

CHAPTER 3

MYTHOLOGY, ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN PANTHEONS AND THE ISRAELITE RELIGION

3.1 Introduction

Data on the mythology of Ancient Near Eastern pantheons have been acquired from archaeological finds, particularly from inscriptions on excavated tablets, as indicated in the previous chapter.

Myths are attempts of man to penetrate the unknown and are personifications of the unconscious and preconscious processes describing man's awakening to the universe. When he encounters the unknown, man projects an archetypal¹ image which involves his instincts.² Myth can also be defined as a 'traditional narrative usually involving supernatural or imaginary persons and often embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomena'.³ The mystery of the coming into being of the universe is a central problem for all mythologies.⁴ Myths narrate origins in the primordial⁵ time⁶ and are developed to explain natural phenomena.⁷ It is significant that the very nature of man – under varying circumstances and in different worlds – 'is apt to hit upon similar explanations of the phenomena everywhere threatening and upholding his life'.⁸ Myths are also 'products of early philosophy, reflecting on the nature of the universe', or they could be political, modelled to unite different worshipping groups into one social or political structure.⁹ Although myths can operate as the basic structure of cultural systems and religious beliefs, some mythological literature acts as polemical vehicle for contentious beliefs and views.¹⁰

At all times and under all circumstances myths have burgeoned throughout the inhabited world.¹¹ In essence, every society – be it past or present – has a mythology of some kind.¹²

¹ Archetype: an original pattern or perfect example of which actual things are copies (Deist 1990:20). 'An archetype is a universal thought form or disposition to perceive the world in certain ways' (Naudé 1986:756).

² Naudé 1986:754-757, 760.

³ Kruger 2001a:47-48.

⁴ Willis 1993:18.

⁵ Primordial: see relevant footnote in § 1.3.

⁶ Kruger 2001a:48.

⁷ Jay 1996:35.

⁸ Montcrieff 1994:2.

⁹ Robertson-Smith 1969:19.

¹⁰ Kruger 2001b:214.

¹¹ Clayton 1990:7.

¹² Jay 1996:1.

Symbols of mythology are instinctive creations of the psyche that have survived into modern times. Strange rituals associated with primitive tribes, as well as with ancient civilisations, have actually led people across those difficult "thresholds of transformation" concerning the conscious and unconscious life.¹³ Mythologies are stories that incorporate supernatural elements and that people believe.

A collection of myths is virtually always a component at the centre of a broader religion. As cultures¹⁴ progress, mythologies grow and develop along with them, simultaneously adapting from place to place.¹⁵ Myth 'exercised power over its cultural community',¹⁶ and became a device to create history.¹⁷ A collection of myths does not necessarily imply a chronology, and although the order in which the events appear in the collection is incidental, it has no effect on the overall message. There are, thus, in this regard clear implications for those who rely on the chronology of the Hebrew Bible to trace the historical development of the Israelite culture.¹⁸ Myth may be used as propaganda¹⁹ and some ancient anecdotes have been adapted for political reasons.²⁰ Certain biblical narratives can be clarified – particularly concerning beliefs, customs and superstitions implicit therein²¹ – by comparison with the folklore²² and literary parallels of neighbouring communities. Some myths may fulfil several functions at the same time.²³

As myth cannot easily be separated from religion, anything associated with religion tends to be regarded as myth, and not as history, therefore 'myths may serve as vital allies of religion'.²⁴ At the same time myth may be a meaningful element in the political organisation of a

¹³ Clayton 1990:7, 9.

¹⁴ Culture is defined as 'a basic pattern of thought around which the symbolic systems develop' (Kunin 1995:19).

¹⁵ Jay 1996:1, 4, 8.

¹⁶ Kunin 1995:25.

¹⁷ That is, myth was a 'subjective and coherent articulation of past and present events' (Kunin 1995:41).

¹⁸ Kunin 1995:42.

¹⁹ As an example: the legend of Esther in the Hebrew Bible probably originated in the harems around a shrewd woman and intrigue at the Persian court. The biblical version has been reshaped to elucidate the Purim festival (Gaster 1969:xxxix).

²⁰ As an example: the narrative of Ham, who looked upon Noah's nakedness (Gn 9:20-27), was written at a time when Palestine was a vassal of Egypt who was regarded as a son of Ham (Gn 10:6). The story, likewise, signifies the subjugation of Canaan – also a son of Ham – by the Israelites (Gaster 1969:xxxix).

²¹ Gaster 1969:xxxvii.

²² Folklore comprises those beliefs, customs, stories and sayings of a community that have been passed on from one generation to another (Deist 1990:98). For example, the notion that the earlier inhabitants of Palestine were giants pertains to the belief held by many people to account for megaliths (Gaster 1969:xxxvii).

²³ Myths may function to: explain natural phenomena, control natural forces (by making sacrifices influencing the gods), bind a clan or tribe or nation together, record a historical event of a tribe or nation in a mythologised form, give descriptions of landmarks, justify a social structure, and control people (Jay 1996:3-4).

²⁴ Kruger 2001a:52.

society, by, for example, justifying the authority of elders or chieftains.²⁵ Yet, Dever²⁶ asks the question whether morality, faith and the life of a religious community could be 'predicated on myth'. He nonetheless indicates that the essence of folk religion is not orthodox theology, but symbol, ritual and myth.²⁷ According to Vehse,²⁸ myth is the obvious alternative to history. The main purpose of historical myths is to transmit a message which is independent of historical accuracy, but rather suggests how people thought about events that had happened. Moye²⁹ indicates that by the incorporation of independent mythical narratives with historicised genealogies, history is created from myth. Kunin³⁰ mentions that 'the historical elements within a body of myth are seen as only incidentally historical'. Myth and history can co-exist; therefore the mythical nature of texts need not be affected by the potential historicity of texts. There is interplay between the two. In the case of biblical texts, there is no structural difference between "mythological" and "historical" texts. "The biblical text provides both a conscious and an unconscious framework for viewing reality."³¹

The Ancient Near Eastern concept of the world comprised of a mythical link between heaven and earth and therefore between temple and cosmos – a link which thus played a meaningful part in the 'larger mythical framework or worldview of the Ancient Near East.'³² It 'was not perceived as merely a symbolical relationship, but as a real (or 'magical') connection.'³³ The temple of the patron god was often looked upon as a replica of his heavenly temple. The king was chosen by the patron god of the royal city. The royal complexes usually consisted of the royal palace and garden, as well as the temple and had 'profound religious and cosmic significance'³⁴ due to the religious nature of kingship. Furthermore, any reference to a temple in myths brought to mind multiple perceptions of which the "mythical link" was possibly the most important. The interpretation of mythical motifs or myths in the Hebrew Bible should therefore be taken seriously by the modern reader.³⁵

²⁵ Kruger 2001b:227.

²⁶ Dever 1997a:46.

²⁷ Dever 2005:61.

²⁸ Vehse 1995:440.

²⁹ Moye 1990:598.

³⁰ Kunin 1995:40.

³¹ Kunin 1995:44. For example: the narrative of Joseph (Gn 37-50) is a myth characterised by the doubling of most – if not all – elements of the story, for example, Joseph dreams two dreams and the pharaoh and his servant each dreams two dreams. This pattern of double structure serves to cloud the underlying [mythological] structure (Kunin 1995:135).

³² Van Dyk 2005:875.

³³ Van Dyk 2005:877.

³⁴ Van Dyk 2005:875.

³⁵ Van Dyk 2005:872-873, 875, 877.

Narrated "sacred history" gives meaning to, and stabilises the chaos of human, or secular and profane, existence.³⁶ Myth, ritual and social structure validate existence in society. Being exposed to hostile environments, groups and communities are more likely to survive than individuals are.³⁷ An epic describes a struggle between two groups.³⁸ This encounter usually entails a physical confrontation, where some cunning is exercised. A mythic epic involves the conflict between two groups of deities. Creation is the result of such a combat.³⁹ In the Genesis creation narratives a mythical background appears everywhere. It is widely acknowledged that the elements and traditions in Genesis 1-11 are very similar to those in corresponding Ancient Near Eastern myths.⁴⁰ These traditions cannot be treated differently from those in the Hebrew Bible, even if the latter is monotheistic in contrast to the Ancient Near Eastern polytheism.⁴¹ Jason⁴² points out that the only examples of mythic epic that the biblical literature could be compared with are ancient written texts and, unfortunately, no *in situ* oral material. On the other hand, 'mythologies are littered with symbolic references and objects'.⁴³ By interpreting these symbols the deeper meaning behind a myth could be clarified.⁴⁴

Clans or tribes had their own gods and when two or more of these groups merged, their gods were added to the collective pantheon. At the same time myths spread as tribes or nations conquered new lands. It was therefore consequential that the early mythic structure of Sumer and Babylon influenced those of other cultures,⁴⁵ and in the same vein, cultural symbolic systems – that is, myth, ritual, kinship and social organisation – have a 'common underlying structure'.⁴⁶ With the emergence of Israelite tribes and the apparent movement of these tribes from Mesopotamia in the east, through Syria and Palestine to Egypt in the west, it was inevitable that they were influenced by the various cultures and religions with which they had

³⁶ Kruger 2001a:48.

³⁷ Kunin 1995:23-24.

³⁸ An epic describes a struggle between two clans, tribes or nations, as well as between classes of beings, such as a conflict between divinities and human beings, or humans and monsters (Jason 1995:282). An epic is a long poem or narrative recounting the achievements of a hero, or heroes (Hanks 1992:164).

³⁹ Jason 1995:282. One of the most important creation myths is the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*. See footnote on the Babylonian creation myth and *Marduk* in § 2.14.6. This epic has a definite political intent, as *Marduk*, deity of Babylon, is elevated to the supreme god of Babylon (Van Reeth 1994:74).

⁴⁰ Skinner 1930:52. Reference to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Genesis 2:10-14 clearly indicates that the earthly paradise was in the region where these rivers flow. Therefore, it is inevitable that the myth took its shape in Mesopotamia – watered by these two rivers – although it probably originated in a dry country like Palestine. On the other hand, the account of the Flood is reminiscent of an alluvial country, such as the Euphrates Valley (Skinner 1930:56). The numerous mythical elements in the biblical creation narratives are, in their own right, a matter of research and shall, therefore, not be discussed in this thesis.

⁴¹ Kruger 2001a:50.

⁴² Jason 1995:284-285.

⁴³ Jay 1996:16.

⁴⁴ Jay 1996:16.

⁴⁵ Jay 1996:10, 12, 23.

⁴⁶ Kunin 1995:19.

made contact. Although the existence of a monotheistic Yahwistic faith since the time of the patriarch Abraham is professed in the Hebrew Bible, general consensus has been reached by scholars that these early tribes – and the later Israelite nation – practised a syncretistic-type religion, particularly influenced by the Canaanite religion and mythologies. Walker⁴⁷ indicates that two forms of Yahwism were practised. In the Canaanite naturalistic semblance *Yahweh* was identified with *Asher*, the moon god, whose consort's emblem – the *asherah* pole – was placed alongside the altars for *Yahweh*. The other type of Yahwism was Mosaic and ethical. This form of veneration was introduced into Palestine by those tribes under the influence of Moses. Since the discovery of the Ugaritic texts,⁴⁸ which are unquestionably the most important source of information on the Syro-Palestinian religions and pantheons, many aspects in the Hebrew Bible have been clarified. Canaanite deities were worshipped not only in Syria-Palestine; their influence reached as far as Egypt.⁴⁹

Mythology has been studied from antiquity to the extent of collecting and systematising all traditional stories and commenting on them. Various ambiguous theories developed.⁵⁰ The critical study of myths and its application to both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament began as early as the time of the Church Fathers. They started to allegorise⁵¹ what might be seen as myths in the Bible. During the course of the nineteenth century the scientific study of myths – including possible mythical material in the Hebrew Bible – developed rapidly. Some results of these investigations indicated that many narratives were the products of a long process of evolution of community traditions. Scholars were ultimately forced to 'reconsider the relationship between mythology and biblical tradition'.⁵² Despite research during the past two hundred years, scholars have not been able to provide a satisfactory definition of myth. The Myth-Ritual Theory was expounded by the Scottish scholar William Robertson Smith⁵³ in the

⁴⁷ Walker 1958:262.

⁴⁸ See § 2.8.

⁴⁹ Asiatic workers – most likely brought as prisoners from Syria to Egypt and working mainly near Thebes and Memphis – worshipped deities of the Canaanite pantheon. The influence emanating from these workers, in the fourteenth to thirteenth century BC, probably resulted in some Canaanite deities being worshipped in Egyptian temples. When compatible, the Canaanite deities later partly merged with the Egyptian deities. Similarly, aspects of Egyptian deities appeared in Canaan; a frequent example is the so-called *Hathor* wig (Hestrin 1991:55); see also the footnote on *Hathor* in § 2.14.1.

⁵⁰ Rose 1972:717. Collectors of mythologies are known as mythographers (Rose 1972:718). Mythography is the representation of myths in painting or sculpture (Oxford University Press 1964b:587).

⁵¹ An allegory is a literary device – even a genre – 'that makes extensive use of figurative or symbolic language to expound a subject or tell a story' (Deist 1990:8).

⁵² Oden 1992:946.

⁵³ Robertson Smith was regarded as one of the foremost scholars of his generation. In his travels to Arabia, he not only mastered Arabic – which he could speak fluently – but became intimately acquainted with the common people. These influences played a role in the preparation for the *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* which was first published in 1889. He later became editor-in-chief of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Muilenburg

late nineteenth century. In his lectures on Semitic religion he declared 'it may be affirmed with confidence that in almost every case the myth was derived from the ritual and not the ritual from the myth'.⁵⁴ Elicited from this theory is a definition offered by scholars during the twentieth century that myths are traditional stories that originated from and were passed on in a communal context. A French scholar, Lévi-Strauss, compared myth with language and music. He suggested that, as phonemes⁵⁵ 'only produce meaning in their interrelationships with one another',⁵⁶ the various elements in myth relate to one another. Evidence from Canaanite myths discovered in Ugarit⁵⁷ persuaded Cross⁵⁸ 'of the bankruptcy of all attempts to prove that Israelite religion is discontinuous with the religions of Israel's neighbors, and hence discontinuous with a mythological tradition'.⁵⁹ A pattern discernible in a substantial amount of literature in the Hebrew Bible concerns the divine warrior.⁶⁰ A combination of mythical and historical traditions are, according to Cross,⁶¹ characteristic of Israelite religion, as he states 'in Israel, myth and history always stood in strong tension, myth serving primarily to give a cosmic dimension and transcendent meaning to the historical, rarely functioning to dissolve history.' In the light of decades of research, it is remarkable that some scholars refuse to pay attention to the redefining of myth, on the assumption that the biblical must be firmly separated from the non-biblical, in particular from the mythological world.⁶²

In conclusion, Droge⁶³ mentions that Wolfgang Speyer⁶⁴ introduced the concept of "authentic religious pseudepigraphy". This practice was widespread throughout the Ancient Near East, as well as in Rome and Greece. Emanating from mythological sources, the author was represented as a deity, an angel or another mythological personality.

1969:5-8, 11). Apart from being 'a leading figure in the origins of modern biblical scholarship', Robertson Smith was also 'a pioneer in the field of the History of Religions' (Anderson & Olyan 1991:7).

⁵⁴ Robertson Smith 1969:18. Dever (2005:33) mentions that the Myth and Ritual School focused on the cult.

⁵⁵ Phonemes are the basic sound units in language (Oden 1992:953).

⁵⁶ Oden 1992:953.

⁵⁷ See § 2.8.

⁵⁸ F M Cross 1973. *Canaanite myth and Hebrew epic*.

⁵⁹ Oden 1992:960.

⁶⁰ For example: Psalms 29, 77, 89, 93; Isaiah 51:9-11.

⁶¹ Cross 1973:90.

⁶² Oden 1992:948, 951-953, 960.

⁶³ Droge 2003:135.

⁶⁴ Wolfgang Speyer, known as a leading expert on forgery in Mediterranean antiquity (Droge 2003:135).

3.2 *Asherah/Athirat* and synonymous female deities

3.2.1 Occurrence in Ancient Near Eastern religions

In the pre-Ugaritic era of biblical studies, Robertson Smith's conclusions regarding *Asherah*⁶⁵ enjoyed a wide following.⁶⁶ Although several passages in the Hebrew Bible refer directly to the goddess *Asherah*,⁶⁷ earlier scholars denied that this was the name of a goddess. At present it is generally accepted that "*Asherah*" in the Hebrew Bible refers to both an independent goddess and her wooden cult symbol.⁶⁸

It seems that the Ebla texts are the earliest to mention a goddess *Asherah*, although she appears to be a 'lesser but well-attested deity'.⁶⁹ She appears as *Ašratum*⁷⁰ – consort of the god *Amurru*⁷¹ – in cuneiform texts from the First Dynasty of Babylon.⁷² Her cult was probably brought to Mesopotamia by the Amorites.⁷³ Being denoted as consort of *Amurru* is evidence of her West Semitic origin.⁷⁴ In a votive inscription dedicated to *Ašratum* on behalf of Hammurapi,⁷⁵ *Ašratum* is described as *kallat šar šami*, "bride of the king of heaven" and *bēlet kuzbi u ulsi*, "mistress of sexual vigour and rejoicing". The personal name *Ašratum-ummī*, "*Ašratum* is my mother", appears only once in the god lists.⁷⁶ This name may be compared with the Old Akkadian name *Ummī-dŠamaš*,⁷⁷ meaning *Šamaš-is-my-mother*.⁷⁸ The name *Aširta* (*Asherah*) appears several times in the el-Amarna Letters,⁷⁹ mentioning the king of Amurru, named *Abdi-Aširta*, "servant of *Aširta*". His name was often written as: *abdi-a-ši-ir-ti(te)*, *abdi-aš-ra-tum*, *abdi-dāš-ra-tum*, *abdi-aš-ra-ti*, *abdi-dāš-ra-ti* and *abdi-aš-ra-ta*. The

⁶⁵ "The opinion that there was a Canaanite goddess called Ashera, and that the trees or poles of the same name were her particular symbols, is not tenable; every altar had its ashera, even such altars as in the popular, pre-prophetic forms of Hebrew religion were dedicated to Jehovah. This is not consistent with the idea that the sacred pole was the symbol of a distinct divinity' (Robertson Smith 1969:188-189). Robertson Smith delivered these *Lectures on the Religions of the Semites* during 1888-1891.

⁶⁶ Margalit 1990:265.

⁶⁷ Judges 3:7; 1 Kings 14:15; 18:19; 2 Kings 21:7; 23:4.

⁶⁸ Day 2000:42-43.

⁶⁹ Day 1986:385. Ebla texts dated ca 2350 BC. See also § 2.3.

⁷⁰ Also known as *Aširatum*, consort of the lunar deity *Amurru* (Lipiński 1972:103).

⁷¹ *Amurru* was the eponymous god of the Amorites – nomadic peoples of the western desert – who became visible in Mesopotamia from the late third millennium BC. *Amurru* is characterised as a storm god, analogous to *Hadad*. *Amurru* carried the epithet "Lord of the Mountain", which is also reflected in the name *El Shadday* (Van der Toorn 1999a:32). See also § 3.5 and § 3.7.

⁷² ca 1850-1831 BC (Day 1986:386).

⁷³ Day 1986:386.

⁷⁴ Wyatt 1999a:100.

⁷⁵ Dated 1792-1750 BC. See footnote on Hammurapi in § 2.4.

⁷⁶ Day 1986:386.

⁷⁷ ^d is an Akkadian determinative (meaning sign; see footnote on "determinative" in § 2.7) that appears before the name of a god. The sign is for the word "*dingir*", meaning "god", the equivalent of *il* or *ilu* in West Semitic (Borger 1979:204).

⁷⁸ Lipiński 1972:104.

⁷⁹ Dated fourteenth century BC. See § 2.5.

word for "holy place" or "sanctuary" is attested in Akkadian as *aširtu*, *ešertu*, *iširtu*, *išertum*, *ašru*, *ašratu*.⁸⁰

The Babylonian *Aṭirat*, called *bēlet sēri*, has chthonic⁸¹ features similar to the Underworld goddess *Geštinanna*.⁸² Both are connected to the god *Amurru*; *Geštinanna* was regarded as his consort at times. *Aṭirat*, portrayed as West Semitic solar deity, has been identified in Babylonia with *Geštinanna* as they both have the same fate, spending half of their lives in the Underworld.⁸³ The Sumerian myth, *Inanna's descent to the Netherworld*, recounts *Geštinanna's* compulsory stay in the Underworld.⁸⁴ The solar deities, *Šapšu* and *Aṭirat*, are the only two deities of the Ugaritic pantheon called *rabbatu*.⁸⁵ In Palestine, during that period,⁸⁶ the sun was considered to be a female deity.⁸⁷ According to Lipiński,⁸⁸ *Aṭirat* could have been venerated as a solar goddess at Taanach. A fifteenth century BC Akkadian letter found at Taanach mentions prince *Abdi-Aširti*, or *Abdi-Ašrati* – servant-of-*Aṭirat* – and also refers to *ummān* (*u-ma-an*)^d *Aširat*, meaning "wizard of *Aṭirat*", an expression designating a diviner.⁸⁹ This title can be compared to that of one of the prophets (*āpilum*) of *Šamaš*,⁹⁰ mentioned in a letter from Mari.⁹¹

Ašratum – probably characterised as goddess of the nomads [Amurru/Amorites] – was often called *Ašratum bēlet sēri*,^d *Gú-bar-ra* or *Gašan-gû-eden-na*, "the Lady of the Steppe".⁹² As goddess of the Steppe, and identified with the desert god *Amurru*, *Aṭirat* went out to the desert

⁸⁰ Day 1986:386, 388.

⁸¹ Chthonic deity refers to a deity of the Netherworld (Deist 1990:44).

⁸² *Geštinanna* was known in Mesopotamia and Sumer. She was goddess of justice, heaven and hell, intelligence, creativity and water. It is "She who keeps records in the Underworld" and is the "Lady of the Vine" (Ann & Imel 1993:330).

⁸³ See footnotes on the solar deity *Shamash* in § 2.4 and § 2.14.6. A fragment of a Ugaritic hymn to the sun goddess *Šapšu* reveals aspects that can be compared with *Aṭirat*. The sun appears every morning in the east, disappears at night in the west, travelling through the Netherworld to appear again the next morning in the east. The belief that the sun was a female deity is attested by a Phoenician ivory relief exhibiting a winged sun-disc and feminine head with *Hathor* curls (Lipiński 1972:106). See footnotes on *Hathor* in § 2.13 and § 2.14.1. The name *Geštinanna* means "Grapes of Heaven"; *Šapšu*, apparently, was particularly fond of wine (Lipiński 1972:117-118).

⁸⁴ Lipiński 1972:109. See footnotes in § 2.3 and § 2.4 on *Inanna*.

⁸⁵ The title *rbt* (*rabbatu*) reveals a particular "community of honour" between *Šapšu* and *Aṭirat* (Lipiński 1972:116-117).

⁸⁶ ca fifteenth century BC.

⁸⁷ According to inscribed clay tablets found at Taanach (Lipiński 1972:105). See § 2.13 and subparagraph on Taanach.

⁸⁸ Lipiński 1972:105. See "Taanach" in § 2.13.

⁸⁹ Albright 1944:16, 18.

⁹⁰ *Šamaš* (*Shamash*) was an Akkadian solar deity, venerated by the Assyrians and Aramaeans. *Šamaš* was a son of the lunar deity *Šin* (Van Reeth 1994:227). See also relevant footnotes in § 2.4 and § 2.14.6.

⁹¹ Lipiński 1972:105.

⁹² Lipiński 1972:104.

to suckle newborn gods.⁹³ From ancient Arabian sources *Aṭirat* is attested as a well-known solar goddess and consort of the moon deities, 'Amm and Wadd.⁹⁴ These sources include several South Arabian inscriptions, a North Arabian stela and a few Arabian Thamudic personal names. The three main deities of the old Arabian pantheon were the star god, moon god and sun goddess. In the Arabian kingdom of Qatabān the principle god was 'Amm – meaning "uncle" – the lunar deity. A territory of this kingdom, called *d-ʿtrt*, meaning "that of *Aṭirat*", was devoted to her. The lunar deity *Wadd* – meaning "loving" – of the kingdoms Maʿin and Awsan, was worshipped together with *Aṭirat* in the temple there. An inscription from Maʿin mentions a month called *d-ʿtrt*, – "the one of *Aṭirat*" – the name clearly owing to a feast celebrated during that month in honour of her. Three gods of Taymāʾ in North Arabia – *Salm zī Mahram*, *Sîn-gallā* and 'Ašīrā' are mentioned in an Aramaic inscription. *Sîn-gallā* – meaning "Sîn the Great" – is normally considered to have been the lunar deity. The affinity to the Babylonian moon god *Sîn* probably dates to the period 553-544 BC when the Babylonian king Nabonidus, a fervent worshipper of *Sîn*, sojourned in Taymāʾ. *Sîn* most likely replaced the local lunar deity whose consort was 'Ašīrā'.⁹⁵

A comparison of the Akkadian couple *Amurru* and *Ašratum* with the Ugaritic *Yrḥ* and 'Atrt may lead to the inference that *Aṭirat* had originally been a solar deity and consort of the moon god (*Yrḥ*).⁹⁶ An Ugaritic text mentions *Aṭirat* and *Yaraḥ* as parallelisms.⁹⁷ According to an early Ugaritic myth, *Aṭirat* was presumed to be a solar deity 'aṭiratu, "who treads the heavens from end to end" in her daily travel. In this instance she may be compared with an ancient South Arabian solar goddess *Tānuf* (*tnp*), "the one who moves to and fro".⁹⁸

Margalit⁹⁹ suggests that the Ugaritic word *atrt* and its Hebrew cognate 'ašērā were originally common nouns meaning "wife, consort". Literally, it means "she-who-follows-in-the-footsteps (of her husband)". From a Sumerian inscription, dedicated to Hammurapi,¹⁰⁰ Canaanite *Athirat*'s Amorite counterpart *Ašratu(m)* was the wife (*aššat*) of *Amurru*, the warrior and storm god, son of *Anu*.¹⁰¹ Her role and function as fertility goddess is reflected in an

⁹³ Fulco 1987b:492.

⁹⁴ Day 1986:397.

⁹⁵ Lipiński 1972:101-103.

⁹⁶ Lipiński 1972:110.

⁹⁷ Lipiński 1972:116.

⁹⁸ Lipiński 1972:116.

⁹⁹ Margalit 1990:269-270, 273.

¹⁰⁰ See relevant footnote in § 2.4.

¹⁰¹ The Sumerian cuneiform sign for "heaven" is *an*, which is also the name of the Sumerian god of the heaven. His Babylonian counterpart is *Anu*, considered as the personified heaven (Hutter 1999a:388).

epithet. Whenever *Amurru* and *Ašratu* are cited together, the rule of "male first" is invariably followed. This literary convention reflects a practice attested in both Mesopotamia and Canaan regarding divine married couples.¹⁰² In Ugaritic, as in Arabic, the noun *'tr* (footstep, trace) is used as a preposition meaning "following, after". Margalit¹⁰³ draws the conclusion that 'it thus stands to reason that a common-noun *aṯrt*, contextually determined as meaning "wife, consort", should contain the notion of "following-in-the-footsteps of ..."'.¹⁰⁴

The Hittite *Elkurnirša* myth¹⁰⁴ – dated the second half of the second millennium BC – clearly has a North-West Semitic background. The god *Elkurnirša* corresponds to the form *'l qn 'rs* – *El*, creator of the earth. His wife, *Ašertu*, is evidently synonymous with *Athirat* (*Asherah*).¹⁰⁵ This myth suggests a separation between *Elkurnirša* (*El*) and *Ašertu* (*Athirat*) which sheds some light on allusions in the Hebrew Bible associating *Ba'al* and *Asherah* (*Athirat*). Scholars consider an estrangement between *El* and *Athirat*.¹⁰⁶

Two identical figurines¹⁰⁷ – the one almost complete and the other a large fragment – have been excavated at the Philistine cities Aphek and Ekron.¹⁰⁸ Two nude babies, with uplifted arms, are held between the breasts of each figurine. No similar figurine of a mother suckling two babies has been found. An "ivory" from Ugarit depicting a winged goddess with *Hathor*¹⁰⁹ hairstyle, has been identified as the nurse of the twins *Shahar* and *Shalem*,¹¹⁰

¹⁰² According to an Ancient Near Eastern phenomenon, 'Ugaritic male deities tend to represent a reality statically (for example, warriorhood, and fertility), while their female consorts are thought of as bringing that reality into action (by actual fighting, the act of physical fecundity)' (Fulco 1987b:492). This led to significant uncertainty within the various pantheons regarding their roles and sexuality. Although *El* – at Ugarit – was father to all creatures and creator of heaven and earth, *Athirat* is called "creatress of the gods" in many Phoenician inscriptions (Fulco 1987b:492). In the Ugaritic legend of Aqhat, the craftsman god *Kothar-wa-Ḫasis* promised the patriarch Danel a bow which Danel presents to his son Aqhat; see footnote in this paragraph on Keret. The goddess *Anat* (see § 3.3) covets the bow and eventually offers Aqhat immortality to obtain the bow. He spurns her indicating that as female she has no business with a bow. After this humiliation she murders him. In the Ancient Near Eastern texts the bow is an unequivocal symbol of masculinity. In a number of texts *Anat* – goddess of love and war – is explicitly described as taking away men's bows, thereby changing them into women. This mythological theme arises from men's experience that women are threatening to their sexuality and life. Ancient men were profoundly concerned about their potency and sexuality (Hillers 1973:71-74, 78).

¹⁰³ Margalit 1990:274.

¹⁰⁴ *Elkurnirša* was the god in the Hittite mythology who created the earth (Van Reeth 1994:72).

¹⁰⁵ Although *Athirat* seems to be the consort of *Il*, this is nowhere stated as such (Wyatt 1999a:99).

¹⁰⁶ Day 1986:390-391. The thesis is that *El* lost *Asherah* to *Ba'al* due to *El*'s alleged impotence and *Ba'al*'s seizure of the kingship of the pantheon (Olyan 1988:40).

¹⁰⁷ The figurines – dated the thirteenth century BC – are females with long hair curling outwards – which could be serpents; with a protruding navel and a deeply cut vagina and pubic hair; three bracelets on each wrist and a crescent-shaped pendant (Margalith 1994:109). Compare these figurines with descriptions in § 2.13.

¹⁰⁸ The two cities are approximately thirty-eight kilometres from each other (Margalith 1994:109).

¹⁰⁹ See relevant footnote in § 2.14.1.

¹¹⁰ The names mean "Dawn" and "Dusk", respectively (Margalith 1994:110). After their birth – according to the Ugaritic text – the twin gods left for the desert to live among the stones and trees. As the desert was not capable of sustaining life, the gods hunted on the fringe of the desert (Hadley 2000:45-46).

progeny of *El*, born from two wives. This nurse, "The Lady", the "Great Mother goddess", is none other than *Asherah-and-Rahmaya*.¹¹¹ The two figurines, as well as the ivory, all represent the same mythological theme of a 'divine mother suckling two (semi-)divine twins'.¹¹² Suggestions that *Rhmy* refers to the two goddesses *Athirat* and *Anat* have been disputed. The name could refer to a completely independent goddess, equivalent to the Akkadian goddess *d^sa-sú-ra-tum* – meaning womb.¹¹³ This suggestion has, however, been superseded by the idea that *d^sa-sú-ra-tum* should rather be equated with *ktrt*, the birth goddess.¹¹⁴ A number of other cult objects excavated at Ekron include painted animal figurines, as well as a stylised head with birdlike facial features. This head is characteristic of *Ashdoda*, a female figurine found at Ashdod.¹¹⁵ *Ashdoda* is a hallmark of the mother goddess in the Aegean cult.¹¹⁶ Cultic inscriptions excavated at Tel Miqne – ancient Philistine city of Ekron – indicate that the Canaanite *Asherah* was worshipped there. The most important inscription reads 'sanctified to Asherat, for the shrine and oil'.¹¹⁷

Athirat – implied to have once been a solar deity and consort of the moon god – was later seen as two separate goddesses. Under the name *Athirat* she lost her solar character to become a maritime goddess "who treads on the sea",¹¹⁸ and received naval characteristics in the Ugaritic pantheon.¹¹⁹ She is frequently called *rbt. 'atrt. ym*, "Lady *Athirat* of the Sea". The "Lady who traverses the Sea" was probably the original full name of the goddess, later abbreviated to the common designation "*Athirat*".¹²⁰ Mythological texts confirm her maritime nature in the religious traditions of Ugarit, as well as those in the coastal cities of Tyre and

¹¹¹ Some scholars indicate that *Rahmy*, meaning "maiden", refers to the virgin *Anat*. Therefore, two goddesses are implied, namely *Asherah* and *Anat*. Other scholars conceive a single goddess *Athirat*, with either a second name or an epithet *Rahmy*. The identification of *Rahmy* with *Anat* could be on account of *raham*, translated as "damsel" (Margalith 1994:111). However, it would be surprising that the virgin *Anat* (*rhm*) could be a mother goddess. *Rhmy* is probably just another name for *Athirat* (Day 1986:390). In the Ugaritic mythology *Anat* was more a martial than maternal figure (Margalith 1994:112).

¹¹² Margalith 1994:110-111. In the Hebrew Bible the "divine twins" may be reflected in the narratives of Esau and his twin Jacob, as well as that of Jacob's grandsons Perez [meaning, "bursting forth"] and Zerah [meaning "sunrise", "dawn"]. See Genesis 25:21-27; 38 (Margalith 1994:113).

¹¹³ In the Hebrew Bible *rhm* means "womb" (Margalith 1994:112).

¹¹⁴ Day 1986:390.

¹¹⁵ The *Ashdoda* figurine has a body in the shape of a chair and a birdlike head (Dothan 1990:27).

¹¹⁶ Dothan 1990:27. Mother goddesses were often dominant in early pantheons. *Inanna* developed into the later Babylonian *Ishtar* and Syrian *Astarte* (Jay 1996:14).

¹¹⁷ Gitin 1990:232. The inscriptions may indicate the storage of oil used in a cultic rite for *Asherah*. The language of the inscriptions cannot be clearly identified and may be ancient Hebrew, Phoenician or Philistine. Aegean influence is noticeable in the city – confirming the connection between the Sea Peoples (such as the Philistines) and the Aegean region. Ekron was an important city-state throughout most of the Iron Age and one of the largest cities in the biblical period (Gitin 1990:232).

¹¹⁸ Lipiński 1972:117.

¹¹⁹ Fulco 1987b:492.

¹²⁰ Day 1986:387-388.

Sidon, mentioning three times the "fisherman of *Athirat*".¹²¹ The gods of Tyre were known at Ugarit by the thirteenth century BC. According to a mythological text [from Ras Shamra],¹²² 'the hero Keret¹²³ made a pilgrimage and offered a vow to *Asherah* of Tyre'.¹²⁴

Punic¹²⁵ inscriptions refer to a supreme goddess, *Tnt* or *Tinnit*, whose cult was known in Phoenicia during the seventh century BC. Her identity has been disputed, while the Canaanite goddesses *Asherah*, *Anat* and *Astarte* have been suggested as possibilities. As the cult of *Tinnit* was known in Phoenicia, she could have been a native Phoenician goddess and not necessarily originated in North Africa. Scholars argue that the name *tnt* is related to *tnn*, "the dragon", meaning that she could have been "The Dragon Lady" or "the one of the dragon".¹²⁶ Binger¹²⁷ disputes the argument that *Asherah* either was a lady of the sea, or was treading on a sea-dragon. In her Akkadian title, *bēlit sēri*, she is connected with mountains and steppes, and definitely not with the sea or rivers. Furthermore, interpreting *rbt atrt ym* as "Lady *Asherah* of the day", and not "Lady *Asherah* of the sea", is syntactically and orthographically just as possible as the traditional interpretations. However, the problem with the interpretation of "day" is that *špš*, and not *Asherah*, was the Ugaritic solar deity.

On a number of occasions, the goddess *Athirat* is called *Qudšu*.¹²⁸ Apart from being attested in Ugaritic texts, the name *Qudšu* is also known in Egypt as the name of a goddess,¹²⁹ where she was depicted naked with a *Hathor* wig and standing on a lion holding serpents in one

¹²¹ Lipiński 1972:110.

¹²² Text on a clay tablet, inscribed with the alphabetic cuneiform script (Guirand 1996:74). See also § 2.8.

¹²³ Texts concerning Phoenician mythology, found at Ras Shamra, do not relate only about deities, but also contain legends about god-like heroes. Keret, king of Sidon, was the son of *El* and a soldier of the goddess *Šapas*. He had a beautiful son, Danel, who was another mythological hero (Guirand 1996:79).

¹²⁴ Peckham 2001:31.

¹²⁵ Punic was the language of the Carthaginians. The Punic character – treacherous and perfidious – was attributed to the Carthaginians by the Romans (Oxford University Press 1964b:716). Carthage was an ancient city near Tunis on the North African coast, founded by the Phoenicians and destroyed during the Punic wars [third century BC] (Oxford University Press 1987:247). In an excavation project, three inscriptions from a temple wall at the Tuscan port Pyrgi – two in the Etruscan language and one in Punic – were found, dedicated to the Phoenician deity *Astarte*. This find proves that there was an important Punic colony in this Etruscan port during the early fifth century BC (Charles-Picard 1983:297-298, 308).

¹²⁶ Day 1986:396.

¹²⁷ Binger 1997:43-45.

¹²⁸ *Qudšu* is a name meaning "holiness" or "sanctuary". 'The personification of sanctuaries in divine names is well-attested among the Semites' (Day 1986:388).

¹²⁹ From the Nineteenth Dynasty [1293-1185 BC] the Egyptian mythology knew a goddess *Qudšu*. Her roots were apparently in the Semitic world. She was usually depicted between the gods *Min* and *Resheph*, the latter being a Semitic god. In the Egyptian documents *Qudšu* – whose attribute was the lion – was only an epithet of the goddess *Anat*. As *Qudšu (Anat)*, she was the consort of *Amurru*, the god of the West. In the Egyptian texts *Amurru* had the name *Resheph*. They appeared together at harvest time in the sacrifice of the ass. The god *Min* was identified with the god *Pan* of the Greeks. *Min* was the protector of travellers in the desert (Guirand 1996:38, 76).

hand and flowers in the other; in some instances she has serpents in both hands, her erotic character being distinctively emphasised. On a relief discovered at Thebes, she is called *qdš-ʿstrt-ʿnt* indicating a fusion with the Canaanite goddesses *Astarte* and *Anat*.¹³⁰ Wyatt¹³¹ mentions that the name on this relief reads *qdšt* [and not *qdš*], and argues that there is 'no justification for identifying the goddess of the stelae with *Athirat*'. According to Cornelius,¹³² "*Qudšu*" is identified on stelae by hieroglyphs as *qdš/qdšt*, and he proposes that the name be read as "*Qedeshet*", without suggesting any pronunciation.

The early attestations of *Asherah* – originally a West Semitic goddess – do not afford much information on her character. Clay tablets discovered at the ancient Canaanite city of Ugarit provide important finds from a religious point of view. All the major deities that appear in the Ugaritic myths and rituals are found in other Canaanite sources, such as Aramaic, Moabite and Phoenician texts. The Canaanite *Asherah* was known by the name *Athiratu* or *Athirtu* (*ʿatrt*). 'It is indisputable that the Ugaritic and other North-West Semitic texts have revolutionized our understanding of the Bible' and the Ugaritic texts 'are our most important North-west Semitic source about the goddess *Asherah*'.¹³³ Before the discovery of these texts, scholars erroneously equated *Asherah* with *Astarte*. According to the Ugaritic myths, *Asherah* was the wife of the aged supreme deity *El*,¹³⁴ and was also known as *'Elat*, "goddess". Depictions of *Asherah* are that of a typical mother – seen as a kind of matriarch.¹³⁵ Besides striving to please *El*, she apparently had a decisive influence on major rulings made by him. *Asherah* was, furthermore, referred to as *El's* consort – *'ilt*, or *'Elat* – the "mother of the gods". These gods are termed the "seventy sons of *Athirat*".¹³⁶ However, it was not attested throughout ancient times that she was the mother of *El's* children or that she had unnamed children of her own.¹³⁷ By the end of the second millennium BC *Asherah's* popularity

¹³⁰ Day 1986:388-389.

¹³¹ Wyatt 1999a:100.

¹³² Cornelius 2004:45. *Qedeshet* is indicated by various titles on iconographic material, such as "*Ke(d)eshet*, lady of heaven", "*Qedesh*, lady of heaven, mistress of all the gods, eye of *Ra*, without her equal", "*Qedeshet*, lady of heaven, great of magic, mistress of the stars" and "*Qedeshet*, beloved of *Ptah*". The titles of *Qedeshet*, *Anat* and *Astarte* are very stereotyped – especially referring to "lady of heaven", "mistress of the gods" – but as Cornelius (2004:80-84) points out, only *Qedeshet* is called the "beloved of *Ptah*".

¹³³ Day 1986:385, 387.

¹³⁴ Supreme deity of the Canaanite pantheon. See § 3.7.

¹³⁵ The *Ba'al* myth explains that *Asherah* kept herself busy with maternal and domestic affairs: she worked with a spindle, washed her clothes and cooked food in a cauldron – all to charm the good-natured *El* (Korpel 2001:131).

¹³⁶ Day (1986:387) indicates that 'there is a direct line of connection' between the view of *Athirat's* seventy sons and the later Jewish concept of the 'seventy guardian angels of the nations' (Dt 32:8; 1 Enoch 89:59; 90:22-25). The "sons of God" (Dt 32:8) reflect the Canaanite idea of the "sons of *El*" – *bn 'il*. Albright (1968:121) adds that *Asherah* also had the designation *Qāniyatu 'elīma*, "she who gives birth" to the gods. In an earlier Ugaritic myth she presumably destroyed the Sea Dragon, thereby enabling *El* to create the earth.

¹³⁷ Fulco 1987b:492.

began to decline as she systematically merged with *Anat*. She finally lost her position as independent goddess in all Canaanite religions outside Israel, only materialising at times as a member of the triad of goddesses, together with *Anat* and *Astarte*.¹³⁸

It is problematic to establish the "real" or "original" meaning of the name "*Asherah*", and actually quite irrelevant. The relevance of a word, name or title is to verify the way it has been employed in a given context and to discover the hidden codes. *Asherah* is regarded as both a divine name and a noun, and more likely as a word "functioning" as a divine name.¹³⁹ Binger¹⁴⁰ proposes that "*Asherah*" is the official name-title of the primary goddess of the Ugaritic pantheon and that this name-title denotes her as female counterpart of the male supreme god – be it *El*, *Ba'al* or *Yahweh*. Hadley¹⁴¹ indicates that the origin of the cult of *Asherah* (*Athirat*) is probably in Mesopotamia where she was introduced as *Ašratu* or *Ašratum* by the Amorites.¹⁴² Many proposals have been advanced regarding the etymology of Ugaritic *Athirat* and Hebrew *Asherah*, yet, the meaning and derivation of the terms remain uncertain.

According to the Priestly tradition in Exodus 6:3, אֱלֹהֵי שָׂרַי¹⁴³ is the deity who was worshipped by the pre-Mosaic patriarchal people who did not yet know *Yahweh*, or his name. The word שָׂרַי occurs forty-eight times in the Masoretic Text, mainly in early poetic and late archaic texts. To determine the identity of the deity, evidence from extra-biblical texts should be utilised. שָׂרַי is generally derived from a Proto-Semitic word "*tad*", meaning "mountain". 'A metaphysical¹⁴⁴ extension of the primitive meaning',¹⁴⁵ from the Hebrew שָׂרַי, is obviously "breast".¹⁴⁶ If, in contrast to the customary interpretation identifying Semitic deities – such as *Yahweh* and *El* – with a mountain, the etymology for "breast" is favoured, Lutzky¹⁴⁷ theorises that שָׂרַי was originally the name or epithet of a goddess before becoming a biblical epithet of *Yahweh/El*. Lutzky¹⁴⁸ examines the possibility that שָׂרַי, as a goddess epithet, is more specifically that of *Asherah*. The feminine morpheme *-(a)y*¹⁴⁹ existed in early West Semitic texts,

¹³⁸ Korpel 2001:127, 129-131, 136, 138, 141.

¹³⁹ Binger 1997:142, 146.

¹⁴⁰ Binger 1997:146.

¹⁴¹ Hadley 2000:44, 49.

¹⁴² See earlier discussion in this paragraph.

¹⁴³ *El Shadday*, translated as "God Almighty".

¹⁴⁴ Metaphysics: 'the branch of philosophy that seeks to investigate the first principles of reality through logical argument; the scholarly study of the essence of being' (Deist 1990:156).

¹⁴⁵ Lutzky 1998:16.

¹⁴⁶ Genesis 49:25; Isaiah 28:9; Lamentations 4:3.

¹⁴⁷ Lutzky 1998:15-16.

¹⁴⁸ Lutzky 1998:16-23, 32, 34.

¹⁴⁹ The feminine suffix *-ay* appears only in the name of Sarai. The later shift to Sarah suggests that *-ay* – at some stage – was no longer understood as feminine (Lutzky 1998:17).

particularly poetic texts, in the names of deities and mythical beings. A goddess nursing was a divine act. Many decades ago scholars suggested that שדי was the name of a fertility deity, linked to שר, "breast". In this instance the name שדי expressed the nurturant aspect of the "great mother" visually represented with large multiple breasts. אל שדי could thus be 'an androgynous fertility deity incorporating the image of *Asherah* (who is associated with nursing), consistent with the androgynous monotheism of Gen. 1.¹⁵⁰

As major West Semitic deity, *Asherah's* name – or cognate names – is found from the second millennium BC among the Amorites, in Mesopotamia, Ugarit, Phoenicia, Arabia and Egypt, as well as in Hittite and Canaanite mythology. Her image is reflected in a number of prominent Ancient Near Eastern goddesses. Evidence indicates the presence of *Asherah* in early Israelite religion, with specific reference to inscriptions found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom. *Asherah* also carries the epithet *Rahmay* – as discussed earlier in this paragraph – referring to "the one of the womb". Imagery representing breasts and a womb is a form of divine epiphany associated with mother goddesses. The cult of the "goddess of the breast" has been tolerated in the Israelite Monarchy from the eighth to sixth centuries BC and is likely to have been the cult of *Asherah*. שדי as *El*-epithet is virtually limited to the Priestly Source, which singled אל שדי out as the pre-Mosaic God, rather than another deity.¹⁵¹ The paradoxical elevation of *El Shadday* – as the god of the past – may have been a factor in the disappearance of goddess worship from the official religion of Israel as depicted in the biblical texts.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Lutzky 1998:18. Fishbane (1987a:27) refers to the first creation narrative in Genesis 1:27: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them'. A trace of the creation of a primordial androgynous being (hermaphrodite) could be implied here. Later rabbinic traditions considered Adam hermaphroditic. *The Legend of the Jews* (Ginzberg 1909:66) mentions that 'the creation of woman from man was possible because Adam originally had two faces, which were separated at the birth of Eve'. Cassuto (1961:57-58) confirms that according to the rabbinic interpretation in the Talmud – *B. Berakhoth* 61a, *B. 'Erubin* 18a, *Bereshith Rabba* viii 1 and other parallel passages – 'man was created with two faces, that is, hermaphrodite'. Skinner (1930:68) disagrees that the first human being was androgynous, being later separated into man and woman, as it has no substantiation in the text. Fishbane (1987b:199) notes that the creation version in Genesis 1:27 stands in sharp contrast to the tradition in Genesis 2:22-24. The Babylonian Talmud is classified under six orders or *sedarim*, which are divided into tractates, such as *Berakoth*, *'Erubin* and *Bereshith Rabba* (Rappoport & Patai 1966:360-362). See also footnote on the Mishnah and the Talmud in § 3.2.2. An androgynous being (or hermaphrodite) means bisexuality, and relates to the simultaneous possession of male and female physical features (Deist 1990:12). *Hermaphroditus* is a mythological being with male and female sexual characteristics. According to ancient traditions he was the child of the Greek gods *Hermes* and *Aphrodite*. On request of the nymph *Salamacis* – when *Hermaphroditus* attempted to reject her advances – their two bodies were united as one, being neither man nor woman, yet to be of both sexes (Van Reeth 1994:106).

¹⁵¹ For a detailed discussion of the arguments in favour of the epithet שדי being linked to *Asherah*, see Lutzky (1998:16-36).

¹⁵² Lutzky 1998:35.

Athirat/Asherah, *Anat* and *Astarte*, as well as the Mesopotamian goddess *Inanna-Ishtar*, seem to have fused. Egyptian *Athirat* – called *Qudshu* – was probably an assimilation of the attributes of other north-eastern goddesses. Likewise, *Athirat's* consort *Ba'al* was most likely not merely *Ba'al-Hadad*, but a combination of several gods.¹⁵³

3.2.2 Occurrence in the Masoretic Text and Israelite religion

The goddess אֲשֶׁרָה (*Asherah*) – masculine plural אֲשֶׁרִים – was worshipped in Palestine at the time when the Israelites established themselves there. Through the centuries she was popular among the Northern Israelites and Judeans alike, even being venerated by kings and queens.¹⁵⁴ Dependent on different perceptions of the biblical *Asherah*, she could be explained as 'a phenomenon of official religion, a forbidden non-conformist cult, a house-cult or part of popular religion'.¹⁵⁵ Various suggestions have been made by scholars over a period of time and conclusions drawn regarding the meaning of *Asherah* in the Hebrew Bible. Some scholars equate *Asherah* with the goddess *Astarte* or her symbol, while others maintain that *Asherah* was not the name of a deity but a cult object. As early as 1889, Robertson Smith¹⁵⁶ claimed that *Asherah* always denoted a wooden pole. Other scholars had an image, a tree or a phallic symbol in mind. The Dutch scholar, Kuenen¹⁵⁷ argued that *Asherah* signified both a goddess and a cult object symbolising her.¹⁵⁸ She was not to be equated with *Astarte*. The view of Kuenen is still widely accepted today and consistent with interpretation of biblical data and Ancient Near Eastern archaeological evidence. Since the discovery of the inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom¹⁵⁹ the possibility of a female consort for *Yahweh* has been extensively debated. In both instances reference is made to "*Yahweh* and his *Asherah*".

The Hebrew word *'ašērâ* – as also its Amorite-Akkadian and Ugaritic cognates – represents a North-West Semitic noun *'tr*, meaning, "to follow behind" ("in someone's footsteps"); denoting a "wife", "consort".¹⁶⁰ Although the Semitic root *'tr* can have different explanations, the

¹⁵³ Fulco 1987b:492.

¹⁵⁴ Lipiński 1972:112.

¹⁵⁵ Kletter 2001:199.

¹⁵⁶ Robertson Smith 1969:188. He specifically refers to Deuteronomy 16:21, 'You shall not plant any tree as an Asherah beside the altar of the Lord your God that you shall make', and draws the conclusion that Deuteronomy referred to 'either a living tree or a tree-like post' and argues that either form was probably originally admissible (Robertson Smith 1969:188).

¹⁵⁷ Kuenen 1882a:88-93.

¹⁵⁸ The people of the Ancient Near East – and particularly the Israelites – hardly made any distinction between a deity and its image or symbol (Kuenen 1882a:89).

¹⁵⁹ See § 4.3.9 and § 4.3.10 for a discussion on these contentious inscriptions and the implication of the phrase "*Yahweh* ... and his *Asherah*" – possibly referring to *Asherah* being his consort.

¹⁶⁰ Margalit 1990:284. See also discussion in § 3.2.1.

Ugaritic interpretation does not include "walk" or "stride", but only "follow". The Hebrew *šr* is a common noun – "footstep", as well as a denominative verb *šr* – "to follow" (behind), particularly in the case of the *Pi'el*¹⁶¹ form of the verb.¹⁶² Apart from the morphology of the word *šrh* pointing to a common noun, the literary-idiomatic context indicates a divine person with the proper name *Asherah*.¹⁶³ Akkadian, Phoenician and Aramaic terms corresponding to the Hebrew *'ašērâ*, *'ašērīm* and *'ašērōt*, designate a shrine, chapel or sanctuary.¹⁶⁴ Day,¹⁶⁵ however, indicates that although the meaning of "chapel" or "cella" is attested in other Semitic languages it does not appear elsewhere in Hebrew and should therefore be rejected.

Kletter¹⁶⁶ states that *Asherah* was an undeniable component of the official cult of Judah, introduced into the Jerusalem temple by the Judean kings as a foreign, but not forbidden cult.¹⁶⁷ Regarding Josiah's¹⁶⁸ reform, the Hebrew Bible states, 'and he brought out the *Asherah* from the house of the LORD'.¹⁶⁹ Many debates evolve around the problematic word *'ašērâ* in the Masoretic Text. It seems to indicate a wooden cult object, a pole, a tree or a stone that can "stand",¹⁷⁰ be "made",¹⁷¹ be "set up",¹⁷² be "planted",¹⁷³ "cut down",¹⁷⁴ "uprooted",¹⁷⁵ "burned",¹⁷⁶ "brought out",¹⁷⁷ "destroyed",¹⁷⁸ "made into dust",¹⁷⁹ "taken away"¹⁸⁰ and "broken into pieces".¹⁸¹ The word *'ašērâ* occasionally indicates the name of a goddess.¹⁸² Vriezen¹⁸³ is of the opinion that, on the basis of all the aforementioned texts, it could be

¹⁶¹ *Pi'el* is often the causative form of the verb.

¹⁶² Vermaak 2001:58.

¹⁶³ Margalit 1990:266.

¹⁶⁴ Lipiński 1972:116.

¹⁶⁵ Day 1986:392.

¹⁶⁶ Kletter 2001:200.

¹⁶⁷ Deuteronomy 16:21; 1 Kings 15:13; 2 Kings 21:7; 23:4, 7; 2 Chronicles 33:3-5, 19. *Asherah* was also closely associated with the "host of heaven" (2 Ki 17:16; 21:3; 23:4).

¹⁶⁸ Josiah reigned in Judah ca 640/39-609 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:197).

¹⁶⁹ 2 Kings 23:6. Verse 7 reads: 'And he broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes who were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the *Asherah*'. The Hebrew word **בְּתִיִּים** is translated in the ESV by "hangings"; Holladay (1971:51) interprets it as "woven garment". Day (1986:407) mentions that **בְּתִיִּים** is probably cognate with the Arabic *batt*, "woven garment".

¹⁷⁰ Isaiah 27:9.

¹⁷¹ 1 Kings 14:15; 16:33; 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3; 2 Chronicles 33:3; Isaiah 17:8.

¹⁷² 2 Kings 17:10; 2 Chronicles 33:19.

¹⁷³ Deuteronomy 16:21.

¹⁷⁴ Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:5; Judges 6:25-26, 28, 30; 2 Kings 23:14; 2 Chronicles 14:2; 31:1.

¹⁷⁵ Micah 5:13.

¹⁷⁶ Deuteronomy 12:3; 2 Kings 23:6, 15.

¹⁷⁷ 2 Kings 23:6.

¹⁷⁸ 2 Chronicles 19:3.

¹⁷⁹ 2 Kings 23:6; 2 Chronicles 34:4, 7.

¹⁸⁰ 2 Chronicles 17:6.

¹⁸¹ 2 Chronicles 34:4.

¹⁸² An "image" of *Asherah* (1 Ki 15:13; 2 Ki 21:7), "prophets" of *Asherah* (1 Ki 18:19), "vessels" for *Asherah* (2 Ki 23:4) and "hangings" [woven garments] for *Asherah* (2 Ki 23:7) (Vriezen 2001:73).

¹⁸³ Vriezen 2001:73.

deduced that the *'ašērâ* was an object used in the cult, placed next to the altars and next to the pillars dedicated to *Ba'al*.

A sacred tree or pole was presumably treated as a symbol of the goddess *Asherah*. The explicit prohibition against planting a sacred pole or tree beside an altar of YHWH in Deut 16:21 shows that this actually did happen.¹⁸⁴ North¹⁸⁵ points out that the מצבה-type sacred pole or tree-trunk had in some cases a masculine phallic character. The stylised wooden poles – representing an image of *Asherah* – were rejected by strict Yahwism.¹⁸⁶ Smith¹⁸⁷ argues that the Israelite religion demonstrated variegated roles of popular and state-religion, wherein the 'mixture of indigenous and imported religious features, and the complex features of convergence and differentiation undermines some of the main scholarly views about Israelite religion in general and Israelite monotheism in particular'.¹⁸⁸ Evans¹⁸⁹ proffers that this differentiation process endeavoured to define Yahwism in more exclusive terms, rejecting non-Yahwistic מצבות and אֲשֵׁרִים, even though these features were included in some *Yahweh* worshippers' application of Yahwism.

The Hebrew Bible, at times, equates *Asherah* with a sacred tree or pole.¹⁹⁰ This tradition has not been enlightened by the, otherwise informative, Ugaritic texts. Korpel¹⁹¹ indicates that it is reasonably conclusive that trees and stones were regarded as animated beings whispering messages, however, according to available texts, they never related to the goddess *Asherah*. She explains that the relation to the "*asherah*-tree" was a symbol of fertility probably as a result of *Asherah*'s merging with her daughter *Anat*.¹⁹² Cult statues made of wood were

¹⁸⁴ Vriezen 2001:73. For a discussion of the sacred tree symbol and stylised tree, see Hestrin (1991:50-59) and Dever (2005:226-229). Olyan (1988:4) mentions that the deuteronomistic polemic against the "*asherah*" is found mainly in 'rhetorical speeches concerning the sins of Israel and/or Judah against *Yahweh*' (for example 2 Ki 17:16-17).

¹⁸⁵ North 1989:131.

¹⁸⁶ Jeroboam's golden calves are a prime example of an inherent Israelite cultic feature which was later rejected as Canaanite (Evans 1995:201). See § 2.14.4.

¹⁸⁷ Smith 1990:154.

¹⁸⁸ Smith 1990:154.

¹⁸⁹ Evans 1995:201.

¹⁹⁰ 1 Kings 14:23; 16:33; 2 Kings 17:16.

¹⁹¹ Korpel 2001:141.

¹⁹² Korpel 2001:141. During the first millennium BC מצבות and במוֹת were regarded symbols of *Ba'al*. The trees associated with these מצבות should, therefore, represent *Ba'al*'s wife *Anat* (see § 3.3). In Israel, however, fertility resided in *Asherah* as *El*, and not *Ba'al*, was held to be the supreme God. The Ugaritic myths denote *Asherah* as wife of *El*, the elderly chief god of the Canaanite pantheon (Korpel 2001:130, 141). As *El* was associated with wisdom, the "Tree of Knowledge" may be linked to him, as the "Tree of Life" to *Asherah*. The *asherah*-pole of the goddess was a surrogate tree of life (Kruger 2001a:65). Korpel (2001:141-142) furthermore indicates that the original reading of Hosea 14:9 (not the translation in verse 8) is of some importance:

'Ephraim, what have I to do with your idols?

It is I who is his *Anat* and his *Asherah*!

common in the Ancient Near East. Popular Judean pillar figurines¹⁹³ do not seem to represent a tree and there is also no definite proof that *Asherah* had a pillar-shaped body.¹⁹⁴ Olyan¹⁹⁵ is of the opinion that biblical and extra-biblical evidence indicates that the *asherah* was not a living tree, but maybe a pole in some cases and otherwise a stylised tree, such as a date palm. According to Day,¹⁹⁶ there is strong evidence suggesting that 'ašērâ in the Hebrew Bible was a 'wooden pole symbolizing the goddess Asherah',¹⁹⁷ yet, he acknowledges that several references in the Masoretic Text denote the goddess herself.¹⁹⁸ Concerning the epigraphic finds at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom, he favours the view that the phrase "*Yahweh* and his *Asherah*" implies that a 'cult symbol rather than the goddess Asherah (is) directly the source of blessing alongside Yahweh'.¹⁹⁹

In a pattern discernible in North-West Semitic religions, an abstract aspect of a male deity 'is hypostatized,²⁰⁰ personified, and worshiped as a goddess, who may then be thought of as the consort of the god'.²⁰¹ This aspect that has been hypostatized is the cultically available presence of the god. Therefore, not the cult object itself, the *asherah*, but a token of *Yahweh*'s "effective presence" is hypostatized.²⁰² Miller²⁰³ is of the opinion that the controversial inscription at Kuntillet 'Ajrud should be recognised as a hypostatisation of *Yahweh*, thus reference to a cult object marking his presence. He mentions, however, that 'how far that hypostatization has taken place in these inscriptions (a feminine deity, the consort of *Yahweh*?) is not altogether clear'.²⁰⁴

Vermaak²⁰⁵ points out that scholarly discussions on *Asherah* in the Hebrew Bible can be divided into pre-Ugaritic and post-Ugaritic periods, and that 'despite divergent interpretations it

It is I who is like an always green cyprus,
from me comes your fruit!

– in this text *Anat* and *Asherah* seem to be identified with each other, both compared with a luxuriant fruit-bearing tree. This idea stems from Wellhausen (Wellhausen, J 1963. *Die kleinen Propheten: übersetzt und erklärt*. 4. Unveränderte Aufl. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter).

¹⁹³ See § 2.13 under the subtitle "Female figurines".

¹⁹⁴ Kletter 2001:200.

¹⁹⁵ Olyan 1988:1.

¹⁹⁶ Day 1986:392.

¹⁹⁷ Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:3; 16:21; Judges 6:25-26, 28, 30.

¹⁹⁸ Day 2000:46. Examples are: 2 Chronicles 14:3; 17:6; 19:3; 24:18; 34:4.

¹⁹⁹ Day 2000:52.

²⁰⁰ Hypostasis: the real representation of God/a god, for example, the 'idea that the holiness or glory of God represented God in the Israelite temple' (Deist 1990:119). 'Thus it is the "trace" or "effective presence" – not the cult object – that is hypostatized' (McCarter 1987:155).

²⁰¹ McCarter 1987:148.

²⁰² McCarter 1987:148, 155.

²⁰³ Miller 2000a:204.

²⁰⁴ Miller 2000a:204.

²⁰⁵ Vermaak 2001:43-44, 47.

is generally accepted that the *asherahs* were cult objects symbolizing or representing the goddess Asherah'. On the basis of the verbs in the Hebrew Bible connected to the word "*asherah*" he is of the opinion that it was a manmade object and not a living tree. Nouns used in conjunction with "*asherah*" are "high place",²⁰⁶ "graven/carved image",²⁰⁷ "pillar",²⁰⁸ "altar"²⁰⁹ and "incense altar".²¹⁰ Certain English translations for "*asherim*" are "groves" or "living trees". This interpretation probably followed the Septuagint²¹¹ which has a term "*althos*" which was translated as "groves", and in some of the Mishnah²¹² texts associated with living trees. Proposals of sacred *asherah*-poles in the form of stylised trees have no supportive archaeological material.²¹³ Vermaak²¹⁴ has, however, another proposal, suggesting that '*asherah* in the Hebrew Bible as a cult object refers to a certain type of ancient game board.' The "shield board game"²¹⁵ or the "game of fifty-eight holes" was played throughout the Ancient Near East. These boards, the *asherahs*, were made of ivory or baked clay and several have been excavated at numerous places. The games were probably played by the Israelites not fully understanding the impact these games might have on their religious lives. These boards were possibly regarded as cult objects of the mother goddess.²¹⁶ The majority of the people probably did not comprehend the metaphysical²¹⁷ significance of these games and as the magic took control of them only a few realised the implication thereof.²¹⁸

²⁰⁶ 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 7:10; 18:4; 21:3; 23:15; 2 Chronicles 14:3; 17:6; 31:1; 33:3, 19; 34:3.

²⁰⁷ Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chronicles 33:19; 34:3, 4, 7; Micah 5:12.

²⁰⁸ For example: Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:3; 16:21-22; 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:10; 18:4; 23:14.

²⁰⁹ Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:5.

²¹⁰ 2 Chronicles 14:4-5; Isaiah 17:8.

²¹¹ Also known as the LXX (Seventy); best-known Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. It originated sometime during the late Intertestamental Period and the second century AD. It was widely used by the Early Church (Deist 1990:234).

²¹² The Mishnah is the Jewish oral law, contained in the first part of the Talmud, and consists of a summary of all the major rabbinical pronouncements on the Law. The Talmud – or "Instruction" – is the written version of discussions by Jewish scholars on the Law and other passages from the Hebrew Bible (Deist 1990:159, 253).

²¹³ Vermaak 2001:49-50.

²¹⁴ Vermaak 2001:50-61.

²¹⁵ Referred to as the "shield board game" due to its obvious geometrical shape (Vermaak 2001:51).

²¹⁶ The mother goddess – also known as a fertility goddess – had many manifestations in the Ancient Near East. Deities were regularly symbolised by living creatures. The mother goddess was often portrayed by the symbol of a lion, throne or tree, alluding to strength, dignity and fertility. 'These symbols possibly provide the context or the *Sitz im Leben* in which these board games were actually played' and can all be indirectly connected to the mother goddess, therefore the board games can be regarded as possible cult objects of the mother goddess (Vermaak 2001:51-52). The implication would be that these games were played as fertility games, in order that the mother goddess – passing through the Netherworld – could bring back the fertility god. This would thus be a favourable game to play for people dependent on agriculture. The excavated game boards have all been dated as from the end of the Late Bronze Age. Most were found in burial contexts (Vermaak 2001:53-54).

²¹⁷ See footnote on "metaphysics" in § 3.2.1.

²¹⁸ Vermaak 2001:62. If these game boards were cult objects of *Asherah*, as suggested by Vermaak (2001:43-62), the religious implication would be that *Asherah* controlled fertility, and that the lives and livelihood of the ancient people were dependent on the outcome of this game, therefore relinquishing – in the case of the Israelites – dependence on *Yahweh*.

From a very early period the tradition of a sacred tree symbol formed part of most Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Depictions of this tree are found in Iran, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and some Mediterranean countries. In Palestine it appears on a variety of pottery vessels.²¹⁹ The sacred tree, as a source of life, symbolises growth and revival.²²⁰ The ever-green oak and the terebinth seem to have been the principal sacred trees for the ancient Israelites. Both these trees are still common in the region that was known as Palestine.²²¹ Epiphanies of *Yahweh* – or his messengers – repeatedly took place under trees;²²² *Yahweh* appeared to Moses in a bush.²²³ The tactic of reducing oracle-giving trees²²⁴ – which was a place of manifestation of the divine – to just wood, was repeated time and again.²²⁵ From the eighth century BC trees were considered to be a danger to monotheism in general and particularly to Yahwism.²²⁶ According to Lipiński,²²⁷ the earliest biblical texts²²⁸ imply that *asherah* was a "woody spot" or a "Canaanite sacred grove" of considerable size.²²⁹ Exodus 34:13 commands that the "*asherim*" (plural) be cut down, thus designating the sacred groves of the Canaanites. In her discussion of Isaiah 57:3-13 Susan Ackerman²³⁰ indicates that the predominant image in these verses is sexual. The citizens of Jerusalem as well as the city are pictured as a harlot. The people are involved in sexual intercourse under the trees. They are accused of lusting among the terebinths and 'under every green tree'.²³¹ Many motifs used for the two themes – creation and garden of God – in the composition of Genesis 2-3, are common with examples

²¹⁹ See § 2.13 regarding the stylised tree as depicted on the Taanach cult stand and the Lachish ewer. Egyptian tree-representations depict nursing and food-providing aspects. Taking the interchange of deities among neighbouring Ancient Near Eastern cultures into consideration, as well as references in the Hebrew Bible to *Asherah* as a tree, clearly indicates that the tree on the Lachish ewer symbolises this goddess (Hestrin 1991:56).

²²⁰ Hestrin 1991:54.

²²¹ Although being two different trees the general appearance of the oak and terebinth is similar and they have therefore been confused by the ancient Israelites. It is not always possible to determine which tree is referred to in the Hebrew Bible. In certain parts of the Near East the oaks are still today regarded with superstitious reverence by some peasantry (Frazer 1923:322-325). In Egypt the tamarisk tree was sacred to worshippers of *Osiris*. According to the myth, *Osiris*' body – in its sarcophagus – washed ashore at Byblos and lodged in a tamarisk tree (Walker 1988:471). *Osiris* was king of the Underworld, according to Egyptian mythology. The belief was that the pharaohs became *Osiris* when they died and that immortality could be attained by following *Osiris* (Willis 1993:33).

²²² Genesis 18:1, 4, 8; Judges 6:11; 1 Kings 19:5.

²²³ Exodus 3:1-5.

²²⁴ Genesis 12:6; 2 Samuel 5:24.

²²⁵ Keel 1998:54. For example Jeremiah 2:27; 3:9.

²²⁶ Keel 1998:54-56.

²²⁷ Lipiński 1972:112.

²²⁸ Deuteronomy 16:21; Judges 6:25-30.

²²⁹ Despite Lipiński's (1972:112) suggestion, there is no clear indication in the aforementioned texts that a cluster or number of trees is referred to; both citations mention the *asherah* next to an altar.

²³⁰ Ackerman 1992:152-154.

²³¹ Isaiah 57:5 in the ESV reads: 'you who burn with lust among the oaks, under every green tree'. See a previous footnote in this paragraph referring to confusion between the oak and terebinth. Ackerman (1992:152) mentions that 'the sacred nature of intercourse in Isaiah 57:5 is indeed indicated by a pun in the Hebrew, the word for "terebinths" – among which the Israelites are accused of lusting – 'ēlīm, is the same as the word for "gods". That is, one can simultaneously read in v 5a, "you who burn with lust among the terebinths" and "you who burn with lust among the gods" '.

in Ancient Near Eastern literature. Certain elements in the Genesis narrative are related to sexual and fertility concepts. These include the phrase "mother of all living".²³² Some of the features in the narrative²³³ appear in other traditions, suggesting the possibility that it had been told in earlier forms. In the Genesis narrative it thus became a polemic against Canaanite fertility cults, indicating a link between Eve and *Asherah* in the presence of the serpent with its fertility connotations.²³⁴

Vriezen²³⁵ mentions that archaeological finds interpreted as remains of a *מצבה*²³⁶ or *asherah* and an altar could be an indication that both *Yahweh* and "his *Asherah*" were worshipped alongside each other in that particular sanctuary, each with its own cult object. Regarding the question of a goddess in the Israelite religion, Miller²³⁷ indicates that one cannot declare unreservedly 'that one of the distinctive features of the worship of *Yahweh* was the absence of any consort in the cult or theology associated with *Yahweh*'. Although the Hebrew Bible condemns the veneration of any other deity alongside *Yahweh*, the extent of the reaction from the prophets and deuteronomists on this aspect suggests the existence of syncretism among the Israelites. The presence or absence of "goddess worship" in Yahwism should be observed in the total analysis of male-female relations in a social, economic and religious framework. The radical centralisation of Yahwism included an impression of a feminine dimension of *Yahweh*. The obliteration of a feminine dispensation in Yahwism is probably partly due to a resistance to syncretism and the major role played by goddesses in the mythology and religion of Syria-Palestine. A distinct characteristic of Yahwism is 'the absorption of divine roles and powers into the one deity, *Yahweh*,²³⁸ which incorporates the feminine. However, several aspects of the Israelite religion embody feminine facets, as seen in the numerous excavated female figurines and the inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom. Therefore, the possibility should be acknowledged that Israelite worshippers identified the "*asherah*" of the epigraphic finds with the great goddess *Asherah*.²³⁹

²³² חוה (*Hawwah*) or חיה (*haya*); see § 3.3.

²³³ Such as aspects of the serpent, the nakedness of the couple and the punishments of the man and woman (Wallace 1985:184).

²³⁴ Wallace 1985:183-184.

²³⁵ Vriezen 2001:74-75.

²³⁶ *מצבות* (standing stones) were also used for non-cultic purposes, for example as a treaty-stone (Gn 31:44-45), a tombstone (Gn 35:20) or a boundary-stone (Is 19:19) (Vriezen 2001:74).

²³⁷ Miller 1986:239.

²³⁸ Miller 1986:244.

²³⁹ Miller 1986:239-241, 244-246.

By the presentation of a court case, Edelman²⁴⁰ poses the question of 'proving Yahweh killed his wife'. She sketches the scenario of a suit filed in the heavenly court on behalf of *Asherah's* former earthly worshippers against *Yahweh*, the prime suspect in the murder of his wife *Asherah*. This exposition by Edelman is based on Zechariah 5:5-11. In a vision disclosed to Zechariah ben Iddo,²⁴¹ *Yahweh* revealed his intention to kill *Asherah* – according to Edelman. The contents of a sealed אֶפֶה²⁴² show a woman, identified as הַרְשָׁעָה, "Wickedness", simultaneously representing *Yahweh's* "wife" in "human form", as well as her cult statue. The lead cover of the metallic ephah confined this "divine being" indefinitely. 'The land of Shinar', in verse 11, could literally mean Babylonia or be a metaphor for the "exile". The vision could indicate that *Asherah* was "murdered" or permanently "confined to a coffin". It is on record – in commensuration with Edelman's interpretation – that *Asherah* used to be beside *Yahweh* in the Jerusalem Temple,²⁴³ and from graffiti and figurines it is known that the Judean people were quite attached to her prior to the Exile. There is, however, no attestation of her presence in the Persian-era Jerusalem Temple. Production of popular Judean pillar figurines terminated at the same time. Approximately five hundred years later *Asherah* is replaced by a human mother who gave birth to *Yahweh's* divine Son. This mother is virtually elevated to the position of *Asherah*, even reintroducing the practice of figurines in her worship.²⁴⁴ Edelman²⁴⁵ concludes that by 'using an alternative form of scholarship, issues concerning how meaning is determined when reading an ancient text, the development of monotheism with the resulting need to reinterpret older Yahwistic texts, and how to understand divine motivations are explored. . . . The case remains unresolved, as do answers to the issues'.

3.2.3 Queen mother and the cult of *Asherah*

The queen mother – נְבִירָה – held no official office within the Judean and Israelite monarchies and could not lay claim on any privileges by virtue of her conventional position, although she

²⁴⁰ Edelman 2003:335, 338, 340-343.

²⁴¹ The prophet Zechariah – one of the twelve minor prophets – was either the son or a descendant of Iddo. In Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 he is called the son of Iddo, however, he appears as a descendant of Iddo in Nehemiah 12:16. "Son" may also mean "descendant". Iddo was named as head of a family of priests who returned after the Exile. Zechariah – a priest, as well as a prophet – was a contemporary of the prophet Haggai. His recorded prophetic activity was during the period 520-518 BC. He was concerned with the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple (Mauch 1962b:942).

²⁴² An ephah (אֶפֶה) is a dry measure equal to a tenth of a ḥomer (Ezk 45:11). The reference in Zechariah 5:5-11 poses some textual problems with the vision of a woman in an ephah. This term in the vision probably implies a container larger than the standard size (Sellers 1962a:107). A ḥomer (חֹמֶר), also a dry measure, is thus equal to ten ephahs. The word is related to the Akkadian *imeru*, meaning "ass" and probably refers to a load an ass should carry (Sellers 1962b:639).

²⁴³ 2 Kings 23:6-7.

²⁴⁴ In the scenario of the court case Edelman questions the concession made for the virtual deification of Mary, in the light of the longstanding absence of *Yahweh's* older "divine wife", *Asherah* (Edelman 2003:340-343).

²⁴⁵ Edelman 2003:344.

had an official status. The ambitious נַבְרִת used their influence to determine the next heir of the throne.²⁴⁶ However, in the Egyptian, Hittite and Mesopotamian empires the mother of the ruling king did indeed have a great influence. The Judean queen mother was greeted by the king with gestures of honour, a throne was placed for her on the king's right-hand side,²⁴⁷ she probably had a crown²⁴⁸ and was repeatedly mentioned together with the king.²⁴⁹ The names of most Judean queen mothers have been preserved in the biblical record and could be an indication of their importance.²⁵⁰ The fact that the names of only two queen mothers of the Northern Kingdom have been maintained²⁵¹ does not imply that they had less influence, but could be ascribed to the negative attitude of the editors of the Hebrew Bible towards the Northern Kingdom.²⁵² The word גַּבִּירָה, also meaning "lady" or "mistress", is a metaphor for Babylon.²⁵³

It has become clear that the ancient Israelite cult made far more allowances in religious beliefs and practices than admitted by the exilic and post-exilic editors of the Masoretic Text. In the male-dominated culture – as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible – significant information concerning women's religious activities was not included. Comparative material is of little value as it emanates from other patriarchal societies. Ackerman²⁵⁴ proposes that the Israelite and Judean queen mother had the official responsibility in the king's court to dedicate herself to the cult of *Asherah*, the mother goddess. Olyan²⁵⁵ argues that *Asherah* and her cult symbol had a decided position in the Israelite religion, not only being legitimate in popular Yahwism, but in the official cult as well – and maybe, even in very conservative circles. 'The prohibition and polemics against *Asherah* and her cult symbol attest to their popularity in the cult of Yahweh in Iron Age Israel.'²⁵⁶

The most explicit link for a queen mother with any cultic activity is expressed in 1 Kings 15:13.²⁵⁷ King Asa²⁵⁸ removed his mother Maacah – the queen mother – as גַּבִּירָה, as 'she had

²⁴⁶ Ackerman 1993:385-386.

²⁴⁷ 1 Kings 2:19.

²⁴⁸ Jeremiah 13:18.

²⁴⁹ Jeremiah 13:18; 22:26; 29:2.

²⁵⁰ For example, 1 Kings 14:21; 15:2, 10.

²⁵¹ Zeruah, mother of Jeroboam (1 Ki 11:26) and Jezebel (1 Ki 21:4-7).

²⁵² Szikszai 1962:975.

²⁵³ Holladay 1971:54.

²⁵⁴ Ackerman 1993:388.

²⁵⁵ Olyan 1988:74.

²⁵⁶ Olyan 1988:74.

²⁵⁷ See also 2 Chronicles 15:16.

²⁵⁸ King of Judah 911/10-870/69 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:196).

made an abominable image for Asherah'.²⁵⁹ Ackerman²⁶⁰ points out that scholars have suggested that the alien element of *Asherah* worship had been introduced by Maacah into the Judean cult. The only substantiation for this claim is Maacah's presumed foreign ancestry. As indicated in paragraph 3.2.2, multiple texts²⁶¹ suggest that it was the norm in Judah during the ninth to seventh centuries BC to worship both Yahweh and *Asherah* in the Jerusalem Temple. In the same vein, the queen mother Jezebel – frequently accused of introducing the alien cult of *Asherah* into the religion of the Northern Kingdom – worshipped *Asherah*, as an element of the state cult,²⁶² in her capacity as גבירה.

Nehushta, queen mother of Jehoiachin,²⁶³ may also have been a participant in the cult of *Asherah*. Her name is most probably derived from the root נחש, "serpent".²⁶⁴ Human names appropriated from the animal kingdom were common in the Semitic world. Nehushta probably carried an epithet of *Asherah*, whose association with serpents is well attested in many sources.²⁶⁵ Maacah, Athalia and Nehushta from Judah, together with Jezebel from the Northern Kingdom, are four queen mothers identified in the Hebrew Bible as devotees of *Asherah*. Scholars have noted that queen mothers from the South figured more prominently in the royal court than those from the North.²⁶⁶ To understand the role of the queen mother in the South, Ackerman²⁶⁷ proposes that 'if the Judean royal ideology holds that Yahweh is the adopted father of the king,²⁶⁸ then is it not possible that the adopted mother of the king is understood to be Asherah as seen by many "as the consort of Yahweh"?' *Yahweh* was thus perceived as surrogate father of the king and *Yahweh*'s female consort, *Asherah*, as surrogate mother. Should this be true, the implication is that the Judean queen mother was seen as the "earthly

²⁵⁹ 1 Kings 15:13.

²⁶⁰ Ackerman 1993:390-392.

²⁶¹ See footnotes on various relevant texts in § 3.2.2.

²⁶² 1 Kings 16:33 reports that Ahab erected an *asherah* in Samaria, participating in *Ba'al* and *Asherah* worship.

²⁶³ 2 Kings 24:8. Jehoiachin reigned three months in Jerusalem (597 BC) (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:197). The city was besieged by king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Jehoiachin gave himself up to Nebuchadnezzar, together with his wives, mother, servants, officials and palace officials. He was taken prisoner and all the temple treasures were carried off to Babylon (2 Ki 24:10-15).

²⁶⁴ See § 3.3 on Eve.

²⁶⁵ See § 3.2.1 for *Asherah*'s identification with *Qudšu*, the serpent-bearing goddess. In Proto-Semitic texts, *Asherah* is called "the Lady of the serpent" (Ackerman 1993:397).

²⁶⁶ Ackerman 1993:396-399.

²⁶⁷ Ackerman 1993:400.

²⁶⁸ In the Egyptian culture the king of Egypt was regarded as a god as from the early Old Kingdom, as "the divine principle of rule upon earth". He did not die, but continued to rule in the existence after his death. His confidence as god-king contributed to Egypt's dominance in the early ancient world. The king was the god *Horus*, and later became the son of *Re* (see footnotes describing *Re/Ra* in § 2.5 and § 2.7) (Wilson 1962:59). *Horus*, the sky god, took on the form of a falcon whose right eye was the sun and left eye the moon (Willis 1993:44).

counterpart of *Asherah*" – the king's heavenly mother – and, therefore, depicted as patron of *Asherah*, consequently being the second most powerful person in the royal court.²⁶⁹

Lipiński²⁷⁰ indicates that towards the end of the tenth century BC Maacah, the Judean queen mother, had made a *מפלצת*²⁷¹ – a phallic emblem or ithyphallic idol²⁷² – for the *asherah* of Jerusalem. This *asherah* was probably a pagan shrine. The *מפלצת* should be connected to the root *blt*, "to protrude". In the Septuagint it is translated by "coition".²⁷³

3.2.4 Synopsis and conclusion: *Asherah* and synonymous female deities

It is evident, as seen in paragraph 3.2.1, that, possibly due to migrating nations, there had been an integration of various deities from different pantheons, influencing one another. There even may have been a common origin in some distant past. The assumption that a particular cosmic goddess or "general goddess" was worshipped by many Ancient Near Eastern societies in the initial stages of the formation of a state or tribe, seems conceivable. Kletter,²⁷⁴ however, is of the opinion that once a population group adopted a deity, it cannot be a "general goddess", as 'it is adopted for specific needs and circumstances of that population, thus becoming unique'. Ugaritic myths and rituals wherein *Asherah* appears denote her as a "great goddess".²⁷⁵ *Asherah* was evidently originally a West Semitic goddess, but was at times – as it frequently happened with deities from foreign countries – admitted to the Mesopotamian pantheon. From the many inscriptions recovered and information gathered regarding Ancient Near Eastern deities, it is obvious that the same gods and goddesses – with cognate names – materialised in various pantheons. Canaanite *Asherah*, known as *Athirat* ('*atrt*), *Athiratu* or *Athirtu* appears with synonymous names in different mythologies, covering more or less the whole region of the Ancient Near East.

The earliest known reference to *Asherah* is in texts from Ebla, dated ca 2350 BC. As *Ashratu*, consort of *Amurru* – warrior and storm god of the Amorites – she appears in the Mesopotamian cult. Her connection with *Amurru* attests her West Semitic origin. This cult was

²⁶⁹ Ackerman 1993:400-401.

²⁷⁰ Lipiński 1972:113.

²⁷¹ *מפלצת* (transcribed as *miplešet*) is described in Holladay (1971:209) as a "disgraceful image". See 1 Kings 15:13; 2 Chronicles 15:16. King Manasseh of Jerusalem built an *asherah* that contained an idol or emblem (Lipiński 1972:113), a *פסיל* (transcribed as *pāsīl*) (2 Ki 17:41) (Holladay 1971:294). Manasseh transferred the *פסיל* with its shrine to the Jerusalem Temple of *Yahweh* (Lipiński 1972:113).

²⁷² An ithyphallic symbol refers to the phallus carried in Bacchus festivals, a metre used for Bacchic hymns, a poem in this metre or a licentious poem (Oxford University Press 1964a:463).

²⁷³ Lipiński 1972:113.

²⁷⁴ Kletter 2001:198.

²⁷⁵ Korpel 2001:127.

probably brought to Mesopotamia by migrating Amorites. The el-Amarna Letters refer to the king of Amurru (Amorites) as *Abdi-Aširta*, "servant of *Aširta*" (*Asherah*).

The Babylonian *Athirat* – called *bēlet sēri* – was portrayed as a West Semitic solar deity with chthonic features.²⁷⁶ She was equated with *Geštinanna*, goddess of the Underworld. Both were regarded as consorts of *Amurru*, and, as solar deity, *Athirat* spent her nights with *Geštinanna* in the Netherworld.²⁷⁷ *Šapšu* was known as the solar deity of Ugarit. During the fifteenth century BC the sun was regarded as a female deity in Palestine. *Šapšu* and *Athirat* were the only two deities called *rabbatu*, signifying a particular "community of honour" between them. Inscriptions from Taanach – a site populated by Canaanites – indicate that *Athirat* was venerated there as solar deity.

Ašratum, characterised as a goddess of nomads – the Amurru/Amorites – was often declared *Ašratum bēlet sēri*, "Lady of the Steppe". As goddess of the Steppe she was identified with *Amurru*, the desert god. *Athirat* was venerated in Arabia – attested in Arabian sources – as solar deity and consort to the moon gods *'Amm* and *Wadd*. The three major deities of the old Arabian pantheon were the star god, lunar god and solar goddess. During the sixth century BC the Babylonian moon god *Šin* replaced the local lunar deity.

The Akkadian couple *Amurru* and *Ašratum*, compared with the Ugaritic *Yrh* and *'Atrt*, may be an indication that *Athirat* was originally a solar deity and consort of *Yrh*, the moon god. An early Ugaritic myth indicates *Athirat* as the solar deity *Athiratu*, "who treads the heavens from end to end". In the same vein, *Athirat* may be compared with an ancient South Arabian solar deity *Tānuf*, "the one who moves to and fro". In time to come, *Athirat* lost her solar character in the Ugaritic pantheon to become a maritime goddess, "who treads on the sea". Her full name "The Lady who traverses the sea" was later abbreviated to *Athirat*. Mythological texts from Ugarit, Tyre and Sidon confirm her maritime nature. Binger²⁷⁸ disputes her connection with the sea indicating that her Akkadian title *bēlet sēri* associates her with the steppes and mountains.

The Hittite creator deity *Elkurnirša* corresponds to the Canaanite *El*. *Elkurnirša* has a North-West Semitic background and his wife *Ashertu* is synonymous with *Athirat*. Canaanite

²⁷⁶ Chthonic refers to the Netherworld, the place of the dead (Deist 1990:44, 169). See footnote in § 3.2.1.

²⁷⁷ See *Geštinanna* and relevant footnote in § 3.2.1.

²⁷⁸ Binger 1997:43-45.

Asherah – or *Athirat* – referred to as *El*'s consort in the Ugaritic texts, is also known as *'Elat*, "goddess". She is depicted in the texts as a kind of matriarch. A nurse of the twins *Shahar* and *Shalem* – progeny of *El*, born from two wives – is identified as *Asherah-and-Rahmaya*, the "Great Mother goddess". Suggestions that *Rahmaya* refers to *Anat* and *Athirat* have been disputed. *Rhmy* is probably another name for *Athirat*. The Ugaritic word *'atrt* and Hebrew cognate *'ašērâ* were originally common nouns meaning "wife", "consort", literally meaning "she-who-follows-in-the-footsteps" (of her husband).

Punic inscriptions refer to a supreme goddess *tnt* or *Tinnit* known during the seventh century BC in Phoenicia. Although scholars have suggested identifying her with *Asherah*, *Anat* and *Astarte*, her identity has been disputed. *Athirat* was also known as *Qudšu* in Egypt. On a relief from Thebes she is referred to as *qdš-'strt-'nt*, indicating a fusion with the Canaanite goddesses *Astarte* and *Anat*. At the end of the second millennium BC *Asherah*'s popularity began to decline as she merged with *Anat* and *Astarte*. She finally lost her position as independent goddess in all Canaanite religions, but maintained it in the religion of the Israelites. Although we do not have much data on the character of *Athirat/Asherah*, clay tablets from Ugarit are informative on religious aspects.

Korpel²⁷⁹ is of the opinion that the *Asherah* mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic *Asherah* are identical. She was creatress and great mother next to her husband *El*. *Asherah* was familiar in ancient Israel as her name was linked to that of *El*, who was an Israelite God. She must have been acceptable to many Israelites who were in need for at least one goddess next to *Yahweh-El*. As *El* was presented as the mighty "*Ba'al*"²⁸⁰ 'the pair Asherah-Baal came into being as an alternative to a rigid concentration on one God'.²⁸¹ Scholars have reached a reasonable agreement accepting that *Asherah* in the Masoretic Text refers to both an independent goddess and her wooden cult symbol. Taking into consideration the dominant position she has in the Hebrew Bible, as well as explicit references to her and *Yahweh*,²⁸² she is the only likely candidate in the syncretistic religious practices of Iron Age Judah and the Northern Kingdom. Korpel²⁸³ indicates that, particularly within family religion, 'Asherah kept her own, characteristic position, next to YHWH-El. Up till now there is no evidence that she played an important role in the official cult'.

²⁷⁹ Korpel 2001:149.

²⁸⁰ *Ba'al* meaning "lord".

²⁸¹ Korpel 2001:150.

²⁸² Inscriptions at Kuntillet' Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom. See discussions in § 4.3.9 and § 4.3.10.

²⁸³ Korpel 2001:146.

Research on, and discussion of similar deities with cognate names – particularly with reference to *Athirat/Asherah* – active in various pantheons spread widely over the Ancient Near East, substantiates my theory on pre-Israelite *Ya*-religions. Research on the emergence of *Athirat/Asherah* in all the main pantheons of the Ancient Near East, clearly indicates that there was interchangeability among the various nations and an acceptance of foreign deities and rituals. Therefore, *Ya*-related names – attested from extra-biblical sources²⁸⁴ and discovered over a large region in the Ancient Near East – to my mind, indicate the possibility of a type of *Ya*-religion practised by different peoples in the pre-Israelite period. In addition thereto, the position should be ascertained of marginal groups maintaining a monotheistic Yahwism, in contrast to a syncretism practised by the Israelites. Therefore it is essential to take cognisance of the role of Ancient Near Eastern deities – particularly *Asherah* and *Ba'al* – in these syncretistic customs, with due consideration of information from extra-biblical sources, the Masoretic Text and archaeological finds. In conclusion, I wish to affirm Miller's²⁸⁵ words that 'the question of the place of the goddess in the history of Yahweh will probably always remain an elusive one.' Similarly, the influence of *Asherah* and the Canaanite religion on the compilation of the Masoretic Text should not be overlooked.

A map – Map 1 – is included at the end of Chapter 3 to give a visual impression of the estimated distribution of the deity *Asherah/Athirat* and goddesses with cognate names.

3.3 Relevant female deities

Cornelius²⁸⁶ indicates that with the literally thousands of iconographic representations of women from the Ancient Near East, scholars have to ascertain which of these figures are goddesses. Thereafter, the goddess's name and function in society and religion have to be established. She can be identified by, inter alia, her wings, a horned²⁸⁷ or Egyptian-type²⁸⁸ crown, particular gestures and what she is holding in her hands.²⁸⁹

Eve, first created female and therefore prototype of women, as well as progenitor of mankind, has been veiled in myths and legends centuries before the Christian era.²⁹⁰ The appearance of some mythological aspects in the creation narratives led various scholars to conclude that a

²⁸⁴ See discussion in § 4.3.

²⁸⁵ Miller 1986:247.

²⁸⁶ Cornelius 2004:4-5.

²⁸⁷ See footnotes on "horns" in § 2.3 and § 2.14.3.

²⁸⁸ See footnotes on *Hathor* in § 2.13, subtitle "Taanach", and § 2.14.1.

²⁸⁹ See description in § 3.2.1 and § 3.3 of *Qedshet/Qudšu* holding snakes or flowers.

²⁹⁰ Haag et al 1994:19.

goddess lies behind Eve.²⁹¹ A Sumerian cuneiform sign *TI* signifies both the words "life" and "rib", referring to a female named *NIN.TI*, which could be interpreted as "Lady of Life" or "Lady of the Rib". The Sumerian *NIN.TI* is structurally similar to the aetiology²⁹² for the designation חַוְוָה, that is, Eve, which is connected to the word חַי or חַיָּה, meaning life, to live.²⁹³ This association could have led to the legend that Eve had been moulded from the rib of the first man, Adam.²⁹⁴ The Sumerian myth furthermore recounts that *Ninhursag(a)*²⁹⁵ created *NIN.TI* when *Enki*²⁹⁶ had a pain in his rib.²⁹⁷ According to tradition, a significant link exists between a name and its function, therefore suggesting that the name חַוְוָה is etymologically²⁹⁸ related to חַי.²⁹⁹ Eve – known as *Hawwah* [חַוְוָה] – was recognised in Phoenicia, Mesopotamia and Sumer as mother, guardian and goddess. As Phoenician goddess of the Underworld she was invoked in inscriptions and possibly identified with *Ishtar*.³⁰⁰ In the Persian mythology *Meshiane* was celebrated as the first woman and creator of life.³⁰¹ On a votive stela from the Carthaginian necropolis³⁰² a goddess *Hwt* is invoked, "Great Lady, *Havvat*, Goddess, Queen (?)" (*rbt hwt 'lt mlkt ...*). *Hwt* could be related to the Hurrian *Hebat*, the consort of the Hurrian storm god *Teshub*³⁰³ [or *Tsehub*].³⁰⁴ *Hebat* or *Heba* is also indicated as a variant of *Ishtar*. Hittite myths, likewise, link her to the storm god *Teshub* as his consort. Hittite god-lists moreover name her "queen of heaven,³⁰⁵ *Hebat* of Halba, *Hebat* of Uda, *Hebat* of Kizzuwatna". In Hittite prayers she is addressed as "Sun goddess of Arinna". Although there is no evidence that the biblical *Hawwah*, Eve, has been derived from the divine *Hebat*, such a possibility should not be precluded.³⁰⁶ The Old Babylonian *Atra-Ḫasīs*³⁰⁷ epic seems to give a

²⁹¹ Wyatt 1999c:316.

²⁹² Aetiology (or Etiology) is an explanation offered on origins, therefore explaining an incomprehensible phenomenon by means of a quasi-historical answer (Deist 1990:87).

²⁹³ Genesis 3:20, 'The man called his wife's name Eve [חַוְוָה], because she was the mother of all living [חַי]; חַוְוָה, transcribed as *Hawwah*; חַי or חַיָּה, transcribed as *haya*.

²⁹⁴ Gaster 1969:21. Genesis 2:21-22, 'So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man'.

²⁹⁵ See footnote in § 2.4 on *Ninhursag*.

²⁹⁶ See footnote in § 2.3 on *Enki*.

²⁹⁷ Fishbane 1987b:199.

²⁹⁸ Etymology is 'the scholarly study of the historical development of the meanings of words and phrases' (Deist 1990:88).

²⁹⁹ Wyatt 1999c:316.

³⁰⁰ See § 3.4 and footnote on *Ishtar* in § 2.4.

³⁰¹ Ann & Imel 1993:326, 329, 338.

³⁰² Necropolis or cemetery; Carthage: see § 3.2.1, footnote on "Punic".

³⁰³ See § 3.5 on storm gods.

³⁰⁴ Wyatt 1999c:317.

³⁰⁵ See § 3.4.

³⁰⁶ Patai 1992:160-161.

³⁰⁷ *Atra-Ḫasīs* appears as wise man and hero in the Old Babylonian Flood Myth. The Sumerian god *Enlil* – who symbolised the forces of nature (see footnote in § 2.3) – became intolerant of the clamour of the human beings, which kept him awake. After several warnings *Enlil* sent a massive flood. *Enki* (see footnote in § 2.3) advised *Atra-Ḫasīs* beforehand to build a boat to save himself and his family. In some versions of the myth *Atra-Ḫasīs*

thematic, as well as literal parallel to the Genesis title **אֵם כָּל חַי**³⁰⁸ – "mother of all the living" – which is similar to "*bēlet-kala-īlī*", "mistress of all the gods", a title bestowed on the creator goddess *Mami*.³⁰⁹ There is thus the possibility that the hidden figure of the mother goddess *Mami* lies behind the character of Eve. In such an instance the Masoretic Text demythologised the function of the goddess *Mami* without doing away with all her attributes, but ascribed it to the first woman and human mother. Eve is thus not only created, but also creator. A transparent added image is superimposed upon her.³¹⁰

Williams³¹¹ is of the opinion that ancient interpreters undeniably made an association between Eve and the serpent. Popular etymology in Genesis 3:20 links the word **חַוָּה** to the root **חַוָּה**. Rabbinical exegesis associated the name **חַוָּה** with the Aramaic **חַוַּיָּא**, serpent.³¹² Scholars have commented on the Aramaic *ḥewya'* and Arabian *ḥayya*, both meaning "serpent".³¹³ Sakenfeld,³¹⁴ however, does not agree that any wordplay with the name of Eve is significant, pointing out that 'the actual derivation of the name remains uncertain'. The serpent (**נָחָשׁ**)³¹⁵ in Genesis 3:1 is described as 'more crafty than any other beast of the field'. The **נָחָשׁ** is the most intriguing biblical serpent with mythological associations.³¹⁶ Its complex identity combined its character as animal, human being with respect to the power of language and to be like the gods with the ability of secret knowledge.³¹⁷ The resemblance between **חַוָּה** (Eve) and the Aramaic **חַוַּיָּא** (serpent) influenced speculation of an earlier form behind the present Genesis

is called *Ziusadra*. The world was submerged in a massive flood by rains lashing down seven days and nights. *Atra-Ḥasīs*, his family and animals on the boat were saved. *Utnapishtim* is the name of the hero in the version of the flood myth related in the *Gilgamesh Epic* (Storm 2001:32).

³⁰⁸ **אֵם כָּל חַי**, transcribed as *'ēm kol-ḥay*. Genesis 3:20.

³⁰⁹ The title, **אֵם כָּל חַי**, is conferred on Eve after her creation and near the end of the Garden of Eden episode when she was destined to be a fertile and procreating woman. At the same position in the topical progression of the *Atra-Ḥasīs* epic – just before the first childbirth and at the conclusion of the creation episode – *Mami* is honoured by the assembly of gods as "mistress of all the gods" (Kikawada 1972:33-35).

³¹⁰ Kikawada 1972:33-35, 37.

³¹¹ Williams, A J 1977:358.

³¹² Childs 1962a:181-182. **חַוַּיָּא** transcribed as *ḥewya'*.

³¹³ Wyatt 1999c:316.

³¹⁴ Sakenfeld 1993:206-207.

³¹⁵ **נָחָשׁ**, transcribed as *nāḥāš*.

³¹⁶ The generic word for a venomous snake in the Masoretic Text is **נָחָשׁ**. Cognate Semitic names are the Ugaritic *nhš* (serpent) and Arabian *ḥanaš* (serpent). The word **נָחָשׁ** appears thirty-one times in the Masoretic Text (Hendel 1999:744). The plural form **נָחָשִׁים** in Amos 9:3 refers to a sea-serpent, crocodile or dragon [Leviathan]. The bronze serpent idol referred to in 2 Kings 18:4 was **נָחָשׁ תָּנִין** (Holladay 1971:235).

³¹⁷ Hendel 1999:746-747. Cornelius (1997a:221, 224-225, 229) points out that artists are more than just illustrators, as they also function as interpreters. Therefore it is interesting to note the way the serpent of Genesis 3 was understood and subsequently represented visually. The question that had to be addressed was whether it was a real serpent that could talk and walk upright. By their elucidation, visual artists not only illustrate, but also comment on and interpret the text. In some representations a winged female serpent (fifteenth century), a serpent with the head of a woman (twelfth century) or a serpent with the body of a woman is depicted. This could be an exposition of the serpent as Eve. Sjöberg (1984:222-223) is of the opinion that **נָחָשׁ** in Genesis 3 was clearly an animal that originally had four legs. The general meaning of **נָחָשׁ** is a reptile and therefore it may have been a chameleon that seduced Eve.

narrative wherein only God, man and a serpent deity are involved.³¹⁸ The similarity was seen as that of Eve being a serpent goddess.³¹⁹ According to rabbinical literature, Rabbi Aha states that *hawwāh* – related to *hewya'* – is a justification for Eve's name.³²⁰ Bury and others³²¹ mention that the declaration of the man (Adam) that Eve is "the mother of all living"³²² proves that she was a serpent ancestress. The rabbis also indicated that poison or dirt, which was carried through to her descendants, had been injected into Eve by the serpent.³²³

In the Ancient Near Eastern mythology and iconography the serpent can be identified with a number of deities and demons.³²⁴ Egyptian mythology presents the serpent as a dominant and multivalent symbol.³²⁵ *Asherah's* association with serpents is demonstrated in Proto-Sinaitic texts wherein she is called *dṯ bṯn*, "Lady of the Serpent". The premise that the Phoenician/Punic *tnt* – vocalised as "tannit", meaning serpent – could be identified with *Asherah*, would thus also indicate her relationship with serpents.³²⁶ In the *Qudšu* iconography the serpent is associated with a goddess – most likely *Asherah*, depicted naked, standing on a lion, holding snakes in both hands, or, in some portrayals, holding flowers in the one hand.³²⁷ The **שרפים**³²⁸ are now generally understood to be winged serpents with certain human characteristics. Various attempts have been made to clarify the meaning and background of the **שרפים**. Reasonable consensus has been reached that the Egyptian *ureaus* serpent was the primary source of the seraphim-motif.³²⁹

³¹⁸ Layton 1997:29.

³¹⁹ Wallace 1985:148.

³²⁰ Boyarin 1993:88-89. Rabbi Haninah comments in addition that 'when the woman was created, the Satan was created with her' (Boyarin 1993:89). The creation narrative is discussed in the rabbinical *Genesis Rabbah*. See also footnote in § 3.2.1, incorporating an explanation of the Babylonian Talmudic *sedarim*. Neusner (1985:xi-xii) indicates that 'Genesis Rabbah presents the first complete and systematic Judaic commentary to the book of Genesis'. It is a composite document compiled ca AD 400. According to Rabbi Joshua ben Qarhah the serpent conceived a passion for Eve. It seems the rabbis studied the material in an attempt to answer some baffling questions concerning a fixed tradition.

³²¹ Bury et al 1925:428.

³²² Genesis 3:20.

³²³ Montefiore & Loewe 1938:306. The dirt injected by the serpent was removed from the Israelites by the acceptance of the Law.

³²⁴ Serpent symbolism was more diverse in Egyptian and Mesopotamian, than in Canaanite and Phoenician mythology and iconography (Hendel 1999:744-745). The serpent is associated with the Greek god of healing *Asclepius*, and is preserved in the physician's caduceus which shows the serpent entwined around the staff of the Greek god *Hermes* (Landman 1939:484). The serpent is commonly associated with magic and incantations – particularly the cure or avoidance of snakebites. Symbolic connections, apart from healing, protection and regeneration, include sexuality. The meanings are, however, unclear (Hendel 1999:744-745).

³²⁵ In Egyptian mythology the serpent appears as an adversary or a protector, signifying life and regeneration or death and non-existence. The venomous *Ureaus* serpent [cobra] protected Egyptian kings and gods (Hendel 1999:744-745).

³²⁶ Ackerman 1993:397-398.

³²⁷ Cornelius 2004:45-47. See also § 3.2.1 for a description of *Qedeset (Qudšu)*.

³²⁸ **שרפים**, transcribed as *seraphim*. Isaiah 6:2-3.

³²⁹ Mettinger 1999a:742-743. In the Masoretic Text the word **שרף** appears three times in the Pentateuch and four times in Isaiah. Etymologically it refers to "the one who burns". Iconographic evidence indicates that the

The Ancient Near Eastern people regarded the serpent as the embodiment of wisdom and, therefore, uncovering the way to knowledge. 'The wisdom element surrounding the serpent may also serve as a parody on the wisdom schools, showing the dire consequences of their over-reliance on wisdom and failure to observe the direct ordinances of Yahweh.'³³⁰ Deist³³¹ is of the opinion that the serpent could be allegorically interpreted as human wisdom in the event of Genesis 2 and 3 originating during the reign of David and Solomon.

The mythical *Lilith* who persisted in Jewish traditions as late as the Middle Ages, reappearing in the late nineteenth to twentieth century *Women's Liberation Movement*, was linked to Eve by way of being the alleged first wife of Adam.³³² *Lilith* originated from the Sumerian mythology as a demon of desolation, associated with the Babylonian *Lilîtu*.³³³ Mesopotamian Semites described her as a hideous monster with a serpent in each hand.³³⁴

In the Masoretic Text there is no direct reference to the Ugaritic goddess *Anat(h)* ('nt').³³⁵ There are, however, a few possible allusions to her.³³⁶ Available evidence indicates that she was originally a North-West Semitic goddess presented in the Ugaritic texts as a fertility goddess and consort of *Ba'al*. Some scholars, however, argue that there is no clear reference in

ureaus motif was familiar on scarabs and seals in Palestine, from the Hyksos Period to the end of the Iron Age (Mettinger 1999a:742-743). The Hyksos Period refers to a time of political turmoil in Egypt at the end of the Thirteenth Dynasty [1782-1650 BC] and between the Middle Kingdom [2040-1782 BC] and the New Kingdom [1570-1070 BC]. During that period [ca 1650-1570 BC] Egypt was ruled by the Hyksos, Semitic-speaking people from the Levant who infiltrated Egypt and eventually took over (Hoffmeier 1994:270). Holladay (1971:355) interprets 𐤀𐤍𐤏 as a fiery serpent (Nu 21:6; Dt 8:15), a winged serpent (unidentifiable) (Is 14:29; 30:6), a bronze serpent (Nu 21:8-9) and a mythological six-winged creature (Is 6:2-6).

³³⁰ Kruger 2001b:230.

³³¹ Deist 1986:86.

³³² Ancient Jewish legends developed around the mythical and mystical figure of *Lilith*, probably to resolve the inconsistency of two different creation narratives in Genesis. According to the rabbis, *Lilith* was created as Adam's first wife – in accordance with the first creation narrative in Genesis 1:27. When *Lilith* left Adam, Eve was created – in concurrence with the second creation narrative in Genesis 2:22-23. For a detailed description of the figure of *Lilith*, see Mondriaan (2005:752-762).

³³³ Storm 2001:50.

³³⁴ Gaster 1969:579.

³³⁵ Day (2000:136-141) mentions that there are dubious allusions to *Anat* in the Hebrew Bible. Scholars have suggested that the sound of shouting/singing – '*annôt* – in Exodus 32:18 refers to the goddess *Anat*. However, this is speculation without supporting evidence. Scholars likewise argue that 'the description of Deborah in Judges 5 has been influenced by imagery associated with the goddess *Anat* found in the Ugaritic texts'; in this instance five parallels are indicated, inter alia, that, like *Anat*, Deborah was a leader of warriors (Day 2000:137). A number of scholars maintain that the expression, 'I look upon a virgin', in Job 31:1 is an allusion to the "virgin *Anat*". Day (2000:140) is not convinced that the woman in the "Song of Songs" – as has been claimed – is the goddess *Anat*. See footnote in § 3.2.1 on *Rahmy*, a possible reference to the virgin *Anat*.

³³⁶ Day (2000:132-136) is of the opinion that possible references to *Anat* mainly occur in place names, such as Beth-anath (Jos 19:38; Jdg 1:33); Beth-anoth (Jos 15:59); Anathoth (Jos 21:18; 1 Ki 2:26; Is 10:30; Jr 1:1; 11:21, 23; 32:7, 8, 9). The name Shamgar ben Anat appears twice in the book of Judges (Jdg 3:31; 5:6). According to 1 Samuel 31:10 Saul's armour was taken to the temple of *Ashtaroth* at Beth-shan after his death. There is the possibility that the temple in question was that of *Anat* which has since been discovered at Beth-shan.

the Ugaritic texts that she has ever been a reproductive deity.³³⁷ Handy³³⁸ indicates that narratives allegedly signifying *Anat's* fertility role are so damaged that scholars are inconclusive about this function. Some Ugaritic texts describe *Anat* and *Ba'al* copulating, announcing the birth of bovine children, yet, she is also depicted as his virgin sister and his consort. The Egyptians – with their well-structured hierarchy of gods – apparently found the coexistence of three goddesses, *Asherah* – consort of *El* – together with *Anat* and *Astarte*, both sisters and wives of *Ba'al*, very confusing.³³⁹ Of all the deities represented in narratives concerned with *Ba'al*, *Anat* appears as the most active and physically powerful.³⁴⁰ Day³⁴¹ mentions that mythological texts portray *Anat* as a volatile and independent warrior and hunter; she was active in male spheres of combat and hunting.³⁴² In a well-known Ugaritic text her bloodthirsty nature is explicitly exhibited.³⁴³ Phoenician inscriptions found in Cyprus mention *Anat* on a spearhead, thus attesting to her martial associations. *Anat's* vengeance on her enemies has been compared by scholars to *Yahweh's* action on a number of occasions, as described in the Hebrew Bible.³⁴⁴ Cassuto³⁴⁵ notes that notwithstanding her shocking cruelty towards her enemies, she was regarded as goddess of life and fertility. The epithet, "mother of nations" is applied to *Anat* in some Ugaritic writings. This designation may be an allusion to the perception of fertility. 'Her beauty and grace were deemed the acme of perfection.'³⁴⁶ During the Hellenistic Period she was identified with the Greek warrior and virgin goddess *Athena*.³⁴⁷

³³⁷ Day 1999:36-37.

³³⁸ Handy 1994:103-105.

³³⁹ Albright 1968:128, 135.

³⁴⁰ Handy 1994:104.

³⁴¹ Day 1999:37-39.

³⁴² See footnote in § 3.2.1 on the "legend of Aqhat" and the symbol of Ugaritic masculinity.

³⁴³ *KTU* 1.3 ii:3-30 (Day 1999:37). According to this passage in the Ugaritic *Ba'al* myth, *Anat* 'wrecks havoc on her enemies', being up to her knees in their blood (Day 2000:141). Stern (1994:120-124) indicates that there are striking points of contact between the "bloodbath" text and Psalm 23. The following are mentioned: the deity, *Anat*, arranges tables for her soldiers, while the enemy soldiers are in the house (Ps 23:5 'You [the deity *Yahweh*] prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies'); some of *Anat's* slaughter takes place in a valley (Ps 23:4 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil'); *Anat* pours "oil of peace" (Ps 23:5b 'you anoint my head with oil'); much of the "bloodbath" action takes place in *Anat's* house where the gates are closed but open later to receive her favoured warriors, soldiers and heroes (Ps 23:6b 'and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD'). Psalm 23 clearly has a mythic background, the *Anat* text being 'a source of poetic inspiration for a Hebrew poet' ... but, in this instance 'the "bloody imagery of *Yahweh*" has receded into the background' (Stern 1994:123-124).

³⁴⁴ Isaiah 34:6-10; 63:1-6; Ezekiel 39:17-20; Zephaniah 1:7-18; Zechariah 9:15.

³⁴⁵ Cassuto 1971:64-65.

³⁴⁶ Cassuto 1971:65.

³⁴⁷ Cassuto 1971:65. *Athena* was a protector during war and charitable in time of peace. She was responsible for the arts, literature and practical arts. *Athena* was identified with *Anaitis* (see discussion in this paragraph on *Anahita*) and with *Minerva*, the Roman and Etruscan war goddess (Ann & Imel 1993:154, 195).

Inscriptions of Ramesses II³⁴⁸ provide Egyptian evidence for *Anat*, called the "Mistress or Lady of Heaven". Ramesses claimed her support in battle in his right to universal rule. He furthermore professes a mother-son relationship with her.³⁴⁹ A deity *Anat-Yahu* is mentioned in fifth century BC Aramaic Elephantine texts.³⁵⁰ The Hyksos³⁵¹ were probably instrumental in the cult of *Anat* reaching Egypt. *Anat* was regarded as one of the greatest goddesses in Egypt during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties.³⁵² *Yahu* (*Yahweh*) was the prime deity worshipped by the Jews of Elephantine. *Anat-Yahu*, literally meaning *Anat* of *Yahu*, seems to indicate that *Anat* was seen as *Yahweh*'s consort. Despite opposing arguments, reasonably conclusive evidence indicates that *Anat* was *Ba'al*'s consort. Thus, if *Yahweh* could be equated with *Ba'al*, it would be natural to surmise *Anat* being *Yahweh*'s consort. These Elephantine Jews also worshipped *Anat-Bethel*, *Herem-Bethel* and *Eshem-Bethel*. In a treaty, ca 675 BC, between Esar-haddon of Assyria and Baal, king of Tyre, a deity *Anat-Bethel* is attested. In the light of *Anat-Bethel* being the name of a deity, the same could be said of *Anat-Yahu*, and therefore it seems indubitable that the goddess *Anat*, in the form of *Anat-Yahu*, did function as *Yahweh*'s wife amongst the Jews at Elephantine in the fifth century BCE.³⁵³

The fertility goddess *Anahita*,³⁵⁴ source of all waters on earth, of human reproduction and of the cosmic sea, is a figure of ancient Persian myth.³⁵⁵ Influenced by Chaldean astrology, heavenly bodies were held in awe and *Anahita* was identified with the planet Venus.³⁵⁶ In the *Zend-Avesta*, she is portrayed as a goddess of war who drives a chariot pulled by four white horses – wind, rain, cloud and hail. Possibly equivalent to *Anat*, she was known as goddess of love and war in Babylon and as "Lady of Heaven" in Egypt. The bull was sacred to her.³⁵⁷ *Ahurani* – meaning "she who belongs to *Ahura*"³⁵⁸ – was known as fertility and water goddess

³⁴⁸ Ramesses II: 1279-1212 BC (Clayton 1994:146).

³⁴⁹ Day 1999:40.

³⁵⁰ See discussion on *Anat-Yahu* in § 4.3.13. See § 2.14.5 for a discussion on the Jews at Elephantine.

³⁵¹ For an explanation of the Hyksos Period, see footnote on *seraphim*, § 3.3.

³⁵² Cassuto 1971:65. Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties: 1570-1185 BC (Clayton 1994:98).

³⁵³ Day 2000:142-144.

³⁵⁴ Also known as *Anaitis*; the Greek name for *Anahita* or *Anat* (Ann & Imel 1993:317).

³⁵⁵ Willis 1993:67. Apart from inscriptions and documentary evidence from neighbouring civilisations, Persian cults and myths are known to us only through the *Zend-Avesta*. The Iranians (Persians) developed from a branch of the Indo-European race known as Aryan (noble). The religion of classical Persia arose from a mingling of Assyro-Babylonian and Aryan beliefs (Guirand 1996:309-310). The *Zend-Avesta* – *Avesta-va-Zend*, texts with interpretation – are sacred writings of the Zoroastrians. *Zend*, or Old Iranian, was the language of the Avesta, forming with Old Persian the Iranian group of Indo-European languages (Oxford University Press 1964b:1020).

³⁵⁶ Guirand 1996:311.

³⁵⁷ Ann & Imel 1993:317.

³⁵⁸ Known as *Ahura-Mazda[h]*, or alternatively as *Ormazd*. *Ahura* was the highest divine entity in Zarathustra's teachings in ancient Persia. As creator of the sky, earth and men, he was, according to ancient inscriptions, the greatest of the gods. The evil spirit *Ahriman* was his opponent (Dresden 1962a:72). Zarathustra (Zarathushtra) was the prophet in ancient Iran and founder of the Zoroastrian religion in the sixth century BC (Dresden

of ancient Persia. Apart from being *Ahura's* daughter, she was also his consort.³⁵⁹ *Ahurani* was beneficial for healing and prosperity.³⁶⁰

3.4 *Queen of Heaven*

'A goddess called *Queen of Heaven* appears briefly in Jeremiah 7:17-18, and then again in Jeremiah 44:15-24.³⁶¹ Jeremiah attributes the catastrophe of the Exile to the veneration of the *Queen of Heaven*,³⁶² while the women of Jerusalem and Judah ascribe the disaster to their lack of offerings to the *Queen of Heaven*.³⁶³

Currently the most popular view regarding the identity of the *Queen of Heaven* is that the designation refers to *Astarte*. Apart from being called "Lady of Heaven" – along with *Anat*, *Ish-tar* and *Qudšu/Asherah* – *Astarte* is the Canaanite goddess 'most frequently associated with the heavens'.³⁶⁴ The name of the deity *Astarte* is found in Ugaritic as 'ttrt (*Athtart*), in Phoenician as 'štrt (*Ashtart*) and in Hebrew 'Aštōret (singular) or 'Aštārôt (plural). The masculine form 'Athtar, 'Ashtar, is probably the name of the planet Venus, and of the Akkadian goddess *Ishtar*. The male deity is thus the morning star while, as in the Greek tradition, the goddess is the evening star.³⁶⁵ *Ashtart* is often mentioned in the Ugaritic texts, but only rarely in the mythological texts.³⁶⁶ In the Hebrew Bible she is referred to as *Ashtaroth* of the Philistines and *Ashtoreth* of the Phoenician Sidonians.³⁶⁷ The plural form *Ashtaroth* in 1 Samuel 31:10 could be interpreted as the singular *Ashtoreth*; the intensive plural is occasionally used in the Hebrew Bible for divinities or divine-like phenomena.³⁶⁸ The altered plural form *Ashtaroth*

1962b:935). The Persians recognised one supreme god *Ahura-Mazda* ("Wise Lord"), the all-embracing sky (Willis 1993:67).

³⁵⁹ Van Reeth 1994:12.

³⁶⁰ Ann & Imel 1993:316.

³⁶¹ De Villiers 2002:620.

³⁶² Jeremiah 7:17-18 'Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven. And they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger.'

³⁶³ Jeremiah 44:15-24. Jeremiah 44 focuses on a confrontation between the prophet Jeremiah and Judean refugees in Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Jeremiah attributes the catastrophe to the wrath of *Yahweh* provoked by the worshipping of "other gods" by inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. The refugees indicate that they have always worshipped the *Queen of Heaven* with positive effects. Since they terminated this veneration (possibly with Josiah's cult reform – 2 Kings 22-23) they have experienced the repugnance of the goddess. From the time they had ceased their offerings she ended her protection and patronage of the people of Judah with catastrophic results (Becking 2001:197-199). Bury et al (1925:427) indicate that the "shewbread" (Bread of Presence) placed in the outer chamber at the Temple, was actually food dedicated to the deities. The *Queen of Heaven* had her cakes (Jr 7:18) and the "table was set for Fortune" and the "cups filled for Destiny" (Is 65:11).

³⁶⁴ Day 2000:148-149.

³⁶⁵ See § 3.2.1 on the twins *Shahar* and *Shalem*, Dawn and Dusk.

³⁶⁶ Wyatt 1999b:109-110.

³⁶⁷ 1 Kings 11:5, 33; 2 Kings 23:13. A Philistine temple for *Ashtaroth* is mentioned in 1 Samuel 31:10.

³⁶⁸ Machinist 2000:60. The intensive plural is most notably used in the case of the Israelite God.

could also be a deliberate scribal distortion of *Astarte*.³⁶⁹ *Ashtoreth* – who was actually *Astarte* – was known in Canaan as the "Great Goddess", and as the Ancient Near Eastern "*Queen of Heaven*".³⁷⁰ She was known to the Assyrians and Babylonians as *Ashtar*, goddess of fertility and love.³⁷¹ *Astarte*, as chief Phoenician goddess at Tyre and Sidon, was taken along to new colonies established by the Phoenicians.³⁷² *Astarte*'s influence and prominence were not confined to the Mesopotamian and Palestinian cults, but may have reached as far as Edom. Although the deities to whom the Edomites dedicated their votive plaques and figurines are not easy to identify, some may represent the goddess *Astarte*, who was probably known in Edom along with the Canaanite deities *Ba'al/Hadad* and *El*.³⁷³ One of the four temples in the Egyptian city Per-Ramesses³⁷⁴ was that of *Astarte*, placed to the east – a direction appropriate for a Semitic goddess.³⁷⁵

Sumerian *Inanna*³⁷⁶ and Akkadian *Ishtar* were the major Mesopotamian goddesses of love, war and the planet Venus. The Semitic name *Ishtar* was pronounced *Eshtar* in earlier times. *Ishtar* is derived from the masculine '*attar*',³⁷⁷ and attested as the Canaanite feminine *Astarte*. As patroness of independent women and prostitutes she was also the spouse and lover of the king with whom she participated in the ritual of sacred marriage.³⁷⁸ *Ishtar* was probably called *Išhara* during the marriage rites. ^d*Išhara*,³⁷⁹ one of the names of *Ishtar/Inanna*, is also written *Ašhara* or *Ešhara*. Her astrological constellation was the scorpion.³⁸⁰ She was often portrayed with horns³⁸¹ of the crescent moon – believed to govern growth and rebirth³⁸² – and

³⁶⁹ Hadley 1997:172.

³⁷⁰ *Astarte* was also known as *Innin*, *Inanna*, *Nana*, *Nut*, *Anat*, *Anahita*, *Ishtar*, *Isis*, *Au Set*, *Ishara*, *Asherah*, *Ash-tart*, *Attoret*, *Attar* and *Hathor*. Each name of this multi-named "Divine Ancestress", denoted – in the various languages and dialects – veneration for her as "Great Goddess" (Stone 1979:124).

³⁷¹ Negev & Gibson 2001:61.

³⁷² *Astarte* had a temple in Memphis, Egypt, and temples at Carthage. An alabaster statuette of her had been found in Spain (Cavendish 1985:168).

³⁷³ Bartlett 1989:194.

³⁷⁴ The famous city Per-Ramesses, capital of Ramesses II [1279-1212 BC], was applauded on a stela in the great temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel, as well as in poetical compositions preserved on papyri. Papyrus Anastasi II refers to the temple of *Astarte* (Finegan 1998:236). In Papyrus Anastasi III the city Pi-Ramessu – House of Ramesses – is praised, inter alia, as follows: 'I have found it well very, very excellently. It is a perfect estate, without equal, with the layout of Thebes. Re himself is the one who founded it' (Hallo & Younger 2002:15).

³⁷⁵ Finegan 1998:236.

³⁷⁶ *Inanna* was the daughter of the moon god *Nanna/Sîn* and his wife *Ningal*. *Inanna* was the sister of the solar deity *Uta/Shamash*. She was depicted as the wife of various fertility gods, as well as the wife of *An*, the sky god (Abusch 1999:452). See also footnotes on *Inanna* and *Eštar* in § 2.3; see footnotes on *Shamash* in § 2.4 and § 2.14.6 and the discussion in § 3.6.

³⁷⁷ '*Attar*' was a masculine deity from southern Arabia and Ugarit (Abusch 1999:452).

³⁷⁸ Abusch 1999:452-453.

³⁷⁹ ^d*Išhara* or *dingir Išhara*: see footnote on *dingir*^(d) – an Akkadian determinative sign – in § 3.2.1.

³⁸⁰ Becking 1999c:450.

³⁸¹ See footnotes in § 2.3 and § 2.14.3 for the function of horns.

³⁸² Cavendish 1985:170.

as a naked woman with long hair, holding her breasts.³⁸³ Some scholars interpret the rain goddess – identified by her complete nudity – as being *Ishtar*. Akkadian cylinder seals³⁸⁴ portray the storm god and his consort, the rain goddess – bringer of rain. Both are mounted on a lion-griffin, the storm god preceded by a naked goddess.³⁸⁵ Van Loon³⁸⁶ indicates that the Syrian *Ishtar* – or *Astarte* – is normally depicted in partial nudity. Clay figurines of *Ishtar/Inanna/Astarte* from the Mesopotamian area portray her in a characteristic breast-offering pose, known among archaeologists as the "*Ishtar* pose". This pose suggests her function of nourishment. As described in Jeremiah 44, Judeans were reluctant to abandon her³⁸⁷ – probably considering the fertility feature. *Ishtar* was known as "Goddess of Love", "Mother goddess with bountiful breasts" and "Goddess of War".³⁸⁸

Mesopotamian *Ishtar* is identified with *DIL-BAT*, the Sumerian name for the planet Venus. At the same time, *'Attar*, chief god of the South Arabian pantheon and astral deity, is portrayed as the planet Venus. Among the Canaanites *'Attart* (*Astarte*) was a goddess. The male *'Attar* was probably considered to be the Morning Star and the female *'Attar* the Evening Star.³⁸⁹ A number of Akkadian texts seem to indicate that *Ishtar* was regarded being androgynous,³⁹⁰ while fourteenth century BC Canaanites considered *'Attar* to be androgynous. A text from Mari refers to a male *Ishtar*.³⁹¹ Some scholars concede that Isaiah 14:12-15 draws upon a mythological text which originated outside Palestine. Certain interpretations of the Ugaritic *'Attar* myths³⁹² have been equated with aspects of the Isaiah poem. *'Attar* of the Ugaritic myths has been compared to הילל בן-שחר, 'O Day Star, son of Dawn'.³⁹³ However, there is a problem to correlate *'Attar* and הילל בן-שחר as the Ugaritic texts clearly indicate that both *'Attar* and *Šaḥar* were progeny of *El and Athirat*.³⁹⁴ Therefore *'Attar* cannot be the son of שחר.³⁹⁵ Heiser³⁹⁶ indicates that 'since Venus (Hēlēl ben-Šāḥar) was visible in the light

³⁸³ Negev & Gibson 2001:61.

³⁸⁴ Dated ca 2275-2150 BC.

³⁸⁵ Van Loon 1990:364. Griffin (also known as griffon or gryphon): 'a creature with a lion's body and an eagle's wings and head' (Wehmeier 2005:655). See § 2.13, subtitle "Bull figurines", as well as the relevant footnote on the "naked rain goddess" in the same paragraph.

³⁸⁶ Van Loon 1990:363.

³⁸⁷ Walker 1988:206.

³⁸⁸ Bury et al 1925:227.

³⁸⁹ See discussion and footnote in § 3.2.1 on *Shahar* and *Shalem* and Margalith's (1994:110) identification of the names as referring to Dawn and Dusk. Dahood (1958:88), however, does not identify the Morning Star and Evening Star with *Shahar* and *Shalem*.

³⁹⁰ See footnote in § 3.2.1 for an explanation of "androgynous" and "hermaphrodite".

³⁹¹ Dahood 1958:85-88.

³⁹² *KTU* 1.2.III.1-24 and *KTU* 1.6.1.43-67 (Heiser 2001:355).

³⁹³ Isaiah 14:12a.

³⁹⁴ See § 3.2.1 on *Shahar* and *Shalem*.

³⁹⁵ Heiser 2001:354-356.

³⁹⁶ Heiser 2001:356.

of the dawn before the actual appearance of the sun over the horizon, Venus could be understood as being brought forth by the dawn (Šāḥar) in astronomical, not genealogical terms'. The author of Isaiah 14:12 obviously refers to Venus – the morning star – by its epithet "Shining One", and therefore "Dawn" is not personified in Isaiah.

A designation of *Ishtar* – *Annunītum* – became an independent deity, retaining her former character as war goddess. An Old Babylonian goddess of Mari – *Dīrītum* – went through an analogous transformation. She started off as a manifestation of *Ishtar*, establishing her own identity and rising to prominence in the Mari pantheon. An Old Babylonian text explicitly equates *Dīrītum* with *Ishtar*, reading "*Ishtar*, the one of Dir", thereby confirming the name *Dīrītum* as an appellative for *Ishtar*.³⁹⁷ It is not surprising that the cult of *Dīrītum* spread beyond Dir to a number of other cities – particularly to Mari and Zurubbān³⁹⁸ – considering the antiquity of the cult of *Ishtar* at Mari and, notably, *Dīrītum* being a manifestation of *Ishtar*. The best indication of *Dīrītum*'s prominence was exhibited by the *Dīrītum* festival.³⁹⁹

Shaushka – ^dŠa-(u)-uš-ga – was an important Hurrian goddess; the ideographic form of her name being ^dIŠTAR(-ka). She was associated with *Ishtar* of Nineveh, with whom she shared some characteristic features. She was located particularly in southern Anatolia and northern Syria and very popular during the time of the Hittite Empire. According to some texts, *Anu*⁴⁰⁰ – or *Sîn*⁴⁰¹ – was her father, and *Teshub* – the Hurrian and Hittite storm god – her brother. *Shaushka* had male and female characteristics,⁴⁰² and was dressed in both male and female attire, with male attributes such as an axe. According so some Hurrian texts, magicians acquired their power from her. Although there is no direct reference to *Shaushka* in the Hebrew Bible, she may be relevant for some biblical texts.⁴⁰³ Her character was probably not

³⁹⁷ *Ishtar* was often named after the place where her cult had been established. Examples are: *Dīrītum*, *Hišamītum* and *Kišītum*. *Dīrītum*, as *Ishtar*, was therefore originally at home in the city of Dir. The city of Dir is approximately 11 km south of Mari. The antiquity of the cult of *Ishtar* in the Kingdom of Mari is well-attested (Hoskisson 1996:261-262).

³⁹⁸ Zurubbān lies between Terqa and Mari (Hoskisson 1996:262).

³⁹⁹ Hoskisson 1996:261-265. The king of Mari, as well as other kings and officials, attended the *Dīrītum* festival at Dir from the sixteenth to the nineteenth of the month Kiskissum. This festival was probably held annually at the same time with the king of Mari in attendance. *Dīrītum* possibly rose to supremacy during the reign of Zimri-Lim (see relevant footnote in § 2.4) who took interest in the cult to the extent that he issued orders that all offerings to *Dīrītum* should be at Mari. The number of sheep consigned to *Dīrītum* on the Mari-list eclipsed that consigned to *Ishtar* (Hoskisson 1996:263-266).

⁴⁰⁰ See footnote in § 2.14.6 on the "Babylonian Creation Myth", and footnote in § 3.2.1 on the "Sumerian cuneiform sign for heaven".

⁴⁰¹ See § 3.6 on astral deities.

⁴⁰² See footnote in § 3.2.1, incorporating "androgynous" and "hermaphrodite".

⁴⁰³ Deuteronomy 22:5 forbids a woman to dress like a man, and vice versa; it could be linked to the idea of *Shaushka* changing peoples' sexuality (Hutter 1999b:759).

unknown in ancient Israel as she was linked to the *Queen of Heaven*. Archaeological material indicates that she was familiar within the biblical environment.⁴⁰⁴

Symbols and figures on seals may serve as criteria for chronology. Assyrian iconography on seals, found in Israel and dated between the eighth and seventh centuries BC, exhibits a goddess – identified as *Ishtar* – within a circle. Depictions of *Ishtar* on first millennium monumental works are uncommon. Mesopotamian literature refers to her with various designations, mostly relating to her different cult centres. These epithets represent her diverse characters – each portrayal with its own peculiarities. 'Anthropomorphic'⁴⁰⁵ representations of *Ištar* found in Israel depict her only within a circle.⁴⁰⁶ She is identified by stars – regarded as her symbols – as well as light radiating from her, often standing on a lion. Iconographic representations of *Ishtar* frequently show her together with women – thus corroborating the role she played in the cult particularly carried out by women.⁴⁰⁷ In conclusion, Ornan⁴⁰⁸ indicates that Assyrian iconography substantiates the prominent role *Ishtar* played in both Israel and Judah. She and *Astarte* are the most plausible candidates for identification with the *Queen of Heaven*. Pinnock⁴⁰⁹ mentions that small jars – dated between 1800 and 1650 BC – have been excavated at Syrian Ebla. These jars were decorated with unusual superimposed bird heads and naked female figurines with grotesque faces.⁴¹⁰ The jars are not very refined and 'probably the expression of a popular, rather than official religious activity, related to the cult of *Ishtar*, the great patron deity of Old Syrian Ebla'.⁴¹¹

After many attempts by scholars to identify the *Queen of Heaven*, Schmitz⁴¹² indicates that some consensus has been reached that the title refers to the Mesopotamian goddess *Ishtar*. After 722 BC,⁴¹³ the Neo-Assyrian Empire imposed an official state religion on Israel, thus introducing some Mesopotamian cults – probably including that of *Ishtar*. Consequently, her cult was also brought into Judah. However, scholars have recently accepted that the *Queen of*

⁴⁰⁴ Hutter 1999b:758-759.

⁴⁰⁵ Anthropomorphic: see relevant footnote in § 1.2.

⁴⁰⁶ Ornan 2001a:239.

⁴⁰⁷ Ornan 2001a:240, 242, 246, 248. For a discussion of the depiction of *Ishtar* on different types of seals, see Ornan (2001a:235-252).

⁴⁰⁸ Ornan 2001a:251.

⁴⁰⁹ Pinnock 2000:121-128.

⁴¹⁰ For a further description, see § 2.3.

⁴¹¹ Pinnock 2000:128.

⁴¹² Schmitz 1992:587.

⁴¹³ During the reign of Hoshea in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (730/29-722/21 BC), Samaria was besieged and captured by the Assyrians. This put an end to the state of Israel. A number of Israelites were deported and replaced by inhabitants from Babylon, Hamath, Cuthah and a few other cities. A syncretistic-type of *Yahweh*-worship ensued (Jagersma 1994:159-160). See description in 2 Kings 17:24-33.

Heaven in Judah has to be identified with the Canaanite *Ashtoreth*, also known as *Astarte*. Her veneration by the Judeans included burning incense to her, pouring out libations to her and preparing cakes for her⁴¹⁴ – the latter activity being the strongest evidence that her cult was of Mesopotamian origin.⁴¹⁵ However, this is not an indication that the practices in Judah were established in their original Mesopotamian form. Elements from the Mesopotamian religion became intermingled with the syncretistic Palestinian cults. Nevertheless, although the title "*Queen of Heaven*" in the Hebrew Bible could refer to the Palestinian *Astarte*, it is unlikely that associations with *Ishtar* would have been absent. The offering of cakes or loaves was an important feature in the devotion to many different deities, particularly to the Mesopotamian *Ishtar*, who had 'a special relation to the planting and harvesting of cereal crops in Mesopotamia'.⁴¹⁶ According to Rast,⁴¹⁷ there are two possibilities regarding the cakes prepared for the goddess. In Judah the cult was particularly associated with women, but could have involved entire families.⁴¹⁸

Regarding the question of the identity of the *Queen of Heaven* – by which biblical scholars have long been "plagued" – Ackerman⁴¹⁹ confirms that no consensus has been reached. There are, however, indications that the *Queen of Heaven* could be identified with Canaanite *Astarte* – the West Semitic equivalent of *Ishtar*. Sparse details in the Hebrew Bible do not contribute to this identification. Suggestions to equate *Anat* with the *Queen of Heaven* have been rejected.⁴²⁰ Ackerman⁴²¹ proposes 'that the Queen of Heaven is a syncretistic deity whose character incorporates aspects of west Semitic *Astarte* and east Semitic *Ištar*'.

Except for 1 Samuel 31:10, all texts in the Hebrew Bible mentioning *Astarte* appear in deuteronomistic polemic.⁴²² In the same way as the distinction between the goddess *Asherah* and

⁴¹⁴ Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17-19.

⁴¹⁵ Scholars are obviously not clear on the identification of the *Queen of Heaven*. On the one hand, they accept Canaanite *Astarte* to be the likely candidate, yet, at the same time, indicating that "preparing cakes for the *Queen of Heaven*" is evidence for her Mesopotamian origin – and therefore recognise her as *Ishtar*. During the Hellenistic and Roman periods she was identified with *Venus-Aphrodite* (Negev & Gibson 2001:61). *Venus*, goddess of love and beauty, was associated with the Greek fertility goddess *Aphrodite* (Van Reeth 1994:10, 261).

⁴¹⁶ Rast 1977:169.

⁴¹⁷ Rast 1977:171-172. The dough could have been formed by hand in the shape of a goddess (figurine) or in a symbol representing her, such as a star or crescent. The second possibility is the employing of a mould in a particular shape. A mould, portraying a nude female, was excavated at Mari. For more information on the 'dough that was knead' and the 'cakes that were baked', see Rast (1977:167-176).

⁴¹⁸ The loyalty of the women to this cult (Jr 44:17-19) 'raises questions about the marginal status of women in the Yahwistic cultus affirmed in the Law and Prophets of the Hebrew Bible' (Schmitz 1992:587).

⁴¹⁹ Ackerman 1992:8-10, 16.

⁴²⁰ For a discussion of the possibility to identify *Anat* as the *Queen of Heaven*, and reasons for rejecting such an identification, see Ackerman (1992:13-20).

⁴²¹ Ackerman 1992:34.

⁴²² For a detailed discussion of the various relevant texts, see Müller (2001:429-432).

the *asherah*-pole became totally obscured in the time of the Deuteronomist and Chronicler, *Astarte* was de-deified in the biblical text. She is identified as a foreign deity in the Deuteronomistic History. The Chronicler either did not know of the existence of *Astarte* in Israel, or felt she was irrelevant for the history of Israel and Judah. It is significant that *Astarte* shifted from a well-known and widely-worshipped deity in Palestine to a Hebrew fertility idiom⁴²³ and eventually 'total silence on the part of the latest biblical writers'.⁴²⁴ *Astarte* and *Ba'al* are sometimes paired in the biblical text, usually in a negative, polemical sense. The term "*Ba'al* and *Astarte*" is a symbolism of polytheism in general, rather than referring to the deities in particular.⁴²⁵

Two conflicting ideologies are evident between Jeremiah – devoted to the *Yahweh*-alone worship – and the flourishing cult of the *Queen of Heaven*. The ideology of the Judeans incorporated various religious practices in their worship, thereby anticipating all aspects of favourable divine power.⁴²⁶ De Villiers⁴²⁷ indicates that 'fact and fiction seem to be intertwined in the book Jeremiah' and that events are not submitted 'objectively and factually' but in a highly 'subjective and emotional style'. De Villiers⁴²⁸ poses the question whether the *Queen of Heaven* existed or whether she was a literary construct. However, extra-biblical sources ratify the existence of her cult, indigenous even to Israel and Judah.

A map – Map 2 – is included at the end of Chapter 3 to give a visual impression of the estimated distribution of the manifestations of the deity *Queen of Heaven* as *Ishtar* and cognate names.

3.5 Storm gods and warrior gods

As so many deities share common characteristics – inter alia, the storm, warrior and solar gods – it is basically impossible to compartmentalise them separately. Therefore paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6 should be read in conjunction with each other.

⁴²³ An idiom in Deuteronomy (Dt 7:13; 28:4, 18, 51) refers to the fertility of the flock. The flock's productivity is called "*ashterot*" [עֲשֵׂתְרוֹת] (*astartes*) (Fulco 1987a:471). In the present form of the texts all indications of earlier deities seem to have been lost. In the case of disobedience, *Yahweh* will make the fruit of the livestock and the ground the spoil of the Neo-Babylonians (Müller 2001:432).

⁴²⁴ Hadley 1997:173-175, 178.

⁴²⁵ Hadley 1997:173.

⁴²⁶ Ackerman 1992:34-35.

⁴²⁷ De Villiers 2002:622.

⁴²⁸ De Villiers 2002:622.

Since the second millennium BC the storm was conferred on a particular divinity in the Assyro-Babylonian mythology. This divinity, *Adad* – god of lightning and the tempest – let loose the storms and the winds. At the same time, he brought the beneficent wind with its abundant rains. He also had the prerogative to reveal the future. His associate in these various functions was the goddess *Shala*.⁴²⁹ In the Assyrian version of the Flood Myth in the *Gilgamesh Epic*,⁴³⁰ *Adad* is the one who brought about the storm and rains. *Adad* and the solar deity *Shamash*⁴³¹ were often linked as guardians of the heavens. They were the two gods invoked by divination⁴³² priests, and, together with *Marduk*⁴³³ – god of Babylon – were considered the triad of divine judges.⁴³⁴ *Adad* was related to *Dagan*⁴³⁵ with whom he shared his consort *Shala*. Scholars have suggested that *Adad* and *Dagan* were originally one god, and that *Adad*, "thunder", was the initial title of *Dagan*.⁴³⁶ *Ba'al* as 'a-da is attested in second millennium BC Ebla texts and in the ca 1800 BC Egyptian Execration Texts.⁴³⁷

According to Frymer-Kensky,⁴³⁸ the Akkadian form of *Adad*'s name is *Hadad*, probably related to the Arabic *haddat*, meaning noise, thunder. He was known as *Hadad* among the Aramaeans and Amorites, as *Adad* by the Mesopotamians and as *Haddu* among the Canaanites. He was worshipped as a warrior god, particularly by the Assyrians. Apart from one possible exception – *Hadad-rimmon*⁴³⁹ in Zechariah 12:11 – the designation "*Hadad*" never appears in the Hebrew Bible. A number of kings from the Syrian area had the name Ben-Hadad. Veneration of *Hadad* continued into the Hellenistic era, and even later – when *Zeus* was in reality *Hadad*.⁴⁴⁰

⁴²⁹ Guirand 1996:60-61. *Shala* was first worshipped by the Sumerians, then taken into the Chaldean pantheon and into the religion of the Babylonians where she became the consort of *Adad*. As Canaanite storm goddess she was often depicted carrying a sheaf of corn. She was also known as *Shalash* (Ann & Imel 1993:347). The consort of *Adad* was perceived as the bringer of rain (Van Loon 1990:364).

⁴³⁰ See footnote in § 3.3 on *Atra-Hasis*, and discussion in § 3.9 on the *Gilgamesh Epic*.

⁴³¹ See relevant footnote in § 2.4 on *Shamash*, and discussion in § 3.6.

⁴³² Divination: foretelling the future by performing symbolic or magic acts, for example by scrutinising the liver of a newly slaughtered animal (Deist 1990:74). See also relevant footnote on "divination" in § 2.4.

⁴³³ See relevant footnotes on *Marduk* in § 2.14.6 and in § 3.1.

⁴³⁴ *Adad* functioned as a 'god of oracles and judgement' (Greenfield 1999:378).

⁴³⁵ See relevant footnote on *Dagan* in § 2.3.

⁴³⁶ Frymer-Kensky 1987:26.

⁴³⁷ Day 1992a:545. Egyptian Execration Texts: Egyptian curse texts.

⁴³⁸ Frymer-Kensky 1987:26.

⁴³⁹ *Hadad-rimmon* refers to the Semitic storm god. Zechariah 12:11 states that 'the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo'. "*Rimmon*" is an epithet of *Hadad* and is identical to the Hebrew word for pomegranate. Scholars suggest that *Hadad-rimmon* could be the name of a town or village on the plain of Megiddo, named after the deity, or that Zechariah refers to the mourning rites for this deity *Hadad-rimmon* (Maier 1992c:13).

⁴⁴⁰ Maier 1992b:11. *Zeus* was the supreme deity on Olympus in Greece (Willis 1993:132).

The logogram dIM ⁴⁴¹ for the Sumerian god *Ishkur* was applied when writing the name *Adad* and versions thereof, such as *Haddu/Ba'lu*, Hurrian *Teshup* and Hittite *Tarhunza*. The name *Hadda* – written $^d\grave{a}-da$ – appears in Eblaite god-lists⁴⁴² and is also known as a theophoric⁴⁴³ element in personal names. In the course of the Mesopotamian history, during the Old Babylonian Period, the names of $^d\grave{a}-da$ and the solar goddess dUTU appear together as guarantors in treaties. *Adad/Hadad* of Aleppo was later assimilated into the Mesopotamian pantheon and appeared with the *sibitti* – the *Pleiades*⁴⁴⁴ – among witnesses to treaties. The main sanctuary of *Hadad* was in Aleppo. Neither the Akkadian texts, nor later Aramaic inscriptions, afford an advanced mythology of *Hadad*. Ugaritic mythological and epic texts provide information on his role in the West Semitic pantheon.⁴⁴⁵

The storm god has a distinctive iconography. In the Akkadian period he was portrayed with a thunderbolt and mace on the back of a lion-dragon. Cylinder seals from the Old Babylonian Period depict him standing on the back of a bull, with a mace or another weapon in his right hand and some form of thunder in the left hand. He wears a conical headdress and is bearded. Ugaritic *Ba'lu* – *Ba'al* is represented with a thunderbolt, a spear touching the ground with streaks of lightning at its other end, a slightly curved dagger in his belt, wielding a mace in his right hand, bearded, and wearing a horned headdress.⁴⁴⁶ The token of *Ba'al* was an upright stone pillar – *מַצְבֵּה* – probably a phallic symbol.⁴⁴⁷ The root *ברק* is common to Semitic languages – referring to the phenomenon of "lightning" – and occurs in the onomastics⁴⁴⁸ of several Semitic languages.⁴⁴⁹ Although never portrayed independently of the storm god, it is attested that lightning was deified in Mesopotamia. Lightning was also associated with the storm god as his symbol, and functioned as a weapon of *Yahweh* in his portrayal as Storm God or Warrior God. Poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible refer to *Yahweh*'s "arrows", and the

⁴⁴¹ See footnote on Akkadian determinative in § 3.2.1.

⁴⁴² See § 2.3 on Ebla.

⁴⁴³ See theophoric name in footnote on "hypocoristicon" in § 2.3.

⁴⁴⁴ *Pleiades*: in Greek mythology the seven daughters of *Atlas* turned into a constellation on their deaths. The *Pleiades* is a conspicuous constellation or cluster of stars in Taurus (Oxford University Press 1964b:677). *Atlas* was one of the Greek legendary titans [a large person with great strength] who were punished for revolting against the Greek god *Zeus*; as punishment he had to support the heavens with his head and hands (Oxford University Press 1964a:64). Taurus is the bull constellation of the zodiac, including the *Pleiades* and *Hyades* (Oxford University Press 1964b:904).

⁴⁴⁵ Greenfield 1999:378.

⁴⁴⁶ Greenfield 1999:379. The headdress is a conical crown with two horns projecting from the front (Fulco 1987c:32). Three pairs of third millennium BC bronze figurines were excavated in the Plain of Antioch. The male figures carry maces and spears – weapons appropriate for gods of lightning and thunder (Van Loon 1990:364). See footnotes in § 2.3, § 2.14.1 and § 2.14.3 on "horns".

⁴⁴⁷ McKenzie 1966:72.

⁴⁴⁸ Onomastics: the study of the history and origin of names, especially names of people (Wehmeier 2005:1020).

⁴⁴⁹ The root *ברק* appears in proper names in Ugaritic, Amorite, Phoenician, Punic, Palmyrene, Old South Arabic and Akkadian (Barré 1999:519).

lightning-bolt is called a "spear".⁴⁵⁰ Lightning is associated with the theophany⁴⁵¹ of *Yahweh*, often in combination with thunder, cloud and an earthquake.⁴⁵² Kuenen⁴⁵³ states that the Book of Amos contains numerous utterances mentioning light and fire as symbols of *Yahweh* and evidence of his presence. In addition thereto, Miller⁴⁵⁴ indicates that fire was significant in the mythology of the Ancient Near East – particularly in that of Syria-Palestine. Fire was used against the enemies of the gods and became a significant element in the historical traditions, particularly in holy wars. According to Ancient Near Eastern tradition, the storm god was the executive deity who delegated power to the king.⁴⁵⁵

Albertz⁴⁵⁶ mentions that in the symbolism of the Ancient Near East 'the bull had long taken on religious connotations ... the storm god *Adad* was depicted as a "horned wild bull" or "great wild bull of heaven and earth".' A number of portrayals show him standing on the back of a bull.⁴⁵⁷ Common terracotta plaques have been excavated representing the storm god standing on a bull, which may be an indication of 'the increasing popularity of the theme in the Old Babylonian period'.⁴⁵⁸ Since time immemorial the sound of thunder has been compared with that of a bull's roaring and stamping, and the bull has thus been associated with rain.⁴⁵⁹ In the Ugaritic texts *Ba'al* was at times represented as a bull, although the title "bull" was actually reserved for the god *El*.⁴⁶⁰ Identifying the deity which is shown in combination with a bull is complicated by the fact that similar features are occasionally shared by the storm and the moon gods. Apart from sharing the image of the bull, both deities are associated with fertility and regeneration. It is often difficult to determine whether the storm god is represented with lunar features, or vice versa. 'The interchanging of divine attributes between different deities ... does not contradict ANE religious concepts, as the polytheistic theology conceived the world as being simultaneously governed by several divine entities.'⁴⁶¹ The possible fusion of different divine images into one icon can be perceived in first millennium religious history⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁰ Habakkuk 3:11.

⁴⁵¹ Theophany is the manifestation or appearance of God/a god to human beings (Deist 1990:259).

⁴⁵² Barré 1999:519.

⁴⁵³ Kuenen 1882a:44-45. Examples of relevant texts in Amos are 1:4, 9-10, 14; 2:5; 5:6.

⁴⁵⁴ Miller 2000a:18-23.

⁴⁵⁵ Mendenhall 1973:223.

⁴⁵⁶ Albertz 1994:144.

⁴⁵⁷ Albertz 1994:144.

⁴⁵⁸ Ornan 2001b:15.

⁴⁵⁹ Van Loon 1990:364.

⁴⁶⁰ Albertz 1994:144.

⁴⁶¹ Ornan 2001b:24-25.

⁴⁶² Ornan 2001b:25. A basalt statue of a storm god mounted on a bull has been found at Hazor. On the assumption that a combination of emblems – representing different deities – is embodied in a supreme god, scholars have suggested that this statue could be a representation of *El*, head of the Canaanite pantheon. In the Ugaritic literature he is referred to as "bull *El*" (Ornan 2001b:17).

– particularly in respect of the Israelite religion. According to the nineteenth century Dutch scholar Kuenen,⁴⁶³ *Yahweh* was venerated in the form of a young bull; therefore, priests and other devotees of the golden calves accepted that they were worshipping *Yahweh*.

Adad was known as the Canaanite *Ba'al*, or *Ba'al Hadad*.⁴⁶⁴ The word *ba'lu* is a Semitic noun meaning "lord", "owner". As an appellative, *bēlum*, it was applied as an epithet for various deities in early Mesopotamia, probably in a genitive construction.⁴⁶⁵ Characteristics of a storm god were repeatedly linked to *Ba'al*, who was undoubtedly the national god in Ugarit, although *El*, the father of the gods, was head of the pantheon. The late acceptance of *Ba'al* in the Ugaritic pantheon could be ascribed to tension between *Ba'al* and *El*, which is often referred to in the Ugaritic texts. The consort of *Ba'al* was always associated with fertility and love.⁴⁶⁶ The goddess *Anat* is indicated in the Ugaritic texts as *Ba'al's* principle consort. His dwelling was on Mount Zaphon⁴⁶⁷ – called *hazzi* by the Hittites. *Ba'al* has a number of epithets in the Ugaritic texts. Those occurring frequently are: "the victor *Ba'al*", "rider of the clouds" and "the prince lord – *Ba'al* – of the north".⁴⁶⁸ According to two traditions, he was alternatively the son of *El* and the son of *Dagan*. Consistent with the content of the *Ba'al* myths, *Yam*,⁴⁶⁹ *Mot*⁴⁷⁰ and *Ba'al* were the three competing sons of *El*. In his battle with *Yam*, *Ba'al* eventually achieved victory over chaos, thereafter controlling the weather.⁴⁷¹ Smith⁴⁷² mentions that biblical *Ba'al* was regarded a Phoenician god, identified with either *Ba'al Shamem*⁴⁷³ or *Melqart*.⁴⁷⁴ Phoenician inscriptions at Byblos attest that *Ba'al Shamem*

⁴⁶³ Kuenen 1882a:235. Golden calves were set up in sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel (1 Ki 12:25-32).

⁴⁶⁴ The name *Haddu* – that is, *Hadad* or *Adad* – for *Ba'al*, was used only in sacred texts (De Moor 1977:187).

⁴⁶⁵ The genitive indicates the domain or the object controlled, for example, *bēl-harrān* means "lord of Harrān", referring to the moon god *Sin* (De Moor 1977:182-183). *Sin* resided in Harran (Stol 1999:782).

⁴⁶⁶ De Moor 1977:186-187.

⁴⁶⁷ Mount Zaphon is located approximately 40 km north of Ugarit at Jebel el-Aqra' in the northern region of Canaan; it is the highest mountain in Syria, 1759 m above sea level. The Hebrew word for "north" – צפון (*šāpôn*) – is probably derived from the name of the mountain (Day 1992a:545). De Moor (1997:147) mentions that – according to Job 26:7 and Psalm 89:12 – God appears to be the creator of Zaphon. Job 37:22 likewise states that the gold covering God with splendour originates from the Zaphon.

⁴⁶⁸ Day 1992a:545. See § 3.3 for a discussion of *Anat*.

⁴⁶⁹ *Yam* represented the "sea" and the unruly forces of chaos; he was the equivalent of the Mesopotamian *Tiamat* – see footnote in § 2.14.6 on *Marduk*, *Apsu* and *Tiamat*. With the aid of magical weapons, *Ba'al* fought and killed *Yam*. *Ba'al* proclaimed himself king (Willis 1993:65). For a detailed discussion of the *Ba'al* myths and *Ba'al* cycle (seasonal cycle affecting the fertility of the land) see Day (1992a:545-547).

⁴⁷⁰ *Mot* was god of death and a primeval earth monster. He attempted to usurp *Ba'al's* kingship, but was killed by *Anat* (see § 3.3 on *Anat*). This episode is a follow-up on the previous *Ba'al* myths concerning *Yam*. See Willis (1993:65) for details.

⁴⁷¹ Fulco 1987c:31.

⁴⁷² Smith 1990:42-43.

⁴⁷³ בעל שמים (*Ba'al Shamem*) refers to the heaven(s) or sky (Holladay 1971:375).

⁴⁷⁴ The name *Melqart* means "King of the City". He appears as the god of the first millennium BC Tyre. Some scholars identify *Melqart* as the *Ba'al* worshipped on Mount Carmel and mocked by Elijah (1 Ki 18:20-40). On a ninth to eighth century BC stele – dedicated to the king of Aram – *Melqart* has the emblem of a warrior god (Ribichini 1999:563). Olyan (1988:62-63) argues that *Ba'al Shamem* appears to be the *Ba'al* of Carmel. A

manifested meteorologically.⁴⁷⁵ He had power over the storm and could bring about "evil wind".

The concept of a "god of heaven" was developed during the first millennium BC in the North-West Semitic religions. *Ba'al Shamem* – בעל שמים – emerged as a 'new type of supreme god'.⁴⁷⁶ He is mentioned for the first time in mid-tenth century BC Phoenician inscriptions. The epithet "God of Heaven" was later equated with *Yahweh* in the Judaeo-Israelite religion. *Yahweh* was originally a local weather god – responsible for rain and fertility – in the Midianite-Edomite region, and later venerated as such in the Judaeo-Israelite religion.⁴⁷⁷ With the rise of the Monarchy *Yahweh* became supreme and universal weather God, a position reserved for the "God of Heaven". Phoenician influence on the Israelite Monarchy is furthermore visible in, inter alia, the Temple of Jerusalem which was built under Phoenician direction.⁴⁷⁸ 'A direct link between *Yahweh* and *Baal shamem* was established when the Omrides organized their kingdom in conformity with the Phoenician organization.⁴⁷⁹ *Yahweh* was surrounded by a "host of heaven" and celestial powers were ascribed to him, thereby confirming his status as "God of Heaven". Fifth century BC Jewish inhabitants of Elephantine⁴⁸⁰ spoke of *Yahweh* as "*Yahu*, God of heaven".⁴⁸¹

The entire area inhabited by Canaanites was dedicated to the worship of *Ba'al*. The cult of *Ba'al*, along with other Canaanite gods, was adopted by the Egyptians during the time of the Middle Kingdom.⁴⁸² The various Syro-Palestinian population groups each had their own *Ba'al* – as indicated in literary documents – a deity who was 'of fundamental significance for the human existence'.⁴⁸³ In the various texts *Ba'al* appears mostly in association with the other gods.⁴⁸⁴ Myths concerning *Ba'al* are found in the Ugaritic, Hittite and Egyptian

second century BC inscription from Carmel was found on a statue of *Zeus Heliopolis* linking *Ba'al* to the god of Carmel. In agreement with the Nabatean *Zeus Helios* – identified with *Ba'al Shamem* – *Zeus Heliopolis* has both storm and solar attributes. Olyan (1988:63) points out that according to Sanchuniathon, the storm god was 'the king par excellence'. During the sixth century BC Sanchuniathon wrote a history of Phoenicia which has been partially preserved – via Philo of Byblos – in Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica* (Fulco 1987d:73-74). Eusebius (ca 260-339) was bishop of Caesarea and the first major historian of the church (Lyman 1990:325).

⁴⁷⁵ This power is mentioned in a curse treaty between Esarhaddon and Baal II, king of Tyre (Smith 1990:43). Esarhaddon was king of Assyria (681-669 BC) (Grayson 1992a:574).

⁴⁷⁶ Niehr 1999a:370.

⁴⁷⁷ Examples in the Hebrew Bible are: 2 Samuel 22:9-16 identical to Psalm 18:8-15; Psalm 29; Psalm 65:9-13; Jeremiah 10:13 identical to Jeremiah 51:16; Jeremiah 14:22 and 31:12; Joel 2:22-24; Haggai 1:10-11.

⁴⁷⁸ 1 Kings 5:1-18; 7:13-45.

⁴⁷⁹ Niehr 1999a:370.

⁴⁸⁰ See discussion of the Jewish colonists on Elephantine in § 2.14.5.

⁴⁸¹ Niehr 1999a:370-371.

⁴⁸² 2040-1782 BC (Clayton 1994:68).

⁴⁸³ Herrmann 1999a:133.

⁴⁸⁴ For a discussion of various inscriptions referring to *Ba'al*, see Herrmann (1999a:134-135).

traditions. The most comprehensive mythological series from Ugarit incorporates six tablets written by a person named Ilmilku. Ugarit also furnishes the largest amount of cultic material.⁴⁸⁵

Although *Yahweh* was the God acting predominantly in the sphere of history, '*Ba'al* held a unique position among the inhabitants of Palestine'.⁴⁸⁶ The pattern of the seasons and the regular return of fertility were experienced as an indication of *Ba'al*'s power.⁴⁸⁷ As a divine name, *Ba'al* appears seventy-six times in the Hebrew Bible. Authors and redactors of the Masoretic Text generally show a basic aversion to idols. It was not their intention to reveal in detail the character or peculiarities of the Canaanite religion. 'They were inclined to speak of Baal and his worship in pejorative terms'.⁴⁸⁸ There are indications in the Masoretic Text that *Baal-berith* was the god of Shechem.⁴⁸⁹ It is not clear whether *El-berith*⁴⁹⁰ has to be identified with *Baal-berith* or whether there were two gods, each with his own temple, at Shechem. Likewise, *Baal-zebub* is mentioned as the god of the Philistine city Ekron.⁴⁹¹ *Baal-peor*⁴⁹² was venerated on the mountain Peor in Moab and his cult was characterised by 'sacral prostitution and by eating a sacrificial meal, by means of which an intimate relationship was established between the god and his worshippers'.⁴⁹³ A conflict was prevalent between *Yahweh* and *Ba'al* even before the Israelite settlement in Canaan.⁴⁹⁴ Later an even greater encounter took place under the Omrides.⁴⁹⁵ Mulder⁴⁹⁶ furnishes a detailed exposition of *Ba'al* worship in Israel as depicted in the Masoretic Text. Rituals and customs of the *Ba'al* religion were condemned by the prophets. The Israelites and Judeans were forbidden to take part in any facet of this religion.⁴⁹⁷ On account of the similarity between *Yahweh* and *Ba'al* 'many of the traits ascribed to Yahweh inform us on the character of the Palestinian Baal'.⁴⁹⁸ According to Herrmann,⁴⁹⁹ *Yahweh*'s sphere of influence in the Israelite religion 'gradually widened to

⁴⁸⁵ De Moor 1977: 189-190. For a discussion of cultic and mythological material, see De Moor (1977:189-192).

⁴⁸⁶ Herrmann 1999a:138.

⁴⁸⁷ Herrmann 1999a:138.

⁴⁸⁸ Mulder 1977:193. As an example: *ba'al* was transformed into *בֹּשֶׁת* (*boshet*), "shame", in Isaiah 42:17. For a discussion of the various occurrences of *Ba'al* and related forms in the Hebrew Bible, see Mulder (1977:193-194).

⁴⁸⁹ Judges 8:33; 9:3-4.

⁴⁹⁰ Judges 9:46.

⁴⁹¹ 2 Kings 1:2, 6, 16.

⁴⁹² Numbers 25:3, 5; Deuteronomy 4:3; Psalm 106:28; Hosea 9:10.

⁴⁹³ Mulder 1977:194.

⁴⁹⁴ Numbers 25:1-5.

⁴⁹⁵ 1 Kings 16:31-33; 18:17-40.

⁴⁹⁶ Mulder 1977:195-198.

⁴⁹⁷ Mulder 1977:200.

⁴⁹⁸ Herrmann 1999a:138. See § 3.8 regarding attributes ascribed to *Yahweh* and *El/Elohim*.

⁴⁹⁹ Herrmann 1999a:138.

eventually include what had once been the domain of Baal as well'. This 'rise in importance was only possible, in fact, through the incorporation of traits that had formerly been characteristic of Baal only.' Notwithstanding the absorption of *Ba'al* traits by *Yahweh* – as pointed out by Herrmann⁵⁰⁰ – all indications are that the Judeans carried on with syncretistic religious practices, probably worshipping *Yahweh* alongside *Ba'al*.⁵⁰¹

Smith⁵⁰² mentions that some of the older Israelite poems 'juxtapose imagery associated with El and Baal in the Ugaritic texts and apply this juxtaposition of attributes to *Yahweh*'.⁵⁰³ Descriptions in various North-West Semitic texts accentuate *Ba'al*'s theophany in the storm, or his character as a warrior. These two dimensions are explicitly linked in some iconography. Biblical material, however, attributes *Yahweh* with power over the storm,⁵⁰⁴ and presents *Yahweh* as the Divine Warrior.⁵⁰⁵ Budde⁵⁰⁶ indicates that '*Yahweh* wields the most terrible of weapons, the lightning'. He appears in the storm,⁵⁰⁷ he rides on the storm,⁵⁰⁸ and he reveals himself in the storm,⁵⁰⁹ in fire, smoke and cloud.⁵¹⁰ His dwelling is on Mount Sinai where storms gather around the peaks of the mountain.⁵¹¹ According to Fretheim,⁵¹² the appearance of a divinity in fire is unique. Miller,⁵¹³ however, denotes that 'the motif of the gods using fire against their enemies appears to have been more widespread than is sometimes recognized'. Some scholars interpret Amos 7:4 as *Yahweh*'s conflict with the primordial monster, with his weapon "lightning or supernatural fire". The combination "winds" and "fire" is not uncommon in the Ancient Near Eastern mythology – specifically in cosmic conflicts – and appears to be a kind of weapon.⁵¹⁴ In addition hereto, Kuenen⁵¹⁵ mentions that light and fire are signs of *Yahweh*'s presence and an unmistakable indication of the inaccessibility of the "Holy One

⁵⁰⁰ Herrmann 1999a:138.

⁵⁰¹ The various attributes of *Yahweh* – of which some were evidently taken over from *Ba'al* – are discussed in § 3.8.

⁵⁰² Smith 1990:21, 49.

⁵⁰³ Examples of language derived from *El*, *Ba'al* and *Asherah* are exhibited in Genesis 49:25-26; Deuteronomy 33:26-27; 2 Samuel 22:13-16 (Smith 1990:21).

⁵⁰⁴ *Yahweh* presented as the Storm God is elucidated in, inter alia, 1 Samuel 12:18; Psalm 29; Jeremiah 10:11-16; 14:22; Amos 4:7; 5:8; 9:6. See § 3.8 for attributes ascribed to *Yahweh*.

⁵⁰⁵ A number of texts that exhibit Divine Warrior traits are Psalms 50:1-3; 97:1-6; 104:1-4; Habakkuk 3:8-15. See § 3.8 for attributes ascribed to *Yahweh*.

⁵⁰⁶ Budde 1899:27-28.

⁵⁰⁷ Exodus 19:9, 16-19.

⁵⁰⁸ Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 68:4, 7-8, 33; Habakkuk 3:8.

⁵⁰⁹ 1 Kings 19:11-13.

⁵¹⁰ Exodus 3:2-3.

⁵¹¹ Budde 1899:28.

⁵¹² Fretheim 1991:55. Examples in the Masoretic Text of such an appearance are in Genesis 15:17 and in Exodus 3:2-4.

⁵¹³ Miller 2000a:18.

⁵¹⁴ Miller 2000a:18, 21.

⁵¹⁵ Kuenen 1882a:44-45.

of Israel". Houtman⁵¹⁶ suggests that the theophany of *Yahweh* on Mount Sinai could indicate a volcanic eruption,⁵¹⁷ although it is unlikely that people would reside in the vicinity of an active volcano.⁵¹⁸

The Akkadian word *ūmu*, day – which corresponds to the Hebrew יוֹם, "day" – has an additional meaning, "storm" – and often appears in divine designations. The Akkadian *ūmu*, storm, was frequently used with theophanic⁵¹⁹ connotations. Therefore, in the light of the Akkadian *ūmu*,⁵²⁰ Niehaus⁵²¹ interprets Genesis 3:8 'in the wind of the storm' and not 'in the cool of the day'. *Yahweh* advances in the theophany of the storm wind. Niehaus⁵²² indicates that if his interpretation is correct, it affects other terms in this Genesis text: it will not be the voice of *Yahweh* the man and woman heard, but the 'thunder of his stormy presence'.

According to Obermann,⁵²³ the designation "Rider-of-the-Clouds" was applied to *Ba'al* long before it became an appellative of *Yahweh*. The epithet *rkb 'rpt* refers to *Ba'al* driving his "chariot of clouds", also probably meaning "Rider-upon-the-Clouds". When driving in his chariot, *Ba'al* goes out to distribute rain, but at the same time it sets *Ba'al* in the position of a warrior god. In Habakkuk 3:8 *Yahweh* is said to drive a horse-drawn chariot.⁵²⁴ Miller⁵²⁵ suggests that 'the clouds are the war chariot of the storm god as he goes to do battle'. The word *aliyan* – translated as "victorious", "almighty" – is often used in the *Ba'al* mythology, followed by other epithets, such as "Rider-upon-the-Clouds". *Aliyan* never occurs as an independent divine name.⁵²⁶ A West Semitic term *hurpatum* appears in a text from Mari. This term seems to be indirectly related to both the Hebrew and Ugaritic words for "cloud", insofar as it appears in descriptions of a storm god's presence.⁵²⁷ In most Semitic languages the root *rkb* – "to mount (upon)" – is applied mainly for chariot driving, and not for riding on an

⁵¹⁶ Houtman 1993:119.

⁵¹⁷ Exodus 19:18. See also Habakkuk 3:6.

⁵¹⁸ See a previous reference in this paragraph to the theophany of *Yahweh*, combined with thunder, cloud, and earthquakes.

⁵¹⁹ See footnote on "theophany" earlier in this paragraph (§ 3.5).

⁵²⁰ According to Niehaus (1994:264), the Akkadian *ūmu* (storm) has a Hebrew cognate in a second description of יוֹם, as "storm". See also Holladay (1971:131) for יוֹם, interpreted as "storm", "wind", "breath".

⁵²¹ Niehaus 1994:264.

⁵²² Niehaus 1994:264.

⁵²³ Obermann 1949:319. See Psalm 68:33.

⁵²⁴ Herrmann 1999c:704.

⁵²⁵ Miller 1973:41.

⁵²⁶ Dijkstra 1999:18-19.

⁵²⁷ See also footnote in § 2.14.1, as well as the discussion by Fleming (2000:484-498) of Mari's large public tent and priestly tent sanctuary. According to Exodus 19:16, *Yahweh* appeared in 'thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud [ענני] on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast'. Holladay (1971:278) indicates ענני as rain clouds (Jr 4:13) and ענן as clouds or a mass of clouds (Gn 9:13).

animal. Similarly, the divine name *Rakib-Il*⁵²⁸ and epithets such as "Rider-upon-the-Clouds" relate to a chariot-driving warrior and not to the imagery of a riding horseman. However, late third millennium BC – and later, particularly during the eighth to seventh century BC – figurines of riding horsemen have been found in Palestine. These figurines usually functioned in domestic and funerary contexts, venerated on the level of family religion. This may be an indication that these figurines depicted a divine protector.⁵²⁹ A statue found in Ammon – dated seventh to sixth century BC – bears the inscription "Yarachazar, chief of the horse", probably indicating this person's function as chief of the cavalry.⁵³⁰

Prinsloo⁵³¹ indicates that, while many scholars are of the opinion 'that Habakkuk 3 has its literary parallel in the Canaanite epic literature', other scholars seriously doubt such a suggestion. Nevertheless, exegetes generally acknowledge an Ancient Near Eastern background of Habakkuk 3 'without over-emphasising the Mesopotamian or Canaanite background'.⁵³² To a large extent, consensus has been reached amongst scholars that Habakkuk 3:3-15 is an archaic theophany, resembling other theophanies in the Hebrew Bible.⁵³³ Habakkuk 3:3-7 describes *Yahweh*'s triumphant march from the "South"⁵³⁴ distinctly portraying him as a heavenly warrior. Although storm god motifs – clouds, winds, lightning and storm – are absent in Habakkuk 3:3-7 and Deuteronomy 33:2, they do appear in the archaic theophanies of Judges 5:4 and Psalm 68:8-10. A blinding light associated with the appearance of *Yahweh* clearly depicts *Yahweh* as a solar deity.⁵³⁵ Habakkuk 3 gives a description of a theophany with accompanying natural phenomena. The "Lord of Light" is described as a Divine Warrior; the plague – רבר – went before him and pestilence – רשף – followed on his heels.⁵³⁶ Although Ugaritic ritual texts indicate that *Resheph* – רשף – who has been linked to war, the underworld and metalworking, was worshipped in Ugarit, there is 'too little material to draw any final conclusions'.⁵³⁷

⁵²⁸ *Rakib-Il / Rakib-El*: see also description in § 3.6.

⁵²⁹ Uehlinger 1999:705-706.

⁵³⁰ Landes 1962b:113.

⁵³¹ Prinsloo 2001:484.

⁵³² Prinsloo 2001:485.

⁵³³ Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 68:7-8.

⁵³⁴ South-eastern regions of Canaan: Sinai, Mount Paran, Seir, Teman.

⁵³⁵ Prinsloo 2001:478-479.

⁵³⁶ Habakkuk 3:5 (ESV: Hab 3:4). The plague – רבר – mentioned in Habakkuk, is indicated by Holladay (1971:68) as bubonic plague. Compare 1 Kings 8:37; Jeremiah 14:12. רבר was the master of epidemics (Ex 9:3; Jr 21:6). רשף and רבר could be seen as two 'personalized natural powers, submitted to *Yahweh*' (Xella 1999:703).

⁵³⁷ Handy 1994:109-110.

Qôś was the national deity of the Edomites and is attested in the names of their kings, *Qausmalak*. His official status is indicated on the *Horvat 'Uza* ostrakon in some Edomite administrative correspondence from the first half of the sixth century BC. Archaeological findings at a seventh to sixth century BC building complex excavated at *Horvat Qitmit*,⁵³⁸ have been interpreted as an Edomite sanctuary where *Qôś* and an unnamed female consort were worshipped. Although the majority of references to *Qôś* is Idumaeen,⁵³⁹ his name appears in Egyptian listings of names which were possibly those of *Shasu* clans from the thirteenth century BC.⁵⁴⁰ As indicated in previous paragraphs,⁵⁴¹ the *Shasu* clans were connected to Edom and Seir. At the same time Egyptian records point to a possible link between these clans and 'Yhw in the land of the *Shasu*'.⁵⁴² The southern part of Edom later developed into the Nabatean cultic centre of Petra. *Dū-Šarā* – "The One of the Sharā-Mountains" – was the Nabatean national deity and probably corresponded to the deity *Qôś*.

The Arabic word *qaus* – "bow" – which is the deified weapon of the storm god or warrior god, is the etymon of *Qôś*. *Qôś* is also presented as "Lord of the Animals".⁵⁴³ Knauf⁵⁴⁴ indicates that 'his area of origin and his nature as an aspect of the Syrian weathergod present *Qôś* as closely related to Yahweh', and he furthermore poses the question, 'could the two have originally been identical?' According to Bartlett,⁵⁴⁵ *Qôś*-names are typical Semitic theophoric names of which the element *qws* thus represents the name of a deity. The nature of this god is portrayed – to some extent – in these theophoric names, for example, *qwsgr* "*Qôś* is powerful", *qwsmlk* "*Qôś* is king" and *qwsnhr* "*Qôś* is light". He is represented at a Nabatean shrine on a throne flanked by bulls with a thunderbolt – the symbol of the lord of rain – in his left hand. It therefore seems that he was undoubtedly a storm god. Some scholars argue that the Edomites procured knowledge of *Qôś* from their early Arab neighbours.

Miller⁵⁴⁶ is of the opinion that the Divine Warrior is 'one of the major images of God' in the Hebrew Bible. In the religious and military experience of Israel, the perception of God as warrior was of paramount importance. Ancient Near Eastern deities fought wars to maintain

⁵³⁸ *Horvat Qitmit* is approximately 10 km south of Arad (Knauf 1999a:675). See § 2.14.2 for more information on Arad.

⁵³⁹ Idumaea was not an organised distinct administrative district before the early fourth century BC (Knauf 1999a:675).

⁵⁴⁰ Knauf 1999a:674-675.

⁵⁴¹ See § 2.4, § 2.5 and § 2.6 for more information on the *Shasu*.

⁵⁴² See § 4.3.4.

⁵⁴³ Knauf 1999a:676-677.

⁵⁴⁴ Knauf 1999a:677.

⁵⁴⁵ Bartlett 1989:200-204.

⁵⁴⁶ Miller 1973:1, 64-65, 74.

or reinforce their positions in the divine pantheons, and to secure order in the universe.⁵⁴⁷ Therefore, Israel's belief was that their wars were in fact "the wars of *Yahweh*". As 'commander of the armies of heaven and earth he fought for Israel'.⁵⁴⁸ Literary material from the Hebrew Bible – which could be reasonably dated – provides "valuable historical control". Early Israelite poetry contains the earliest literary remains of its history. The final blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy incorporates the vision of *Yahweh* the Warrior.⁵⁴⁹ The victory "Song of Deborah"⁵⁵⁰ – dated late twelfth or early eleventh century BC – basically concentrates on the 'victory of *Yahweh* and his armies over the enemies of Israel'.⁵⁵¹ Psalm 68 contains war songs and war poetry celebrating the victory of *Yahweh*.⁵⁵² In the psalm he is portrayed with his "heavenly chariotry and entourage" – 'thousands upon thousands'.⁵⁵³ The glorious deeds of *Yahweh*, the Warrior, are vividly described in the "Song of Moses", the "Song of the Sea".⁵⁵⁴ Habakkuk 3⁵⁵⁵ emphasises the mythological conflict between *Yahweh* and the chaos forces of the sea and death. The theophany of *Yahweh* correlates with that described in Deuteronomy 33, Judges 5 and Psalm 68, while a parallel to Canaanite and Mesopotamian mythology can be recognised.⁵⁵⁶ Besides the above-mentioned poetic material, the image of *Yahweh* is portrayed as warrior in Joshua 10, 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18.⁵⁵⁷ In conclusion,

⁵⁴⁷ 'In this interrelation of the cosmic and the historical, such fundamental matters as kingship, salvation, creation, and the building of temples were related to and depended upon the military activities of the gods and their armies' (Miller 1973:64).

⁵⁴⁸ Miller 1973:64.

⁵⁴⁹ Deuteronomy 33:2-5, 26-29. The structure of the poem consists of a theophany of *Yahweh* and his heavenly army (Dt 33:2-3), the establishment of kingship (Dt 33:4-5) and Israel's settlement in the land (Dt 33:26-29) (Miller 1973:75).

⁵⁵⁰ Judges 5.

⁵⁵¹ Miller 1973:87. Judges 5:2 could be an allusion to the Nazirites and therefore the earliest reference to their custom and law. Samson (Jdg 13-16), was linked to the Nazirite vow. His strength and ability as warrior could indicate that the Nazirites were a type of "holy warriors" (Miller 1973:88-89).

⁵⁵² There are indications that at least parts of the psalm are placed in a cultic context; *Yahweh*'s battle is against cosmic enemies (Miller 1973:103-104, 111).

⁵⁵³ Mullen 1980:192-193. See Psalm 68:17.

⁵⁵⁴ Exodus 15. *Yahweh*'s deliverance of his people is recounted, but in a different type of theophany. This song 'preserves a familiar mythic pattern: the combat of the divine warrior and his victory at the Sea' (Miller 1973:113, 117).

⁵⁵⁵ Habakkuk 3:3-15.

⁵⁵⁶ Miller 1973:118-119. Habakkuk 3:5 exhibits the closest parallel to *Marduk*'s march with his servants (see relevant footnote incorporating *Marduk*, § 2.14.6); the servants at times being the gods of plague and pestilence (Miller 1973:119). *Resheph* was long known as deity of disease and pestilence. Egyptian inscriptions, however, attest that he was venerated as warrior god in Egypt (Handy 1994:109). *Resheph* was adopted at the court of pharaoh Amenophis II [1453-1419 BC] and was regarded as a special protector during military operations. He is also attested at third millennium BC Ebla and may have been related to the royal necropolis as a chthonic god (see footnotes in § 3.2.1 and § 3.2.4 referring to chthonic). Habakkuk 3:5 describes that *Resheph* followed on God's heels (Xella 1999:701, 703).

⁵⁵⁷ Joshua 10:12-13; 2 Samuel 22:7-18; Psalm 18:7-18 (Miller 1973:121-123). For a detailed discussion of the afore-mentioned literary material, portraying *Yahweh* as Divine Warrior, see Miller (1973:74-128). Armies of *Yahweh* in later traditions are also discussed in Miller (1973:128-165).

Miller⁵⁵⁸ observes that from an early period Israel conceived the idea of *Yahweh* being a Divine Warrior – a perception which, depicted in apposite language, dominated Israel's faith.

Cross⁵⁵⁹ agrees with Miller that the Hebrew Bible portrays *Yahweh* as Divine Warrior. He discusses Psalm 24 as depiction of *Yahweh* as the Warrior-King. He notes that 'the language of holy war and its symbolism may be said to be the clue to an adequate interpretation of Psalm 24 and its place in the cultic history of Israel'.⁵⁶⁰ Epithets such as *yahwê šēbā'ōt*, 'stem from the old ideology of the league, from the Songs of the Wars of Yahweh'.⁵⁶¹ As early as the pre-monarchical period, the concept of *Yahweh* as warrior was possibly linked to the idea of *Yahweh* as king. His dwelling was on Zion, which symbolised security. This security was 'rooted in Yahweh's presence there as king and in his power as *creator and defender*'.⁵⁶²

Lang⁵⁶³ mentions that the ancient world often represented the king as the deity's human war leader. Both *Yahweh* and the Sumerian god *Ningirsu*⁵⁶⁴ represented a common type of deity in the ancient world – the tutelary deity of the state. In this capacity they shared the same responsibility – 'to secure royal victory in battle';⁵⁶⁵ the national god was therefore also the warrior god. This ideology was dominant in Iron Age Israel and its neighbours. Mesopotamian images and texts typify the divine warrior's participation in human warfare. Biblical traditions narrating the Hebrew conquest of Palestine closely resemble these depictions.⁵⁶⁶

Battles between Ancient Near Eastern nations were deduced as battles between patron gods, leading to the ideology of a "holy war". This concept was shared by Israel⁵⁶⁷ and therefore *Yahweh's* attribute as warrior was identified with his name.⁵⁶⁸ The practice of extermination in tribal feuds also contributed to the idea of a holy war.⁵⁶⁹ Celestial beings that formed *Yahweh's* entourage and fought his battles signified the "hosts", in the title "Lord of Hosts".⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁵⁸ Miller 1973:171.

⁵⁵⁹ Cross 1973:91-111.

⁵⁶⁰ Cross 1973:99.

⁵⁶¹ Cross 1973:99.

⁵⁶² Ollenburger 1987:56, 72-73.

⁵⁶³ Lang 2002:47.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ningirsu*, son of *Enlil* (see footnote in § 2.3) and patron of Lagash – prominent Sumerian city – had his temple in this city. He was concerned with irrigation which brought about fertility, but was also known as warrior god. His attribute was a club, flanked by two S-shaped snakes (Guirand 1996:60).

⁵⁶⁵ Lang 2002:49.

⁵⁶⁶ Lang 2002:49-50. See Lang (2002:50-52) for a comparison between the Mesopotamian depictions and Joshua's conquest of Jericho, as described in the Hebrew Bible.

⁵⁶⁷ Judges 11:23-24; 2 Kings 18:33-35.

⁵⁶⁸ Glatt-Gilad 2002:64. Exodus 15:3.

⁵⁶⁹ Gerstenberger 2002:156.

⁵⁷⁰ Joshua 5:13-15; Judges 5:20.

The interplay between God's identity and his reputation – two aspects of his name – is illustrated in psalms concerning the Warrior God.⁵⁷¹ 'His military power goes hand in hand with the enhancement or preservation of his reputation.'⁵⁷² Appeals to this military power probably had their origins in cultic liturgy linked to military events. A plea to God's honour was made through "prophetic intercession". The expectation of the appellant was veiled in the perception that God was 'concerned about his honor in the eyes of the nations'.⁵⁷³ Israel's exile brings shame upon God's reputation. Concern for his reputation is explicitly expressed by Deutero-Isaiah.⁵⁷⁴ The close connection between God's exalted reputation and Israel's salvation in battle is expressed in various liturgical texts in the Psalms.⁵⁷⁵ *Yahweh*, as Divine Warrior, fought for the tribes.⁵⁷⁶

Taking war very seriously, Israel undoubtedly had a pre-battle rite – or maybe a number of pre-battle ceremonies.⁵⁷⁷ It was common practice for a priest or prophet to determine beforehand whether *Yahweh* approved the attack or not. Details of the different customs are, however, unknown.⁵⁷⁸ Psalm 18 designates *Yahweh* as a rock, fortress, shield, high tower [stronghold] and 'the horn of my salvation'.⁵⁷⁹ The "horn of my salvation" was not merely a symbolic image but in fact actual horns – as those used by Zedekiah in the rite before the battle.⁵⁸⁰ These horns⁵⁸¹ – as a liturgical device – allude to divine strength that brings about victory. The purpose of the rite is an attempt to facilitate the process for a sign from *Yahweh*, thereby raising the morale of the warriors when convinced that a victory is in the making which has been cultically inaugurated.⁵⁸²

In Ancient Near Eastern folklore the enthronement of a king included the ritual handing over of a special weapon, which was perceived as the weapon of the warrior god. Many references

⁵⁷¹ Psalms 44:5; 48:10; 72:1-3; 79:9-10.

⁵⁷² Glatt-Gilad 2002:66.

⁵⁷³ Glatt-Gilad 2002:69.

⁵⁷⁴ Isaiah 48:11; 52:5.

⁵⁷⁵ Glatt-Gilad 2002:64-67, 69, 71-72, 74. See for example Psalms 44; 79:9-10.

⁵⁷⁶ Gerstenberger 2002:146.

⁵⁷⁷ Examples are: Moses holding up his staff for the massacre of Amalek (Ex 17:8-16); Joshua pointing his javelin towards Ai (Jos 8:18-29); warriors are described as consecrated ones (Is 13:3).

⁵⁷⁸ Psalm 20, as an example, is clearly divided into two sections: the first is a prayer for the king before the battle, and the second a 'shout of assurance that victory is guaranteed' (Stacey 1982:471).

⁵⁷⁹ Psalm 18:2.

⁵⁸⁰ Zedekiah, a prophet who promised king Ahab [reigned in Israel 874/3-853 BC] victory in the battle against the Aramaeans. The prophesying by four hundred cultic prophets took place on the threshing floor outside Samaria. During the ecstatic activities of the prophets, Zedekiah placed the horns of iron on his head – symbolising great power (compare Dt 33:17) and thus victory for the king (MacLean 1962b:947). See 1 Kings 22:1-28 and 2 Chronicles 18:1-27.

⁵⁸¹ See relevant footnotes in § 2.3 and § 2.14.3 on the meaning and function of "horns".

⁵⁸² Stacey 1982:471-473.

to this ritual are found in cuneiform literature. The temple of *Adad*⁵⁸³ in Mari⁵⁸⁴ probably contained such weapons with which the deity fought *Tiamat*,⁵⁸⁵ the mythical dragon of the sea. Some biblical texts illustrate the idea of a divine weapon.⁵⁸⁶ Throughout the Ancient Near East the myth of the divine warrior's successful battle against the chaos monsters was well known. The Ugaritic "*Ba'al* and *Yam* myth" recounts the conflict between the storm god *Ba'al* and the sea god *Yam*. Psalm 74 alludes to the Creator God's battle with the sea. In the book of Job⁵⁸⁷ the antagonism between God, the sea, *Rahab*⁵⁸⁸ and the "Fleeing Serpent", is pointed out.⁵⁸⁹ References to *Rahab* in the Hebrew Bible should be read against the background of the Ancient Near Eastern mythology describing the victory over the powers of chaos, which are represented as monsters. Texts in the Hebrew Bible relate to a concept of a battle between *Yahweh* and chaos, prior to creation.⁵⁹⁰ 'The chaos-battle mythology reveals much of the worldview of the ancient warrior societies.'⁵⁹¹

'Within the separatist religious sect at Qumran, the image of God as a warrior is particularly prominent in the War Scroll, where it assumes highly apocalyptic form.'⁵⁹² Members of the sect were expected to participate in a divine battle against the forces of darkness. The War Scroll describes this battle which will totally eradicate all evil.⁵⁹³

Information gleaned from Ugaritic texts indicates that, while *El* was seemingly the 'father of gods and the "executive" deity of the pantheon at Ugarit',⁵⁹⁴ he had limited power which gradually declined in the face of *Ba'al*'s increasing popularity. A line of tradition in Canaanite mythology, however, portrays *El* to a certain extent as a warrior deity. It is unlikely that he could have been a ruler of the gods without some manifestation of power. As warrior deities, the activities of *Ba'al* and the goddess *Anat*⁵⁹⁵ were closely related. They were mainly in

⁵⁸³ See previous discussion in this paragraph and also footnote in § 2.3.

⁵⁸⁴ See § 2.4 for a discussion of Mari.

⁵⁸⁵ See footnote in § 2.14.6.

⁵⁸⁶ For example, Ezekiel 30:24: 'And I [*Yahweh*] will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put my sword in his hand.'

⁵⁸⁷ Job 26:10-13.

⁵⁸⁸ *Rahab*, also known as *Leviathan* or *Tannin*, was one of the names in the Hebrew Bible for the chaos monster. This name seems to have no cognates in neighbouring cultures, although there are many parallels to the phenomenon of chaos monsters. Job 9:13 refers to the helpers of *Rahab* (רהב) who bowed beneath אלהים; in Psalm 89:10 אלהים יהודה crushed *Rahab*, and according to Isaiah 51:9 יהודה 'cut Rahab in pieces' (Spronk 1999b:684).

⁵⁸⁹ Lang 2002:55-59.

⁵⁹⁰ Spronk 1999b:684-685.

⁵⁹¹ Lang 2002:61.

⁵⁹² Hiebert 1992:879.

⁵⁹³ Hiebert 1992:879.

⁵⁹⁴ Miller 1973:48.

⁵⁹⁵ See § 3.3 for a discussion of the Ugaritic goddess *Anat*.

the centre of a series of battles. The question arises whether the warrior attributes of *Yahweh* developed independently, or under influence of the image of the Canaanite *Ba'al*.⁵⁹⁶

The concept "host of heaven" originated from the metaphor of *Yahweh* as Warrior. In combat *Yahweh* was assisted by warriors and an army.⁵⁹⁷ In the Israelite religious history, the "host of heaven" indicated the divine assembly gathered around the heavenly King, *Yahweh*.⁵⁹⁸ The illustration of *Yahweh* seated on his throne with "all the host of heaven" gathered on his right and left hand sides, is appropriated from terrestrial depictions. The idea of a divine council underlies Isaiah 6 wherein *Yahweh* carries the title "Lord of Hosts".⁵⁹⁹ Texts in Deuteronomy⁶⁰⁰ and Psalms⁶⁰¹ exhibit an astral concept of the "host of heaven" and understood it as the "sun, moon and stars". Israelites and Judeans alike were reproached for their veneration of the "astralised host of heaven".⁶⁰² Altars for the worship of the "host of heaven" in the Jerusalem Temple were removed during Josiah's cult reform.⁶⁰³ The exact meaning of the "host of heaven" in post-exilic texts remains vague.⁶⁰⁴

The question arises to what extent an incidence of contact existed between the "host of heaven" and the "divine council"; whether any distinction can be made or whether it should be deemed an interchangeable concept. Mullen⁶⁰⁵ indicates that 'the concept of the divine council, or the assembly of the gods, was a common religious motif in the cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan, Phoenicia and Israel'.⁶⁰⁶ Even as late as in the post-biblical apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, and writings from Qumran, there are numerous allusions to the heavenly council. It is difficult to determine the extent of the influence of the heavenly council in Mesopotamia. The so-called "synod of the gods" in Egypt apparently played an insignificant role in the Egyptian religion. Members of the divine council are designated in similar terminology in Hebrew and Ugaritic literature. Handy⁶⁰⁷ suggests that a model for a bureaucracy should be implemented to comprehend the behaviour of the Syro-Palestinian divine world,

⁵⁹⁶ Miller 1973:24, 50.

⁵⁹⁷ Joshua 5:13-15; 2 Kings 6:17; 7:6; Psalm 68:17; Isaiah 13:4-5; Joel 3:11; Habakkuk 3:8.

⁵⁹⁸ 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18.

⁵⁹⁹ Isaiah 6:3, 5.

⁶⁰⁰ Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3.

⁶⁰¹ For example: Psalm 148:2-3.

⁶⁰² 2 Kings 21:3, 5; Jeremiah 8:2; 19:13. Astral worship specifically forbidden in Israel implies knowledge of such veneration (Saggs 1978:91).

⁶⁰³ 2 Kings 21:5; 23:4-5.

⁶⁰⁴ Niehr 1999c:428-429.

⁶⁰⁵ Mullen 1980:113-114, 119.

⁶⁰⁶ See descriptions in Job 1-2; Daniel 7; Zechariah 3.

⁶⁰⁷ Handy 1994:10, 65, 79, 89.

although hierarchy could seldom be seen as "open-ended" at the upper level.⁶⁰⁸ In the Canaanite pantheon *El* and *Asherah* were acting as highest authority. *El* was designated with wisdom, as well as being arbiter of justice. The actions of both divine and human beings were subject to the justice of *El*. Psalm 82 condemns all members of the divine council to death for abusing their offices.⁶⁰⁹

The constitution and function of the divine assembly, as indicated in early Hebrew sources, exhibit a similarity to the Canaanite and Phoenician divine councils. Major and minor deities aided the high god in warfare. Although the Israelite religion prohibited the worship of other gods than *Yahweh*, he was, nonetheless surrounded by divine beings. The prophet, as courier of the council, was introduced as a new element into the Israelite traditions. There is, however, a remarkable similarity between the human prophet and the Ugaritic divine messenger.⁶¹⁰ The council of *Yahweh* – the Israelite counterpart of the council of *El* – lies implicitly behind the prophetic language applied in the revelation of the word of *Yahweh*.⁶¹¹ During the Exile Hebrew traditions struggled with the problem of Good versus Evil. Demons were thus developed as divine powers in opposition to *Yahweh*.⁶¹² There are indications in some of the prophetic oracles in the Hebrew Bible 'that the divine council participates as a cosmic or heavenly army in the eschatological wars of *Yahweh*, those military activities associated with the Day of *Yahweh*, and that these conflicts (or this conflict?) involved a joint participation of human or earthly forces and divine or heavenly armies'.⁶¹³ A metaphor running right through the Scripture – Old and New Testament – comprises the dominant reality of the combat of *Yahweh* against opposing forces.⁶¹⁴

The designation *Yahweh Sebaoth* – יהוה צבאות – functioned prominently as a cultic name in Shiloh and Jerusalem, and is attested from the pre-monarchical to post-exilic times.⁶¹⁵ This epithet meaning "hosts of heaven", "armies", or similar depictions, is closely connected to the

⁶⁰⁸ In neither the modern nor ancient world does authority, in a given bureaucracy, need to rest in one person, although, normally, there is a single highest authority (Handy 1994:65).

⁶⁰⁹ Psalm 82:1-2, 6-7 reads

'... God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked ... You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince".'

The "divine council" is a reference to the "assembly of *El*" (Handy 1994:89).

⁶¹⁰ Mullen 1980:278-279.

⁶¹¹ Cross 1973:186-187. See, for example, 1 Kings 22:19-28; Psalm 82; Isaiah 6:1-13; Jeremiah 23:16-18.

⁶¹² Mullen 1980:279.

⁶¹³ Miller 2000a:397-398.

⁶¹⁴ Miller 2000a:156, 410.

⁶¹⁵ Mettinger 1999b:920.

idea of the "holy war".⁶¹⁶ The designation can thus be translated as "Lord of Hosts", and probably alludes to either the armies of Israel or heavenly hosts. The use of the Zebaoth designation in Hebrew can be traced back as far as pre-monarchic Shiloh.⁶¹⁷ There are indications of early cultic activity at Shiloh, from the Middle Bronze II period onwards. Therefore, the temple at Shiloh⁶¹⁸ should be understood against a Canaanite background. Although some scholars attempt to trace *Yahweh Sebaoth* back to Canaanite *Resheph*⁶¹⁹ – *Resheph* the soldier, or *Resheph* the lord of the army – evidence points to *El* features in the deity worshipped at Shiloh. In the Hebrew Bible the term is attested in those books which represent a tradition linked to the theology promoted at the Jerusalem Temple.⁶²⁰ It thus seems that the designation "*Sebaoth*" was closely linked to Zion and the Temple, and 'that Yahweh Zebaoth was conceived as enthroned in invisible majesty on the cherubim throne in the Solomonic Temple'.⁶²¹ A further aspect of the *Zion-Sebaoth* theology was the idea that the Temple was the junction between heaven and earth; therefore *Yahweh* could be located simultaneously on earth and in heaven. The designation *Sebaoth* also occurs in passages in which the divine council plays a role.⁶²²

Choi⁶²³ indicates 'that *yhw h šēbā'ōt*, is an actual construct phrase, with the doubly determined proper name *yhw h*, ... strengthened by the nearly identical Ugaritic phrase *ršp šb'l'*. This deity *ršp* – *Resheph* – occurs in different inscriptions, from Egypt to Ugarit and Cyprus. The image of the deity appears in Egyptian artwork, from Late Bronze to Iron I Ages, and as a theophoric⁶²⁴ element in different personal names.⁶²⁵ The Hebrew Bible presents *Resheph* as a plague or a demon force, indicating that *ršp* – as *b'l* – had a dual function as a proper name or a common noun.⁶²⁶ Choi⁶²⁷ discusses and illustrates various applications of *Resheph*, as it occurs in Ancient Near Eastern and Phoenician inscriptions. He concludes that certain phrases which incorporate *Resheph* do not refer to a regional manifestation of the deity, but indicates a specific facet of the deity. This finding is significant to clarify the phrase

⁶¹⁶ Deist 1990:223.

⁶¹⁷ Mettinger 1999b: 920. 1 Samuel 1:3, 11; 4:4.

⁶¹⁸ 1 Samuel 1:9; 3:3.

⁶¹⁹ A description of *Resheph* is incorporated in a footnote in § 3.2.1, and also in an earlier footnote in this paragraph.

⁶²⁰ Psalms (fifteen times), Proto-Isaiah (fifty-six times), Haggai (fourteen times), Zechariah (fifty-three times) and Malachi (twenty-four times) (Mettinger 1999b:921).

⁶²¹ Mettinger 1999b:922.

⁶²² Mettinger 1999b:920-923.

⁶²³ Choi 2004:19.

⁶²⁴ See footnote in § 2.3.

⁶²⁵ Some of these names are attested in the Mari letters (see § 2.4 on the "Mari documents"), and other forms in Ugaritic, Phoenician, Ammonite and the Hebrew Bible (Choi 2004:19-20).

⁶²⁶ Choi 2004:21.

⁶²⁷ Choi 2004:19-27. See these pages for the relevant discussion.

yhwh šēbā'ôt. 'Evidence from the use of *ršp* in various regions (therefore) suggests that *yhwh šēbā'ôt* is a genuine construct chain, used to point out and highlight a specific aspect of the deity's nature.' In this instance *Yahweh's* character as warrior and 'supreme commander of armies' is accentuated.⁶²⁸

Livingstone⁶²⁹ mentions that when the Assyrians became the might in the Ancient Near East, *Aššur* – their national god – took the central place. To ease this substitution *Aššur* was identified with the Old Babylonian god *Anšar*.⁶³⁰ *Aššur* thus became "Lord of the gods" – he was regarded as creator and ordained man's fate. Apart from these functions he was above all a warrior god who accompanied the armies into battle. He was mostly represented as a winged disc or mounted on a bull or floating through the air. As supreme divinity he also had the quality of a fertility god, who was depicted by surrounding branches, and in this capacity had a female goat as attribute. *Ninlil* was *Aššur's* principle consort.⁶³¹ It is significant that *Aššur*, as warrior god, was also portrayed with the attributes of the storm god (*Adad*) and of the solar god (*Shamash*). It seems, therefore, that he was at the same time warrior, solar and storm god. Cornelius and Venter⁶³² indicate that he was an anthropomorphic⁶³³ deity regarded as superhuman. A well-known illustration of *Aššur* shows him in a winged sun disc firing a bow. The sun disc is actually the representation of a chariot travelling through the sky. *Ninurta* – firstborn son of *Aššur* and god of warfare and hunting – was known as an outstanding deity in Assyria.⁶³⁴ *Aššur's* temple – *bit Aššur* – was the main centre of his cult in the city of Assur. Assyrian prayers in their religious rituals indicate the deity's prominence in royal ideology and epitomise his character as national god.⁶³⁵ The god *Aššur* was considered the

⁶²⁸ Choi 2004:27.

⁶²⁹ Livingstone 1999:108-109.

⁶³⁰ It became practice in Assyria to write the name of the god *Aššur* as *AN.ŠÁR* – signs designating a primeval deity in Babylonian theogonies. Babylonian *Anšar* and *Kišar* – meaning "whole heaven" and "whole earth" – preceded the deities *Enlil* (see footnote in § 2.3) and *Ninlil*. Through an intelligent move the Assyrian *Aššur* – not figuring anywhere in the Babylonian pantheon – appeared as head of the Babylonian pantheon, gradually adopting everything belonging to *Enlil*. *Ninlil* – *Enlil's* wife – became the Assyrian *Mullisu* (Livingstone 1999:108-109). *Ninlil* was known in Mesopotamia and Sumer as ancient goddess of the earth, sky, heaven and the Underworld. She was patron of the city of Nippur (see footnote in § 2.4); her emblems were the serpent, the heavenly mountain, the stars and a stylised tree; she later assimilated with *Ishtar*; in Babylon she was called *Belit* or *Belit-matate*; she gave birth to the moon god (Ann & Imel 1993:342). "Theogony": a myth telling of the birth and genealogy of the gods (Deist 1990:258).

⁶³¹ Guirand 1996:57.

⁶³² Cornelius & Venter 2002:184.

⁶³³ See footnote in § 1.2.

⁶³⁴ Grayson 1992b:753.

⁶³⁵ It is significant that the theophoric element (see footnote on "hypocoristicon" in § 2.3) *Ashur* appears in a number of Assyrian kings' names, such as Ashur-uballit I (1363-1328 BC), Ashur-resh-ishi I (1132-1115 BC), Ashur-bel-kala (1073-1056 BC), Ashur-dan II (934-912 BC), Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC), Ashurbanipal (died 627 BC) and his son Ashur-etil-ilani (Gwaltney 1994:85-88, 100).

deified city Assur, which – according to analysed evidence – was built on a holy spot of pre-historic times.⁶³⁶ *Aššur* was regarded as the Assyrian *Enlil* – the latter, as god of Nippur,⁶³⁷ being one of the most important figures in the Babylonian pantheon. Sennacherib⁶³⁸ attempted to replace the cult of the great god *Marduk* in Babylon by the similar cult of *Aššur* – *Aššur* thus taking the place of *Marduk*.⁶³⁹ It is noteworthy that *Amurru* – the eponymous god of the Amorites – was also perceived as warrior and storm god. These nomadic peoples of the western desert settled in Mesopotamia in the latter part of the third millennium BC. Although introduced into the Mesopotamian pantheon at a late stage, *Amurru* was nevertheless presented as son of *An*⁶⁴⁰ – supreme god of the sky in the Babylonian mythology.⁶⁴¹

3.6 Astral deities

Astral deities were not an unfamiliar phenomenon for the ancient Israelites.⁶⁴² A number of references in the Hebrew Bible indicate that *Yahweh* is Lord of the sun, moon and stars.⁶⁴³ The Babylonian creation epic – the *Enuma Elish*⁶⁴⁴ – describes that *Marduk* was the one who set the heavenly bodies in order and divided the constellations of the zodiac and months of the year among the great gods. The Babylonians recorded the positions of the sun, the moon and the planets Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Saturn and Mars to the date of a birth. The constellations became the objects of a religious cult.⁶⁴⁵ The term *מזלות*⁶⁴⁶ appears only in 2 Kings 23:5 in the Hebrew Bible, referring to prohibited astral cults. The Masoretic Text furnishes scant information on specific constellations.⁶⁴⁷ 'Once the threat of idolatry had faded away'⁶⁴⁸ the

⁶³⁶ Assur was built on an impressive natural hill, and therefore – as place of strategic significance – its "holiness" was exploited therein that it had the character of a city and of a god (Livingstone 1999:108).

⁶³⁷ See footnote in § 2.4 on Nippur.

⁶³⁸ Sennacherib – monarch of the Neo-Assyrian Empire during 704-681 BC – tried to maintain control of Babylonia by procuring the throne of the dual monarchy (Arnold 1994:59).

⁶³⁹ The Assyrians did not require conquered peoples to worship *Ashur*, as they respected local deities, but for propaganda purposes declared that these deities abandoned their worshippers (Livingstone 1999:109).

⁶⁴⁰ Van der Toorn 1999a:32.

⁶⁴¹ Storm 2001:19.

⁶⁴² Genesis 37:9; Deuteronomy 4:19; 2 Kings 23:5.

⁶⁴³ Psalm 148:3; Ecclesiastes 12:2; Isaiah 13:10; Jeremiah 31:35; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:10; 3:15.

⁶⁴⁴ See footnotes in § 2.14.6 and § 3.1 for explanatory notes on *Marduk* and the *Enuma Elish*, respectively.

⁶⁴⁵ Zatelli 1999:202.

⁶⁴⁶ *מזלות* – transcribed as *mazzālôt* – refers to astral cults prohibited by Josiah [Judean king 640/39-609 BC]. 2 Kings 23:5, 'And he deposed the priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to make offerings in the high places at the cities of Judah and around Jerusalem; those also who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and the moon and the constellations and all the host of the heavens.' Likewise, a slight phonetic variant *מזרות* – in Job 38:32 – is clearly an astronomical reference (Zatelli 1999:202). Holladay (1971:189) describes *מזלות* as zodiacal signs and *מזרות* as the constellations, probably consisting of: Venus as evening and morning star, Hyades (in the constellation of Taurus), the boat of Arcturus and the southern constellations of the zodiac.

⁶⁴⁷ Job 9:9 Bear and Orion; Job 26:13 fleeing serpent; Job 38:31 Pleiades and Orion; Job 38:32 *mazzārôt* and Bear; Isaiah 13:10 'For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed light'; Amos 5:8 Pleiades and Orion.

⁶⁴⁸ Zatelli 1999:203.

zodiacal constellations were widely promoted within the Judaic culture. The zodiac was set into the background of rabbinical literature.⁶⁴⁹ Zodiac symbols are portrayed on the mosaic floors of several synagogues of the Roman and Byzantine periods.⁶⁵⁰ On the mosaic floor of the sixth century Beth Alpha synagogue – in Israel's Jezreel Valley – the Greek solar god *Helios* rides his four-horse chariot. Around him is the light of the moon and the night sky is sprinkled with stars. This, and other zodiacs on synagogue floors, 'illustrate an ancient Israelite tradition of retaining elements of pagan sun worship in their own worship'.⁶⁵¹ The identification of *Yahweh* with the sun is supported in a number of biblical passages.⁶⁵² The epithet "Lord of Hosts"⁶⁵³ could intimate that *Yahweh* was in command of all the stars, and therefore also associated with the sun.⁶⁵⁴

A debate between Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Judah-ha-Nasi⁶⁵⁵ about the validity of astrology for Jews is recorded in the tractate *Shabbat* of the Babylonian Talmud⁶⁵⁶ and states, 'The planetary influence gives wisdom, the planetary influence gives wealth and Israel stands under planetary influence.' In contrast to this assertion Rabbi Johanan⁶⁵⁷ declares, 'There are no constellations for Israel.'⁶⁵⁸ However, as the various synagogue pavements signify, some Jews believed that they stood under planetary influence. Seven pavements in Palestinian synagogues, all repeating the same basic zodiac composition, have been preserved. These compositions represent the 'twelve signs of the zodiac in a radial arrangement around *Helios*⁶⁵⁹ in the chariot of the sun with the personifications of the seasons surrounding it'.⁶⁶⁰ *Helios* is always in the centre of the composition in the chariot of the sun. The "frequency and longevity" of these synagogue decorations indicate that it was a "deliberate adoption" of the

⁶⁴⁹ The number twelve influenced the rabbinical thought on the zodiac as it represented, inter alia, the number of tribes, the stones on the ephod (Ex 28:17-21) and the number of oxen which formed the base of the copper basin in the Jerusalem Temple courtyard (1 Ki 7:23-26) (Zatelli 1999:203). An ephod (אֶפֶד) refers to a garment worn by the priests. The word is connected to the Syriac sacerdotal vestment. The Septuagint (see footnote on LXX in § 3.2.2) generally refers to the shoulder strap of a tunic. The ephod was connected to the high priest's breastplate, containing the "lots of divination" – the Urim and Thummim – leading thereto that the ephod was regarded as an agent of divination (see footnote on "divination" in § 2.4) (Stern 1993:189).

⁶⁵⁰ Zatelli 1999:202-203.

⁶⁵¹ Taylor 1994:61.

⁶⁵² Passages such as Deuteronomy 33:2 'The Lord came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran'; Psalm 80:3 'Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.'

⁶⁵³ 1 Samuel 4:4.

⁶⁵⁴ Taylor 1994:61.

⁶⁵⁵ Rabbi Hanina was a Babylonian who studied in Palestine with Rabbi Judah-ha-Nasi; the latter died before AD 230 (Roussin 1997:83).

⁶⁵⁶ See "Babylonian Talmud" and "Tractates", incorporated in footnotes in § 3.2.1 and § 3.2.2. This specific debate is recorded in the Tractate *Shabbat* 156b (Roussin 1997:83).

⁶⁵⁷ Rabbi Johanan lived in Tiberias ca AD 250 (Roussin 1997:83).

⁶⁵⁸ Roussin 1997:83.

⁶⁵⁹ The Greek solar deity.

⁶⁶⁰ Roussin 1997:83.

composition and not merely an inadvertent copying of a pagan model.⁶⁶¹ Practice of magic, astrology and angel worship among the Jews has been attested.⁶⁶² Of the high priest's robe, Josephus⁶⁶³ writes, 'the vestment of the high priest being made of linen signified the earth; the blue denoted the sky, being like lightning in its pomegranates, and in the noise of the bells resembling thunder. . . . Each of the sardonyxes declares to us the sun and the moon; And for the twelve stones, whether we understand by them the months, or whether we understand the like number of the signs of that circle which the Greeks call the *Zodiac*, we shall not be mistaken in their meaning.'⁶⁶⁴

The word *Helios* is ambivalent, being both a common noun and an actual name. The predominant aspect thereof in a given text can only be determined contextually – for example, religious, stellar, cosmic or political. *Helios*, in solar worship, was venerated mainly by individuals. Yet, the word appears frequently in the Greek Septuagint and New Testament. In ancient Greek literature *Helios* has – apart from being the solar disc – virtually no identity. However, two important aspects were its tireless observation of the human world and being a manifestation of cosmic order.⁶⁶⁵ *Helios* rides in his horse-drawn chariot – as expressed in the synagogue zodiacs – while *Yahweh* is portrayed in his chariot of clouds.⁶⁶⁶ In the traditions of the Jewish people, *Yahweh* is characterised in the Hebrew Bible as heavenly Warrior, causing 'havoc in both the celestial and terrestrial realms'⁶⁶⁷ as he marches triumphantly from the "South".⁶⁶⁸ 'Yahweh's theophany in the storm which leads to the blotting out of the sun and moon'⁶⁶⁹ is exhibited in Habakkuk 3. Snyman⁶⁷⁰ mentions that the 'overwhelming picture of Yahweh's power' as expressed in Habakkuk 3:3-7, was with the intention to send out a message 'that Yahweh acts on behalf of his people as He had done in the past when the sun and moon stood still'.

⁶⁶¹ When analysed in terms of the structure of the *Sefer HaRazim*, the symbolism of the synagogue pavement compositions becomes clear. The earthly realm is represented in the lowest level, the celestial sphere in the centre is epitomised by the Helios-in-zodiac panel and the highest sphere – the Torah Shrine panel – symbolises where *Yahweh* resides (Roussin 1997:93). *Sefer: Jewish medieval literature* (Epstein 1959:230).

⁶⁶² Roussin 1997:89-90.

⁶⁶³ Flavius Josephus (AD 37 - ca 100), son of a priestly Jewish family, later became a Roman citizen and author. His first work was *The Wars of the Jews* and in approximately AD 93 he completed the *Antiquities of the Jews* (Whiston 1960:vii, ix).

⁶⁶⁴ Whiston 1960:75.

⁶⁶⁵ Gordon 1999:394-396.

⁶⁶⁶ Psalms 18:10-11; 68:17, 33; 104:3; Habakkuk 3:8. The following verses in the Hebrew Bible refer to heavenly "horses and chariots" (Jr 4:13), "horses and chariots of fire" (2 Ki 2:11; 6:17) and 'the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun' (2 Ki 23:11).

⁶⁶⁷ Prinsloo 2001:479.

⁶⁶⁸ Habakkuk 3:3-7.

⁶⁶⁹ Day 2000:155. Habakkuk 3, particularly verse 11, 'the sun and the moon stood still in their place', could be a reference to Joshua 10:12-13.

⁶⁷⁰ Snyman 2003:432.

In the Masoretic Text, the word *Shemesh* – שמש – does not actually reflect a divine name. The Canaanite solar cult is, however, revealed in place names, such as Beth-shemesh,⁶⁷¹ Enshemesh⁶⁷² and Ir-shemesh.⁶⁷³ These names probably maintain the memory of sanctuaries which were earlier devoted to the solar deity.⁶⁷⁴ Lipiński⁶⁷⁵ is of the opinion that 'the lack of evident traces of solar worship in Hebrew anthroponomy⁶⁷⁶ seems to indicate that the cult of the sun was not very popular in Syria-Palestine in the Iron Age, contrary to Egypt and to Mesopotamia'.⁶⁷⁷ The Deuteronomist refers to "the host of heaven"⁶⁷⁸ and "the sun, the moon and the constellations"⁶⁷⁹ worshipped during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon.⁶⁸⁰ This led scholars to theorise that an Assyrian astral cult 'was imposed upon Judah as a symbol of subjection and vassalage'.⁶⁸¹ *Shimige* was the Hurrian solar deity that had much in common with *Shemesh*. *Shimige* took note of the acts of man, blessed the righteous and punished the evil-doer. As divine judge he was often involved in treaties. His cult was not limited to Anatolia as he was also venerated along the Phoenician coast.⁶⁸²

Taylor⁶⁸³ suggests that the Israelites did indeed consider the sun as an icon or symbol of *Yahweh*. Close examination of the Taanach cult stand⁶⁸⁴ shows, inter alia, the *asherah* as a cult symbol next to a "portrait" of the goddess herself – the goddess had therefore not been separated from her cult symbol. On the one tier of the stand a horse with sun disc on its back is depicted, and on another tier, two cherubim. The two cherubim protect a vacant space with the invisible deity, *Yahweh*, between them – represented by his symbol, the sun.⁶⁸⁵ Images on the cult stand have recently been identified by scholars as the Canaanite *Ba'al* and *Asherah*.

⁶⁷¹ Joshua 15:10; 21:16.

⁶⁷² Joshua 15:7; 18:17.

⁶⁷³ Joshua 19:41.

⁶⁷⁴ Lipiński 1999:764-765.

⁶⁷⁵ Lipiński 1999:765.

⁶⁷⁶ Anthroponomy is the 'study of the laws that govern the relationship between man and his environment' (Deist 1990:14).

⁶⁷⁷ Seemingly contrary to Lipiński's point of view, Ezekiel 8:16-18 mentions, inter alia, 'men with their backs to the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun toward the east'. Lipiński (1999:765), however, interprets Ezekiel's vision as having the meaning that the men 'were not sun-worshippers, but devotees of Yahweh'.

⁶⁷⁸ 2 Kings 21:3.

⁶⁷⁹ 2 Kings 23:5.

⁶⁸⁰ Judean kings: Manasseh (687/86-642/41 BC) and Amon (642/41-640/39 BC) (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:197).

⁶⁸¹ Lipiński 1999:765.

⁶⁸² Van der Toorn 1999d:773. See brief referral to *Shamash* and solar mythology in *Qohelet* further on in this paragraph.

⁶⁸³ Taylor 1994:53-54, 58.

⁶⁸⁴ For a discussion of the Taanach cult stand, see § 2.13, subtitle "Taanach".

⁶⁸⁵ In congruence with the Jerusalem Temple, the depictions on the Taanach stand symbolise the seemingly empty shrine – Holy of Holies – where the invisible *Yahweh* dwelled (1 Ki 6:23-28). The expression "the Lord [*Yahweh*] of Hosts who sits on the cherubim" (1 Sm 4:4; 2 Sm 6:2) is 'virtually synonymous with the theology of the Jerusalem Temple' (Taylor 1994:58, 60).

Taylor,⁶⁸⁶ however, argues that the subjects on the tiers are *Yahweh* – and not *Ba'al* – and *Asherah*. Therefore, according to this interpretation, *Asherah* is understood to be *Yahweh*'s consort.⁶⁸⁷ The Tanaach horse – an animal associated with *Yahweh* – and its sun disc are reminiscent of 'the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord ... and he [Josiah] burned the chariots of the sun with fire'.⁶⁸⁸ The horses and chariots were placed at the entrance of the Temple 'facing eastwards, towards the gate by which *Yahweh*, the God of Israel, has entered the sanctuary'.⁶⁸⁹ Thus, the sun's chariot was *Yahweh*'s vehicle.⁶⁹⁰ The ancient idea of a chariot of the sun was born from the perception that the sun is a wheel turning through the heavens – as attested by the legend of Elijah being carried up to the heaven in a chariot and horses of fire.⁶⁹¹

Eighth century BC Aramaic inscriptions from Zinçirli mention the divine triad, *El*, the sun god and *Rakib-El* – charioteer of *El* – suggesting that the sun's chariot was in fact *El*'s vehicle driven by *Rakib-El*.⁶⁹² A similar perception probably existed regarding the Jerusalem Temple and the episode of the ascension of Elijah in Northern Israel.⁶⁹³ Lipiński⁶⁹⁴ argues that 'there can be little doubt that the sun was conceived in biblical times as a vivid symbol of *Yahweh*'s Glory'.⁶⁹⁵ Although solar symbolism might have proffered a danger for *Yahweh*-worship, several texts in the Hebrew Bible stress *Yahweh*'s authority over the sun and the moon.⁶⁹⁶ Gericke⁶⁹⁷ indicates that the word שמש appears at least thirty-five times explicitly in the book of *Qohelet*.⁶⁹⁸ This particular "sun imagery" appears frequently in the phrase "under the sun" – תחת השמש. Apart from these examples of explicit occurrences many instances of implicit sun imagery seem to be present, suggesting 'the possibility of allusions to solar mythology'⁶⁹⁹ and symbolism. It was *Shamash* – *Shemesh* – in Mesopotamian solar mythology that

⁶⁸⁶ Taylor 1994:54.

⁶⁸⁷ Taylor (1994:53-55, 61) comes to this conclusion in the light of the particular portrayals on the cult stand, as well as the inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom mentioning *Yahweh* and his *Asherah*. (See § 2.9 and § 2.10, as well as § 4.3.9 and § 4.3.10 for a discussion of the finds and the inscriptions). Within the context of the Israelite religion, it was rather *Yahweh* than *Ba'al*, who was closely associated with *Asherah*.

⁶⁸⁸ 2 Kings 23:11. See also discussion of the "Horse figurines" in § 2.13 under the same subtitle.

⁶⁸⁹ Lipiński 1999:765. Ezekiel 43:2, 4; 44:1-2.

⁶⁹⁰ Read also Habakkuk 3:8 in this respect.

⁶⁹¹ 2 Kings 2:11-12; 6:15, 17.

⁶⁹² *Rakib-El* was the holy patron of the Aramaic dynasty of Zinçirli (Lipiński 1999:765).

⁶⁹³ Lipiński 1999:765. 2 Kings 2:11-12.

⁶⁹⁴ Lipiński 1999:766.

⁶⁹⁵ Deuteronomy 33:2 and Habakkuk 3:3-4 describe *Yahweh*'s coming as the rising of the sun. According to Isaiah 59:19 and Ezekiel 43:2, 4; 44:1-2 his glory comes from the east, 'while Isaiah 60:19 announces that *Yahweh*'s Glory will replace the sunlight when the new Jerusalem will arise' (Lipiński 1999:766).

⁶⁹⁶ Genesis 1:14-18; Joshua 10:12-14; 2 Kings 20:9-11; Job 9:7; Psalms 74:16; 104:19; 136:7-9; 148:3-6; Jeremiah 31:35.

⁶⁹⁷ Gericke 2003:245-246.

⁶⁹⁸ The Book of Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew Bible.

⁶⁹⁹ Gericke 2003:250.

instructed the righteous in wisdom and was specifically associated with concepts like justice, time and life – similar themes to those found in *Qohelet*.⁷⁰⁰

In his discussion of Psalm 104, Dion⁷⁰¹ argues that much of this psalm has been procured from Egyptian and Syrian traditions 'reclaiming for the God of Israel an important part of the common theology of the ancient Near East.' Some of its elements reflect Akhenaten's⁷⁰² legacy and the literary tradition of the Amarna solar deity. Many symbols and phrases, typical of Ancient Near Eastern storm gods, have also been incorporated into Psalm 104 – the two traditions of storm and solar deities harmoniously blended by the psalmist. Appearances of *Yahweh* in Psalm 104⁷⁰³ 'are reminiscent of various aspects of the epiphanies of the storm god',⁷⁰⁴ with lightning as its main iconographic attribute. The legacy of solar worship in Egypt has been adjusted to the character of *Yahweh*. The Egyptian *Hymn to the Aten*⁷⁰⁵ has something in common with Psalm 104.⁷⁰⁶ Dion⁷⁰⁷ notes that many place names containing the element "*Shemesh*", as well as various horse figurine artefacts with a disc object between their ears, are an indication that solar worship was deeply ingrained in Palestine when the new nation Israel emerged. Under the Israelite Monarchy some solar symbolism had been assimilated by Yahwism before the violent reaction of the deuteronomists and seventh century BC prophets. Depictions in Psalm 104 are reminiscent of the pairing of storm and solar deities in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Pairing of these two gods is in recognition of "their joint supremacy". Dion⁷⁰⁸ concludes that Psalm 104 is explicitly addressed to *Yahweh*, the only God of post-exilic Judah, although many motifs in this psalm are borrowed from traditions and imagery of deities other than the God of Israel.⁷⁰⁹

According to Smith,⁷¹⁰ 'the solar descriptions of *Yahweh* during the monarchy perhaps furnish the background to descriptions of the sun in biblical cosmology'. Some scholars interpret the solar language in Psalm 19 as a polemic against solar worship in Israel whereas Smith does

⁷⁰⁰ Gericke 2003:244, 251.

⁷⁰¹ Dion 1991:44.

⁷⁰² See discussion on Akhenaten's "monotheism" in *Excursus 4*.

⁷⁰³ Psalm 104:3-4, 7.

⁷⁰⁴ Dion 1991:51.

⁷⁰⁵ See *Excursus 4* for a discussion of the *Aten* – the cult of the sun disc. This hymn – a piece of Egyptian religious poetry – was discovered at Tell el-Amarna on the west wall of the tomb of Ay (Dion 1991:58). Ay, a vizier, was the father of Nefertiti – a lady of non-royal blood – who married Akhenaten (see *Excursus 4*) (Clayton 1994:121).

⁷⁰⁶ For a comparison of the *Aten Hymn* and Psalm 104, see Dion (1991:60).

⁷⁰⁷ Dion 1991:64-65.

⁷⁰⁸ Dion 1991:69.

⁷⁰⁹ For a detailed discussion of Psalm 104 and the influence of Ancient Near Eastern mythologies on the compilation of the psalm, see Dion (1991:43-71).

⁷¹⁰ Smith 1990:120-121.

not perceive it as polemical, but as an attestation of the glory of God. The sun is a positive indication of order in *Yahweh's* creation.

Josephus⁷¹¹ mentions that the devotion of the Essenes⁷¹² took a particular form, 'for before sunrising they speak not a word about profane matters, but put up certain prayers which they had received from their forefathers, as if they made a supplication for its rising'.⁷¹³

Inhabitants of southern Mesopotamia were aware of the link between the phases of the moon and the tides and consequently interpreted the moon as being responsible for the water supply to the fields and all living entities. Therefore the moon god, 'in addition to his role as illuminator of the night',⁷¹⁴ was regarded as a fertility deity. This aspect of the deity was reflected in the powerful and virile bull, visualised in the similarity between the bull's horns and the so-called "horns" of the "new" moon, 'symbolising the eternal cycle of nature'.⁷¹⁵ By the end of the Old Babylonian Period⁷¹⁶ the association of the bull with the lunar deity began to diminish in visual representations, while the connection between the bull and the storm god became more prevalent.⁷¹⁷ A phenomenon in the imagery of the Ancient Near East is the 'sharing (of) identical emblems by different deities'.⁷¹⁸ Some creatures may represent the distinctive features of the deities who "control" them – such as the bull and the storm god – and at the same time shed light on comparable characteristics that personified other deities. In this regard the horns of the bull and the "horns" of the lunar deity are a typical example.⁷¹⁹

Yrḥ – ירח – is the most common biblical Hebrew word for "moon" or "moon god". The word appears close to thirty times in the Hebrew Bible. It occurs in several Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphic works – at times in combination with the solar deity *Shemesh*. *Yrḥ* and terms

⁷¹¹ Whiston 1960:476.

⁷¹² Essenes: a Jewish sect who lived in the desert close to the Dead Sea from ca 200 BC to ca AD 70 (Deist 1990:86).

⁷¹³ The Essenes believed they were the people of the "New Covenant". They strictly adhered to the Levitical purity laws and were scrupulous in their avoidance of ceremonial uncleanness. Although Josephus thought the Essenes engaged in solar worship, neither of the ancient writers, Philo or Hippolytes, makes any reference to this extraordinary practice (Farmer 1962:146).

⁷¹⁴ Ornan 2001b:3.

⁷¹⁵ Ornan 2001b:3. Fragments of a wall painting from Mari – contemporary to the Ur III period [2112-2004 BC] – attest a connection between the bull and the lunar deity. Such a link is furthermore evident during the Old Babylonian Period [2000-1595 BC] as portrayed, for example, on a number of cylinder seals and impressions (Ornan 2001b:7).

⁷¹⁶ Old Babylonian Period: 2000-1595 BC (Arnold 1994:47).

⁷¹⁷ Ornan 2001b:14. A Late Bronze statue from Hazor – "the-deity-on-the-bull" – attests the mingling of storm and lunar deity attributes (Ornan 2001b:24-25).

⁷¹⁸ Ornan 2001b:3.

⁷¹⁹ Ornan 2001b:3.

describing the lesser astral bodies – the stars, constellations or "hosts of heaven" – were often grouped together. At the same time, the terminology "hosts of heaven" in the Hebrew Bible, was indicative of the inclusion of all luminaries.⁷²⁰ Symbols on seals, as well as evidence in the Hebrew Bible, bear witness that the cult of the "hosts of heaven" was widespread in seventh century BC Judah⁷²¹. According to the Deuteronomist, astral cults in Judah increased significantly during the seventh and sixth centuries BC.⁷²²

In the Mesopotamian tradition the lunar deity was known by the name *Nanna*, *Suen* and *Ash-imbabbar*. During the Old Babylonian Period *Suen* was written as *Sîn* – attested in lexical texts from Ugarit and Ebla. Documents from Mari⁷²³ refer to *Sîn* of Haran. More than one lunar tradition could be accountable for the different names of the lunar deities. According to traditions in antiquity, 'the moon governed a vast and visible celestial assembly'.⁷²⁴ These "night luminaries" moved with regularity across the skies controlling the heavens, as well as an alien world. It furthermore represented the cultural and natural life cycle of birth, growth, decay and death. The cultic calendar was determined by the movements of the moon; the latter thus being awarded a prominent place in Mesopotamian myth and ritual.⁷²⁵ The lunar deity – an immediate offspring of *Enlil*⁷²⁶ and *Ninlil*⁷²⁷ – was created before the solar deity, and gave birth to lesser luminaries. In both the history of ancient Mesopotamian religions and early Syrian traditions the lunar deity enjoyed widespread popularity.⁷²⁸ In the Assyro-Babylonian mythology this deity occupied the main position in the astral triad, with *Shamash* and *Ishtar* – the sun and the planet Venus, respectively – as its children.⁷²⁹

In the Aramaic-speaking world the Sumerian and Babylonian *Sîn* was the name of the lunar deity residing in Haran. Although venerated everywhere, Ur⁷³⁰ remained the cult centre of

⁷²⁰ Schmidt 1999:585. Genesis 37:9 is an example.

⁷²¹ Examples are Deuteronomy 4:19; 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18; Nehemiah 9:6; Isaiah 40:26; Jeremiah 8:2; 19:13; Daniel 8:10, 13.

⁷²² Keel 1998:101-102.

⁷²³ Documents from Mari at the beginning of the second millennium BC (Stol 1999:782).

⁷²⁴ Schmidt 1999:586.

⁷²⁵ *Sîn* was visualised as an old man with a long beard, the colour of lapis-lazuli. In the evening he got into his barque, which appeared in the form of a brilliant crescent moon, and travelled through the nocturnal sky. Due to his illumination of the night he was the enemy of criminals (Guirand 1996:57).

⁷²⁶ See footnote on *Enlil* in § 2.3.

⁷²⁷ See footnote in § 3.5, incorporating *Ninlil*. The moon god, *Nanna/Sîn*, was born from an illicit union of *Enlil* and *Ninlil* (Stol 1999:783).

⁷²⁸ Schmidt 1999:586-587.

⁷²⁹ Guirand 1996:57.

⁷³⁰ Ur was an important Sumerian city during the third millennium BC and beginning of the second millennium BC. Apart from Babylon, it is the best known Mesopotamian site in the Hebrew Bible, particularly connected to Abraham (Gn 11:31). It is well known for its *ziggurat* (see footnote in § 2.4) constructed by Ur-nammu, founder of the Third Dynasty (2112-2094 BC). Ur-nammu dedicated the *ziggurat* to the moon god *Nanna/Sîn*. The

Nanna/Sîn. The Assyrians considered the moon god of Haran as a special patron to extend their boundaries.⁷³¹ The name is attested as a theophoric⁷³² element in Assyrian and Babylonian personal names.⁷³³ The cult was promoted by Nabonidus⁷³⁴ who gave *Sîn* designations such as "Lord/King of the Gods", "God of the Gods". *dNin-gal* was *Sîn*'s consort.⁷³⁵ The lunar emblem of Haran – of Aramaean origin – portrays the moon god in a boat. The symbol of a crescent on a pole was common in southern Mesopotamia during the first half of the second millennium BC.⁷³⁶

The Hebrew Bible attests the admiration of man for the multitude of stars created by God,⁷³⁷ yet, in the Ancient Near East stars were widely regarded as gods. Likewise, the existence of astrological references in the Hebrew Bible cannot be denied, 'often hidden in the most ancient layers of the text, revealing deified aspects of cosmic phenomena as distinguished from mere physical/natural elements'.⁷³⁸ For example, traces of superstition and divination associated with star cults – probably from Mesopotamian origin – are present in the astral dream of Joseph.⁷³⁹ Likewise, Joshua 10:12-13 could be interpreted as an incantation prayer uttered in a context of astrological conjecture.⁷⁴⁰ In post-exilic tradition, the non-religious observation of stars – influenced by Hellenistic science – 'gradually became a form of astrological and astronomical speculation'⁷⁴¹ partly applied by rabbis.⁷⁴² At the same time Babylonian astral divination was common among post-exilic Jews. Reference to the stars as a prophetic symbol in Daniel 8-10 is an allusion to those Jews who submitted to Hellenistic paganism.⁷⁴³ It is, however, extremely problematic to identify the particular sources underlying the Yahwistic lunar symbolism, as an 'admixture of Mesopotamian and west Asiatic lunar traditions throughout the Levant' – although well documented – spans several centuries.⁷⁴⁴

discovery of several royal tombs at Ur is, however, responsible for its archaeological fame (Margueron 1992:766-767).

⁷³¹ Keel 1998:68.

⁷³² See "theophoric name" incorporated in a footnote on "hypocoristicon" in § 2.3.

⁷³³ Personal names such as Sanherib [Sennacherib], Sanballat and Shenazzar (Stol 1999:782).

⁷³⁴ Nabonidus: Babylonian ruler 555-539 BC (Bodine 1994:33).

⁷³⁵ Stol 1999:782-783.

⁷³⁶ Keel 1998:68, 87, 101.

⁷³⁷ For example, Genesis 1:14-16; Job 9:7-9; Psalms 8:3; 147:4; 148:3-5; Jeremiah 31:35.

⁷³⁸ Lelli 1999:811. Jeremiah indicates that his contemporaries regard heaven as an astral deity, and not a natural entity entirely dependent on God's will (Jr 14:22). King Josiah opposed all idolatrous cults destroying objects in the Temple associated with astral cults (2 Ki 23:4-5, 11) (Lelli 1999:811).

⁷³⁹ Genesis 37:9.

⁷⁴⁰ Lelli 1999:812.

⁷⁴¹ Lelli 1999:813.

⁷⁴² Most of the rabbis' discussions in this connection concerned the determination of holy days (Lelli 1999:813).

⁷⁴³ Lelli 1999:810-814.

⁷⁴⁴ Schmidt 1999:588.

Shalem – as the deity *Šalim* from Ugaritic texts – was probably the divine power symbolised by *Venus* as the Evening Star. The divine name *Šalim* is found in personal names of the earliest known Mesopotamian Semites and later Amorites. It also occurs in place names⁷⁴⁵ and as a theophoric element in some Israelite personal names.⁷⁴⁶ *Shagar* (Morning Star) and *Shalem* (Evening Star) were offspring of the Canaanite *El* and two "women" he encountered at the seashore.⁷⁴⁷ Speculative connections link *Shalem* with the alleged cult of the *Venus* star in Jerusalem and the cult of Melchizedek.⁷⁴⁸ Further links have been suggested with the Star of Bethlehem.⁷⁴⁹

3.7 Canaanite *El*

The meaning of the word, or name, *El*, 'el, 'il(u), is God/god. The etymology of the word has not been determined conclusively. 'Ilu, as an appellative for deities, has been attested in Ancient Mesopotamia, as well as in some of the Ugaritic texts – such as the mythological, cultic and epic texts. These texts furnish more than five hundred references to *El*, who is denoted as 'a distinct deity who, residing on the sacred mountain, occupies within the myths the position of master of the Ugaritic pantheon, carrying the title *mlk*, king'.⁷⁵⁰ The meaning "god" for the term 'il is well documented in Old Akkadian, beginning in pre-Sargonid times until late in the Babylonian Period.⁷⁵¹ The appellative 'il appeared in Old South Arabian dialects, but was replaced by 'ilāh in North Arabic. Although the appellative may have been used in an expression such as 'il *Haddu* – the god *Haddu* – it was rarely applied as such. As a proper name it occurred in the earliest stages of Semitic languages which could indicate that this designation – alongside its use as a generic appellative – belongs to Proto-Semitic.⁷⁵²

The couple *El* and *Asherah* held the highest authority in the Syro-Palestinian mythology. At some point in the traditions of the Syro-Palestinian religious history *El* was acknowledged as

⁷⁴⁵ Place names, such as Jerusalem: *yērūšālam* (Huffmon 1999b:755).

⁷⁴⁶ Theophoric personal names, such as David's sons Absalom ('*Abšālôm*) and Solomon (*šēlōmōh*) (Huffmon 1999b:755).

⁷⁴⁷ See § 3.2.1 and footnote in § 3.2.1 on *Shagar* and *Shalem*.

⁷⁴⁸ Abram's encounter with Melchizedek is recounted in Genesis 14:18-20. He is described as king of Salem [later Jerusalem] and priest of God Most High ('*ēl 'elyōn*). It is not possible to determine whether the image of this priest-king was devised by the author of Genesis 14, or whether he was known as such in certain Jewish circles. The name Melchizedek means "King of Righteousness". Apart from Genesis 14, his name appears in Psalm 110:4 in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in the Letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament (Heb 5:6; 6:20; 7:17) (Astour 1992b:684-686).

⁷⁴⁹ Huffmon 1999b:755-757.

⁷⁵⁰ Herrmann 1999b:274-275.

⁷⁵¹ Pre-Sargonid: before 2360 BC (Cross 1974:242). Babylon was captured by Persian Cyrus in 539 BC (Arnold 1994:66), thus signalling the end of the Babylonian Period.

⁷⁵² Cross 1974:242-244.

leader of the pantheon.⁷⁵³ Several epithets describe *El* as father and creator, as well as the "ancient one" or the "eternal one".⁷⁵⁴ *El* could create by modelling from clay, by a spoken word, or even by sexual intercourse. Even so, the creation of a new human being was considered to be by way of a mental process wherein both *El* and *Asherah* participated, and not by their physical interaction. Ancient kings boasted that they were the physical offspring of deities.⁷⁵⁵ An important Ugaritic text – the *hieros gamos*⁷⁵⁶ – recounts the birth of *Shagar* and *Shalem*,⁷⁵⁷ twin sons of *El* and his two wives.⁷⁵⁸ In the Ugaritic *Ba'al*⁷⁵⁹ texts, *El* behaves "passively and ineffectually" although other texts imply that *El* was very important in Ugarit.⁷⁶⁰

Despite *Ba'al*'s rise to a dominant position among the gods in the Ugaritic texts, the myths never lose sight of the importance of *El*. Gods were powerless to undertake any assignment without his permission. Although not directly portrayed in the Ugaritic and Phoenician mythologies, there are indications in the texts that *Ba'al* – who actively rose to kingship – must have dethroned the older and less virile *El* in order to secure this position.⁷⁶¹ L'Heureux⁷⁶² mentions that both internal and external evidence seem to indicate that *Ba'al* gradually took control of *El*'s functions. Internal evidence which allegedly demonstrates the degradation of *El* and his replacement by *Ba'al*, is based, inter alia, on arguments that *El* is a remote figure in texts dealing with *Ba'al* and *Anat*, that his dwelling place is in faraway regions and that treatment by *Asherah* and *Anat* indicate his feebleness – particularly their acclamation that "*Ba'al* is our king". It furthermore seems that *El* was impotent.⁷⁶³ Some scholars argue that the Ugaritic text *CTA 1* – although fragmentary – describes *El*'s dethronement in the conflict between him and *Ba'al*.⁷⁶⁴ External evidence involving the strife between *El* and *Ba'al* is mainly based on parallels in comparative mythological material⁷⁶⁵ in the *Kumarbi* myths,⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁵³ Handy 1994:69.

⁷⁵⁴ Cross 1974:245.

⁷⁵⁵ Korpel 2001:130.

⁷⁵⁶ *Hieros gamos*: sacred marriage; marriage between a divine and human being (Deist 1990:114).

⁷⁵⁷ *Shagar* and *Shalem*: Dawn and Dusk; see discussion in § 3.2.1.

⁷⁵⁸ Cross 1974:246.

⁷⁵⁹ See § 3.5 for a discussion of *Ba'al*.

⁷⁶⁰ Lemche 1988:203.

⁷⁶¹ Mullen 1980:84, 92-93.

⁷⁶² L'Heureux 1979:3-8.

⁷⁶³ For a detailed discussion of internal evidence supporting the alleged degradation of *El*, see L'Heureux (1979:4-28).

⁷⁶⁴ See L'Heureux (1979:18-26) for a discussion and suggested interpretation of the Ugaritic text *CTA 1*.

⁷⁶⁵ For a discussion of the comparative mythological material, see L'Heureux (1979:29-49).

⁷⁶⁶ In the Hittite myths *Kumarbi* was the father of the gods. On a partially preserved tablet the victory of the weather god *Teshub* – Hittite version of *Ba'al/Hadad* – over *Kumarbi*, is recounted (Willis 1993:66).

Sanchuniathon's work preserved by Eusebius,⁷⁶⁷ and Hesiod's *Theogony*.⁷⁶⁸ The above-mentioned evidence is, however, far from being conclusive.⁷⁶⁹

The divine council, or assembly of *El*, is attested in the Ugaritic myths. The concept of an assembly of the gods was a familiar religious theme in the cultures of Mesopotamia, Canaan, Phoenicia, Egypt and Israel. *El*'s dwelling-place – his tent – was described as 'being of somewhat elaborate construction'.⁷⁷⁰ It contained more than one room – reminiscent of the Israelite Tabernacle – with many elaborate ornaments. External evidence suggests that it was a tent-shrine and not a permanent structure. A short Akkadian text from the Mari archives refers to the *qersū* as a sacred construction.⁷⁷¹ The same word appears repeatedly in the Ugaritic texts in the description of *El*'s mountain sanctuary. His dwelling was associated with a mountain – his wisdom manifested from his tent-shrine on his holy mountain.⁷⁷² He was 'attributed with a kind of wisdom that made him judge everything rightly'.⁷⁷³

A well-known designation, *El* the Bull, is a metaphor expressing his divine dignity and strength.⁷⁷⁴ The occurrence of *El* and *Shadday* in parallelism⁷⁷⁵ reinforces the idea that *Shadday* is an *El* epithet. In Canaanite and Mesopotamian mythology the divine council consisted of high gods, each connected to a group of lesser gods. *Shadday* may have been the high god with whom lesser *Shadday* gods were linked. The latter have been associated tentatively with the biblical *šēdīm* – a term referring to a secondary or intermediary spirit or deity, which could be either protective or threatening, good or bad. The name "*Shadday*", and thus *Shadday* gods, have been found in Transjordan.⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁶⁷ A fourth century Christian writer Eusebius copied material from a third century philosopher Porphyry, who had the *History of the Phoenicians* – written at the end of the first century AD by Philo of Byblos – as source. Unfortunately Porphyry changed the contents of sources to suit himself. It is unclear whether Eusebius also made use of Philo's original text. Information for Philo's narratives – purported to be myths from Syria-Palestine – came from early collections by the Phoenician Sanchuniathon. Preserved passages are found in Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel*. Sanchuniathon's information ostensibly came from ancient documents on the Phoenician culture retained at various cult centres. Philo stated that the material derived from Sanchuniathon originated before the time of the Greek culture. In Philo's history, 'El was depicted as defending his status and position by violent and unacceptable means' (Handy 1994:44-45, 94).

⁷⁶⁸ Hesiod's poem, the *Theogony*, was written approximately during the eighth century BC and 'is the oldest Greek attempt at mythological classification' (Guirand 1996:87). The Greeks felt the necessity to provide their gods with a genealogy and history (Guirand 1996:87). Philo's portrayal of *El* happily killing gods in revenge has much in common with the *Theogony* (Handy 1994:94).

⁷⁶⁹ L'Heureux 1979:4.

⁷⁷⁰ Mullen 1980:134.

⁷⁷¹ *Qersū*: frame of a priestly tabernacle. See footnote on *qersum* and *hurpatum* in § 2.14.1.

⁷⁷² Mullen 1980:113, 120, 134, 136, 151.

⁷⁷³ Herrmann 1999b:275.

⁷⁷⁴ Herrmann 1999b:275.

⁷⁷⁵ *Shadday*: the almighty. *El Shadday* (אל שדי), as in Genesis 17:1; 28:3; 43:14; 48:3; Exodus 6:2.

⁷⁷⁶ Lutzky 1998:28-29, 31.

Bartlett⁷⁷⁷ indicates that 'the deity El was almost certainly known in Edom', as attested by inscriptions on seals found at Tawilan⁷⁷⁸ and Petra,⁷⁷⁹ consecutively bearing the names *sm'el* and '*Abdi-el*'.

The relationship between the God of Israel (*Elohim*) and the Canaanite god *El* is to a great extent centred upon the religion of the Patriarchs.⁷⁸⁰ The religious traditions in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis distinguish two types of references to the deity. "God of the fathers" linked the god to an ancestor, where the ancestor – in some instances – is unnamed,⁷⁸¹ while in other texts the name of the ancestor is given.⁷⁸² The second type of reference gives the full formula, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob".⁷⁸³ These formulas indicate that the deity was worshipped by the family or clan of the person whose name was used to identify the god. In a reconstruction widely accepted by scholars, the deity established a relationship with the ancestor and, through him, with the clan.⁷⁸⁴

Biblical *Elohim* portrays many features that could possibly have been derived from Canaanite *El*.⁷⁸⁵ Likewise, biblical *Yahweh* shares qualities and epithets with Canaanite *El*, such as creator and father,⁷⁸⁶ old age and wisdom,⁷⁸⁷ patience and mercy,⁷⁸⁸ eternal kingship.⁷⁸⁹

Excursus 1: Israelite religion and syncretism

*Dever*⁷⁹⁰ denotes that religion could be defined as a 'verbal and non-verbal structure of interaction with superhuman being(s)', and *Deist*⁷⁹¹ describes syncretism as 'the reconciliation and subsequent conflation of (parts of) two (or more) distinct religious systems on the basis of elements common to

⁷⁷⁷ Bartlett 1989:196, 211.

⁷⁷⁸ Tawilan – north of Petra – has been identified with a seventh to sixth century BC unfortified agricultural Edomite village (Negev & Gibson 2001:494).

⁷⁷⁹ Petra – the famous capital of the Nabateans – is situated in a valley of the mountains of West-Edom (Cohen 1962c:772).

⁷⁸⁰ L'Heureux 1979:49.

⁷⁸¹ Genesis 31:5 אלהי, 29 אלהי, 42 אלהי; 43:23 אלהי; 46:3 אלהי; 49:25 אל; 50:17 אלהי; Exodus 15:2 אלהי; 18:4 אלהי.

⁷⁸² Genesis 26:24 אלהי אברהם; 28:13 אלהי יצחק ... אלהי אברהם; 31:53 אלהי נהור ... אלהי אברהם.

⁷⁸³ Exodus 3:6 יעקב אלהי יצחק אלהי אברהם אלהי אביך אלהי אלהי אברהם; see also Exodus 3:15, 16; 4:5.

⁷⁸⁴ L'Heureux 1979:49, 51-52.

⁷⁸⁵ See § 3.8.2 for attributes ascribed to *Elohim* in the Masoretic Text.

⁷⁸⁶ 'Bull *El* his father, king *El* who created him' (CTA 3.5.43; 4.1.5; 4.4.47) and 'Is not he your father, who created you' (Dt 32:6) (L'Heureux 1979:49).

⁷⁸⁷ *El*: CTA 3.5.38; 4.4.41; 4.5.66; 10.3.6 and biblical Daniel 7:9 (L'Heureux 1979:49).

⁷⁸⁸ A standard epithet of *El*: "the kind one, the god of mercy" and biblical '... the Lord, a god merciful and gracious, slow to anger' (Ex 34:6) (L'Heureux 1979:49).

⁷⁸⁹ The title "Eternal King", assigned to *El*, is equivalent to the Hebrew title (מלך עולם) applied to biblical *Yahweh* in Psalm 10:16 and Jeremiah 10:10 (L'Heureux 1979:49-50). See § 3.8.1 for attributes ascribed to *Yahweh* in the Masoretic Text.

⁷⁹⁰ Dever 2005:2.

⁷⁹¹ Deist 1990:250.

them both (or all).' Dever,⁷⁹² furthermore, mentions that the modern concept of ancient Israelite religion sketches an idealistic, romantic portrait, which, however, obscures the reality of that religion. He distinguishes at least two religions, namely "folk" religion and "official" or "state" religion. Although the latter presupposes 'that the state had the power to enforce religious conformity',⁷⁹³ it is doubtful whether that happened. Various expressions of beliefs and practices in Israel were tolerated under the rubric of "Yahwism". Israelite religion is an example of a cultural phenomenon. Miller⁷⁹⁴ indicates that 'any effort to describe the religion of ancient Israel' has to conclude that 'there was not a single understanding or expression of what the religion was'.

According to Boshoff,⁷⁹⁵ a responsible interpreter of the biblical text should take into account all aspects that influenced the forming of the text. The background of believers constitutes the historical, geographical, sociological, cultural and religious environment. History of religion entails an 'historical investigation of developments, changes and dynamics within or among religions'.⁷⁹⁶ Two distinct religio-historical approaches to the Hebrew Bible, at the beginning of the twentieth century, can be recognised, namely the predominantly German religionsgeschichtliche Schule⁷⁹⁷ and the Myth and Ritual School.⁷⁹⁸ There is currently a significant growth in publications regarding Israel's religious history. Scholars suggest a variety of approaches to the religio-historical problems in the Hebrew Bible, all of which are 'to a great extent dependent upon the results of other disciplines'.⁷⁹⁹ The biblical texts are, however, a primary source for the history of the Israelite religion. Albertz⁸⁰⁰ indicates that the development of the history of the Israelite religion as a discipline is complex and often described in a variety of perspectives. It should not be defined as merely a history of ideas or of the spiritual, but should be 'presented as a process which embraces all aspects of the historical development'.⁸⁰¹ The period before the formation of the state is, particularly, "burdened with uncertainties". Consistent with the information in the Hebrew Bible, the Israelite religion has a beginning in history; however, such a claim remains a problem. According to the Pentateuch, 'there was a prelude to the religion of Israel in the religion of the patriarchs'.⁸⁰²

Cross⁸⁰³ is of the opinion that scholars should not only trace the origin and development of Israel's religion, but also its emergence from a Canaanite past, its furtherance from this past, its new emergence and 'subsequent changes and evolution'. Israelite religion evolved from Ancient Near Eastern religions, particularly from the religious culture of Canaan. Due to archaeological research, the history of Israel has become part of that of the Ancient Near Eastern world. It is, therefore, now possible to describe the religion of Israel from an Ancient Near Eastern point of view, notably West Semitic mythology and cult. It should also be kept in mind that 'Israel as a nation was born in an era of extraordinary chaos and social turmoil'.⁸⁰⁴

⁷⁹² Dever 2005:4-5, 8.

⁷⁹³ Dever 2005:5.

⁷⁹⁴ Miller 2000b:46.

⁷⁹⁵ Boshoff 1994:121-123, 126, 129.

⁷⁹⁶ Boshoff 1994:122.

⁷⁹⁷ This school is associated with the name of Hermann Gunkel (Boshoff 1994:123).

⁷⁹⁸ The Myth and Ritual School is connected to the name of SH Hooke (Boshoff 1994:123). See also the reference in § 3.1 to the link between this school and the nineteenth century scholar Robertson Smith.

⁷⁹⁹ Boshoff 1994:129.

⁸⁰⁰ Albertz 1994:3, 11, 23-25.

⁸⁰¹ Albertz 1994:11.

⁸⁰² Albertz 1994:25.

⁸⁰³ Cross 2004:8.

⁸⁰⁴ Cross 2004:11.

Scholars generally agree that the main function of the Israelite cult was to actualise the tradition. Seasonal feasts celebrated the great redemptive acts of the past, and at the same time traditions were renewed. The Deuteronomist, Deutero-Isaiah, Ezekiel and the Complaint Psalms were probably concerned to reinterpret Israel's cult and thereby authenticate Israel's tradition.⁸⁰⁵ The cult dominated the existence of the Israelite people, being also the medium to express their spiritual and cultural life. The cultic process was influenced by various factors in the selection, developing, altering and preserving of traditions. Historical events were interpreted as the saving deeds of Yahweh, and therefore the very existence of the Hebrew Bible is indebted to the Israelite cult. Canaanite and other foreign influences constantly threatened the cult. In the expressing of the theophany of Yahweh, ancient Canaanite material was used, slightly altered.⁸⁰⁶ Lemche⁸⁰⁷ is of the opinion that Israelite religion can only be sought in the Hebrew Bible; the religion described there is quite different from that which was present in Palestine during the biblical period. Biblical scholars generally apply the term "Israelite religion" in a questionable way.

Internal pluralism can be observed in the Israelite religion, distinguishing, inter alia, domestic religion, city religion, royal religion; these are all 'aspects of an overarching religious system'.⁸⁰⁸ It is thus possible to differentiate between the religious practices carried out by families and those performed by the state. Families were concerned with devotion to a local god, as well as the cult of the ancestors – particularly veneration of the "God of the father". The Hebrew Bible applies this designation to Yahweh in his capacity as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Scholars increasingly re-search the position of goddesses in Israelite religion. Literary, as well as epigraphic data reveal that the goddesses Asherah and the Queen of Heaven enjoyed particular prominence in the Israelite cult – as discussed in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.4. The possibility to identify Asherah as consort of Yahweh 'calls for a reassessment of the interpretation of the many fertility figurines (most notably the so-called pillar figurines and the Astarte plaques)⁸⁰⁹ found in Israel'.⁸¹⁰ The potential of an official consort for Yahweh is a "spectacular and new" perspective.⁸¹¹

Scholars growingly interpret Israelite monotheism and aniconism as relatively late developments – possibly enforced only in the Second Temple Period. They furthermore tend to recognise early Israelites as Canaanites who developed a new identity; their devotion should thus be seen as a variant of the Canaanite cult.⁸¹² Biblical religion, therefore, should be considered essentially as a subset of Israelite religion, and the latter as a subset of Canaanite religion. At the beginning of the first millennium BC ancient Israel began to show distinctive religious traits that were clearly a progression from a Canaanite matrix. Extra-biblical evidence is, however, of paramount importance for a perception of this development.⁸¹³ The Israelites not only adopted the language of Canaan, but also appropriated much of the Canaanite cultic vocabulary – as established by epigraphic finds.⁸¹⁴

⁸⁰⁵ Childs 1962b:75, 77.

⁸⁰⁶ Kapelrud 1977:102-103, 113, 117, 124.

⁸⁰⁷ Lemche 1994:165.

⁸⁰⁸ Van der Toorn 1998:14.

⁸⁰⁹ For a discussion of the various figurines found in Israel, see § 2.13, subtitle "Female figurines".

⁸¹⁰ Van der Toorn 1998:18.

⁸¹¹ Van der Toorn 1998:13-18.

⁸¹² Van der Toorn 1998:24.

⁸¹³ Coogan 1987:115-116,120.

⁸¹⁴ Obermann 1949:318-319. Two examples of appropriated Canaanite cultic language are, firstly, "Rider-of-the-Clouds" (an epithet applied to *Ba'al* long before the time of the Israelites) and, secondly, "Creator of heaven

Zevit⁸¹⁵ mentions that, within its dynamic social system, Israelite religion was regarded as a complicated phenomenon 'characterized by a complexity not easily described'. Non-Yahwistic theophoric names convey loyalty to deities other than Yahweh, and at the same time displayed public knowledge of other deities. Most Israelites knew Yahweh as their patron deity, 'knew his consort Asherah, and knew other deities as well to whom they referred by (the) general idioms⁸¹⁶ – such as "sons of gods", "other gods". These "other deities" were probably worshipped through similar, but different, rites; the same god might even have been venerated at various places for disparate reasons. Evidence that more than one deity was worshipped is usually in the form of paired appurtenances, such as two steles for two deities at the temple of Arad.⁸¹⁷ According to Berlinerblau,⁸¹⁸ recent studies challenge the assumption that "popular religion", in the Israelite context, comprised of a unified, homogenous group which stood apart from a unified homogenous "official religion". In ancient Israel the official religion was largely that which is presented in the Hebrew Bible. There are many indications in the Masoretic Text of overt hostility by the authors towards the institutions of power and their religious affinities. In some instances the legitimacy of the Monarchy is called into question.⁸¹⁹ It could, however, be assumed that biblical Yahwism was at some point an "official religion". It thus seems that the religious social structure of ancient Israel consisted of two interrelated layers; official religion being the religion of the orthodoxy who wielded power against the "others", who comprised the popular religious groups – the latter being women, non-privileged economic classes and heterodoxies.⁸²⁰

As indicated earlier in paragraph 3.2.2, Miller⁸²¹ mentions that, although the Hebrew Bible condemns the veneration of any other deity alongside Yahweh, polemics in the Hebrew Bible and the extent of the reaction from the prophets and deuteronomists regarding the worship of other gods signify the existence of syncretism among the Israelites. According to Hadley,⁸²² Asherah, denoted as a goddess in her own right during the Monarchical Period, developed into an object during the Exile. She furthermore mentions that it is possible to trace the process by which this evolution took place. The goddess Astarte – who was presumably worshipped on a large scale in Palestine – was demoted and de-personalised to a fertility idiom in the Hebrew Bible by the Deuteronomist, and moved to total silence by the latest biblical writers.

Excursus 2: Israelite women and religion

As from the ninth century BC onwards, both Judeans and Northern Israelites venerated an array of figurines, popularly known as Astartes.⁸²³ Evidence from archaeological finds indicate that the Israelite cult made far more allowances in religious beliefs and practises than admitted by editors of the Masoretic Text. In conformity with a male-dominated culture, the Hebrew Bible does not enlighten us on the Israelite women's religious activities. Information acquired from ancient Mesopotamian texts discloses a certain homogeneity – despite historical developments and geographical diversity – between the Mesopotamian and Israelite cultures. Therefore, a comparison could be drawn between the

and earth", which was used by both Canaanite Melchizedek and Abraham (Gn 14:19, 22) and which appears in Phoenician inscriptions as an epithet of *El*.

⁸¹⁵ Zevit 2001:646.

⁸¹⁶ Zevit 2001:652.

⁸¹⁷ Zevit 2001:587, 608, 646, 652-653.

⁸¹⁸ Berlinerblau 1996:21, 31, 33, 44.

⁸¹⁹ Examples are 2 Samuel 12; 1 Kings 3:2-3; 11:5-13; 15:5.

⁸²⁰ Berlinerblau 1996:44.

⁸²¹ Miller 1986:239.

⁸²² Hadley 1997:169, 171, 178.

⁸²³ Zevit 2001:268, 271.

*Mesopotamian and Israelite women, particularly also regarding their cultic practices. Religion dominated social life. Unfortunately, most available data on women were written from an "aristocratic context". The household of the average daily-labourer or slave obviously would have been different.*⁸²⁴

Popular belief – which differs from folk religion – 'is a multicolored collection of convictions',⁸²⁵ which originated from official religious doctrine, fantasy and folklore. Folk religion basically consisted of beliefs and intuitions, incorporated into religious experiences and teachings, as well as some cultic rituals. Official religion – practised by the upper class – enjoyed prestige, and folk religion, popularity. Although sorcery was punishable in both Israel and Mesopotamia, it was impossible to eradicate the phenomenon. Both witchcraft and sorcery were applied by women to take revenge for their social subordination. The art of divination⁸²⁶ was important within folk religion. In Mesopotamia this science flourished. Women, however, rarely practised it; a career as interpreter of signs could hardly be combined with motherhood. In Israel, knowledge of the future rested in the priests who made use of the Urim and Thummim.⁸²⁷ Regarding official religion, Israelite women were basically completely excluded from any means of communication with the divine world.⁸²⁸ Women and the underprivileged were, seemingly, never permitted to officiate at ceremonies or administer any rituals.⁸²⁹ In folk religion the situation was, however, different. The spirituality of a woman was at times powerful in the area of divination.⁸³⁰ Dreams provided insight into the counsel of the gods. Women often had significant dreams – mainly symbolic image dreams – which could perhaps be ascribed to them being more receptive. According to Mesopotamian sources, female prophets received their messages through direct divine inspiration. Mesopotamians often called these prophets "a mad person". In Israel there were fewer female prophets than in Mesopotamia.⁸³¹

Official Yahwism was characterised by a predominant male role 'in the establishment and maintenance of the cult of this deity'.⁸³² Berlinerblau⁸³³ assumes that the Hebrew Bible represents the views of an "official Yahwism" which scholars often associate with an economically dominant class. It is, however, difficult to take it for granted that Yahwism – as portrayed – in reality functioned as the "official religion" of ancient Israel. Women who are generally categorised under the heading of "popular religion", never constituted a homogenous group. Although they might have shared common experiences, they differed sociologically; some might have been economically disadvantaged and politically powerless, while others were wives and mothers of prominent members of the "official religion". There is, however, the possibility that the actions of clusters of Israelite women – such as residents of a small village, or devotees of a particular deity – were motivated by the realisation that they were grouped as the non-privileged.

⁸²⁴ Van der Toorn 1994:13-17.

⁸²⁵ Van der Toorn 1994:112.

⁸²⁶ Divination: see footnote in § 2.4.

⁸²⁷ See Urim and Thummim incorporated in a footnote in § 3.6.

⁸²⁸ Van der Toorn 1994:112-113,116,121-122.

⁸²⁹ Berlinerblau 1996:34-35.

⁸³⁰ A well-known example of female necromancy is found in 1 Samuel 28, when the Israelite king Saul visited the female diviner from Endor.

⁸³¹ Van der Toorn 1994:122, 126, 128-129, 131.

⁸³² Berlinerblau 1996:34.

⁸³³ Berlinerblau 1996:167-169.

Meyers⁸³⁴ mentions that the Hebrew Bible is mainly the result of an unrepresentative, small segment of the Israelite population. Priestly activity and editors played a significant role in the compilation of the text. Consequently, 'the few fragments of information about women come from sources removed both hierarchically and demographically from the lives of most women'.⁸³⁵ As women were never included in the priesthood, they were never part of the ruling elite. This exclusion – to a great extent – of women as individuals or as groups from the Hebrew Bible could signify that the information it does contain may be distorted or a misrepresentation of the lives of women removed from urban centres. Berlinerblau⁸³⁶ speculates that women might have practised forms of cult different – in some ways – from the male-centred "official Yahwism".

Carol Christ⁸³⁷ discusses the political and psychological significance of a goddess symbol among women and the effect of male symbolism of God on women. Religions focused on the worship of a male God create motivations 'that keep women in a state of psychological dependence on men and male authority'.⁸³⁸ For women, the goddess is a divine female that could be invoked in prayer and ritual; she is the symbol of life and death; she represents the legitimacy and beauty of female power; she reflects the sacred power within women and nature – linking birth and death cycles. In a goddess-centred ritual of magic and spell-casting, she personifies power and energy. Through the juxtaposition of Eve and Mary, patriarchal religion enforces the view that female initiative and will are evil. Although Carol Christ concentrates on the idea of a "goddess symbol" for the modern woman, her reasoning could very well have been applicable in the lives of the ancient Israelite women, particularly considering the numerous female figurines that have been excavated in Israelite – and specifically Judean – context.

Zevit⁸³⁹ denotes that from the ninth century BC onwards the Israelites venerated at least one goddess represented by an assortment of pillar figurines. These figurines, as well as plaques representing animate beings, are of the most significant sources of information regarding the Israelite religion. They were probably employed for prayer and ritual, and as a group, perceived as objects associated with fertility. Being so popular, they most likely were implemented in the practice of private, individual cults. Daviau⁸⁴⁰ mentions that particular artefacts⁸⁴¹ provide confirmation of Iron Age religious activities. Unfortunately, artefacts concerning "domestic cult" are not well known. Those finds that do appear in a domestic setting are 'evidence of religious activities practised by family members in the home'.⁸⁴² The pattern of official and domestic cult practices was not unique for Iron Age Israel and Judah and could be compared with similar practices which were widespread in the Ancient Near East. According to texts from the Hebrew Bible, as well as from Mesopotamian and Ugaritic literature, cultic activities were assigned to the roof or an inner room.⁸⁴³

⁸³⁴ Meyers 1988:11-13.

⁸³⁵ Meyers 1988:12.

⁸³⁶ Berlinerblau 1996:34.

⁸³⁷ Christ 1979:274-275, 278, 282-283.

⁸³⁸ Christ 1979:275.

⁸³⁹ Zevit 2001:267, 271-273.

⁸⁴⁰ Daviau 2001:199-201.

⁸⁴¹ Artefacts, such as ceramic figurines, fenestrated stands, chalices, rattles and four-horned altars excavated at a temple or small shrine site (Daviau 2001:199).

⁸⁴² Daviau 2001:199.

⁸⁴³ According to Jeremiah 19:13 'all the houses on whose roofs offerings have been offered to all the host of heaven', and Jeremiah 32:29 'the houses on whose roofs offerings have been made to Baal and drink offerings have been poured out to other gods'.

As discussed in paragraph 3.2, it is clear that Asherah – albeit the goddess herself, or her cult symbol – was venerated by the majority of Israelites. If Christ's reasoning is valid, concerning the need of women for a goddess symbol, Asherah would have been particularly favoured by Israelite women. This scenario is attested in 2 Kings 23:7, referring to 'the women (who) wove hangings for Asherah'. Similarly, it seems that the Israelite and Judean queen mothers had the official responsibility to dedicate themselves to the cult of Asherah.⁸⁴⁴ As indicated in paragraph 3.2.3, 'the prohibition and polemics against Asherah and her cult symbol attest to their popularity in the cult of Yahweh in Iron Age Israel'.⁸⁴⁵ The adoration in Judah of the Queen of Heaven – generally identified as Canaanite Astarte – confirms her veneration by Judean women, who burned incense to her, poured out libations to her and prepared cakes for her.⁸⁴⁶ Jeremiah attributes the catastrophe of the Exile to the veneration of the Queen of Heaven, while the women in turn blame the disaster to their lack of offerings to the Queen of Heaven.⁸⁴⁷ The cakes prepared for the goddess – and thus for her cult – was particularly associated with women, and therefore probably involved the whole family. In the light of the loyalty of the women to the cult of the Queen of Heaven, Schmitz⁸⁴⁸ questions 'the marginal status of women in the Yahwistic cultus affirmed in the Law and Prophets of the Hebrew Bible'.

Phyllis Bird⁸⁴⁹ indicates that Wellhausen,⁸⁵⁰ in his analysis of the Israelite religion, emphasised the masculine, martial and aristocratic nature of the Israelite religious assemblies, where only males had rights and duties of membership. Other scholars argued that, as an original ancestral cult of the dead could be sustained only by a male heir, it automatically excluded women from the cultic service. Some scholars maintained that women were disinterested in the cult of Yahweh, but attracted to foreign cults or pre-Yahwistic beliefs. Bird⁸⁵¹ argues that underlying these assumptions were the marginal or subordinate status of women in the Israelite cultus. Early nomadic Israel was kinship-structured with a basic patrilineal and patriarchal family. She suggests that biblical historians should determine – as accurately as possible – the actual roles and activities of women in the Israelite religion. Unfortunately, relevant information is – to a great extent – unavailable and unrecoverable. Seemingly, women were confined to maintenance and support roles in the cultic service; activities identified with women are, for example, singers, dancers and attendants in the sanctuary. It is hardly possible to determine the extent of participation as worshippers. Predominantly female forms of ritual and worship referred to in the Hebrew Bible are the offerings to the Queen of Heaven⁸⁵² and the weeping for Tammuz.⁸⁵³

With reference to Bird's analysis, Miller⁸⁵⁴ mentions that, while cultic leadership – at all times – appeared to be under male control, women were not completely excluded from cultic service or sacred space. Admittedly, males occupied positions of authority and performed tasks requiring technical

⁸⁴⁴ This dedication is attested in 1 Kings 15:13 when the Judean king Asa removed the queen mother – his mother Maacah – as 'she had made an abominable image for Asherah'.

⁸⁴⁵ Olyan 1988:74.

⁸⁴⁶ See Jeremiah 7:17-18; 44:15-24.

⁸⁴⁷ See also § 3.4.

⁸⁴⁸ Schmitz 1992:587.

⁸⁴⁹ Bird 1987:397.

⁸⁵⁰ Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) was a German scholar who, together with Karl Graf, proposed the classic pentateuchal Source Hypothesis (West 1981:64). See also § 8.2.

⁸⁵¹ Bird 1987:397-399, 406, 408-409.

⁸⁵² Jeremiah 7:17-18; 44:19.

⁸⁵³ Ezekiel 8:14. *Tammuz* was a deity of Mesopotamian origin who, according to Ezekiel, was introduced into the Jerusalem Temple. Women wailed over the death of this god (Alster 1999:828).

⁸⁵⁴ Miller 2000b:202.

*skills and training, particularly concerning the restriction of priestly functions to males. However, apart from maintenance roles, women probably had additional responsibilities, such as weaving and sewing of vestments, hangings and other materials for cultic use, as well as the preparation of cultic meals for rituals, and cleaning duties.*⁸⁵⁵ *Dijkstra*⁸⁵⁶ *denotes that the Hebrew Bible mostly portrays "women and worship" negatively. The 'religious life with its daily rites in domestic and local places of worship was much more embedded in the social life of ordinary people, women included, than later tradition would indicate'.*⁸⁵⁷ *As the biblical authors were proponents of a monotheistic movement, an already patriarchal culture and religion were portrayed even more dominantly male. The participation of women in the official religion was downplayed and therefore complicates the assessment of women's involvement in the religion and cultus of ancient Israel.*

3.8 Divine attributes in the Masoretic Text

As indicated in discussions in previous paragraphs,⁸⁵⁸ it is, to a large extent, hardly possible to distinguish the various Ancient Near Eastern deities from one another. The occurrence of shifted boundaries and migrating peoples had the implication that deities, originally designated to a certain nation or a specific territory, appeared in various pantheons, albeit with different, but often similar – or even the same – names. Consistent therewith, more than one attribute seems to have merged in particular deities. It is therefore – in many cases – not possible to categorise each deity with a specific characteristic. The extent of contact between the different groups – which later integrated to become the Israelite nation – and the various neighbouring peoples, had the result that all the attributes of the numerous Ancient Near Eastern deities were later conferred upon the Hebrew God.

Lang⁸⁵⁹ indicates that 'the Hebrew God ranks as the most distinguished deity on record in human history' ... and that 'no other deity can boast a biography comparable to that of the Hebrew God'. In his book,⁸⁶⁰ *The Hebrew God: portrait of an ancient deity*, Lang⁸⁶¹ indicates that he endeavoured to present a 'comprehensive and convincing account of the Hebrew God, ... that sums up and completes previous research'. He appropriates research done by Georges Dumézil⁸⁶² to classify the portrayals of *Yahweh* in the Hebrew Bible. Dumézil developed the "trifunctional theory", according to which a 'tripartite system underlies both the divine world and human society'.⁸⁶³ According to Dumézil, deities may be categorised in "sovereignty and

⁸⁵⁵ For a discussion of the inclusion of women in cultic activities, see Miller (2000b:201-207).

⁸⁵⁶ Dijkstra 2001c:164-165, 188.

⁸⁵⁷ Dijkstra 2001c:165.

⁸⁵⁸ In this regard, § 3.2.1, § 3.3, § 3.4, § 3.5 and § 3.6 in particular, are relevant.

⁸⁵⁹ Lang 2002:vii.

⁸⁶⁰ Lang 2002: see bibliography in this thesis for details.

⁸⁶¹ Lang 2002:vii-viii.

⁸⁶² A scholar renowned in the history of religions.

⁸⁶³ Lang 2002:4.

the sacred", "physical power and the military", "fertility", thus corresponding to the three basic human social classes, namely 'wisdom, war, and wealth'.⁸⁶⁴ Lang's⁸⁶⁵ analysis is divided into five sections, "Lord of Wisdom", "Lord of War", "Lord of the Animals", "Lord of the Individual – the Personal God" and "Lord of the Harvest".

It is not the focus of this thesis to deliberate extensively on the various attributes of the Hebrew God and consequently these attributes are pointed out only summarily hereafter. As my study entails a research on the origin of *Yahweh* and Yahwism, which – according to my hypothesis – may have developed from earlier forms of a *Ya-* or even a type of *Yahweh*-veneration, it is necessary that I am knowledgeable about the attributes of the Ancient Near Eastern deities and the possible influence thereof to characterise the Hebrew God. Various features ascribed to the Israelite God could be associated with particular Ancient Near Eastern deities.

As discussed later in Chapter 5, two main hypotheses on the origin of Yahwism have been developed by scholars during the past number of decades. One of these theories debates the adoption of the *El*-figure by *Yahweh*. I have therefore, in the following two paragraphs,⁸⁶⁶ summarised attributes that were conferred mainly on either *Yahweh* or on *El/Elohim*. In previous paragraphs in this chapter – as mentioned earlier in a footnote – the main characteristics of deities have been discussed to a certain extent. I have also indicated to what degree these attributes were associated with *Yahweh*. Numerous text references from the Hebrew Bible have been incorporated in the aforementioned discussions. In the following summaries only a number of text references are included. I have also taken note of Lang's research in this regard.⁸⁶⁷

The different words, or terms, applied in the Hebrew literature that lead to the identification of a particular characteristic of the Deity, are denoted separately, but grouped together. The occurrence of particular attributes, connected with either *Yahweh* or *El/Elohim*, is pointed out in paragraph 3.8.3, thereby indicating specific characteristics associated with the Deity.

For practical purposes, abbreviated forms of the various books in the Hebrew Bible are applied in the following two paragraphs; see paragraph 1.6 for the relevant abbreviations.

⁸⁶⁴ Lang 2002:4-5.

⁸⁶⁵ Lang 2002:v-vi.

⁸⁶⁶ § 3.8.1 and § 3.8.2.

⁸⁶⁷ Lang's research, as presented in his book *The Hebrew God: portrait of an ancient deity*.

3.8.1 Summary of attributes ascribed to *Yahweh*

Storm God: relevant terminology

Storm clouds; cloud(s) [chariots indicated under Warrior God]: Ex 13:21-22; 14:19-20, 24; 16:10; 19:9, 16; 24:15-16, 18; 33:9-10; 34:5; 40:34-35, 38; Lv 16:2; Nm 9:16-22; 10:34; 11:25; 12:5; 14:14; Dt 5:22; 31:15; 1 Ki 8:10-11; 2 Chr 5:13-14; Neh 9:12; Ps 18:11-12; 97:2; 99:7; 104:3; 108:4; 135:7; 147:8; Is 4:5; 5:6; 19:1; Lm 2:1; Ezk 10:4; 30:3; Nah 1:3; Zch 10:1.

Wind; whirlwind; storm; tempest: 2 Ki 2:1; Job 38:1; 40:6; Ps 11:6; 18:10; 104:4; 107:25, 29; 135:7; 147:18; 148:8; Is 11:15; 28:2; 29:6; 30:30; Jr 11:16; 23:19; 30:23; Ezk 13:13; Am 1:14; Jnh 1:4, 13-14; Nah 1:3.

Thunder; lightning(s); hail; hailstones: Ex 9:18, 23-24, 28-29, 33; 19:16; Jos 10:11; 1 Sm 2:10; 7:10; 12:17-18; 2 Sm 22:14-15; Job 38:22, 25, 35; 40:9; Ps 18:12-13; 29:3; 93:4; 97:4; 104:7; 135:7; 144:6; 148:8; Is 28:2; 29:6; 30:30; Ezk 13:13.

Water(s); sea; waves; river; rain; flood; mist; snow: Ex 9:33; 1 Sm 12:17-18; Job 38:22,25; Ps 29:3,10; 33:7; 88:7; 89:9; 93:4; 104:13; 105:29; 107:25, 29, 33, 35; 147:8, 16, 18; 148:4, 8; Is 28:2; 40:12; Ez 13:13; Zch 10:1.

Earthquake; earth trembled; mountains smoke, melt: Ex 19:18; Jdg 5:4; 1 Ki 19:11; Ps 97:4-5; 99:1; 104:32; 144:5; Is 2:21; 13:13; 29:6; Jr 51:29; Jl 3:16; Hab 3:6.

Coal; fire; sulphur; smoke: Gn 19:24; Ex 9:24; 13:21-22; 4:24; 40:38; Nm 14:14; Dt 4:11; 5:22; 1 Chr 21:26; 2 Chr 7:1, 3; Neh 9:12, 19; Ps 11:6; 18:8, 12-13; 21:9; 29:7; 79:5; 89:46; 97:3; 104:4, 32; 148:8; Is 4:5; 29:6; 30:30; 66:15-16; Jr 11:16; Lm 4:11; Ezk 15:7; 30:8; 39:6; Zch 2:5.

Roar (like a lion): Hs 11:10; Jl 3:16.

Broke the sea monsters: Ps 89:10; 104:26; Is 27:1.

Wings: Ps 17:8; 91:4; 104:3.

Warrior God: relevant terminology

Shield; buckler (small round shield); sword; spear; javelin: Lv 26:25; Nm 22:23; Dt 32:41-42; Job 39:23; Ps 3:3; 17:13; 18:2, 30, 35; 28:7; 35:2, 3; 46:9; 59:11; 84:11; 89:18; 91:4; 115:9-11; 119:114; 144:2; Is 27:1; 34:5-6; 66:16; Jr 46:10; Ezk 6:3; 21:3-5; 30:25; Am 9:1.

Bow; arrows: Dt 32:42; 2 Sm 22:15; 2 Ki 13:17; Ps 21:12; 38:2; 46:9; 144:6; Zch 9:13-14.

Chariots; horses: 2 Ki 6:17; Ps 18:10; 68:4, 33; 104:3; Is 19:1; 66:15; Jr 4:13; Hab 3:8.

Trumpet; banner; horn: Ex 17:15; 19:16; 2 Sm 22:3; Ps 18:2; 47:5; 89:17; 112:9; Zch 9:14.

Stronghold; fortress; tower; rock; mountain; guard: Dt 32:4; 2 Sm 22:2-3; Ps 9:9; 12:7; 18:2, 31, 46; 19:14; 28:1; 31:2-3; 37:39; 71:3; 89:26; 91:2, 11; 92:15; 94:22; 95:1; 125:2; 142:5; 144:1-2.

Battle; wars; struck down / killed foes, nations; pestilence: Ex 15:3; 17:16; Lv 26:25; Nm 21:14; 1 Chr 21:14; Ps 24:8; 46:9; 89:23; 135:10; 136:15, 17-18, 24; 144:1; Hab 3:5.

Solar God: relevant terminology

Established heavenly lights (sun, moon, stars): Ps 89:37; 104:19; 118:27; 136:7, 8, 9; 147:4; Is 45:7; Jr 31:35; Am 5:8.

Lord God is a sun/moon: Ps 84:11; Is 24:23.

Sun, moon, stars praise the Lord: Ps 148:3.

Light; shine (face): Ex 13:21; 2 Sm 22:29; Job 38:24; Ps 4:6; 18:28; 27:1; 80:19; 89:15; 90:8; 104:2; 118:27; 119:105, 130, 135; Is 2:5; 60:1, 19-20; Da 2:22; Mi 7:8; Hab 3:4.

Sun stood still; sent darkness, shade; prevent sun/moon to strike you: Jos 10:12; Ps 105:28; 121:5-6; Is 45:7; Ezk 32:7.

Creator God: relevant terminology

Creator: 1 Chr 16:26; Neh 9:6; Ps 8; 89:11-12; 95:4-6; 96:5; 104:19-20; 119:90; 124:8; 134:3; 136:5-7; 146:6; 148:5; Is 40:28; 43:1, 15; 64:8.

Heavens made by a word: Ps 33:6; 147:4.

Shepherd: relevant terminology

Shepherd; rod/staff; flock; sheep: Ps 23:1, 4; 28:9; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3; 107:41; Jr 31:10; Ezk 34:12.

King: relevant terminology

The Lord, Most High; Mighty One: Ps 7:17; 9:2; 21:7; 47:2; 83:18; 91:9; 92:1; 132:2, 5.

King; throne; enthroned; sceptre: 2 Chr 18:18; Ps 10:16; 29:10; 47:2; 48:2; 84:3; 93:2; 95:3; 99:1; 102:12; 103:19; 110:2; 113:5; Is 6:1; 33:22; 43:15; 66:1; Zch 14:9.

Kingdom; rules; reigns; world belongs to: Ps 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1; 103:19; 145:11-13; 146:10.

Temple; Zion; musical instruments; sing: Ps 30; 33:2-3.

Lord of hosts: relevant terminology

Lord, God of hosts: Ps 59:5; 69:6; 80:4; 84:8; 89:8; Is 3:1, 15; 10:16, 23-24, 33; 19:4; 22:5, 12, 14-15; 28:22; Jr 2:19; 46:10; Am 9:5.

Lord of lords, Lord exalted above the gods: Ps 97:9; 136:3.

Lord of hosts: Ps 24:10; 46:7, 11; 84:1, 3, 12; Is 1:9, 24; 2:12; 5:7, 9, 16, 24; 6:3, 5; 8:13, 18; 10:26; 13:4, 13; 14:22-24, 27; 17:3; 18:7; 19:12, 16-18, 20, 25; 21:10; 22:14, 25; 23:9; 24:23; 25:6; 28:5, 29; 29:6; 31:4-5; 37:16, 32; 39:5; 44:6; 45:13; 47:4; 48:2; 51:15; 54:5; Jr 6:6, 9; 31:35; 50:34; Mi 4:4; Nah 2:13; 3:5; Hab 2:13; Zph 2:9-10; Hg 1:2, 5, 7, 9, 14; 2:4, 6-9, 11, 23; Zch 1:3-4, 6, 12, 14, 16, 17; Ml 1:4, 6, 8, 10-11, 13-14; 4:1, 3.

Judge: relevant terminology

Judge; wrath: Dt 32:41; 1 Sm 2:10; Ps 7:8; 9:4, 8, 16; 36:6; 78:21; 94:2; 96:10, 13; 97:6; 98:9; 105:5, 7; 110:6; Is 33:22; Jr 11:20.

Justice; righteousness: Ps 5:6; 7:17; 9:4, 8; 11:7; 31:1; 33:5; 35:24, 28; 36:6, 10; 88:12; 89:14, 16; 96:13; 97:2; 98:2, 9; 99:4; 103:6, 17; 112:3, 9; 116:5; 119:40, 62, 75, 106, 137, 138, 142, 144, 160, 164; 129:4; 143:1, 11; 145:7, 17.

Law; courts; divine council: Ps 78:5; 84:2; 89:7; 119:62, 75, 106, 160, 164; Is 33:22.

Redeemer: relevant terminology

Redeemer; heals; answers; salvation; listens; anoints with oil; foundation: Ps 19:14; 20:1; 23:5; 66:18; 68:26; 55:16; 98:2; 103:3; Is 44:24; 47:4; 63:16; Jr 50:34.

Father: relevant terminology

Father: Dt 32:6; 1 Chr 29:10; Ps 103:13; Pr 3:2; Is 63:16; 64:8; Ml 1:6.

3.8.2 Summary of attributes ascribed to *El/Elohim*

Storm God: relevant terminology

Storm clouds; cloud(s): Ex 14:19; Job 22:14; 26:8-9; 36:29; 37:11, 15; Ps 78:14.

Wind; whirlwind; storm; tempest; hurricane: Job 30:22; Ps 50:3; 78:26; 83:15.

Lightning; thunder: Ex 19:19; 20:18; Job 26:14; 28:26; 36:29-30, 32; 37:2, 3-5, 11, 15; 40:9; Ps 78:48; 81:7.

Water; sea; river; rain; flood; springs; rocks split open: Job 28:26; Ps 65:7, 9; 74:15; 78:13, 15, 20, 44; 114:8.

Fire; smoke: Ex 20:18; Ps 50:3; 78:63.

Broke the sea monsters: Ps 74:13-14.



Wings: Ps 36:7; 57:1; 63:7.

Warrior God: relevant terminology

Shield; sword; weapons of war: Ps 7:12-13; 47:9; 76:3.

Bow; arrows: Ps 7:12-13; 60:4; 64:7; 76:3.

Helmet; trumpet; banner: Ex 19:19; Ps 60:4, 7.

Chariots; horses: Dt 33:26; Ps 68:17.

Stronghold; fortress; tower; rock; mountain; guard: Ex 3:1; 2 Sm 23:3; Ps 42:9; 46:7, 11; 48:3; 59:16-17; 61:2-3; 62:2, 6-7; 78:35; 141:8.

Battle; wars; army; march; captives: 1 Chr 5:22; 12:22; 14:15; Neh 4:20; Ps 68:7, 18.

Solar God: relevant terminology

Established heavenly lights: Gn 1:3, 14; Ps 76:16.

Light; shine (face); tent for the sun: Job 29:3; Ps 19:4; 36:9; 43:3; 44:3; 50:2; 67:1; 80:3.

Creator God: relevant terminology

Creator; established mountains: Gn 1; 2:3; 27:28; Dt 4:32; Job 35:10; Ps 65:6; 68:15; 78:54.

Heavens made by a word: Ps 74:16.

Shepherd: relevant terminology

Shepherd; flock; sheep: Gn 48:15; Ps 68:10; 78:52; 80:1.

King: relevant terminology

King; throne; enthroned; sceptre; kingdom; rules; Zion: Ps 43:4; 44:4; 45:6; 47:6; 50:10-12; 59:13; 65:1; 68:24; 145:1.

God Most High: Ps 46:4; 50:14; 57:2; 73:11; 78:35; 107:11.

Judge: relevant terminology

Judge: Job 21:22; Ps 7:11; 50:4, 6; 58:11; 67:4; 75:7; 76:8-9; 82:1, 8.

Justice; righteousness: Dt 32:4; Ps 7:11; 48:10; 50:6; 58:11.

Divine council; law: Ps 37:31; 40:8; 82:1.

Redeemer: relevant terminology

Redeemer; salvation; fountain of life; protects; helper; trust; listen: Lv 26:12; Ps 20:1; 36:9; 50:23; 51:14; 54:1, 4; 56:11; 66:19; 78:35; 79:9; 85:4.



Father: relevant terminology

Father: Ps 68:5; Is 9:6; MI 2:10.

3.8.3 Inference from summaries of attributes; some other characteristics

Although not all the relevant texts in the Hebrew Bible have been appropriated for the summaries in the previous two paragraphs,⁸⁶⁸ the particular texts in these paragraphs give an acceptable indication of the main characteristics associated with either *Yahweh* or *Elohim*.

It is clear that the attributes of the major Ancient Near Eastern deities – storm god, warrior god and solar god – have all been conferred on *Yahweh*, and that he was thus perceived as Storm, Warrior and Solar God. In this regard there is a resemblance to the Assyrian warrior god *Aššur*,⁸⁶⁹ also identified as storm god and solar god. At the same time *Aššur* was considered a fertility god and creator who ordained man's fate.⁸⁷⁰ Both *Yahweh* and *Elohim* are portrayed in the Hebrew Bible as "Creator", as well as "Father"; these two epithets also appear as descriptions of the Canaanite *El* in the Ugaritic texts.⁸⁷¹ Day⁸⁷² mentions that the Ugaritic *Ba'al* cycle contains three main sections,⁸⁷³ of which all three have 'left echoes in the pages of the Old Testament [which] has appropriated storm theophany language from Baal'. Various North-West Semitic descriptions emphasise either *Ba'al*'s "storm theophany", or his role as warrior god. Biblical material downgrades deities – other than the Israelite God – reserving power over the storm and the designation "Divine Warrior" for *Yahweh*.⁸⁷⁴ Psalms 29, 89 and 93 are examples of the portrayal of *Yahweh* as Warrior and Storm Deity, and in Psalm 77:16-20 *Elohim* (God) is also depicted as such. Psalm 113 designates *Yahweh* as Solar God, while Psalm 104 characterises him as both Solar and Storm Deity.

Although the Canaanite deity *Anat*⁸⁷⁵ is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, her "savage fighting" – as described in the Ugaritic *Ba'al* cycle⁸⁷⁶ – has often been compared with several biblical passages.⁸⁷⁷ Smith⁸⁷⁸ has drawn a comparison between *Yahweh* and *Anat* in these

⁸⁶⁸ § 3.8.1 and § 3.8.2.

⁸⁶⁹ See § 3.5 for a discussion of *Aššur*.

⁸⁷⁰ Guirand 1996:57.

⁸⁷¹ Handy 1994:77-78.

⁸⁷² Day 2000:91.

⁸⁷³ In the Ugaritic *Ba'al* cycle (*KTU* 2 1.1-6) there are three main sections: the conflict between *Ba'al* and *Yam*; *Ba'al* who has become king builds a "house" (temple/palace) on Mount Zaphon; *Ba'al*'s conflict with *Mot*, the god of the Underworld (Day 2000:91). For more information, see discussion in § 3.5.

⁸⁷⁴ Smith 1990:49, 61.

⁸⁷⁵ See § 3.3 regarding *Anat*.

⁸⁷⁶ *CTA* 3.2.3-30; *KTU* 1.3 II.

⁸⁷⁷ See, for example, a footnote in § 3.3 where the "bloodbath" text of *Anat* is compared with Psalm 23.

⁸⁷⁸ See Smith (1990:61-64), for a discussion of two of these parallel passages.

passages. However, 'since Anat is not attested in the Bible excepting in a few personal names, the lack of contact between her cult and that of Yahweh forestalls any theory of direct dependence'.⁸⁷⁹ The common language may have been derived from a third source. As mentioned earlier, Lang⁸⁸⁰ indicates that the king was often represented as the human war leader of the deity. As the Deity of the State, *Yahweh* had the responsibility to secure royal victory in battle. During the royal enthronement a special weapon – the warrior deity's weapon – was handed over to the new king.⁸⁸¹ Divine warfare terminology was inherited by the Israelites from its neighbours. War legends 'are particularly characteristic of traditions relating to the exodus from Egypt and the conquest of the promised land'.⁸⁸² Apart from human battles, the Divine Warrior – notably *Yahweh*, also in his capacity as Storm God – wages a successful battle against beings which represent chaos. Celestial beings – who formed *Yahweh*'s entourage and fought his battles – signified the "hosts" in his title "Lord of Hosts". Biblical texts cite overwhelming references to *Yahweh* as "Lord of Hosts".

From the summarised epithets, both *Yahweh* and *Elohim* are indicated as Shepherd, King and Redeemer. Regarding the particular texts that have been evaluated, those concerning judgment, justice and righteousness refer to a greater extent to *Yahweh* than to *Elohim*. In the eyes of the Israelite scribes the Hebrew God was a "wise administrator and legislator".⁸⁸³ In his discussion of the Book of Joel, Crenshaw⁸⁸⁴ mentions that 'the struggle between those who emphasized divine compassion and others who stressed YHWH's justice has left its trail in the Bible, demonstrating both the tenacity of tradition and the versatility of its transmitters'. Traditional motifs based on ancient theophanies – "the day of *Yahweh* ", "the enemy from the north", "the sacred mountain" – are applied by the prophet. He furthermore attributes the control of rain, and therefore nature's yield, to *Yahweh*. 'This mastery of history and nature [thus] entitled YHWH to the claim of uniqueness'.⁸⁸⁵

Mythology and ritual acquired from a polytheistic worldview can be reconstructed provisionally from scattered biblical traditions and texts. Ancient Syrian mythology can be recognised in the tradition of a wise creator deity – at times called *Yahweh* – but whose original name seems to have been Ugaritic *El* or *Elohim*. Lang⁸⁸⁶ mentions that *Hokhmah* – patroness of the

⁸⁷⁹ Smith 1990:63.

⁸⁸⁰ Lang 2002:47, 49, 55, 57.

⁸⁸¹ Compare Psalm 110:2; *Yahweh* sends his mighty sceptre.

⁸⁸² Lang 2002:49.

⁸⁸³ Lang 2002:36.

⁸⁸⁴ Crenshaw 1995:193-194.

⁸⁸⁵ Crenshaw 1995:196.

⁸⁸⁶ Lang 2002:24-26.

scribes and administrators – is a figure also involved in the wisdom tradition. He points out that translations in the Hebrew Bible refer to her as "Wisdom" and that relevant evidence for the wise God and wisdom goddess is found in the Book of Proverbs.⁸⁸⁷ Day,⁸⁸⁸ however, discounts such a suggestion, indicating that 'there is not a scrap of evidence that any such goddess ever existed'. Smith,⁸⁸⁹ on the other hand, proposes that the Canaanite goddess *Asherah* may be a candidate for the female figure of Wisdom. Lang,⁸⁹⁰ furthermore, poses the question why the *Yahweh*-alone editors did not discard Proverbs 1-9 altogether in the redaction process. This text – as a so-called "school text"⁸⁹¹ – remained a widely known piece of literature for many centuries. It even reverberates in a number of early Jewish writings. Ben Sira⁸⁹² maintains that the voice of Wisdom is heard when the Law is read in the synagogue. Hadley⁸⁹³ denotes that, according to Proverbs 8:22-31, Lady Wisdom declares that 'The LORD [*Yahweh*] possessed me at the beginning of his work ...', and that she was therefore the first of all *Yahweh*'s creations. Some scholars suggest that Wisdom existed independently of *Yahweh*. In the Book of Proverbs particular reference is made to the "knowledge" and "wisdom" received from *Yahweh*.⁸⁹⁴ 'The fear of the Lord has a paradigmatic role in connection with wisdom.'⁸⁹⁵ The fear of a deity is also found in the Babylonian wisdom literature and in later Egyptian compositions.⁸⁹⁶

The Hebrew Bible occasionally applies a female metaphor to describe *Yahweh* or *Yahweh*'s actions.⁸⁹⁷ The attestation of female images is an indication that *Yahweh* 'both encompasses the characteristics and values expressed through gendered metaphors and transcends the categories of sexuality'.⁸⁹⁸ Attributing female roles and metaphors to "male" deities was not an unknown concept in the Ancient Near East, but did not imply a female status for the god.⁸⁹⁹

⁸⁸⁷ See particularly Proverbs, chapters 1-9.

⁸⁸⁸ Day 1995:69.

⁸⁸⁹ Smith 1990:94-95.

⁸⁹⁰ Lang 1999:903.

⁸⁹¹ Christians, from late antiquity up to the Middle Ages, never created their own curriculum for schools, but learned to read and write by utilising pagan literature, such as the poetry of Homer or Virgil. Proverbs 1-9 was similarly employed as a "school text" (Lang 1999:903).

⁸⁹² Ben Sira, or Yeshua ben Eleazar ben Sira, a professional scribe – thereby implying a wise man or sage – wrote during the early second century BC in Jerusalem his *Wisdom*; also known as *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, or *The Book of Sirach*. It is one of the earliest, and certainly the longest of the deuterocanonical or apocryphal books of the Old Testament. The book contains, inter alia, moral, cultic and ethical sayings, theological and philosophical reflections, and observations about life and customs (Di Lella 1992:931-932).

⁸⁹³ Hadley 1995:236.

⁸⁹⁴ See, for example, Proverbs 2:5-6.

⁸⁹⁵ Day 1995:66. See Proverbs 1:7.

⁸⁹⁶ Day 1995:67.

⁸⁹⁷ Compare, for example, Isaiah 42:14; 46:3; 49:15.

⁸⁹⁸ Smith 1990:99.

⁸⁹⁹ Examples are: *Athtar* is mother, 'tr'um; *Shamash* is my mother, ummi-šamaš; lord is mother, a-da-nu-um-mu (Smith 1990:99).

The same applied for a goddess. There is, to a certain degree, the lack of gender language for *Yahweh* in the Hebrew Bible, which could be attributed to the avoidance of anthropomorphic imagery for *Yahweh*. This tendency is found mainly in the priestly and deuteronomistic traditions. *Yahweh* was portrayed as a male God without a consort. Israelite society also perceived *Yahweh* 'as embodying traits or values expressed by various gendered metaphors and as transcending such particular renderings'.⁹⁰⁰

According to Stone,⁹⁰¹ archaeological research confirms that a goddess – "Mistress of Heaven", the "Creatress" – was venerated at the very beginnings of religion, and it therefore signifies that 'God was a woman'. Later biblical idol worshippers of the Ancient Near Eastern *Queen of Heaven* thus, likewise, venerated a 'woman God'. However, to speak of God, or address God, 'is among the most difficult and audacious things that humans do'.⁹⁰² The designation "He", found in positive attributes of God, does not actually disclose anything about God; masculine imagery and pronouns are merely linguistic devices. The exclusively male God language in reality reveals much about a particular society and religion. Jewish religion involves talking to God, and not about God, and therefore female God language especially is important.⁹⁰³ Pagels⁹⁰⁴ mentions that the absence of feminine symbolism of God in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is in contrast to other religious traditions. In the actual language of worship God is addressed in exclusively masculine terms. Patriarchal traditions of Israel – wherein social and cultural forces suppressed women's participation and feminine symbolism – were later adopted by Roman and Christian communities.

The concept of androgyny⁹⁰⁵ is unexpected in the Hebrew Bible, yet in Job 38⁹⁰⁶ *Yahweh* confronts Job with a rhetorical question:

'Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?
From whose womb did the ice come forth
and who has given birth to the frost of heaven?'

Although it cannot be attested that Job is a monotheistic composition, it is unlikely that this

⁹⁰⁰ Smith 1990:99-103.

⁹⁰¹ Stone 1979:120, 123-124.

⁹⁰² Gross 1979:169.

⁹⁰³ Gross 1979:170-172.

⁹⁰⁴ Pagels 1979:107, 117.

⁹⁰⁵ For a description, see "androgynous" and "hermaphrodite" incorporated in a footnote in § 3.2.1.

⁹⁰⁶ Job 38:28-29.

passage refers to two parents.⁹⁰⁷ Wyatt⁹⁰⁸ presumes that in Job it is the same deity *Yahweh* – identified with *El Shadday*, or *El*; the latter who appears in the bulk of the poem – who acts in both paternal and maternal roles in the formation of the natural world. The language is metaphorical and is in accordance with idioms in other Ancient Near Eastern religions. In the said passage the Deity is represented as androgynous. Implicit references to androgyny are found in Isaiah,⁹⁰⁹ and particularly in Genesis 1:27:

'So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him,
male and female he created them.'

Akkadian *ilānū* – the gods – is 'an exact parallel to the Hebrew *'ēlōhîm*',⁹¹⁰ attested in Late Bronze Age cuneiform documents.⁹¹¹ Preference for the usage of *ilānū* (plural) over *ilu* (singular) spread from the Mediterranean coastal plain, into the valleys, and finally to the Palestinian highlands. Consequently, the Late Bronze Age usage of *ilānū* ultimately resulted in Hebrew (biblical) *'ēlōhîm*. Singular *ilu* reflects a Canaanite usage and probably originated from Egyptian court language. A number of first millennium parallels to biblical *'ēlōhîm* have been attested in epigraphic material.⁹¹² The Akkadian *ilānū*, counterpart of *'ēlōhîm*, is probably 'the result of linguistic borrowing from the west, ultimately from the Canaanite group of Northwest Semitic languages'.⁹¹³ Biblical *'ēlōhîm* – in its distinct significance as a divine title – and both *'ēl* and *'ēlōah*, refer to a god in a general sense, gods of other peoples, or to a divine image. *'Ēlōhîm* is used in many of the same phrases as *'ēl* and *'ēlōah*.⁹¹⁴ *'Ēlōhîm* is essentially an abstract noun occurring in various construct expressions. The abstract character thereof gives it more flexibility than the terms *'ēl* and *'ēlōah*. *'Ēlōhîm* is a known designation for Israel's God.⁹¹⁵ In the book of Job the name *Yahweh* appears in chapters 1, 2, 38, 40 and 42, while there are numerous applications of the title *'ēl*, less of *'ēlōhîm* and a few

⁹⁰⁷ Wyatt 2005:248-249.

⁹⁰⁸ Wyatt 2005:249-250.

⁹⁰⁹ Isaiah 42:14; 49:15; 66:12-13.

⁹¹⁰ Burnett 2001:7-8.

⁹¹¹ Documents from Amarna, Qatna, Taanach and Ugarit. The use of *ilānū* in the Amarna Letters in Canaanite vassal correspondence, was recognised as a parallel to biblical *'ēlōhîm* (Burnett 2001:7-8).

⁹¹² For a discussion of some of these parallels, see Burnett (2001:24-53).

⁹¹³ Burnett 2001:53.

⁹¹⁴ Examples are: אלהי ישראל (Jos 22:24) and אל ישראל (Ps 68:36); אלהים חי (2 Ki 19:4) and אל חי (Jos 3:10); אלה אלהים לא (Dt 32:17), בלא אל (Dt 32:21) and ולא אלהים (Hs 8:6) (Burnett 2001:55-56).

⁹¹⁵ Burnett 2001:14-15, 25, 53-58, 60.

references to *Shadday* (שׁדַּי). A significant feature of the book is the appropriation of the designation *'ēlōah* which appears at least once in most chapters.⁹¹⁶

The Hebrew word *'ēlōah* is derived from *'ilāh-*, which could be a secondary form of the Semitic word *'il-*. *Elohim* – as the Jewish designation of God – represents an expansion of *Eloah*. As a theophoric element, and as an appellative, *Eloah* is absent from both Ugaritic and biblical personal names. It does, however, appear in Arabian and Aramaic names. While the name *Eloah* is relatively unimportant, *Elohim*, which is a prominent name in the Hebrew Bible, is also absent in proper names. In comparison with the plural form *Elohim*, the number of occurrences of *Eloah* in the Hebrew Bible is considerably lower. The appellative function of *Eloah* is apparent in several passages.⁹¹⁷ Pardee⁹¹⁸ is of the opinion that its role in Habakkuk 3:3 is debatable. He argues that in the context of Habakkuk 3 – 'Eloah has come from Teman, Qadosh [the Holy One] from Mount Paran' – the phrase is obviously monotheistic and refers to *Yahweh*. It is, however, not clear whether 'God / (the) Holy One' or 'a god / a holy one' is a parallelism, or whether the expression applies a common noun as an epithet of *Yahweh*, or employs a divine name equivalent to *Yahweh*.

In their concept of God the Israelites ascribed an anthropomorphic nature to God: he possesses hands, ears, eyes, fingers, feet, a mouth and other bodily parts; God is also capable of feelings resembling those of humans. 'An anthropomorphic vision of God underlies many of Israel's religious institutions.'⁹¹⁹ Some texts in the Hebrew Bible, however, 'stress the difference between God's divinity and man's humanity'.⁹²⁰ On account of his heavenly nature, God transcends humans; the concept of his invisibility is linked to his celestial being. As an adjective, *Elohim* occurs as a term for "the spirits of the dead". The apparition or spirit of Samuel is described as "*'ēlōhîm* coming up from the earth".⁹²¹ As there is no clear division between human and divine in the Ancient Near East, the word *'ēlōhîm* can be used in the sense of "divine" or "exceptional".⁹²²

⁹¹⁶ Examples of the designation אֱלֹהִים in the book of Job, are the following: Job 3:4, 23; 4:9; 5:17; 6:4, 8; 10:2; 11:7; 12:4, 6; 15:8; 16:20, 21; 19:6, 21, 26; 21:9, 18; 22:12, 26; 27:3, 8, 10; 28:23; 29:2, 4; 31:6; 33:12, 26; 35:10; 36:2; 37:15; 39:17; 40:2.

⁹¹⁷ In an appellative function אֱלֹהִים or אֱלֹהֵי appears in: Deuteronomy 32:15, 17; 2 Samuel 22:32; 2 Chronicles 32:15; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalms 18:32; 114:7; Isaiah 44:8; Daniel 11:37-39; Habakkuk 1:11 (Pardee 1999:287).

⁹¹⁸ Pardee 1999:287.

⁹¹⁹ Van der Toorn 1999b:361-362.

⁹²⁰ Van der Toorn 1999b:362. An example of such a text is, Numbers 23:19, 'God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.'

⁹²¹ 1 Samuel 28:13.

⁹²² Van der Toorn 1999b:361-364. For a discussion of deified ancestors, ancestral spirits and *Yahweh-El*, an ancestral God, see § 5.7.

In Northern Israel the term *'ēlōhîm* had a special significance in their national cultus. Jeroboam I⁹²³ made two golden calves – bull statues – which represented the Deity and which he set up in the sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel.⁹²⁴ In a worship credo, *'ēlōhîm* is associated with these bull statues: 'Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.'⁹²⁵ The concept of a plurality of gods – *'ēlōhîm* – is not foreign to the exodus tradition and traces thereof are found throughout this book. Furthermore, an apparent link between the ark and the exodus formula,⁹²⁶ merits consideration. In 1 Samuel 4:8 the Philistines – with reference to the ark – mention the gods, אלהים, who struck the Egyptians with various plagues.⁹²⁷ Burnett⁹²⁸ maintains that 'the *'ēlōhîm* cult-formula cited in Exod 32:4, 8; 1 Sam 4:8; and 1 Kgs 12:28 was a well established religious tradition of common-Israelite heritage, which had been featured in the central worship of premonarchic Israel'. This exclusive role of *'ēlōhîm* suggests that the term had a particular status as divine designation among the northern Israelites; a status which became authoritative in their national cultus. Plural *'ēlōhîm* originally denoted *Yahweh* and his divine entourage. With Jeroboam's appropriation of the "worship-formula" the prominence of *'ēlōhîm* as a title for Israel's God, was reinforced.⁹²⁹

Scholars noted apparent differences in the use of *Yahweh* or *Elohim* in the Psalter. Numerous appearances of the Tetragrammaton in the so-called Elohistic Psalter⁹³⁰ cannot be overlooked, although the virtually exclusive appearance of *Elohim* is found in these psalms – Psalms 42-83. An analysis of the three groups of psalms⁹³¹ in the Elohistic Psalter indicates a distribution of *Yahweh* among all three groups. Simplistic theories by scholars – such as, the redactional insertion of *Yahweh*; superficial editing by Elohistic redactors who overlooked instances of *Yahweh*; 'or the substitution of the generic term *Elohim* for the original proper name YHWH with occasional re-infiltration of the proper name⁹³² – should be avoided. The Elohistic inclination should also be separated from a fear to pronounce the Tetragrammaton –

⁹²³ Jeroboam I was the first king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel; 931/930- 910/909 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:196).

⁹²⁴ 1 Kings 12:28-30.

⁹²⁵ 1 Kings 12:28. This liturgical formula is associated with the bull [calf] image in the account of Aaron's rebellion in Sinai, when he declared : 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt' (Ex 32:4) (Burnett 2001:80).

⁹²⁶ See previous footnote regarding the liturgical formula associated with the bull image in Sinai.

⁹²⁷ Burnett 2001:79-80, 86, 92.

⁹²⁸ Burnett 2001:105.

⁹²⁹ Burnett 2001:105, 119.

⁹³⁰ The so-called Elohistic Psalms; Psalms 42-83.

⁹³¹ The three groups are: first collection of Korahite Psalms (Psalms 42-49); second Davidic Psalter (Psalms 51-72); Asaph Psalms (Psalms 50, 73-83) (Hossfeld & Zenger 2003:50). For a discussion of the appearance of *Elohim* and *Yahweh* in these groups, see Hossfeld & Zenger (2003:42-50).

⁹³² Hossfeld & Zenger 2003:50.

an observance which only began later.⁹³³ Hossfeld and Zenger⁹³⁴ are of the opinion that the 'purposefully-used name for God, YHWH, is not indicative of a secondary redaction, but an expression of theological thinking that typically reveals itself only as a theological tendency in these texts'.

Further characteristics of *Yahweh* and/or *Elohim* in the Hebrew Bible are, for example, eternity (Habakkuk 1:12); immortality (Psalm 90:2); omnipotence (Job 24:1); omnipresence (Psalm 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:23-24); omniscience (1 Chronicles 28:9; Isaiah 42:8-9); immutability (Malachi 3:6); holiness (Psalms 47:8; 99:3, 5); grace and mercy (Psalm 136); longsuffering (Exodus 34:6) and faithfulness (Psalm 36:5).

The appearance of the name *Yahweh*, *Yahweh Elohim*, or *Elohim*, in the Hebrew Bible depends on a particular tradition and, in some instances, possibly on the preference of the redactor. Despite the declaration in Exodus 6:3, '... but by my name the LORD [*Yahweh*] I did not make myself known to them' [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob], the name *Yahweh* or *Yahweh Elohim* appears close to two hundred times in Genesis.⁹³⁵ Smith⁹³⁶ mentions that, with regard to Genesis, the name *Yahweh* could have been substituted by another term for God, without affecting the substance of the particular passage. Different titles were used when God revealed himself to the patriarchs,⁹³⁷ yet, 'God has many titles, but only one name, LORD (YHWH)'.⁹³⁸ It is clear, from deliberations in this and some previous paragraphs,⁹³⁹ that *Yahweh* is an infinite-dimensional God, into whom all the attributes of the Ancient Near Eastern deities are integrated.

3.9 Influence of myths and legends on the Masoretic Text

The focus point of my research in this thesis is on the origin of *Yahweh* and Yahwism – the latter which eventually culminated in monotheism. Both *Yahweh* and the Yahwistic religion of the Israelites form an integral part of the Hebrew Bible, which includes legendary and mythical matter. It is conceivable that myths and legends of Israel's neighbours had an

⁹³³ Hossfeld & Zenger 2003:35-36, 42-51.

⁹³⁴ Hossfeld & Zenger 2003:50.

⁹³⁵ The name *Yahweh* does not appear in the narrative of Joseph from the time he had contact in the prison with the cupbearer and baker of the pharaoh (Gn 40:1-48:22) (Smith 1968:105).

⁹³⁶ Smith 1968:105.

⁹³⁷ Titles of God in the patriarchal narratives: "God Most High", אֵל עֲלִיּוֹן (Gn 14:18-20, 22); "God of heaven", אֵל שָׁמַיִם (Gn 24:3, 7); "Everlasting God", אֵל עוֹלָם (Gn 21:33); "God Almighty", אֵל שַׁדַּי (Gn 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3) (Smith 1968:107).

⁹³⁸ Smith 1968:107.

⁹³⁹ See § 3.5, § 3.6 and § 3.8.1.

influence on their perception of *Yahweh* and Yahwism, and particularly influenced related traditions. It is therefore necessary that I take note of relevant myths and legends that clearly had an effect on the Israelite traditions, and the compilation thereof in the Masoretic Text.

As mentioned in paragraph 3.1, a myth can be defined as a 'traditional narrative usually involving supernatural or imaginary persons and often embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomena'.⁹⁴⁰ Myths are attempts to explain everyday occurrences and "inexplicable" events. They also functioned 'to justify an existing social system and account for traditional rites and customs',⁹⁴¹ and thereby became a device to create history.⁹⁴² In Israel, myth served primarily 'to give a cosmic dimension and transcendent meaning to the historical',⁹⁴³ and seldom dissolved history that always stood in a strong tension with myth. Migratory patterns in the Ancient Near East resulted therein that neighbouring communities influenced one another in respect of literary creations which incorporated established myths. Similarly, legends,⁹⁴⁴ which are traditional stories recounting the wonderful deeds of some acclaimed – legendary – person, were adopted and modified. Many legends developed to account for anomalies in the biblical text. 'Mesopotamian legends familiar to the early Hebrews were recast and edited by later Israelites to illustrate sacred teachings.'⁹⁴⁵ Therefore, some biblical narratives could be clarified by comparing it with parallels from those nations with whom they were continuously in contact. Myths and religion were mostly associated, and therefore myths may be informative on religion. Myths – and legends – were furthermore records of matters pertaining to dynastic changes, social reforms, introduction of foreign cults, invasions and migrations.⁹⁴⁶

Many scholars agree that myths were not invented by Israel, but adopted from other nations and then adapted. Main mythic themes in the Hebrew Bible can be traced to ancient forms, particularly from Ugaritic and Mesopotamian traditions. As an historical source, the Hebrew Bible is to a large extent unreliable, written by people with "mythic minds", who operated in a world of symbols and narratives. Most elements in the Hebrew Bible which have been recognised as having mythic status, 'had antecedents and congeners in the wider near eastern world'.⁹⁴⁷ History, as told in the Hebrew Bible, is 'highly ideological in its intent',⁹⁴⁸ and

⁹⁴⁰ Kruger 2001a:47-48. See also § 3.1 for a discussion of "myth".

⁹⁴¹ Graves 1996:v.

⁹⁴² Kunin 1995:41.

⁹⁴³ Cross 1973:90.

⁹⁴⁴ See also footnote in § 1.5.

⁹⁴⁵ Silver 1974:9, 311.

⁹⁴⁶ Graves 1996:vii.

⁹⁴⁷ Wyatt 2005:170.

⁹⁴⁸ Wyatt 2005:173.

should therefore be classified as myth; history and myth not being opposing terms⁹⁴⁹ – myth being one of the main vehicles by which biblical writers did their theologising.⁹⁵⁰ A French scholar, Lévi-Strauss⁹⁵¹ – who compared myth with language and music – was concerned with the logic of myth, and wrote that 'myth grows spiral-wise until the intellectual impulse which has produced it is exhausted'.⁹⁵² He indicates that myth presents an intricate mass of data, and that the interpreter should get to the deep structure of the myth, for which he shall need a sensitivity to assess the complexities thereof.⁹⁵³ The meaning of a story is discovered only when it is in relationship 'with alternate forms and presentations of the myth'.⁹⁵⁴ Gaster⁹⁵⁵ denotes that myths and chronicles in the Hebrew Bible 'are paradigms of the continuing human situation we are involved in, ... [and] myth, as an extension of existential experience, is thus the natural language of Religion'.

Although it is the tendency to assume that all beliefs originated in Mesopotamia, and from there moved to the West, many assyriologists indicate that, instead of Mesopotamian influences on the mythological and religious concepts of Mediterranean peoples, the coastal regions affected ideas in Mesopotamia.⁹⁵⁶ The discovery of epigraphic material attests the textual transmission of mythological matter, as early as the fourteenth century BC, throughout the fertile crescent.⁹⁵⁷

Some myths and legends of the Ancient Near East, and their biblical counterparts, are discussed briefly hereafter.

Wyatt⁹⁵⁸ refers to the *Chaoskampf*⁹⁵⁹ tradition wherein the deity battles with a sea monster, gains a kingdom in victory, and becomes a hero. This myth cuts through Hebrew literary traditions and forms the paradigm of creation, Genesis 1; redemption from Egypt, Exodus 15; redemption to come, Isaiah 27:1. Psalm 89 relates *Yahweh's* victory in the primeval battle

⁹⁴⁹ Wyatt 2005:155, 167, 170, 173.

⁹⁵⁰ Batto 1992:1.

⁹⁵¹ See also reference to Lévi-Strauss in § 3.1.

⁹⁵² Williams, R B 1977:280.

⁹⁵³ Williams, R B 1977:279-281.

⁹⁵⁴ Williams, R B 1977:285.

⁹⁵⁵ Gaster 1969:xxxiv, xxxvi.

⁹⁵⁶ Sjöberg 1984:218.

⁹⁵⁷ Mondy 1990:149.

⁹⁵⁸ Wyatt 2005:168.

⁹⁵⁹ The *Chaoskampf* tradition occurs primarily in the Ugaritic *Ba'al* cycle of myths (*KTU* 1.1-6) (Wyatt 2005:168). See also *CTA* 3.2.3-30, *KTU* 1.3 II and § 3.5 for *Ba'al's* battle with *Yam* and *Mot*. Apart from the deities *Yam* and *Mot*, there are passing references in the Ugaritic texts to a number of chaos demons defeated by *Ba'al* (Mondy 1990:171).

granting the king security to rule.⁹⁶⁰ Divine kingship is thus attained through the cosmic struggle and the subsequent establishing of the world order.⁹⁶¹

The *Enuma Elish*⁹⁶² or *Epic of Creation*, is an Akkadian text that recounts the cosmic conflict between the mother goddess *Tiamat*⁹⁶³ – personifying the primeval ocean – and the young *Marduk*.⁹⁶⁴ The victorious *Marduk* – who is acknowledged as supreme deity – creates the universe and humankind. He split *Tiamat's* corpse and created two spheres of water – reminiscent of the divided waters in Genesis 1:6-8. Although the battle with *Tiamat* – the dragon ocean – is East Semitic in the *Enuma Elish* version, the myth is actually of West Semitic origin.⁹⁶⁵ The *Ba'al* cycle myth⁹⁶⁶ recounts *Ba'al's* struggle for supremacy in the West Semitic pantheon and cosmic domination.⁹⁶⁷ This cosmic struggle is compared with *Yahweh's* battle with the sea monsters.⁹⁶⁸

A number of fragmentary versions of the *Eridu Genesis*⁹⁶⁹ – a Sumerian creation myth, dated ca 1600 BC – contain several parallels with the first chapters of biblical Genesis. Both accounts of the creation of humankind are structured in a similar way. This Sumerian myth includes a description of the founding of the first cities, the institution of kingship, and a great flood.⁹⁷⁰ There are striking similarities between this version and the biblical creation narrative – particularly as told in the P-source.⁹⁷¹ Apart from the comparability of structure of the

⁹⁶⁰ Wyatt 2005:168-169.

⁹⁶¹ Mondl 1990:177.

⁹⁶² See footnote in § 3.1. The text consists of seven tablets, probably composed during the eleventh century BC (*ANET* 60-72, 501-503) (Arnold & Beyer 2002:31-50). Some scholars maintain that, due to the composition being dated the twelfth to eleventh century BC, the possibility that the creation narratives in the Hebrew Bible borrowed concepts from this epic, should be excluded (Sjöberg 1984:218).

⁹⁶³ See footnote in § 2.14.6.

⁹⁶⁴ See footnotes in § 2.14.6 and § 3.1.

⁹⁶⁵ Arnold & Beyer 2002:31-32.

⁹⁶⁶ See earlier footnote in this paragraph. Six tablets excavated at Ugarit contain a conflict myth – the *Ba'al* cycle myth. The tablets are dated the first half of the fourteenth century BC. Ilmilku is indicated as the scribe responsible for the preserving of the myth (Arnold & Beyer 2002:50-62).

⁹⁶⁷ Arnold & Beyer 2002:50.

⁹⁶⁸ *Rahab*: Job 9:13; 26:12; Psalm 89:10; Isaiah 51:9. A mythological sea serpent or dragon. Functions similarly to an originally Canaanite chaos monster, the Leviathan. In the Hebrew Bible *Rahab* appears as a sea monster defeated during creation, or as a metaphorical name for Egypt (Day 1992c:610). See also footnote in § 3.5.

Leviathan: Job 3:8; Psalm 74:14; Isaiah 27:1. A mythological sea serpent or dragon personifying the chaos waters. Mentioned in the Ugaritic texts, Hebrew Bible and Jewish literature. The name means "twisting one". The *Leviathan's* defeat is associated with *Yahweh* – particularly in a creation context (Day 1992b:295).

"Sea monster": Psalm 74:13.

⁹⁶⁹ A clay tablet from Nippur (see footnote in § 2.4) and a fragment from Ur (see footnote in § 3.6), are both inscribed with Sumerian text. A third fragment, translated into Akkadian, is dated ca 600 BC. Although the fragments of these texts represent different versions of the myth, they are, nonetheless, all renderings of the original story. A list of cities are also given. The god *Enki* (see also footnote in § 2.3) is portrayed as the saviour of mankind. Eridu was his first city (Jacobsen 1981:513-514, 519).

⁹⁷⁰ The hero of the Sumerian Flood Chronicle is named Ziusudra (Arnold & Beyer 2002:13-15).

⁹⁷¹ See § 8.2 for a brief discussion of the P-source.

two stories, they represent an analogous style of a peculiar and unusual character.⁹⁷² A parallel to *Elohim's* divine command on the six successive days of creation in Genesis 1 is found in the Memphis creation narrative.⁹⁷³

Von Rad⁹⁷⁴ indicates that the Priestly account of the creation⁹⁷⁵ is 'in essence not myth or saga, but Priestly doctrine ... [this] ancient, sacred knowledge, [was] preserved and handed on by many generations of priests, repeatedly pondered, taught, reformed and expanded most carefully and compactly by new reflections and experiences of faith'. Several irregularities in the textual material clearly indicate that the process of transmission was exposed to radical purification and extraction of all mythical and speculative elements.

Cassuto⁹⁷⁶ theorises that the Israelites had an epic tradition concerning the Garden of Eden narrative,⁹⁷⁷ which has a fixed literary form in one or more epic poems, as well as being supported in a number of biblical texts. Skinner⁹⁷⁸ regards this epic as 'one of the most charming idylls in literature ... marked by childlike simplicity of conception, exuberant though pure imagination, and a captivating freedom of style'. A mythological background appears everywhere, with symbols derived from ancient religious traditions. Some scholars believe that the Sumerian myth – *Enki*⁹⁷⁹ and *Ninhursag*⁹⁸⁰ – about the loss of paradise is a parallel to the loss of the Garden of Eden.⁹⁸¹ In the description of Eden a blend of mythic and historical elements is found. Based on a mythic garden-of-God theme, these mythic elements are sufficient to suggest a 'divine dwelling within the human, historical context'.⁹⁸² Mondl⁹⁸³ indicates that similarities have been noted between the complex of mythic themes associated with Canaanite *El* and biblical Eden. Parallel themes with ancient Mesopotamian and Ugaritic traditions are, inter alia, "Tree of Life", "serpent",⁹⁸⁴ "divine dwelling" – as described in a Canaanite and

⁹⁷² In both traditions chronology plays a role; precise figures for the length of reigns and life spans of persons are listed – extraordinarily large figures (Jacobsen 1981:527-528).

⁹⁷³ Arnold & Beyer 2002:63-65. *Ptah*, the god of crafts was worshipped at Memphis in Egypt. He fashioned gods and kings out of precious metals. He created by thinking and speaking out aloud the names of all the gods (Willis 1993:39).

⁹⁷⁴ Von Rad 1972:63-64.

⁹⁷⁵ Genesis 1:1-2:4a (Boshoff et al 2000:162).

⁹⁷⁶ Cassuto 1961:72-73.

⁹⁷⁷ Genesis 2:8-3:24.

⁹⁷⁸ Skinner 1930:51-52.

⁹⁷⁹ For information on *Enki*, see footnote in § 2.3, and an earlier footnote in this paragraph.

⁹⁸⁰ See footnote in § 2.4.

⁹⁸¹ The date of the composition is unknown, but there are copies dated the first half of the second millennium BC (Arnold & Beyer 2002:15-19).

⁹⁸² Wallace 1992a:282.

⁹⁸³ Mondl 1990:174.

⁹⁸⁴ See also discussion on "Eve" in § 3.3.

Mesopotamian myth – "council of the heavenly beings", "life-giving waters" (rivers), "abundant fertility", "trees of supernatural quality and great beauty".⁹⁸⁵

There are several indications that the literary unity of the Garden of Eden narrative is flawed. A particular problem is the confusion concerning the two trees on which the fate of man depends: the "Tree of Life" and the "Tree of Knowledge" of good and evil.⁹⁸⁶ The "Tree of Knowledge"⁹⁸⁷ in the middle of the garden is the focal point of the narrative. This motif discloses certain Mesopotamian links.⁹⁸⁸ The "Tree of Life" confers immortality on those who eat from it. Occasional descriptions of sacred trees with magical powers are found throughout Ancient Near Eastern literature. The origins of the concept of the "Tree of Life" are, however, obscure. Apart from the biblical texts, there is no explicit reference of such a particular tree in other ancient literature. Other references in the Masoretic Text to the "Tree of Life" are found only in Proverbs; in Proverbs 3:18 it is equated with wisdom.⁹⁸⁹ Hestrin⁹⁹⁰ indicates that from a very early period the sacred tree symbol formed part of the tradition in most of the Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Since the beginning of the second millennium BC the stylised sacred tree – highly artificial – was an accepted motif of Assyrian art. This design is also found on a variety of pottery vessels in Palestine.

Some of the mythical features in the Garden of Eden narrative have their counterparts in the Ancient Near East. The "Tree of Life" has an association with the world cosmic tree, and may represent immortality or wisdom. The "Tree of Knowledge" may have some connection with the attainment of human faculties. The serpent was believed to possess natural and supernatural qualities; it was also associated with wisdom. Entities which usually appear in ancient myths – gods, trees, serpents and humans – were all retained in the final text of Genesis 3. This narrative, with all its mythological symbols, may have been composed as a polemic against some of the religious and cultural beliefs held by the ancient Israelites.⁹⁹¹ Exact parallels of the biblical name Adam have been identified in Amorite and Ebla texts.⁹⁹² Scholars have concluded, furthermore, that a goddess lies behind Eve.⁹⁹³

⁹⁸⁵ Wallace 1992a:282-283.

⁹⁸⁶ Skinner 1930:52.

⁹⁸⁷ Genesis 2:17; 3:3-5.

⁹⁸⁸ Speiser 1964:20, 25-26.

⁹⁸⁹ Wallace 1992b:658.

⁹⁹⁰ Hestrin 1991:54. The life-giving tree was also depicted in Egypt. A wall painting from the burial chamber of Pharaoh Tutmosis III portrays the ruler being suckled by a breast protruding from a sycamore tree (Hestrin 1991:54).

⁹⁹¹ Kruger 2001a:51-52, 54-55, 69.

⁹⁹² Layton 1997:23.

⁹⁹³ Wyatt 1999c:316. See § 3.3 for a discussion of Eve.

Three different major Flood chronicles have survived: the Sumerian Flood story, the eleventh tablet of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, and the *Athra-H̄asis Epic*. Details of these narratives indicate clearly that they 'are intimately related to the biblical flood story, and, indeed, that the Babylonian and biblical accounts of the flood represent different retellings of an essentially identical flood tradition'.⁹⁹⁴

The well-known *Gilgamesh Epic*⁹⁹⁵ is probably the greatest Babylonian work of literature. The narrative describes the meeting of the legendary Gilgamesh – king of Uruk – and *Utnapishtim*, who relates how he received immortality when forewarned of a divine plan to flood the world. *Utnapishtim* has been called the "Babylonian Noah". The biblical Flood story and the Babylonian Flood Epic include many obvious similarities.⁹⁹⁶ Numerous parallels between this epic and the Garden of Eden narrative have also been identified.⁹⁹⁷ Themes, such as sexual awareness, wisdom and nature's paradise, are attested in various ancient sources. It is, however, noteworthy that all of these motifs appear in the *Gilgamesh Epic*.⁹⁹⁸ Samson, of the Book of Judges,⁹⁹⁹ has been compared with Gilgamesh.¹⁰⁰⁰

Certain books in the Hebrew Bible contain remarkable parallels with the wisdom of the Ancient Near East,¹⁰⁰¹ suggesting a dependence on the wisdom of those people. Regarding the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, there are at least six parallels between this literary work and biblical

⁹⁹⁴ Frymer-Kensky 1988:61-62.

⁹⁹⁵ The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is composed in Akkadian, and relates the adventures of Gilgamesh who ruled ca 2600 BC in Uruk. The narrative is recorded on twelve tablets. Various episodes of the epic may have circulated as early as 2100-2000 BC. At some stage the independent narratives were woven into a whole. Major Mesopotamian sites continue to yield copies and fragments of the epic. As no complete edition has survived from any single site, scholars have created a composite version. The different narratives share major characters and specific episodes, but obviously address different audiences. See Sasson (1992:1024-1027) for a discussion of this epic. Uruk (biblical Erech) was one of the prominent Sumerian cities in the lower part of Mesopotamia. The Sumerian deity *An-Anu* was the highest god in the pantheon at Uruk. Kish (see footnote in § 2.4), being the first seat of Mesopotamian kingship after the Flood, was succeeded by Uruk as centre of power. Gilgamesh (originally Bilgamesh in Sumerian) is the best known king of the First Dynasty of Uruk (Bodine 1994:22, 24, 29). His name might be of Kassite or Elamite origin. A real national hero did become, at times, the centre of different legends of deities and supernatural beings. Mythologically he was regarded as a type of solar god (Spence 1994:249).

⁹⁹⁶ *Utnapishtim* built a large reed boat which allowed him to survive the Flood. He was accompanied by his family and pairs of all the animals. See Arnold & Beyer (2002:66-70) for a translation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

⁹⁹⁷ Wright 1996:321. Parallels between the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Garden of Eden narrative are, inter alia, the creation of *Enkidu* – a counterpart of Gilgamesh – out of clay; *Enkidu's* association with the animals; the subsequent appearance of a woman – a harlot – who engages him in sex after which he becomes very wise, like a god. The epic furthermore deals with immortality – a possibility which is foiled by a snake (Wright 1996:321).

⁹⁹⁸ Speiser 1964:26.

⁹⁹⁹ Judges 13:1-16:31.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Bury et al 1925:429.

¹⁰⁰¹ Particularly certain parts of the Book of Proverbs – especially Proverbs 12:17-13:11 – as well as the Book of Job (Day 1995:55-56).



Qohelet, illustrating the dependence of the latter on Gilgamesh.¹⁰⁰² Both compositions 'compare the shallowness of human achievement to the wind ... [and] both employ the unusual image of the threefold cord'.¹⁰⁰³

The *Epic of Atra-Ḫasis*¹⁰⁰⁴ describes a massive flood intended to destroy humankind. *Atra-Ḫasis* was warned in advance and survived in a boat. This epic presents the story in primeval history, and therefore in a context comparable to that of Genesis. Although an ancient epic, the literary work portrays considerable development. The author(s) utilised old motifs which are presented in a coherent account. As in Genesis, the flood came in response to a major problem in creation.¹⁰⁰⁵

A fragmentary tablet of the first Sumerian tradition of the Flood has been found in the ruins of Nippur.¹⁰⁰⁶ In this legend the king and the priest *Ziusudra* – "Long of Life" – is introduced where the latter is carving a god to worship and consult as an oracle. *Ziusudra* is saved in a boat during the deluge which lasted seven days. He was informed beforehand of the verdict reached by the gods to destroy mankind. This account has been recorded in the *Sumerian*

¹⁰⁰²

Qohelet (Ecclesiastes)

9:5-9 (Revised Standard Version)

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing and they have no more reward; but the memory of them is lost. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and they have no more for ever any share in all that is done under the sun.

Go and eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already approved what you do.

Let your garments be always white; let not oil be lacking on your head.

Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life which he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil which you toil under the sun.

(Day 1995:59-60).

¹⁰⁰³ Day 1995:55-56, 59-61. The "threefold cord" refers to, inter alia, 'two are better than one ... if they fall, one will lift up his fellow ... A threefold cord is not quickly broken' (*Qohelet* 4:9-12) (Day 1995:60-61).

¹⁰⁰⁴ The *Epic of Atra-Ḫasis* was probably composed in the early second millennium BC. It describes the creation of humankind and its near extinction in a flood. Humans were created to perform physical work for the gods. When they became noisy and burdensome, the high gods decided to destroy them in a massive flood. Many editions of this epic are extant from various periods of Mesopotamian history (Arnold & Beyer 2002:21-31). See also footnote in § 3.3.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Frymer-Kensky 1988:63-65.

¹⁰⁰⁶ See footnote on Nippur in § 2.4.

Gilgamesh

x. iii. 6-14 (Babylonian version)

Gilgamesh, whither do you rove?
The life you pursue you shall not find.
When the gods created mankind,
Death for mankind they set aside,
Life in their own hands retaining.

As for you, Gilgamesh, let your belly be full,
make merry by day and by night.
Of each day make a feast of rejoicing,
Day and night dance and play!
Let your garments be sparkling fresh,
Your head be washed; bathe in water.
Pay heed to the little one that holds on
to your hand
Let your spouse delight in your bosom!

For this is the task of [mankind]!

King List,¹⁰⁰⁷ which contains documents of historiographic character. Instead of poems or epics – as in the case of the previous two chronicles – the King List was published for chronological and historical purposes. Sumer's history is divided into two periods: before the Flood, and after the Flood.¹⁰⁰⁸

Scholars deduce that Genesis 6-9 recounts two different stories about the Flood, which are interwoven in these chapters. The oral nature of the basic source material is probably accountable for these different renderings. Early redactors generally added features from different versions to a particular narrative. These details often seemingly contradicted each other. This material was arranged with a specific purpose in mind, most likely by two authors or schools.¹⁰⁰⁹ Follansbee¹⁰¹⁰ reconstructs 'a primitive and original version of the [Flood] story of which those elements were an integral and essential feature, and from which our extant forms may well have been derived'.

Finds excavated at the Mesopotamian city Kish include a major flood-deposit level dated ca 3300 BC.¹⁰¹¹ Definite evidence at Ur¹⁰¹² reveals a great flood of waters more than seven metres deep. Apart from a few cities on high mounds, everything in the Delta would have been destroyed. The higher areas of Ur escaped the flood, but houses at the foot of the mound were wiped out. Several villages perished and were never again inhabited.¹⁰¹³

Genesis 11:1-9 records the account of the "tower of Babel" as an explanation for all the different languages in the world. This text represents a Sumerian equivalent, although there is no certainty about the translation of a key phrase in the Sumerian epic, *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*.¹⁰¹⁴

¹⁰⁰⁷ The Sumerian King List contains a list of the kings of Sumer. The original was written when Utuhegal – king of Uruk (see an earlier footnote in this paragraph) – liberated Sumer from the domination of Gutu; the date of this event is uncertain and lies between ca 2120 and ca 2065 BC. Eight kings are mentioned and five antediluvian cities, namely Eridu, Badtibira, Larak, Sippar and Shuruppak. A brief text refers to the Flood, 'these are five cities, eight kings ruled them for 241,000 years. (Then) the Flood swept over (the earth). After the Flood had swept over (the earth) (and) when kingship was lowered (again) from heaven, kingship was (first) in Kish' (Hämmerley-Dupuy 1988:57-58).

¹⁰⁰⁸ Hämmerley-Dupuy 1988:55-59.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Habel 1988:13, 15, 25, 28.

¹⁰¹⁰ Follansbee 1988:76. Evidence from mythological texts from Ugarit (see § 2.8) – dated the middle of the second millennium BC – is implemented in a reconstruction of an original version of the Flood chronicle. Follansbee suggests that in the original Hebrew story – from which the biblical text is a later redaction – the hero Noah played the part of *Aleyan-Ba'al* (see § 3.5). See Follansbee (1988:75-85) for a detailed discussion of this suggestion.

¹⁰¹¹ Wiseman 1982c:665.

¹⁰¹² See footnote in § 3.6.

¹⁰¹³ Woolley 1988:95.

¹⁰¹⁴ The phrase, 'harmony-tongued Sumer', is questioned (Arnold & Beyer 2002:71).

A first millennium BC Akkadian document known as the *Autobiography of Sargon*, explains the unexpected and rapid rise of Sargon the Great, first great Semitic ruler of Mesopotamia. He was the founder of the Dynasty of Akkad.¹⁰¹⁵ This document contains a birth legend of Sargon, explaining that he was an illegitimate son of a priestess. She abandoned her baby; as priestess she was not permitted to bear children. Written in the first person, the composition mentions, inter alia,

'My mother, a high priestess, conceived me, in secret she bore me.
She placed me in a reed basket, with bitumen she caulked my hatch.
She abandoned me to the river from which I could not escape.
The river carried me along; to Aqqi, the water drawer, it brought me.
Aqqi, the water drawer, when immersing his bucket lifted me up.
Aqqi, the water drawer, raised me as his adopted son.'¹⁰¹⁶

There is an unmistakable parallel between this birth legend and that of Moses:

'The woman conceived and bore a son ... , she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son.'¹⁰¹⁷

A Sumerian account of Sargon's rise to power, mentions that his ascendancy was foretold to him in a dream. Sargon was a cupbearer to king Urzababa of Kish.¹⁰¹⁸ The king was displeased with the prophecy in Sargon's dream although he had, beforehand, premonitions of his own downfall. 'Sargon's dream of replacing his master and ruler is reminiscent of the dreams of Joseph in Genesis 37.'¹⁰¹⁹ Both Sargon's dream and those of Joseph are categorised as symbolic dreams. Although scholars recognise the folkloristic character of the Joseph narrative, neither his story nor that of Sargon's rise to power is a folktale. The Joseph chronicle concludes the patriarchal narrative that brought the family of Jacob into Egypt. The introduction of the Sargon text depicts a prosperous Kish ruled by Urzababa. This text is part of a group of "historical-literary" compositions which describe the rise and fall of Mesopotamian

¹⁰¹⁵ Sargon ruled 2334-2279 BC (Arnold & Beyer 2002:75).

¹⁰¹⁶ Translation of this composition is in Arnold & Beyer (2002:75-76).

¹⁰¹⁷ Exodus 2:2-10.

¹⁰¹⁸ See footnote in § 2.4.

¹⁰¹⁹ Cooper 1985:34. Genesis 37:1-11 recounts that Joseph, as a young boy, dreamt that the sheaves in the field bowed before his sheaf, and that 'the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down' to him (Gn 37:9).

leadership, prior to the Old Babylonian Period.¹⁰²⁰ Although these two "dream narratives" have no specific details in common, they may, even so, have some common ancestor.¹⁰²¹

Batto¹⁰²² mentions that "myth" is generally recognised within the primeval narratives of Genesis 1-11, while, to suggest that the story of the exodus may also be a myth, is not easily accepted. In the exodus chronicle 'myth is replaced by historical consciousness, Biblical religion is at core historical'.¹⁰²³ Although biblical revelation frequently revolved around historical events, it should be recognised that myth – even more than history – served as an agency of biblical revelation. The question is whether the exodus was conceived as an historical event within biblical tradition, or whether this tradition presented it as a timeless story. Batto¹⁰²⁴ indicates that the different literary strands in the Pentateuch portraying the Israelites' escape from Egypt, compels scholars 'to conclude that we are dealing primarily with a developing literary tradition that owes as much – or more – to myth as to history'.

Wenham¹⁰²⁵ indicates that, although 'Genesis shares many of the theological presuppositions of the ancient world', most of the chronicles therein are presented as an alternative world view to that which is generally accepted in the Ancient Near East. Genesis 1-11 essentially challenges ancient beliefs about God, the world and mankind. The Hebrew writer probably appropriated familiar mythological motifs, adapted into an original story of his own.¹⁰²⁶ The Israelite textual material displays a tendency to moderate mythical elements in traditions inherited by them. Myths in Genesis 1-11, as well as chronicles in the Book of Joshua, provide explanations for certain existing phenomena. There is, however, a vast difference between the explanation of the myths, and that of the conquest narratives.¹⁰²⁷ Many traditions are behind present-day biblical texts, which provided the author with his basic material. In the final product the different components have been blended to such an extent that there is not much hope for a successful recovery.¹⁰²⁸ Vehse¹⁰²⁹ denotes that the primary purpose of narratives is to convey a message. Historical myths, therefore, are independent of historical accuracy, but

¹⁰²⁰ Old Babylonian Period dated 2000-1595 BC (Arnold 1994:47).

¹⁰²¹ Cooper 1985:33-39.

¹⁰²² Batto 1992:102.

¹⁰²³ Batto 1992:102.

¹⁰²⁴ Batto 1992:102-103, 126. See Batto (1992:102-127) for a discussion of 'the exodus as myth'.

¹⁰²⁵ Wenham 1987:xiv.

¹⁰²⁶ Wenham 1987:53.

¹⁰²⁷ Ramsey 1981:80.

¹⁰²⁸ Speiser 1964:25.

¹⁰²⁹ Vehse 1995:440.

suggest how people thought about happenings. Scholars generally agree that the historical books in the Hebrew Bible are "historicised myth" or "mythologised history".¹⁰³⁰

The above discussions – albeit brief – are only a few examples of Ancient Near Eastern literature and folklore that had an influence on biblical traditions, as presented in the Hebrew Bible. In Boshoff and others,¹⁰³¹ Ancient Near Eastern and comparable biblical literature are tabled.

3.10 Résumé and conclusion

My research problem indicates that biblical scholars recognise the complexity of the origin of Yahwism. It has been ascertained that beliefs and deities of the Ancient Near Eastern peoples played a significant role in the religion of Israel. Furthermore, consensus has been reached amongst most scholars that a large section of the Israelites – apart from recognising *Yahweh* as their national God – practised syncretism, wherein deities of their neighbours were acknowledged and venerated. Attributes of these deities had a notable influence on the specific image of *Yahweh* as perceived by the Israelites. Descendants of the various so-called Israelite tribes emphasised particular aspects and characteristics in their worship of *Yahweh*. The attributes of the different gods thus reached culmination in the being of one Deity, *Yahweh*. Through the continuous migration of the Ancient Near Eastern peoples, from one place to another, their customs, traditions and beliefs were widely spread. In my research I endeavour to find a plausible answer for the disparity that, while the pre-exilic Israelites practised syncretism for centuries, the post-exilic Judahites – within a number of years – observed a strict discipline of monotheism. The main purpose, therefore, of incorporating this chapter in my thesis is that, in the light of the Israelites' syncretism – as well as the culmination of the attributes of the ancient gods in the figure of *Yahweh* – it is a prerequisite for the remainder of my research that I am knowledgeable about the Ancient Near Eastern beliefs and deities.

Since the discovery of innumerable extra-biblical texts – as discussed in Chapter 2 – it has come to light that the mythologies and legends of the different Ancient Near Eastern peoples – particularly the Canaanites – had a significant effect on the religion of the Israelites, as well as on many biblical texts that were obviously influenced by these ancient – notably Mesopotamian – myths and legends. Myths narrate origins in the primordial time¹⁰³² and are

¹⁰³⁰ Dever 1997a:21.

¹⁰³¹ Boshoff et al 2000:53.

¹⁰³² Kruger 2001a:48.

developed to explain natural phenomena.¹⁰³³ Some mythological literature could also act as a polemical vehicle for controversial beliefs and views.¹⁰³⁴ A collection of myths is generally inherent in religion. Some biblical texts and narratives could be clarified by comparison of literary parallels of the Ancient Near East. Myth and religion cannot readily be separated; myth may be an obvious alternative to history.¹⁰³⁵ Myth and history can co-exist; therefore the mythical nature of texts need not be affected by the potential historicity of texts. Myth, ritual and social structure validate existence in society.¹⁰³⁶

The scientific study – developed during the course of the nineteenth century – of myths and of mythical material in the Hebrew Bible indicates that many narratives were the products of a long process of evolution of community traditions.¹⁰³⁷ A combination of mythical and historical traditions, which were not easily distinguishable, characterise the Israelite religion and biblical texts. Myth cannot be regarded as being informative on either history or culture. The relation between myth and history is often indeterminate; history, mostly being the criterion by which myth is judged.¹⁰³⁸ 'Mythical thought and mythical literature are at the very heart of Israel's religion.'¹⁰³⁹

Considering the thousands of texts, or fragments of texts, that have been excavated and of which a large portion deals with ancient myths, it is clear that deities and cultic rituals were of the utmost importance for these ancient peoples. It is furthermore evident that there had been an integration of deities from different pantheons, inevitably influencing one another and consequently adopting attributes. From the many inscriptions recovered and information gathered, it is apparent that many of the same gods and goddesses – with cognate names – materialised in various pantheons.

For an extensive synopsis of *Asherah/Athirat* and synonymous female deities, see paragraph 3.2.4.

This goddess *Asherah* – known as Canaanite *Athirat* – was evidently originally a West Semitic deity, who was at some or other time admitted to the Mesopotamian pantheon. She was

¹⁰³³ Jay 1996:35.

¹⁰³⁴ Kruger 2001b:214.

¹⁰³⁵ Vehse 1995:440.

¹⁰³⁶ Kunin 1995:23-24, 44.

¹⁰³⁷ Oden 1992:946.

¹⁰³⁸ Kunin 1995:25.

¹⁰³⁹ Oden 1992:960.

also known as *Athiratu* or *Athirtu*. She appears in different mythologies, covering more or less the whole region of the Ancient Near East. The earliest known reference to *Asherah* is in texts from Ebla, dated ca 2350 BC. She furthermore emerges in the Mesopotamian cult as *Ashratu*, consort of the Amorite storm and warrior god *Amurru*. Both *Asherah* and *Geštinanna* – goddess of the Underworld – with whom *Asherah* was equated, were regarded as consorts of *Amurru*. Depicted as a solar deity, *Asherah* spent her nights with *Geštinanna* in the Netherworld. *Ašratum*, characterised as a goddess of the nomads, was often referred to as *Ašratum bēlet sēri*, "Lady of the Steppe". *Athirat*, venerated in Arabia as solar deity, was a consort of the Arabian moon gods, 'Amm and Wadd. Canaanite *Athirat* may therefore have been originally a solar deity and thus consort of the Semitic moon god *Yrh*. An early Ugaritic text indicates her as the solar deity *Athiratu*, "who treads the heavens from end to end". At a later stage she lost her solar character to become a maritime goddess – *Athirat*. Ugaritic texts furthermore refer to her as Canaanite *El*'s consort, also known as 'Elat. The Ugaritic word *atrt*, and Hebrew cognate 'ašērâ, were originally common nouns meaning "wife", "consort", literally denoting "she-who-follows-in-the-footsteps" (of her husband). *Athirat* was also known in Egypt as *Qudšu*. A relief from Thebes in Egypt refers to *gdš- 'strt- 'nt*, indicating a fusion with the Canaanite goddesses *Astarte* and *Anat*. She finally lost her position in all Canaanite religions, but maintained it as *Asherah* in the religion of the Israelites.

This brief indication of different appearances of *Asherah/Athirat* at various pantheons, and with cognate names, substantiates my theory that, similarly, the veneration of a *Ya*-deity – or deities with analogous names – over a vast area of the Ancient Near East, is conceivable.

The goddess *Asherah* – אֲשֶׁרָה – was worshipped in Palestine at the time when the Israelites established themselves there, being popular among the Northern Israelites and Judeans alike. Biblical *Asherah* could be explained as 'a phenomenon of official religion, a forbidden non-conformist cult, a house-cult or part of popular religion'.¹⁰⁴⁰ Over a period of time scholars have made various suggestions regarding the meaning of *Asherah* in the Hebrew Bible. Kletter¹⁰⁴¹ states that *Asherah* was an undeniable component of the official cult of Judah, introduced into the Jerusalem Temple by the Judean kings as a foreign, but not forbidden cult. Consensus has not been reached by scholars regarding the problematic word 'ašērâ in the Masoretic Text. According to various text references in the Hebrew Bible, the word seems to

¹⁰⁴⁰ Kletter 2001:199.

¹⁰⁴¹ Kletter 2001:200.

indicate a wooden cult object, a pole, a tree or a stone. Vriezen¹⁰⁴² is of the opinion that, on the basis of a number of descriptions in the Hebrew Bible referring to *'ašērâ*, it could be deduced that it was an object used in the cult placed next to the altars and next to the pillars dedicated to *Ba'al*. A sacred tree or pole was presumably treated as a symbol of this goddess. Some scholars conceive that, in certain cases, the sacred pole or tree-trunk had a masculine phallic character. Cult statues made of wood were common in the Ancient Near East.

According to Korpel,¹⁰⁴³ the *Asherah* mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic *Asherah* are identical. She was familiar in ancient Israel as her name was linked to *El*, who was an Israelite God. She was probably acceptable to many Israelites as a goddess next to *Yahweh-El*. When the dominant position she has in the Hebrew Bible is taken into consideration, she is the only likely candidate in the syncretistic religious practices of Iron Age Judah and the Northern Kingdom. Archaeological finds interpreted as remains of a **אֲשֵׁרָה** or an *'ašērâ*, and an altar, could be an indication that both *Yahweh* and "his *Asherah*" were worshipped alongside each other in that particular sanctuary, each with its own cult object.¹⁰⁴⁴ Miller¹⁰⁴⁵ denotes that, regarding the question of a goddess in the Israelite religion, one cannot declare unreservedly 'that one of the distinctive features of the worship of *Yahweh* was the absence of any consort in the cult or theology associated with *Yahweh*'. Since the discovery of the inscriptions – "*Yahweh* and his *Asherah*" – at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom, the possibility of a female consort for *Yahweh* has been debated extensively. Despite ongoing debates, scholars have reached reasonable agreement, accepting that *Asherah* in the Masoretic Text refers to both an independent goddess and her wooden cult symbol.

It has become clear that the ancient Israelite cult made far more allowances in religious beliefs and practices than admitted by the exilic and post-exilic editors of the Masoretic Text. Although the queen mother – **גְּבִירָה** – held no official office within the Judean and Israelite monarchies, she nevertheless had an official status. Ackerman¹⁰⁴⁶ proposes that the queen mother had the official responsibility to dedicate herself to the cult of *Asherah*, the mother goddess. The most explicit link indicating such a cult activity is expressed in 1 Kings 15:13, when king Asa removed his mother Maacah, as 'she had made an abominable image for *Asherah*'. The queen mother Jezebel – frequently accused of introducing the alien cult of

¹⁰⁴² Vriezen 2001:73.

¹⁰⁴³ Korpel 2001:149.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Vriezen 2001:74-75.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Miller 1986:239.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ackerman 1993:388.

Asherah into the religion of the Northern Kingdom – most likely worshipped *Asherah* as an element of the state cult in her capacity as גבירה. Maacah, Athalia and Nehushta from Judah, together with Jezebel from the Northern Kingdom, are four queen mothers identified in the Hebrew Bible as devotees of *Asherah*.

The discussion of four female deities – *Eve*, *Lilith*, *Anat* and *Anahita* – is deemed necessary for extra background for my research.

Some mythical aspects linked to *Eve*, first created female and therefore prototype of women, led various scholars to conclude that a goddess lies behind *Eve*. A Sumerian cuneiform sign *TI* – signifying both the words "life" and "rib" – refers to a female named *NIN.TI*. The name could be interpreted as "Lady of Life" or "Lady of the Rib". *NIN.TI* is structurally similar to the aetiology for the designation חוה – *Eve*, which is connected to the word חי or חיה, meaning life, to live. This association could have led to the legend that *Eve* had been moulded from a rib. *Eve* – known as חוה (*hawwāh*) – was recognised in Phoenicia, Mesopotamia and Sumer as mother, guardian and goddess. There is also the possibility that the hidden figure of the mother goddess *Mami* lies behind the character of *Eve*. *Mami* was a creator goddess, known as "mistress of all the gods", and is thus analogous to *Eve*, "the mother of all the living". Ancient interpreters undeniably made an association between *Eve* and the serpent.¹⁰⁴⁷ Some scholars note a possible wordplay between the Aramaic *ḥewya'* – related to *ḥawwāh* – and Arabian *ḥayya*, both meaning "serpent". This similarity was seen as that of *Eve* being a serpent goddess. *Asherah's* association with serpents is likewise known, as demonstrated for example in Proto-Sinaitic texts. The Ancient Near Eastern people regarded the serpent as the embodiment of wisdom.

Mythical *Lilith* – who originated from the Sumerian mythology as a demon of desolation – was linked to *Eve* by way of being the alleged first wife of Adam. She was also associated with the Babylonian *Lilītu*. Mesopotamian Semites described her as a hideous monster with a serpent in each hand.

Although the Masoretic Text has no direct reference to the Ugaritic goddess *Anat*, there are a few possible allusions to her. In the Ugaritic texts she is portrayed as a consort of *Ba'al*, and

¹⁰⁴⁷ Williams, A J 1977:358.

there is also a conceivable intimation that she was, in addition, a fertility goddess. The narratives signifying this reproductive role are, however, so damaged that scholars are inconclusive about this function. The Ugaritic mythological texts present *Anat*, foremost, as a volatile and independent warrior and hunter. Her bloodthirsty nature is explicitly demonstrated in a well-known Ugaritic text. Her vengeance on her enemies has been compared to *Yahweh's* actions on a number of occasions. Scholars have indicated striking points of contact between this Ugaritic "bloodbath" text and Psalm 23. According to Stern,¹⁰⁴⁸ it is thus clear that Psalm 23 has a mythic background, the *Anat* text being 'a source of poetic inspiration for a Hebrew poet'.

The fertility goddess *Anahita* is a figure of ancient Persian myth. She was also identified with the planet Venus. In the *Zend-Avesta*¹⁰⁴⁹ she is known as a goddess of war and is possibly comparable to *Anat*.

The prophet Jeremiah attributes the catastrophe of the Exile to the veneration of a goddess, called the *Queen of Heaven*, who appears briefly in two passages in Jeremiah.¹⁰⁵⁰ The women of Jerusalem and Judah, however, attribute this disaster to their lack of offerings to the *Queen of Heaven*. Currently most scholars identify her with Canaanite *Astarte*, who – apart from being called "Lady of Heaven" – is frequently associated with the heavens. This link with the heavens is also connected to *Anat*, *Ishtar* and *Qudšu/Asherah*. The masculine form '*Athar*, '*Ashtar*, is probably the name of the planet Venus; the latter also a personification of the Akkadian goddess *Ishtar* – the male deity thus being the Morning Star, and the goddess the Evening Star. In the Hebrew Bible she is referred to as *Ashtarot* of the Philistines and *Ashtoret* of the Phoenician Sidonians. The Assyrians and Babylonians identified her as *Ashtar*, goddess of fertility and love. Sumerian *Inanna* and Akkadian *Ishtar* were major goddesses of love, war and the planet Venus. In Canaan she was attested as *Astarte*. Clay figurines from Mesopotamia portray her in a characteristic breast-offering pose, known among archaeologists as the "*Ishtar* pose". As described in Jeremiah 44, Judeans were reluctant to abandon her – probably due to the fertility feature.

An Old Babylonian goddess of Mari – *Dīrītum* – was initially a manifestation of *Ishtar*, later establishing her own identity and rising to prominence in the Mari pantheon. The ideographic

¹⁰⁴⁸ Stern 1994:123-124.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Persian cults and myths are known to us through the *Zend-Avesta* (Oxford University Press 1964b:1020).

¹⁰⁵⁰ Jeremiah 7:17-18; 44:15-24.

form of the name of *Shaushka* – an important Hurrian goddess – was ^d*IŠHTAR(-ka)*. She was associated with *Ishtar* of Nineveh, with whom she shared some distinctive features. As she was linked to the *Queen of Heaven* her character was probably not unknown among the Israelites.

Mesopotamian literature refers to *Ishtar* with various designations, mostly relating to her different cult centres. Representations of her depict her within a circle. She is identified by stars – regarded as her symbols – as well as light radiating from her, often standing on a lion. She is frequently shown together with women – thus corroborating the role she played in the cult essentially carried out by women.

After 722 BC the Neo-Assyrian Empire imposed an official state religion on Israel introducing some Mesopotamian cults, probably including that of *Ishtar*. Consequently her cult was also brought into Judah. Her veneration by the Judeans included burning incense to her, pouring out libations to her and preparing cakes for her.¹⁰⁵¹ Although the title *Queen of Heaven* in the Hebrew Bible probably refers to the Palestinian *Astarte*, it is unlikely that associations with *Ishtar* – who was particularly related to the planting and harvesting of cereal crops in Mesopotamia – would have been absent. The ideology of the Judeans incorporated various religious practices in their worship, thereby anticipating all aspects of favourable divine power.

The major Ancient Near Eastern deities – notably the storm, warrior and solar gods – share common characteristics. It is, therefore, hardly possible to compartmentalise them separately.

In the Assyro-Babylonian mythology the storm was conferred on the divinity, *Adad* – god of lightning, tempest, storms and winds. At the same time he was responsible for abundant rains, and had the prerogative to reveal the future. According to the Assyrian version of the Flood myth, *Adad* was accountable for the storms and rains that brought about the flood. *Adad* and the solar deity *Shamash* were often linked as guardians of the heavens, and together with *Marduk* – god of Babylon – were considered the triad of divine judges. *Adad* and the Phoenician grain god *Dagan* shared the consort *Shala*. *Adad* was also known as *Hadad* among the Aramaeans and Amorites, as *Adad* by the Mesopotamians, and as *Haddu* among the Canaanites. He was likewise worshipped as warrior god, particularly by the Assyrians.

¹⁰⁵¹ Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17-19.

Hadad/Adad, whose main sanctuary was in Aleppo, was later assimilated into the Mesopotamian pantheon and appeared with the *sibitti* – the *Pleiades*¹⁰⁵² – among witnesses to treaties. A number of kings from the Syrian area had the name Ben-Hadad. Apart from a possible exception – *Hadad-rimmon* – the divine designation "*Hadad*" never appears in the Hebrew Bible.

The storm god has a distinctive iconography. In the Akkadian period *Adad* was portrayed with a thunderbolt and mace on the back of a lion-dragon – and also on the back of a bull. He wears a conical headdress and is bearded. The Ugaritic storm god *Ba'al* was represented with a thunderbolt, a spear touching the ground with streaks of lightning at its other end, wielding a mace in his right hand. Although lightning was never depicted independently of the storm god, it was deified in Mesopotamia. Associated with the storm god as his symbol, lightning functioned as a weapon of *Yahweh* in his portrayal as Storm God or Warrior God. Poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible refer to *Yahweh's* "arrows", and the lightning-bolt is called a "spear". It is furthermore identified with the theophany of *Yahweh*, often in combination with thunder, cloud and an earthquake.

The Canaanite storm god was known as *Ba'al* or *Ba'al Hadad*. The word *ba'lu* is a Semitic noun meaning "lord" or "owner". Characteristics of a storm god were repeatedly linked to *Ba'al*, who was undoubtedly the national god in Ugarit, although *El*, the father of the gods, was head of the pantheon. The goddess *Anat* is indicated in the Ugaritic texts as *Ba'al's* principle consort. According to the content of the *Ba'al* myths, *Yam*, *Mot* and *Ba'al* were the three competing sons of *El*. In his battle with *Yam* – who represented the sea and the unruly forces of chaos – *Ba'al* eventually achieved victory over chaos, thereafter controlling the weather. *Ba'al Shamem* – as a concept of a god of heaven – developed during the first millennium BC in the North-West Semitic religions. The epithet "God of Heaven" was later equated with *Yahweh* in the Judaeo-Israelite religion. The entire area inhabited by Canaanites was dedicated to the worship of *Ba'al*. Myths concerning *Ba'al* are found in Ugaritic, Hittite and Egyptian traditions; the Ugaritic texts contribute to the largest amount of relevant cultic material.

Although *Yahweh* acted predominantly as national God of the Israelites, *Ba'al* held a unique position among the inhabitants of Palestine – and thus also among the Israelites. As a divine

¹⁰⁵² See footnote in § 3.5.

name, *Ba'al* appears seventy-six times in the Hebrew Bible. Authors and redactors of the Masoretic Text generally show an aversion to idols, speaking of *Ba'al* and his worship in pejorative terms. Even before the Israelite settlement in Canaan, a conflict was prevalent between *Yahweh* and *Ba'al*.¹⁰⁵³ An even greater encounter later took place under the Omrides.¹⁰⁵⁴ Rituals and customs of the *Ba'al* religion were condemned by the prophets. On account of the similarity of characteristics between *Yahweh* and *Ba'al*, many of the attributes ascribed to *Yahweh* familiarise us on the character of the Palestinian *Ba'al*. Yet, despite the absorption of *Ba'al* traits by *Yahweh*, all indications are that the Judeans carried on with syncretistic religious practices – probably worshipping *Yahweh* alongside *Ba'al*. Some of the older Israelite poems 'juxtapose imagery associated with El and Baal in the Ugaritic texts and apply this juxtaposition of attributes to *Yahweh*'.¹⁰⁵⁵

Descriptions of *Ba'al*'s theophany in the storm, or his character as a warrior, are explicitly linked in some iconography. Biblical material, however, presents *Yahweh* as Divine Warrior, with power over the storm. 'Yahweh wields the most terrible of weapons, the lightning';¹⁰⁵⁶ he appears in the storm and rides on the storm, and reveals himself in the storm, fire, smoke and cloud. His dwelling is on Mount Sinai where storms gather around the peaks on the mountain.

The designation "Rider-of-the-Clouds" was applied to *Ba'al* long before it became an appellation of *Yahweh*. When driving in his chariot, *Ba'al* goes out to distribute rain, but at the same time it sets *Ba'al* in a position of a warrior god. In Habakkuk 3:8 *Yahweh* is said to drive a horse-drawn chariot. The word *aliyan* – translated as "victorious", "almighty" – is often used in the *Ba'al* mythology, followed by epithets, such as "Rider-upon-the-Clouds". Similarly the divine name *Rakib-Il* relates to a chariot-driving warrior. Habakkuk 3:3-7 describes *Yahweh*'s triumphant march from the "South", distinctly portraying him as a heavenly warrior. A blinding light associated with the theophany of *Yahweh* clearly depicts him as a solar deity. In Habakkuk 3 the "Lord of Light" is described as a divine warrior; the plague – רבב – went before him and pestilence – רשף – followed on his heels.

Qôš, the national deity of the Edomites, is attested in the names of their kings, *Qaus-malak*. The Arabic word *qaus* – "bow" – which is the deified weapon of the storm god or warrior

¹⁰⁵³ Numbers 25:1-5.

¹⁰⁵⁴ 1 Kings 16:31-33; 18:17-40.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Smith 1990:21.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Budde 1899:27-28.

god, is the etymon of *Qôś*. Although the majority of references to *Qôś* are Idumaeen, his name appears in Egyptian listings of names that were possibly those of *Shasu* clans from the thirteenth century BC. These clans were associated with Edom and Seir.¹⁰⁵⁷ At the same time Egyptian records point to a possible link between the *Shasu* and 'Yhw in the land of the *Shasu*'.¹⁰⁵⁸ This connection between *Yhw* and the *Shasu* from Edom and Seir is significant in the light of *Yahweh*'s "triumphant march from the South".¹⁰⁵⁹ It is furthermore a substantiation of the Kenite hypothesis, according to which *Yahweh* was venerated by the Kenites and Midianites before Moses became acquainted with *Yahweh*. My hypothesis is in accordance with this proposal by scholars. Knauf¹⁰⁶⁰ indicates that *Qôś* is presented as closely related to *Yahweh*, and therefore he poses the question 'could the two have originally been identical?' Considering the number of features that coincide, this argument by Knauf is not implausible. At a Nabatean shrine, *Qôś* is represented on a throne flanked by bulls with a thunderbolt in his left hand – presumably indicating that he was a storm god.

The Divine Warrior is, according to Miller,¹⁰⁶¹ 'one of the major images of God' in the Hebrew Bible. In the religious and military experience of Israel, the perception of God as warrior was of paramount importance. Israel believed that their wars were in fact "the wars of *Yahweh*", seeing that Ancient Near Eastern deities fought wars to maintain or reinforce their positions in the divine pantheons. Early Israelite poetry incorporates visions of *Yahweh* the Warrior. In Psalm 68 *Yahweh* is portrayed with his "heavenly chariotry and entourage". In various poetic material the glorious deeds of *Yahweh*, the Warrior, are vividly described. Israel's perception of *Yahweh* being a Divine Warrior dominated their faith. This concept of *Yahweh* was possibly also linked to the idea of *Yahweh* as King. The ancient world often represented the king as the deity's human war leader; it was the deity's responsibility 'to secure royal victory in battle'.¹⁰⁶² Battles between Ancient Near Eastern nations were comprehended as battles between patron gods, leading to the ideology of a "holy war". Celestial beings that formed *Yahweh*'s entourage and fought his battles signified the "hosts", in the title "Lord of Hosts". God's honour and Israel's salvation in battle were closely connected.

Israel undoubtedly had a pre-battle rite. It was common practice for a priest or prophet to determine beforehand whether *Yahweh* approved the attack or not. Horns – as a liturgical

¹⁰⁵⁷ See discussions in § 2.4, § 2.5 and § 2.6.

¹⁰⁵⁸ See § 4.3.4.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4; Habakkuk 3:3.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Knauf 1999a:677.

¹⁰⁶¹ Miller 1973:1.

¹⁰⁶² Lang 2002:49.

device – were used, in some instances, before a battle. Horns symbolised divine strength that brought about victory. The enthronement of a king included the ritual handing over of a special weapon, which was perceived as the weapon of the warrior god.

The concept "hosts of heaven" originated from the metaphor of *Yahweh* as warrior. In combat *Yahweh* was assisted by warriors and an army. The "hosts of heaven" thus indicated the divine assembly gathered around the heavenly King, *Yahweh*. The question arises whether any distinction can be made between the "hosts of heaven" and the "divine council". The concept of the assembly of the gods – or the divine council – was a common religious motif in the Ancient Near East. In the Canaanite pantheon *El* and *Asherah* were acting as the highest authorities. The actions of both divine and human beings were subject to the justice of *El* – who was designated with wisdom and was also arbiter of justice. Psalm 82 condemns all members of the divine council to death for abusing their offices. The constitution and function of the divine assembly in the Israelite religion exhibit a similarity to the Canaanite and Phoenician divine councils.

The designation *Yahweh Sebaoth* – יהוה צבאות – meaning "hosts of heaven", "armies" or similar depictions, is closely connected to the idea of the "holy war". This epithet can thus be translated as "Lord of Hosts". It seems that this appellation was intimately linked to Zion and the Temple – 'Yahweh Zebaoth was conceived as enthroned in invisible majesty on the cherubim throne in the Solomonic Temple'.¹⁰⁶³

When the Assyrians became the might in the Ancient Near East, *Aššur* – their national god – took the central place. To ease the substitution of major gods to *Aššur* in the dominant position, he was identified with the Old Babylonian god *Anšar*, and thereby became the "Lord of the gods". *Aššur* was above all a warrior god who accompanied the armies into battle. He was mostly represented as a winged disc, or mounted on a bull, or floating through the air. A well-known illustration shows him in a winged sun disc firing a bow. The sun disc was the representation of a chariot travelling through the sky. It is significant that *Aššur*, as warrior god, was also portrayed with the attributes of the storm god (*Adad*) and of the solar god (*Shamash*). It seems, therefore, that he was at the same time warrior, solar and storm god. The god *Aššur* was considered the deified city Assur, which was built on a holy spot of pre-historic times.

¹⁰⁶³ Mettinger 1999b:922.

Astral deities were not an unfamiliar phenomenon for the ancient Israelites. A number of references in the Hebrew Bible indicate that *Yahweh* is Lord of the sun, moon and stars. The epithet "Lord of hosts" could intimate that *Yahweh* was in command of all the stars. The Babylonian deity *Marduk* divided the constellations of the zodiac and months of the year among the great gods. The constellations became the objects of a religious cult. In the Hebrew Bible astral cults were prohibited. At a later stage, within the Judaic culture, zodiacal constellations were widely promoted. Mosaic floors of several synagogues of the Roman and Byzantine periods portray zodiac symbols, illustrating 'an ancient Israelite tradition of retaining elements of pagan sun worship in their own worship'.¹⁰⁶⁴ The compositions on the pavements in Palestinian synagogues represent the twelve signs of the zodiac arranged around *Helios* – the Greek solar god – who was always in the centre of the composition in the chariot of the sun; *Yahweh* is usually portrayed in a chariot of clouds. *Helios*, in solar worship, was venerated mainly by individuals.

In the Masoretic Text, the word *Shemesh* – שמש – does not actually reflect a divine name. The Canaanite solar cult is, however, revealed in place names, such as Beth-shemesh. "The lack of evident traces of solar worship in Hebrew anthroponomy seems to indicate that the cult of the sun was not very popular in Syria-Palestine in the Iron Age, contrary to Egypt and to Mesopotamia."¹⁰⁶⁵ The astral bodies were apparently venerated during the reigns of the Judean kings Manasseh and Amon. Scholars therefore theorise that the Assyrian astral cult was enforced upon Judah as a symbol of vassalage. Taylor¹⁰⁶⁶ suggests that the Israelites did indeed consider the sun as an icon or symbol of *Yahweh*. The horse on the Taanach stand¹⁰⁶⁷ and its sun disc are reminiscent of 'the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to house of the Lord ... and he [Josiah] burned the chariots of the sun with fire'.¹⁰⁶⁸ The sun's chariot was *Yahweh's* vehicle. The ancient idea of a chariot of the sun was born from the perception that the sun is a wheel turning through the heavens – as attested by the legend of Elijah being carried up to the heaven in a chariot and horses of fire.¹⁰⁶⁹ Lipiński¹⁰⁷⁰ argues that 'there can be little doubt that the sun was conceived in biblical times as a vivid symbol of *Yahweh's* Glory'. *Shamash* – *Shemesh* – in Mesopotamian solar mythology instructed the righteous in wisdom, and was specifically associated with concepts like justice,

¹⁰⁶⁴ Taylor 1994:61.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Lipiński 1999:765.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Taylor 1994:53-54, 58.

¹⁰⁶⁷ See § 2.13, subtitle "Taanach".

¹⁰⁶⁸ 2 Kings 23:11.

¹⁰⁶⁹ 2 Kings 2:11-12; 6:15, 17.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Lipiński 1999:766.

time and life – themes found in the book of *Qohelet*. In this book the "sun imagery" appears frequently in the phrase "under the sun", suggesting possible allusions to solar symbolism and mythology.

The ancient peoples – who were aware of the link between the phases of the moon and the tides – interpreted the moon as being responsible for the water supply to the fields and all living entities. Therefore the lunar deity, apart from being illuminator of the night, was regarded as a fertility god. This aspect was reflected in the powerful and virile bull – particularly in the similarity between the bull's horns and the so-called "horns" of the "new" moon, symbolising the cycle of nature. *Yrh* – ירח – the most common biblical Hebrew word for "moon" or "moon god" appears close to thirty times in the Hebrew Bible. *Yrh* and terms describing the lesser astral bodies – the stars, constellations or "hosts of heaven" – were often grouped together. The terminology "hosts of heaven" in the Hebrew Bible was, at the same time, indicative of the inclusion of all luminaries. According to the Deuteronomist, astral cults in Judah increased significantly during the seventh to sixth centuries BC.

In the Mesopotamian tradition the lunar deity was known by the name *Nanna*, *Suen* and *Ashimbabbar*. *Suen*, written as *Sîn*, is attested in lexical texts from Ugarit and Ebla. Documents from Mari refer to *Sîn* of Haran. The "night luminaries" controlled the heavens as well as an alien world. It represented the life cycle of birth, growth, decay and death. The cultic calendar was determined by the movements of the moon, which was awarded a prominent place in Mesopotamian myth and ritual. In the Assyro-Babylonian mythology the lunar deity occupied the main position in the astral triad, with *Shamash* and *Ishtar* – the sun and the planet Venus, respectively – as its children. Haran was the cult centre of *Nanna/Sîn*. The moon god of Haran was considered by the Assyrians as a special patron to extend their boundaries. The lunar emblem of Haran portrays the moon god in a boat. The symbol of a crescent on a pole was common in southern Mesopotamia during the first half of the second millennium BC. In both the history of ancient Mesopotamian religions and early Syrian traditions the lunar deity enjoyed widespread popularity.

In the Ancient Near East stars were widely regarded as gods. Astrological references in the Hebrew Bible are often hidden in the most ancient layers of the text. Babylonian astral divination was common among post-exilic Jews. It is, however, extremely problematic to identify the particular sources underlying the Yahwistic lunar symbolism. The births of the twins *Shagar* (Morning Star) and *Shalem* (Evening Star) – offspring of Canaanite *El* and two

"women" he encountered at the seashore – are recounted in an important Ugaritic text, the *hi-eros gamos*. Speculative connections link *Shalem* with the alleged cult of the *Venus* star in Jerusalem and the cult of Melchizedek.

The etymology of the word, or name *El*, *'el*, *'il(u)* – meaning God/god – has not been determined conclusively. *'Ilu*, as an appellative for deities, has been attested in Ancient Mesopotamia, as well as in Ugaritic texts. In these texts *El* is denoted as a distinct deity, who – together with *Asherah* – held the highest authority in the Syro-Palestinian mythology. Several epithets describe *El* as father, creator, the "ancient one" or the "eternal one". Despite *El*'s implied importance in Ugarit, the Ugaritic *Ba'al* texts indicate *El*'s passive and ineffectual behaviour. Yet, gods were powerless to undertake any assignment without his permission. There are indications in various mythological texts that *Ba'al* – who actively rose to kingship – probably dethroned the older and less virile *El* in order to secure this position. External evidence involving the strife between *El* and *Ba'al* is based mainly on parallels in comparative mythological material. The assembly of the gods was a familiar religious theme in the Ancient Near Eastern cultures; the divine council of *El* – the assembly of gods – is attested in the Ugaritic myths. The bull – a designation of *El* – is a metaphor expressing his divine dignity and strength.

The relationship between the God of Israel (*Elohim*) and the Canaanite god *El* is to a great extent centred upon the religion of the patriarchs. The religious traditions in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis distinguish two types of reference to the deity: "God of the fathers" – which links the god to an ancestor – or a full formula, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob". The deity, identified by the name of the clan, was thus worshipped by those families. Biblical *Elohim*, as well as *Yahweh*, portrays many features that could possibly have been derived from Canaanite *El*.

As indicated in discussions in this chapter, deities with cognate – and often similar – names appeared in several pantheons. In concordance herewith, different attributes merged in particular deities. Contact between the Israelite nation and the other Ancient Near Eastern peoples resulted therein that all the features of the various deities were later conferred upon the Hebrew God. Attributes of biblical *Elohim* and *Yahweh* – as depicted in the Hebrew Bible – have been summarised from a selection of relevant texts.

It is apparent from an analysis of this synopsis that, apart from all the other characteristics associated with *Yahweh*, the Israelites perceived him predominantly as a Storm, Warrior and Solar God. In this regard there is a resemblance with the Assyrian warrior god *Ashur*, who was also identified as storm god and solar god. Both *Yahweh* and *Elohim* are portrayed in the Hebrew Bible as Creator and Father – epithets that are linked to Canaanite *El*. Biblical texts cite overwhelming references to *Yahweh* as "Lord of Hosts"; celestial beings – who formed *Yahweh*'s entourage and fought his battles – signify the "hosts" in this title. Both *Yahweh* and *Elohim* are indicated in the texts as Shepherd, King and Redeemer. Matters concerning "justice" and "righteousness" mainly refer to *Yahweh*. The Hebrew God was a wise administrator and legislator in the eyes of the Israelite scribes. Ancient Syrian mythology could be recognised in the tradition of a wise creator deity. Lang¹⁰⁷¹ suggests that relevant evidence for the wise God and wisdom goddess is found in the Book of Proverbs.

The Hebrew Bible occasionally applies a female metaphor to describe *Yahweh* or *Yahweh*'s actions. Attributing female roles and metaphors to "male" deities was not an unknown concept in the Ancient Near East. The lack of gender language for *Yahweh* in the Hebrew Bible could be attributed to the avoidance of anthropomorphic imagery for *Yahweh*. Some scholars – such as Stone¹⁰⁷² – allege that a goddess was venerated at the very beginnings of religion, and it therefore signifies that 'God was a woman'. Implicit references to androgyny in the Hebrew Bible are found in Job 38,¹⁰⁷³ Isaiah,¹⁰⁷⁴ and particularly in Genesis 1:27. In their concept of God the Israelites ascribed an anthropomorphic nature to God.

The appearance of the name *Yahweh*, *Yahweh Elohim*, or *Elohim* in the Hebrew Bible depends on a particular tradition and, in some instances, possibly on the preference of the redactor. Scholars have noted apparent differences in the use of *Yahweh* or *Elohim* in the Psalter. Numerous appearances of the Tetragrammaton in the so-called Elohistic Psalter cannot be overlooked. Various theories have been proposed by scholars to resolve this occurrence. Hossfeld and Zenger¹⁰⁷⁵ are of the opinion that the 'purpose-fully used name for God, YHWH, is not indicative of a secondary redaction, but an expression of theological thinking that typically reveals itself only as a theological tendency in these texts'.

¹⁰⁷¹ Lang 2002:24-26.

¹⁰⁷² Stone 1979:120, 123-124.

¹⁰⁷³ Job 38:28-29.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Isaiah 42:14; 49:15; 66:12-13.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Hossfeld & Zenger 2003:50.

Legendary and mythical matter forms an integral part of the Hebrew Bible, and was thus also a fundamental component of the Yahwistic religion of the Israelites. As discussed in previous paragraphs in this chapter, it is evident that the Israelites – in their concept and practising of their religion, be it in their veneration of *Yahweh* or of other deities – were basically influenced by surrounding cultures and religions. It is therefore inevitable that myths and legends of their neighbours affected traditions documented in the Masoretic Text. Many legends in the Hebrew Bible developed to account for anomalies in the biblical text. Familiar ancient legends were recast and edited by later redactors. Some biblical narratives could, therefore, be clarified by comparing them with parallels from those nations with whom they were continuously in contact. As an historical source, the Hebrew Bible is to a large extent unreliable.

The creation narratives in Genesis, and particularly the sequential Garden of Eden chronicle, have various parallels and comparable themes in the Ancient Near Eastern literature. Creation myths primarily describe the cosmic struggle and ensuing battle with chaos monsters, subsequently establishing world order. Well-known creation myths are the Akkadian text of the *Enuma Elish* – or *Epic of Creation* – and the Sumerian *Eridu Genesis*. The Ugaritic *Ba'al* cycle myth is compared with *Yahweh's* battle with the sea monsters. A mythological background appears everywhere in the Garden of Eden narrative, with symbols derived from ancient religious traditions. Some scholars believe that the Sumerian myth – *Enki and Ninhursag* – about the loss of paradise is a parallel to the loss of the Garden of Eden. Corresponding themes include the "Tree of Life" and the "Tree of Knowledge".

Three major flood chronicles that have survived are the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Atra-Ḫasis Epic* and the Sumerian flood story; the latter is recorded in the *Sumerian King List*. In each of the three narratives the counterpart of Noah – *Utnaphistim*, *Atra-Ḫasis* and *Ziusudra*, respectively – is forewarned of an impending massive flood intended to destroy mankind. All three survive in a boat. Archaeological finds at the Mesopotamian cities Kish and Ur revealed major flood deposits, dated ca 3300 BC. It is apparent that, apart from a few cities on high mounds, everything in the Delta would have been wiped out.

The account of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9, is represented in a Sumerian equivalent. The birth legend of Sargon the Great – founder of the Dynasty of Akkad – is preserved in the *Autobiography of Sargon*. There is an unmistakable parallel between this birth legend and that of Moses. A Sumerian account of Sargon's rise to power mentions that his ascendancy

was foretold to him in a dream. This legend is reminiscent of the dreams of Joseph in Genesis 37 – the sheaves in the field bowed before his sheaf, and the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him.

Batto¹⁰⁷⁶ mentions that, although biblical revelation frequently revolved around historical events, it should be recognised that myth – even more than history – served as an agency of biblical revelation. The Hebrew writer probably appropriated familiar mythological motifs, adapted into an original story of his own. The primary purpose of narratives being to convey a message therefore renders them independent of historical accuracy.

With regard to discussions in this chapter, particularly concerning the widespread appearance of the same or cognate deities, as well as the analyses of attributes associated with *Yahweh*, it is clear that the different Ancient Near Eastern communities had a significant influence on the Israelite nation – specifically with reference to their religion.

My theory, that a semblance of *Ya*-veneration in various areas of the Ancient Near East was possible – and maybe even probable – is substantiated by the outcome of the earlier deliberations in this chapter. Similarly to the appearance of an *Asherah/Athirat*-type deity in different pantheons, a *Ya*-type deity may have been venerated by numerous peoples. In this regard, see the discussions in paragraph 4.3. According to the Kenite hypothesis – as discussed in Chapter 5 – the Kenites, as well as the Midianites, had worshipped *Yahweh* before Moses and the Israelites became acquainted with him. Being nomad metalworkers, the Kenites and other marginal groups connected to them – genealogically or by intermarriage – had the opportunity to travel over large areas, and even relocate, thereby spreading their religious beliefs. A religion, similar to their *Yahweh*-veneration, could thus have emerged elsewhere.

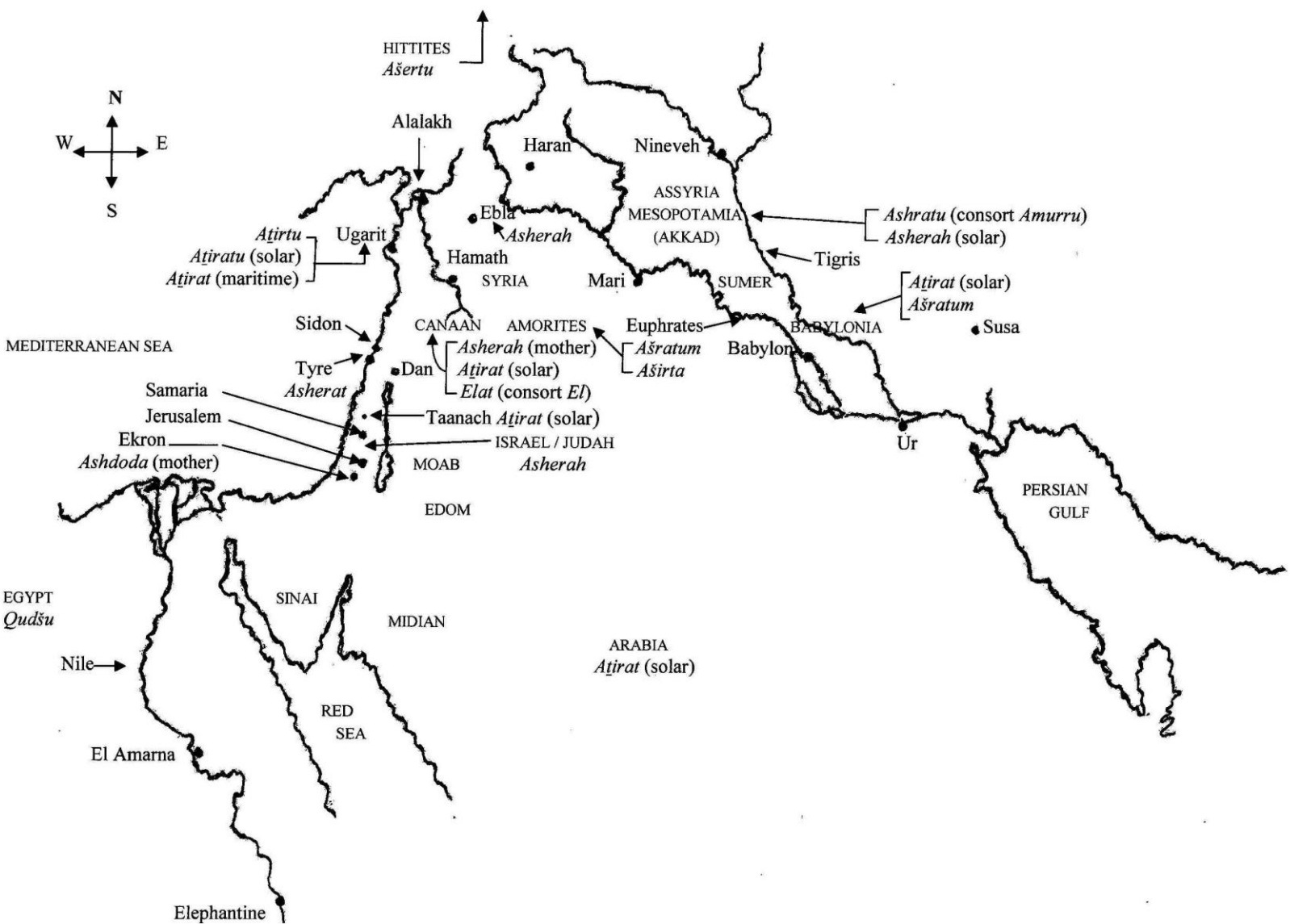
The various ancient deities were normally linked to a particular attribute. As the previous discussions indicate, storm and warrior characteristics were often observed in the same deity. In some instances the deity also exhibited solar traits. A summary of the attributes associated with either *Yahweh* or *Elohim*, as depicted in a selection of biblical texts, clearly indicate that *Yahweh* was notably regarded as a Warrior God, as well as a Storm God and Solar God. These, in addition to all the other different attributes of the various deities, culminated into the Being of *Yahweh*. He was probably venerated by the individual Israelite tribes in accordance

¹⁰⁷⁶ Batto 1992:102.

with a particular characteristic. Knowledge of the Israelites' perception of *Yahweh* assists me to reach a conclusion regarding my hypothesis on the development of Yahwism.

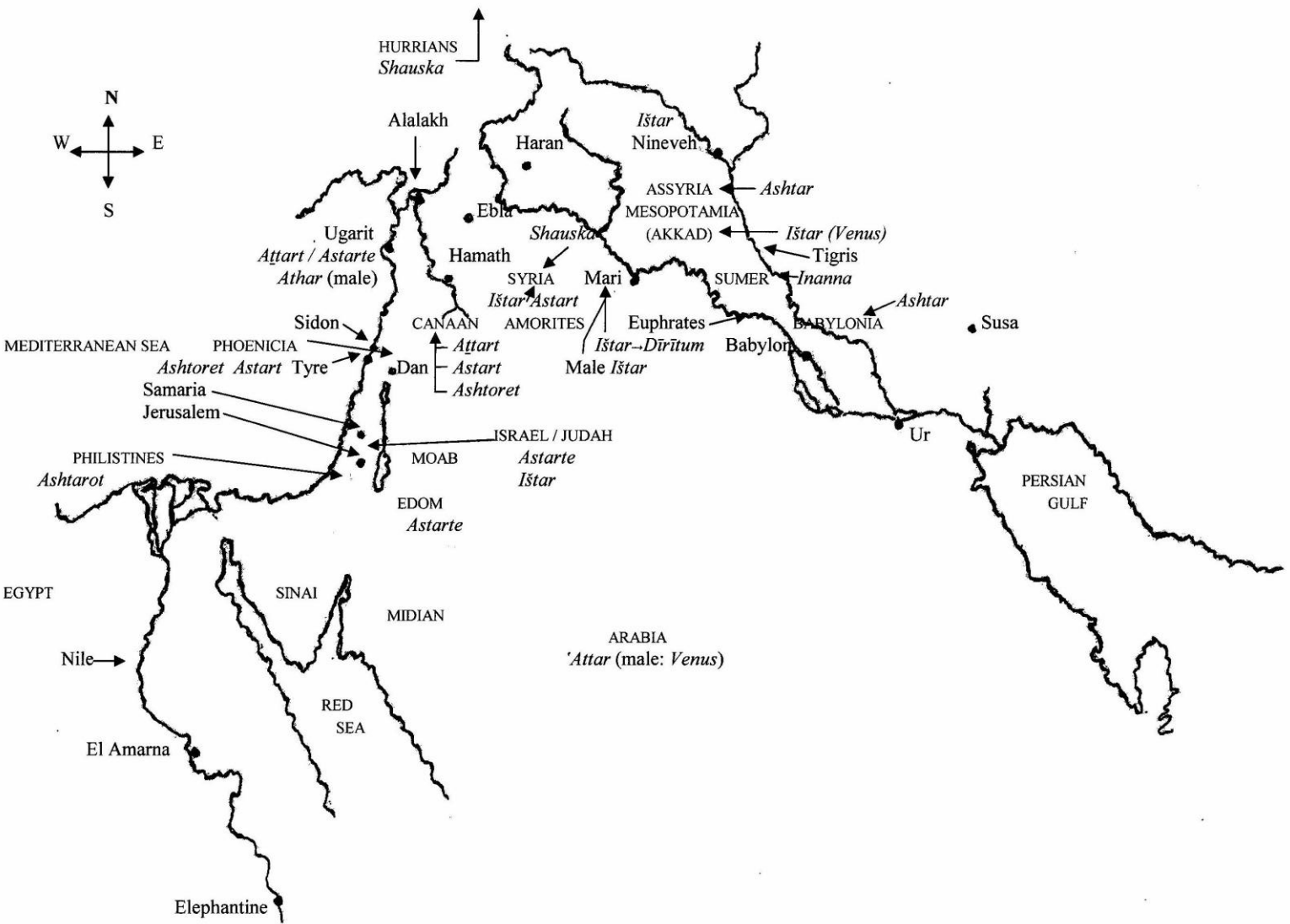
In the chapter hereafter the origin, analysis and interpretation of the name YHWH are reviewed. These deliberations are closely connected to the Being of *Yahweh*, into whom all the attributes of ancient deities have culminated. A number of extra-biblical finds, concerning possible *Ya*-related religious practices, are briefly discussed in the following chapter. A review of these finds substantiates my theory that it is conceivable that such a form of worship was indeed practised.

Map 1 and Map 2 appear on the next two pages, respectively indicating places connected to the designation *Asherah/Aṭirat* and cognate names, and places linked to the manifestations of the *Queen of Heaven*.



Map 1. Occurrence of the name *Asherah* or related forms¹⁰⁷⁷

¹⁰⁷⁷ The map indicates places connected to the designation *Asherah/Ašratu*, as well as areas and cognate names linked to this deity. *Asherah/Ašratu* and analogous goddesses are discussed in paragraph 3.2.1. The different epithets are denoted in italics.



Map 2. Manifestations of the *Queen of Heaven* / planet *Venus*¹⁰⁷⁸

¹⁰⁷⁸ The map indicates places connected to manifestations of the *Queen of Heaven*, attested in either epigraphic finds or other references. The different designations of the *Queen of Heaven* – as denoted in italics on the map – are discussed in paragraph 3.4.