Some Rabbis knew popular Greek literature as well as their Homer. Some also knew about the death through entombment of the Egyptian and Hellenistic deity Osiris. Meanwhile, we must be careful not to confuse the few Greco-Roman texts preserved today with the plethora of written and oral traditions that once were circulating—unless the evidence suggests it. I shall argue here that the retellings of Moses’ discovery of Yosef’s bones in Exodus in light of the Osiris myth found in the Tosefta and in the Samaritan text Tevat Marqe (further TM) is based on a source that reads a passage in the Moralia (356 A 9–358 B 8) of Plutarch (ca. 40–ca. 120 CE). Later rabbinic variants of the myth do not show familiarity with this text.

In Gen. 50:26, Yosef receives an oath from the Israelites to take his (embalmed) remains with them upon leaving Egypt. This oath is recalled when Moses takes the bones during the Exodus (Ex. 13:19). The laconic

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1 My sincere gratitude to Rachel Neis for her invaluable suggestions and corrections, and to Menahem Kister who twice encouraged me to pursue this study. All translations in this paper are my own.


3 For further bibliography on this understudied text, cf. A.D. Crown, R. Pummer and A. Tal, eds, A Companion to Samaritan Studies, Tübingen 1993, 235ff. and Z. Ben Hayyim’s introduction in Tibat Marqe, A Collection of Samaritan Midrashim, Jerusalem 1988. Based on the language, the pertinent portion of the text that covers the Exodus has been dated by Ben Hayyim to roughly the same time as the Palestinian Talmud (Cf. ibid., p. v and 15-26). Marqua collected materials from earlier times, he himself lived in the third to fourth centuries, thus more or less contemporary to the time of the Tosefta and the Mekhilta.

4 For a list of parallels cf. Lieberman, Tosefta Kifshuta, ad loc.

biblical language is embellished in several rabbinic re-imaginings of the incident. Tosefta Sota 4.7, together with its close parallel in the roughly contemporary *petichta* of Mekhilta Beshallah, is the oldest rabbinic version. The passage under discussion and its larger context are structured almost exactly alike in Tosefta and Mekhilta. Nothing suggests that one text depends on the other; rather, they are probably based on a common source. Since both are written in mishnaic Hebrew and display similar sentence structures while their respective wording is congruent only rarely, I propose a Semitic, most likely an Aramaic source. I will focus on the following version of the Tosefta from the Venice Manuscript.

Whence did Moses know where Yosef was buried? They said Serah Bat Asher was in that generation.
And she went and told to Moses: ‘In the river Nile Yosef is buried’ Since Egypt made him spits of metal and joined them with tin (םהרבא של גבעת) And Moses went and stood at the river Nile and said: ‘Yosef, Yosef, the hour has come that the Holy One, Blessed be He, delivers Israel, For the Shekhinah is waiting for you and Israel is waiting for you And the Clouds of Honour are waiting for you, If you reveal yourself – good, and if not – we have fulfilled the oath that you made our fathers swear’ The coffin of Yosef floated and Moses took it and went with it.

The story is preceded by praise of Moses, and followed by an *a minoris ad majus* comparison with the iron ax that Elisha let float, and a second version that has Yosef buried in the kings’ tombs. The two competing

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2. Both texts contain small expansions *vis-à-vis* each. These expansions, however, can all be traced to inner parallelisms and repetitions.
4. She had lived from the time of Yosef to the time of Moses. The role of Serah Bat Asher has been treated in depth by J. Heineman, *Aggadot ve-Toldotehen*, Jerusalem 1974, 49-219.
5. The Mekhilta (ibid.) explicates what follows from the context in the Tosefta: Egypt made him a metal chest and drowned it in the Nile.