no doubt that the reform for the religious life of the ancient Israelites proposed by Moses (as earlier by Akhenaten) became the greatest event in the spiritual life, as history has shown, not only of this nation, but of all mankind. Results of Moses' ascending the Mount of Sinai are widely known, in fact, they (in forms of political life, the

spiritual quest, material culture) define the life of humanity today.

More intricate are questions on the origins of monotheism, which was claimed by Moses in such a radical manner. This topic still has no clear-cut contours of scientific certainty and is carefully broached by some researchers.

The monotheistic religion of the Old Testament being crystallised, and its evidences appearing in the text (different names/epithets of God, multiple forms, echoes of mythological enemies and advisers of God) the beheading of the God's image was taking place. Historical, tribal god was associated with the "distant" demiurge, the Almighty, the God, and approved in this role. The influence of the results from this unprecedented pantheon monotheism process on the culture and history of the world is obvious. However, the question about the causes and effects still needs to be clarified, and first of all, in frames of the Egyptian context – as it was the Exodus, with all its connotations of Egyptian, to be a turning point of creating unprecedented monotheism.

The issue on the nature of Egyptian polytheism is quite controversial. Thus, the researcher of Egyptian mythology W. Budge writes that "the Egyptians believed in One God, self-existent, immortal, invisible, eternal, omniscient,

omnipotent, incomprehensible, the creator of heaven, earth and the underworld, the creator of sea and land, men and women, animals and birds, fish and reptiles, trees and plants, and incorporeal creatures – messengers, to do His will and the word"<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, many manifestations of divine beings expressed in countless deities and their epithets are the obvious signs of the Egyptian polytheism that is repeatedly emphasized in the biblical tradition.

According to V. Zhdanov "the most important event in the history of the spiritual culture of the New Kingdom of Egypt"<sup>8</sup> refers to the seventeen-year reign of Pharaoh Akhenaten. Quite a lot of work is devoted to this period by both foreign and domestic Egyptologists.

The young pharaoh Amenhotep IV (1364-1347 BC) – the son of Amenhotep III, in whose reign the country achieved the highest economic power, associated in particular with the conquests in Asia and Nubia – overturned earlier cults (especially in respect to the cult of Amun) in the sixth year of

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7 Budge, W.E.A. (2008), *The Egyptian Book of the Dead [Egipetskaya kniga mertvykh]*, Azbuka-klassika, St. Petersburg, p. 12.

8 Zhdanov, V.V. (2006) *The evolution of the category of "Maat" in ancient Egyptian thought [Evolyutsiya kategorii "Maat" v drevneegipetskoj mysli]*, Sovremennye tetradi, Moscow, p. 93.

his reign and introduced a new cult of "state" God Aten (*'Itn* – "sun disc")<sup>9</sup>. The king refused his former name Amenhotep (*'Imnhtp* – "Amon satisfied") and started calling himself Akhenaton (*3hn' Itn* – "acceptable before Aten"). Egypt's capital was moved from Thebes to a new city Ahetaton ("horizon of Aten") and unprecedented measures were taken across the country to eradicate the "paganism", objectionable polytheism, especially the cult of Amun.

In the last century the Amenhotep IV was often considered as a humanist and defender of high ideals (obviously not without regard to the biblical parallels of monotheistic faith). Now the version that the main task of Amenhotep was to exalt royal power and his own power is more popular: so Akhenaten prohibited, in particular, the writing of the noun "God" (*ntr*): from that time both the Sun (Aton) and the king had to be called only "kings" (*nsw*)<sup>10</sup>. And, although the foreign policy of Akhenaten was quite peaceful, the domestic one was characterized by rigid persecution of "infidels".

Freud was among the first to consistently outline the theory of Egyptian

origin of Jewish monotheism. He argued that Moses was an Egyptian, and his religion was a religion of Aten. Although Freud's hypothesis about the names of *Aton* (Hellenized form, in fact, likely that sounded like a *Yot*<sup>11</sup>), *Adonai* and *Adonis* being identical is no longer a scientific argument today, some of his notes did not lose credibility.

There is a lot in common among the distinctive features of the Akhenaten religion and the ancient Hebrews' monotheism, which was in its infancy at that time. We will briefly list these factors, as each of them is fairly well-known and researched.

1) Reduction of the mythological framework in favor of the religious component. Both the Bible and discovered texts of the Akhenaten era show comparative poverty of cosmogonic component. Like the concept of Akhenaten, names of other gods are forbidden in the Moses monotheism as well: "Thou shall have no other gods before me <...> Thou shall neither bow down to them nor serve them" (Exodus 20:3,5). Names of other gods' being destructed by order of the Pharaoh, as well as the writing of "gods"

9 Ibid. P. 94.

10 This fact was first noticed by Yu. Perepelkin.

11 Sinilo, G.V. (2008) *The ancient literature of the Middle East and the world of Tanach* [*Drevnie literaturny Blizhnego Vostoka i mir Tanakha*], Flinta, MPSI, Moscow, p. 68.

in the Bible find parallels: "Do not invoke the names of other gods" (Exodus 23:13).

2) Denial of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Various kinds of magic were probably also prohibited and persecuted in the time of pharaoh Akhenaten<sup>12</sup>. Text of the Bible definitely tells about the magic and divination being unacceptable "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. .... He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed." (Exodus 22:18, 20).

3) Refusal from anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images of God. In the era of Akhenaten, who prohibited not only the old "false" forms of religion, but also the traditional writing of names and images of gods (images and writing were destroyed everywhere), only the image of the solar circle with rays crested by hands was legitimized. "It was totally new to Egypt that Akhenaten deprived gods of any anthropomorphic features"<sup>13</sup>. The second commandment of Moses says about the images of the transcen-

dent being prohibited: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image that is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:4). It should be noted that archaeological investigations have not revealed any images of Yahweh.

4) Refusal from the doctrine of the afterlife. Without being studied to such extent as the cult of Aton the cult of Osiris was in the shade and oblivion in the Amarna religion. Aton religion quasi took the traditional Egyptian funerary cult out of the context by making it a subject to a some kind of "epohe"<sup>14</sup>. The rejection of the afterlife doctrine in both Akhenaten's religion and the religion of Moses is associated with the denial of the existing and quite common doctrines, such as those reflected in the "Pyramid Texts". Probably, the reasons for refusing this side of mythology and religion is associated with the reformist nature of both these decisive turns to monotheism, that sharply broke most of the previous customs.

Thus, both religious turns have essentially similar moments. M. Zil'berman directly writes about the image of God's

12 Zil'berman, M., "Fathers of Abraham" ["Ottsy Avraama"], available at: <http://www.hapiru.ru/book1.html>

13 D. van der Plas, "The veto on images in monotheistic religions" ["Zapret na izobrazheniya v monoteisticheskikh religiyakh"], available at: [http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov\\_Buks/bogoslov/Article/plas\\_zapr.php](http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov_Buks/bogoslov/Article/plas_zapr.php)

14 Zhdanov, V.V. (2006) *The evolution of the category of "Maat" in ancient Egyptian thought* [Evolyutsiya kategorii "Maat" v drevneegipetskoj mysli], Sovremennye tetradi, Moscow, p. 98.



being borrowed and "edited", "Indeed, to keep the ancient Hebrews "on a tight rein" one needed a "great God, mighty and terrible" (Deuteronomy 10:17). And having modified and adapted the learning of Akhenaten (introduced some ideas of other cosmogonic cycles) Moses introduced this wise God to "stiff-necked" Jewish people (the Lord God gave laws "directly for you") in his teaching under pressure of Mesopotamian dogmas on "faith of the fathers"<sup>15</sup>.

However, the monotheism of Akhenaten and Moses cannot be considered as essentially uniform, and probably not only in framework of historical perspective, which could distort the features of teaching. We briefly present the main differences:

1) The problem of transcendence. While Moses proposes the concept of the absolutely transcendent God, Akhenaton worships the sun in the form of the solar disk and its manifestations as primarily a solar deity.

2) The problem of the sacred reign. For Akhenaton, obviously, the most important aspect of his reform was the political one; his identifying Aton with the pharaoh (that was also manifested by re-

placing the lexical unit "god / gods" with "king") was aimed to strengthen the authority of Pharaoh, in the spiritual field as well. The God of Moses is essentially transcendent and everyone without exception must obey its laws.

Comparing paradigmatic installations of Moses' and Akhenaten's monotheistic reforms brings convincing evidences of doctrines' internal unity that built their basis. We agree with the opinion of G.V. Sinilo that "one should talk about the Akhenaton impact (especially direct one) on Moses very carefully"<sup>16</sup>. However, in our opinion, one may agree with the opinion of M. Korostovtsev that the culture of ancient Egypt, with its developed mythology and theology, with its priestly tradition, with its antiquity and authority could act as a "giving" culture rather than the one taking the wrong ideology.

### **Writing and literature of Egypt and the Old Testament era**

Following many researchers B.A. Turaev notes "numerous points of contact between <Egyptian> literature and Se-

<sup>15</sup> Zil'berman, M., "Fathers of Abraham" ["Ottsy Avraama"], available at: <http://www.hapiru.ru/book1.html>

<sup>16</sup> Sinilo, G.V. (2008) *The ancient literature of the Middle East and the world of Tanach* [Drevnie literatury Blizhnego Vostoka i mir Tanakha], Flinta, MPSI, Moscow, p. 66.

mitic one, e.g., with the Biblical one"<sup>17</sup>. M. Korostovtsev shows many examples related to the influence of Egyptian literature on the Bible. It concerns, in particular, the story of the Exodus itself: so the "separation" of the Red Sea waters by Moses finds a parallel in the Egyptian paper (papyrus Vestkar) where a priest also "separated" pond water<sup>18</sup>.

Comparing such texts as the Hymn to Aten and Psalm 103 shows that some important motives of the Bible were borrowed from Egyptian culture, and to be more accurately, Akhenaton's doctrine of Aton. Motive of God's vital presence in the existence of men and animals, the motive of creation and its marvelous wealth undoubtedly unites these texts. At the same time, even a brief comparative analysis points to the differences: on the one hand the Egyptian text is permeated (and limited) with solar symbolism, the Bible has a broader, more metaphysically harmonious and metaphorically rich image of the Creator's glorification through cleansing the Lord's image from natural connotations.

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17 Turaev, B.A. (2002) *History of the Ancient East [Istoriya Drevnego Vostoka]*, Kharvest, Minsk, p. 67.

18 Korostovtsev, M.A. (1974), "Ancient Egypt and the cosmogony of ancient Jews" ["Drevnii Egipet i kosmogoniya drevnikh iudeev"], *Palestinskii sbornik*, No. 25(88), p. 31.

If the moral and ethical standards were introduced to the Old Testament society in the commandments given to Moses by the Lord, in the framework of Egyptian tradition they were summarized in the "Papyrus Ania" and 125th chapter of the "Book of the Dead", also called the "Negative Confession". The "Negative Confession" is not fully extant at our times, but the preserved fragments show a significant typological unity between the two morality codes of the ancient East. According to M. Zil'berman, the first four commandments characterizing the monotheistic cult are not reflected in the "Book of the Dead" as well as the commandment about honoring parents<sup>19</sup>. At the same time the other commandments have much in common.

The teaching genre was one of the most revered in Egypt, as well as in the whole Ancient Middle East<sup>20</sup>. One of the oldest texts preserved in this genre is the text of the Old Kingdom "Teachings of Ptahhotep" which is extant in several lists revised by the Middle Kingdom, the vizier teaching his son. "Teachings of

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19 Zil'berman, M., "Fathers of Abraham" ["Ottsy Avraama"], available at: <http://www.hapiru.ru/book1.html>

20 Sinilo, G.V. (2008) *The ancient literature of the Middle East and the world of Tanach [Drevnie literatury Blizhnego Vostoka i mir Tanakha]*, Flinta, MPSI, Moscow, p. 30.

Ptahhotep" consists of 45 (46) maxims of moral and philosophical nature in poetic form. The document is very close to the biblical books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes from typological point of view. In terms of their form the "Teachings of Ptahhotep" and Proverbs are orders given by father to son. They are united by themes of wisdom and its acquisition, truth and righteousness (Maat), wealth and poverty, passion and reason, piety and justice.

The didactic tradition of biblical aphoristic teachings' being formed under the influence of centuries-old traditions of the Egyptian didactic literature may be considered textually proven, with the latter being doubtlessly provided in many other texts, which were not extant at our time. At the same time, the area of didactics and its depth in the lyrics were different: if Egyptian texts are mostly aimed at practical purposes, i.e. bear advices of etiquette and domestic nature, the biblical teachings are focused on the moral and ethical issues, with their importance being postulated.

We agree with the opinion of the leading specialist in Egyptian literature M. Korostovtsev that the serious impact of Egyptian literature on other ancient literature, especially the Bible cannot be negated.

## Customs and traditions of Egyptian and Jews

An important feature of the unity between the Egyptian religion and culture in general and Israeli monotheism was the postulation of the people's exceptionality and the need to preserve ethnic identity.

Exceptionality of the Chosen People, its ethnic "sanctity" is a significant part of Egyptian life ("The Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians", Gen. 43:32) and Israel ("transgress against our God in marrying strange wives", Neh. 13:30), although the latter only strengthened this tradition to the time of the Second Temple.

As far as the customs and rituals of Egypt and Israel are concerned, one can make a preliminary conclusion on their sufficient affinity, including sacred and everyday traditions. In particular, we point out that the marriage to the sister born by other mother was common in Egypt and was legal in Israel until the time of King David<sup>21</sup>. Let us turn to a more detailed consideration of such fundamental traditions, such as circum-

<sup>21</sup> Graves, R., Patai, R. (2002), *Hebrew myths. The book of Genesis [Judeiskie mify. Kniga Bytiya]*, B.S.G.-Press, Moscow, p. 194.

cision, dietary restrictions and prohibitions, attributes of cult practice.

Circumcision is a rite adopted in some nations since ancient times. Obviously, since the archaic times it had a character of trait that distinguishes a "pure" people from "impure" people. Pictures of circumcision in the Old Kingdom tombs date back to the prehistoric period<sup>22</sup>.

The question on the appearance of circumcision among the Jews is a difficult one. According to Genesis, the patriarch Abraham was among first who was circumcised and circumcised his offspring. However, the fact that "And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin" (Genesis 17: 24) indicates the absence of this custom among his ancestors.

One may refer to the following quote from the book of Joshua as to an indirect proof of the probable Egyptian origin of the custom: "all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised" (Josh.. 5: 5) – meaning that circumcision was obviously made rigorously in Egypt and the fact that the Lord took from the Jews "the reproach of Egypt" is not associated with its absence.

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22 Bibbi, J. (1984), *In search of Dilmun* [*V poiskakh Dil'muna*], Nauka, Moscow, p. 250.

It should be clarified that the rites of circumcision were of different character in Egypt and in Israel. So if circumcision was (probably as a sign of initiation into manhood) made in adolescence (in particular, as shown on the dilapidated relief of the Khons temple in Karnak from time of Amenhotep III)<sup>23</sup> in Egypt, the Jewish law prescribed: "And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations". (Genesis 17: 12). At the same time not all men were obviously circumcised in Egypt, this practice should have been common only among the nobility or perhaps priesthood<sup>24</sup>; the Tanah categorically prescribes circumcision for all male babies.

At the same time the writings of the prophets (this trend has fully developed in Christianity) speak of the importance of not only physical but spiritual purity, "all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart" (Jeremiah 9: 26). This trend (the primacy of the spiritual covenant and sacrifice over bodily rituals) was completed in the New Testament: "Circumcision is

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23 One of the first descriptions is given in: Chabas, F. (1861), *Circoncision chez les Egyptiens*, Paris.

24 Glick, L.B. (2005), *Marked in Your Flesh: Circumcision from Ancient Judea to Modern America*, Oxford University Press, New York, 384 p.

nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God". (1 Cor 7:19), "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love". (Galatians 5:6).

Antiquity of the circumcision custom in ancient Egypt being archaeologically confirmed, as well as the position of the Egyptian culture being developed in the region mostly as affecting one, and not as one being affected (especially from such an insignificant people at that time like Habiro / Jews) provide a strong indication that the circumcision custom, which acquired the crucial value in Judaic tradition, could be borrowed by the Jews of the Egyptian captivity era from the more "powerful" Egyptian culture.

It is interesting to stress coincidences in the field of food taboos in Egyptian and Jewish traditions. Unlike Egypt prohibitions that were of selective nature (prohibitions were imposed on certain people before certain actions), the Jewish laws were more stringent (at least, as enshrined in the Book of Leviticus) and should be applied to everyone without exception. Impure products desecrate both people and objects; we see that the prohibition extending on the entire community, just as circumcision was not always obligatory for the Egyptians

(probably common among priests), became the norm for Jews.

Common features can be observed between ancient Jewish religious practice and the attributes of Egyptian worship. For example, the cloths of Israeli priests were borrowed from the Egyptians, as well as the custom of using linen for priestly garments<sup>25</sup>. The episode, when Moses closes his luminous face with veil, is also a manifestation of traditional Egyptian religious practices. It is known that the Egyptian priests also covered their face with a veil in solemn moment of religious ceremonies in the temple or during the announcement of the prophecies<sup>26</sup>. It is possible that the portable sanctuaries of great Egyptian gods, which were carried by pharaohs during their military campaigns, could serve as a prototype for a portable temple<sup>27</sup>.

Jews, who lived in Egypt, used their funeral rites, as clearly stated in the Bible. Joseph was buried in Egypt and according to the Egyptian custom. Following formal burial rites seemed to be interconnected with the cult of Osiris. The Bible reflects the Egyptian views on the afterlife as well,

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25 Brugsh, G. (2000), *All about Egypt [Vse o Egipte]*, Zolotoi vek, Moscow, p. 65.

26 Kosidovskii, Z., "The Bible stories" ["Bibleiskie skazaniya"], available at: <http://www.philosophy.ru/library/bibl/skazaniya.html>

27 Brugsh, G. (2000), *All about Egypt [Vse o Egipte]*, Zolotoi vek, Moscow, p. 374.

in particular ideas about psychostasia. The biblical books repeatedly mention weighing as a method to estimate a soul (Job 31:6; Proverbs. 16: 2: "the LORD weighs the souls", 21: 2: "the LORD weighs the hearts").

### Conclusion

According to Karl Jaspers, the Egyptian culture belonged to the "old" man era, the time of great ancient cultures, and the ancient Hebrew culture prevailed in the era of the "axial age", when there was "a man of the type which has been preserved to this day"<sup>28</sup>. However, new cultures and peoples that appeared and rose on the waves of "axial age" are undoubtedly the offspring and only survived bearers of cultural antiquity. One such trail leads through an unprecedented monotheism of Moses, who was educated by Egyptian princess, to the long history of Egyptian wisdom, with the latter being much older than the period of the Jewish people existence.

The extent of the Egyptian culture's influence on the Hebrew one certainly is extensive and debated; it will be enriched by new archaeological data and analytical researches. However, due to the state of modern Egyptology and bibli-

cal studies one may confidently state that there are significant influences of Egyptian culture on the developing unique monotheistic culture of ancient Israel.

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## **Влияние египетской религии и культуры на картину мира ветхозаветного иудея**

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### **Аннотация**

Статья посвящена вопросам взаимодействия и взаимовлияния древнеегипетской и иудейской культур. Рассматривая предположительный период «египетского рабства» как ключевой момент взаимодействия культур, автор высказывает и подтверждает предположения о возможном влиянии египетской традиции на мифологию Ветхого Завета, монотеистическую идею, библейскую словесность, обряды и ритуалы древних евреев.

### **Ключевые слова**

Древний Египет, Ветхий Завет, иудаизм, монотеизм, Эхнатон, реформа, обычаи, мифология, Моисей.

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