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Der Herr der Träume: Eine Studie zur Funktion des Traumes in der Josefsgeschichte der Hebräischen Bibel

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This book is a dissertation that was defended at the Evangelical Faculty of Theology at the Friedrich-Wilhelms University in Bonn. In the introduction to this book on Joseph the dreamer, Lanckau argues that dreams are a universal phenomenon in the life of at least the higher mammals. Although Aristotle in his books *De somno*, *De insomniis*, and *De divinatione per somnum* had already tried to explain the origin of dreams, we have to realize that these origins and the biological functions of dreams are even today not totally clear. Jörg Lanckau claims that the dream narratives of Israel teach us a special language in which the Eternal speaks. They also allow us a view into deep human experiences. Lanckau considers his book an Old Testament contribution to the cultural history of the dream.

In the first section of the introductory chapter, Lanckau starts to sketch some physiological and psycho-analytical observations. A reference to prospective dreams like the one that Abraham Lincoln received before his assassination is an introduction to a brief overview of classical dream narratives and dream theories. In the next section Lanckau gives a *status questionis* of the research on dream narratives in Old Testament research. He argues that in Old Testament exegetical literature phenomena such as “dream” or dream-narratives from the Bible are frequently discussed but that these discussions rarely become systematic (37). Lanckau presents some studies regarding the Old Testament and related

literature like the Assyrian Dreambook, Egyptian dream narratives, and material from Mesopotamia.

On the basis of his study of this literature, Lanckau sketches his own research (43). He does not try to study the whole range of the dream narratives in the Old Testament but, after a systematic treatment of the phenomenon of dream in the Old Testament, concentrates on a specific complex of texts where dreams constitute a very essential element within the narrative: the Joseph narrative.

The basis for this choice is obvious, as this narrative is the most elaborate example of stories about dreams in the Old Testament. In this complex one can find six dreams of different persons. The dreams are of different types. Here dream divination and dream interpretation are more important than elsewhere in the Old Testament. Although Dan 2 and 4 could also be a candidate for Lanckau's research, he argues that these stories are quite certainly dependent on the Joseph narratives.

Lanckau warns that we cannot use the dream narratives of the past as described in the Bible and related literature as dream protocols (44). It is quite certain that these dream narratives have been revised and that they thus have become part of the context and that they thus now share in the literary and theological message of these passages. Some of the possible questions regarding the Joseph stories deal with the fact that dreams are involved. Thus, the interpretation of the dream is dependent on the interpreter of the passage. An important question is whether one should understand the dreams in the Joseph narratives as dream wishes or as divine revelation (45). Another important area of research can be the figure of Joseph himself. Is there a continuity between the young dreamer Joseph and the interpreter of dreams in Gen 40–41, or are these persons nearly different figures (47)?

Subsequently Lanckau describes his methods and defines the terms he will use in his research. He distinguishes between dream reports (*Traumbericht*) and dream narratives (*Traumerzählung*; 49). A dream report applies only to the report of the dream itself and of its introduction, while a dream narrative includes a dream report and its context. A dream narrative gives the information about the hearers of the dream and eventually also about the interpreter and the interpretation of the dream. Lanckau also makes a distinction between “extra-relational” dreams and “intra-relational” ones. Lanckau defines as “extra-relational” those dreams that refer to somebody outside the dream report (51).

At the end of the introductory chapter, Lanckau explains that he will treat historical-critical questions only to some extent. While concentrating on the text of the Old Testament, he will only from time to time refer to historical-critical problems or literature

(53–64). At the end of the introduction, Lanckau sketches the range of what he calls “die vermutete Grundsicht,” the presumed primitive form of the story.

In the second chapter we find an overview of the “dream facts” of the Old Testament. After dealing with the semantics (67–75), all the dream stories of the Old Testament are presented (76), and several aspects of dreams are discussed.

After these preliminaries in the first chapters as a kind of first course, Lanckau starts with his main course: an exploration of the dream narratives in the Joseph stories. In chapter 3 he analyzes Joseph as dreamer in Gen 37 (123–92). In the next chapter the dreams of the king’s cupbearer and the royal baker (Gen 40) are discussed, while the double dreams of the pharaoh (Gen 41) are dealt with in chapter 5. The function of Jacob’s dream in Gen 46:1–5 is sketched in a short chapter (283–96).

After the analyses of the dream narratives, Lanckau focuses in chapter 7 on Joseph as a dreamer, while in chapter 8 Joseph as interpreter of dreams is discussed. In the next chapter Lanckau presents some historical-critical conclusions, while in the last chapter we find his elaborate conclusions regarding the functions of the dreams in the Joseph cycle and regarding the function of Joseph in his role as protagonist.

Lanckau argues that the perspective of “Grundsicht” is probably that of an author who was an official in northern Israel, while Joseph (as representative of the northern part) and Judah are antipodes, and this because the sympathy of the author is clearly for Joseph. He adds several other arguments. He refers, for example, to the fact that there are quite a few references to Egyptian influences (367). He argues that there is also a *relecture* from a “Judah” perspective and another one from a priestly point of view.

In the last chapter Lanckau presents the dream interpreter Joseph as the ideal wise man. Joseph acknowledges that the brothers “thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive” (KJV). Lanckau argues that the reconciliation between the different fractions in the “house Israel” is the important lesson for the audience.

Lanckau has written a decent dissertation in the typical German style. The theme of his book is from a literary and theological perspective highly attractive, because of the special relations between the dream phenomenon and daily life. It is quite clear that Lanckau realizes that his theme is so promising. Although this book is sometimes difficult reading, for example, because the transitions are not always clearly indicated or explained, the theme and the figure of Joseph remain so important that a reader from time to time can

feel the fascination of Lanckau for his object. As to be expected, it is possible that a book like this raises questions.

One of the questions that this book has raised is how and in what way Lanckau deals with the combination of diachronic and synchronic methods. In my opinion, Lanckau tries to kill two birds with one stone, because he wants to explain both the figure of Joseph in the biblical text and the one in the so-called Grundschrift. Although in his introduction he argues that he will not extensively discuss diachronic problems, in his conclusion the diachronic approach seems to be the more relevant one (ch. 9, but sometimes also in ch. 8). The result seems to be quite an ideal Joseph. Could it be that thus the exciting elements in the biblical stories about Joseph are slightly neglected? Could a more synchronically oriented study have resulted in a more dynamic image of Joseph? I would think so. Related to this question, I have to note that, although in his bibliography Lanckau refers to synchronic studies, such as the one of R. Longacre (*Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39–48* [2nd ed.; Winona Lake, Ind., 2003]) and R. Pirson (*The Lord of the Dreams: A Semantic and Literary Analysis of Genesis 37–50* [JSOTSup 355; Sheffield, 2002]) he hardly refers to studies like that in his discussion, for example, of Gen 37. It is quite remarkable that he refers mostly to German literature. I would like to know how Lanckau assesses Pirson's statement that, although in many studies on Gen 37–50 Joseph is depicted as a wise and righteous ruler, he himself casts doubts on such a depiction. Joseph again and again implicitly and explicitly exceeds the human domain and makes claims that approach or even intrude into the sphere of the divine. In his study Pirson argues that Joseph is not being too modest or that he has too lofty aspirations. Could this be an indication that the evaluation of Joseph's deeds in Genesis is less positive than sketched by Lanckau?

There is another aspect that raises a more or less similar question. Could it be that the opposition between dreams and the Mosaic authority or between dream and the word of God is less black and white than Lanckau argues (103–19; see, e.g., 118)? It is argued by the great Jewish scholar Abraham Joshua Heschel that Jewish thinking and living can only be adequately understood in terms of a dialectical pattern containing opposite or contrasted properties. As in a magnet, the ends of which have opposite magnetic qualities, these are opposed to one another and exemplify a polarity that lies at the very heart of Judaism.

When we look at the various views on dreams and visions in biblical traditions, we can detect such polarities. Dreams were valued variously during the different periods of Israel's history. In some earlier texts of the Old Testament, dreams are presented as communication with the divine, while in other texts one is warned against dreams. Dreams could be a way of conveying messages from God, as is explicitly said in Num

12:6–8. Dreams and visions are the ordinary, though enigmatic, way in which the divine speaks to prophets, but with Moses God speaks face to face. In Scripture there are time and again stories in which God speaks through dreams and visions (see Gen 15:1–6; 20:3–8; 28:11–15; 37:40,41). But elsewhere in Scripture it is suggested that dreams do originate in working (too) hard (Eccl 5:3: “Dreams come with much business,” REB).

We find very critical remarks about dreams in chapter 34 of Ben Sira. Although 34:1–7 is a long tirade against dreams, “scribe” Ben Sira’s critique on dreams is used to reinforce the position of the law. However, the opposition between the law of God and dreams is not as cut and dried as it seems. Sirach places the revelation of the law far above prophetic ways of divine communication such as dreams. At the same time, he acknowledges that these dreams can be divine communication. This is a prime example of the dream dilemma: Which dreams are divine and which are not? Even, which dreams are trustworthy? Elsewhere I argued that since the time of Sirach the relation between revelation through Scripture and learning and revelation through dreams and visions is a moot point (see “Trustworthy Dreams? About Dreams and References to Scripture in 2 Maccabees 14–15, Josephus’ *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.302–347 and in the New Testament,” *Persuasion and Dissuasion in Early Christianity, Ancient Judaism, and Hellenism* (ed. P. W. van der Horst et al.; CBET 33; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 87–107; repr. in B. J. Koet, *Dreams and Scripture in Luke-Acts: Collected Essays* [CBET 43; Leuven: Peeters, Leuven University Press, 2006], 25–50). In the encounter between Jewish movements and the Hellenistic world, we see a quite specific authentication strategy. Dreams had to fulfill a criterion. Dreams or visions together with Scriptures are divine revelations and a guarantee for “a turn for the better.” Although Lanckau mentions this relation (118; see also the literature mentioned in note 244), I think that this method of discerning “trustworthy dreams” should get even more attention because I think that it is the key for the acceptance of dreams as divine revelations.

When dreams are at issue, quite a few people become alert. It is to be expected that Lanckau’s dissertation will also be able to contribute to the study of the phenomenon of “dreams,” even if the author is dealing with a dream wisdom as old as the biblical narrative.

One last remark: the pagination given in the table of contents is not correct.