



ממצרים גאלתנו Egyptology and the Exodus

A. Introduction

- How important is the historical context of the Exodus?
- What is unique about Pharaoh and Egypt?
- And how can we bring this and other fun ideas to our seders?

1. Deuteronomy 6:21

“You shall say to your children: We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and God freed us from Egypt with a mighty hand”

ואמרת לבנך עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים
ויציאנו ה' ממצרים ביד חזקה

2. The Haggadah (At the start of the Maggid section, after the Four Questions)

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, But the Lord our God took us out from there, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. And if the Holy One, blessed be God, had not brought out our ancestors from Egypt, then we and our children, and our children's children, would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt...

עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים,
ויציאנו אדני אלקינו משם ביד
חזקה ובזרוע נטויה. ואלו לא הוציא
הקדוש ברוך הוא את אבותינו
ממצרים הרי אנו ובנינו ובני
בנינו... משעבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים...

3. Exodus 13:3

And Moshe said to the People: remember the day that you came out of Egypt, from the *House of Slaves*, because with a mighty hand God took you from this...

ויאמר משה אל העם זכור את היום הזה
אשר יצאתם ממצרים מבית עבדים כי
בחזק יד הוציא ה' אתכם מזה...

B. Torah and Talmudic references with a historical significance

4. Genesis 47:11

And Yosef provided abodes for his father and for his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in **the best of the land, in the land of Raamses**, as Pharaoh had commanded.

וישב יוסף את אביו ואת אחיו ויתן
להם אחזה בארץ מצרים, במיטב
הארץ בארץ רעמסס כאשר צוה
פרעה.

5. Exodus 1:11 (quoted in the Haggadah)

So they set over them taskmasters to afflict them with burdens. And they build for Pharaoh **treasure/store cities**, namely **Pitom** and **Raamses**.

וישימו עליו שרי מסים למען ענתו,
בסבלתם ויבנו ערי מסכנות לפרעה את
פתם ואת רעמסס.

6. Exodus 12:37

And the children of Israel journeyed from Raamses to Sukkot, about 600,000 men on foot, besides children.

ויסעו בני ישראל מרעמסס סכתה כשש
מאות אלף רגלי הגברים לבד משף.

7. Numbers 33:3-5

And they departed from **Raamses** in the first month, on the 15th day of the first month; on the morrow after the Passover the children of Israel went out with a high hand in the sight of all Egypt. And Egypt was burying all their firstborn, whom the Lord had smitten among them: upon their gods also the Lord executed judgments. And the children of Israel journeyed from **Raamses**, and pitched at Sukkot.

ג ויסעו מרעמסס בחדש הראשון,
בחמשה עשר יום לחדש הראשון:
ממחרת הפסח יצאו בני ישראל ביד
רמה לעיני כל מצרים. ד ומצרים
מקברים את אשר הכה ה' בהם כל בכור
ובאלהיהם עשה ה' שפטים. ה ויסעו בני
ישראל מרעמסס ויחנו בסכת.

8. Talmud - Sotah 11a

And they built for Pharaoh store cities [*miskenot*]: Rav and Shmuel differ in their interpretation, one said: They were so called because they endangered [*mesakkenot*] their owners, while the other said because they *impoverished* [*memaskenot*] their owners, for a master has declared that whoever occupies himself with building becomes impoverished.

“*Pitom and Raamses*” - Rav and Shmuel differ in their interpretation: one said, Its real name was Pitom, and why was it called Raamses? Because one building after another collapsed [*mitroses*]. The other said that its real name was Raamses, and why was it called Pitom? Because the mouth of the deep [*pi tehom*] swallowed up one building after another.

תלמוד בבלי - סוטה יא.
ויבן ערי מסכנות לפרעה - רב ושמואל, חד אמר: שמסכנות את בעליהן, וחי"א: שממסכנות את בעליהן, דאמר מר: כל העוסק בבנין מתמסכן.

(שמות א) את פיתום ואת רעמסס - רב ושמואל, חד אמר: פיתום שמה, ולמה נקרא שמה רעמסס? שראשון ראשון מתרוסס; וחד אמר: רעמסס שמה, ולמה נקרא שמה פיתום? שראשון ראשון פי תהום בולעו.

9. Ibn Ezra on Shemot 1:11

Raamses - The Gaon says that this is the name of a place called 'Eye of the sun'.

אבן עזרא הפירוש הקצר שמות א:יא
רעמסס. ויאמר הגאון שהוא שם מקום יקרא 'עין השמש':

C. Who was the Pharaoh of the Exodus?

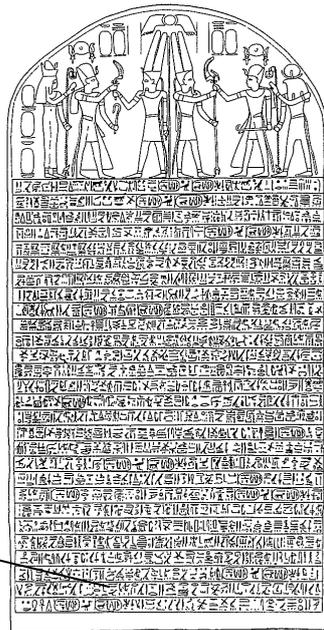
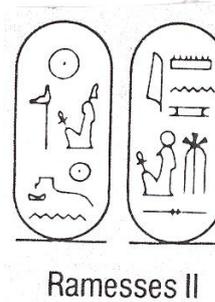
“Ramesses II, who reigned for over half a century, was one of the great kings of the 19th dynasty. He conducted many military campaigns in Western Asia, and carried out numerous building operations throughout Egypt. Among these he was active in completing a royal residence begun in the east Delta by his father Sthos I, which he named *Per-Ramesses*, 'House of Ramesses', in his honour. This building work appears to correspond to that involving the Israelites during the 'oppression' (Exodus 1:8-11). Coupled with the evidence of the Merneptah Stela (which implies that the Israelites were a wandering group in Palestine c.1208BCE, with a possible Exodus in the 13th century BCE), **this suggests Ramesses II as a possible Pharaoh of the Exodus.** This matter is still debated however...”

(*Bible in the British Museum: Interpreting the Evidence*, p.41, T.C. Mitchell, 1988)

Era of Ancient Egypt*	Approx. Yrs (BCE)	Bible (based on traditional sources)
Foundation of Egyptian state	c.3050	The ten generations from Adam to Noah (starts 3760 BCE)
Early Dynastic period	2920-2575	
Old Kingdom	2575-2134	
1 st Intermediate Period	2134-2040	
Middle Kingdom	2040-1640	Abraham
2 nd Intermediate Period	1640-1532	Isaac
New Kingdom [18 th - 20 th Egyptian Dynasties]	1550-1070	Joseph, Jacob Moses and Exodus (1312 BCE) Joshua, Judges
3 rd Intermediate Kingdom	1070-712	First kings of Israel
Late Period	712-343	Southern Kingdom exiled 586BCE

Egyptian kings of the 19 th dynasty	Approx. Yrs (BCE)
Ramesses I	1307-1306
Sethos I	1306-1290
Ramesses II	1290-1224
Merneptah	1224-1214
Sethos II	1214-1204
Siptah	1204-1198
Twosre	1198-1196

p.36, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, J. Baines & J. Malek, Equinox (Oxford), 1984



The name Israel:
Line 27, reading
from right to left



isrir = isril = Isra'el

Are Israelites mentioned in ancient Egyptian texts?

**The Merneptah Stela
(Granite, Thebes, Cairo Museum)**

From the end of the text:

*The princes are prostrate, saying: "Mercy!"
Not one raises his head among the Nine Bows.
Desolation is for Tehenu; Hatti is pacified;
Plundered is the Canaan with every evil;
Carried off is Ashkelon; seized upon is Gezer;
Yanoam is made as that which does not exist;
Israel is laid waste, his seed is not;
Hurru is become a widow for Egypt!
All lands together, they are pacified;
Everyone who was restless, he has been bound
By the King of Upper and Lower Egypt....*

D. The gods of Egypt

10. The Haggadah: In Maggid:

As it is written: "And I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night; I will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from human to beast; and upon all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments; I am God." (Exodus 12:12).

11. Talmud - Nedarim 25a

Idols too are called 'god', as it is written, "And against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment." (Exodus 12:12)

12. Midrash Rabbah - Leviticus 22:8

Israel were passionate followers after idolatry in Egypt... the Holy One, blessed be God, said: Let them offer their offerings to Me at all times in the Tent of Meeting, and thus they will be separated from idolatry and be saved from punishment.

13. Zohar, Vayikra III 50b

The houses of Egypt were full of magic and idolatry.

שנאמר: "וְעִבְרַתִּי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
בְּלִלְתָּהּ הַזֶּה, וְהַפִּיתִי כָּל בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם, מֵאָדָם וְעַד בְּהֵמָה, וּבְכָל
אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׁפָטִים אֲנִי
ה'":

עבודת כוכבים איקרי אלוה, דכתיב: (שמות
יב) ובכל אלהי מצרים וגוי.

ויקרא רבה – כב:ח

...היו ישראל להוטים אחר עבודת
כוכבים במצרים... אמר הקב"ה יהו
מקריבין לפני בכל עת קרבנותיהן
באהל מועד והן נפרשים מעבודת
כוכבים והם ניצולים.

14. Midrash – Devarim Rabbah 3:17

Moshe spoke to God after Israel had done that deed (Golden calf!) He said to God, ‘Do You not know from where You brought them out? Was it not from Egypt, from the **place of idolatry**?’

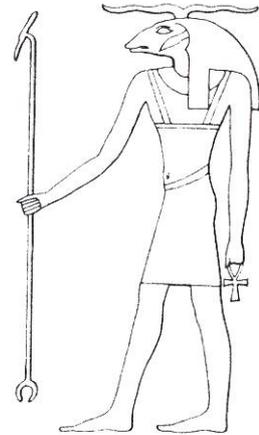
דברים רבה – ג:יז
אמר משה להקב"ה בשעה שבאו לידי אותו מעשה א"ל אי אתה יודע מאיזה מקום הוצאת אותם ממצרים **ממקום עבודת כוכבים**

15. Midrash Rabbah - Exodus 6:5

“...the Children of Israel did not listen to Moshe because of their shortness of spirit” (Exodus 6:9). – It was so difficult for them to abandon idol worship.

16. Midrash – Shemot Rabbah 16:2

You will find that when Israel were in Egypt they served idols which they were reluctant to abandon... God then said to Moses: As long as Israel worship Egyptian gods, they will not be redeemed; go and tell them to abandon their evil ways and to reject idolatry. This is what is meant by: **מִשְׁכוּ וּקְחוּ לָכֶם צֹאן** “Draw out, and take lambs for yourselves” (Exodus 12:21) – i.e. draw your hands away from idolatry and take for yourselves lambs, thereby slaying the gods of Egypt and preparing the Passover; only through this will the Lord pass over you...



17. Ancient Egypt, L. Casson, Time Life Books, 1965, p.71-72

Khnum, one of the gods associated with Creation, was portrayed as a ram, an animal the Egyptians considered unusually prolific.... Khnum assumed a human body but retained the head of a ram; and when he did, the myth surrounding his role in Creation had him fashioning men (and every baby still to be born) on a potter's wheel.



Ram-headed deity, 18th Dynasty (in British Museum).

Perhaps from the Valley of the Kings; a pair of horns was originally on its head.

E. The Hebrew Midwives and the Haggadah

18. The Haggadah, In *Maggid*:

“great, mighty” – as it is written,

“The children of Israel were fertile and had large families. They became very, very great in number and might, and the land became filled with them.” (Exodus 1:7)

“and many” – as it is written,

“I made you as the plants of the field. You became many and grew, and became mature. Your breasts were full, your hair was grown, but you were naked and bare.” (Ezekiel 16:7).

“And I passed over you and I saw you downtrodden in your blood and I said to you, ‘through your blood you shall live’; and I said to you, ‘through your blood you shall live’.” (Ezekiel 16:6)

גְּדוֹל עָצוֹם – כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר,
וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פְּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ
וַיַּעֲצְמוּ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד וַתִּמְלֵא
הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם:

רַב - כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר,
רַבְּבָה כְּצִמַח הַשָּׂדֶה נִתְתִּיף
וַתִּרְבֵּי וַתִּגְדְּלִי וַתִּבְאֵי בְּעַדֵּי
עֵדָיִם שְׂדֵיִם נִלְנוּ וַשְּׁעָרַי צִמַּח
וְאֶת עָרְס וְעָרְיָה:
וְאֶעְבֵּר עָלֶיךָ וְאֶרְאֶךָ מִתְּבוֹסֶסֶת
בְּדַמֶּיךָ וְאֶמַּר לָךְ בְּדַמֶּיךָ חַיִּי
וְאֶמַּר לָךְ בְּדַמֶּיךָ חַיִּי:

- The great numbers intimidated Pharaoh but then the Haggadah then seems to go off the subject and get into physical maturity and bloodiness.
- Why are the Ezekiel verses reversed? And why is the end repeated?

19. Exodus 1:11-22

(11) Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. (12) But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were mortified because of the people of Israel. (13) And the Egyptians made the people of Israel serve with rigor; (14) And they made their lives bitter with hard slavery, in mortar, and in brick, and in all kinds of service in the field; all their service, which they made them serve, was with rigour. (15) And the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew **midwives**, and the name of one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah; (16) And he said, When you do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the birth-stools; if it is a son, then you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live. (17) But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive. (18) And the king of Egypt called for the **midwives**, and said to them, Why have you done this thing, and have saved the male children alive? (19) And the **midwives** said to Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and deliver before the **midwives** come to them. (20) Therefore God dealt well with the **midwives**; and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. (21) And it came to pass, because the **midwives** feared God, that he made them houses. (22) And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son who is born you shall throw into the river, and every daughter you shall let live.

יא וַיִּשְׂמוּ עָלָיו שָׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן
עַנּוֹתוֹ בְּסַבְלָתָם וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכָּנוֹת
לְפָרְעֹה אֵת פִּתּוֹם וְאֵת רַעַמְסֵס׃ יב
וְכַאֲשֶׁר יֵעָנּוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ
וַיִּקְצֹוּ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ יג וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ
מִצְרַיִם אֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרֶךְ׃ יד
וַיִּמְרֹרוּ אֵת חַיֵּיהֶם בְּעַבְדָּה קָשָׁה
בְּחֹמֶר וּבִלְבָנִים וּבְכָל עֲבָדָה בְּשָׂדֵה
אֵת כָּל עֲבַדְתָּם אֲשֶׁר עָבְדוּ בָהֶם
בְּפָרֶךְ׃ טו וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
לְמִילֵדוֹת הָעִבְרִית אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הָאֵחָת
שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה׃ טז וַיֹּאמֶר
בְּיַלְדֹכֶן אֵת הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וּרְאִיתֶן עַל
הָאֲבָנִים אִם בֵּן הוּא וְהַמַּתְּן אֹתוֹ
וְאִם בַּת הוּא וְחִיָּה׃ יז וַתִּירָאנָּה
הַמִּילֵדוֹת אֵת הָאֱלֹקִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ
כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵיהֶן מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
וַתַּחֲיִין אֵת הַיְלָדִים׃ יח וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ
מִצְרַיִם לְמִילֵדוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן מַדּוּעַ
עָשִׂיתֶן הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַתַּחֲיִין אֵת
הַיְלָדִים׃ יט וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה הַמִּילֵדוֹת אֶל
פָּרְעֹה כִּי לֹא כְנָשִׁים הַמִּצְרִית
הָעִבְרִית כִּי חַיּוֹת הֵנָּה בְּטָרֶם תָּבוֹא
אֲלֵהֶן הַמִּילֵדוֹת וַיִּלְדוּ׃ כ וַיִּיטֹב
אֲלֵהֶם לְמִילֵדוֹת וַיִּרְבֶּה הָעָם וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ
מְאֹד׃ כא וַיְהִי כִּי יִרְאוּ הַמִּילֵדוֹת אֵת
הָאֱלֹקִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בְּתִים׃ כב וַיִּצְוֶה
פָּרְעֹה לְכָל עַמּוֹ לֵאמֹר כָּל בֶּן־הַיְלֹד
הַיְאָרָה תִּשְׁלִיכֶהוּ וְכָל הַבַּת תַּחֲיִין׃

Analysis

- Pharaoh has a two-pronged approach: labour and labour
- Two treasure cities, two midwives
- Notice similarity in Hebrew of *bricks, stools* and *son*
- Seven-time repetition of *midwives*
- *Liveliness* is what distinguishes Egyptians from Hebrews
- Six time repetition of the *life* motif
- God responds to Pharaoh independently.

Questions

- So were Hebrew boys killed? It seems they were. The next chapter confirms it.
- Plan B worked by expanding the command – Hitler's willing executioners
- Why is this mass-execution so unclear in the text? Surely this moral outrage is what justifies the tenth plague?

20. Midrash – Shemot Rabbah 1:14

“And he said, When you do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women...” (Exodus 1:16) – Why did Pharaoh command to kill them at the hand of the midwives? So that God should not demand the penalty from them [the Egyptians], and punish them.

“...and see them upon the birth-stools [ha'avnaim]” (Exodus 1:16) – the place in which the child is released.

Another explanation of the word *ha'avnaim*, said R. Yehuda ben Shimon, is that God makes the limbs of a woman as hard as stones (*avanim*) when she sits on the birth-stool, for otherwise she would die.

R. Pinchas, the Haver, said in the name of R. Yonah: This supports R. Yehuda ben Shimon [who maintains] that the word *avnaim* means a block, which is a hard object; as it is written, “Then I went down to the potter’s house, and, behold, he was at his work on the wheels [ha'avnaim]” (Jeremiah 18:3).

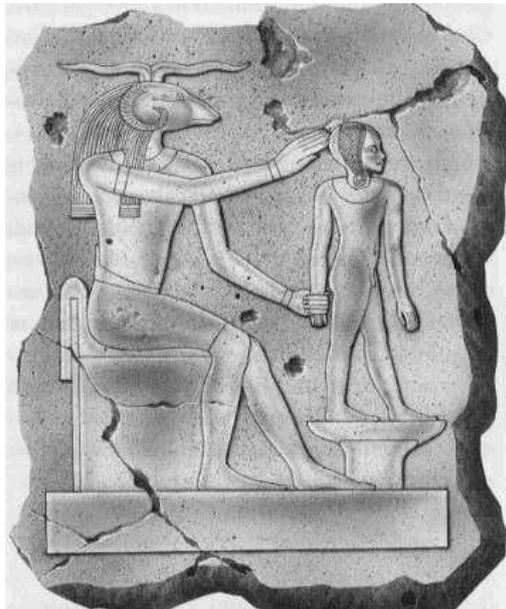
R. Chanina said that he gave them an impressive sign; for just as the potter sits with one leg on each side of the block [mould], so also a woman has one leg on each side and the child between them.

Others say, that when she stoops to give birth, her thighs grow cold like stones.

“...if it is a son, then you shall kill him” (Exodus 1:16) – He told them: ‘If it be a male child, slay it. If, however, a female child, do not slay it, but if it lives, let it live, and if it dies, it dies.’

They then said to him, ‘How are we to know if it be male or female?’ R. Chanina said that he gave them a clear sign; if its face be turned downward, know you that it is a male, because he is looking through his mother at the earth from which he is created; but if its face is turned upward, then it is a female, because it is looking at the source of its creation - the rib; as it is said, “And God took one of his ribs” (Genesis 2:21).

God thereupon said to him [Pharaoh], ‘O wicked one! He who gave you this advice is an idiot. You ought rather to slay the females, for if there be no females, how will the males be able to marry? One woman cannot marry two men, but one man can marry ten or a hundred!’



שמות רבה – א:יד

ויאמר בילדכן את העבריות, למה צוה להרוג אותם על ידי המילדות, כדי שלא יתבע הקב"ה ממנו ויפרע מהן, וראיתן על האבנים, מקום שהולד נפנה בו,

ד"א האבנים א"ר יהודה בר סימון שהקב"ה עושה אבריה של אשה קשה כאבנים בשעה שיושבת על המשבר לילד, שאלולי כן מתה,

ור' פנחס החבר אומר בשם ר' יונה מסייע ליה לרבי יהודה בר סימון אין אבנים אלא סדן שהוא דבר קשה, דכתיב (ירמיה יח) וארד בית היוצר והנה הוא עושה מלאכה על האבנים,

א"ר חנן סימן גדול מסר להם מה יוצר זה ירך מכאן וירך מכאן וסדן באמצע, אף אשה ירך מכאן וירך מכאן וולד באמצע, ואית דאמרי בשעה שכורעת לילד יריכותיה מצטננות כאבנים,

אם בן הוא והמתן אותו, אמר להם אם זכר הרגו אותו, ואם נקבה אל תהרגו אותה, אלא אם חיתה חיתה ואם מתה מתה,

אמרו לו מהיכן נדע אם זכר אם נקבה, א"ר חנינא סימן גדול מסר להם אם פניו למטה דעו שהוא זכר שמביט באמו בארץ שממנה נברא, וכשהוא פניו למעלה היא נקבה, שמבטת בברייתה בצלע, שנאמר (בראשית ב) ויקח אחת מצלעותיו,

אמר לו הקב"ה, רשע מי שנתן העצה הזאת טפש הוא, היה לך להרוג את הנקבות אם אין נקבות זכרים מהיכן ישאו נשים, אשה אחת אינה יכולה ליטול שני אנשים אבל איש אחד יכול ליטול עשר נשים או מאה...

Life in Ancient Egypt
(Strouhal, CUP, 1992 p.16-18)

We now come to the actual delivery, and here the medical papyri are almost totally silent. Evidently this matter was left to the midwife, being regarded as an abnormal event outside the purview of medical science, possible complications apart.

Not even in ancient Egypt, however, could childbirth proceed without pain. "One day Ruddjedet felt sick and suffered severe birth-pangs", we read in the early New Kingdom Westcar Papyrus, telling the story of the wife of a priest of Re. And a prayer to the god Amun includes the plea:....hasten hither like the north wind, for she has come to full term. She is racked with pain; her time is due." ...

Before the delivery the mother would usually move into a "childbed arbour", a light structure of poles and greenery set up in the corner of the garden or courtyard, or on the roof of her house. Here she would remain until the purification was over.

Most of our information about childbirth procedures is gleaned from illustrations, notably reliefs in the *mammisis* erected in the vicinity of major temples and consecrated to the mystery of the union of queen and god from which the king in question had issued. One lost relief from Armant, known from drawing made by early excavators, showed the naked Cleopatra kneeling in childbirth – a posture adopted by Egyptian country women to this day. The three women standing behind her are clearly tutelary goddesses, with Neith to the fore; the third goddess is holding the life-symbol *ankh*. Three more women kneel in front of her, the first, who holds the baby, being evidently the midwife, the second apparently a wet-nurse and the third yet another assistant. The hieroglyph *mesi*, "giving birth", itself represents a woman kneeling for the event.

An alternative posture for childbirth, less frequent according to some investigators, was to squat over two large bricks with a gap between them. A relief in Cairo Museum shows a woman sitting inside a brick structure with her hands on her knees and her elbows and forearms resting on the edge. This simple birth-stool is mentioned in texts and the position also appears as one of the hieroglyphic symbols for "birth".

Deliveries are usually portrayed in the normal advanced stage where the head and arms have

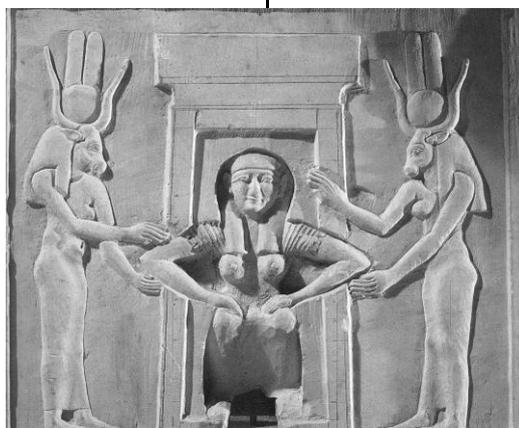
emerged first. According to the Westcar Papyrus the umbilical cord was not cut till the baby had been cleaned and bathed and the afterbirth placenta called *kh*, had appeared. There are no references to the navel being bandaged. Separation was evidently carried out only when the umbilical circulation had ceased. Cord and afterbirth both had magical associations and were thought to be invested by a spiritual *alter ego* or double of the child. They were sometimes dried and preserved to accompany the individual even to the grave.



[Above: Part of an inscription from a temple wall... showing a woman giving birth while kneeling on two bricks. This stylised presentation forms the hieroglyph denoting child-bearing. Graeco-Roman Period. (London, British Museum).]

Few midwives received special training such as was given in the celebrated House of Life at Sais in the Delta. The literature accords them the epithet "sweet". The infant is described as slipping smoothly into the hands of one such, while another supports the mother from behind. Not every midwife had the skill or knowledge needed for her task and obstetric ignorance or carelessness must have cost many a mother her health or even her life. The vocation was considered "unclean" and held in low esteem.

Doctors seem never to have specialised in obstetrics or gynaecology and were only called in when complication had arisen. To bring on labour it was recommended in the Ebers medical papyrus that the mother should sit naked on a *niaia* plant and await results. A compress round the lower half of the abdomen, with a layer of straw and needs beneath it, was thought to speed up a sluggish delivery by "freeing the child from the womb". Discharge of the caul and placenta was supposedly facilitated by a douche of warm oil containing crushed chips of a freshly made vase. Doctors sought to assuage labour pains, often described as very intense, by giving the patient intoxicating drinks, mostly beer.



[Above: A squatting woman giving birth, assisted by two goddesses Hathor who, with Taweret, was invoked during childbearing. Relief from temple of Hathor at Dendera. Ptolemaic. (Cairo, Egyptian Museum).]

Comments

- Power in Egypt was masculine & hierarchical, but God recognised the female commitment to life...
- So we see that the battle raged on two different levels:

Battle:	External	Internal
Gender:	Masculine	Feminine
Key characters:	Pharaoh and Moshe	The unnamed women
Actions of characters:	<i>Stop the threat:</i> Slavery, killing the boys, refusal of Exodus	<i>Live your beliefs:</i> Women committed to life, Children of Israel cry out to God
Divine reactions:	<i>Public miracles:</i> Ten plagues, splitting of the Sea	<i>Private miracles:</i> Houses for the midwives, responding to the covenant
Nation:	Egypt	Israel
Ultimate power:	Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt	The Holy One, Blessed be God
C.f. Literature and cinematic parallels:	<i>The Big Battle:</i> Aragon & Co. vs. Sauron's armies, Destroying the death star	<i>The Personal Struggle:</i> Frodo and the Ring, Luke and his father

- That is why the end of Exodus 1 is so mute about the mass-execution.
- It is *not* the essential story!
- The movie, 'Prince of Egypt' understands this and so the importance of the mass-execution (external) is on the development of Moshe's conscience (internal).

The two bloods?

- They parallel the double dip:
- Which parallels the beginning and end of the story:
 - (a) Yosef sold into slavery – coat dipped in blood (Genesis 37:31)
 - (b) Death of the firstborn – hyssop dipped in blood (Exodus 12:22)
- These are the two bloods.
- Again, these are internal vs. external issues:
 - (a) The ability of Yosef and his brothers to rebuild their relationship after everything
 - (b) The conquering of Egyptian power – kill the son of a 'god', and everyone else's.

Numbers 33:3-5

And they departed from Raamses in the first month, on the 15th day of the first month; on the morrow after the Passover the children of Israel went out with a high hand in the sight of all Egypt. And Egypt was burying all their firstborn, whom the Lord had smitten among them: upon their gods also the Lord executed judgments. And the children of Israel journeyed from Raamses, and pitched at Sukkot.

ג ויסעו מרעמסס בחדש הראשון, בחמשה עשר יום לחדש הראשון: ממחרת הפסח יצאו בני ישראל ביד רמה לעיני כל מצרים. ד ומצרים מקברים את אשר הנה ה' בהם כל בכור ויבאליהם עשה ה' שפטים. ה ויסעו בני ישראל מרעמסס ויחנו בסכות.

רש"י במדבר לג:ד
ומצרים מקברים - טרודים באבלם:

And the reversal of the Ezekiel verses?

- Feminine maturity precedes both external and internal struggles.
- In Egypt we must grow up, in every sense... This is the birth of a nation, literally!

Four Practical Seder ideas:

1. Have a sofa Seder

- Why sit at the dining room table for five hours *not* dining?
- Do your Seder in the lounge and then just move to the table for the meal.
- Pillows and throws will ensure everyone is comfortable
- Side tables can be used to hold wine glasses and bottles
- And your coffee table can become the centre-piece Seder plate.
- *Ma Nishtana* ends with, '... but on this night we recline' - The Talmud (Pesachim 108a) tells us that lying on your back is going too far, but surely a soft sofa is more in the spirit than an upright chair?
- Children (and adults) may drop off for a surreptitious nap and then re-engage later without disturbance
- Pesach is *Zman Cherutainu*, the 'Moment of our Freedom', and that freedom is symbolised by reclining; we are being encouraged to *ditch the formality* of the dinner table and take a more relaxed approach: at ease and comfortable

2. Dip all night long

- Early in the proceedings we dip the *Karpas* vegetable in saltwater and make the blessing: Following many rabbinic opinions, this tantalising little appetizer is all we eat until the *matzah* than opens the meal.
- However, some have the ancient custom of eating crudités, with a whole host of different tangy dips, throughout the reciting of the Haggadah – not so much as to ruin your appetite for the meal, but enough to stop you yearning for it
- You could also give treats to the children as rewards for a clear *Ma Nishtana*, asking their own questions, or correctly answering some simple Pesach-related teasers you have thought up
- Vegetables and sweets are foods that do not require *Birkat HaMazon* (Grace after Meals) so they are fine to eat before the meal, although you should add the *Boreh Nefashot* after-food blessing if you do

3. English-Egyptian-Hebrew seating cards or your guests

- Use a hieroglyphics translator from the web
- Write out the names of your guests in English and also in hieroglyphics on the outside, and their Hebrew names on the inside
- At the beginning of the Seder tell them that when they feel they have personally 'left Egypt', then they should turn over their cards
- Children can have a fun afternoon before the Seder making all of these!
- You could also print out a crib sheet

4. Make an edible Egypt scene

- This is fun to do and can be a centre piece on your dining or coffee table
- Pyramids of *charoset* - a mixture of apples, nuts and wine - Add date paste or crushed almonds to ensure your pyramids don't collapse
- Palm trees of parsley & spring onions - Bathe the spring onions in water to make their ends curl
- Sand dunes of *matzah* meal or desiccated coconut - Be honest, we always buy more of this stuff that we really need
- You can even make a river of blood by folding foil into a trough and adding red wine!