Chapter 9
Great men

9.1 Introduction

When Freud wrote Civilization and Its Discontents he was already well past seventy. The last major debate (with Klein, inter alia) resulted in fact in a repetition of standpoints he had taken earlier. The interest in pre-Oedipal developments (in girls) did not result in new clinical research. We could almost say the opposite – he began to concentrate on “great men”, religious leaders in whom he had long been interested. The time for debate was over. The old psychologists with whom he had debated in his earliest work, people like Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, were long dead. Even most of his earliest followers had died or broken with him. The most recent generation of psychoanalysts was going its own way.

The last decade of Freud’s life was mainly devoted to repetitions and further elaborations of ideas he had worked out earlier. The most important theoretical treatises of these years, for example An Outline of Psychoanalysis, are all characterized by this. A second group of texts are about analysis and treatment (especially Analysis Terminable and Interminable) and these too largely restate older ideas, albeit with a more explicitly tragic tone. Even Why War? mostly consists of repetitions of findings on the death drive, aggression and cultural development, and can largely be regarded as an abstract of Civilization and Its Discontents. It was written as an answer to an open letter from Albert Einstein to Freud, whereby Einstein’s question is clear – how is it possible that people in modern society can still be driven to the madness of violence and destruction? What is particularly noticeable here is that Freud combined a “pessimistic” view on human destructiveness with the utopian hope that others would also become pacifists, just like “us”. By calling himself a pacifist he was siding with the great names of the time. What is of course also clear is that his pacifism must be seen against a background of emerging Fascism and Nazism in Europe. The 1930s were years when anti-Semitism began to become much more systematic. Freud’s books, and those of other psychoanalysts, did not escape the organized book-burnings in

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1 The first two parts of An Outline of Psychoanalysis are a compacted version of Freud’s main psychoanalytic ideas reaching back to Project for a Scientific Psychology. The most important new theoretical idea is presented in the third part of the text and concerns “the splitting of the ego” which Freud now not only regarded as a characteristic of psychosis, but also of the neuroses. This issue of “splitting” seems to have been inspired by Klein and her thoughts on projection in the pre-Oedipal stage, but we should bear in mind here that Freud was primarily concerned with the splitting of the ego whereas Klein discusses the splitting of the object (for example, good breast vs bad breast). On this issue see J.-M. Quinodoz, Reading Freud, pp.250-253.

2 P. Gay, Freud, p.615.


Germany. This threatening period ended for him with flight to London, shortly before he died. Seen against this background, it is thus hardly surprising that at this period in particular he began to spend a lot of time working on Jewish identity (in relation to anti-Semitism). These reflections resulted in Moses and Monotheism, on which Freud worked for five years and which was published in 1939. It consists of three volumes, the first of which appeared in Imago in early 1937 and the second at the end of the same year. The third and by far the largest volume was published in 1939 (in Amsterdam), together with the first two volumes. It was Freud’s last great work and is the main theme of this chapter.5

9.2 Moses the Egyptian

Freud and some of his followers had expressed interest in Moses earlier. These followers focussed on the heroic characteristics of Moses.6 Theodor Reik, for example, had applied Freud’s ideas from Totem and Taboo on the totem meal, the hate of the primal father and the sense of guilt to Judaism. He presented Moses as a mythical hero, a rebellious figure battling with God. This figure represented a piece of primitive mythical religion in Jewish monotheism.7 Thus, Judaism was no exception to the general lines of development in religion Freud had already depicted.8 Yet, according to Reik, some questions remained to be answered. What psychic factors had caused the sense of guilt of the Jewish people to develop a strict monotheism? And what psychic factors could explain the Jewish belief in being a chosen people?9 In Moses and Monotheism Freud formulated answers to these questions.

For Freud, however, Moses was not merely a mythical hero representing the primitive prehistory of Judaism. On the contrary, Freud’s interest in Moses can

5 The text consists of three parts. The first two were written in 1937. The third part starts with two preface notes (written in Vienna and London in 1938). Idem, pp.54-58. What follows is the first part of the second version of the manuscript from 1938 (pp.59-104). Then the first version of the manuscript from 1934 is inserted (pp.105-130). The final pages are then the second part of the second version (130-137). On the complex genesis of Moses and Monotheism and an analysis of the amalgam of “versions” the final text holds see I. Grubrich-Simitis, Freuds Moses-Studie als Tagtraum. Ein biographischer Essay, Verlag Internationale Psychoanalyse, Weinheim, 1991, pp.79-103; A.F.M. Mampuys, De ik-spleissing van de man Mozes en de inscheuring van zijn ik. Een commentaar bij Freuds Mozeswerk, zijn ik-spleijingstekst en de Wolfmancasus, Groningen, 1997.


8 We should note here that Reik’s application of Totem and Taboo to Judaism seemed to fill a lacuna – Freud had not discussed Judaism in Totem and Taboo, yet he had stressed the primitive core of Christianity.

9 Idem, pp.360-361. On discussions on Moses in the psychoanalytic movement see H. Westerink, “De mythische held of de man Mozes?”; H. Westerink, “Zum Verhältnis von Psychoanalyse und Mythologie”.

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also be traced back to a number of other factors. The first has already been mentioned – reflections about Moses were reflections about Jewish identity against a background of rising anti-Semitism and a threatening world. A second reason to study Moses was that he was the founder of a religion. Freud’s interest in the founders of religions can be traced back at least to Group Psychology and Civilization and Its Discontents. It is reasonable to assume that he now wanted to study such a founder of cultural morals in more detail. A third reason for studying Moses was a personal one – he had long been fascinated by this figure.

In a 1935 letter, Freud set out what would be the core of his first treatise on the man Moses as an Egyptian. He wrote in this letter that the question of who Moses was, the figure who was the key to understanding the Jewish character, had occupied him all his life. Freud had indeed long been interested in Moses. This was particularly clear from Freud’s fascination with Michelangelo’s statue of Moses in Rome. He first saw it in 1901 and thereafter visited it regularly. It is clear that the fascination was for Moses and not so much for Michelangelo. The product of this fascination was The Moses of Michelangelo. One of the underlying questions here too is who Moses actually was. According to Freud, Michelangelo had not depicted Moses as the short-tempered man who beat an Egyptian to death and smashed the stone tablets in a fit of rage, but as the man who succeeded in bringing something “more than human” (Übermenschliches) about, something that is one of man’s greatest achievements, namely the control of one’s own drives for the greater good of a higher goal. This element of the renunciation of aggression had already been linked to Moses by Freud via a reference to the apostle Paul in Obessive Actions and Religious Practices.

The fact that in the 1930s Freud again became mesmerized by Moses can be linked not only to a personal fascination, but must also be placed against the background of an interest in the founders of religions, an ongoing discussion in the psychoanalytic movement of religion, Judaism and the figure of Moses and a reflection on Jewish identity against a background of increasing anti-Semitism. What is remarkable in this context is Freud’s reference to James Henry Breasted’s The Dawn of Conscience from 1934. A central theme in this book about the

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cradle of the development of morality and conscience in Western culture (the Middle East) is the question of the place of the people of Israel in this tradition. Breasted saw Israel as a channel for older moral traditions, such as that of the great empires of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. He made clear in his foreword that this train of thought was by no means an anti-Semitic one. Thus Breasted made a link between historical research into the meaning of the Jewish people for the “advance of man toward new visions of character and social idealism” in the Western world and the current identity of that people.\(^\text{14}\) There is a second reason why this book by Breasted is interesting – Freud’s reference to this book reveals that once again, in \textit{Moses and Monotheism} too, the genesis and development of morality and conscience (and thus also the sense of guilt) has taken central stage. In addition, the book by Breasted is also a reflection on the human tendency towards destruction. He put forward that our primitive ancestors were unmoral savages, the human expression of this for tens of thousands of years was the art of making weapons, whereby the development of the moral sense is virtually still in the starting blocks by comparison. Primitive destructive forces can thus still be released, whereas the development of a conscience is actually intended to master these forces.\(^\text{15}\) Thus in Breasted Freud discovered a new confirmation of ideas he expressed in \textit{Civilization and Its Discontents} and of his arguments against the London school – there is a link between destructive tendencies and the formation of conscience and morality.

Incidentally, in Breasted that morality is not anchored in a historical moment, as was the case with Freud in \textit{Totem and Taboo}, but rather in the gradual development of customs and legislation. Certain individuals have boosted important developments. In the Egyptian tradition he pointed mainly to Akhenaton, and with the Jewish tradition Moses is the key figure par excellence, a leader who was able to merge the Egyptian and Midianite traditions and thus teach the people morality (the Ten Commandments).\(^\text{16}\) Finally, he also pointed out that the evolution of the conscience still had a long way to go and that its completion would probably mean that traditional (thus also religious) convictions would have to make way for new insights.\(^\text{17}\) In short, with Breasted we meet themes that touch on the themes of Freud’s great cultural studies, \textit{Totem and Taboo, The Future of an Illusion} and \textit{Civilization and Its Discontents}. This is the line in which \textit{Moses and Monotheism} can be placed.

The question concerning the identity of Moses, who Freud assumed was a historical figure around whom myths and legends had grown up, starts with the matter of the name.\(^\text{18}\) It seems unlikely that Moses is a Hebrew name – the

\(^\text{14}\) Idem, pp.xv-xvii.
\(^\text{15}\) Idem, Introduction, chapter I.
\(^\text{16}\) Idem, pp.349ff.
\(^\text{17}\) Idem, pp.419-420.
\(^\text{18}\) S. Freud, \textit{Moses and Monotheism}, pp.7ff.
explanation of the name (Exodus 2:10) is not correct and it is also unlikely that an Egyptian princess would have given a Hebrew name to the child she found. What is more likely is that the name is derived from the Egyptian “mose”, which means “child”. However, this does not mean that Moses was Egyptian.

The contribution to this theme was Rank’s *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*. Rank assumed that every prominent culture idolized its national heroes in myth, legend and saga. Birth stories were particularly strongly mythologized. The most important thing Freud wanted to adopt from here was the thought that two families play a role in the myth – the important family to whom the hero is born and the subservient family in which the hero grows up. The birth myth around Moses does not fit this structure, however. Moses was born in a poor Jewish family and then grew up at the Egyptian court. According to Rank, the myth was adapted later and an earlier myth did in fact fit the general model. This was too speculative for Freud to follow and he did not think the differences between the Moses myth and the general model were sufficiently explained by later adaptations to the model. The differences are based on historical facts.

So for Freud there was a real family to whom Moses was born and there was the later mythologization. From an analysis of the relationship between the two Freud came to the hypothesis that Moses was an Egyptian prince around whom the Jewish people had spun a myth. The hero Moses was thus not the mythical representative of some form of primitive Judaism, but an Egyptian prince who threw in his lot with the Jewish slaves. Freud could not yet support his hypothesis with real arguments. The only argument was a generality – behind every legend, myth or saga hides a kernel of historical truth. This latter argument was particularly characteristic of his interest in the true facts behind the stories. That Moses was an Egyptian prince is a hypothesis that arises from the idea that a piece of repressed actual history is hiding behind the phenomenon. In other words, he was concerned with the reconstruction of a specific primal scene, in this instance also as a reply to Rank.

9.3 Akhenaton and monotheism

Moses, the liberator and legislator of the Jewish people, was an Egyptian. For the time being this remained a hypothesis. “If Moses was an Egyptian”, then it is at first sight hard to imagine he would have lowered himself to the level of

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19 See 4.2.
21 The tenor of Freud’s discussion of Rank was that the latter’s work was not only extremely speculative, but that he had also tried to formulate a primal myth as a model, thereby underemphasizing the differences between myths.
23 As in his critique of Jung, Freud emphasized in his discussion of Rank the problem with applying a general interpretation scheme to various stories and figures in different religious contexts.
associating with a formerly enslaved people. On the other hand, it also seems unlikely that the Jewish people would have adopted the legislation and religion of a strange Egyptian. The hypothesis appears too problematic, but Freud pointed out that there was a possibility that the Jewish religion really did spring from the Egyptian. If Moses really lived, he would have been a contemporary of Amenhotep IV, also known as Akhenaton, a pharaoh who during his reign introduced a form of monotheism.

The interest in Akhenaton was nothing new in the circle around Freud. In 1912 Abraham had published on this pharaoh in *Imago*. He emphasized the subconscious attitude of Amenhotep towards his parents as the core complex through which his monotheism can be approached – he saw himself as the son of Aton and introduced a religious system wherein that god was the only god. This religious attitude was accompanied by a change in name (from Amenhotep to Akhenaton) and with struggles against the god Amun and the removal of everything to do with that god, including the name of his father Amenhotep III. To Abraham it was clear that Akhenaton worshipped the Aton as an idealized father. He then pointed out that this god Aton has many similarities with Yahweh – a god that is impersonal (Akhenaton announced a ban on statues), free of passions, whims and hate; a god of peace and not war. And so, according to the conclusion, the Aton religion was a precursor of Mosaic legislation. He even went a step further by stating that this Aton religion also contained the kernel that would be preserved in Christianity. Despite this advanced development, Akhenaton’s monotheism was not a success. Akhenaton imposed his religious reforms too rigorously and thus came into conflict with the religious perceptions of the people. His lot is a sad one – after his death a counter-revolution was instigated. He may have had a small group of supporters and worshippers, but in fact he stood alone.

Freud related Akhenaton’s story and came to a conclusion close to that of Abraham – Akhenaton was surrounded by a small group of sympathizers and if Moses was an Egyptian, he would have been one of them. He then went further with an argument that the Jewish religion in essence can be traced back to Akhenaton’s monotheism. The similarities already begin with the names of the two gods – Aton and Adonai. Freud thought that he could find an argument in Arthur Weigall in support of the idea that the name Adonai was derived from Aton. Weigall, however, was actually arguing the opposite – the introduction of

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24 Idem, p.18.
25 Idem, pp.20ff.
26 K. Abraham, “Amenhotep IV (Echnaton). Psychoanalytische Beiträge zum Verständnis seiner Persönlichkeit und des monotheistischen Aton-Kultes”, in Psychoanalytische Schriften II, pp.329-359. Although Freud never referred to this article directly, it is significant that in *Moses and Monotheism* he called upon the same literature on Akhenaton as Abraham.
27 Idem, p.344.
29 Idem, p.25.
Aton in Egypt was the introduction of a foreign, namely Syrian, element. In his view Akhenaton’s monotheism did not continue in Judaism but in Christianity.  

Another similarity between Judaism and the Akhenaton religion apparently lay in the denial of an afterlife – Akhenaton challenged the worship of other gods and thus also the belief in an afterlife; the Jewish religion continued in this line. Once again Freud referred to Weigall and once again that reference is rather strange – according to the latter, the Akhenaton religion did believe in a life after death, but there was no belief in hell. Circumcision, which was apparently introduced to the Jewish people by Moses, also apparently has an Egyptian origin.

According to Freud, these arguments all point in one direction – Moses was definitely an Egyptian. He was a high-ranking supporter of Akhenaton. After the death of Akhenaton he lost his position during the counter-revolution. His solution was to found a new empire with a new people: “These he chose to be his new people – a historic decision”. He became the leader of a collection of Semitic tribes, the future Jewish people.

Freud continued to repeat that this reconstruction was not only hypothetical and speculative but would remain so. In fact we have seen that Freud borrowed his thesis from the literature – he is extremely selective when collecting his arguments. Yet there was one fact that stood out for him – Jewish monotheism was derived from the Egyptian religion and Moses was the key figure. The main problem, however, was that these core thoughts did not seem to be in agreement with other new insights into Jewish history and the origin of Jewish monotheism. In 1906 the historian Eduard Meyer had claimed that the Jewish religion had known a founding moment. He localized that event in Meriba-Kadesh, an area to the south of Israel. That was where the Jewish tribes adopted the worship of a Midianite god, the worship of the volcano god Yahweh. According to Meyer, this volcano god had the character of a terrifying demon. For him, too, Moses was the founder of Jewish monotheism. He was not an Egyptian but a Midianite, probably a miracle-worker of low social status. Freud saw it as his duty to resolve the problem of linking these two different origin stories. What is remarkable is that he now no longer referred to Breasted, despite his having linked the Egyptian Moses and the Midianite Moses with each other in *The Dawn of Conscience*. Moses had grown up in Egypt, but at a certain moment he entered the desert and learned of

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32 A. Weigall, *The Life and Times of Akhnaton*, pp.120-123.
34 Idem, p.28. This choice by Moses is the primal deed from which the later Jewish belief in being the chosen people stems. H. Westerink, “Zum Verhältnis von Psychoanalyse und Mythologie”, pp.306-308.
Yahweh from the Midianites. Breasted even thought that the Israelites exchanged their polytheism for monotheism under the influence of Moses, but concluded that this change implied a stronger motive than the influence of their great leader. He found that motive in an eruption of Mount Sinai, whereby Yahweh demonstrated his power.\(^{36}\) Freud definitely knew about Breasted’s theory but merely pointed out that Mount Sinai was not a volcano and thus the motive could not be sought there. In what follows below, it will turn out that Freud saw another link between the Egyptian and the Midianite traditions.

### 9.4 The Kadesh compromise

Freud now called upon Ernst Sellin, who had written on the meaning of Moses for the religion of the Israelites.\(^{37}\) Referring to, \textit{inter alia}, Meyer. Sellin posed a simple key question: who is Moses? Sellin took the book of Hosea as his line of approach. His findings were that in the early history of the Jewish people there had been an exodus from Egypt and that subsequently in the desert (near Mount Sinai) a religious community was created from the merging of different tribes. He saw Moses as the leader of the exodus. Sellin’s most important finding, however, was that Moses was murdered by his own people.\(^{38}\) With this discovery, Freud now had all the pieces of the puzzle needed for a reconstruction.

According to Freud, Moses was an Egyptian who took the Aton religion, monotheism and circumcision from Egypt into the desert.\(^{39}\) There at a certain moment he was murdered by his own people. In the desert, specifically near the place Kadesh, unification took place of related tribes who worshipped Yahweh, among other gods, under the leadership of a Midianite priest. This unification, which took place over a period of several generations, bears the character of a


\(^{38}\) The question remains whether Freud had first met this view in Sellin – further on in \textit{Moses and Monotheism} he indicated that Goethe, too, had accepted the murder of Moses. S. Freud, \textit{Moses and Monotheism}, p.89; H. Politzer, \textit{Freud und das Tragische}, p.173.

\(^{39}\) Idem, pp.47ff. Already in 1935 Freud gave an outline of the central line of thought on Moses in a letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé. S. Freud, L. Andreas-Salomé, \textit{Briefwechsel}, pp.222-224. Freud wrote that not Yahweh but Moses was the liberator, religious founder and legislator. His idea was that the character of Yahweh was mainly determined by events concerning Moses and not the other way round. According to Freud, the Jews had murdered Moses. This murder was repressed, but it is exactly in religion where again and again we see the “return of the repressed”. The repressed (“Moses” god) returns in the character of Yahweh. Seen in this light, Freud’s interest in Moses fit what he had always interested him in psychoanalysis – something had been repressed and whatever it was returned as complaints and symptoms, in dreams, in compulsive actions and fears, et cetera. In other words, something happened in the past which made its mark on the character of somebody in the here and now.
compromise – Yahweh now became the sole god who could only be addressed by the name Adonai. Circumcision was adopted from Egypt and the morally higher cultural level of the Egyptian group became a determining influence in Jewish legislation. Monotheism in these early days was still very underdeveloped; Yahweh was still basically a violent volcano god among the gods.

That compromise now formed the basis for reinterpreting history; it had been Yahweh who had delivered the people from Egypt. Thanks to the sense of guilt of some of the people about the murder of Moses, the anonymous priest-founder was later given the name of Moses. In short, the Egyptian Moses was never in Kadesh and did not know Yahweh and the Midianite Moses never knew Moses and was never in Egypt.  

Freud’s reconstruction, and he was well aware of this, was open to criticism. After all, the Bible has few or no passages which could support this reconstruction. He thus paid a lot of attention as well to the later reinterpretation of the past: that Yahweh freed the people, that Yahweh demanded circumcision from his people, that the patriarchs knew Yahweh already, that it was not Kadesh but the Sinai where the revelation took place. According to Freud, the aim of all these stories was to disguise the true course of events. Thus it was hardly surprising that there was no direct support for his reconstruction. For Freud, the most important consequence of this was that during the course of history and the reinterpretation of the past, the god Yahweh gradually moved further and further away from his Midianite origins and increasingly adopted the identity of the god of the Egyptian Moses.

The most important historical fact that was obscured was the murder of Moses. In Freud’s view (in 1938) this Egyptian Moses was a despot who forced a new religion on the people and ruled them with a rod of iron. Moses’s monotheism was unacceptable to the fleeing group, just as Akhenaton’s religion had been unacceptable. The group rose up and killed the “tyrant”. Once at this point primal history repeated itself, just as Freud had described it in Totem and Taboo: the primal father (Moses) was murdered and the sons (the people) were remorseful.

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40 S. Freud, Moses and Monotheism, p.48, p.52; S. Freud, L. Andreas-Salomé, Briefwechsel, p.223. This reconstruction of Judaism based on two traditions and two religious leaders enabled Freud to reconstruct Jewish monotheism without associating primitive religious elements (polytheism, mythic heroes) with the Egyptian Moses.

41 S. Freud, Moses and Monotheism, p.47.

42 Idem, p.50.

43 Robert Paul has reformulated (and defended) Freud’s thoughts on the importance of the murder in Jewish history. According to Paul, the Torah exemplifies an obsessional style of thought that can be interpreted as a composition against unconscious sense of guilt. This unconscious sense of guilt is in the heart of Judaism (and Christianity). It is transmitted in sociocultural systems organized around a shared fantasy (myth) – the Oedipal murder of Pharaoh by Moses – and intersects with individual unconscious guilt feelings. Because of this the Torah is still a dominant cultural symbol instilling both the fantasy and the sense of guilt, thus inciting to the commitment to moral values, social solidarity and the acceptance of the other’s otherness. R.A. Paul, Moses and Civilization. The Meaning Behind Freud’s Myth, Yale University Press, New Haven, London, 1996.

44 S. Freud, Moses and Monotheism, p.47.
The reinterpretation of history provided the opportunity to deny this painful event. However, the reinterpretation did not stop at a denial. The god Yahweh, an angry, violent local god, slowly but surely acquired the character of Moses’s spiritualized god, loving and omnipotent. In short, the teaching that had been rejected by the murder of Moses eventually turned out to be the strongest. Freud saw this development as a final victory of the god of Moses over the volcano god Yahweh. It was primarily the Levites (descendents of the Egyptian group) and the prophets who were behind this development.\footnote{Idem, p.51.}

For Freud this was the most important result of the reconstruction – in the religious history of Judaism Yahweh increasingly acquired the character of the god introduced by Moses from Egypt. The compromise between the two groups (from Egypt and from the region of Midian) concerning their own origins and the identity of the god linked to them evolved over a long period of time. Two moments of religious foundation were merged in that development: the foundation by the Egyptian Moses was first repressed by the Midianite foundation but eventually emerged as victorious. And the two foundings are linked to two founders who are also merged by tradition. How the Egyptian tradition eventually gained the upper hand over the Midianite had still to be explained, but it appeared to be automatically linked to the murder of Moses and the remorse about that.

Thus Freud had reconstructed an even greater primal scene hiding behind a long process of assimilation and concealment in stories wherein an original detail gradually gained the upper hand, i.e. the traumatic murder of Moses and a subsequent period of the foundation of a new religion. That period determined the religious history of the Jewish people. The meaning of that “one great man”\footnote{Idem, pp.107-111. Grubrich-Simitis (and others following her interpretation) has stressed the fact that Freud called Moses a “great man” and identified with him. It should be noted here that Freud referred to Moses as a “great man” only in the first version (1934) of the manuscript, a version that was later integrated in the third part of the tripartite book. Idem, pp.105-130. In this first version Freud presented a positive picture of Moses. However, in the first two parts of the final text (1937) and in the second version of the manuscript (1938) Freud depicted Moses as a primal father. This meant a change in identification. It was no longer Moses but the apostle Paul who was identified with (see further on in this chapter). On this issue see H. Westerink, “The Great Man from Tarsus: Freud on the Apostle Paul”, in Psychoanalytic Quarterly 76 (2007/1), pp.217-235 (231-234).} was thus mainly determined by reactions and developments after his death.

9.5 What is a great man?

The third part of the Moses book is a concentration on and an explanation of the significance of the murdered leader Moses for the religious history of the Jewish people. What makes reading this part difficult is that it is in fact an amalgam of two versions written in 1934 and 1938.

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He started this third part with an extensive summary in which he emphasized Moses’s fate and that of his followers as well as asked why the murder of Moses did not mean the end of his significance. For Freud it was a fact that the monotheistic cult founded by Akhenaton had been brought with Moses, but that at first it was the underdog in the compromise of Kadesh in which the violent god Yahweh emerged victorious. Freud saw in these events the most central development in Judaism: “the central fact of the development of the Jewish religion was that in the course of time the God Yahweh lost his own characteristics and grew more and more to resemble the old god of Moses, the Aton”. The people’s many bitter experiences in fact supported this movement – the god who, after all, had chosen the Jewish people and led them out of Egypt to freedom would also eventually lead the people to the happiness he had promised. Whenever that fact was doubted, “they increased their own sense of guilt”, so that eventually even the most melancholy lot still fit into God’s plans for salvation. Thus Freud regarded the sense of guilt in particular as the driving force behind the development from the Yahweh to the Aton character of God. With regard to religion, this meant the importance of “the Mosaic ideals” – an absolute monotheism, the rejection of magical ceremonies and a clearly emphasized strict morality. Hence, Freud argued in the 1934 version, Moses imprinted certain “traits” upon the Jewish people, traits that can be grouped under the heading “advancement in intellectuality”, character traits (“decisiveness of thought”, “strength of will”, “energy of action”, “autonomy and independence” of the Jewish people that developed over a period of time through an ongoing identification with Moses.

This advancement in intellectuality “consists in deciding against direct sense-perception in favour of what are known as the higher intellectual processes”. This is the main characteristic of the Mosaic identity of the Jewish people, and indeed, this advancement in intellectuality that is now ascribed to the Jews was already associated with Moses as early as Freud’s analysis of the Michelangelo statue. Then he wrote about the “more than human” Moses representation that it was the expression of “the highest mental achievement that is possible in a man, that of struggling successfully against an inward passion for the sake of a cause to which he has devoted himself”. In Moses and Monotheism he related this

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47 S. Freud, Moses and Monotheism, pp.59ff.
48 Idem, p.63. In the first version of the Moses manuscript from 1934 Freud did not emphasize the change in characteristics from Yahweh to Aton, but stressed that “Moses may have introduced traits of his own personality into the character of his God – such as his wrathful temper and his relentlessness”. Idem, p.110.
49 Idem, p.64.
50 Idem.
53 S. Freud, Moses and Monotheism, p.117.
advancement (or achievement) to sublimation, yet again Freud failed to depict this mechanism.55

For Freud, no theory that regarded monotheism as a system developing naturally from polytheism in advanced cultures could explain why Judaism became monotheistic. Even biblical (priestly) historiography itself could not explain this supposed development. After all, this historiography was by definition regarded as a reinterpretation and cloaking of what had really happened. In order to be able to understand this gradual development into monotheism Freud now called upon an old idea in his work – the latency period. In individual lives, like in cultural developments, a period of internal conflict and doubt can often precede the embracing of a new concept. The example was the incubation (latent) period between a traumatic event and the development of a symptom. This clinical fact formed the basis for Freud’s search for the development of the Moses character in the Jewish religion.56

The murder of Moses had been repressed, but the symptom through which that which is repressed returns had not yet evolved; in individual life, we meet latency in the development of an individual, the period between the repression and the return of an experience and the compulsively logical manner in which that experience recurs. Once again Freud was testing an old methodology – the analogy between (obsessional) neuroses and cultural phenomena (morality and/or religion).57 He was also repeating old positions when he stated that neuroses can be derived from traumatic experiences in childhood that are of a sexual and/or aggressive nature, and that these experiences have subsequently been forgotten. He then continued along the lines of earlier thoughts about the compulsion to repeat and the defence – the traumatic experience compulsively forces itself onto the consciousness, and vice versa it is known that the ego defends itself against this repetition. It thus followed that obsessional neurotic symptoms have the character of a compromise between the urge to repeat and defence, but usually only emerge after a period of latency.

What is noticeable here is that Moses and Monotheism was not only a return to the fascination for the figure of Moses from the time of Totem and Taboo, but now also to Totem and Taboo itself and the period preceding it when Freud was studying obsessional neurosis in particular. That he was now emphasizing the latency period to such a degree may perhaps be seen as a reaction to an excessive interest in pre-Oedipal development phases in previous years, but it is nevertheless mainly a new appreciation of a concept that had already been given its place in

55 S. Freud, Moses and Monotheism, p.86. See also, A. Vergote, De sublimatie, pp.202-224; S. Heine, Grundlagen der Religionspsychologie, pp.171-173.
56 S. Freud, Moses and Monotheism, pp.66ff.
57 Idem, pp.72ff.
Chapter 9. Great men

*Three Essays.*\(^{58}\) During the latency period there was a period when the first curbs to sexual drives were given shape through disgust, shame and aesthetic and moral codes. This was also the period wherein the early sexual goals could be sublimated. Freud had not paid much attention to this period since *Three Essays*; he regarded it as an intermediate period between the period when sexuality played a leading role (early childhood rounded off with the dissolution of the Oedipus complex) and the following period (puberty). That character also has a latency period in *Moses and Monotheism* – a relatively quiet period without disturbances.\(^ {59}\) Nevertheless, he said, it is of significant importance for the genesis of a neurosis, obsessional or otherwise.

The concept of the latency period only became important again now because Freud was looking for an analogy for the period between the repression of the murder of Moses and the inevitable reappearance of Mosaic characteristics in Jewish religion. We have of course seen that he had already applied the model of the obsessional neurosis in *Totem and Taboo*, but as yet without the element of latency. The murder of the primal father meant an immediate sense of guilt which resulted in the creation of commands and prohibitions. Then there was no question of a latency period. When he now began to apply these thoughts to Judaism, that long period turned out to have been present there as well and that therefore meant an adaptation of *Totem and Taboo* with the benefit of hindsight. According to Freud, this latency period in history could be called “tradition” indicating the transmission of historic material orally (as opposed to written records). Hence the disavowed memories were in fact never lost but “persisted in traditions which survived among the people” and eventually “would end in a written record”.\(^ {60}\) It was this latency period that both “illuminated and obscured” what he would call the “historic truth” of Judaism and Jewish identity – the past (primal) events that eventually return into memory.\(^ {61}\)

Freud now referred to his theory of the primal murder by the sons of the primal father as a “condensed” history. In actual fact it was not a single murder that had taken place, instead there was a period of thousands of years in the history of mankind wherein the banishment of the sons by the father and the resultant patricide repeated itself on innumerable occasions.\(^ {62}\) After the murder there followed a long time when the brothers struggled with each other for their father’s position until, after a period of time, they realised that this struggle would lead to nothing other than danger to themselves. At the same time, they began to remember the companionability of the time around the patricides. These two developments during the latency period resulted in the emergence of the first forms of social

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\(^ {59}\) S. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, p.77.

\(^ {60}\) Idem, p.69.


organization, characterized by a denial of libido, mutual responsibilities and the first sacred institutions, in short, “the beginnings of morality and justice”. This is also the period when totemism, the first manifestation of religion, began to take shape. What follows is a long development over time from totemism to monotheism.

In this reinterpretation of primal and religious history, which now took place over thousands of years, the most important shift was that from true fact and its immediate impact to gradual development. Freud still accepted the primal murder, but the sense of guilt and its influence on later developments was now much more related to the period of latency, of tradition. We could put it this way – what is latent in the latency period is the sense of guilt. It is a sense of guilt transmitted from generation to generation, but without being expressed in official written records. Instead of the Deed and its immediate effects Freud thus stressed tradition as illuminating and obscuring primal events. Hence, Deed became a more abstract “truth” wrapped in delusions, a “shadowy ‘original sin’”.

For Freud the core of the reinterpretation of Totem and Taboo was clear – in the development of religion, what it is all about is “on the one hand fixations to the ancient history of the family history and survivals of it, and on the other hand revivals of the past and returns, after long intervals, of what has been forgotten”. This latter element had, he now thought, not been done justice in Totem and Taboo and now appeared with regard to the history of Jewish religion to be of crucial importance for the emergence of strict monotheism and the Mosaic character of Yahweh.

Idem, p.82. The period after the primal murders was primarily characterized by shifts in power relationships, mutual limitations and social organization. The re-emergence of what had been repressed only slowly got underway in the most primitive forms of religion. In fact, Freud here seems to have been emphasizing to a much greater degree an element we have often encountered – the social contract and the transition from egoism to altruism. The renunciation of instinct, recognition of mutual obligations and social institutions are fanned by the sense of guilt. We have also seen that a necessary altruism meant that the individual perceived that he could benefit from loving and being loved. This element was now also included in the discussion – the sons create social institutions because they perceive that they are in danger from mutual conflict and because they have strong mutual connections due to their joint memories of the murder.

Idem, pp.80ff.

Idem, p.130, p.135. From another angle, too, the immediate impact and significance of the primal murder seems to be put into perspective. In a letter from Freud to Rolland from 1936, known as A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis, sense of guilt is also discussed. Freud described how in 1904 he and his brother travelled to Athens full of expectations, but nevertheless failed to enjoy the view of the Acropolis. When he tried to find the reason behind this lack of pleasure thirty-two years later, he ended up at the sense of guilt. Now, however, it is no longer the sense of guilt for the murderous feelings towards his father, as it had been in the time of The Interpretation of Dreams. In the final paragraphs of the letter, he completely emphasized the desire to outdo his father: “it seems as though the essence of success was to have got further than one’s father, and as though to excel one’s father was still something forbidden”. Thus we are no longer dealing here with murderous thoughts towards the father, but rather with a triumph that simultaneously implies disdain. S. Freud, A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis, SE XXII, p.247.

Idem, p.84.
The period of latency ends with the return of the repressed. According to Freud, “prehistoric tragedy insisted on being recognized”. Here, therefore, is the element of the return of the traumatic, an urge that at a certain moment became stronger than the resistance to it. Freud saw only one explanation – “a growing sense of guilt”. This answer was predictable from the point of view of *Totem and Taboo*, but what is surprising is the evidence proposed for the thought that a growing sense of guilt would result in a prehistoric father returning as the only almighty god. This evidence was the apostle Paul. “Paul seized upon this sense of guilt and traced it back correctly to its original source”. Expressed differently and in more detail, the best proof for the return of what had been repressed in Judaism is the history of the emergence of Christianity. The significance of one great man (Moses) was fathomed by another great man, Paul.

### 9.6 St Paul

Freud’s fascination with Moses is clear not only in *The Moses of Michelangelo*, but also – how could it be otherwise – in *Moses and Monotheism*. Freud was preoccupied with Moses throughout his life and not without the ambivalent feelings linked with such a father figure. Moses was “the great man”, the founder of the Jewish religion, but he was also the “tyrant” who was not accepted by his people and was subsequently murdered. In addition, Moses was not actually a single historical figure. The name points to two founders – the murdered Moses and the anonymous Midianite priest who was the actual leader during the compromise of Kadesh. The significance of Moses was gradually teased out of the historical person, or persons. Naturally Moses had really existed, but Freud debunked much of what was ascribed to this figure – his Jewishness and virtually the entire leadership episode up to Canaan. These stories about this great man turned out to be mostly fiction. Hence, the decisive significance of Moses was the role he played in tradition.

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67 Idem, p.86.
68 Idem.
69 On Freud and Paul see A.F.M. Mampuys, *De ik-splijting van de man Mozes en de inscheuring in zijn ik*, pp.314-327; H. Westerink, “The Great Man from Tarsus”.
71 Jan Assmann has rightfully argued that Moses was not addressed by Freud as “figure of history” but as “figure of memory”, i.e. the meaning of Moses lies not so much in his historic appearance and acts, but in his reappearance as a character ideal in tradition. J. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), London, 1997, pp.10-11. Also, J.J. DiCenso, *The Other Freud*, pp.79-84.
Moses was a father figure not necessarily because he founded monotheism, because that was actually his spiritual father Akhenaton, but rather because he had created the Jews and their religion. He was not the exponent of a popular movement, but a man with enormous psychic and intellectual capabilities who was able to significantly influence a group of people. Moses the Egyptian was the father of the later intellectual elite (the Levites and also the individual prophets) of what later became his people. In turn, the Jews went through an impressive advancement in intellectuality characterized by high intellectual and moral standards. Although Moses may not have been Jewish, he introduced to Judaism what was good in the later Jewish character – intellectual and moral civilization.

But this advancement also has a shadowy effect. Part of that moral civilization and the Jewish character was the fact that the Jews have become what they have become – the object of anti-Semitic hate, a hate “that the Jews had drawn upon themselves”. This last comment reveals a not unimportant shift. In the period when Freud was working on The Future of an Illusion he regarded anti-Semitism mainly as an expression of the Christian accusation. Moses and Monotheism concentrates more strongly on the guilt brought onto the Jews by themselves. After all, the Kadesh compromise resulted in the Jews beginning to regard themselves as the chosen people, who could not help but attract the jealousy of others. In short, Moses’s monotheism is behind the fact that the Jews developed a high opinion of themselves and thus induced the jealousy of others. The murder of Moses is the reason why the Jews saddled themselves with a sense of guilt that would inevitably affect that “self-regard”.

It is also from this point of view that we must try to understand Freud’s fascination for the apostle Paul. Just as with Moses, this fascination had deep roots. For example, in 1920 he wrote to Pfister in response to his article on the apostle: “I have always had a special sympathy for Paul as a genuinely Jewish character”. For Freud, Paul was a Jew who realized – in fact this is actually an intellectual and even psychoanalytical realization – that the Jewish people were plagued by a sense of guilt, a “malaise” that could be related to a primal crime, an original sin. Thus Paul already had all the intuition Freud reconstructed in Totem and Taboo and in Moses and Monotheism – there had been a primal crime and

73 S. Freud, Moses and Monotheism, p.117.
74 St Paul is already quoted in Obsessional Acts and Religious Practices, as we have seen. In the period when he was working on Totem and Taboo and when his fascination for Moses was already apparent, Freud wrote a short article on Paul, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians”. In this text Freud suggested that Paul held a special position in the foundation of Christianity because after him, via John, the way to worshipping the mother goddess (i.e., Mary) was once again opened up. S. Freud, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians”, SE XII; H. Westerink, “The Great Man from Tarsus”, pp.221-223. In Group Psychology he called Paul a “great thinker” who thanks to his ode to love in the letter to the Corinthians can be listed alongside Plato and his vision on Eros. Idem, pp.223-225.
75 S. Freud, O. Pfister, Psychoanalysis and Faith, p.76.
this was followed by a growing sense of guilt. In other words, Freud credited Paul with this discovery: “The reason we are so unhappy is that we have killed God the father.”76 In the same way as he had set himself the task in *Civilization and its Discontents* to thematize this sense of guilt in order to lighten the load, so had Paul in the distant past already tried to relieve the Jews (and the heathens) of their malaise. Paul came to believe in Christ due to the insight that with his death the people had been freed of guilt: “We are freed from all guilt since one of us has sacrificed his life to absolve us”.77

For Pfister, too, Paul was primarily a Jew. He summarized the Jewish character as characterized by a religious fear of God, a burning desire to compensate for low self-regard with conscious moral acts and a deep-felt sense of guilt.78 For Pfister, Paul was a Jew who was entirely aware of his “sinfulness”, in other words, of the fact that Adam’s crime had introduced a guilt into the world which weighed down his descendents. According to Pfister, this all fitted into the Jewish tradition of the pursuit of overcoming this guilt. Paul thus also stood in this tradition when he emphasized that Christ died as a peace offering and thus achieved redemption from guilt.

In this brief description of the Jewish character in general and that of Paul in particular we have met the two elements that recur in Freud’s work – Paul was the person who recognized the Jews’ sense of guilt and who knew how to free them of it. For Pfister, too, Paul was more than just an exponent of a certain culture; he was an independent great man who was the actual founder of Christianity. Nevertheless, there are important differences between Pfister’s and Freud’s views on Paul. For Pfister, Paul was not only a genius, but primarily a neurotic, a man who was strongly aware of a sense of guilt behind which Pfister suspected a repressed sexual problem, and not the murder of Moses. A second important difference between Pfister and Freud is that the former paid a great deal of attention to Paul’s introduction to the Hellenistic way of thinking via the Tarsian philosophy schools. The moral dimensions of Paul’s character are Jewish to an important degree, but the intellectual dimension is primarily Hellenistic. This Hellenistic influence gave an important boost to Paul’s belief in the resurrection (an un-Jewish element that can be linked with mystery cults) and the emphasis on the love of one’s neighbour. Pfister thus emphasized that Paul’s thought processes were mainly influenced by the release from a fixation with Jewish laws through an ethical sublimation (and conversion).79 For Freud, the relationship between universalism and Hellenism was exactly the reverse – once Christianity had jumped out of its Jewish framework, it also absorbed elements from other traditions. This tendency was the reason why

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79 Idem, p.290.
strict monotheism in Christianity was relaxed in favour of polytheistic elements – the Christian religion could not maintain the high, spiritual standards of Judaism.\textsuperscript{80} This regression was also able to explain a great deal of anti-Semitism – under a thin layer of love of one’s neighbour is hidden a “barbarous polytheism”, and Christians actually react just like the ancient Amun priests to the new Akhenaton religion.\textsuperscript{83} The hatred of Jews is in fact a hatred of Christians in the sense that it represented a hate of monotheism and the fact that Christ and Paul were Jews.

Because Freud, unlike Pfister, saw Paul as a Jew and shifted every Hellenistic tendency to the period after Paul,\textsuperscript{82} Paul could eventually (in 1938) become what he was for Freud: the only truly great man in Judaism, the Jew who recognized the return of the repressed murder of Moses and tried to free the people from that sense of guilt by promising redemption. According to Freud, for Paul Christ was the returned murdered first Messiah, Moses, who was murdered again, but who also rose from the dead and vanquished guilt.\textsuperscript{83} Thus for Freud Paul was the end of the latency period, the moment of return of the repressed and the necessary innovation of religion. It was Paul who broke with the belief that monotheism was exclusively Jewish and replaced the old father religion with a son religion, thus in a sense destroying Judaism.\textsuperscript{84} Once arrived at this point, Freud again tackled anti-Semitism. Those Jews who could not recognize the return of what had been repressed, could not take the step Paul had taken, were regarded by the Christians as the murderers of God (Christ). This accusation was correct, in Freud’s opinion, because the Jews did not dare to accept the murder of Moses and thus took a “tragic guilt” upon themselves, from which they either could not or would not free themselves.\textsuperscript{85}


\textsuperscript{81} Idem, p.91.

\textsuperscript{82} Compare S. Freud, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians”.

\textsuperscript{83} Idem, p.89.

\textsuperscript{84} Idem, p.88.

\textsuperscript{85} Idem, p.87, p.136. It is worth noting that in the Moses text Freud regularly used the concepts “tragic” and “tragedy”. There are references in the parts about Paul to Greek tragedy (i.e., Oedipus) due to the guilt of the hero present there and to Goethe who, according to Freud, had also accepted that Moses had been murdered by the Jews. These associations make it likely that \textit{Moses and Monotheism} should not only be regarded as an application of \textit{Totem and Taboo}, but also of the “tragic” \textit{Civilization and Its Discontents} to the Jewish character.
9.7 The sense of guilt and the return of the repressed

The history of Judaism and Christianity has several glorious and tragic moments. Moses the liberator is a glorious moment. Another is Paul. The first murder and its lasting legacy is tragic; it resulted in a sense of guilt, a “tragic guilt”. The developments after Paul are also tragic: the regression in Christianity, the lasting guilt on the part of the Jews. If Freud regarded himself as a liberator (from illusions), this took place under the tragic circumstances of increasing anti-Semitism and the flight to London. This sense of guilt, we can say, appeared to be more persistent than an innovation of culture and religion.

This liberation should actually be taken with a pinch of salt. Paul generated only a partial liberation as the Christian religion was eventually also guilt-ridden (see 7.5). The liberation in which Paul believed concentrated on the insight into the return of the repressed (the murder) and the possibility of atonement. In fact this is a clinical insight; Freud knew that patients could cling tenaciously to their sense of guilt. The negative therapeutic reaction had demonstrated this. That sense of guilt is apparently so deeply rooted that liberation from it is too optimistic a hope. The history of Judaism, as he described it in Moses and Monotheism, is thus actually a description of the development of the sense of guilt among the Jews. Their entire religious development was determined by this.

For one final time he made use of the analogy between obsessional neurosis and cultural development.86 The fact that the sense of guilt could grow and become a determining factor in the return of the repressed could be understood from that neurosis. With an obsessional neurosis it is clear that a fantasy has been repressed but has not vanished. Although what has been repressed is excluded from consciousness by reaction formations, it continues to be insistent. It can return when (1) the reaction formation weakens, as in the case for example of sleep, (2) the repressed fantasy receives a “special reinforcement”, as for example happens during puberty with sexual fantasies, and (3) when new fantasies and recent experiences are reminiscent of the old fantasies.87 In every case what has been repressed does not return unchanged. It is always influenced by the resistance. This thought process, which can be traced back to the time of the seduction theory (see 1.8), was now translated into the terms id, ego and superego.88 The ego has always had the character of a compromise between the id and the outside world. This ego can repress, force fantasies back into the unconscious id. However, repressed fantasies will also return to the ego from the id. Given that the superego is also a representative of the id, this is even unavoidable. Once again, Freud remarked that the id not only consisted of individual drives and impressions, but

87 S. Freud, Moses and Monotheism, p.95.
88 Idem, p.97.
was also determined by an “ancient heritage”.89 This heritage consists in “certain [innate] dispositions”, a reference to the theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck on the inheritance of psychic dispositions. Contrary to Lamarck, these dispositions are not active but reactive – they “react in a particular manner to certain excitations, impressions and stimuli”.80 He added that these dispositions include “distinctions” as there are distinctions between individuals and species. The most important examples of such reactive patterns are linked with the Oedipus complex.91

This idea that hereditary material is passed down through a people as “memory-traces” is determinative for the assumption that this history runs concurrently with that of a neurotic. Just as a neurotic represses old impulses (sexual and aggressive) that nevertheless return from that repression, so too can a people repress a prehistoric tragedy that nevertheless returns to consciousness over the course of history. Just as in obsessional neurosis hostile feelings towards the father are repressed, in the history of every people the murder of the primal father is repressed. The question now is which circumstances ensured that this repressed fact could return in the Jewish people. The most important reason is that the murder of Moses not only released memories of the primal murder, but also fanned an already existing sense of guilt (due to that primal murder).92 Hence Freud used these ideas on the inheritance of psychic dispositions not only, as he called it, to bridge “the gulf between individual and group psychology”, but especially to relate the murder of Moses to primal patricide, i.e. to relate one speculative hypothesis to another. After all, the transmission of memory-traces had already been depicted more convincingly when Freud discussed tradition and the passing on of material that was not in the official written records. Here, the transmission of memory-traces was situated in a cultural field independent of inherited psychic dispositions.93

89 Idem, p.98.

90 Idem. Compare also, S. Freud, Totem and Taboo, p.158. Freud’s Lamarckism in Moses and Monotheism has been much debated in literature since Yosef Yerushalmi’s critique on psycho-Lamarckism in Freud’s theory on tradition and memory-traces. The most important, and in my opinion convincing reactions to this critique have come from Jacques Derrida, Richard Bernstein and Jan Assmann who have all developed theories on the transmission of unconscious memory-traces in what Derrida describes as a cultural “archive”, Bernstein refers to as “tradition” and what Assmann has called “cultural memory”. Y.H. Yerushalmi, Freud’s Moses; J. Derrida, Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 1996; J. Assmann, Moses the Egyptian; R.J. Bernstein, Freud and the Legacy of Moses. On this issue see also, R.A. Paul, Moses and Civilization, pp.172-174.

91 S. Freud, Moses and Monotheism, p.99. Freud had already prepared the way for this position in The Interpretation of Dreams; when seeing or reading Oedipus Rex there is a question of recognition and that is why this tragedy makes such an impression – the reader or viewer recognizes in himself the antipathy towards the father, the love of the mother and the guilt that this releases. In Totem and Taboo, the case of the Wolf Man, and The Ego and the Id Freud had also discussed phylogenetic material, as we have seen.


93 On this point I agree with the analyses of Freud’s thought on the transmission of tradition made by Derrida, Bernstein and Assmann.
As a result, the sense of guilt takes central stage in the history of the Jewish people. The murder of Moses repeated the primal murder and the resultant strengthened sense of guilt then determined the character of the Jewish people and its institutions. That the primal murder could be repeated was a result of the fact that the murdered father had returned as an elevated father in the religion and thus remained present as a father. The ambivalence of the sons with regard to the father remained at the same time unchanged. That ambivalence had enabled the first murder and the elevation; it now enabled a new murder. It was this ambivalence of feeling that led the people at a certain moment to murder their leader (father). The effect of this murder is clear: “all that could come to light was a mighty reaction against it – a sense of guilt on account of that hostility, a bad conscience for having sinned against God and for not ceasing to sin”.\(^94\) This is the basis on which the people embraced increasingly strict regulations. The moral “ascesis” at least created the illusion that the people were ethically more civilized than those surrounding them. Behind this illusion constantly lurked insistent “sins” and a reactionary sense of guilt that could not be soothed by increasingly strict regulations. They are rooted in the primal histories of the sons and the fathers – hated and loved, murdered and internalized as an authority turning into an increasingly strict superego (under the pressure of a growing sense of guilt) and finally returning to consciousness. Thus the murder of Moses, via a long period of a growing sense of guilt, briefly surfaces in Paul’s consciousness: “the dark traces of the past lurked in his mind, ready to break through into its more conscious regions”.\(^95\) This single sentence sets wide-ranging links; naturally the thought referred to the dark traces of an ancient guilt in the tragedy *Oedipus Rex* as quoted in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, but also to the ancient guilt in *Totem and Taboo* as well as to the tragic element in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.\(^96\)

### 9.8 Assessments

After the debate with the London school, after the death of most of his friends and oldest followers and in a period when in Germany itself his work was being burned, Freud was in a certain sense once again forced into the position of the, in his own words, monomaniac he had been in the 1890s. Then *The Interpretation of Dreams* followed as the result of a self analysis. Nearly forty years later, the result was *Moses and Monotheism*, a reflection on Jewish identity and a hunt along the dark trace of the sense of guilt for an ancient crime, the murder of the “great man” and “tyrant”. In the second version of the third part of the manuscript (1938)

\(^{94}\) Idem, p.134.

\(^{95}\) Idem, p.87.

\(^{96}\) The relation between tragedy (opera, drama), culture and religion was already suggested as early as 1905/1906 in *Psychopathic Characters on the Stage*. See 3.5.
Freud did not identify himself with that tyrant (as he had done in the first version) who selected a bunch of slaves to propagate the Akhenaton cult, but rather with the apostle Paul, whose intellectual capacities resulted in a brief “psychoanalytic” insight into the origin of the sense of guilt.

When we remember that the novel about Moses was strongly coloured by *Civilization and Its Discontents*, we can even go a step further. Tragedies had always been important (*Oedipus, Hamlet, Faust*), and now Freud’s own history had also become tragic, a tale of a sense of guilt that determined the character of an entire people and its fate throughout history, including a threatening future in Nazi Germany. Seen in this light, there are certainly arguments to support the following hypothesis – Freud also identified with his oldest hero, Goethe, and *Moses and Monotheism* was his Faustian novel. It was not for nothing that he stated that Goethe had also had the insight that Moses had been murdered by his own people.

It goes without saying that *Moses and Monotheism* was mainly the application of an old, tried and trusted method and of earlier theories. The most important hypotheses and mental leaps were determined by the analogy with the obsessional neurosis. The most important hypotheses were thus provided by *Totem and Taboo* and by older material from his followers (Rank, Abraham). Once again the sense of guilt takes central stage. The tragic inevitability of this was emphasized even more strongly than before – it formed the core of tradition and, as an unconscious sense of guilt, ready to be (re)activated. By emphasizing the latency period between the murder of Moses and the return of the repressed, the growing sense of guilt as the driving force behind an increasingly strict morality (and advancement in intellectuality) was stressed even more than in *Totem and Taboo*. In that text the sense of guilt had been an initial, determinative reaction resulting in the emergence of obedience on the part of the sons towards the dead father. The emphasis then lay on soothing the sense of guilt with that obedience and the instigation of taboos resulting in the categorical imperative. The Deed is put into perspective and with the introduction of the latency period in cultural and religious history the dark trace of the ancient guilt is fully emphasized.