



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation for research

The past decades numerous debates evolved around the question of the origin of *Yahweh* and the Israelite religion of Yahwism. General consensus has been reached amongst a large number of biblical scholars that the pre-exilic Israelite nation practised a syncretistic-type religion that included the God *Yahweh*, while a strict *Yahweh*-alone monotheism was subsequently observed in post-exilic times. Zevit¹ indicates that 'the worldview of the YHWH-alone movement may have become particularly widespread among Israelites', during the sixth and fifth centuries BC 'under circumstances yet to be determined by historians'. Two hypotheses debated by scholars the past number of years are proposals that *Yahweh* has a Midianite/Kenite origin or that he has originated from an Ancient Near Eastern *El*-figure. No clear-cut decision has been reached, either to the origin of *Yahweh*, or to the origin and rise of Yahwism culminating in post-exilic monotheism.

1.2 Research problem

Current debates amongst biblical scholars accentuate the complexity of the origin of Israel as a nation, as well as that of their Yahwistic religion. It is clear that archaeology plays an important role in resolving matters concerning Israel. The Hebrew Bible is not an historical book. It has no intention as such to relate how Israel originated, but rather why it originated. There are specific limitations, for various reasons, to glean historical information from the Hebrew Bible.² A number of scholars negate the events described in the Hebrew Bible, claiming it to be mere fiction originating from, and invented during the Persian and Hellenistic periods.³ No two scholars are in complete agreement with each other.

The religions and gods of the Ancient Near Eastern peoples played a significant role in the religion of Israel. Attributes of contemporary deities had a notable influence on the crystallisation of the concepts the Israelites and Judeans had of *Yahweh* in their worship of this God at certain stages. Migration of groups as well as interaction amongst nations gradually led to the intermingling of deities. According to archaeological data, deities having names synonymous

¹ Zevit 2001:690.

² Biblical texts have been compiled by scribes and editors at dates predominantly much later than the alleged events they recount. The narrated history is therefore hardly unbiased (Dever 1997a:20-21).

³ Sixth to first century BC. See § 8.9 on minimalistic views regarding the historicity of the Masoretic Text.

with and attributes similar to those of, inter alia, the female *Asherah/Athirat* and the male *Ba'al/Hadad*, appeared at various localities over a widespread area. It therefore seems that the same, or similar, gods were worshipped by different peoples. In the light hereof the question arises whether particular *Ya*-related names located at regions in the north, south, east and west of the Ancient Near East, could be linked to the *Yahweh* of the Midianites/Kenites and thus to the *Yahweh* of the Israelite nation.

Aniconism⁴ and exclusive monotheism are elusive 'to when and why they emerged in ancient Israel'.⁵ As far as I could ascertain, the question has not been raised, and consequently not answered, as to how the syncretistic-type religion of the Israelite nation – that had been practised for many centuries – could, in a number of years, radically change to a *Yahweh*-alone monotheistic religion. My research concludes that – regarding the origin of Yahwism – the Kenites, in particular, as well as other marginal groups, such as the Rechabites, played a significant role in the establishment of an Israelite Yahwism, specifically in the incidence of the radical change from a syncretistic religion to a *Yahweh*-alone monotheism during the exilic and post-exilic periods.

1.3 Hypothesis

My hypothesis takes cognisance of the supposition that the peoples of the various nations of the Ancient Near East, continuously and extensively migrated from one place to another, wandering as far as from east to west and from north to south in the whole region,⁶ thus spreading religious and other beliefs, influencing one another.

If, as it seems to be, that deities over a vast area of the Ancient Near East, with cognate names and resembling the Canaanite goddess *Asherah/Athirat* (or the Canaanite god *Ba'al/Hadad*) were actually the same deity with different, but similar names, the question could be asked whether there is any substantiation for the argument that deities were limited to a specific nation or area (or city/city-state). Scholars have attested that the various cities or city-states each had their own patron god and that the different nations had their own national god. It seems, however, that at least the mother goddess (and in some instances the creation god and

⁴ The term aniconism refers to 'cults where there is no iconic representation of the deity (anthropomorphic or theriomorphic) serving as the dominant or central cultic symbol' (Mettinger 1997:220-221). Anthropomorphism is the representation of God, or gods, in terms of human anatomy and human behaviour (Deist 1990:14). Theriomorphism is the conception of animals in human terms or, the other way round, depicting man as half-beast and half-man (Deist 1990:260).

⁵ Evans 1995:195.

⁶ Compare the biblical narrative of Abraham (Gn 12-21).

storm god) was a global (in the sense of the Ancient Near East) goddess or god, familiar and accepted in the whole of the Ancient Near East. This leads to and substantiates my hypothesis that some form of Yahwism originated – or was inherited from migrating groups – at various localities of the Ancient Near East, such as in the South, in the Syro-Palestinian areas and even as far east and west as Mesopotamia and Egypt. Thus, over a long period of time, a semblance of Yahwism could have developed over a vast area.⁷

I, furthermore, postulate that *Yahweh* was known and revered by the Midianites and Kenites from a very early period. A Moses-type figure had acquired knowledge about *Yahweh* through the Midianites and Kenites. He introduced *Yahweh* to a group migrating from Egypt into Palestine. This group in their turn acquainted the tribes in Judah with *Yahweh*, and also introduced *Yahweh* to those peoples who, over many decades, had infiltrated Canaan or were inherent in Canaan. Some tribes in Canaan also might have gained knowledge about *Yahweh* from travelling metalworkers from the South. During the late second and early first millennium BC, certain tribes grouped together establishing an Israelite nation in a monarchical environment. To substantiate the historical existence of such a nation, and thus earn credibility in the eyes of other kingdoms, various oral traditions were collected and a so-called chronological history of Israel compiled. A powerful exodus tradition authenticated *Yahweh* as the national God of this nation.⁸ Despite adopting *Yahweh* as a major god, the Israelites continued with a syncretistic-type religion previously practised in Canaan.

Related marginal groups – such as the Kenites and Rechabites – acknowledged as nomads and mainly practising metalwork, emanated from the South. The Rechabites, living in a kind of symbiosis with the Judeans, eventually merged with them. Their strong *Yahweh*-tradition – probably acquired from the southern Kenites – advanced *Yahweh* worship in Judah. In the North the Canaanite *El* initially held the highest authority, but was ousted in the course of time by the popular Canaanite *Ba'al* who tipped the scale in favour of *Ba'al*-worship in the North. Rechabite presence in the North is attested by the incident, in 841 BC, when

⁷ Compare the incidence of primordial knowledge. Primordial: of, pertaining to, or existing at (or from) the very beginning; primeval (Little et al 1968:1584). Research indicates that among diverse cultures the same symbols and mythological themes appear recurrently universally, signifying a collective subconscious mind; this is the primordial or primitive psyche from where the conscious mind – as a component of the evolution process – developed (Naudé 1986:755-756).

⁸ Compare the inscription on the Mesha Stele, also known as the Moabite Stone. A black basalt stele containing an inscription of Mesha, king of Moab, in which he recounts his victory over Israel. The inscription is dedicated to the Moabite god *Chemosh*. The account of the victory supplements the report in 2 Kings 3:1-27 in the Hebrew Bible by supplying information that the Israelite king was responsible for the conquest of North Moab. Lines 14-18 of this inscription mention a *Yahweh* sanctuary in the city of Nebo and the removal of accoutrements from there. The incident is dated ca 840-820 BC (Thompson 1982:787-789).

Jehonadab ben Rechab aided Jehu in Northern Israel in a military coup during which all the members of the House of Omri were killed.⁹ Jehonadab ben Rechab was a descendant of the ancestor of the Rechabites and is mentioned as a contemporary of Jehu. Influence of the Rechabites – as well as the Kenites – that probably brought *Yahweh* to the North, is perceptible, inter alia, in the book of Hosea. Due to the nomadic lifestyle of the Rechabites and Kenites, and their particular craft, they moved over a vast area, inevitably spreading their traditions. The possibility can thus not be ruled out that a *Ya*-type – or *Yahweh* – religion elsewhere developed due to their influence, as well as that of other marginal groups and their families, such as the house of Heber, the Kenite.¹⁰

Although acknowledged as the national God of the Israelite nation,¹¹ *Yahweh* was not acknowledged as the only god. Different aspects and attributes in the portrayal of *Yahweh* were emphasised by the various descendants of the so-called Israelite tribes in their worship. He was, inter alia, characterised as either a Storm God or Solar God or Warrior God. Thus, each group envisaged and worshipped *Yahweh* differently. Manifold features of Ancient Near Eastern deities were conferred on *Yahweh*. While *Ba'al* and *El* attributes and traditions were bestowed on the Israelite God in the North, this was not the case in the South where *Yahweh* was more prominent. When Samaria was destroyed and the Northern Kingdom dissolved, many northerners fled to the South, bringing *El* and *Ba'al* with them. In the course of time, *Yahweh* acquired *El* attributes. In the long run, *El* became predominantly redundant.

In addition, I advance that during the Monarchical Period the Rechabites as traditionalist conservatives, as well as some analogous groups, influenced minority communities into monotheistic *Yahweh* worship. There were, probably, priests and Levites among these groups, while certain prophets were influenced by the Rechabites' characteristic maintaining of their traditions. Priestly and other Rechabites, together with some other marginal groups, were part of the Exile. *Yahweh*, the national God of Israel, ostensibly dwelled in the Temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The Exile as well as the destroyed Temple – the indestructible abode of *Yahweh* – compelled Judeans to rethink their religious affinities, concluding that the Exile was a direct result of their idolatry and divergence from the Torah. Marginal groups, such as the Rechabites, who were unwavering in their monotheistic *Yahweh*-alone tradition, came forth as steadfast religious groups propagating *Yahweh* as the only God. They became the

⁹ See 2 Kings 10.

¹⁰ See discussions of Heber, the Kenite, in § 5.2 and § 5.3.

¹¹ See an earlier footnote in this paragraph on the Mesha Stele.

driving force in the strict implementation of the Law. Clans of particular scribes were Kenites "from Hammath", who are explicitly linked to the Rechabites in 1 Chronicles 2:55. The Hebrew Bible refers only sporadically to marginal groups; this could be ascribed to the vying among priests for a superior position in the recorded history of the Israelite nation and subsequent disavowing of minority groups. In the redaction process of the Masoretic Text – during the exilic and post-exilic periods – the history of Israel was fully or partially rewritten or adjusted, presenting *Yahweh* as the God of Abraham who promised the land to the descendants of Abraham. According to the Masoretic Text, the Israelite nation pursued a monotheistic *Yahweh* religion right from the beginning of their history. References in the text to the popular religion embracing *Yahweh* as well as other gods were minimised. *Yahweh* eventually emerged as the one and only God in whom all the attributes of the other gods culminated. He was presented with aspects of *El*, and was at the same time Creator, Storm, Solar and Warrior God.

Therefore, my hypothesis for this research is as follows: *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.*

1.4 Purpose of research

Many aspects relating to Iron Age Israel are presently being scrutinised by biblical and other scholars.¹² The purpose of my research is not merely to repeat that which scholars have debated for many decades, but to approach the problem of Israelite Yahwism with a different premise in mind – defined in my hypothesis – and thereby contribute to biblical research. A large number of biblical scholars accept the concept of a pre-exilic Israelite nation practising a syncretistic-type religion. At the same time these scholars acknowledge it as indisputable that, during the Exile, the then Jews conformed to a Yahwistic monotheism compelling strict law-abiding. I mentioned earlier¹³ that, as far as I could ascertain, the question has not been resolved how this syncretistic-type religion, practised for many centuries by the Israelites, could – in a number of years – radically change to a *Yahweh*-alone monotheistic religion. My purpose for this research is to investigate this disparity and come up with a plausible answer.

¹² Mazar 2001:8.

¹³ See § 1.2, last paragraph.

In this particular field of research innumerable publications have seen the light on more or less every facet of the different disciplines relating to biblical studies. Scholars normally concentrate on a specific feature for their research. In this thesis I discuss various relevant disciplines and endeavour to point out their relation to one another. Developments in both biblical – mainly regarding historiography and the advancement of the Israelite religion – and archaeological research are evaluated. It is therefore also my purpose to indicate that the different applicable fields of scholarship are mutually dependent on each other. In the light thereof, the length of this thesis consequently exceeds that which is normally acceptable for a doctorate.

1.5 Methodology

In the partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters degree in Ancient Languages and Cultures, I had to complete a mini-dissertation.¹⁴ This study was done mainly on the origin of *Yahweh* and Yahwism, specifically evaluating certain relevant hypotheses. The present research ensued from the previous study. It is, therefore, inevitable that some of the foregoing subject matter be dealt with in this thesis. It is, however, employed only contextually where applicable, and not verbatim.

Much has been written since the end of the nineteenth century on matters concerning the ancient Israelites and their religion(s).¹⁵ This study is an attempt to contribute to an already much analysed and researched subject matter, without repeating groundlessly what scholars in this field have debated continuously. In the light of the extent and volume of literature on matters related to the origin and development of Yahwism – which are also directly or indirectly concerned with the Israelite nation and its emergence – the contents of some chapters herein is dealt with only cursorily. It is, however, essential that all relevant aspects at least be referred to, particularly regarding research done by notable scholars. The focal point of this thesis is to investigate the origin of *Yahweh* and development of Yahwism, and also to determine the role of marginal groups – such as the Kenites and the Rechabites – in the establishment of a *Yahweh*-alone movement, culminating in an exilic/post-exilic monotheism. The inclusion of the various chapters is motivated hereafter.

¹⁴ The mini-dissertation, entitled *Jahwe en die herkoms van Jahwisme. 'n Kritiese evaluering van teorieë oor die herkoms van Jahwisme*, was completed during 2002 (Mondriaan 2002).

¹⁵ In the light of Israel's syncretistic religious practices, Zevit (2001:349) refers to the "religions" of the Israelites. See also the reference in § 2.15 and the relevant footnote.

Literature on current research is deliberated, as well as publications that appeared during the initial stages of the exploration of biblical historiography and religion. I acknowledge pioneer work done by early scholars on the history of religions of the Ancient Near Eastern peoples, and more specifically, that of the Israelites. Utilisation of information from encyclopedias and dictionaries is mainly for the purpose of concise explanations in footnotes. Terminology is elucidated in footnotes as and when it occurs in a passage. For practical reasons, footnotes are numbered separately in each chapter. Cross-referencing is employed where applicable. The following method is being observed throughout the thesis regarding quotation marks: a full sentence, or part thereof, in single quotation marks indicates a quotation from a literary source; double quotation marks indicate a particular descriptive word or phrase within a specific context. Unless indicated otherwise, all biblical text references or quotations are from the English Standard Version; some verse numbers therein differ from other translations, as well as from the Masoretic Text. Three types of data, namely literature analysis, archaeological finds and textual information, were mainly employed for this research.

The reader of this thesis should, throughout, bear in mind that my approach to the various subjects in each chapter is with the premise that the Yahwist tradition originated in the South, whence it spread to Judah and to the North. The movement of Kenites, Rechabites and analogous marginal groups, as well as a Mosaic group that advanced from Sinai (and probably from Egypt) was instrumental in, and served as vehicle for, this transmission of Yahwism. I furthermore presuppose that, although the majority of Israelites practised syncretism, marginalised people sustained their Yahwistic faith throughout the Monarchical Period, eventually actively participating in the final compilation and redaction of the Masoretic Text during the exilic and post-exilic periods. To validate the image of an Israelite religion professing a unique monotheistic Yahwistic faith throughout their history, prevailing traditions were employed and modified by redactors in assembling the text. In the final analysis, the main concern is the message communicated by the Hebrew Bible and not the time – pre- or post-exilic – of compilation or finalisation thereof. I wish to emphasise that my research is an historical (hence not theological) approach concerned with the initiation and development of the Yahwistic religion of the Israelite people, and not to research or question the existence of *Yahweh*.

Literature analysis

Literature ranging from the early stages of the formulation of a theory up to the most recent debates concerning particular matters or hypotheses has been taken into consideration. As an

example, the Kenite hypothesis, which was initially formulated by Budde¹⁶ as early as the late nineteenth century, is evaluated, as are some of the many, much later, debates evolving around this theory and other theories regarding the origin of Yahwism. To be acquainted with the different viewpoints of and theories by biblical scholars, each chapter is researched in the same manner.

Archaeological finds

During the twentieth century archaeological excavations became a major science, recovering literally thousands of items of material matter related to the Ancient Near East. Archaeology contributed extensively to the knowledge of biblical history and culture, without which one cannot understand the Hebrew Bible. The excavation of a multitude of Ancient Near Eastern texts and the subsequent recovery of these ancient languages made an enormous impact on biblical research and debates. According to Dever,¹⁷ 'archaeological data are already more extensive than all the biblical texts put together'. Dever¹⁸ criticises biblical scholars for neglecting to make use of archaeological data as a powerful tool to illuminate the Israelite cult. It seems that biblical scholars either analyse texts, or research archaeological data, without linking the two disciplines. In my research I apply relevant archaeological data as support to any theoretical conclusions.

Textual information

In the final analysis the prime source for biblical research is the Masoretic Text. Relevant textual material has been taken into account, particularly concerning the portrayal of *Yahweh* in geographical context.¹⁹ Information from extra-biblical sources applicable to the name יהוה, or related forms, as well as that on relevant Ancient Near Eastern mythologies and deities, is deliberated. References to the Kenites, Rechabites and other relevant marginal groups in the Masoretic Text are appraised, particularly in the light of my hypothesis regarding the role of these peoples in the development of Yahwism. The extent of this research and its particular emphasis – as signified in my hypothesis – does not warrant an in-depth study of original textual matter, nonetheless, in some instances, texts have been consulted in the original ancient language. In other occurrences, the translation of relevant ancient texts by a scholar equipped for the task has been accepted.

¹⁶ Budde 1899:17-25, 35-38, 52-60.

¹⁷ Dever 2005:74.

¹⁸ Dever 2005:76.

¹⁹ For example, Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4; Habakkuk 3:3.

For the elucidation of particular components in this thesis, figures, maps and tables are included. For practical purposes the maps and tables are incorporated at the end of the relevant chapters. Following pages i-iii of the contents, the applicable figures, maps and tables and their corresponding page numbers are listed on page iv.

I herewith acknowledge that copies of sketches from articles by Hestrin²⁰ and Beck,²¹ as well as from a book by Scheffler²² are included in my paragraphs 2.13 and 4.3.9. These sketches are available in the public domain at:

www.matrifocus.com/IMB04/spotlight.htm

www.biblelandpictures.com/gallery/gallery.asp?categoryid=60

www.bibleorigins.net/KuntilletAjrudYahwehAsherah.html

respectively.

Grammar and hyphenation have been verified by the Microsoft Word 2007 programme, language set as United Kingdom English, as well as the *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English*, seventh edition, 2005.²³ When writing the word "Tell" or "Tel" (mound of various ancient occupation levels), the spelling generally applied by scholars regarding a specific site, is employed in this thesis when discussing or referring to the site in question.

I am fully aware of the fact that the spelling and transcriptions of the various Semitic words and names in this thesis are inconsistent. Different transcription systems are applied by scholars, and this complicates the execution of a consistent method of reference regarding research done by scholars. Accepted anglicised names and words are employed where possible. Spelling and transcription systems implemented by relevant scholars are repeated verbatim in quotations. I do not endeavour to systematise the different transcription systems. Divine names – including the name *Yahweh*, but excluding the Tetragrammaton, YHWH – are written in italics. The Tetragrammaton is applied mainly in Chapter 4 in the discussion of the origin, analysis and interpretation of the designation YHWH.

²⁰ Hestrin, R 1987. The cult stand from Ta'anach and its religious background, in Lipiński, E (ed), *Studia Phoenicia. V. Phoenicia and the East Mediterranean in the first millennium B.C. Proceedings of the Conference held in Leuven from the 14th to the 16th November 1985*, 61-77. Leuven: Peeters. (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 22.)

²¹ Beck, P 1994. The cult-stands from Taanach: aspects of iconographic tradition of Early Iron Age cult objects in Palestine, in Finkelstein, I & Na'aman, N (eds), *From nomadism to monarchy: archaeological and historical aspects of early Israel*. Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society.

²² Scheffler, E 2000. *Fascinating discoveries from the biblical world*. Pretoria: Biblia.

²³ Wehmeier, S (ed) 2005. See bibliography for more information.

Due to the extent of subject matter included in this thesis, the overlapping of information in different paragraphs is unavoidable. In certain instances reference has to be made to specific data in more than one paragraph to elucidate the subject under discussion, and for the sake of completeness.

Motivation for the inclusion of the different chapters is as follows.

Chapter 2

Archaeological finds

The question may be raised by the reader why a substantial number of pages of this thesis have been apportioned to this chapter. My research is primarily concerned with the following issues: where the Israelite God came from, who brought him into the Israelite religion, what his position was in this religion and how it happened that he later became a major force in the Jewish religion. Inherent in these matters is the question of the establishment of an Israelite nation, syncretism in the Israelite religion, the influence of minor – probably related – groups on the development of Yahwism, as well as the influence of neighbouring nations on the religion, traditions and culture of an Israelite people.

Archaeological data are regarded as of paramount importance in my endeavour to research the above-mentioned matters. Present-day biblical research has to take cognisance of the irrefutable value of archaeology, without which one cannot do a comprehensive research into biblical history. The Masoretic Text, as literary source, is inconsistent and biased regarding the history and religion of the Israelite people. In this vast field – of archaeology – only a few relevant finds are touched on. It is important that the contents of this chapter be readable matter, also accessible to the layman. Therefore, I deem it necessary to give sufficient background information and refer to some of the most important – many still ongoing – debates in such manner that, albeit brief, the discussion could be meaningful for the reader not acquainted with the specific discovery. However, due to the large extent of literature available on all excavated matter, it is in reality only barely possible to scratch the surface. On the other hand, if the information is too sparse, the reader will not be able to see the relevance of the excavated find (or site) within the broader framework of this research. The finds and sites discussed should give an indication of the complexity regarding the whole subject of the religion and historicity of the Israelite nation.

This chapter – as first chapter of the research material – is an introduction to aspects discussed and evaluated to substantiate my hypothesis. The relevance of each find, or site, is indicated in the conclusion of this chapter.

Chapter 3

Mythology, Ancient Near Eastern pantheons and the Israelite religion

Since the discovery of innumerable extra-biblical texts, consensus has been reached amongst biblical scholars that the mythologies and legends²⁴ of the different Ancient Near Eastern peoples had a great influence on the mythologies and legends as recorded in the Hebrew Bible. It is moreover acknowledged that the pre-exilic Israelite nation practised a syncretistic-type religion involving, inter alia, particularly some Canaanite deities and rituals.

In the Masoretic Text the Israelite God is referred to by the epithets "*Yahweh*" or "*Elohim*". Throughout the Hebrew Bible, *Yahweh* is portrayed with various attributes such as Storm God, Solar God, Warrior God, Mountain God, Creator and Guardian. These different attributes were associated with particular Ancient Near Eastern deities. *El* was the creator and supreme god of the Canaanite pantheon. In most instances important deities had female consorts. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, specifically during the Monarchical Period, reference is made to idolatry and in particular to *Ba'al* worship. The Israelites were also reprimanded for veneration of *Asherah* and *Astarte* as well as of the *Queen of Heaven*. Inscriptions found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom raised the question amongst scholars whether *Yahweh* had a consort.

As stated in my hypothesis, I take cognisance of the supposition that the peoples of the various nations of the Ancient Near East, continuously and extensively migrated from one place to another, thus spreading religious and other beliefs, influencing one another. It has been attested that deities with cognate names and similar attributes were worshipped over a large area of the Ancient Near East. My thesis is that, in the instance of *Ya*-related names discovered over a wide region of the Ancient Near East – as indicated in chapter 4 – the incidence of a *Ya*- or Yahwistic-type religion being practised before veneration of *Yahweh* by the Israelites, need not be excluded. Therefore I should be familiar with the occurrence of a deity, or deities, with analogous names worshipped in different regions, thereby establishing whether

²⁴ A legend is a story of bygone years, handed down for generations, recounting the wonderful deeds of some acclaimed (legendary) person to portray him as someone worthy of imitation (Deist 1990:141); also, a traditional story or myth about a famous person or event (Hanks 1992:278).

this tendency was a regular phenomenon and, thus, substantiate my theory that a Yahwistic-related religion could have been practised elsewhere than only in Israel. I should, likewise, be acquainted with the various attributes – of these gods – which were eventually ascribed to *Yahweh*, as indicated in the Hebrew Bible. The question of a consort for *Yahweh* has been a contentious matter debated during the past decades; I should thus be knowledgeable about the propensity to designate consorts to major deities.

In the course of the discussion of the contents of this chapter it becomes clear – as mentioned earlier – that the Israelite nation practised syncretism, together with their veneration of *Yahweh* as their national God. Additional information on this religious practice of the Israelites – which has not been incorporated into the main body of this chapter – is discussed briefly in two *excursuses* at the end of paragraph 3.7.

It should, thus, be clear that the inclusion of this particular chapter is essential for the substantiation of my hypothesis.

Chapter 4

Name YHWH and related forms

The main focus of this thesis is to research the origin of the Israelite God *Yahweh*, as well as that of the Israelite religion of Yahwism and its subsequent culmination in post-exilic monotheism. As indicated in my hypothesis I postulate that a god *Ya* – or a god with a cognate name(s) – was venerated in different widespread regions of the Ancient Near East. To corroborate my premise it is, therefore, necessary to discuss and evaluate, first of all, various hypotheses of scholars regarding the origin of the name YHWH, as well as different analyses done in an attempt to interpret the name YHWH. The enigma of the name YHWH has not been resolved as yet and no consensus has been reached amongst scholars.

A number of extra-biblical sources concerning this name, or analogous forms, are briefly discussed. According to these sources, the name *Yahweh*, or related forms, appeared before, during and after the Israelite Monarchical Period. In compliance with the Hebrew Bible, Moses was the first person to whom the God *Yahweh* revealed his name. It seems, however, consistent with extra-biblical material, that a god *Ya* – or even a deity *Yahweh* – was venerated elsewhere before *Yahweh* was worshipped by the Israelite people. Two Egyptian thirteenth to twelfth century BC texts mentioning '*Yhw* in the land of the *Shasu*', are some of the most

important discoveries concerning the origin of Yahwism. Additional Egyptian data identify the nomadic *Shasu* with the tribes of Edom, as well as with the "land of Seir". It thus seems that the regions of Edom and Seir were peopled by *Shasu*. The significance of these texts with regard to my hypothesis on the origin of *Yahweh* and Yahwism is deliberated. I theorise that Yahwism originated amongst the Kenite and Midianite tribes, who were nomadic groups predominantly in the regions probably peopled by *Shasu*. The *Shasu* might have been composed of groups such as the Kenites and related tribes. Being nomads, these groups possibly contributed to the development of a form of Yahwism in various regions. I should, therefore, take cognisance of possible extra-biblical referrals to forms related to *Yahweh*.

Chapter 5

Theories regarding the origin of Yahwism

Two main hypotheses regarding the origin of Yahwism have been debated the past number of decades, namely the Kenite hypothesis and the adoption of the *El*-figure by *Yahweh*. These two hypotheses are discussed and evaluated. In the light of my research I conclude that Yahwism – and thus worship of the god *Yahweh* – originated amongst the Kenites and Midianites, who introduced *Yahweh* to Moses.

A prerequisite in the discussion of the Kenite hypothesis is to attempt to reconstruct the origin of the Kenites and their possible link to *Yahweh* and Yahwism. In this regard a potential connection between Cain and the Kenites is explored. Some scholars have identified the Cain narrative of Genesis 4 as the aetiological legend of the Kenites, and Cain thus as the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites. The name Cain is associated with Kenite, meaning "tinsmith" or "craftsman" in cognate Semitic languages. The Kenites were a nomadic tribe of copper-smiths dwelling primarily in the South, the region – according to biblical references – from where *Yahweh* emanated. The genealogy of Cain is important therein that three of Cain's descendants represent lifestyles linked to the Kenites, namely being tent dwellers with livestock, musicians and metal craftsmen. Due to their nomadic lifestyle and particular craft the Kenites travelled from the south to the north, thus having the potential to spread the cult of Yahwism. If – as it seems to be – a form of Yahwism was practised in the regions of Edom and Seir, it is inevitable that the Kenites – who dwelled mainly in the same territories – would have become familiar with this cult.

Moses, who sojourned a length of time among the Kenites and Midianites, would thus have been introduced to the cult of *Yahweh*. It is therefore also necessary to deliberate the Moses-figure – who plays a prominent role in the Masoretic Text – and related traditions. In the latter instance, Moses and such traditions are reviewed only briefly. His association with the Kenites is highlighted.

The adoption of the *El*-figure by *Yahweh* is discussed. Proponents of this hypothesis contend that *Yahweh* originated from *El*. Apart from being a generic term for the word "god", the name *Il*, *Ilu* or *El*, was also the name of the head of the Canaanite pantheon. According to the patriarchal traditions in the Pentateuch, it seems that the name of the patriarch was linked to that of the deity venerated by his family. This god was thus the guardian of the particular tribe. In the pre-Yahwistic patriarchal cult, *El* was worshipped by names such as *El Shadday*. In the early Israelite religion a combination of the names *El* and *Yahweh* was used, or *El/Elohim* was an alternative for *Yahweh*. During the First Temple Period the name *Yahweh* replaced *El*. Cross²⁵ is of the opinion that *Yahweh* was originally a cultic name for *El*. Exodus 6:3 differentiates between the designation of the deity of the patriarchs – God Almighty, אֱלֹהֵי שָׂרֵי – and that revealed to Moses – יְהוָה.

According to De Moor,²⁶ an ancestor of one of the Proto-Israelite tribes received the divine name *Yahwi-Ilu* after his death, indicating that he was, at that stage, united with the Canaanite *Ilu*. The designation *Yahweh*, therefore, could have been derived from *Yahwi-Ilu*. The early Israelites replaced their image of *El* with *Yahweh-El*, their own ancestral manifestation of *El*.

The above theories, concerning *Yahweh* and *El/Elohim*, are deliberated and evaluated in this chapter.

Chapter 6

Rechabites and analogous marginal groups

As advanced in my hypothesis, I deduce that marginal groups, such as the Kenites, Rechabites and analogous marginal tribes or clans emerging mainly from the "South", were responsible for the furtherance of *Yahweh*-worship in Judah as well as in the northern regions of Palestine. As indicated in the discussion of the Kenite hypothesis in the previous chapter, these peoples were knowledgeable about *Yahweh* and worshipped him maybe centuries before Moses. By

²⁵ Cross 1962:225-259.

²⁶ De Moor 1997:368-376.

their typical nomadic lifestyle they were exposed to a lesser degree to syncretistic religious practices and to the "evil and corruption" experienced as a result of urbanisation. Even at a later stage, when they eventually merged with the Judeans, they sustained a strict *Yahweh*-alone religion.

According to genealogical lists in the Hebrew Bible – particularly in Chronicles – as well as sporadic references to the Kenites, Rechabites, Calebites, Kenizzites, Jerahmeelites and others, these groups were evidently linked by common ancestry. The origin of these groups, their interrelationships and their incidence in the Ancient Near East are analysed despite the sparse information in the Masoretic Text. It is clear that some Levites – and even priests and prophets – aligned with the *Yahweh*-alone movement, notwithstanding being a minority group. The influence of the Rechabites during the Monarchical Period was evident as described in Jeremiah 35. It seems that the prophet Hosea was also sympathetic towards this movement.

As proposed in my hypothesis, I advance that marginal groups, such as the Rechabites, came forth as a steadfast religious movement during the Exile, propagating a monotheistic belief in *Yahweh* as only God. Their sober conservatism played a decisive role in the dramatic turn-about of a mainly syncretistic Israelite cult to a monotheistic law-abiding religion.

This chapter, as well as chapters 4 and 5, is essential for the substantiation of my hypothesis and forms the focal point of my research.

Chapter 7

Origin of the Israelite nation: synoptic survey

Debates in respect of the origin and establishment of an Israelite nation have been ongoing for many decades. Consensus has not been reached by scholars in this regard. Although this aspect is not the main concern of my research, I nevertheless have to take cognisance of the various proposed hypotheses. Traditions relating to the Israelites predominantly refer to *Yahweh*'s involvement with this nation, implying a monotheistic belief in and veneration of *Yahweh* from the beginning of their history. However, archaeological finds and polemics in the Hebrew Bible point to the contrary. The Israelite history as portrayed in the Masoretic Text is an idealistic and biased representation.

General consensus has been reached by scholars that, although *Yahweh* was a major god in monarchical Israel, the Israelites practised a syncretistic religion. The phenomenon of interaction between nations, emergence and settlement patterns of tribes of the later Israelite nation in Canaan, as well as the influence of co-regional Ancient Near Eastern nations, had a significant effect on the development of the religion of these Israelites.

To establish the possible incidence of minority groups transmitting the concept of *Yahweh*-worship among the various "Israelite" tribes, I should be acquainted with the proposed possible origin and general settlement picture of these tribes. This matter is, however, dealt with only briefly in this chapter. The settlement of Israelite tribes and the subsequent formation of an Israelite nation is a complex issue that has filled many pages of research by scholars. My main concern in this regard is to establish a link between minority migrating groups – who may have spread the idea of *Yahweh*-worship – and tribes who later formed part of an Israelite nation, and not, as such, the settlement patterns of these tribes. Taking available textual data into consideration, I conclude that minority migrating groups – such as the Kenites and Rechabites, practising their metallurgy profession – were well placed to acquaint the Israelites with *Yahweh*.

Chapter 8

Origin of the Masoretic Text and monotheism: synoptic survey

Supplementary to archaeological finds, the Masoretic Text could be regarded as the only other source of information on the history and religion of the Israelites. Scholars generally agree that the main corpus of the Masoretic Text was finalised – or either compiled and finalised – during the exilic and post-exilic periods. Unfortunately the history of the Israelites has been recorded rather biased, and therefore the Masoretic Text cannot be utilised as a source to establish the historicity of the Israelite nation and its religious practices.

As in the instance of the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History, each one of the other sections and books of the Masoretic Text warrants research in its own right and is, therefore – where applicable – being dealt with only briefly. Since the eighteenth century much has been written and debated on the origin of the Masoretic Text – particularly on the Pentateuch. In the light of the biased representation of the Israelite history and religion, and the seemingly explicit involvement of the Kenites and Rechabites – as signified in 1 Chronicles 2:55 – I regard it necessary to be familiar with current hypotheses on the compilation and finalisation of

the Masoretic Text. Relevant hypotheses and debates are, however, referred to only cursorily in this chapter. An *excursus* briefly elucidates scribes.

According to 1 Chronicles 2:55

'The clans also of the scribes who lived at Jabez: the Tirathites, the Shimeathites and the Sucathites. These are the Kenites who came from Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab',

the Kenites, linked to the Rechabites, are distinctly named as scribes. It thus seems that these two minority groups, particularly, were involved – as scribes – in the compilation and completion of the Masoretic Text. This specific biblical reference substantiates my theory that marginal groups were concerned with exilic and post-exilic activities, and – in agreement with my hypothesis – played a dominant role in the establishment of an exilic and post-exilic *Yahweh*-alone religious movement. Their conceivable influence in this regard is analysed.

The concept of monotheism thus forms an integral part of the exilic and post-exilic religious totality; the perception thereof obviously influenced the finalisation of the Masoretic Text. It is therefore important that I am familiar with this alternative to syncretism. However, the extent of debates and available literature on the issue of monotheism cannot be dealt with in this thesis. I do, nonetheless, briefly refer to aspects of monotheism applicable to my research.

In an *excursus* at the end of paragraph 8.8.1 the so-called Akhenaten monotheism is dealt with cursorily.

In recent years a number of scholars – known as the minimalists or revisionists – came forward with their views on the historicity of the Masoretic Text and an Israelite nation. In most instances they negate the existence of an Israelite nation and Israelite Monarchy, claiming characters, such as Saul, David and Solomon, to be figments of the imagination. They propose that the Masoretic Text was a fabrication of the Persian and Hellenistic periods. In some instances their views merit consideration, although, generally speaking, I cannot agree with their stance. Certain circles strongly support their views. In the light thereof and considering their aggressive proposals on the historicity of the Israelite nation and Masoretic Text, I deem it necessary to be familiar with their views and evaluate those where applicable. These views need not have any effect on my research and conclusive hypothesis, and therefore are referred to only briefly.

Chapter 9

Synthesis and conclusion

At the end of each chapter a comprehensive résumé and conclusion – in respect of the particular chapter – are included. Therefore, the final chapter of this thesis reflects mainly on that which I endeavoured to achieve – as set out in Chapter 1 – and estimates the degree of accomplishment thereof. The relevance of each chapter with regard to my hypothesis is briefly discussed, following which I deduce that the research done – applicable to each chapter in this thesis – was essential to achieve the results that substantiate my hypothesis. A synthesis is compiled from all the research material, concluding: *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.*

Each one of the chapters 2-8 is concluded with a comprehensive résumé regarding the discussions pertaining to the particular chapter; all relevant material is summarised therein. For an overview of the contents of this thesis the reader is recommended to consult the résumés at the end of each applicable chapter.

In conclusion I stipulate shortcomings in my research, with suggestions for further investigation concerning particular facets of this research problem.

1.6 Abbreviations

AASOR	<i>Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
AD	Anno Domini
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
ANET ³	Pritchard, J B (ed) 1969. <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament</i> , 3rd ed with suppl
ASOR.SBL	American Schools of Oriental Research. Society of Biblical Literature
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BARev	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BC	Before Christ
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BS	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>

<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>CNEB</i>	Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible
<i>CR:BS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
<i>CTA</i>	Herdner, A. <i>Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929-1939</i>
<i>ESV</i>	English Standard Version
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
<i>HSM</i>	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HSS</i>	Harvard Semitic Studies
<i>HThR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HTS</i>	<i>Hervormde Teologiese Studies</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTS</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JThS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KAI</i>	Donner, H & Röllig, W. <i>Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften</i>
<i>KTU</i>	Dietrich, M, Lorentz, O & Sanmartini, J (eds) 1995. <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and other places</i>
<i>NCBC</i>	New Century Bible Commentary
<i>NEA</i>	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OLP</i>	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica</i>
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i> (Journal of the Old Testament Society of South Africa)
<i>OTL</i>	Old Testament Library

<i>OTS</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
<i>PDK</i>	Weidner, E F. <i>Politische Dokumente aus Kleinasien. Die Staatsverträge akkadischer Sprache aus dem Archiv von Boghazköi</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>R & T</i>	<i>Religion & Theology</i>
<i>SBL</i>	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>SBL.MS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature. Monograph Series
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Altertumskunde Syrien-Palästinas</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VT Supp</i>	Vetus Testamentum. Supplements
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

Hebrew Bible books²⁷

Gn	Genesis	2 Chr	2 Chronicles	Dn	Daniel
Ex	Exodus	Ezr	Ezra	Hs	Hosea
Lv	Leviticus	Neh	Nehemiah	Jl	Joel
Nm	Numbers	Es	Esther	Am	Amos
Dt	Deuteronomy	Job	Job	Ob	Obadiah
Jos	Joshua	Ps	Psalms	Jnh	Jonah
Jdg	Judges	Pr	Proverbs	Mi	Micah
Ruth	Ruth	Ec	Ecclesiastes	Nah	Nahum
1 Sm	1 Samuel	Can	Canticles ²⁸	Hab	Habakkuk
2 Sm	2 Samuel	Is	Isaiah	Zph	Zephaniah
1 Ki	1 Kings	Jr	Jeremiah	Hg	Haggai
2 Ki	2 Kings	Lm	Lamentations	Zch	Zechariah
1 Chr	1 Chronicles	Ezk	Ezekiel	Ml	Malachi

²⁷ Abbreviations according to Kilian, J 1985. *Form and style in theological texts: a guide for use of the Harvard reference system*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

²⁸ Song of Solomon.



1.7 Archaeological periods in Palestine BC²⁹

Neolithic (New Stone Age)	8500-4500
Chalcolithic (Copper Age)	4500-3500
Early Bronze Age	
Early Bronze IA	3500-3300
Early Bronze IB	3300-3050
Early Bronze II	3050-2700
Early Bronze III	2700-2350
Intermediate Bronze Age	2350-2000
Middle Bronze Age	
Middle Bronze IIA	2000-1800
Middle Bronze IIB	1800-1550
Late Bronze Age	
Late Bronze I	1550-1400
Late Bronze IIA	1400-1300
Late Bronze IIB	1300-1200
Iron Age	
Iron Age IA	1200-1150
Iron Age IB	1150-1000
Iron Age IIA	1000-900
Iron Age IIB	900-700
Iron Age IIC	700-586
Babylonian/Persian Period	586-332
Early Hellenistic	332-167
Late Hellenistic	167-37
Early Roman	37-AD135

²⁹ Negev & Gibson 2001:556.