

Chapter 5

The Practices of the Land of Egypt (Leviticus 18:3): Incest, ‘Anat, and Israel in the Egypt of Ramesses the Great

RICHARD C. STEINER

Yeshiva University

Even the most cursory survey of the scholarly literature on the Exodus from the early days of Egyptology down to the present reveals a striking change of focus. During the 19th century and a good part of the 20th, the major controversy surrounding the Exodus was its date.¹ Today, of course, it is the very historicity of the Exodus that is in question, since many Bible

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1. Older studies of this question (up to 1960) include: A. E. Haynes, "The Date of the Exodus I," *PEFQS* 28 (1896): 245–55; Claude Reignier Conder, "The Date of the Exodus II," *PEFQS* 28 (1896): 255–58; A. H. Sayce, "Who Was the Pharaoh of the Exodus?" *The Homiletic Review* 38 (1899): 483–87; Harold M. Wiener, "The Date of the Exodus," *BSac* 73 (1916): 454–80; J. W. Jack, *The Date of the Exodus in the Light of External Evidence* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1925); A. Lucas, "The Date of the Exodus," *PEQ* 73 (1941): 110–21; H. H. Rowley, "The Date of the Exodus," *PEQ* 73 (1941): 152–57; Etienne Drioton, "La date de l'Exode," in *La Bible et l'Orient: Travaux du premier Congrès d'archéologie et d'orientalisme bibliques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), 36–50; C. de Wit, *The Date and Route of the Exodus* (Tyndale Biblical Archaeology Lecture, 1959; London: Tyndale, 1960). For more recent discussion, see Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Date of the Exodus and the Conquest/Settlement: The Case for the 1100s," *VT* 42 (1992): 510–27; James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 122–26, 132–34; Carol A. Redmount, "Bitter Lives: Israel in and out of Egypt," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (ed. Michael D. Coogan; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 104–6; and Lawrence T. Geraty, "Exodus Dates and Theories," in *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text,*

scholars deny that the Israelites were in Egypt at all during the second millennium BCE.

A prooftext that has been central to both controversies is Exod 1:11b: וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לְפָרְעֹה אֶת־פִּתּוֹם וְאֶת־רַעַמְסֵס, “and they built store cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses.” Already in the middle of the 16th century, Gerardus Mercator, the great Flemish cartographer, wrote:

Armesesmiamum [Rameses Miamun], king of Egypt 66 years and 2 months. This is, without a doubt, the one who was zealous in oppressing the Children of Israel (Exod 1:8–11), because he is said to have died a long time after Moses’s flight from this same persecutor (Exod 2:23), which agrees with the great number of years in his reign; and also because the Children of Israel were forced to build Pithom and Rameses (Exod 1:11), one of which takes the name of the king, the founder, the other (of which), perhaps, (the name) of the queen.²

Having identified Rameses Miamun as the Pharaoh of the Oppression, Mercator naturally identified his successor, called Amenophis in one version of Manetho, as the Pharaoh of the Exodus.³

In the middle of the 19th century, Richard Lepsius pointed out that the Hebrew name of the city of Raamses is “exactly the same as that of King Ramses in hieroglyphics,” adding that “it is difficult to believe that this king’s name was given to a town before any King Ramses had reigned.”⁴ Like Mercator, he concluded that Rameses Miamun (*R^c-ms-mry-ⁱmn* = Rameses II) was the Pharaoh of the Oppression and that his successor, called Merenptah in Egyptian, was the Pharaoh of the Exodus.⁵ This conclusion was accepted by many other early Egyptologists as well as Bible scholars—especially after the discovery of Merenptah’s stela, which was often interpreted at the time as presenting some event of the Exodus from the Egyptian perspective.⁶ Indeed, according to the most recent survey, the

Archaeology, Culture and Geoscience (ed. Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider, and William H. C. Propp; Cham: Springer 2015), 55–64.

2. Gerardus Mercator, *Chronologia: Hoc est, temporum demonstratio exactissima, ab initio mundi, usque ad annum Domini M. D. LXVIII* (Cologne: Birckmann, 1569), 23. Credit for the identification of the Pharaoh of the Oppression with Rameses Miamun is sometimes given to James Ussher (e.g., most recently, in Geraty, “Exodus Dates,” 62, no. 5) or to Richard Lepsius (e.g., in Drioton, “La date,” 39), but see the reference to Mercator (without further details) in Ussher’s *Annales Veteris Testamenti, a prima mundi origine deducti* (London: Fleisher, 1650), 17–18; and in Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (London: Bvrrre, 1614), 206.

3. Mercator, *Chronologia*, 25–26.

4. Richard Lepsius, *Letters from Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Peninsula of Sinai: With Extracts from His Chronology of the Egyptians, with Reference to the Exodus of the Israelites* (trans. Leonora Horner and Joanna B. Horner; London: Bohn, 1853), 426.

5. *Ibid.*, 449–50.

6. See, for example, W. M. Flinders Petrie, “Egypt and Israel,” *Contemporary Review* 69 (1896): 625, view (e); Gaston Maspero, “Sur un monument égyptien portant le nom

view that the Exodus took place in the time of Ramesses II or Merenptah is the consensus view today as well, at least among those who accept its historicity.⁷

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Alan H. Gardiner looked into the possibility of a connection between the biblical city of Raamses and Pi-Ramesses (“House of Ramesses”), the new residential capital built by Ramesses II in the Delta.⁸ He concluded that, “whether or no the Bible narrative be strict history, . . . the Biblical Raamses-Rameses is identical with the Residence-city of Pi-Ra‘messe.”⁹ Moreover, “the Biblical town of Raamses-Rameses keeps alive a dim recollection of the very city where the Pharaohs of the Oppression and of the Exodus actually resided.”¹⁰ These conclusions agree with those of Lepsius.

Despite the agreement between these two giants, Donald B. Redford has challenged the identification of Raamses with Pi-Ramesses, in an attempt to show that Exod 1:11 tells a tale devoid of any historical basis—a tale fabricated by Jewish exiles in Egypt during the Saite or Persian Period.¹¹ Redford’s arguments against the identification have been rejected time and again by other Egyptologists,¹² but his dismissal of the biblical account

des Israélites,” *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (14 Juin, 1896): 1 (bot.); A. H. Sayce, “Light on the Pentateuch from Egyptology,” *The Homiletic Review* 32 (1896): 197–98, 199; Fritz Hommel, “Merenptah and the Israelites I,” *ExpTim* 8 (1896–97): 17; Édouard Naville, “Les dernières lignes de la stèle mentionnant les Israélites,” *Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l’archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes* n.s. 4 (1898): 37; Sayce, “Who Was the Pharaoh?” 483–87; Philippe Virey, “Note sur le pharaon Ménéphthah et les temps de l’Exode,” *RB* 9 (1900): 585; W. M. Flinders Petrie, *A History of Egypt: From the XIXth to the XXXth Dynasties* (London: Methuen, 1905), 115; S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), xxx; Hanbury Brown, “The Exodus Recorded on the Stele of Menephtah,” *JEA* 4 (1917): 19–20; C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges: With Introduction and Notes* (London: Rivingtons, 1918), civ. See also Rowley, “Date,” 157; and Drioton, “La date,” 39–40, with the bibliographical references cited there.

7. Geraty, “Exodus Dates,” 58–59, 62, no. 9. See also after n. 14 below.

8. Alan H. Gardiner, “The Delta Residence of the Ramessides,” *JEA* 5 (1918): 127–38, 242–71.

9. *Ibid.*, 266.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Donald B. Redford, “Exodus I 11,” *VT* 13 (1963): 408–13, 415–18; *idem*, “An Egyptological Perspective on the Exodus Narrative,” in *Egypt, Israel, Sinai: Archaeological and Historical Relationships in the Biblical Period* (ed. Anson F. Rainey; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1987), 138–39, 152; *idem*, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 260 n. 11; *idem*, “The Land of Ramesses,” in *Causing His Name to Live: Studies in Egyptian Epigraphy and History in Memory of William J. Murnane*, 1–3, <http://cassian.memphis.edu/history/murnane/Redford.pdf>.

12. Indeed, some of them had been preemptively refuted already by Gardiner, “Delta Residence,” 137–38, 261–70. See also Wolfgang Helck, “Tkw und die Ramses-Stadt,” *VT* 15 (1965): 40–47; Eric P. Uphill, *The Temples of Per Ramesses* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1984), 3; Manfred Bietak, “Comments on the ‘Exodus,’” in *Egypt, Israel, Sinai:*

continues to resonate with many Bible scholars¹³—in large part, I suspect, because of current skepticism about the Bible as a whole. It is difficult to argue with a *Zeitgeist*!

Be that as it may, it is undeniable that Redford's campaign has had unexpected consequences. It is surprisingly easy to find major scholars who accept Redford's conclusion concerning the Exodus but not his central argu-

Archaeological and Historical Relationships in the Biblical Period (ed. Anson F. Rainey; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1987), 167–68; Kenneth A. Kitchen, “Egyptians and Hebrews, from Ra’amses to Jericho,” in *The Origin of Early Israel—Current Debate: Biblical, Historical and Archaeological Perspectives* (ed. Shmuel Ahituv and Eliezer D. Oren; Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 1998), 67–72, 79–84, and passim; Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 117–19; Frank J. Yurco, “Merenptah’s Canaanite Campaign and Israel’s Origins,” in *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence* (ed. Ernest S. Frerichs and Leonard H. Lesko; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 27–55; Sarah I. Groll, “The Egyptian Background of the Exodus and the Crossing of the Reed Sea: A New Reading of Papyrus Anastasi VIII,” *Jerusalem Studies in Egyptology* (ed. Irene Shirun-Grumach; Ägypten und Altes Testament 40; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 189–90; and Manfred Bietak, “On the Historicity of the Exodus: What Egyptology Today Can Contribute to Assessing the Biblical Account of the Sojourn in Egypt,” in *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture and Geoscience* (ed. Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider, and William H. C. Propp; Cham: Springer, 2015), 24–26, 28–30 (including n. 53).

13. See, most recently, Lester L. Grabbe, “Exodus and History,” in *The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Craig A. Evans, and Joel N. Lohr; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 61–87; and Bernd U. Schipper, “Raamses, Pithom, and the Exodus: A Critical Evaluation of Ex 1:11,” *VT* 65 (2015): 265–88. Schipper attempts to prove that “a historical background for Ex 1:11 in the late 7th century Southern Levant seems to be likely” (*ibid.*, 281). His argument rests on the appearance in that verse of the term **מִצְרַיִם**. His assumption that this term (like another term in Exod 1:11) is an Akkadian loanword leads him to believe that it is out of place in the Ramessid period (*ibid.*, 278, 281). He concludes—based, in part, on the appearance of the word **מִצְרַיִם** in a Hebrew seal inscription dated on paleographic and iconographic grounds to the 7th century (Nahman Avigad, “The Chief of the Corvée,” *IEJ* 30 [1980]: 170–73)—that **מִצְרַיִם** is derived from an unattested Neo-Assyrian administrative term (Schipper, “Raamses,” 278–79, 281–82). It appears that Schipper overlooked Avigad’s discussion of Hebrew **מִצְרַיִם** and Akkadian *massu*: “The term *mas* was probably inherited from the Canaanites. . . . The term *massu* for corvée is found in the Alalakh texts of the Old Babylonian period and in the el-Amarna texts from the early fourteenth century B.C.E.” (Avigad, “Chief,” 172). In other words, the limited geographical and chronological distribution of the Akkadian term, immediately evident to anyone who looks it up in CAD or AHW, is hardly compatible with the assumption that Hebrew **מִצְרַיִם** is a Neo-Assyrian loanword. Moreover, it is well known that Neo-Assyrian *s* is rendered by **š** in Northwest Semitic loanwords; see, for example, Stephen A. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 140–41 including n. 13. Thus, even if Akkadian *massu* was still in use during the Neo-Assyrian Period, despite being unattested then, Hebrew **מִצְרַיִם** cannot have been derived from it. Grabbe (“Exodus and History,” 74) attempts to prove on phonetic grounds that “the Egyptian name Ramesses entered the Hebrew text no earlier than the eighth century BCE.” In a future publication, I hope to show that his linguistic analysis of the toponym is just as flawed as that of Redford.

ment—scholars who consider the Exodus story to be completely fictitious but do not hesitate to equate biblical Raamses with Pi-Ramesses.¹⁴ Given the intimate connection between that equation and the consensus date of the Exodus discussed above, it appears that even these scholars accept that date in some sense. In other words, these scholars seem to agree that the historicity of the biblical account should ideally be evaluated using evidence from the Nineteenth Dynasty—especially evidence from the reign of Ramesses II or his son—if at all possible.

One of the scholars in question, Lester L. Grabbe, has advocated a stricter standard, asserting that the Exodus narrative cannot be corroborated merely by showing that some—or even all—of its details fit what we know of the reign of Ramesses II from Egyptian sources:

Egyptological elements in the exodus narrative. Some have argued that elements within the text fit the period of Rameses II (Hoffmeier 1997), but this is not sufficient; one must show that they do not fit any other period in history.¹⁵

Grabbe has set the bar of proof very high—perhaps *unreasonably* high. Even so, there is evidence that meets his standard. One example that comes to mind is from Sarah I. Groll's discussion of the toponyms associated with the Exodus:

One should note . . . that although such toponyms also appear in later texts, it is to the best of my knowledge only in texts from the time of Ramesses II and Merenptah that several appear together in the same context. In particular, papyrus Anastasi III mentions *Pr-R* ^ϵ*mss-mry-Imm* (1.12), *p3-twef* (2.11) and *p3-b-r3* (3.4, Hebrew *pi-habîrôt* . . .) in the same model letter. It would indeed be a coincidence that a post-Exilic Judaeen scribe, in a story purported to have taken place in Ramesside Egypt, independently associated these same toponyms.¹⁶

Manfred Bietak cites Groll's observation approvingly and expands on it:

Groll (1998: 189) has . . . pointed out that it is the combination of the toponyms Pi-Ramesse, Pi-Atum, Tjeku, and Pa-Tjuf that occurs in Ramesside texts alone and not later. And it is important to stress that it is this very medley of toponyms that also appears in the Pentateuch. Moreover, Pi-Ramesse is absent from texts after the 20th Dynasty and resurfaces only after a lengthy

14. See, for example, William G. Dever, "Is There Any Archaeological Evidence for the Exodus?" in *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence* (ed. Ernest S. Frerichs and Leonard H. Lesko; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 70–71; Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 57–64; and Lester L. Grabbe, "From Merneptah to Shoshenq: If We Had Only the Bible . . ." in *Israel in Transition: From Late Bronze Age II to Iron IIA* (c. 1250–850 B.C.E.) (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008–10), 2.92.

15. *Ibid.*, 92. This is item no. 5 on Grabbe's list of issues involved with "the general question of the exodus." I have italicized the heading for clarity.

16. Groll, "Egyptian Background," 189.

absence, not until the third century BC. . . . This shows that the presence of the toponym Raamses in the Books of Genesis and Exodus must have been adopted from a tradition older than the Third Intermediate and Saïte Periods. The . . . changes in the physical and political landscape of the Eastern Delta, including new major centers and toponyms, were incorporated only later into the Bible (e.g., Psalm 78:12, 43), while the start of the itinerary in Exodus (13:17–18, 14:2) reflects the topographical conditions of the Ramesside Period.¹⁷

In this essay, I would like to point out another piece of evidence, previously overlooked, that satisfies Grabbe's requirement. It differs from other such evidence in that it is found in a legal context rather than a narrative one. The passage I have in mind is Lev 18:3: כַּמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבְּתֶם: "You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt, in which you dwelt, and you shall not copy the practices of the land of Canaan, to which I am taking you."¹⁸ This verse occurs in the introduction to a series of prohibitions against various sexual unions, especially incestuous ones. It characterizes these unions as "the practices of the land of Egypt" (as well as "the practices of the land of Canaan"). I shall argue below that this characterization should be understood as a description of the practices of Ramesses II and his children.

1. *Incest in Egypt*

We may begin with a problem raised by Baruch A. Levine in his commentary to Lev 18:3:

You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt . . . or of the land of Canaan. This statement is puzzling in a code dealing primarily with incest, since there is no explicit evidence that incest was widespread in Canaan or Egypt. At certain periods in the history of ancient Egypt, it was the custom among the royal class to encourage brother-sister marriages. This was not likely to be imitated by the common people of another culture. Some of the tangential prohibitions of chapter 18, however, such as homosexuality and bestiality, were apparently quite common in Canaanite culture.¹⁹

Levine does not cite his source, but he may have been relying on a classic article by Jaroslav Černý, which concluded that, during the Pharaonic Pe-

17. Bietak, "Historicity," 29–30.

18. The rendering "copy the practices of" is from the NJPS version. Others have "do as they do in." To capture the grammatical structure of the Hebrew, one might use "behave in accordance with the behavior of."

19. Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 118. In 1981, upon my arrival at the University of Chicago as a visiting professor, the brilliant and unforgettable Klaus Baer invited me into his office for a chat, and I took the opportunity to ask him about Lev 18:3. According to my recollection, he told me that incest was no more common in Egypt than anywhere else. The problem has gnawed at me ever since.

riod, “consanguineous marriages were possible, but could hardly be termed common” outside the Egyptian royal families.²⁰ More recent studies of consanguineous marriage in Egypt have done nothing to alleviate the problem noted by Levine. Indeed, if anything, they have exacerbated it. Paul John Frandsen, for example, stresses the rarity of brother-sister and father-daughter marriage before the Ptolemaic Period:

The sparse evidence adduced shows that during the Pharaonic Period consanguineous marriages were possible. Within the royal family the practice may have been more common than it was among commoners, but incestuous associations appear on the whole to have been rare until the Ptolemaic Period. When practised it was almost always a marriage between a half-brother and a half-sister. In the literature on the so-called Amarna Period (14th century BC) some scholars are of the opinion that there existed an incestuous relationship between king Akhenaten (Amenophis IV) and three of his daughters, even resulting in the birth of several small girls. Also Ramses II is believed to have married one of his daughters. Other interpretations of the evidence for such relationships have reached the conclusion that the union between the king and his daughters was a ritual one that did not imply any sexual relationship – or that the grandchildren of Akhenaten did not exist at all!²¹

Jaana Toivari-Viitala follows Frandsen in this area:

Marriage between close kin was no taboo in ancient Egypt, but the evidence for such couplings outside the royal family is meager (Frandsen 2009). . . .

Unions between fathers and daughters are occasionally mentioned within the royal family, but they appear not to have occurred among commoners. As sexual intercourse between parent and child is presented as a deterrent in the threat-formulae . . . , such unions were probably considered inappropriate, at least among non-royal persons (Frandsen 2009: 39–40, 43–44).²²

I suggest that there is a perfectly reasonable and simple solution to the problem raised by Levine. It will be noted that Ramesses II is one of only two pharaohs mentioned in Frandsen’s discussion. Ramesses II stands out in Russell Middleton’s survey of consanguineous royal marriages in pre-Ptolemaic Egypt as well.²³ Middleton connects Ramesses II—and only

20. Jaroslav Černý, “Consanguineous Marriages in Pharaonic Egypt,” *JEA* 40 (1954): 29.

21. Paul John Frandsen, *Incestuous and Close-Kin Marriage in Ancient Egypt and Persia: An Examination of the Evidence* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2009), 39. Cf. Johnson M. Kimuhu, *Leviticus: The Priestly Laws and Prohibitions from the Perspective of Ancient Near East and Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 122: “In conclusion, brother-sister marriages were rare in ancient Egypt until the Roman period, and even those rare cases are found in the royal families.”

22. Jaana Toivari-Viitala, “Marriage and Divorce,” in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2013), 6–7, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/68f6w5gw>.

23. Russell Middleton, “Brother-Sister and Father-Daughter Marriage in Ancient Egypt,” *American Sociological Review* 27 (1962): 604–5. This survey has been criticized on methodological grounds, but, when used with caution, it is still useful because more-recent surveys have concentrated on commoners in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods.

Ramesses II—to two types of consanguineous marriage, but even he does not do full justice to that king’s incestual prowess.

It is instructive to compare the list of Ramesses’s marriages with the list of forbidden unions in Leviticus 18. Ramesses II married his sister, Ḥenut-mi-rē^c (Lev 18:9),²⁴ and at least three of his daughters, Bint-ʿAnat, Meryet-Amūn, and Nebt-tawy (Lev 18:6 and/or 18:10).²⁵ According to Kitchen, at least one of these father-daughter marriages was consummated, for Bint-ʿAnat’s tomb bears a depiction of the daughter born of her union with Ramesses.²⁶ Moreover, the king married Bint-ʿAnat while he was married to Istnofret, her mother (Lev 18:17).²⁷ After the death of Ramesses, Bint-ʿAnat was involved in another incestuous union—this time with Ramesses’s successor, her brother, Merenptah.²⁸ In other words, Merenptah (identified as the Pharaoh of the Exodus by many early scholars)²⁹ married a woman who was both his sister (Lev 18:9) and the wife of his father (Lev 18:8).

All in all, Ramesses II and his children set a record for royal incest that probably stands to this day.³⁰ This is hardly the only record set by the king known today as Ramesses the Great. “Certainly in his building-works for

24. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant: The Life and Times of Ramesses II, King of Egypt* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1982), 98; Aidan Dodson and Dyan Hilton, *The Complete Royal Families of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 170.

25. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant*, 110–11; Dodson and Hilton, *Complete Royal Families*, 169, 170, 172. The father-daughter prohibition is not explicit in Leviticus; for possible explanations, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1527–30.

26. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant*, 110, 253; idem, *Ramesseid Inscriptions: Translations* (7 vols.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1994–), 2.603 (bot.). (I am indebted to Kitchen and Alan Millard for the latter reference.) Dodson and Hilton (*Complete Royal Families*, 169) are less certain about this.

27. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant*, 100.

28. Ibid., 110. Two Egyptian stelae prove that Bint-ʿAnat and Merenptah were full siblings, children of Ramesses II and Istnofret (ibid., 100; Dodson and Hilton, *Complete Royal Families*, 168–69). Thus, there is no need to wonder—as some have done—whether Egyptian kings ever married full sisters before the Ptolemaic Period. This evidence is not mentioned in Kimuhu’s recent survey of the literature on this question (*Leviticus*, 114, 119–20).

29. See nn. 3, 5–6 above.

30. Contrast Michael E. Habicht et al., “Body Height of Mummified Pharaohs Supports Historical Suggestions of Sibling Marriages,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 157 (2015): 521: “During the New Kingdom, consanguineous royal marriages, as reflected in their progeny, show a decreasing trend.” The authors found little evidence for such marriages in the Nineteenth Dynasty (ibid., 523), but that is because the only progeny of pharaohs whose height they were able to measure were themselves pharaohs. This is far from a random sample! In any event, if we wish to know whether the consanguineous marriages of Ramesses II were consummated, we cannot do so by examining the mummy of Merenptah. The latter, unlike many of his half-siblings, is not portrayed in the Egyptian monuments as the product of such a marriage.

the gods the entire length of Egypt and Nubia,” writes Kitchen, “Ramesses II surpassed not only the Eighteenth Dynasty but every other period in Egyptian history.”³¹ The builder of what was “probably the vastest and most costly royal residence ever erected by the hand of man” with a “palace and official centre cover[ing] an area of at least four square miles” and a “colossal assemblage” of temples “forming perhaps the largest collection of chapels built in the pre-classical world by a single ruler at one time”³² was clearly not one to be satisfied with half-measures.

2. 'Anat in Egypt

How are we to explain the spike in royal incest during—and immediately after—the time of Ramesses II? An answer to this question, while not strictly necessary for the purposes of the article, would reinforce the evidence adduced in §1. In this section, I would like to explore the possibility that the surge in pharaonic incest is related in some way to the simultaneous rise to prominence in Egypt of a foreign deity: the Cananite goddess 'Anat.

It has been claimed that “Anat . . . did not appear [in the Egyptian pantheon], according to the documents at our disposal, before the reign of Ramesses II.”³³ This claim is perhaps debatable, but it is certainly true that the fortunes of 'Anat in Egypt improved dramatically during the time of Ramesses II. Although sporadic mentions of this goddess can be found during the reigns of earlier kings (e.g., Horemheb and Seti I)³⁴ and later ones (e.g., Merenptah, Ramesses III and IV),³⁵ the evidence suggests that Ramesses II went far beyond other pharaohs in his devotion to her.³⁶ He made her “the mistress of the gods of Ramesses,”³⁷ and he took the

31. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant*, 225.

32. Uphill, *Temples*, 1. This is a description of Pi-Ramesses, the city that the Bible calls Raamses (Exod 1:11b).

33. Christiane Zivie-Coche, “Foreign Deities in Egypt,” *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2011), 2, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7tr1814c>.

34. Donald B. Redford, “New Light on the Asiatic Campaigning of Horemheb,” *BASOR* 211 (October, 1973): 37, 44 (Horemheb); Rainer Stadelmann, *Syrisch-palästinensische Gottheiten in Ägypten* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 94 (Seti I); Wolfgang Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (2nd ed.; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1971), 460 (Seti I).

35. Sakkie Cornelius, “The Egyptian Iconography of the Goddesses Anat and Astarte,” in *Les civilisations du bassin méditerranéen: Hommages à Joachim Šliwa* (ed. Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz and Janusz A. Ostrowski; Cracow: Université Jagellonne, 2000), 72 (Merenptah); Jean Leclant, “Anat,” *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), 1.254 (Ramesses III and IV).

36. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-palästinensische Gottheiten*, 91; cf. Leclant, “Anat,” 254; and Peggy L. Day, “Anat אַנַּת,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 40.

37. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-palästinensische Gottheiten*, 92; Leclant, “Anat,” 254.

unprecedented step of giving his oldest daughter a Canaanite name meaning “daughter of ‘Anat” (Bint-‘Anat).³⁸ When ‘Anat addresses the king in his inscriptions, she refers to herself as his mother, and to him as her beloved son.³⁹ There is no need to belabor the point. It suffices to quote Izak Cornelius’s characterization of Ramesses as an “Anatophile,” who was “obsessed” with the goddess.⁴⁰

‘Anat’s rise to prominence appears to have come at the expense of Nephthys, the original *sister and consort* of Seth (himself identified with the Canaanite god Ba‘l) in Egyptian mythology. Not surprisingly, it is during the Ramesside Period that we find ‘Anat (sometimes together with Astarte) seeming to usurp Nephthys’s traditional mythical roles.⁴¹ According to Jessica Lévai, there is a good reason for this:

It makes sense that the Ramessides would choose new wives for Seth, a god they held in high esteem. That this dynasty sought to honor Seth is evident from the names of a few of its kings: Sety, Sethnakht. The Hyksos brought in their foreign gods, and the Ramessides, who claimed descent from the

38. Richard C. Steiner, “Bittë-Yâ, Daughter of Pharaoh (1 Chr 4,18), and Bint(i)-‘Anat, Daughter of Ramesses II,” *Bib* 79 (1998): 394–408; 80 (1999): 152. See n. 50 below. In addition, Ramesses II allowed one of his sons to marry the daughter of a Syrian man who just happened to be called Bin-‘Anat, i.e., “son of ‘Anat” (Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant*, 111–12). This detail is never mentioned in discussions of Ramesses’s love affair with ‘Anat, but I find it difficult to believe that it is a mere coincidence. Another piece of evidence that may be relevant here is orthographic. Raphael Giveon (*The Impact of Egypt on Canaan* [OBO 20; Fribourg: Academic Press, 1978], 18) has called attention to the rearing-cobra sign (Gardiner I 12) used as a goddess determinative for the Canaanite (and biblical) toponym *Byt-‘nt* (i.e., “House/Temple of ‘Anat”) in an Egyptian topographical list. He does not mention, however, that this writing of the toponym is far from usual. According to J. Simons (*Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists Relating to Western Asia* [Leiden: Brill, 1937], 204), this toponym (usually appearing as *Bt-‘nt*) occurs in nine lists, of which four belong to Seti I (XIII 59; XIV 61; XV 23; XVI a, 3), four to Ramesses II (XIX 5 [note]; XX 16; XXI 8; XXIV 39), and one to Shoshenq I (XXXIV 124). The only list that uses the rearing-cobra sign with our toponym belongs to Ramesses II (XIX 5 [note]); most of the others use the three-hills sign (Gardiner N 25), the determinative for foreign territory that is ubiquitous in these lists. This striking usage may be a reflection of the increased visibility of the goddess ‘Anat during Ramesses’s reign.

39. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-palästinensische Gottheiten*, 91–93; cf. Leclant, “Anat,” 254; and Day, “Anat,” 40. One such inscription is found on a touching sculpture of ‘Anat seated at Ramesses’s side with her hand on his shoulder (Stadelmann, *Syrisch-palästinensische Gottheiten*, 92; Zivie-Coche, “Foreign Deities,” 4, fig. 2).

40. Izak Cornelius, *The Many Faces of the Goddess: The Iconography of the Syro-Palestinian Goddesses Anat, Astart, Qedesbet, and Asberah c. 1500–1000 BCE* (OBO 204; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2004), 85.

41. Jessica Lévai, “Anat for Nephthys: A Possible Substitution in the Documents of the Ramesside Period,” in *From the Banks of the Euphrates: Studies in Honor of Alice Louise Slotsky* (ed. Micah Ross; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 135–43.

Hyksos, would have wanted to incorporate their gods into the Egyptian pantheon.⁴²

The Hyksos, of course, were Asiatics, and 'Anat appears in the names of some of their princes.⁴³

This brings us back to our question: was there some connection between 'Anat and incest in the time of Ramesses? There are, in fact, a few hints in the historical record that may point to an affirmative answer. Some scholars believe that 'Anat was the *sister and consort* of Baʿl in Canaanite mythology,⁴⁴ and, as we have seen, there is evidence that 'Anat supplanted Nephthys as the *sister and consort* of Seth/Baʿl in Egyptian mythology. From the discussion of Mark S. Smith and Wayne T. Pitard, it is clear that the best evidence for 'Anat's being Baʿl's consort comes from Egypt.⁴⁵ This fact is quite important for our discussion. It should be obvious that, when it comes to explaining the behavior of an Egyptian monarch/god⁴⁶ who was obsessed with a Canaanite goddess, Egyptian beliefs about the goddess may well be more relevant than Ugaritic beliefs.

Even more relevant is the evidence from the inscriptions of Ramesses II himself. In one such inscription, 'Anat says to the king, "I gave birth to you as Seth, . . .," leading Rainer Stadelmann to ask whether her words imply that the king is her *son and consort*.⁴⁷ Ramesses's choice of the name Bint-'Anat

42. Ibid., 141.

43. W. F. Albright, "The Evolution of the West-Semitic Divinity 'An-'Anat-'Attā," *AJSL* 41 (1925): 83; Stadelmann, *Syrisch-palästinensische Gottheiten*, 20; Arvid S. Kapelrud, *The Violent Goddess: Anat in the Ras Shamra Texts* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969), 15–16; Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion* (trans. Ann E. Keep; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 238, 342 n. 33; Leclant, "Anat," 253, 255 n. 3. It is usually asserted that many if not all of the Hyksos were West Semites. In support of this assertion, we may note that whoever wrote 'nt(i) in the names of the Hyksos princes pronounced/heard a pharyngeal 'ayin in those names.

44. See, for example, the scholars mentioned in Kimuhu, *Leviticus*, 169–70. Others, however, believe that 'Anat was only the sister of Baʿl or only his consort. For a sample of the discussion, see Kapelrud, *Violent Goddess*, 40–44; J. van Dijk, "Anat, Seth and the Seed of Prē," in *Scripta Signa Vocis: Studies about Scripts, Scriptures, Scribes and Languages in the Near East, Presented to J. H. Hoppers by His Pupils, Colleagues and Friends* (ed. H. L. J. Vanstiphout et al.; Groningen: Forsten, 1986), 41; Neal H. Walls, *The Goddess Anat in Ugaritic Myth* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 89–94, 116–52, 154–56; and Mark S. Smith and Wayne T. Pitard, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle* (VTSup 55, 114; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1994–2009), 1.xxiii n. 6; 2.302–3.

45. Ibid., 2.303.

46. See n. 48 below.

47. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-palästinensische Gottheiten*, 93. Stadelmann (ibid., 94) raises and rejects the possibility that Ramesses served as 'Anat's consort in a *hieros gamos* ceremony in the temple that he built for her. Such a ceremony is now known to have been instituted for the goddess Nanai by an Aramaic-speaking community in Upper Egypt; see my article "The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script: The Liturgy of a New Year's Festival

(“daughter of ‘Anat”) for his oldest daughter may point in the same direction. It could be viewed as hinting that the king’s divine mother, ‘Anat, was also the mother of his child.⁴⁸ If so, we might consider adding mother-son marriage (Lev 18:7) to our list of Ramesses’s consanguineous unions.

Is it mere coincidence that a princess named after the Canaanite goddess ‘Anat was cast as the queen of incest in this pharaonic family drama? If it turns out that the incestuous embraces of Ramesses and his daughter Bint-‘Anat are somehow connected to his embrace of the Canaanite goddess ‘Anat, the juxtaposition of Egypt and Canaan in Lev 18:3 will take on a new and deeper meaning.

3. *Israel in Egypt*

In §1, we saw that the evidence for incest in pharaonic Egypt is—with one important exception—rather limited. What, then, does Lev 18:3 mean when it characterizes incestuous sexual unions as “the practices of the land of Egypt”? In my view, the answer is that this characterization does not refer to the practices of all strata of Egyptian society in every period. It refers, rather, to the consanguineous couplings of Ramesses II and his children. It is true that similar unions—usually brother-sister marriages and often assumed to involve half-siblings⁴⁹—occurred occasionally in other pharaonic families, but Ramesses went far beyond his predecessors and successors in his pursuit of them. No other pharaoh engaged in so many of the incestuous practices that Leviticus 18 prohibits. His prodigious attainments in this area, I would argue, left a lasting imprint on the collective psyche of the Israelites—an imprint second only to the one left by the trauma of being forced into a life of hard labor. Even the name of Bint-‘Anat, the leading lady in this Ramesside sexual saga, was preserved by the Israelites—albeit in a Judaized form and attached to a later Ramesside princess (1 Chr 4:18).⁵⁰

Imported from Bethel to Syene by Exiles from Rash,” *JAOS* 111 (1991): 362–63; and idem, “The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script,” in *The Context of Scripture* (ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr.; 3 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002), 1.309–27 (esp. pp. 310, 322, and—for a mention of ‘Anat in the text—314). However, that was much later, probably in the 4th century BCE.

48. Names of the form “daughter/son of DN” were fairly common among Semites (Steiner, “Bittë-Yâ,” 396–99), and ordinarily it would be unwise to read too much into them. But Ramesses was already a nominal king of Egypt when Bint-‘Anat was born (Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant*, 27, 39–40). He was (or was about to become) “*ex officio*,” as it were, one of the gods of Egypt” (ibid., 174). As such, his choice of a Canaanite name meaning “daughter of ‘Anat” can hardly be viewed as routine.

49. See at n. 21 above.

50. Steiner, “Bittë-Yâ.” See already Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman House, 1969), 27 n. 3: “[‘Bitya daughter of Pharaoh:’] A Hebraized analogue of the Canaanite name Bint-Anat, one of Ramses II’s daughters.”

It must be emphasized that Lev 18:3–18 does not *assert* that the land of Egypt was a hotbed of incest—it *presupposes* it.⁵¹ In other words, it presents it as something that Israelites would be expected to know. But why would the incestuous unions in the family of Ramesses II be a matter of common knowledge among the Israelites? Why would the Israelites be expected to know so much about the marriages of this particular pharaoh and his oldest daughter?

To my mind, the simplest, most straightforward answer is that the Israelites were in Egypt during Ramesses's reign. Many of them—especially if they worked in Ramesses's new residential capital—would have heard the title “King's Daughter and Royal Wife” used with reference to at least three of Ramesses's daughters: Bint-ʿAnat, Meryet-Amūn, and Nebt-tawy.⁵² This is particularly true of Bint-ʿAnat, who would have appeared alongside the king on public occasions during her reign as Chief Queen.⁵³ As for the king's special relationship with the Canaanite goddess ʿAnat, anyone working in Pi-Ramesses would have been aware of that as well, since ʿAnat “evidently even possessed in Pirameses a remarkable temple complex, in which two groups of statues, of ʿAnat and Ramses, were found.”⁵⁴ One of the groups is thought to have been displayed outside the temple, in front of a pylon.⁵⁵ In short, the impression made on the Israelites by the sexual practices of this monarch, even more than the impression made on them by his labor practices, testifies to their presence in Egypt in his time.

51. That is to say, the implication that Egypt outdid other lands in the area of incest remains even if we delete all occurrences of the negator 𐤀 in Lev 18:3–18.

52. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions: Translations*, 2.602 (bot.). Cf. also “King's Daughter, Great Royal Wife” used with reference to Bint-ʿAnat (*ibid.*, 603) and Meryet-Amūn (*ibid.*, 604).

53. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant*, 98, 100.

54. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-palästinensische Gottheiten*, 91. See further n. 39 above.

55. *Ibid.*