Pharaohs, slaves, brick-making and pyramids, a baby in the bulrushes, a drowning army in the Red Sea – these are the initial associations that might come to mind with the word “Egypt,” especially in terms of the Bible. Others may then start to make their presence felt, such as food in times of famine (Jacob and Joseph) and seeking refuge from a child-murdering despot (Jesus, Mary, and Joseph). These few associations merely scratch the surface of such biblical references. In fact, there are 671 references to Egypt in the Bible as a whole, references that include the themes of oppression, slavery, invading armies, and a place to be condemned; but then, Egypt also represents a source of food and fertility, and refuge from oppression and ruthlessness, from Jeroboam to Joseph, Mary, and Jesus.

Egypt, it seems, is not merely present as a background space in biblical narratives; rather, it saturates the biblical text. Moreover, Egypt occupies a very curious and contradictory space. One that I wish to call, following Henri Lefebvre, a “symbolic space.” What I propose to do here is to explore what such contradictory representations of Egypt might mean and what their function might be. My argument has three steps. First, by analyzing the biblical texts on Egypt, I argue that they fall into two groups: on the one hand, Egypt is a “space of fear”; and on the other a “space of hope.” These terms come from David Harvey and they designate the two possibilities that arise in terms of the issue of utopia/dystopia. The second step of my argument is that the difference between a utopian space of hope and a dystopian space of fear depends on the question of closure. If the symbolic space of Egypt remains open, delaying closure, then it is a space of hope, a space where one is welcome for food, refuge, shelter, and recuperation (rather like a vacation). However, closure of such a space
requires an authoritarian decision or move to make that closure. Once closed off, Egypt becomes a space of fear, where visitors are oppressed and put into slavery, from where armies emerge and attack neighbors, seeking imperial domination. All of this remains at the level of the text - the issue here being how Egypt is represented in the various texts of the Bible. So, the third step is to ask what the real historical conditions of this opposition between Egypt as a space of hope and one of fear might be. Here, I argue that this ambivalent representation of Egypt is a spatial feature of what I call a “sacred economy.”

2. Space of Fear and Space of Hope

As I mentioned earlier, there are 671 references to Egypt in the Bible, in both Hebrew and Christian versions. In order to be comprehensive, I am going to construct an exhaustive taxonomy of the texts that is, gather them under some main categories, and then engage in spatial analysis. Although I hardly expect you to read through the entire list, it does provide a striking visual sense of the pervasiveness of certain themes surrounding Egypt in the Bible.

Egypt is, first, a place of oppression and slavery in a number of stories. To begin with, Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt and has a number of dreams while in captivity (Gen 37:25, 28, 36; 39:1–2, 5, 10; 11:1, 5; 41:8, 19, 29, 30, 33–34, 36, 41, 43–46, 48, 53–56). Israel then suffers oppression in Egypt, from which it escapes (Exod 1:1, 5, 8, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19; 2:11, 12, 14, 19, 23; 3:7, 8, 12, 16, 22, 4:18, 19; 21:4, 5; 12, 6:5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 26–29; 7:3, 4–5, 11, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24; 8:5, 6, 7, 16, 17, 21, 24, 26, 9:4, 6, 9, 11, 18, 22, 25; 10:2, 6, 7, 12–15, 19, 21–22, 11:1, 3–7, 9, 12:1, 12 13, 17, 23, 27, 29, 30, 33, 35–36, 39, 40–42, 51; 13:3, 8–9, 14–18; 14:4, 5, 7–13, 17–18, 20, 23–27, 30–31; 15:26; 16:1, 3, 6, 12, 17:3). This theme echoes throughout the Bible. For example, Yahweh brings the people out of Egypt (Exod 18:1, 8–10, 19:1, 4, 20:2, 22:21, 23:9, 13, 29:40, 32:1, 4, 7–8, 11–12, 23, 33:1, 34:18; Lev 11:45; 18:3, 19:34, 36, 22:33, 23:4, 24:10, 25:38, 42, 35, 36:13, 45; 34:11; Num 14:19, 22, 20:15, 10, 22:5, 11; 23:22, 24:8; Deut 1:27, 30; 4:20, 34, 37, 45, 46; 5:6, 15; 6:12, 21, 22, 7:15, 18; 8:14; 9:7, 12; 10:19, 22; 11:3, 4, 10; 13:5, 10; 15:16; 16:1, 3. 6, 12, 20:1, 23:4, 7, 9, 18, 22; 25:17; 26:5, 6, 8, 28:27, 60, 68; 29:2, 16, 25:34; 11:12; Jos 2:10; 5:4, 5, 6, 9, 9; 24:4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 17, 32; Judg 2:11, 12; 6:8, 9, 13; 10:11; 11:13; 16; 19:30; 1 Sam 2:27, 48; 8:8, 10:18, 12:6, 8:15, 6; 2 Sam 7:6, 23; 1 Kgs 12:28; 2 Kgs 17:7, 36, 21:15, 1 Chr 17; 21; 2 Chr 5:10, 6:5, 7, 22; Neh 9:9, 10, 18; Ps 78:12, 43, 51; 80:8, 81:10, 105:21, 38, 106:7, 21, 114:1; 135:8, 9, 10; Isa 10:24, 26; Jer 2:6; 7:22, 25; 11:4, 7; 16:14; 23:7, 41:12; 32:30, 21; 34:13; Ezck 20:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10; Dan 9:15; Hos 2:12; 11:1; 12:9, 13; 13:4; Amos 2:10; 3:1; Mic 6:4; Hag 2:5; Jude 1:5). On a slightly different variant, the Exodus from Egypt becomes a chronological marker, in terms of the number of years passed since Yahweh delivered the people from Egypt (Num 1:1; 3:13; 8:17; 9:1, 26:4, 59; 32:11; 33:1, 3, 38; 1 Kg 6:1, 8–9, 16, 21; 8:5, 11, 13, 9:90). The remaining examples are variations on the preceding themes, such as the need to ensure the people are not forced to return to Egypt (Deut 17:16), or Joseph taking a stance against Egypt (Ps 81:5), the idolatrous traps of Egypt (Ezek 16:26; 17:15; 19:4; 20:36; 23:3, 8, 19, 21, 27), the second return from Exile as a repeat of the Exodus from Egypt (Isa 27:12, 13; Mic 7:12, 15), and then the New Testament retelling of the whole story (Acts 7:9, 10–12, 15, 17, 18, 22, 24, 28, 34, 36, 39, 40), even as an example of faith (Heb 3:16; 8:19; 11:22, 27, 29).

The second major feature of the “space of fear” is the army that pours out of Egypt at regular intervals and threatens to invade. There is of course Pharaoh’s army that hunts down the fleeing Israelites, only to perish in the sea (Exod 14:21–41). After this story, one Pharaoh after another leads an invading army. Shishak (1 Kg 14:25; 2 Chr 12:2, 3, 9, 10). Neco (2 Kgs 23:29; 34:24; 2 Chr 35:20; 36:3, 4), and Tirhakah (2 Kgs 23:29, 34; 24:7) make various appearances at the heads of armies, as do a number of unnamed Pharaohs and Egyptian kings (2 Kgs 7:6; Isa 37:9, 25; Jer 37:5, 7). A final twist on this theme is in 1 Kg 9:16, where Pharaoh, “king of Egypt,” attacks Gezer, slaughters the Canaanites in the town and gives it as a dowry for his daughter to Solomon.

In light of this bad press, it should come as no surprise that Egypt should be the subject of prophetic judgment, replete with all the various end-time themes of God’s vengeance and desolation (Isa 11:11, 15–16, 19:1, 2–4, 6, 12–23, 20:1, 3–5), Jer 25:19, 46:2, 8, 11, 13, 14, 17, 19–20, 22, 24–26; Ezek 29:9, 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 30:1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26; 31:2; 32:12, 15, 16, 18, 21; Dan 11:8, 42, 43; Joel 3:19; Zech 10:10, 11, 14:19). In a sublime twist on this theme, Egypt either becomes an agent of punishment of Israel in the latter days (as with the flies from the sources of the streams of the Nile in Isa 7:18) or the point of comparison for the destruction of Israel: it will have plagues like those in Egypt, or its land will rise and fall like the Nile (Amos 4:10; 8:8). Finally it is a metaphor for the apocalyptic city full of bodies that is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt (Rev 11:8).

This space of fear is, as I have suggested, the primary association with Egypt. Jan Assmann, the Egyptologist and cultural critic, suggests that such a fearful space was the main way in which Egypt was remembered.
for two millennia afterwards. This is true as far as it goes, but Assmann is mistaken when he attributes that “traumatic memory” of Egypt, one that was “the quintessence of idolatry and despotism” (Assmann 2006, 180–81), to the Bible. Surpassing this negative memory, he goes on to paint a different, highly positive, picture that comes from the ancient Greeks, one that was rediscovered in the Renaissance and began to revolutionize the traumatic memory of Egypt.1 As far as Assmann is concerned, “The [Greek] image was as unambiguously positive as the biblical account had been negative” (Assmann 2006, 181). In this respect, I wish to caution against hasty conclusions, since the Bible itself reveals this ambivalence.

Egypt as a space of hope is not a minor, buried theme in the Bible; rather, it reverberates throughout.

It is, first of all, a source of constant food and fertility, which people long for. For instance, in the wonderful Murmuring Stories, Egypt is a place of leeks and lentils, of cucumbers and fleshpots that the people recall in the Wilderness wanderings and owing to which there are murmurs of dissent and revolt against Moses and Aaron (Num 11:5; 18, 20; 13:22, 14:2–4, 20:5; 21:15). Egypt is also the place where various characters in different stories go, or long for, usually due to famine in their own place; Abram, Joseph’s brothers, and indeed all the peoples converge upon Egypt seeking food in times of famine (Gen 12:10–14; 13:1, 10; 41:57; 42:1–3; 43:1, 2, 15; Lam 5:6). It is a place of “fattiness,” where a lost son may prosper and father his own sons, and an old father may visit to be reunited with his son, settle with his clan, and die in peace (Gen 45:2, 4, 8–9, 13, 18–20, 23, 25–26; 46:1, 3, 4–6, 8, 20, 26–27, 34, 47:6, 11, 13–15, 20–22, 26–30; 48:5, 50:3, 7, 11, 14; 50:22, 26; see also Isa 42:4). Indeed, the people themselves may grow and prosper (Gen 47:27; Exod 1:6). Egypt is also a source of wisdom (1 Kgs 4:30), the famed fine embroidered and colored linens (Ezek 27:7; Prov 7:16), treasures (Heb 11:26), and even Solomon’s horses and chariots (1 Kgs 10:28, 29; 2 Chr 1:16–17; 9:28).

Not merely a place of food and plenty, a second major feature of the space of hope is that Egypt offers a refuge from oppression and ruthless. It offers political asylum and respite for people fleeing from pursuers. A significant group of such refugees includes Hadad in his flight from the ruthless Solomon (1 Kgs 11:17, 18, 21); Jeroboam after his rebellion against Solomon, before he successfully takes on Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, and thereby gains the larger part of the split kingdom (1 Kgs 11:40; 12:2; 2 Chr 10:2); Uriah in his flight from Jehoiakim (Jer 26:21–23); the people of Judah, in fear of the Babylonians (2 Kgs 25–26); the survivors from Mizpah (Jer 41:16–17). Also, Joseph, Mary, and a rather young Jesus flee to Egypt, where an angel appears to Joseph in a dream (Matt 2:13–15, 19). Indeed, with all this trekking back and forth, one suspects that these individuals might have encountered each other on the coastal road. In fact, such a convergence upon Egypt was so popular that in the texts of Jeremiah we find curses against anyone who would go to Egypt for refuge (Jer 42:14–19), and then judgments against those who do opt to head off (Jer 43:2, 7, 11–13; 44:1, 8, 12, 15, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30).

Finally, Egypt is a place of strength, offering the possibility of alliances. As Nah 3:9 points out, along with Cush, Egypt has “boundless strength.” Indeed, Solomon thought so, and so made an alliance (1 Kgs 3:1), as did Hosea (2 Kgs 17:4). Yet, this is where we come across the ambivalence of Egypt. What appears to be a source of strength can very quickly become treacherous, as Egypt is, after all, a “splintered reed” (2 Kgs 18:21, 24). Warnings against alliances with Egypt become a prophetic staple, and Egypt rapidly becomes a space of fear rather than hope (Isa 30:7, 3, 7, 31:1, 3; 36:6, 9; Jer 2:18, 36; Hos 7:11, 16; 8:13; 9:3, 6; 11:5, 11:17–18). With such an exhausting treatment, I run the risk of boring readers witless. But I have provided a rather comprehensive treatment in order to show how deeply these spaces of fear and hope run in the Bible. Tracking the way these spaces show up is, of course, merely the first step, a catalogue if you will, in the way Egypt is represented. Indeed, I would suggest that the refrain that echoes countless times throughout the whole Bible — “who brought you up out of Egypt” — is a little more ambivalent than we may have assumed. It is not clear sometimes whether Yahweh did the people a favor or not as they often begged to differ and desperately wanted to go back. The leeks, lentils, cucumbers, fleshpots, and fine-colored linen proved a fair match to the land flowing with milk and honey.

3. Openness and Closure in Utopia

Cataloguing the spaces of hope and fear is just the first step. I now wish to ask why we have such a pattern, why Egypt is represented in such a positive and then a negative light. My argument here is that Egypt functions as both a utopia and a dystopia and that the key to such an opposition is the tension between openness and closure. However, rather than a long theoretical expose on that topic, it is time to descend from the lofty synoptic view I have taken thus far and to take up a specific text.
The paradigmatic text I wish to focus upon is Gen 47. This is a section of the larger Joseph cycle in the later chapters of Genesis, which tells of Joseph's father, Jacob, and his arrival and settlement in Egypt and how the Egyptians coped with the years of famine. The lead-up to this section deals with the Pharaoh's double dream of the seven fat and skinny cows and then the blighted and full ears of corn, Joseph's interpretation that the dream means that seven years of plenty will be followed by seven years of famine, and then Joseph's appointment as governor of Egypt to ensure that enough grain is stored up for the years of famine (Gen 41). At the end of ch. 41, when the famine hits, Egypt, under the guidance of Joseph, is generous to a fault, selling grain not merely to the Egyptians but to "all the world" that came to "Joseph in Egypt to buy grain" (41:57).

However, by Gen 47 things look a little different. Let us pay particular attention to three features: the contrast between Israel and Egypt, the role of the famine in the story, and the way that Joseph goes about his business. For the contrast between Israel and Egypt, ch. 47 begins with Jacob/Israel arriving in Egypt after the drawn-out narrative of the meetings of Joseph with his brothers. Careful provision of land is made for Jacob, even "the best part of the land" (47:6), and food is provided: "And Joseph provided his father, his brother, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents" (47:12). The picture as a whole from the first part of Gen 47 and up to v. 12 is of a space of hope: Jacob arrives with the clan, they are welcomed, given the best food and lodgings, and settle down in comfort. The next verse, however, sounds a different note entirely: "Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe" (47:13). How is it that the clan of Jacob can be provided with the food that they need in the preceding verse when there is "no food in all the land"? Indeed, this is a crucial contrast in this chapter: while Israel prospers, Egypt suffers; while Israel has enough to eat, Egypt does not. Space of hope comes face to face with space of fear. Later on, I will argue that this tension is necessary, indeed, that one side cannot do without the other. The contrast shows up again a little later in the chapter, for here, after the Egyptians have sold their bodies into slavery in order to eat, we find the following verse, "Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly" (47:27). It is as though the famine has barely touched them.

The second feature is the agency of Joseph in the story, especially in vv. 13 to 19. Here is the depiction wherein the Egyptians gradually descend into slavery, or, rather, Joseph corners them into slavery. To begin with, people pay money for food, from both Egypt and Canaan, and Joseph "collected all the silver to be found" (Gen 47:14). When the money runs out, the focus shifts purely onto the Egyptians. They come before Joseph and request food, and he suggests they hand over their livestock in exchange for food (47:16). So, Joseph collects all the horses, flocks, herds, and donkeys, but even this lasts only for a year. A third time, the Egyptians return and ask for food. With no money and no cattle, they say, "[b]uy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh" (47:19). Is it not the Hebrews who are eventually enslaved in Egypt? Of course, they are enslaved at the beginning of the book of Exodus, but only after the Egyptians have all become debt-slaves: their money, flocks, land, and bodies all belong to the Pharaoh: "So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh" (47:20).

Joseph's specific task is as an agent of closure. Or rather, he acts in an authoritarian manner that closes off options for the Egyptians. Little by little, the Egyptians become slaves, first by handing over their money at his demand, then their flocks, and then their land and bodies. What was a land of plenty, even a few chapters earlier (note especially Gen 41:56–57), what was open to all should they require food (albeit upon payment), is now closed. In other words, utopia has become dystopia, a space of fear through an act of authoritarian closure. This situation is reinforced by vv. 20–26 in Gen 47, where Joseph now rations out seed to the people. He instructs them to sow the seed and harvest it, and then give a fifth of the harvest to Pharaoh and use four-fifths for themselves (Gen 47:24). To which the people respond, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh" (Gen 47:25).

Apart from observing that the famine suddenly seems to have disappeared for the sake of a little aside on the origin of a law (the source critics of course have had a field day with this text, suggesting that another source was interwoven here), here lies the deeper narrative reason for the enslavement of the Israelites at the beginning of Exodus. It is not that "a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (Exod 1:8), but that all the Egyptians were already enslaved; the Israelites were just following suit. The well-known dystopian space of fear of the enslaved Israelites begins, at this juncture, with the enslaved Egyptians.

2. Often mistranslated as money, keseph refers to silver metal exchanged by weight rather than coined, as the Greeks tended to do. Without a market economy or any extensive system of trade, such use of silver for exchange was a minor feature (see Flinty 1999, 166–69).
The third feature is the famine itself: if Joseph is an agent of closure then the famine is the means of closure. Joseph is able to carry out the measures of enslavement because of the famine and his preparations beforehand. The famine enables Joseph to gain everything on behalf of Pharaoh. In other words, the famine is the literary device for turning Egypt into a dystopian space. In the years of plenty, Egypt is an open, welcoming place, but, with years of famine, it is closed off, providing Joseph with a means for doing what he would not have been able to do in the years of plenty.

Genesis 47, in other words, is an excellent example of David Harvey’s point concerning the interplay of openness and closure in the depiction of utopia and dystopia. In a discussion of Henri Lefebvre (1991; see also Boer 2003, 87–109), who has deeply influenced Harvey, Harvey argues that Lefebvre leaves his utopias open, especially in terms of space. Lefebvre does not like closure: he finds closed utopias authoritarian, rationalized, bureaucratized, and technocratic. The problem, Harvey suggests, is that Lefebvre is too much of a romanticist, as utopia does in fact need some sort of closure: "to materialize a space is to engage with closure (however temporary) which is an authoritarian act. The history of all realized utopias points to this issue of closure as fundamental and unavoidable... the problem of closure and the authority it presupposes cannot endlessly be evaded" (Harvey 2000, 183). Harvey’s point specifically relates to actual, realized utopias, rather than literary utopias.

Yet, this is also a necessary feature of literary utopias (see Jameson 2005), and my suggestion, in this vein, is that Egypt functions as a literary utopia, especially when it is a space of hope in the Bible. However, when closure occurs, it is an authoritarian act, one that Joseph enacts in this story from Gen 47, and utopia threatens to become a dystopia—a space of hope becomes a space of fear.

4. Utopia and Dystopia in the Sacred Economy

There is one final step in my argument. Thus far, I have argued that Egypt is both a space of hope and a space of fear in the Bible. I then went on to suggest that the reason for this opposition lies in the pattern of openness and closure—in particular as is apparent in the welcoming of Jacob and the enslavement of the Egyptians in Gen 47. Now I wish to ask a final question. What is the social and economic context of that which comprises a metaphorical geography? What is the underlying logic of this pattern of utopian openness and dystopian closure?

Before I proceed, I draw on three more points from David Harvey, surmised in the following quotation.

Places, like space and time, are social constructs and have to be read and understood as such. There are ways to provide a materialist history of this literal and metaphorical geography of the human condition and to do it so as to shed light on the production of spatially differentiated otherness... (Harvey 1993, 25, emphasis mine)

Although the first point is well known, it is worth repeating: place, space, and time are social constructs. My focus is on place and space, but Harvey’s point is that rather than being a given, space is something constructed and produced by human beings, in their thought, literature, culture, and so on. While it may seem counter-intuitive to suggest that a worm was only five centimeters long after the invention of centimeters, we only have to think of the various spaces we construct. A home, replete with walls, a roof, beds, and shelves is not a home until we have made it so, nor is a road until made so, nor indeed a forest. This is the case with Egypt too, in the biblical text. It is too a social construct. Even more, it is a metaphorical geography. The Egypt of which I write is a product of the biblical material. It does not exist as that “Egypt” outside the biblical text. Thus, the Egypt of hope and fear is a literary Egypt—one that has influenced many subsequent representations of Egypt and indeed very real political and economic policies relating to Egypt—both a literary and metaphorical Egypt nonetheless.

It is the third point in the quotation from Harvey that brings me directly to the final part of my argument. Egypt in the biblical texts is a spatially differentiated otherness. By this, I mean that Egypt is on the edge of the constructed spatial worlds of the Bible, and is therefore liminal, at the boundary of what we might call the “known” worlds of the Bible. A group of texts presents Egypt in this fashion. The overall refrain is twofold: this known world extends from Egypt to the river Euphrates; items may come from as far away as Egypt (see Gen 15:18; 25:18; Num 34:5; Josh 13:3; 15:4, 47; 1 Sam 15:7; 27:8; 1 Kgs 4:21; 8:65; 1 Chr 13:5; 2 Chr 7:8; 9:26; 26:8, Jer 24:8; EzeK 48:28; Amos 3:9; Acts 2:10).3

This brings me to my final point: as a boundary-limit space, Egypt may function as a space in which to invest a series of hopes of fears. In the realms of imagination, it is so far away, at the edge of the known world,

3. Cush, Libya, and Nubia are also regarded as part of this border zone (Ps 68:31; Isa 11:11; 20: 43:3; 45:14; Ezek 29:10; 31:4, 5, 9; Amos 9:7; Nah 3:9; Dan 11:43).
that it may therefore become a space in which to place one’s various hopes and fears. By virtue of this, it may therefore be utopian and dystopian. Yet, what sort of utopia/dystopia is it?

We now come to the materialist history of the constructed space of Egypt in the Bible. As a space at the limit, Egypt gives voice to the fundamental tension of what I would like to call the “sacred economy.” It is either a space where everything is freely available, even in abundance, all of which is provided by God, or, it is an aggressive, hostile, imperial space where one must work as a slave, and even then barely survive, since someone else takes what one produces. These two features may be called a logic of allotment and a logic of extraction. One either has food, lodgings, and refuge freely allocated in abundance, or one has these things (and more) taken away and extracted, often by force.

The two are inseparable from one another, in just the same manner that Egypt, the space of fear, and Egypt, the space of hope, are two sides of the same coin, allocation and extraction are the two basic elements of the sacred economy. The sacred economy is a model I have developed for understanding the marginal zone of the southern Levant (and thereby ancient Israel) in the context of ancient Southwest Asia, especially in light of the lamentable lack of an adequate economic model and, indeed, economic history. Let me briefly outline what a sacred economy looks like. Drawing upon soviet-era Russian scholarship and the Marxist school of economic thought known as Regulation theory,4 I distinguish between three levels of economic activity: the basic institutional forms, their varying constellations as economic regimes, and then the overarching mode of production that is constituted by the regimes. Into this threefold structure I introduce a further distinction, between allocative and extractive economic patterns. As the terms indicate, allocative patterns depend on the allocation and reallocation of labor and the produce of labor, while extraction means the appropriation of the produce of labor by those who do not work (the willing unemployed, namely, the ruling class and its hangers-on). Of the building blocks known as institutional forms, there are: subsistence survival, kinship-household, patronage, estates, and tribute-exchange. The first three are largely allocative, while the remaining two are extractive, although there are overlaps between them. At different economic periods, the institutional forms are arranged in different ways, in patterns of dominance and subservience. These arrangements or constellations are the regimes: the subsistence regime, the palatine regime, and the regime of plunder. Here only the first is allocative, characteristic of the bulk of the population engaged in agriculture, while the other two are extractive, the approaches of the little and big kingdoms and their brutal potenates. These regimes indicate the internal workings of the mode of production I call the sacred economy.

Let me outline the building blocks (or institutional forms) of the sacred economy in a little more detail. Three of the five institutional forms are primarily allocative in structure, by which I mean that they operated according to economic patterns of allocation and reallocation—of labor, tools, tasks, and produce. First, subsistence survival emphasizes the importance of agriculture, which was characterized by optimal usage, diversity, security against risk, a focus on labor and usufict (and not land), and small surpluses for tough times. Second, kinship-household provided the social determination of subsistence survival: through religion and cultural assumptions, customary law, division of labor, and social sanction, it determined who did what where and who received what from whom. These households were characterized by flexible and fluid rhythms of spatial production and everyday life. Third, although it is less important, patronage bridges allocation and extraction, moving in either direction depending on the prevailing tenor of the times.

The remaining two institutional forms are extractive, namely, the estates and tribute-exchange. By estates I mean temple and palace estates, along with the development of the state. I understand the state as the result of intractable class conflict, the machinery of which is then seized by one class and turned into an instrument of its own agenda. This ruling class also develops agricultural estates: as non-producers they must find some way to live in the way to which they have become accustomed. The estates were administered either directly or by tenure, and laborers were indentured permanently or temporarily (corvee, debt, and so on). Given the perpetual labor shortage, the estates constantly sought to draw more laborers from the village communities, with little concern for their viability.

The final and extractive institutional form concerns tribute-exchange. Here the many faces of plunder appear, whether crude, polite external, polite internal, or elite plunder. These are usually known as plunder per se, tribute, taxation, and exchange. However, they are all forms of booty, since the underlying purpose is acquisition through some form of extortion. Apart from dealing with the patterns of taxation and tribute,
here we find exchange, markets, and coinage. It is quite clear from the
textual and archaeological records that long-distance exchange was in
preciosities (high value, luxury items) since it was simply impossible to
shift bulk goods over such distances. At a local level, usually between
villages within eyesight of one another, some exchange did take place
for items not obtainable locally. Yet an important shift did happen in
the first millennium, when the need to provision ever larger armies, the
invention of coinage, and the search for new mechanisms of taxation saw
the expansion of local markets. Yet their primary function was logistical
(provisioning empires) rather than for profit, for they were byproducts of
the state’s concerns. 6

How did such institutional forms relate to one another over time? This
takes place through constant rearrangements of institutional forms into
the regimes that responded to different economic situations, with one or
another institutional form dominant and determinative. These constella-
tions may be designated as the subsistence regime, the palatine regime,
and the regime of booty. The subsistence regime was characteristic of
what are usually called times of economic “crisis” or “chaos” - ever-
present, but notable in the third millennium, the middle of the second
millennium, and in the closing centuries of the second millennium. It
was the dominant regime found in the southern Levant and thereby of
ancient Israel. The scarce quotes around “crisis” and “chaos” appear for
a reason, since these periods were by no means a crisis for the 90% of
those involved in the agriculture of the subsistence regime. It was in fact
the most stable of all regimes, and usually the most creative of times -
usable inventions happen during such periods. The palatine regime (an
extractive one) characterized the efforts of various potentates and despots
to seize control of states and support themselves and their dependents
by means of agricultural estates. Inherently unstable, the palatine regime
rose and collapsed time and again, only to run completely out of steam
by the thirteenth century. In its place, the regime of booty characterized
the first millennium and its large empires. It varied between crude plunder
(Assyrian Empire) and the more refined forms of taxation and tribute,
enabled by the use of coinage and development of markets as byproducts
of the state’s over-riding concerns with provisioning its military and
bureaucracy (Persian or Achaemenid Empire). The regime of booty was
also deeply unstable, falling apart readily.

For the sake of my analysis here, the fundamental tension in the sacred
economy is that between allocation and extraction. This is a tension that
both kept the sacred economy functioning and also led to its eventual
demise. So, what is the relation between this excursus into the sacred
economy and the tension between spaces of hope and spaces of fear in
the representation of Egypt? When it is a space of hope, Egypt operates
according to an ideal or utopian form of an allocatory economics. It is
fertile, productive, and open: land, food, and children are freely produced.
Upon his arrival, Jacob settles in the best part of the land, Israel flourishes
and grows, and there is abundant food. Such a space of hope is unfettered
by an extractive economics. However, when Egypt is a space of fear, it
becomes a nightmare of an extractive economics. Armies march out of
Egypt to conquer and extract tribute; its people are enslaved as they have
to sell their bodies for food. They must pay 20% of the produce they make
as a tax when they have become slaves, and then, eventually, the Israelites
are also made slaves and must work for the Pharaoh, with barely enough
food to survive.

5. Conclusion

The utopian space of hope is, I suggest, an ideal literary manifestation
of one half of the sacred economy, while the dystopian space of fear
compresses the literary geography of the other half. Yet, such extremes
can only take place because Egypt is a border zone, a limit space where
these fears and hopes may find expression. I am arguing, therefore, that
the tension between the spaces of hope and fear in Egypt is a literary manifes-
tation of the tension between allocatory and extractive economics. In the
same way that the allocative and extractive elements of the economy
cannot live without each other, so is the case with the two sides of
Egypt: the spaces of hope and fear are inseparable from one another.

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MYTHICAL SPACE AND MYTHICAL TIME: JERUSALEM AS THE SITE OF THE LAST JUDGMENT*

Klaus Bieberstein

1. Mythical Space and Mythical Time

To understand space and time no longer as units existing in nature but rather as transcendental forms of perception was the first fundamental thesis of Immanuel Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason. However, the criticism can be leveled against Kant that he proceeded from more or less scientific reason, but did not take into consideration other ways of perceiving and interpreting the world as independent means of world creation such as language, myth, religion, or art. So it was left to Johann Gustav Droysen, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Heinrich Rickert, and above all Ernst Cassirer, to expand Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason via a Critique of Historical Reason into a comprehensive Critique of Culture and to ask about a grammar of all possible ways of world making (Cassirer 1923–29, 1953–57).

Along with the pure function of cognition we must seek to understand the function of linguistic thinking, the function of mythical and religious thinking, and the function of artistic perception, in such a way as to disclose how in all of them there is attained an entirely determinate formation, not exactly of the world, but rather making for the world, for an objective, meaningful context and an objective unity that can be apprehended as such. (Cassirer 1953: 179; 80)

Cassirer recognized that Kant’s conception of space and time is based on a naive, modern trust in scientific knowledge as the allegedly single legitimate way of interpreting the world, and he could show through

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