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**The rise of Yahwism:
role of marginalised groups**

by

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ABSTRACT

My motivation and purpose of this research particularly evolve around the question on the origin of *Yahweh* and the development of Yahwism, as well as the role of marginal groups in the maintaining of a pre-exilic *Yahweh*-alone monotheism, and the subsequent conversion by Judahites – who previously practised a syncretistic religion – to a post-exilic *Yahweh* monotheism. In accordance with the Kenite hypothesis, the Yahwist tradition originated in the South amongst the Midianites and Kenites. A Moses-type figure acquired knowledge about *Yahweh* from these tribes who venerated *Yahweh* before the Israelites did. According to the Chronicler's genealogy, marginal southern groups were all related. The Kenites and Rechabites had the opportunity, due to their nomadic lifestyle and particular trade – as coppersmiths – to spread their religious beliefs. Although the majority of Israelites practised syncretism, these marginal groups – particularly the Rechabites – sustained their Yahwistic faith throughout the Monarchical Period, actively involved in a *Yahweh*-alone movement. Jeremiah set the Rechabites – who followed a puritanical lifestyle – as an example for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

My hypothesis is *that the Israelite God Yahweh was originally a Midianite/Kenite deity and that marginal groups related to the Kenites, such as the Rechabites, played a significant and dominant role in the preserving of a pre-exilic Yahweh-alone movement, as well as in the establishment of a post-exilic Yahweh monotheism.* My approach to this research was with the premise that the Yahwist tradition originated in the South whence it spread to Judah and the North. According to a recurring biblical tradition, *Yahweh* emanated from the South. Evidence from certain Egyptian documents endorses *Yahweh's* presence in the South.

It was also my aim to establish the interdependence – or not – of different disciplines relevant to the Hebrew Bible. In my research it became clear that archaeology and biblical scholarship – particularly historiography – cannot operate effectively without the acceptance of their mutual dependence.

KEY TERMS

Asherah, Archaeology, Exile/post-exilic, Kenite hypothesis, Kenites, Marginal groups, Monotheism, Rechabites, *Yahweh*-alone movement, Yahwism.



OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie behels 'n ondersoek na die herkoms van *Jahwe* en Jahwisme. Volgens die Keniete hipotese, was die Keniete en Midianiete die groepe wat *Jahwe* aanbid het, reeds voordat die Israeliëte met Hom kennis gemaak het. Hierdie hipotese verklaar dat Moses kennis opgedoen het van *Jahwe* deur die toedoen van sy skoonpa, Jetro, 'n Midianitiese priester. Die roeping van Moses was 'n nuwe openbaring van *Jahwe*. Die sterkte van die Keniete hipotese lê in *Jahwe* se topografiese skakel – volgens Bybelse tekste – met die gebiede in die Suide, dus die omgewing waar die Keniete en Midianiete gewoon het. 'n Verdere aanduiding van 'n verband tussen *Jahwe* en die Suide kom voor in Egiptiese dokumente. Hierdie betrokke tekste verwys na *Yahu* in die land van die *Shasu*-Bedoeïene, asook na 'n plek Seïr. Ander Egiptiese tekste verbind weer die *Shasu* met Edom – dus weereens die suidelike gebiede van die Keniete.

Die Keniete kon skynbaar hulle herkoms terugplaas na Kain, wie se seuns die leefstyl van die Keniete verteenwoordig het; hulle was naamlik metaalwerkers, musikante, en nomadiese veeboere. Volgens die geslagslys van Juda in Kronieke 1, word die verskillende randgroepe in die suidelike dele genealogies aan mekaar verbind. Hierdie randgroepe sluit stamme in soos die Regabiete, Kalebiete, Kenassiete en Jeragmeliëte. Meeste van hulle het metallurgie beoefen. Uit die aard van hulle beroep en nomadiese leefstyl het hulle rondbeweeg, en het dus die geleentheid gehad om hulle kultiese affiliasies – waarskynlik as *Jahwe*-aanbidders – na ander gebiede te versprei. Die Regabiete was bekend vir hulle asketiese leefwyse; in Jeremia 35 word spesifiek daarna verwys. Gedurende die tydperk van die monargie in Israel was daar 'n monoteïstiese *Jahwe*-alleen beweging in Juda. Hierdie beweging was hoofsaaklik saamgestel uit randgroepe. Ten spyte van 'n sinkretistiese godsdiensoefening in Juda en Israel, het hierdie beweging standvastig hulle monoteïstiese Jahwisme beoefen. Uit die aard van hulle beroep as smede is hulle waarskynlik saam met die hoëlui na Babilonië weggevoer. Die vraag ontstaan hoedat dit moontlik is dat 'n volk wat vir eeue 'n sinkretistiese godsdiensoefening het, in 'n kwessie van enkele jare totaal verander om 'n streng, wettiese *Jahwe* monoteïsme na te volg. Volgens my hipotese het die randgroepe van die *Jahwe*-alleen beweging – by name die Regabiete – 'n betekenisvolle rol gespeel tydens die ballingskap om die Jode te oortuig dat 'n *Jahwe* monoteïsme die antwoord op die katastrofe van die ballingskap is.

Naas die ondersoek na die Keniete, Regabiete en ander groepe, asook die *Jahwe*-alleen beweging sluit dié navorsing 'n studie in ten opsigte van relevante argeologiese artefakte en



epigrafiese materiaal. Hieruit is bepaal dat verskillende dissiplines rakende bybelse navorsing, onderling van mekaar afhanklik is en dus nie in isolasie nagevors moet word nie. 'n Ondersoek na die fenomeen dat antieke gode met verwante name in verskillende panteons gevind word, dui daarop dat dié verskynsel van bepaalde *Ya*-name – wat oor 'n groot gebied in epigrafiese materiaal gevind is - moontlik verband kan hou met vroeëre tipe *Jahwe*-aanbidding elders as in Israel.

SLEUTELTERME

Argeologie, Ballingskap, Jahwe, Jahwe-alleen beweging, Keniete, Keniete hipotese, Monoteïsme, Randgroepe, Regabiete, Sinkretisme.