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Contested Kingship: Joseph, Jehoiachin, and Judah in Genesis 49

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Genesis 49 contains several of the Hebrew Bible's most puzzling textual and interpretive difficulties, concentrated in the verses concerning Judah (Gen 49:8–12) and Joseph (Gen 49:22–26). The aim of this article is not to dispel these difficulties completely, but to identify their primary cause and to clarify some of their implications. It argues that the concentration of the chapter's problems in Gen 49:8–12,22–26 points to conflict between Judah and Joseph as their underlying cause; more specifically, it argues that this is primarily a contest over legitimate kingship. Previous commentators have concluded that indications of a struggle between Judah and Joseph in the wider novella reflect a dispute between the northern and southern kingdoms or their successor provinces, but a number of features in these verses, as well as a wider awareness of identity concerns prominent in the sixth century BCE, point more compellingly to the text's function as a proxy for disputes between the descendants of those deported to Babylon with Jehoiachin in 597 BCE and the descendants of those left behind with Zedekiah. The unusually high concentration of textual problems contained in Gen 49:8–12,22–26 is, moreover, in keeping with similar difficulties in other texts concerned with this conflict.

Acknowledgement: In January 2025 the Eaton Fire destroyed our home in Altadena, California, along with the majority of my personal scholarly library. Of the 3500 volumes lost to the fire, most had been inherited: first from Dwight Whipple of Westminster Presbyterian Church, when I was beginning my postgraduate studies; then from Ed Ball of the University of Nottingham, upon my appointment there after his untimely death; and, finally, from Hans Barstad, who had himself inherited the personal libraries of Sigmund Mowinckel and Arvid Kapelrud. As I finalised this article in the weeks after the fire, the impact of these inheritances on my work came through with special clarity, as I realised that, at the time of the original writing, almost every volume in these footnotes had been at my fingertips. At this moment of transition, it is with gratitude that I dedicate this research to those whose generosity made it possible.

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1 The Joseph Novella (Gen 37–50)

That the wider narrative context of Gen 49, namely, Gen 37–50, reflects in its extant form a contest for authority between Joseph and Judah is generally accepted.[1] This is effected within the narrative primarily through the episode concerning Judah and Tamar in Gen 38, the speeches made by Judah in Gen 43–44, and by the ›blessings‹ of Gen 49, which together attract more significant attention to Judah than would otherwise be the case. Although the literary artistry of these chapters within the scope of the novella is more widely appreciated now than it was in the heyday of the Documentary Hypothesis, they are still usually understood as additions, made to attract attention to Judah's standing among the brothers.[2]

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1 The identification of this conflict as basic to the novella's plot and purpose prevails across a diverse assortment of scholarly stances on the novella's relationship to what precedes and follows it canonically; see, e.g., David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 248–253; 273–283; Raymond de Hoop, *Genesis 49 in Its Literary and Historical Context*, OTS 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 568–594; Reinhard G. Kratz, *Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 281–286; Yigal Levin, »Joseph, Judah and the ›Benjamin Conundrum‹,« *ZAW* 116 (2004) 223–241. Some have proposed that this was originally a struggle between Joseph and Reuben, which was taken over and adapted to articulate a struggle between Joseph and Judah (George W. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt: Structural and Theological Context for the Joseph Story*, CBQMS 4 [Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976], 60–79; Walter Dietrich, *Die Josephserzählung als Novelle und Geschichtsschreibung: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Pentateuchfrage* [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989], 21–25; 67–78; Matthew Genung, *The Composition of Genesis 37: Incoherence and Meaning in the Exposition of the Joseph Story*, FAT II/95 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017]; Samuel E. Loewenstamm, »Reuben and Judah in the Cycle of Joseph Stories,« in *From Babylon to Canaan: Studies in the Bible and Its Oriental Background*, ed. Samuel E. Loewenstamm [Jerusalem: Magness, 1992] 35–41; Ulrike Schorn, *Ruben und das System der zwölf Stämme Israels: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung des Erstgeborenen Jakobs*, BZAW 248 [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997], 224–267; Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50)*, VTSup 20 [Leiden: Brill, 1970], 179; Hugh C. White, »Reuben and Judah: Duplicates or Complements,« in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson*, ed. James T. Butler, Edgar W. Conrad, and Ben C. Ollenburger, JSOTSup 37 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985] 73–97), but more recently this proposal has been granted less weight; see Andrew Tobolowsky, »The Problem of Reubenite Primacy: New Paradigms, New Answers,« *JBL* 139 (2020) 27–45.

2 Thus Peter Bekins, »Tamar and Joseph in Genesis 38 and 39,« *JSOT* 40 (2016) 375–397; Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte*, WMANT 57 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 224–229; 244–257; Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis*, 252 f.; David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 473–476; Genung, *The Composition of Genesis 37*; Friedemann W. Golka, »Genesis 37–50: Joseph Story or *Israel*–Joseph Story?,« *CBR* 2 (2004) 153–177; Jonathan Kruschwitz, »The Type-Scene Connection between Genesis 38 and the Joseph Story,« *JSOT* 36 (2012) 383–410; Esther M. Menn, *Judah and*

Curiously, however, the attention to Judah that these passages effect fails to clearly improve the novella's overall depiction of Judah's character or his standing vis-à-vis Joseph. Judah's first appearance depicts him as a self-interested opportunist, intervening in his brothers' plot to kill Joseph by proposing an alternative that achieves the brothers' ends and financial gain in addition (Gen 37:26–28). His next appearance is equally ignominious: a lengthy account of his ill treatment of Tamar that runs the gamut from cruelty – sending the twice-widowed woman back to her father's house, rather than provide for her appropriately as her father-in-law – to the absurd – soliciting the veiled Tamar for sex, then failing to recognise her despite extended conversation and (presumably) close personal contact. Though some have argued that the chapter's conclusion contains the seeds of Judah's moral transformation, the text is clear in its judgement; from Judah's own lips issues the conclusion that ›she is more righteous than I‹ (Gen 38:26).[3] Judah's speeches in Gen 43–44 have also been a focus of attention in efforts to support Judah's supposed transformation over the course of the novella; on this reading, Judah seeks to ensure the safety of his younger brother Benjamin, rather than conniving to sell him into slavery as he did with Joseph (contrast Gen 37). Yet even these speeches highlight Judah's failings; specifically, they mirror earlier speeches made by Jacob, yet ›studiously avoid invoking the noble behaviors of Jacob that [Judah] has failed to uphold‹.[4] The result is a ›sanitized self-portrait‹ that fools Jacob, but should not fool the reader.

Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics, JSJSup 51 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 78–86; Paul R. Noble, »Esau, Tamar, and Joseph: Criteria for Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions,« *VT* 52 (2002) 219–252; Josef Sykora, *The Unfavored: Judah and Saul in the Narratives of Genesis and 1 Samuel*, Siphrut 25 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 9–114; Hans-Georg Wünsch, »Genesis 38 – Judah's Turning Point: Structural Analysis and Narrative Techniques and Their Meaning for Genesis 38 and Its Placement in the Story of Joseph,« *OTE* 25/3 (2012) 777–806; Yong Zhao, »The Story of Judah, the Hero: An Analysis of Genesis 38,« *JBQ* 42 (2014) 238–243. For a more exhaustive list of previous studies in this vein, see John R. Huddlestun, »Divestiture, Deception, and Demotion: The Garment Motif in Genesis 37–39,« *JSOT* 98 (2002) 47–62: 49–51.

3 On Judah's purported transformation, see Bryan Smith, »The Central Role of Judah in Genesis 37–50,« *BibSac* 162 (2005) 158–174; Wünsch, »Genesis 38«; Zhao, »The Story of Judah«; cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972, rev. ed.), 395. This continues a line of interpretation appearing already in the *targumim*; see Moses Aberbach and Bernard Grossfeld, *Targum Onqelos on Genesis 49*, SBL Aramaic Studies 1 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1976), 10. Almost invariably these efforts depend on a positive interpretation of Gen 49:8–12.

4 Judah Kraut, »The Literary Roles of Reuben and Judah in Genesis Narratives: ›A Reflection Complex‹,« *JSOT* 43 (2019) 220–224; cf. Do Hyung Kim's comment that these speeches demonstrate that ›Judah knows how to manipulate his father‹ (»The Comparison of Two Speeches between Reuben and Judah in Genesis 42–43*,« *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 93 [2014] 43–59: 50).

Given the ambivalence of this material, the conclusion that the novella's depiction of Judah is meant positively is largely dependent on the ›blessing‹ spoken over him in Gen 49:8–12.[5] Indeed, it is almost universally assumed that these verses must speak positively about Judah.[6] This expectation of inevitable favour is rooted in the history of the two kingdoms and a reading of the novella in which the struggle between Joseph and Judah represents a struggle between these kingdoms – Joseph representing the north and Judah the south – or their successor provinces.[7] Given the extreme negativity with which the northern regions are depicted elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and the northern kingdom's early political demise, interpreters understandably assume that the novella ought to conclude with Joseph (the northern kingdom) giving way to Judah (the southern kingdom). That this ultimate preference for Judah must be expressed in the blessings, and indeed should be anticipated already in the preceding narrative, primes interpreters to read Judah's position in both the novella and the blessings in a positive light.

An attempt to come at the material without assuming Judah's eventual pre-eminence reveals just how much of an uphill battle it is to reach these conclusions from the text itself. As just observed, Judah is presented remarkably negatively in the novella proper, beginning with his first appearance in Gen 37 and persisting even into his apparently selfless offer to stand surety for Benjamin, which instead serves to highlight his shortcomings vis-à-vis Jacob. Joseph, in contrast, is depicted throughout the narrative as the brother who has the right to rule over the others, as a man who is blessed by the presence of God, and in overall positive terms (esp. Gen 37; 39; 41; 45; 50).[8] The transmission of this story in communities associated with the

5 The genre of Gen 49 has been extensively discussed but is not significant here; the following uses ›blessing‹ as convention rather than prerequisite. For a review of possibilities, see de Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 62–80; 248–315.

6 The two exceptions are Edwin M. Good, »The ›Blessing‹ on Judah, Gen 49 8–12,« *JBL* 82 (1963) 427–432, and Calum M. Carmichael, »Some Sayings in Genesis 49,« *JBL* 88 (1969) 435–444; cf. Stanley Gevirtz, »Adumbrations of Dan in Jacob's Blessing on Judah,« *ZAW* 93 (1981) 21–37: 32 n. 46; Stanley Gevirtz, »Simeon and Levi in ›The Blessing of Jacob‹ (Gen. 49:5–7),« *HUCA* 52 (1981) 93–128: 117. Good and Carmichael both link the so-called blessing with the preceding narrative, especially Gen 38, but neither are then able to explain why Judah should be depicted negatively, either in the blessing or in the novella more generally; they have accordingly failed to persuade interpreters determined to see good news in the words concerning Judah.

7 This territorial orientation is explicit to a greater or lesser degree in most studies; see, for example, Marc Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 2006), 55–60; de Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 594–621; Dietrich, *Josephserzählung*; Hyun Chul Paul Kim, »Reading the Joseph Story (Genesis 37–50) as a Diaspora Narrative,« *CBQ* 75 (2013) 219–238: 230; Horst Seebass, »The Joseph Story, Genesis 48 and the Canonical Process,« *JSOT* 35 (1986) 29–43: 34.

8 This is not to deny that Joseph is a complex character. The novella's exploration of Joseph's imperfections, however, has too often led to simplistic claims that the novella intends to under-

southern kingdom makes this affirmation of Josephite authority and the negativity concerning Judah very strange – if, as almost universally assumed, Joseph is meant to represent the northern kingdom and Judah the southern. Without the historically-conditioned expectations of Judahite sovereignty to cloud the picture, the story of Joseph, Judah, and their other brothers would almost certainly be read as an affirmation of Josephite authority and a critique of Judah's persistent shortcomings.

Rather than trying to force the novella into a mould of southern, Judahite superiority, the following proposes an alternative assignment of parts, based on recent advances in the study of sixth century identity politics. Specifically, it argues that ›Judah‹ represents those left behind in the land with Zedekiah after 597 BCE and that ›Joseph‹ represents those taken to Babylon with Jehoiachin. Viewed in these terms, the novella's preference for Joseph falls in line with a widespread biblical preference for the 597 BCE deportees, whilst the lesser positioning of Judah reflects the tradition's negativity regarding those who stayed in the homeland. The textual difficulties in Gen 49 are, in turn, a consequence of the protracted ideological struggle between the deportee and non-deportee communities, in keeping with similar difficulties in other passages concerned with this relationship.

2 Joseph in Babylonia

The dispute between those deported to Babylonia by Nebuchadnezzar and those left behind in the land of Judah is well known and widely discussed; it is first and vividly attested in the sixth century prophetic books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and its long shadow falls across almost all literature of the sixth and fifth centuries. Less recognised is that this dispute could be articulated in terms of a contest between Israel and Judah: those taken to Babylonia claimed to be the true Israel, whilst those left in the land coalesced around the Judahite homeland. The deportees' claims

mine Joseph's leadership and, by extension, the legitimacy of the northern kingdom or its successor province. The lack of any other serious candidate for leadership in the novella instead supports the conclusion that commentators seem determined to avoid, namely, that – as he twice dreamt – Joseph is meant to rule over his brothers. More serious attempts to reckon with the complexity of the novella's depiction of Joseph vary, though most assume that Joseph is a cypher for the northern territories; see Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel*; Dietrich, *Josephserzählung*; Golka, »Genesis 37–50«; Levin, »Joseph, Judah and the ›Benjamin Conundrum‹«; Mark A. O'Brien, »The Contribution of Judah's Speech, Genesis 44:18–34, to the Characterization of Joseph,« *CBQ* 59 (1997) 429–447. The novella's characterisation of Joseph will merit renewed attention in light of what follows; note, in the interim, Brett's suggestion that its implicit critique of Joseph is aimed at Ezra and other returnees from Mesopotamia (Mark G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* [London: Routledge, 2000], 109–138).

are witnessed most intensely by the book of Ezekiel, which seeks, in the face of a traumatic experience of involuntary migration, to preserve a sense of community rooted in the deportees' shared Israelite heritage. The book of Jeremiah, in turn, reflects efforts by those left behind to respond to the events of this era – repeated mass displacement, subjection to imperial rule, and rejection by the deportees – by asserting the significance of the land of Judah for their own identity claims. Evidence of these various efforts appears first after the deportation of Jerusalem's senior elites in 597 BCE, intensifies over the course of the kingdom's final decade, and is sustained finally by the kingdom's provincialisation in 586 BCE.[9]

In addition to this broadly-defined debate between Israelites deported to Babylonia and Judahites left behind in the homeland, a select number of texts witness to a more specifically-articulated dispute concerning the two groups' royal figureheads. On the one side was Jehoiachin, supported by the deportees with whom he had been taken to Babylon; on the other was Zedekiah, viewed by those in the homeland as the legitimate king of Judah after Jehoiachin's departure. This argument over the locus of kingship could be articulated in terms of a contest of authority between Joseph and Judah, with Joseph representing Jehoiachin and the deportees taken into exile and Judah representing Zedekiah and those left in the homeland.

This association of Joseph with Jehoiachin and the Babylonian deportees is witnessed by several texts. The end of 2 Kings, with its account of Jehoiachin's release from Babylonian prison (2Kgs 25:27–30), is especially significant; as several recent commentators have realised, the account contains a concentration of features that connect the exiled king Jehoiachin and the exiled ancestor Joseph.[10] Further evi-

9 This phenomenon may only be summarised here; for a more detailed analysis, see C. L. Crouch, *Israel and Judah Redefined: Migration, Trauma and Empire in the Sixth Century BCE*, SOTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

10 Jan J. Granowski, »Jehoiachin at the King's Table: A Reading of the Ending of the Second Book of Kings,« in *Reading between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Dana N. Fewell, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992) 173–188; Konrad Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus: Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 142 f.; John E. Harvey, »Jehoiachin and Joseph: Hope at the Close of the Deuteronomistic History,« in *The Bible as Human Witness to Divine Revelation: Hearing the Word of God through Historically Dissimilar Traditions*, ed. Randall Heskett and Brian Irwin, LHBOTS 469 (London: T&T Clark, 2010) 51–61; Michael J. Chan, »Joseph and Jehoiachin: On the Edge of Exodus,« *ZAW* 125 (2013) 566–577; Ian D. Wilson, »Joseph, Jehoiachin, and Cyrus: Book Endings, Exoduses and Exiles, and Yehudite/Judean Social Remembering,« *ZAW* 126 (2014) 521–534; Paul S. Evans, »The End of Kings as Presaging an Exodus: The Function of the Jehoiachin Epilogue (2 Kgs 25:27–30) in Light of Parallels with the Joseph Story in Genesis,« *MJTM* 16 (2014–2015) 65–100. On the parallel passage in Jer 52:31–34, see William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah XXVI–LII*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 1386.

dence occurs in Obad 17–18; in Ezek 37:15–22; 47:13–48:29; and in Zech 10:6. Perhaps the most striking of these is Ezek 37:15–22, in which Joseph represents Jehoiachin in a sign-act representing the dispute over royal legitimacy occasioned by the installation of Zedekiah as king in Jerusalem, after Jehoiachin's deportation to Babylon.[11]

The appeal of the Joseph traditions to the community in Babylonia is not hard to understand: like Joseph, they were involuntary migrants in a strange land, struggling to figure out how to survive and succeed in a foreign court.[12] Indeed, if the extant Joseph story in Genesis looks anything like the Joseph traditions circulating among the Babylonian deportees, it suggests a number of reasons that these deportees might have identified with Joseph.[13] Especially notable is that the Joseph traditions are intensely concerned with issues of authority and leadership, and the deportation of Jehoiachin in 597 BCE and the appointment of Zedekiah as a rival king in Jerusalem provoked a fierce dispute over the locus of royal legitimacy.

The following argues for an interpretation of Gen 49 that is informed by these wider debates between deportees and non-deportees, especially over questions of royal authority. Specifically, it suggests that the textual difficulties that dom-

11 See C. L. Crouch, »Duelling Dynasties: A Proposal Concerning Ezekiel's Sign-Act of the Two Sticks,« *JSOT* 45 (2020) 3–19, for a lengthier discussion of this evidence. As with the novella, traditional approaches to the Ezek 37 sign-act view it as concerning the northern and southern kingdoms. Reading it in terms of a post-597 BCE dispute over royal authority, however, illuminates a number of its apparent oddities and brings it more clearly in line with the concerns of the book in which it is found. The same sign-act uses Judah as a cypher for Zedekiah; the stick that bears the name ›Judah‹ signifies the authority claimed by the kingdom's last native monarch. This builds on and is related to a wider use of Judah terminology among those left behind after 597 BCE; although this phenomenon has been obscured by the scholarly habit of referring to deportees and non-deportees alike as ›Judahites‹, ›Israelites‹, or both, recent analysis has made clear that this indiscriminate nomenclature is an inaccurate representation of identity politics in the sixth century and after. For discussion see Crouch, *Israel and Judah*; for a brief case study, see C. L. Crouch, »Ezekiel's Immobility and the Meaning of ›the House of Judah‹ in Ezekiel 4,« *JSOT* 44 (2019) 182–197.

12 On Joseph as an involuntary migrant see Katherine E. Southwood and Casey A. Strine, eds., »Involuntary Migration and the Joseph Narrative: Interdisciplinary Perspectives,« *HebStud* 60 (2019) 39–106; Kim, »Reading the Joseph Story (Genesis 37–50) as a Diaspora Narrative«. On Joseph's association with the group of deportees taken with Jehoiachin to Babylon, in distinction to those taken to rural Babylonia, see further Crouch, *Israel and Judah*.

13 The extant novella is widely thought to derive from the Persian period, although the use of the Joseph traditions by the sixth century deportees suggests that its essential outlines were in circulation already at that time. Note that the following is not an attempt to argue that either the extant novella as a whole or Gen 49 specifically must date to the early sixth century; it is rather an attempt to connect the concerns of these chapters to a longer history of conflict over the meaning and consequences of displacement for royal authority.

inate in the blessings on Joseph and Judah are a result of the struggles for royal legitimacy that arose in the wake of displacement and consequent institutional upheaval. In keeping with the dominant narrative thread of the novella and the disposition of the Hebrew Bible more broadly, the blessings of Gen 49 originally expressed a preference for Joseph (the Babylonian deportees), accompanied by a rejection of Judah (those left behind in the homeland). The final form of the text, however, has interfered with these assessments. As in Ezek 37:15–22, where the Greek and Hebrew variants have sought to play down the superiority of the Joseph stick in favour of Judah, the traditions preserved in Gen 49 have been amended in order to make more positive claims on Judah's behalf. The resulting textual quagmire attests to both the vehemence and the persistence of these struggles.

The discussion to follow begins with an analysis of the blessing on Joseph, untangling its exegetical difficulties in conversation with the circumstances of the deportees taken to Babylon. It then proceeds to the blessing on Judah, identifying the ways and means by which an originally negative assessment has been transformed into a more optimistic one. The article then returns, finally, to the historical context of these debates and the purpose of the blessings' transformations.

3 The Blessing of Joseph (Gen 49:22–26)

22 Joseph is a son of the Euphrates!
A son of the Euphrates beside a spring,
daughters walking alongside a stream.
23 They resented him and contended;
lords of arrows bore a grudge against him.
24 His bow persevered, the strength of his hands quick-moving:
greater than the mighty hands of Jacob,
than the shepherd's name, the stone of Israel.
25 From the God of your father, who helps you,
and of Shadday, who blesses you:
Blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that rests beneath,
Blessings of breasts and womb.
26 The blessings of your father have prevailed
over the blessings of the one who bore me,
(whilst) longing for the everlasting height.
They shall be upon the head of Joseph
and upon the brow of the one set apart from his brothers.

The blessing on Joseph in Gen 49:22–26 depicts him as the ancestral figure of a community located in Mesopotamia. This is explicit in the first verse, which iden-

tifies Joseph as בן פרת ›son of the Euphrates‹ (v. 22).[14] The statement at first seems odd, given Joseph's strong narrative associations with Egypt, but identifying the Josephites with the river running through the city of Babylon makes sense in light of Joseph's special status among the deportees taken to urban Babylon with Jehoiachin.[15]

Most of the difficulties that have been identified in the rest of v. 22 give way once this Mesopotamian context is recognised.[16] To begin at the end: שור, the final word, occurs otherwise only in 2Sam 22:30 // Ps 18:30.[17] Though there are some exceptions, most interpreters of Gen 49 have followed the translational efforts of the versions at 2Sam 22:30 // Ps 18:30 and understood שור in v. 22 to mean ›wall‹. The Hebrew of all three passages, however, suggests that natural imagery would be more appropriate. In v. 22, שור appears in parallel with עין ›spring‹; this suggests another water form, such as ›stream‹, as an especially likely rendering. Cognate evidence from Akkadian offers multiple appropriate options in this vein, and a narrow body of water would also suit the context of 2Sam 22:30 // Ps 18:30: ›with you [YHWH] I run a mountain ridge, and by my God I leap a stream‹.[18]

Verse 22 depicts this watery שור as something beside which one might go for a walk (צעד). Although the verb is not common, all of its other occurrences refer unambiguously to ambulatory activity – walking, striding, marching, and so on. Interpreters struggling to make sense of v. 22 usually opt for an image of Josephite ›branches running over a wall‹ (בנות צעדה עלי שור), but the use of צעד elsewhere vies against this; בנות ›daughters‹ is never otherwise used to mean ›branches‹, nor

14 For פרת as the Euphrates, see already John A. Emerton, »Some Difficult Words in Genesis 49,« in *Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas*, ed. Peter R. Ackroyd and Barnabas Lindars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) 81–93: 91–93. Unaware of Joseph's significance amongst the Babylonian deportees, however, Emerton read בן as the tamarisk tree, leaving his proposal open to critique because בת (בנות) is never otherwise used of plant parts (e.g., de Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 186–187). The Babylonian deportees' claim to the Joseph traditions (see above) exposes the phrase as an expression of foreign residence and overcomes this objection. Note that the definite article is conventional in English but not in Hebrew.

15 For a sustained discussion of this phenomenon, see Crouch, *Israel and Judah*; for a brief summary, see above. Note also recent arguments viewing Joseph's Egypt as a proxy for Persia, as the novella seeks to address ongoing issues arising from the sixth century displacements; see Kim, »Reading the Joseph Story (Genesis 37–50) as a Diaspora Narrative«; Brett, *Genesis*, 109–136.

16 For previous attempts of make sense of this verse, see de Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 180–194.

17 On Ps 92:12 see HALOT 4:1453.

18 For גדוד ›(mountain) ridge‹, see Ps 65:11. Akk. *šūru* ›reeds‹ suggests perhaps שור ›reedbeds‹; *sūru* is used of ›water channels‹, parallel to a reference to ›canals‹. Both are loans from Sumerian s u r ›ditch‹. Note also the parallel use of עין and שור in Gen 16:7, though שור there is usually taken as II שור, under the influence of subsequent geographical remarks concerning the ancestors' movements.

are flora or fauna otherwise said to צעד.[19] Moreover, the subject of צעד is elsewhere invariably divine or human, and the evidence in this regard is sufficiently robust and sufficiently consistent as to lead to a strong expectation that צעד should have a personified subject also in v. 22. Fortunately, a human subject is readily available. Reading בנות as it appears – ›daughters‹ – not only provides a suitable subject for צעד but also a female counterweight to the description of Joseph as a ›son‹.[20] Indeed, the identification of Joseph with the deportees taken to Babylon provides a meaningful context for this depiction of Josephite sons and daughters walking along the waters' edge: Mesopotamia is a land of canals and irrigation ditches, and the capital itself sits directly on the Euphrates River, with the city centre guarded in antiquity by a man-made moat.[21] Verse 22 thus depicts the sons and daughters of a displaced Joseph walking along these waterways in Babylon.

The interest in Joseph's offspring that this reading reveals also coheres nicely with the following verses, which depict threats against Joseph's wellbeing couched in terms that play on the link between military prowess and fertility.[22] The threat is identified in v. 23 as originating with בעלי חצים ›lords of arrows‹, who are said to have resented (מרר), contended with (ריב), and borne a grudge against (שטם)

19 The interpretive gymnastics required to render בנות ›branches‹ are widely admitted; it requires reading בן פרת as something like ›son of fruitfulness‹ – meaning a fruitful tree or other plant – and בנות ›daughters‹ as an obscure way of referring to the branches of said tree. Apart from other difficulties, neither בן nor בת is ever otherwise used to refer to plants or parts thereof; see de Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 187.

20 The apparently feminine singular verb (צעד) following the feminine plural noun (בנות) may, as is usually suggested, be an archaic or archaising feminine plural, or it may simply be an instance of the scribes' aversion to the feminine plural (GKC§§ 44m, 145k, 145u; cf. Jaakov Levi, *Die Inkongruenz im biblischen Hebräisch* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987], 154–160).

21 The more specific topography and purpose of a city moat, rather than the irrigation function of canals and ditches, may explain the use of the obscure שור, rather than what seems to be, in Hebrew, the more typical נהר (e.g., Ps 137:1; Ezek 1:1).

22 On the nexus of military strength, potency, and masculinity in the ancient world (and its persistence into the modern one), see Tracy M. Lemos, »Israelite Bows and American Guns,« in *God and Guns: The Bible and American Gun Culture*, ed. Christopher B. Hays and C. L. Crouch (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2021) 77–92; cf. Tracy M. Lemos, *Violence and Personhood in Ancient Israel and Comparative Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). The deportees were in Babylon because of their failure on this front; reasserting themselves would have been a priority. See Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, »Ezekiel in Abu Ghraib: Rereading Ezekiel 16:37–39 in the Context of Imperial Conquest,« in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, ed. Stephen L. Cook and Corrine L. Patton (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002) 141–157; Tracy M. Lemos, »The Emasculation of Exile: Hypermasculinity and Feminization in the Book of Ezekiel,« in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad E. Kelle, Frank R. Ames, and Jacob L. Wright (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011) 377–393.

Joseph.[23] This description sounds very like the attitude of Joseph's brothers, whose hatred of their father's favourite (Gen 37) set the stage for Joseph's adventures in Egypt, as well as their ultimately positive outcome (Gen 45:5–8). Years later, after their father's death, the brothers worry that their grudge might be turned back against them (שטם, Gen 50:15), though they are assured that their offence was meant by God for good (Gen 50:19–20).[24] The resentment of the בעלי חצים in v. 23, similarly, sets the stage for the blessings pronounced in the following verses. The allusion to Joseph's brothers as בעלי חצים may be meant more specifically to recall their effective use of lies to convince their father that Joseph had died, rather than merely disappeared; חצים ›arrows‹ are associated in a number of places with false witness and its potentially deadly effects (Jer 9:7; Ps 57:4; 64:3; Prov 25:18; 26:18–19; cf. Isa 49:2; Ps 11:2; 38:2; Lam 3:3–15).

The subsequent verses, like the novella, transform fraternal cruelty into blessing. The affirmation begins: ›his bow persevered, the strength of his hands quick-moving‹ (v. 24a).[25] Whilst the bow's military connotations are widely recognised by interpreters, its affirmation of Joseph's procreative capacity is rarely noted. Yet Tracy Lemos has observed that ›the symbolic significance of the bow in ancient Near Eastern sources is fairly consistent: it is used mainly to symbolize military prowess and sexual potency.‹[26] Here, Joseph is compared favourably to Jacob (v. 24bα) using vocabulary that identifies sexual prowess as the main point of comparison. Given Jacob's success in this regard – sixty-six direct descendants, according to Gen 46:26 – for the blessing to declare that Joseph will surpass Jacob is quite a claim.[27] The extent of the innuendo, however, makes it difficult to deny

23 The meaning of ורבו is ambiguous. On the basis of בעלי חצים it has been proposed that this is an otherwise unattested II רבב, by-form of II רבה. The latter, however, appears only once (Gen 21:20); both there and in the purported instances of a noun form, רב ›archer‹, the sense is better subsumed under the common II רב ›chief officer, official; captain‹. The versions' decision to take ורבו from ריב ›to contend‹ coheres better with the verbs on either side. GKC§ 112rr suggests a frequentative sense for the irregular waw-consecutive. Jacob's ultimate preference for Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh signals that the brothers' resentment of their father's favouritism was neither misplaced nor immaterial (Gen 48).

24 שטם is used to signify fraternal enmity also in Gen 27:41.

25 For ישב as ›to persevere‹, see Ps 125:1; Lev 12:4.

26 See Lemos, »Israelite Bows and American Guns«; cf. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., »Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity: Their Use in Ancient Near Eastern Sympathetic Magic Rituals,« *JBL* 85 (1966) 326–334; Cynthia Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite–Assyrian Encounter* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004).

27 The text never provides an exact number for Joseph's offspring, choosing instead to focus on the two sons born to him in Egypt prior to his family's arrival (Gen 41:50–52; 46:19,27; 48); only in Gen 50:21–22 is there a brief note alluding to grandchildren. The opening of Exodus, of course, intimates very large numbers for the whole of the family, but these are not distinguished by paternity.

that the intention is to emphasise Joseph's success in this arena. Euphemisms unpacked, v. 24 might be rendered as follows: ›Joseph's masculinity (קשת) persevered, so the strength / offspring (זרע)[28] of his penis (יד)[29] was quickened – more than the strength / legacy (יד) of Jacob's masculine power (אביר),[30] more than the shepherd's legacy / name (שם).‹[31] Verse 25 emphasises that this fecundity is a blessing granted by God, invoked in terms that highlight family networks (אל אביך ›God

28 The difference between ע(ו)זר ›arm, strength‹ and זרע ›seed‹ is in the pointing; both have extended or euphemistic meanings related to sexuality and procreation, so the functional difference in this context is slight. The euphemistic valence of each of these terms is discussed, with other examples, in the lexica.

29 M. Delcor, »Two Special Meanings of the Word יד in Biblical Hebrew,« *JSS* 12 (1967) 234–240; Marvin A. Pope, *Song of Songs*, AB 7C (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 517–518; Gary A. Rendsburg, »Word Play in Biblical Hebrew: An Eclectic Collection,« in *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, ed. Scott B. Noegel (Bethesda: CDL, 2000) 137–162: 153 f.

30 The hypermasculinity associated with אביר / אבר becomes explicit in later forms of Hebrew, where אבר is used for the penis; within the biblical texts its semantic range groups powerful men with animals symbolising strength and potency (HALOT 1:6). On this phenomenon more widely, see Lemos, *Violence and Personhood in Ancient Israel and Comparative Contexts*. The term is, in this hypermasculinised sense, occasionally used as part of a divine epithet אביר יעקב. This appears to have confused the tradents of Gen 49, who introduced what initially appears to be another divine epithet, אבן ישראל ›Stone of Israel‹. However, whilst YHWH is elsewhere described as צור ›Rock‹, a reference to YHWH as אבן ›Stone‹ would be exceptional, and the term appears several times in the Jacob narratives: first as Jacob's pillow (Gen 28), then in the context of his suit of Rachel (Gen 29), and finally in reference to a pair of מצבות monuments (Gen 31; 35). Given this, it is possible (probable?) that אבן ישראל refers not to YHWH, but to Jacob. Stavrakopoulou also notes the witnessing function of אבן, as part of a wider argument concerning ancestors and their offspring, which puts אבן in the same semantic territory as יד and שם (Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims*, LHBOTS 476 [London: T&T Clark, 2010], esp. 76). The sexual content of the verse may have contributed to its eventual pietisation.

31 Following the consonantal text and viewing שם as ›name, reputation, legacy‹, in parallel to יד ›hand, power, monument‹, rather than the Masoretes' pointing as שם ›there‹. The association of שם and יד with procreative capacity is most memorably attested by Isa 56:5–6, which promises יד ושם טוב מבנים ומבנות, ›a monument and a name better than sons and daughters‹ to the eunuchs incapable of producing biological offspring. The ›shepherd's legacy‹ refers to Jacob, whose lengthy employment as shepherd to Laban's flocks is a central plot point in the traditions surrounding him. The family profession is subsequently adopted by his sons, who are introduced as shepherds (Gen 37) and insist upon this identification when they encounter pharaoh in Egypt (Gen 46–47). Note that this reading obviates the piling up of divine epithets identified by Magne Sæbø as ›*a real challenge to the study of this chapter*‹ (»Divine Names and Epithets in Genesis 49:24b–25a: Some Methodological and Traditio-Historical Remarks,« in *History and Traditions of Early Israel: Studies Presented to Eduard Nielsen*, ed. André Lemaire and Benedikt Otzen, VTSup 50 [Leiden: Brill, 1993] 115–132: 124, italics original).

of your fathers‹) and ancestral blessings (שדי, traditionally ›Almighty‹).[32] The blessing's sweeping scope – ›blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that rests beneath‹ (ברכת שמים מעל ברכת תהום רבצת תחת) – is emphatic, and its manifestation in abundant fertility is explicit: ›blessings of breasts and womb‹ (ברכת שדים ורחם).

The final verse is uncertain in several regards. As the text stands, it appears to say that these paternal blessings on Joseph have prevailed over those of הורי ›the one who bore me‹. If Jacob is the imagined speaker, the latter would then refer to Rebekah. No reference exists to Rebekah blessing her sons or grandsons herself, but her preference for Jacob over Esau forms a significant element in the family narrative, as she intervenes to ensure that Jacob receives his father's firstborn blessing (Gen 27). Verse 26a thus appears to be a further affirmation that Joseph will surpass his father, Jacob: Jacob's blessing of Joseph will prove even stronger (גבר) than the blessing for Jacob obtained by Rebekah. In this regard it may be significant that Isaac's blessing on Jacob also highlights the kind of fraternal conflict that characterises Joseph's relationships with his brothers.[33]

The section climaxes with a re-affirmation of Joseph's superiority amongst the siblings, declaring that these abundant blessings will fall ›upon the head of Joseph, upon the crown of the head of the one who is set apart from his brothers‹ לראש יוסף ולקדקד נזיר אחיו (v. 26b). Almost every word here emphasises Joseph's leadership role. ראש ›head‹ is a common, somatically-informed metaphor for authority; קדקד

32 As commonly noted, עזר with God as subject is strongly associated with the later books of the Hebrew Bible; this is difficult to explain for those who view the whole of Gen 49 as very old, but makes sense if the Joseph material in its extant form reflects the hopes and claims of the Mesopotamian diaspora. On the divine title שדי, including the fertility associations its use invokes here, see Christopher B. Hays, »›Can a Woman Forget Her Nursing Child?‹ Divine Breastfeeding and the God of Israel,« in *Divine Doppelgängers: YHWH's Ancient Look-Alikes*, ed. Collin Cornell (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2020) 201–218: 201–206. Emendation to the full title אל שדי is unnecessary; mimicking the merisms of the verse, part of the title appears in each of the two halves of v. 25aα and together comprise the whole. On the difficulties of the versions vis-à-vis the divine titles, see Sæbø, »Divine Names and Epithets«.

33 The reference to גבע(ו)ת עולם in the blessing of Joseph at Deut 33:15, together with a similar collocation at Hab 3:6, has led LXX and some commentators to read הר(ר)י instead of הורי, though the lack of further overlap between the verses raises doubts about the wisdom of the move. The trouble lies completely within v. 26aβ, עד תאות גבעת עולם; the verse is coherent enough to this point (v. 26aα) and resumes its sense in the latter half (v. 26b). The association of גבעה with worship activities, including at the temple in Jerusalem (e.g., Isa 10:32; 31:4; Ezek 34:26), together with Joseph's diaspora situation, may signal an emphatic gloss underlining the reach of this blessing – it survives even as Joseph's descendants long for YHWH's eternal hill (contra the Masoretic pointing, גבעת is almost certainly a singular construct; otherwise every plural occurrence of the noun is written *plene*). Note, further, that the second person address of vv. 25–26a sets it apart from the third person address used from v. 9 onwards; the especially accentuated piety of this verse and a half may be a later addition or have been interfered with in a way similar to vv. 3–8.

›crown of the head‹ is a poetic variant.[34] The root נזר, in general terms ›to set apart, consecrate‹, is used in several contexts of royal authority, including the identification of a crown prince, heir presumptive to the kingship (2Chr 11:22). The noun form refers most frequently to the crown of royal authority, especially in instances involving the investiture of royal power in a new king (2Sam 1:10; 2Kgs 11:12 // 2Chr 23:11; also Ps 89:40; 132:18; and perhaps 89:20). The blessing upon Joseph thus concludes with a robust affirmation of his royal authority over his brothers, despite the wider context of displacement from the family homeland – a message that is fully in keeping with the favour shown to Joseph throughout the novella.

An awareness of the significance of Joseph for the Babylonian deportees facilitates a reading of these verses that resolves a number of the problems that have plagued their interpretation. Most immediately, understanding that this blessing speaks of Joseph as a ›son of the Euphrates‹ and imagines his copious offspring strolling along the moats and canals of Babylon allows the interpretive gymnastics involving ambulatory flora – the daughterly branches running awkwardly over dubious walls – to be abandoned with a sigh of relief. Fraternal hatred is then transformed into blessing, with Joseph's procreative successes exceeding even those of his father, and culminating with an affirmation of Joseph's ongoing royal status and authority over his brothers. The thrust of the blessing is to insist that Joseph's royal claim cannot be eliminated simply by expelling him to a foreign land: even as his offspring long for home, they retain their claims to authority over the entire people of Israel. Read with an eye for Joseph's ability to represent Jehoiachin, these verses affirm Jehoiachin's claim to the throne and assure the deportee community that they will not merely survive in Babylon, but thrive.

4 The Blessing (?) of Judah (Gen 49:8–12)

8 Judah – you!
Your brothers will praise you,
your hand is on the neck of your enemies;
your father's sons will bow down to you.
9 Judah is a lion cub:
rapacious, my son, you rise.

34 Deut 28:13 (cf. Deut 28:44); Judg 10:18; 11:8–9,11; 2Sam 22:44 // Ps 18:43; Jer 13:21; Ps 118:22; Lam 1:5; 1Chr 11:6; 26:10; 29:11; 2Chr 11:22; for קדקד, Jer 2:16,45, cf. Akkadian *qaqqadu*. On the royal entendre of this verse see Kristin M. Swenson, »Crowned with Blessings: The Riches of Double-Meaning in Gen 49,20b,« *ZAW* 120 (2008) 422–425. Joseph is not explicitly identified as מלך ›king‹, but this makes sense in a post-kingdom context; Ezekiel 40–48 famously avoids the term and, whilst the Hebrew of Ezek 37:22 uses it, the corresponding Greek text avoids it.

He kneels, he lies down like a lion,
and like a lioness – who would rouse him?
10 A rod will not turn aside from Judah,
but that which is decreed is between his feet:
a witness that he entered her skirts
(whilst) she waited for him at Enaim.
11 He binds an ass to the vine,
and the offspring of a donkey to the grapevine;
washes his garment with wine,
and his robe with blood-red grapes.
12 Eyes are dull from wine,
and teeth white from fat.

That the blessing on Joseph in vv. 22–26 is not read for what it is – a promise of Joseph's ongoing authority among and over the brothers – is largely due to the blessing on Judah, which appears several verses earlier in Gen 49:8–12. More specifically, it is due to v. 8, which introduces this blessing with an announcement of Judahite supremacy, promising the other brothers' obeisance and priming the reader for a thoroughgoing paean to Judah's superiority in the following verses. Upon inspection, what actually follows is rather less favourable than v. 8 leads the reader to expect: the leonine imagery in v. 9 depicts Judah's fraternal cruelty; v. 10 recalls his sexual and moral shortcomings; and the absurd imagery in v. 11 underscores his reputation for foolishness. The contrast between these disparaging comments and v. 8 suggests that v. 8 represents an editorial attempt to ameliorate the rest of the blessing's litany of disapproval. In fact v. 8 has succeeded remarkably well, if this was its intended purpose: primed by v. 8's enthusiasm, the following verses have been read by interpreters overwhelmingly in positive terms.

That this is not the natural way to read vv. 9–12 is indicated first by the text-critical and exegetical quagmire that surrounds these verses. Most of the most notorious difficulties in these verses, however, are a result of interpreters' attempts to follow v. 8's lead in presenting Judah more positively than the text or the associated tradition would otherwise justify. The attempt to whitewash Judah's character has come at significant interpretive cost, even as the scars borne by the text itself reveal the long history of efforts to improve Judah's reputation. Nevertheless, the blessing's underlying negativity concerning Judah remains more or less intact, if one suspends the presumption of Judahite favour even momentarily: only in one or two places has interpretive interference left more detritus than it is possible to clear away. Recognising v. 8's hold over interpreters' view of these verses, the following paragraphs will first explain why its enthusiasm for Judah is so suspect. It will then proceed to unpack the network of allusions in vv. 9–12, which when relieved of the obligation to praise Judah may be more naturally understood as thoroughly condemning him.

Verse 8 makes a bold announcement of Judah's fraternal authority: ›the sons of your father will bow down to you‹ (ישתחוו לך בני אביך). This has provided a thin but highly effective veneer of positivity for the blessing as a whole, priming the reader to interpret the rest of the blessing in similar terms. Yet the incongruity between the positivity of v. 8 and the depiction of Judah in the wider novella is such a startling one that even commentators who presume Judahite favour will sometimes note the discrepancy.[35] To put it plainly: nowhere else do the other sons of Jacob make obeisance to Judah. Authority among the brothers is otherwise clearly and consistently granted to Joseph, with the only real question in the novella being how Joseph's authority is to be established.[36]

The contrast between Joseph's claim to authority in the novella and v. 8's claim to authority for Judah is highlighted by the use of identical vocabulary to depict each man's status. In his first dream, Joseph tells his brothers, ›my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down (ותשתחיון) to it‹ (Gen 37:7). In the second, he says, ›the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down (משתחוים)‹ (Gen 37:9, also 37:10). The same term for obeisance also appears when the dreams' promise of Joseph's authority comes to pass. First, ›Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves down (וישתחוו) before him‹, seeking food to alleviate a famine (Gen 42:6). The narrative overtly connects this interaction to Joseph's earlier dream (Gen 42:9). Then, lest the point be missed, the brothers' obeisance is repeated: on their second visit, they again ›bowed to the ground

35 Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 476; Martin T. Pröbstle, »›Lion of Judah‹: The Blessing on Judah in Genesis 49:8–12,« in *»For You Have Strengthened Me«: Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Gerhard Pfandl in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Martin T. Pröbstle, with Gerald A. Klingbeil and Martin G. Klingbeil (St. Peter am Hart: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2007) 23–49: 33 f.; Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 81.

36 Because Gen 49 is widely considered one of the latest additions to the novella, the following assumes that its extant form may be legitimately interpreted in conversation with the preceding narrative. That the chapter itself contains material of varying ages, used and amended by later tradents, is generally accepted, with prominent interventions in the Judah and Joseph passages and in the Reuben–Simeon–Levi–Judah sequence in particular. See Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte*, 228 f.; Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis*, 250 f.; Daniel Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 85–90; Jean-Daniel Macchi, *Israël et ses tribus selon Genèse 49*, OBO 171 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); Schorn, *Ruben und das System der zwölf Stämme Israels*, 248–267; Andrew Tobolowsky, *The Sons of Jacob and the Sons of Herakles: The History of the Tribal System and the Organization of Biblical Identity*, FAT II/96 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 55–62. Most pertinent for the present discussion are the works of Tobolowsky, Schorn, and Macchi, which argue that these revisions are post-monarchic (contra de Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 594–621, who places the whole ›deathbed episode‹ in the Solomonic era). Note that a detailed analysis of Judah's appearances in the rest of the novella is beyond the scope of the present argument, though this material will merit renewed attention as a result.

(וישתחוו) before him‹ (Gen 43:26, also 43:28). These interactions between Joseph and his brothers tell a clear story, because every single instance of obeisance in the entire novella involves members of the family bowing down to Joseph.[37] If the plot is driven by the question, ›Before whom do the brothers have to bow?‹, the answer could hardly be more obvious.[38]

This means that when v. 8 asserts that it is יהודה אתה ›Judah, you‹ to whom the brothers bow down, it is contradicting the thrust of everything that precedes it, using language that makes this defiance impossible to ignore. Anywhere else in Gen 37–50, a description of brothers bowing down (וישתחוו) would be recognised as a reference to Joseph's authority. Here, the brothers' obeisance is suddenly and unexpectedly a sign of their submission to Judah. The language makes this attempt to appropriate Joseph's authority for Judah impossible to ignore.

Indeed, the rest of v. 8 confirms that this is an attempt to elevate Judah at Joseph's expense. To begin with the declaration that his ›hand shall be on the neck of your enemies‹ (v. 8aβ): whilst there is nothing in Judah's story to which this declaration of domination might sensibly allude, multiple possibilities suggest themselves for Joseph. The line could refer to Joseph's authority in Egypt, where he consolidated his power to the point that ›all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain‹ (Gen 41:57). That the declaration of dominance is sandwiched between two statements explicitly concerning the brothers (v. 8aα,b) may alternatively implicate the brothers themselves as the enemy over whom one of their number will hold power. Indeed, the brothers' declared hatred of and behaviour toward the young Joseph fits the image of an enemy to a tee (Gen 37:4–5,8).[39]

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37 In addition to the five appearances already noted (Gen 37:7,9; 42:6; 43:26,28), the verb is also used in Gen 47:31, where it is usually understood to refer to Israel / Jacob bowing down ›at the head of his bed‹ על ראש המטה. Raymond de Hoop has convincingly argued, however, that the text depicts Israel bowing down to Joseph as the new ראש המטה ›head of the tribe‹ (»›Then Israel Bowed Himself …‹ (Genesis 47.31),« *JSOT* 28 [2004] 467–480). This allowed, the only remaining exception to the verb's use in the novella is Gen 48:12, in which Joseph appears to bow down to his father (וישתחו) in the context of the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh. The versions, however, attest to a plural verb (וישתחוו), suggesting that Ephraim and Manasseh are the ones who bow down, not Joseph. Note also Gen 44:14; 50:18, where the brothers' subordination is expressed using נפל; the first of these also points back to Joseph's dreams (Gen 44:15).

38 De Hoop, »›Then Israel Bowed Himself …‹«: 496 n. 34.

39 Although to be designated an ›enemy‹ איב often insinuates foreignness, the epithet may be applied to those much more nearly at hand; ultimately, the status requires only acute antipathy – note especially the frequent parallel of derivatives of שנא ›to hate‹ with איב ›enemy‹, e.g., Lev 26:17; Num 10:35; Deut 30:7; 2Sam 22:18,41; Ps 18:18,41; 21:9; 25:19; 35:19; 38:20; 55:13; 68:2; 69:5; 83:3; 106:10; 139:22; Esth 9:1,5,16; cf. Exod 1:10; Deut 7:15; 32:41; 33:11; 2Sam 5:8; Ezek 16:27; 23:28; Ps 44:8,11; 89:24; 106:41; Eccl 3:8. For the use of איב with reference to intimate relationships see, e.g., Mic 7:6; Lam 1:2; many of the psalms also depict the psalmist's enemy as someone close at hand.

The ease with which the statements of v. 8 may be understood with reference to Joseph suggests that most of this verse probably originated as a description of Joseph, not Judah. At some point, it was inserted at (or shifted to) its present position, where it provided a new, more flattering introduction for the blessing addressed to Judah. The mechanics of the transfer are not particularly subtle; although יהודה אתה forcibly changes the identity of the addressee, the phrase dangles awkwardly at the start of the verse rather than being integrated into the syntax.[40] The transfer was probably inspired – and certainly facilitated – by the assonance of the verb (ידה) with the name Judah (יהודה), yet even this is a tell-tale sign that something is amiss.[41]

Despite the awkwardness, the new material has undermined Joseph's authority quite successfully – claiming Joseph's fraternal authority for Judah and, in the process, priming the reader to perceive the following verses concerning Judah in similarly positive terms. Once the sleight-of-hand is unveiled, however, the veneer of positivity melts away and what remains in vv. 9–12 is not praise and adulation but a sobering evaluation of Judah's foolish behaviour.

First comes a depiction of Judah in leonine terms: ›Judah is a lion cub …‹ (v. 9). This is widely assumed to be a positive metaphor, signalling that the tribe of Judah is destined to be the source of Israel's kings.[42] A closer look at the Hebrew Bible's use of lion imagery problematises this conclusion. Whilst the depiction of YHWH

40 On the phrase's defiance of normal Hebrew syntax see Francis I. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch*, JBLMS 14 (New York: Abingdon, 1970), 42. Verse 8 also grants the blessing a surfeit of references to Judah; repetition of the addressee's name occurs otherwise only in the material concerning Dan (Gen 49:16–17) and Joseph (Gen 49:22,26). No other blessing repeats the name a third time, as v. 8 causes vv. 8–12 to do (vv. 8a,9a,10a). Note also that v. 8 addresses Judah in the second person (as do the blessings on Reuben, Simeon, and Levi), whereas vv. 9–12 are dominated by the third person characteristic of the subsequent blessings. The blessings on Reuben, Simeon, and Levi are widely interpreted as purposefully negative pronouncements, whose current position is designed to improve Judah's standing – that v. 8 uses the second person address that also characterises these three preceding blessings is yet another sign that it has been added as a positive intervention on Judah's behalf.

41 The verb ידה almost always refers to praise of or thanks to YHWH; Gen 49:8 is one of only four instances that appear to refer to a human object. Of these, Job 40:14 intimates that the idea of praising of human being is absurd, though Ps 45:18 uses it of the king. Psalm 49:19 uses it more generally. Genesis 29:35 uses ידה to provide a folk etymology for יהודה, but Rachel's praise is for YHWH, not Judah. In keeping with this, de Hoop suggests that יהודה originated as a declaration of divine praise, from הוד rather than ידה (de Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 115–121).

42 It is simpler to name the exceptions rather than the rule – namely, Good, »The ›Blessing‹ on Judah«; Carmichael, »Some Sayings in Genesis 49«. Note that the same ›lion cub‹ language is applied to Dan in Deut 33:22, and Gad is described as a lion in Deut 33:20. Absent interpretive expectations of Danite or Gadite supremacy, however, the imagery is not there presumed to be royal in valence, as it is here.

as a lion is widespread – and in keeping with the depiction of other ancient Near Eastern deities in leonine terms – the biblical texts almost never use lion imagery for human kings.[43] More precisely: the only biblical text that clearly uses lion imagery in relation to human royalty is Ezek 19, in which the queen mother and her two royal offspring are likened to a lioness and her cubs. In Ezekiel's allegory this imagery is deployed very negatively, with the lion cubs depicted as ravening man-eaters who wreak devastation on their own land (Ezek 19:3,6–7).[44] The principal target of the allegory is Zedekiah, and both the immediate depiction of the lions and the book's overall antipathy for this last king of Judah (Ezek 12:8–16; 17:1–24; 21:29–32; cf. 22:6–12) make it highly improbable that the likening of this part of the royal family to a pride of lions was meant positively.

In light of this negativity, v. 9's depiction of Judah as a lion loses much of its lustre.[45] Moreover, given the novella's interest in obeisance and bowing down, it is striking that both passages depict their ›royal‹ lions as knelt down (ברע, Gen 49:9; Ezek 19:2). Whilst the term can be used to describe animal behaviour, its principal use is for persons doing obeisance to their overlords (e.g., 1Kgs 8:54; 19:18; Isa

43 See Brent A. Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, OBO 212 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005). Strawn identifies Ezek 19:2–9 as ›*the only text in the Hebrew Bible* where the lion image is used metaphorically of Israelite kings (and perhaps also the queen mother) in a highly-developed and militaristic way akin to what is found in the ancient Near East‹ and emphasises the extent to which it differs from those ancient Near Eastern analogies in its negativity (*ibid.*, 56 [italics original]; for the sustained discussion, see *ibid.*, 248–250).

44 There is debate over the identities of the lioness and her two cubs, but the lineages of the final kings of Judah strongly suggest that the lioness should be identified as Hamutal, as the only queen mother in the late seventh century to raise two sons to the throne of Judah (2Kgs 23:31; 24:18). The language used to describe the fate of the second cub is also the same as that used to describe the fate of Zedekiah in Ezek 17:20 (cf. also 17:10). Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, AB 22 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 355–357, and Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, NICOT (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 603–607, provide overviews of the issues involved in assigning historical referents to the characters in this passage.

45 A number of connections between the allegory and v. 9 suggest that these two texts have been intentionally linked and that the more straightforward Ezek 19 may be taken as a guide to the interpretation of v. 9; all three words used to describe Judah as a ›lion‹ in v. 9 – לביא ›lioness‹, ארי ›lion‹, גור ›cub‹ – appear also in Ezek 19 (which adds כפיר ›young lion‹), and both texts invoke vine imagery, despite the lack of any obvious link between lions and vines (an incongruence sometimes used to justify dissociating the two halves of Ezek 19; see Walther Zimmerli, *Ezechiel 1, I. Teilband*, BKAT 13/1 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969], 421 f.). In the context of the present argument – namely, that the struggle for authority to which Gen 49 witnesses relates to the division of the population in the sixth century – these links with the Ezekiel traditions are especially striking: Ezekiel is the single most sustained articulation of the conflict between the divided populations and the most uncompromising in its preference for the Jehoiachin deportees.

45:23; Ps 22:19; 72:9; 95:6; Esth 3:2,5; Ezr 9:5; 2Chr 7:3; 29:29; cf. 2Sam 22:44 // Ps 18:40; Ps 17:13). Its use in v. 9 reinforces the conclusion that the description of Judah as a lion is not a positive image of dominance but a negative image of submission, and one with disturbingly violent connotations.

This is affirmed by v. 9's other intertextual connections, especially its use of מטרף (v. 9aβ).[46] The novella repeatedly describes Joseph's destruction at the hands of his brothers using this root's verbal form, טרף ›to tear‹. Thus, when the brothers offer Joseph's distinctive coat to his father as evidence concerning his disappearance and presumed death, Jacob exclaims, ›An evil creature has eaten him; surely Joseph has been torn to shreds (טרף טרף)!‹ (Gen 37:33). Jacob reiterates this belief later in the narrative, declaring that ›surely [Joseph] was torn to shreds (טרף טרף), for I have not seen him again until now‹ (Gen 44:28). Given the importance of Joseph's apparent death to the narrative and the crucial role of Judah in Joseph's disappearance (Gen 37:26–28), the description of Judah's actions in v. 9aβ using טרף is suggestive (a point noted already by Rashi). Judah's character is aptly described as מטרף ›rapacious‹; his opposition to Joseph's death is motivated not by fraternal amity but by desire for profit (Gen 37:26–27) and his actions vis-à-vis his nuclear family are callous and self-serving (Gen 38). Moreover, descriptions of the ravenous destruction of prey (טרף) by lions carries a negative sense when used metaphorically of leadership figures, as when Ezekiel describes the prophets devouring human lives like a lion devouring its prey (Ezek 22:25, cf. 22:27). Wherever the term appears, it is an image of death.[47] No wonder no one dares rouse this Judahite lion.

This negative assessment of Judah's character extends into the rest of the blessing. Like v. 9, v. 10 is usually taken as a promise of Judah's royal status: ›A sceptre will not depart from Judah‹ (לא יסור שבט מיהודה). Although שבט may be used for a (royal) sceptre, its more frequent use is ›tribe‹ or (punitive) ›rod‹.[48] Which sort of שבט will not depart (סור) from Judah would be clearer if the rest of the verse were not so troubled; v. 10b, in particular, is a long-standing *crux* to which a satisfactory resolution has proven elusive. Once the assumed positivity of v. 9 is let go, however, a suggestive possibility for v. 10 presents itself – namely, that this verse

46 As pointed, v. 9 suggests מן plus the noun טרף, but the consonantal text may also be construed as a *piel* participle from the verb טרף, perhaps ›rapacious‹ (HALOT 2:380). The difference is incidental to the present argument; the sense is clearly one of violent, self-serving destruction.

47 For a full discussion of biblical lion imagery, see Strawn, *What Is A Lion?*. The use of leonine imagery for YHWH may reveal the reasoning behind its apparent negativity vis-à-vis human beings, namely, that only YHWH may arrogate to himself death-dealing power.

48 See HALOT 4:1387–1390. Insofar as the king wields (punitive) authority, the relationship between the general ›rod‹ and the more specifically royal ›sceptre‹ is understandable enough. Nevertheless, the latter is in fact remarkably rare, appearing perhaps half a dozen times or so.

declares Judah's perpetual judgement with reference to his behaviour vis-à-vis Tamar (Gen 38). In the novella, the Tamar episode appears immediately after the account of Joseph's disappearance, to which v. 9 just referred, and several elements of v. 10 appear to allude to this next phase of the story.

At the climax of Gen 38, Judah acknowledges that ›she [Tamar] is more righteous than I‹ (Gen 38:26).[49] The picture of Judah's character painted by the story is not a complimentary one. He is shown having a lengthy (by biblical standards) conversation with his daughter-in-law, yet is so unobservant that he fails to realise who she is. To be blunt: at the point in the narrative that Judah has sex with Tamar, Tamar has been married to two of his sons and is perceived by Judah to pose an existential threat to his family. Her bold actions, moreover, make clear that she is not a forgettable woman. For Judah not to recognise her, *whilst having sex with her*, is an indictment of his most basic observational skills. Yet it hardly comes as a surprise: throughout the episode, Judah's treatment of those around him exhibits a startling lack of awareness of or interest in anyone other than himself.[50] By the time the chapter concludes, Judah's failure to give Tamar to Shelah in marriage has been compounded by a self-absorbed stupidity that leads him to have sex with Tamar, without even realising who she is. The offensiveness of the union is made clear by the admission that ›he did not know her again‹ (Gen 38:26, cf. Lev 18:15; 20:12).

This disturbing episode seems to lie behind the troublesome v. 10.[51] Verse 10b is a long-standing *crux*: MT *ketiv* has שילה, MT *qere* recommends שילו, and the versions take the opportunity to have a messianic heyday.[52] The reversal of a common scribal error – שולה ›her skirt(s)‹ in lieu of MT's שילה – however, begins to unpick the tangle, revealing a reference to Judah's sexual union with Tamar.[53] The use of

49 See Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 41–43; 62 f., on indications of the narrator's discomfort with Judah's behaviour.

50 David M. Gunn and Dana N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, OBS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 34–45; Wünsch, »Genesis 38«: 792–794.

51 Others have proposed allusions to Gen 38, but struggled to account for the resulting negativity; for a summary of previous proposals, see Gary A. Rendsburg, »Redactional Structuring in the Joseph Story: Genesis 37–50,« in *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text*, ed. Vincent L. Tollers and John R. Maier (London: Associated University Press, 1990) 215–232: 219 f.

52 On the versions, see de Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 122–124. This propensity to elaborate the verse's purportedly messianic undertones is fascinating, but unfortunately limits its usefulness for making sense of MT. On the Greek translator's struggles with Gen 49 in general, see Emmanuel Tov, »Gen 49 in the Septuagint – Trial and Error,« in *A Pillar of Cloud to Guide: Text-Critical, Redactional, and Linguistic Perspectives on the Old Testament in Honour of Marc Vervenne*, ed. Hans Ausloos and Bénédicte Lemmelijn, BETL 269 (Leuven: Peeters, 2014) 455–469; on the *targumim*, see Aberbach and Grossfeld, *Targum Onqelos on Genesis 49*, 10–27.

53 On ו/י interchange, see Emmanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 227–229. The ה-suffix is a third feminine singular, not an archaic third masculine sin-

שול ›skirt‹ has a strong association with sexual violation (Jer 13:22,26; Nah 3:5; Lam 1:9) and indicates the sexual nature of the actions that the blessing seeks to recall. This association is reinforced by בוא, which has well-known sexual connotations (Gen 16:2; 19:31; 30:3–4; 38:8; Deut 22:13; 25:5; 2Sam 16:21), whilst the proximity of שולה/שילה to שלה ›Shelah‹, the name of the son whom Judah ought to have given to Tamar (Gen 38:11,14,26), adds a further layer to the connection. The verb סור ›to turn, set aside‹ also nods to the Tamar episode: Tamar was able to set aside (סור) her widow's attire (Gen 38:14) and then the veil she had used for disguise (Gen 38:19), but here Judah will not be able to set aside (סור) the consequences of his own behaviour (v. 10bα). The שבט that will not depart from Judah is thus best understood as a ›rod‹ of punishment, which will stand in perpetuity as ›a witness that he entered her skirt(s)‹ (עד כי יבא שולה, cf. Gen 38:18). Punishment has been decreed (מחקק) and Judah will not escape.[54]

The final three words of the verse have been overshadowed by the focus on שילה but further a reading linked to Gen 38. The main problem in v. 10bβ lies with יקהת, which – apart perhaps from Prov 30:17 – is otherwise unknown and difficult to make sense of. In v. 18 the verb קוה ›to wait‹ is similarly disconnected from its immediate context, suggesting that v. 10bβ could have originated as a pious gloss, since distorted, but the absence of a divine epithet weighs against this. It is more plausible to see a reference to Tamar waiting for Judah by the side of the road (Gen 38:14) – the act to which she was driven after waiting for Judah to give Shelah to her in marriage (Gen 38:11).[55] This leaves the final word, עמים; in light of the preceding, this seems to be either an error for or an allusion to ענים ›Enaim‹, where

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gular. On the implausibility of the latter, see Serge Frolov, »Judah Comes to Shiloh: Genesis 49:10bα, One More Time,« *JBL* 131 (2012) 417–422: 418; on purportedly archaic elements of the chapter more generally, see Macchi, *Israël et ses tribus*, 23 f. Note that שול normally appears in plural; the original text could have been *plene* שוליה (cf. Lam 1:9), with the loss of י attributable to confusion arising from the ו/י interchange, or שולה may be an unusual but permissible defective spelling of the suffix on a plural noun (GKC§ 91k). Either explanation is possible, although the latter's simplicity is attractive. For a review of past proposals concerning the verse, see de Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 122–139.

54 This reads מחקק as a *pual* participle rather than MT *poel*. The verb is not common in any form; this makes certainty regarding its sense in v. 10 elusive, but drinking is associated with the possibility of forgetting what has been decreed in Prov 31:5 (cf. the reference to excessive drinking in v. 12) and punishment for sin is marked by inscription (using the by-form חקה) upon the feet in Job 13:27. The latter especially suggests that ›that which is decreed / inscribed between his feet‹ in v. 10 is meant to serve as a perpetual witness (עד) to Judah's sin. Inscription on the hands is introduced more positively in Isa 49:16, but the emphasis is likewise on unforgettability. Good may be right to see an allusion to Judah's staff, as well (»The ›Blessing‹ on Judah«: 429 f.); the punitive valence of שבט would explain its use here in lieu of מטה (Gen 38:18).

55 Reading ›she waited‹ קותה in lieu of MT יקהת (metathesis of ת/ה and ו/י interchange).

Tamar sat waiting for Judah (Gen 38:14).[56] Verse 10, taken altogether, thus warns that Judah's punishment will not be forgotten; it serves as ›a witness that he entered her skirts, whilst she waited for him at Enaim‹ (עד כי יבא שולה ולו קותה ענים).

The final two verses of the oracle turn from Judah's specific crimes to a more general depiction of his foolishness. Commentators are surprisingly insistent that binding donkeys to vines (v. 11a) is an image of overabundance, but it is patently stupid to bind herbivorous animals to edible plants. Likewise, washing one's garments in wine (v. 11b) is a quick route to ruined clothing.[57] Judah's ill-advised behaviour further extends to getting drunk and overeating: he is described as having ›eyes dull from wine‹ (חכלילי עינים מיין, v. 12a) and teeth smeared with fat (לבן שנים מחלב, v. 12b).[58] As with the preceding two images, these last two comments are usually taken positively, as signs of Judah's abundance. Again this is doubtful. The otherwise unknown form חכלילי is probably derived from חכל, cognate with the Akkadian *ekēlu* ›to be dark‹, and indicative of a gloomy or dull demeanour, rather than the ›sparkling‹ eyes most commentators seek.[59] Proverbs 23:29–30 uses an abstract noun from the same root to refer to the חכללות עינים ›dull eyes‹ of those who spend too much time drinking. With an eye to the novella we might note that the reference to sheepshearers (גזזי צאנו) in Gen 38:12 intimates that Judah had been eating and drinking heavily by the time he encountered Tamar on the road to Enaim (cf. 2Sam 13:23–28).[60] This might explain his failure to recognise her – though it might also have proved an impediment to Tamar's procreative aims. As for the white teeth, perhaps the most interesting light on the subject is cast by Deut

56 On נ/מ interchanges, see Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 228. Good makes a similar connection via עינים in v. 12 (»The ›Blessing‹ on Judah«: 432).

57 The reference to the ›blood of grapes‹ (דם ענבים) makes clear that the wine in mind is red, not white, and red wine stains are notoriously difficult to get out. On the colour of ancient Israelite wine, see Carey E. Walsh, *The Fruit of the Vine: Viticulture in Ancient Israel*, HSM 60 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 107–110. The negative valence is reinforced by Ezek 19:10, which depicts the queen mother as a vine growing in her leonine sons' blood (or in the blood shed by their rapacious behaviour), and by the Song of the Vineyard in Isa 5, which associates bloodshed with viticulture (Isa 5:7). If SamPent כסות for MT סות is correct, v. 11 may also allude to Judah's words in Gen 37:26 and Tamar's actions in Gen 38:14,16, all using the verb כסה ›to cover‹.

58 The distinction between חלב ›milk‹ and חלב ›fat‹ lies in the pointing, not the consonantal text. If the text does intend to refer to milkfat specifically, it is notable that the consumption of milkfat is associated with infancy (Judg 4:19; 5:25; Isa 28:9) and eating it as an adult is associated with desperation (Isa 7:21); there may be a further negative valence in this regard in v. 12. On other possible mis-pointings of חלב ›fat‹ as חלב ›milk‹ see Idan Dershowitz, »A Land Flowing with Fat and Honey,« *VT* 60 (2010) 172–176, esp. 176 n. 27.

59 On the versions see BHQ and Arvid S. Kapelrud, »Genesis xlix 12,« *VT* 4 (1954) 426–428, though the latter takes the מן in a comparative sense rather than a causal one.

60 That עינים (v. 12a) is homonymous with ענים ›Enaim‹ further underscores the allusion.

32:14–15, in which YHWH's gift of abundance from the flocks (חלב צאן) is followed by the people's excessive indulgence and rejection of YHWH (cf. Job 15:27).[61] Whatever the contextual nuances of this final comment, it seems to be a continuation of these verses' poor assessment of Judah's character.

At a few points, the extant text concerning Judah remains stubbornly obscure. Despite this, it sheds most of its worst difficulties as soon as it is relieved of the pressure to produce a positive outcome for Judah. Apart from v. 8, which primes the reader to read otherwise, the text is an unremittingly negative litany of Judah's shortcomings: his ruthless involvement in efforts to get rid of Joseph, his manifold offences vis-à-vis Tamar, and his persistent foolishness. Only the re-use of a positive word concerning Joseph as a prelude has convinced interpreters that these condemnations must somewhere contain a positive word for Judah. Indeed, the history of interpretation shows that commentators have by and large been duped by v. 8, and by their own expectations of Judahite superiority, into reading vv. 9–12 as though they spoke positively of Judah. The ruse of v. 8 revealed, the interpretive gymnastics to which commentators have resorted in order to achieve these ends may finally be put to rest.

5 Joseph vs. Judah

If v. 8 did not exist, the interpretation of these blessings and their expression of preference for Joseph could end here – indeed, this article would probably not have been necessary, because the rest of the verses concerning Judah would never have been so forcibly conformed to the positive expectations of subsequent interpreters. But the verse does exist, and so the question that remains is why its determined – and historically highly successful – effort to improve Judah's standing occurred in the first place. The answer requires a final, closer look at sixth century identity politics, drawing on recent advancements published elsewhere.

As noted above, the biblical traditions express a strong preference for those taken to Babylonia, together with a highly negative attitude toward those left in the homeland. This is usually articulated as a preference for the ›Israelite‹ deportees, in contrast to the homeland ›Judahites‹, although the former may also be identified with reference to Joseph, with whom the Jehoiachin deportees claimed a special affinity. This preference for the deportees is most overt in the book of Ezekiel – which as a corollary condemns those left in Jerusalem after 597 BCE at great length – and in the

61 Deut 32:15 refers also to דם ענבים. Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 85, notes a connection there between satiation and forgetfulness; this may affirm v. 10's apparent interest in ensuring that Judah remember his sins.

book of Jeremiah. In the latter, those left in the land with Zedekiah between 597 BCE and 586 BCE are portrayed as having been given a temporary reprieve, of which they failed to take advantage. This preference for the deportees, over and against those left in the homeland, extends also to the literature of the postexilic period; whilst not quite absolute, its canonical dominance is overwhelming.

One immediate consequence of the current interpretation of Gen 49, therefore, is to relieve the interpretive pressure placed on the blessing pronounced over Judah: it no longer has to be forced into overcoming the novella's preference for Joseph, or more specifically the favour shown in the blessing spoken over Joseph. Once Joseph is recognised as a cypher for the Jehoiachin deportees, Gen 49's preference for Joseph falls into line with the rest of the Hebrew Bible's similar preference for the deportees, with Judah's lesser status in keeping with the Hebrew Bible's denigration of those who had been left behind in the homeland (and their descendants). As long as Judah was thought to signify the (former) southern kingdom and Joseph the (former) northern kingdom, the novella's preference for Joseph posed a bizarre historical anomaly and called for a resolution that favoured Judah. Now, however, these unfavourable depictions of Judah are consistent with the negativity shown to those left behind after 597 BCE.

Given this broader context, why do a few passages then reflect such herculean efforts to extend YHWH's favour to Judah? Here, in Gen 49, an originally condemnatory word over Judah was given a pro-Judah preface – forcing a more positive evaluation of Judah, even as it made an interpretive quagmire of what follows. In a similar vein, the Greek and Hebrew versions of Ezek 37 interfered with a text that originally favoured Joseph, bringing Judah into prominence at the cost of a painfully mangled text.[62]

Although the canonical texts as they stand have largely obscured the particular conflicts that produced them, what survives suggests that these attempts to incorporate Judah into existing assertions of divine preference for the deportees were a response to the multiplicity of deportation events that occurred during the kingdom's final decade and its subsequent provincialisation. That there was not one but several sixth century deportations is often ignored by the scholarly literature on this period, which tends to elide the deportation of Jehoiachin and others of Jerusalem's upper class in 597 BCE with the later deportations of 586 BCE and 582 BCE.[63] Part of the fault for this lies at the feet of Ezekiel, which insistently champions the 597 BCE contingent.

62 Crouch, »Duelling Dynasties«.

63 An exception is John J. Ahn, »Forced Migrations Guiding the Exile: Demarcating 597, 587, and 582 B.C.E,« in *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of the Exile*, ed. John J. Ahn and Jill Middlemas, LHBOTS 526 (London: T&T Clark, 2012) 173–189, though he has little interest in the relationships among these successive communities.

Yet, despite Ezekiel's rejection of anyone left in Judah after 597 BCE, the fall of Jerusalem brought another wave of the kingdom's former inhabitants to Babylonia, first in 586 BCE and probably again in 582 BCE (Jer 52:30). Although little is known about where these later deportees were settled, a number of late annotations in Ezekiel and Jeremiah suggest an interest in including them in the promises made to the deportees of 597 BCE.[64] Many of these annotations distinguish these later deportees by referring to them as ›Judahites‹ – recognising that their unique experiences differentiated them from earlier deportees and marking this difference with nomenclature developed in the homeland. In a few places, as in Ezek 37 and Gen 49, these annotations go beyond assertions of equal standing and claim Judahite superiority.

Many of the oddities of the extant Joseph novella reflect these shifting sands of post-monarchic identity politics. The novella's determined preference for Joseph, the first brother to go into exile, echoes the claims of those deported with Jehoiachin. But these early deportees would eventually be joined by other members of the community – just as Joseph was joined by his father and brothers, who settled near him in Egypt (Gen 45–47). Uncertainty over the extent to which the earlier forced migrant(s) would welcome these latest arrivals is echoed in the brothers' anxiety over Joseph's behaviour after Jacob's death (Gen 50). In the novella as in other texts concerned with post-597 BCE leadership claims, Judah's standing vis-à-vis Joseph forms a point of particular concern. For the most part, the novella affirms the Josephites' rightful dominance, even as it acknowledges the possibility that Joseph might misuse his power.[65]

In the penultimate chapter of the story, however, supporters of Judah's claims have made a final, valiant effort to assert Judah over Joseph. Once a straightforward affirmation of Josephite authority, Gen 49's extant form takes the traditional language of Josephite rule and applies it to Judah, claiming on behalf of those with lingering ties to the homeland the prerogatives otherwise clearly and exclusively granted to their brothers in Babylonia. As with similar efforts elsewhere, the consequences are awkward: clumsy syntax, followed by an interpretive quagmire that has stymied commentators for centuries.

In revealing this Judahite sleight of hand, the foregoing has identified the origins of this textual confusion in the wider and well-known context of struggles between those left in the homeland and those deported to Babylonia. In the process it has explained the novella's otherwise baffling preference for Joseph and relieved the pressure on interpreters to make everything that follows Gen 49:8 conform to its pro-Judahite demands. Though the difficulties of the extant text may never

64 See Crouch, *Israel and Judah*.

65 This merits renewed attention in light of the current argument but requires a separate study; in the meantime, see Brett, *Genesis*, 109–136.

be completely resolved, they stand as a witness to deep and prolonged disputes over the locus of royal authority, the distribution of divine favour, and the legacy of Israel itself.

Abstract: The so-called blessings of Jacob in Gen 49 are full of textual and interpretive difficulties. The concentration of these difficulties in the verses concerning Judah (Gen 49:8–12) and Joseph (Gen 49:22–26) points to their origin in conflict over the locus of legitimate kingship. This article argues that a number of these problems are a result of disputes between the descendants of those deported to Babylon with Jehoiachin in 597 BCE and the descendants of those left behind with Zedekiah in the homeland. The high concentration of textual problems in Gen 49 is consistent with similar textual difficulties in other texts concerned with this conflict.

Keywords: Joseph; Jehoiachin; Judah; Israel; Genesis

Zusammenfassung: Die Segenssprüche Jakobs in Gen 49 bereiten textkritische und inhaltliche Schwierigkeiten, deren Konzentration in den Versen zu Judah (Gen 49,8–12) und Joseph (Gen 49,22–26) auf einen Ursprung im Konflikt um den Ort legitimer Königsherrschaft hinweist. Vor dem Hintergrund von Identitätspolitik im 6.Jh. begreift der vorliegende Beitrag eine Reihe dieser Probleme als Reflektion der Konflikte zwischen den Nachfahren der 597 v. Chr. mit Jojachin nach Babylon Deportierten einerseits und den Nachfahren der mit Zedekia im Land Verbliebenen andererseits. Eine ähnliche Konzentration an Schwierigkeiten findet sich auch in anderen Texten im Zusammenhang mit diesem Konflikt.

Schlagwörter: Joseph; Jojachin; Judah; Israel; Genesis

Résumé: Les bénédictions de Jacob en Gn 49 contiennent de nombreuses difficultés textuelles et interprétatives. La concentration de ces difficultés dans les versets concernant Juda (Gn 49,8–12) et Joseph (Gn 49,22–26) indique qu'elles trouvent leur origine dans un conflit sur le lieu de la royauté légitime. Cet article postule qu'un certains de ces problèmes, dans le contexte de la politique identitaire du VIe siècle avant l'ère chrétienne, reflètent les conflits entre les descendants de ceux qui ont été déportés à Babylone avec Yoyakîn en 597 avant notre ère et les descendants de ceux qui sont restés dans le pays avec Sédécias. La forte concentration de problèmes textuels en Gn 49 s'observe également dans d'autres textes concernant ce conflit.

Mots-clés: Joseph; Yoyakîn; Juda; Israël; Genèse