



CHAPTER 5

THEORIES REGARDING THE ORIGIN OF YAHWISM

In the preceding chapter matters relating to the name YHWH have been discussed. In continuation of the previous deliberations, hypotheses on the origin of *Yahweh* and Yahwism, and relevant matters, are evaluated hereafter.

5.1 Introduction

Handy¹ is of the opinion that anyone who ventures to explain religious traditions where there is virtually no reliable source material and 'not a single living devotee of the culture to consult', exhibits some audacity. Despite the varied and fragmented data currently available on the religious life of the Syro-Palestinian people of the second and first millennia BC, scholars attempt to create a "coherent religious vision". Human² indicates that a 'complete and uniform picture of the Israelite religion' cannot be reconstructed due to a lack of information on the pre-monarchical and early monarchical periods. He furthermore argues that, although Albright³ identifies Moses as the founder of the Israelite Yahwist religion, he is 'doubtful whether one could still speak about monotheism in this early Mosaic period of Israelite history'.⁴ Van der Toorn,⁵ on the other hand, mentions that it was Saul⁶ who promoted the Israelite God to the rank of national God.

Although the Hebrews obviously would have been interested in the origin of their worship of *Yahweh*, there is no general tradition that can be authenticated. Lewy⁷ mentions that the three different accounts in the Pentateuch about this significant historic event are an indication that beliefs were at variance.⁸ The main contributors to the pentateuchal material were the important Yahwist narrator, the northern prophetic Elohists and the pre-deuteronomistic southern Priestly Elohists.⁹ The Yahwist narrator recorded that, as early as at the time of the birth of

¹ Handy 1994:3-4.

² Human 1999:495-496.

³ Human 1999:495. William F Albright's thesis is propounded in *From stone age to Christianity: monotheism and the historic process* (1957, 2nd ed, 270 ff. New York: Doubleday).

⁴ Human 1999:496.

⁵ Van der Toorn 1993:519.

⁶ Saul, as first king of the United Monarchy of Israel, brought about a territorial state, put an administrative structure in place, as well as a standing military force (Van der Toorn 1993:519). Saul reigned from 1050 BC (or 1045) to 1011/10 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:196).

⁷ Lewy 1956:430.

⁸ Yahwist account: Genesis 4:26; Elohists account: Exodus 3:14-15; Priestly account: Exodus 6:2-3 (Boshoff et al 2000:88, 104, 162).

⁹ Contributors to the Pentateuch are discussed briefly in § 8.2.

Enosh, 'people began to call upon the name of the Lord' [*Yahweh*].¹⁰ The Yahwist thus linked this important occurrence with an unimportant person. He likewise designates Cain as the ancestor of Lamech and, by implication of Noah,¹¹ whereas the Priestly narrator calls Seth their ancestor.¹² For the later Chronicler the idea was probably intolerable that Noah and Abraham were from the lineage of the murderer Cain.¹³ The pronouncement that people began to "call upon the name of *Yahweh*" with the birth of Seth's son,¹⁴ suggests that Seth is the physical and spiritual ancestor of Israel, and therefore a true model of a follower of *Yahweh*.¹⁵ Westermann,¹⁶ however, denotes that the J-narrator¹⁷ does not imply that a definite *Yahweh* cult began at the time of Enosh, but refers to worship in a general sense. The narrator thus distinguishes between the worship of *Yahweh* and religion; the latter, being part of humankind, is rooted in the primeval time. God's history in Israel therefore embraces the whole of humanity right from its beginnings.

Since the latter part of the nineteenth century many debates evolved around the question concerning the origin of *Yahweh* and the Israelite religion of Yahwism. Dijkstra¹⁸ mentions that 'the traditional view on the origin of Israel's religion and belief in YHWH was based on the picture that the Old Testament itself draws from the religion of ancient Israel'. This view was accepted by Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Contradictory traditions, as in Genesis 4:26 and Exodus 6:3,¹⁹ intensify the problem of the origins. The Cain and Abel narrative informs us that *Yahweh* was the Entity of their veneration. The prehistory of the primeval – and later – ancestors tells us that they called upon the name of *Yahweh* as in a "normal" tradition of worship.²⁰ It is conceivable that the J-narrator was familiar with traditions that worship of *Yahweh* – possibly by southern tribes – preceded Moses. Until recently, scholars assumed that these narratives, implying a pre-Israelite veneration of *Yahweh*, was part of some of the oldest layers of the Pentateuch, however, this view is no longer taken for granted. J, as a

¹⁰ Genesis 4:26b. To Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, a son, Enosh was born.

¹¹ Genesis 4:17-24 (Boshoff et al 2000:88).

¹² Genesis 5:6-32 (Boshoff et al 2000:162).

¹³ Lewy 1956:430.

¹⁴ Genesis 4:26.

¹⁵ Nolan 1982:22.

¹⁶ Westermann 1984:339-340.

¹⁷ Yahwist; see § 8.2.

¹⁸ Dijkstra 2001a:81.

¹⁹ Genesis 4:26 : 'To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD [*Yahweh*].'

Exodus 6:3 : 'I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty [*El Shadday*], but by my name the LORD [*Yahweh*] I did not make myself known to them.'

²⁰ Genesis 5:29; 9:26; 12:1; 14:22; 15:2; 18:27; 21:33; 24:3; 27:20, 27; 28:16, 21; 29:32-35; 31:49; 32:9; 49:18. According to Genesis 28:13 *Yahweh* introduced Himself by this name.

literary work, is lately dated by some scholars close to the Deuteronomistic History. 'The universalism of J is no longer the optimistic worldview of the Solomonic renaissance, but the new outlook of the Babylonian captives who retold and adapted ancient traditions in the light of their predicaments, developing a new, Diaspora theology.'²¹ Exodus 6:3,²² on the other hand, presents a different picture of the origin of *Yahweh*-veneration, creating the impression that this name was revealed to Moses for the first time, while, contrary to this perception, the antediluvian and postdiluvian ancestors were 'seen as recipients and transmitters of YHWH's original revelation'.²³ Thus, the Pentateuch supports a twofold tradition about the disclosure of *Yahweh*, and consequently of the origin of Yahwism.²⁴

Abraham Kuenen published a monumental work on the history of the religion of ancient Israel, as early as 1882.²⁵ Kuenen²⁶ indicates that the books of the Hebrew Bible are unanimous therein that they all acknowledge 'the divine origin of Israel's religion', and, that our 'belief in the exceptional origin of the religion of the Israelites is founded simply and solely on the testimony of their holy records'. Although these records appear at variance with each other, they nonetheless clearly declare a natural development of the religion itself and a belief in its heavenly genesis. Our concept of Israel's religious history, however, depends completely on our judgement of the Hebrew Bible. Kuenen²⁷ therefore poses the question whether the accounts of this history – as recorded in the Hebrew Bible – could be 'a foundation for our own review of its religious development'. He indicates that this is however not possible and that 'we cannot follow the guidance offered to us by the historical books', as they were written centuries after the events they record. It is totally unlikely that oral traditions would have remained unbiased and free from external influences after such a long time. An inquiry into this religious history pertaining to the period earlier than the eighth century BC should therefore not be done.

Dijkstra²⁸ agrees with Kuenen that, although belief in *Yahweh*, in a sense, stands at the beginning of the religion and the people of Israel, all three – thus also belief in *Yahweh* – originated more or less simultaneously on the soil of Canaan. Increased knowledge about

²¹ Dijkstra 2001a:85.

²² See earlier footnote in this paragraph.

²³ Dijkstra 2001a:86.

²⁴ Dijkstra 2001a:82-86, 88.

²⁵ Kuenen, A 1882. *The religion of Israel to the fall of the Jewish State*. 3 vols. Translated by A H May. (See Kuenen 1882a and Kuenen 1882b in the bibliography of this thesis).

²⁶ Kuenen 1882a:11.

²⁷ Kuenen 1882a:16.

²⁸ Dijkstra 2001a:92-93, 95-96.

Canaanite religions therefore contributes to a better perception of the religion of the early Israelites. Research on the origin of *Yahweh* and Yahwism should take the occurrence of syncretism into account. Syncretism – the concept which implies the contact and amalgamation of distinct religions – purports that two independently developed religions of Canaan and Israel came into contact and fused into a new religion in certain regions of Palestine. The cult of *Yahweh* from the southern desert regions thus merged with the local Canaanite cults – particularly those of *El*, *Ba'al*, and even *Asherah*. Robertson Smith,²⁹ a contemporary of Kuenen, mentions that certain myths do not merely explain particular traditional practices, but also attempt to systematise the variety of beliefs and worship, and thereby disclose the origins of "larger religious speculation". It is also clear that mythology became more important in the later stages of ancient religions. Therefore, any investigations should be directed firstly to the religious institutions which controlled the lives of the people. These views of scholars thus corroborate the inclusion of chapter 3 in this thesis.³⁰

'The Hebrew Bible presents a quite clear schematic outline of the history of Israelite religion',³¹ convincingly defining Israel as the people of *Yahweh*. It indicates that, although they have strayed from time to time into the worship of other gods, their relationship with the one God, *Yahweh*, is clearly explicated, thus presenting a unique monotheism in a polytheistic context. This traditional biblical view of Israel's religion can hardly be called historical. The appropriation of biblical material for the reconstruction of early Israelite history and religion has become problematic. Extreme viewpoints are prevalent. On the one hand some scholars downplay the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History as irrelevant literary creations of late post-exilic periods, probably in reaction to the other perspective that biblical traditions may be reliably traced back to the earlier events they refer to. Most scholars, however, agree that the texts in their present form are not mere reconstructions of events, but that the selection, arrangement and presentation of pentateuchal and deuteronomistic narratives were influenced by conditions and matters that dominated the exilic and post-exilic periods. Despite the biblical presentation of Israel's religion – but also on account of it – it remains a matter of contention.³²

²⁹ Robertson Smith 1969:18-19, 22. See footnote on this scholar in § 3.1.

³⁰ Chapter 3: concerning mythology and Ancient Near Eastern religions, as well as the syncretistic religious practices of the Israelites.

³¹ Mayes 1997:51.

³² Mayes 1997:51-52, 56-57.

Lemche³³ indicates that there is 'no evidence of a deity called Yahweh in Palestine prior to the emergence of Israel'. The question is thus where this deity came from and what he was. Answers to these questions remain hypothetical, since accounts in the Hebrew Bible are historically unattainable. Extra-biblical information points to, inter alia, *Yahweh's Shasu* nomads in the Sinai Peninsula.³⁴ Other sources also link *Yahweh* to this peninsula.³⁵ He furthermore mentions that these references are insignificant if there are no other traditions in the Hebrew Bible to establish *Yahweh's* origin in Sinai. *Djebel Musa*, in southern Sinai, is the traditional site of *Yahweh's* sanctuary. *Yahweh* revealed himself in Sinai in thunder, smoke, fire and an earthquake. These external manifestations, however, give no decisive information about the character of a deity. Yet, it is probable that *Yahweh* was regarded as the local manifestation of the storm god in Sinai, and later in Palestine. Lemche³⁶ concludes that it seems 'that Yahweh was originally located in the Sinai Peninsula, and that he was "brought" to Palestine sometime between the end of Late Bronze Age and the emergence of the Israelite monarchy.'

The Hebrew Bible, in its totality, gives a fairly explicit picture of the origin of the Israelite religion, as well as the manner in which *Yahweh*, the only God, revealed himself to the patriarchs and to Moses. It explains that *Yahweh* made a covenant with his people who pledged themselves to a monotheistic faith. The development of the Israelite religion – as outlined in the Hebrew Bible – is not supported by any historical comparisons. Although extra-biblical epigraphic sources do not confirm the rise and establishment of Yahwism as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, it is, nonetheless, the only original evidence relating to the worship of *Yahweh*.³⁷ Any conclusions drawn from this extra-biblical material 'show a divine figure worshipped in the region of Syria and Palestine from the beginning of the second millennium BC on, both by sedentary people and by nomads'.³⁸ Garbini³⁹ mentions that, contrary to what traditional biblical Yahwism proclaims, it seems that 'Yahweh existed before the Hebrew people existed and was worshipped in the land of Canaan when the Hebrew tribes were still practising the cult of their fathers'. The entire Hebrew Bible is a testimony of the demythologisation by some religious Hebrew circles that transferred the work of *Yahweh* from nature to history.

³³ Lemche 1988:252-255.

³⁴ See discussions in § 2.6 and § 4.3.4.

³⁵ The *Song of Deborah*, regarded as the oldest text in the Hebrew Bible, presents *Yahweh* as "the one from Sinai" (Jdg 5:5). This phrase could be compared with Psalm 68:8, which refers to *Yahweh* as 'the One of Sinai'. Many scholars regard this psalmic fragment almost as old as the *Song of Deborah* (Lemche 1988:253).

³⁶ Lemche 1988:253.

³⁷ See Garbini (1988:55-57), as well as § 4.3 in this thesis, for brief discussions of relevant extra-biblical material.

³⁸ Garbini 1988:57.

³⁹ Garbini 1988:57.

The religion of the Israelites was originally, to a great extent, analogous to that of neighbouring populations. In some prophetic circles a religious reform came forth, based on a moral cult of one God. The account in the Hebrew Bible about the origins of Yahwism is inconsistent with the results of an historical analysis. This version 'gives us ... a history of the religious evolution of Israel from the point of view of the priestly class of Jerusalem in the post-exilic period: a history with irritatingly nationalist connotations, characterized by an increasingly marked exclusivism'.⁴⁰ Garbini⁴¹ denotes that it is furthermore incomprehensible what motivated the redactors of the Hebrew Bible to give an extra-Palestinian origin to a religion which originated in the land of Canaan.

Since the time of Kuenen,⁴² scholars advanced different hypotheses on the origin of *Yahweh* and Yahwism. The origin, analysis and interpretation of the designation YHWH is discussed in paragraph 4.2. From this analysis it emerged that some scholars suggest that the name *Yahweh* developed from an older divine name *Yāh*, and even from the Egyptian *I-H*, also being *Yah*. *WH* was an added Egyptian epithet. The Egyptian epithet "W" – One – was customarily conferred on a supreme deity. Therefore, either through Semitic or through Egyptian, the Kenite *Yāh* thus became "*Yah-weh*", meaning "*Yah-One*". Scholars have also advanced that the Arabic interjection *Ya-huwa*, meaning "Oh, He", should be explored. Prehistoric ancestors of North Sinaitic tribes possibly called their god "He", celebrating during festivals with the cultic cry "Oh, He" – *ya-huwa*. These are but two hypotheses on the origin of the name *Yahweh*, both proposing a North Sinaitic, thus a possible Kenite root. The Kenite hypothesis – advanced in 1872 – characterises *Yahweh* as a desert god worshipped by the Kenites and related groups and that this preceded veneration of *Yahweh* by the Israelites. Currently many scholars accept the Kenite hypothesis as a feasible explanation for the origin of Yahwism. Some other scholars, however, suggest, as an alternative hypothesis, that *Yahweh* was originally a cultic epithet for *El* – as *Yahweh-El* – and that the *El*-figure was later adopted by *Yahweh*. These two hypotheses are discussed and evaluated hereafter in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.6.

5.2 Origin and characteristics of the Kenites

The Kenites were a nomadic or semi-nomadic tribe of coppersmiths who inhabited the rocky country south of Tel Arad. As early as the thirteenth century BC they made their livelihood

⁴⁰ Garbini 1988:62.

⁴¹ Garbini 1988:52-63.

⁴² Nineteenth century Dutch scholar Abraham Kuenen; see bibliography in this thesis for A Kuenen 1882, and an earlier footnote in this paragraph.

as metal craftsmen. There may be some resemblance to the modern Arab tribe, the Sleib, who travel – somewhat gypsy-like – as smiths or tinkers.⁴³

During the latter part of the nineteenth century – in 1894 – Stade identified the Cain narrative of Genesis 4 as the aetiological legend of the Kenites.⁴⁴ When Eve 'conceived and bore Cain' she declared: 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD'.⁴⁵ The name Cain – קַיִן – is a derivation from the word "gotten" or "acquired" – *qānîti*, קָנִיתִי. The name recurs later in Numbers 24:21-22 in the oracle of Balaam. In this text Cain – קַיִן – is associated with the Kenites – קֵינִי. The name has its etymology in a root *qyn*.⁴⁶ The word means "spear".⁴⁷ A similarly spelt root appears in fifth century BC South Arabian tribal, clan and personal names. The root, meaning "smith", is also found in later Aramaic and Arabic.⁴⁸ In cognate Semitic languages it means "tinsmith" or "craftsman".⁴⁹ In 2 Samuel 21:16 a *keino* – קֵינוּ – is mentioned, which could refer to a spear or metal weapons in general.⁵⁰ The name could also be related to Ugaritic *qn*, meaning "reed" or "shaft". The name Cain, likewise, might be connected to *qayn*, a Thamudic⁵¹ deity. The legend of Cain and Abel has been interpreted mythologically. In this mythology Cain represents the deified sun. *Qayn*, a well-attested Thamudic personal name, also may have represented a deified ancestor. It is uncertain whether there is any link between *Qayn* and the South Arabian deity *Qaynān*, *Kenan*.⁵² In the genealogical lists of the antediluvian heroes, Kenan – *Qênān* – is named as the son of Enosh.⁵³ Etymologically the name could be derived from Cain, with a diminutive ending *-ān*. *Qênān* could be interpreted as meaning "smith", "javelin" or "little Cain"; *Qaynān* was probably a patron deity for smiths and metalworkers. The only information about Kenan found in the Hebrew Bible, is recorded in Genesis 5:12-14: he fathered Mahalalel, as well as other sons and daughters, and lived for nine hundred and ten years.⁵⁴

⁴³ Landes 1962c:6.

⁴⁴ Nolan 1982:14. Article by B Stade, 1894. Das Kainszeichen. ZAW 14, 250-318.

⁴⁵ Genesis 4:1.

⁴⁶ Fry 1992:806.

⁴⁷ Holladay 1971:318.

⁴⁸ Fry 1992:806.

⁴⁹ Allon 1971:906.

⁵⁰ Negev & Gibson 2001:281.

⁵¹ The Thamudic language is a dialect of preclassical North Arabian. It comprises of about a thousand graffiti and has been found in West and Central North Arabia, particularly in the region of Midian. It dates from the sixth century BC to the fourth century AD (Huehnergard 1992:159).

⁵² Becking 1999a:180.

⁵³ Genesis 5:9-14; 1 Chronicles 1:1-2.

⁵⁴ Becking 1999d:479.

Kunin⁵⁵ indicates that 'two primary kinds of genealogies are found in Genesis: segmentary genealogies and linear genealogies (or pedigrees)'. Segmentary genealogies trace the lines of descent from a particular ancestor, and are typical of societies whose social structure is built on lineages. Genesis 10:8-19 is based on this specific genealogical structure. Linear genealogies, on the other hand, follow a single line of descent, tracing only significant ancestors. Genesis 4:17-22 is an example of the linear form of J.⁵⁶ Genesis 5:1-28 and 10:1-8 represent the linear and segmentary forms of P⁵⁷ respectively. The genealogy in Genesis 10 is a mixture of J and P documents.⁵⁸ Origins of nations are all described in segmentary genealogies, with the exception of that found in Genesis 4:17-22, which some scholars consider to be the tribal genealogy of the Kenites, thereby accepting Cain as the eponymous ancestor of this tribe. The Kenite genealogy was probably an independent source of their origin which was later incorporated into this text. To support this theory, scholars quote Numbers 24:21-22 wherein the name Cain is applied parallel to Kenite. There is, however, no evidence that the Kenites associated themselves with Cain as their primeval ancestor, or that the Israelite narratives relating to Cain, were shared with the Kenites.⁵⁹ According to Exodus 3:1 and Judges 1:16, there is a connection between the Midianites and the Kenites;⁶⁰ the latter were perhaps regarded as a clan of the Midianites. 1 Chronicles 2:55 links the Kenites and the Rechabites. Linear genealogies share a similar form, consisting of lists of seven or ten lineal descendants which segment into three lines – such as the list identified in Genesis 4:17-22; seven linear descendants are recorded from Cain to Lamech, concluding with the three sons of Lamech.⁶¹ The two basic genealogical structures are thus linear genealogies, which list one member of each generation in descent, while the segmented genealogies indicate a family tree that branches out into clans and lineages.⁶²

'... the Ancient Israelite manipulated genealogical information to produce a particular view of the past that conformed to his or her present need'.⁶³ Genealogical traditions among Ancient Near Eastern nations were well developed with consistent patterns. Biblical genealogies are, however, completely different with no established pattern or priority for a particular form. Therefore the form of the biblical genealogy has to be analysed before any conclusions can be

⁵⁵ Kunin 1995:182.

⁵⁶ J: Yahwist narrator of sections in the Pentateuch; see explanation in § 8.2.

⁵⁷ P: Priestly writer of sections in the Pentateuch; see explanation in § 8.2.

⁵⁸ Boshoff et al 2000:88.

⁵⁹ Kunin 1995:182-183.

⁶⁰ Exodus 3:1 refers to Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, as a priest of Midian, while Judges 1:16 names him a Kenite.

⁶¹ Kunin 1995:183-184.

⁶² Levin 2001:12.

⁶³ Aufrecht 1988:205.

drawn regarding the function or historicity of the data. Genealogies were generally applied to establish rights or the proof of lineage, and also for material gain. When oral traditions were compiled and written in a systematised way it generally resulted in a compromise. Genealogies were collected over a long period of time and not transmitted in a systematic fashion.⁶⁴

According to Levin,⁶⁵ two basic terms are applied in the Hebrew Bible to express genealogical relationships: in the pentateuchal sources the root *yld* – to give birth – is mostly used, while the root *yhs* – relationship – is more prevalent in Chronicles. Most biblical genealogies represent clans and families, their economic or administrative structure and their geographic distribution. Characters in genealogies could be identified with toponyms known from historical sources. Members of a community generally associate themselves with an eponymous ancestor who was the founder of a town or village. Particular genealogical forms were employed by the different writers of the biblical books, living in different times, with varied messages intended for specific readers. The list of descendants of Cain, for example, 'was obviously meant to bridge the chronological gap between the Cain and Abel narrative and the Flood story'.⁶⁶ Most of the genealogical material in the book of Genesis is recapped in the first chapter of the Chronicler, presumably intended to convey his version of the history of ancient Israel, thereby specifying Israel's place among the nations. The Chronicler's concept of Israel is defined both genetically and geographically. Textual deviations from Genesis could be ascribed to scribal errors.

Wilson⁶⁷ mentions that genealogies are records of a person's or a group's descent from an ancestor or ancestors. In Ancient Near Eastern literature – other than that of Israel – genealogies appear only on rare occasions. Attested lists are primarily Mesopotamian King Lists,⁶⁸ as well as second millennium BC texts dealing with the history and political organisation of the Amorites. Miller⁶⁹ denotes that a standard genealogy, which was comparable to the

⁶⁴ Aufrecht 1988:211-212, 215-216, 218.

⁶⁵ Levin 2001:15, 21-22, 28, 31-33, 36-37.

⁶⁶ Levin 2001:33.

⁶⁷ Wilson 1992:929-930.

⁶⁸ Mesopotamian King Lists as a whole do not fit the strict definition of a genealogy. However, some of these lists do contain genealogical fragments that record lines of ancestors. Of these lists the Sumerian King List is a valuable source (Wilson 1977:72-73). Levin (2001:20) mentions that Wilson – see aforementioned reference – was the first scholar 'to compile a comprehensive and systematic survey of the genealogical material and to compare it both to the anthropological data and the biblical lists'.

⁶⁹ Miller 1974:164,167, 172-173.

Hammurapi Genealogy⁷⁰ and the Assyrian King List,⁷¹ probably circulated from an early stage among Syro-Palestinian tribal groups. These standard genealogies consisted of one-dimensional lists of ancestors – normally ten generations – which were regarded as the common ancestry of the different tribes. Both the J and P pentateuchal writers⁷² would have been dependent on such a genealogy. The Cain and Abel narrative,⁷³ as well as *The Song of Lamech*,⁷⁴ clearly originated independently and were later joined to the genealogy by the Yahwist. These three units⁷⁵ represent different literary genres. The narrative, however, required that the genealogical list be split into two family lines⁷⁶ to serve as a common ancestry to all mankind.

The Cainite genealogy of the Yahwist is evidently a variant version of the Priestly writer's list. The generations from Cain to Lamech in Genesis 4:17-18 correspond with those from Kenan to Lamech in Genesis 5:9-25. The Yahwist's version of the Sethite genealogy⁷⁷ was probably retained by the redactor as it links Seth's name to the commencement of the worship of *Yahweh*.⁷⁸ A distinguishing characteristic of the J-tradition is the assumption that *Yahweh* was worshipped from the earliest times by his personal name.⁷⁹ The Sethite genealogy of Genesis 4:25-26 is a single, self-contained tradition. Preserved in a fragmentary state it has notably been altered. The Sethite line is perceived as moral and religious, in opposition to the Cainite line which represents good and evil that runs through the whole history of mankind.⁸⁰ According to Israelite myth and legend, Seth became the father of all the righteous people. He never intermarried with the daughters of Cain – as all Cain's descendants were wicked. However, Seth's children – who were called the "sons of God" – became iniquitous. They took the "daughters of man" as their wives, and thus, from the seed of Cain, the giants were born.⁸¹

⁷⁰ The genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty is important for the study of Ancient Near Eastern genealogies therein that it reveals a previously unknown function of royal genealogies; for a discussion thereof, see Wilson (1977:107-114). Hammurapi: see footnote in § 2.4.

⁷¹ Of the three groups of texts in the Assyrian King List, only one contains an extensive amount of genealogical material (Wilson 1977:86-87).

⁷² See § 8.2.

⁷³ Genesis 4:1-16.

⁷⁴ Genesis 4:23-24.

⁷⁵ The Cain and Abel narrative, the so-called Cainite genealogy (Genesis 4:17-22) and the *Song of Lamech*.

⁷⁶ The Cainite and Sethite genealogical family lines.

⁷⁷ Genesis 5, as well as the brief list in Genesis 4:25-26. Scholars generally agree that these verses are the fragmentary remains of a more extensive Sethite genealogy which the Yahwist included alongside the Cainite genealogy (Miller 1974:164).

⁷⁸ Genesis 4:26.

⁷⁹ Miller 1974:164-165.

⁸⁰ Westermann 1984:338.

⁸¹ Rappoport & Patai 1966:200. Genesis 6:1-4.

Moye⁸² indicates that all genealogical lists more or less follow the same lines.⁸³ In the extended list of 'the generations of Adam',⁸⁴ the phrase 'generations of the heavens and the earth'⁸⁵ links the human creation to the divine. All antediluvian genealogies thus 'serve the purpose of narrowing down universal humanity to the single line that will be God's chosen people'.⁸⁶ Therefore, if genealogy could be described as the conveyance of history in its pre-historical form, then these two different genealogies in the antediluvian history of Genesis signify the presentation of a particular event, while each genealogy has its own point of departure within the context of that one specific event. This event pertains to the origin of the ancestral father, who becomes an historical causality in the writings of the history.⁸⁷

As early as the post-exilic age, growing Messianic speculations, as well as cultic concerns within Judaism, led to a scholarly interest in biblical genealogies. Later scholars regarded the genealogies in the Hebrew Bible as accurate sources to reconstruct the Israelite history. In the course of time scholars realised that genealogies in Genesis might have been constructed originally by linking names which have been obtained from early Near Eastern mythological traditions and legends. Mythical names were probably used to "fabricate" a biography of the ancestors. Genealogies in tribal societies were often applied to indicate the political and social relationships between tribes. Therefore, biblical genealogies were regarded as accounts of tribal origins and interrelationships. Much of the genealogical material comes from late sources in Israel's history, of which the earliest genealogies are from a source not older than the Davidic period. Late sources might, however, contain early material; therefore early oral units could have been linked artificially in the genealogies, but may also contain pure fabrications. The question is whether Ancient Near Eastern writers considered genealogy an historiographic genre, whether they had the same function and form at written and oral levels, and whether they developed out of narrative traditions. In tribal societies kinship relationships, which linked a person to other people, played an important role.⁸⁸

Moye⁸⁹ mentions that 'the intricate interrelation of genealogy and mythical narrative, then, serves not only to unify the text as a whole but also to unite the mythical paradigm of

⁸² Moye 1990:590.

⁸³ For example, the repeated phrase: 'and Adam knew his wife' (Gen 4:1, 25), encloses the Cain narrative (Moye 1990:590).

⁸⁴ Genesis 5:1.

⁸⁵ Genesis 2:4a.

⁸⁶ Moye 1990:590.

⁸⁷ Westermann 1984:324.

⁸⁸ Wilson 1977:1-3, 7-8, 18.

⁸⁹ Moye 1990:577, 591.

dissociation from and reunion with the divine to the historical paradigm of exile and return, which is the informing pattern of the Hebrew Bible as a whole'. He furthermore indicates that the intimate relation between history and fiction should be recognised; history being a "slippery term", while the meaning of fiction is ambiguous.

Regarding some aspects, Ancient Near Eastern material has clear similarities to the Cainite genealogy in Genesis 4:17-26. 'Both the Mesopotamian and biblical traditions speak of seven figures or seven generations of ancestors who lived before the flood and who were the founders of various arts of civilization.'⁹⁰ This number corresponds to the lists of the seven *apkallu*, the "seven wise ones" or the "Seven Sages". Most scholars agree that the majority of names in the Cainite "genealogy of seven" are not Hebrew, but rather of Babylonian origin.⁹¹ The *apkallus* were individuals who were never depicted as genealogically related.⁹² In Sumerian mythology they teach humanity the art of civilisation. The number ten in the Sethite genealogy is consistent with the same number of antediluvian kings, or heroes, in the Mesopotamian tradition. The last name was that of the hero of the Flood.⁹³ In the Koran five idols are mentioned who were erected by the descendants of Cain, namely *Wadd*, *Sowa*, *Yaghut*, *Ya'uk* and *Nasr*.⁹⁴

'A number of scholars suggest that Gen. 4:17-24 once circulated orally and functioned as a genealogy of the Kenite tribe.'⁹⁵ Cain and the Kenites are also linked in Judges 4:11. Heber, the Kenite, is said to have separated from Cain; he is also identified with the sons of Hobab, the Kenite – or Midianite – father-in-law of Moses.⁹⁶ Scholars therefore conclude 'that Cain is simply another name for the Kenite tribe'.⁹⁷ Other scholars, however, negate the theory that Cain was the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites. Lewy⁹⁸ refers to Cain as the 'name of the imagined ancestor of the Kenites'. He is of the opinion that the Kenites worshipped *Yahweh* or *Yahu* – whom he describes as a storm-and-fire god of the mountains – but that they did not know the origin of such worship and therefore attributed it to their ancestor Cain. According

⁹⁰ Wilson 1977:154.

⁹¹ Westermann 1984:325, 328.

⁹² Wilson 1977:154.

⁹³ Kunin 1995:184.

⁹⁴ Guirand 1996:323.

⁹⁵ Wilson 1977:156.

⁹⁶ English bible translations (such as the ESV) of Judges 4:11 read: 'Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites ...'. The Hebrew text reads: וְהֵבֶר הַכֵּנִי נִפְרָד מִקֵּין. See § 5.3 regarding the three names of Moses' father-in-law.

⁹⁷ Wilson 1977:156.

⁹⁸ Lewy 1956:431.

to Westermann,⁹⁹ 'Cain has no connection with the family tree of the Kenites nor is he their primal ancestor'. Blenkinsopp,¹⁰⁰ on the other hand, refers to Cain as the ancestor of the Kenites. Kuenen¹⁰¹ mentions that the narratives in Genesis were constructed based on a theory of the origin of nations. The Israelites considered nations or tribes as families. This view is expressed, for example, in idioms such as "the house of Israel". As more time elapsed and they thought back, the visualising of a family became smaller, until it concluded in the father of the tribe, or of the whole nation. Narratives that "prove" the origin of nations are therefore historically unfounded. Halpern,¹⁰² however, indicates that the ancestry of the Kenites could be traced to an eponym, the biblical Cain. Nolan¹⁰³ suggests 'that the Cain narrative of Genesis 4 is the Kenites' own aetiological legend, which they themselves composed'.

Despite the varying degrees of comment by scholars on the origin of the Kenites, there are many traits of the Kenites that could link this tribe to Cain.

When the origin and growth of a civilisation is built into its genealogy 'one presupposes a development in its achievements'.¹⁰⁴ As mentioned earlier in this paragraph, linear genealogies consist of either ten or seven lineal descendants. The number seven obviously describes a totality. Genesis 4:17-22 designates seven generations of the primeval period. In a further development of this genealogy the beginning of urban civilisation is described with the report of the building of the first city.¹⁰⁵ The genealogy is concluded with the seventh generation – the three sons of Lamech.¹⁰⁶ These sons represent different occupational groups, which require mobility to a certain extent. Therefore, taking the building of a city into account, four separate lifestyles are reflected.¹⁰⁷ The first son of Lamech was Jabal, who was the 'father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock'.¹⁰⁸ The second son was Jubal, 'the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe'.¹⁰⁹ Tubal-cain was the last son, 'the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron'.¹¹⁰ Thus Jabal and Jubal, the children of Cain's wife Adah, and their descendants were cattle breeders and musicians who lived in tents, while Tubal-cain – son of Zillah

⁹⁹ Westermann 1984:333.

¹⁰⁰ Blenkinsopp 1986:359.

¹⁰¹ Kuenen 1882a:110.

¹⁰² Halpern 1992:17.

¹⁰³ Nolan 1982:27.

¹⁰⁴ Westermann 1984:342.

¹⁰⁵ Genesis 4:17.

¹⁰⁶ Westermann 1984:342.

¹⁰⁷ Miller 1974:168.

¹⁰⁸ Genesis 4:20.

¹⁰⁹ Genesis 4:21.

¹¹⁰ Genesis 4:22. Tubal-cain is a compound name, of which the second noun indicates the trade (Allon 1971:906).

– and his descendants were smiths and metalworkers. Palestinian folklore was familiar with two Cains who represented radically different lifestyles: Cain the city builder – together with his son Enoch – and prototype of the settled farmer, and Cain, the name-giving ancestor of the Kenite metalworkers.¹¹¹ The founding of a city is considered to be an element of sedentary civilisation. In contrast, the group associated with Lamech represents the nomads.¹¹²

The Kenites – or Qenites – were a non-Israelite community or clan, frequenting the wilderness of Sinai. Scholars generally agree that the etymology of the term "Kenite" implies that they were migrating smiths. In Arabic, Syriac and Palmyrene the root *qyn* can form the basis for words meaning "to forge", "metalworker". Tubal-cain, a descendant of Cain is identified as the founder of metallurgy, and therefore the first metallurgist. His name Tubal could be connected to Tabal, a renowned centre of metallurgy in south-eastern Cappadocia. There is, however, no certainty whether the Kenites were named after an occupation or a particular figure. Apart from being itinerant metalworkers, they were also musical specialists who could be connected to Cain's offspring Jubal, the archetypal musician. Their third association with Cain could be with his son Jabal, the tent dweller and livestock breeder. The Kenites were tent dwellers, herders, musicians and metalworkers.¹¹³ Their traditions, thus, depict Cain as their eponymous ancestor.

The Kenites, who might have been a clan of the Midianites, wandered in the Sinai, the Negeb, Midian, Edom, Amalek and northern Palestine. After the "conquest" of Canaan they settled in the Negeb,¹¹⁴ of which a region was named after them.¹¹⁵ There may be an indication in "Balaam's song"¹¹⁶ that the Kenites "dwelt in the rock", not far from Punon,¹¹⁷ one of the main sources of copper.¹¹⁸ This "rock" also appears to be a reference to the mountains of Edom and Midian, and could denote the Edomite mountain fortress Sela,¹¹⁹ close to rich copper

¹¹¹ Miller 1974:169.

¹¹² Westermann 1984:327, 330.

¹¹³ Halpern 1992:17-18.

¹¹⁴ Judges 1:16.

¹¹⁵ 1 Samuel 27:10.

¹¹⁶ Numbers 24:21.

¹¹⁷ Punon was on the route of the exodus (Nm 33:42-43), and is identified with Feinan, which is forty-eight kilometres south of the Dead Sea. The region is reasonably rich in water and arable soil, as well as in rich copper mines. These mines were worked in both protohistoric and later historical periods. Archaeological surveys indicate that mining took place from the Chalcolithic to the Byzantine periods. Slag heaps, crucibles and mining installations have been found there (Negev & Gibson 2001:413).

¹¹⁸ Negev & Gibson 2001:281.

¹¹⁹ Sela means "rock", and was an Edomite fortress city. This site has been identified with the Nabatean rock-city of Petra, which lies halfway between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. Another site for Sela has also been proposed, close to Buseira – biblical Bozrah. It is possible that both locations served as capitals for Edom at different times (Fanwar 1992:1073-1074).

deposits.¹²⁰ The Kenites' presence in the southern regions is confirmed by the discovery of a Hebrew ostrakon¹²¹ at Arad,¹²² wherein the place name Kinah, as well as Ramoth-Negeb is mentioned.¹²³ Kinah,¹²⁴ which was situated not far from Arad, may be linked to colonisation by Kenites of the eastern part of the Beer-sheba Valley.¹²⁵ Judges 1:16 mentions that the descendants of the Kenites went up 'from the city of the palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad.' Kenite families evidently occupied settlements or cities in the South. Narratives from the time of David refer to the cities of the Kenites.¹²⁶ These probably included Kinah¹²⁷ and possibly Kain¹²⁸ on the border of the wilderness of Judah.¹²⁹

Yohanan Aharoni, who excavated at Arad, revealed a raised platform – probably an altar – in the centre of the uncovered village. He identified this village in Stratum XII¹³⁰ as the most likely establishment of the Kenites. The altar base in the centre of the village 'may reflect in some way the priestly background of this ancient clan'.¹³¹ Herzog and others¹³² indicate that during the tenth century BC the Israelites built an altar at Arad. They used the few remaining stones of a previous altar, which preserved an even earlier cultic tradition of a platform that may have been a Kenite shrine in the twelfth century BC. Dever,¹³³ however, mentions that this site had no Late Bronze Age occupation. During the late tenth century BC a small, isolated village was founded on the ruins of an Early Bronze city.

¹²⁰ Allon 1971:906.

¹²¹ Ostraca (con): see footnote in § 2.14.2.

¹²² Arad was an important city in the eastern Negeb, on the border of Judah and on the main road to Edom. During the Early Bronze Age II there was a large fortified city on the site. During Iron Age II a new settlement was founded on the ridge of the ancient city. In the centre of a small open village was a raised platform with an altar, which could have been the high place where Kenite families worshipped (Jdg 1:16). More than two hundred ostraca (inscriptions on potsherds) were found at Arad (Negev & Gibson 2001:42-44). The site is identified with Arabic Tell 'Urad, approximately twenty-nine kilometres east of Beer-sheba (Dever 2003:29).

¹²³ Negev & Gibson 2001:281.

¹²⁴ Kinah is one of the cities mentioned in the list of cities in Joshua 15, as the inheritance of Judah (Jos 15:20-22). It was situated in the Negeb on the Edomite border (Jos 15:21-32). Wadi el-Qéni is mentioned as a possible site of biblical Kinah; it has been connected recently with Khirbet Ghazze, which is six to seven kilometres south-west of Arad. The site was strategically important on the road to Edom. It consisted of a sizeable fortress. Excavations yielded ostraca similar to those found at Arad. One of the ostraca found at Arad indicates Kinah as one of the logistic centres of the area (Liwak 1992:39).

¹²⁵ Liwak 1992:39.

¹²⁶ 1 Samuel 27:10; 30:29.

¹²⁷ Joshua 15:22.

¹²⁸ Joshua 15:57.

¹²⁹ Allon 1971:907.

¹³⁰ Stratum XII at Arad represents Iron Age I – twelfth to eleventh century BC (Herzog et al 1984:4).

¹³¹ Herzog et al 1984:1, 3, 6.

¹³² Herzog et al 1984:33.

¹³³ Dever 2003:29.

The Kenites, identified as metalworkers and coppersmiths – earlier in this paragraph – lived as nomads or semi-nomads.¹³⁴ According to the *Song of Deborah*,¹³⁵ it is clear that the Kenites dwelled in tents and kept cattle.¹³⁶ The ease with which one branch of the Kenite community moved from the South to the North (Judges 4:11) could be taken as a confirmation of their itinerant pastoralism.¹³⁷ Evidence of their nomadic tendencies can be recognised in certain textual references, namely, Moses' Midianite father-in-law kept flocks;¹³⁸ Heber, the Kenite, 'pitched his tent' and his wife Jael lived in a tent;¹³⁹ at the time of Saul the Kenites lived in the wilderness of Judah and avoided the arable soil;¹⁴⁰ the Rechabites – who were related to the Kenites – lived in tents in opposition to agriculture.¹⁴¹ The curse on Cain from the soil – see discussion further on in this paragraph – was probably perceived by the Kenites as the origin of their nomadic lifestyle.¹⁴² Israelite tribes who lived in tents are traced back to Jabal. According to tradition, they had herds of cattle. The Assyrian King List A records in similar detail about seventeen kings who lived in tents.¹⁴³ This particular way of living as nomads suited the Kenites' profession as metalworkers and coppersmiths. Although tents were thus one of the basic structures in the Ancient Near East, important for domestic, sexual, cultic, military and agricultural purposes, they are very seldom preserved in the archaeological record. A Midianite tent shrine at Timnah is a notable exception.¹⁴⁴

Scholars have also noted that the "community" of the Kenites was identical to nomadic units at Mari.¹⁴⁵ In some Mari documents specific terminology for tribal units appears – for example, *gāyūm*, *gāwum*, *ummatum*, *hibrum* – which have been borrowed from West Semitic. The term *hibrum* – Hebrew *heber* – refers to a smaller separate tribal unit of closely linked families within the larger unit of the clan or tribe. The Hebrew Bible mentions Heber the Kenite¹⁴⁶ as the name of the head of an isolated family, which appears to be a tribal subdivision that had broken away from the parent tribe. It would seem that the name "Heber"

¹³⁴ Landes 1962c:6.

¹³⁵ Judges 5. The *Song of Deborah* – dated the end of the twelfth century BC – is one of the oldest compositions preserved in the Hebrew Bible. It is therefore more or less contemporary with the events it describes. Although the historicity of the poem cannot be established, it is difficult to believe that it does not celebrate an actual battle (Schloen 1993:20-21).

¹³⁶ Judges 5:24-25.

¹³⁷ Van der Toorn 1995:234.

¹³⁸ Exodus 3:1.

¹³⁹ Judges 4:11, 17-18.

¹⁴⁰ 1 Samuel 15:4-8.

¹⁴¹ Jeremiah 35.

¹⁴² Nolan 1982:15, 28-29.

¹⁴³ Westermann 1984:331.

¹⁴⁴ Negev & Gibson 2001:501.

¹⁴⁵ Halpern 1992:18.

¹⁴⁶ Judges 4:11, 17; 5:24.

personifies this nomadic subdivision, of which a group of families or clans had been linked by distinctive ties from the time of their collective wanderings. Samuel¹⁴⁷ mentions the "cities of the Kenites" – which probably refer to temporary settlements similar to the *alāni* of the Mari documents – that could indicate that some of the Kenites became settled farmers. As in the Mari idiom – the *hibrum ša nawim* – the rest of the tribe continued to live as nomads. Heber, the son of Beriah,¹⁴⁸ was head of the main branch of Asher's descendants.¹⁴⁹ Neither the meaning of *ummatum*, nor the etymology thereof, has as yet been established satisfactorily. The word normally occurs in military contexts. It may have a connection with Hebrew *'ummah*, which is derived from Semitic *'m*, mother. *Ummatum* could therefore denote some sort of tribal or "mother" unit. The term, however, was applied frequently as a military term. In the earliest stages armies were formed on the basis of families of the different tribes. Indications are that the organisation of armies in ancient Israel was the same as in Mari. The Hebrew cognate of *ummatum* – *'ummah* – occurs only twice in the Hebrew Bible. In the first instance it relates to the Midianites, and in the other to the closely affiliated Ishmaelites. In both instances it signifies a tribal unit.¹⁵⁰

The *Song of Deborah* 'is an exultant song of victory by tribal leaders on the morrow of a battle, giving expression in its language and spirit to the whole gamut of nomadic attitudes and values'.¹⁵¹ Desert warfare – as described in Arabian sources – could apply to the fighting habits of the early Israelites, who were in many ways much like the Arabian nomads. A nomadic attack was consistently accompanied by the shouting of war cries from both sides. Tribal custom prescribed that in a tribal community members were protected, in either way of doing right or wrong. Running through the Hebrew Bible are repeated references to a highly developed nomadic code of honour. Nomads were constantly roaming with their herds in search of water and pasture.¹⁵² The word "Kenite", קניי, could have its etymology in the word for "livestock", "cattle", מִקְנֵה.¹⁵³

One of the hallmarks of the early development of civilisation in the Ancient Near East was the ability to manipulate ores to produce strong metals. While experimentation in metallurgy started at a very early date, it became a successful, although primitive, science during the third

¹⁴⁷ 1 Samuel 30:29.

¹⁴⁸ 1 Chronicles 7:30-40.

¹⁴⁹ Malamat 1962:143, 145-146.

¹⁵⁰ Malamat 1979:527-528, 533.

¹⁵¹ Seale 1974:27.

¹⁵² Seale 1974:33, 38, 75, 106, 115.

¹⁵³ Nolan 1982:107. See also Holladay (1971:212).

millennium BC. The beginnings of metallurgy is regarded in many places throughout the world as of the utmost importance in the history of humankind.¹⁵⁴ It has a prominent place in Sumerian, as well as Greek and Roman myths.¹⁵⁵ In Mesopotamia none of the ores was locally available and therefore, presumably, would have been obtained through trade. High-quality articles such as weapons and jewellery were manufactured out of chemically complicated metal alloys. Mines and mining areas from antiquity were discovered in eastern Anatolia. Trade routes developed and gateway cities progressed along these routes.¹⁵⁶ Anatolia was known for its rich iron ores and also had some copper. According to Assyrian documents, a nation, Tubal, traded in copper in Asia Minor and produced metal objects. It seems that Tubal-cain could be identified with Tubal, which is also mentioned in Ezekiel 27:13. The el-Amarna Letters refer to a region in northern Syria as the "Land of Copper" where copper was mined.¹⁵⁷

During the thirteenth century BC the Hittites discovered a process to extract iron from its ores. At that stage the Hittite Kingdom had expanded to include virtually all of Asia Minor. Their political dominance, however, declined dramatically following disputes concerning royal succession.¹⁵⁸ By the end of the thirteenth century BC the great powers of western Asia, including the Hittite Empire, collapsed. Egypt withdrew from Canaan. Although international trade probably suffered, it is unlikely that it was discontinued.¹⁵⁹ Scholars have suggested that the Kenites were a group of metalworkers who left the Hittite Empire with its downfall and introduced the art of metallurgy to the Israelites.¹⁶⁰ Irnash, known as the "city of a serpent" – or perhaps originally "city or copper" – was a city in Judah.¹⁶¹ Although the Hebrew Bible refers to copper, it is actually bronze, an alloy of copper and tin. Bronze was one of the most important metals from as early as the beginning of the third millennium BC, until it was later replaced by iron.¹⁶² After 1200 BC a large amount of metal was produced and circulated, but it was always linked to the local inhabitants. It had no connection with

¹⁵⁴ Westermann 1984:333.

¹⁵⁵ Westermann 1984:333. Some gods in the myths are depicted in battledress. An example is an image of the Greek goddess *Hera* – wife of the major god *Zeus* – on an amphora. She is fully armed with a battleshield (Willis 1993:132, 134). For an explanation of "amphora", see description incorporated in a footnote in § 2.13, subtitle "Taanach".

¹⁵⁶ Kelly-Buccellati 1990:117-118, 126.

¹⁵⁷ Negev & Gibson 2001:335. See § 2.5 in connection with the Amarna Letters.

¹⁵⁸ Negev & Gibson 2001:231, 281, 335, 337.

¹⁵⁹ Schloen 1993:33.

¹⁶⁰ Frick 1971:287.

¹⁶¹ The site of Irnash is unknown, but it might have been also in the territory of Benjamin, north of Jerusalem. Scholars have suggested the site of Deir Nahas, near Beit Jibrin. See also 1 Chronicles 4:12 (Gold 1962:725).

¹⁶² Negev & Gibson 2001:336.

Greeks, Phoenicians, foreign merchants, or migratory metalworkers. This period also reflected continuity in technology from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age.¹⁶³

Although our knowledge of mining activities in the biblical period is limited, it seems that the Kenites and other semi-nomadic tribes who dwelt in the South,¹⁶⁴ held a kind of monopoly on copper mining and the production of copper artefacts. Important sources of copper were in the southern Arabah, Sinai and Punon. Excavations at Tel Arad revealed a large amount of metal objects and remains of copper metallurgy that could be dated back to the beginning of the fourth millennium BC. The nearby Valley of Beer-sheba was the centre of copper metallurgy, and copper ores from both Feinan and Timnah were well known in the Early Bronze Age.¹⁶⁵ Egyptians exploited the mines in Sinai, and in the Early Iron Age at Timnah.¹⁶⁶ The mines at Timnah were formerly attributed to Solomon, but recent research indicates that they were quarried at least two centuries earlier.¹⁶⁷ A smelting camp of Early Iron Age I was found in the Timnah Valley.¹⁶⁸ Copper smelting furnaces, as well as all the necessary metallurgical equipment have been excavated. The particular technological processes that had been applied have been reconstructed. The Egyptians operated the mines and smelters jointly with the local inhabitants. These included Midianites, Kenites and Amalekites who preserved metallurgical traditions that could be traced back to prehistoric times. A small early Semitic-type sanctuary, as well as a high place, close to the site, has also been uncovered. In paragraph 2.14.1 a twelfth century BC Egyptian temple at Timnah is discussed. This *Hathor* temple shows distinct Semitic features. Among the finds at the temple were so-called Edomite pottery – probably of Midianite origin – and many copper offerings, which include a copper snake with a gilded head; the latter was probably a Midianite votive serpent.¹⁶⁹

The nature of mining and trade in metal products prevented the smith from establishing a permanent domicile or to become involved in agriculture. He usually moved on when the supply of ore was exhausted.¹⁷⁰ 'Metallurgists in antiquity, as a rule, formed proud endogenous lines of families with long genealogies', and their technical lore 'was handed down and

¹⁶³ Muhly 1998:320.

¹⁶⁴ South of Palestine, Sinai Peninsula and regions where tribes such as the Midianites dwelled.

¹⁶⁵ Hauptmann et al 1999:1, 5.

¹⁶⁶ A description of Timnah is incorporated in a footnote in § 2.2. See also § 2.14.1.

¹⁶⁷ Negev & Gibson 2001:281, 305, 335, 337, 365.

¹⁶⁸ See § 2.14.1 for a description.

¹⁶⁹ Negev & Gibson 2001:507-508.

¹⁷⁰ Frick 1971:285.

guarded jealously from generation to generation'.¹⁷¹ The biblical tradition gives the impression that a close link existed between the Kenites and Midianites – metalworking also being a distinctive feature among certain Midianites, particularly the group among whom Moses settled.¹⁷²

Midian, who has descended from Keturah,¹⁷³ has a different mother than the main line of descent from Abraham. Midian appears to be the only ideologically significant group of the Keturite tribes. They were pastoral nomads who lived on the east side of the gulf of Aqabah. In Exodus a positive attitude is exhibited towards Jethro, Moses' father-in-law and priest of Midian,¹⁷⁴ which suggests a positive attitude towards Midian. In Numbers,¹⁷⁵ however, Midian is depicted in a hostile manner. In Judges,¹⁷⁶ following the enslavement of the Israelites, Gideon defeated the Midianites. The Hebrew Bible, thus, portrays Midian positively, as well as strongly negatively. However, after the book of Judges, Midian does not appear to have been ideologically significant.¹⁷⁷ In Genesis 37, traders who took Joseph to Egypt are termed Ishmaelites in the one text, and in the next, Midianites.¹⁷⁸ Revell¹⁷⁹ explains that the general view is that, although these names represent distinct groups, the names are derived from two strands of tradition which have been combined in the narrative. The two names may also be regarded as alternative designations for the same group. In Judges 8:22-24 the term "Ishmaelite" is applied to the Midianites; however, this approach has not been supported readily by scholars. Variant designations for a population group or an individual are common in biblical narratives. 'Biblical narrators deployed alternative designations in just this sort of way to specify the different roles in which a character might interact with others.'¹⁸⁰ Scholars initially typified Midianites as Bedouin nomads and traders travelling by camel caravan,¹⁸¹ but it has become clear that they had a 'complex and highly sophisticated society'.¹⁸² They

¹⁷¹ Frick 1971:285.

¹⁷² Fensham 1964:51-52.

¹⁷³ Keturah was another wife of Abraham whom he took after the death of Sarah. Her children and grandchildren can be identified with prominent Aramaean or Arabian tribes and cities, for example, Midian, Sheba, Dedan (Gn 25:1-4). In terms of genealogy, as depicted in the Hebrew Bible, Keturah links Abraham to those Arabian tribes who were not included among the descendants of Hagar (Knauf 1992a:31).

¹⁷⁴ Exodus 3:1.

¹⁷⁵ In Numbers 22:4-7, Midian [and Moab] hire Balaam to curse Israel; in Numbers 25 Midian is blamed for leading the Israelites into sin; Numbers 31 describes a holy war against Midian. Psalm 83 lists Midian as a past enemy (Kunin 1995:190).

¹⁷⁶ Judges 6-8.

¹⁷⁷ Kunin 1995:190.

¹⁷⁸ Genesis 37:27-28.

¹⁷⁹ Revell 2001:70-75.

¹⁸⁰ Revell 2001:75.

¹⁸¹ Genesis 37:25-28, 36. For a description of "caravans", see footnote in § 2.9 on "caravanserai".

¹⁸² Mendenhall 1992b:817.

were also shepherds in the Sinai region.¹⁸³ Archaeological and other evidence for the Midianites points 'to a fairly recent northern origin of important segments of the population'.¹⁸⁴

When scholars interpret ancient texts, they should attempt to recover what the authors meant to convey to their audiences, and try to avoid biased readings influenced by present-day worldviews. A goal of the social-scientific approach is 'to provide contemporary readers with possible scenarios for understanding texts that are from cultures radically different from our own'.¹⁸⁵ The pattern in traditional Middle Eastern Bedouin societies conforms more or less to that of East African pastoral societies, where smiths and artisans are viewed with some fear. They are often spurned and observed as dangerous sorcerers with supernatural powers. These smiths form separate groups which are fragmented and scattered. Smiths and tinkers are considered to be from inferior tribes. In myths and traditional stories, smiths are characterised as being both human and divine. Smiths and other artisans, as well as their families are marginalised in the socio-economic sphere, as they do not fully participate in economic activities, such as agriculture or pastoralism. These marginal characteristics can also be seen in the biblical portrayals of the Kenites, Midianites and Rechabites. 'The ambivalent and marginal character of smiths and artisans is clearly represented in the figure of Cain – the biblical culture hero and first builder of a city, the eponymous ancestor of tent dwellers, musicians, and metalsmiths – when he is compared to similar figures in other traditional culture hero stories'.¹⁸⁶ Cain being neither fully human nor fully divine epitomises a category of a being that is neither fully nomadic nor fully sedentary. Scholars have suggested that Genesis 4 was originally an Edomite myth explaining the origins of a group of metalworkers from the copper-mining region east of the Arabah.¹⁸⁷

Huffman¹⁸⁸ declares that 'the story of Cain and Abel'¹⁸⁹ is dramatic and powerful, with many dimensions So many possible questions are left unanswered, so many conceivable lines of development are passed over, that the story remains elusive to us'. In the narrative the basic occupational contrasts of shepherd and farmer are highlighted. Some scholars comment that *Yahweh's* favourable response to Abel's sacrifice indicates 'a preference for the nomadic, pastoral life as opposed to agricultural pursuits'.¹⁹⁰ The text does not indicate how *Yahweh*

¹⁸³ Mendenhall 1992b:815, 817.

¹⁸⁴ Mendenhall 1973:166.

¹⁸⁵ McNutt 1999:47.

¹⁸⁶ McNutt 1999:54.

¹⁸⁷ McNutt 1999:47-49, 51, 53-54, 57-58.

¹⁸⁸ Huffman 1985:109.

¹⁸⁹ Genesis 4.

¹⁹⁰ Huffman 1985:109.

made his preference known. The general consensus amongst scholars is that Cain lacked the proper attitude. Subsequent to the sacrifices that had been made, Abel's flocks were blessed with fertility, in contrast to the field of Cain. He responded in anger and killed his brother.¹⁹¹ Several Sumerian myths describe strife between deities or kings, each attempting to convince the other of his superiority. The Cain and Abel narrative may be compared with these myths, and should, therefore, not exclude the possibility that it was composed of two originally independent chronicles. In the early stages of their settlement the Israelites were primarily shepherds and were contemptuous of the village farmers. The narrative thus probably dates from the early days of tribal settlement in Canaan. Equating Cain the farmer with Cain of the genealogy is therefore conceivable. The genealogy no longer served as the common ancestry of all mankind, but only of those groups – such as shepherds, musicians and metalworkers – who were predisposed to a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life.¹⁹² This narrative furthermore discloses that when people live side-by-side, the possibility arises of the destruction of a human life by another human. The *Song of Lamech*¹⁹³ is a song of the desert, as blood vengeance is part of life in the desert.¹⁹⁴

The biblical text mentions that Abel brought 'the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions', while Cain brought 'an offering of the fruit of the ground'¹⁹⁵ as a sacrifice to *Yahweh*.¹⁹⁶ Genesis 3:17 mentions 'cursed is the ground because of you'. It therefore seems that Cain's offering was rejected being produce from the ground. Man was created from the soil – *הָאָדָמָה*¹⁹⁷ – but in Genesis 3:14-19 the status of *hā'ādāmā* is changed and is cursed. Cain was a tiller of the soil.¹⁹⁸ In response to Cain's fratricide *Yahweh* indicates '... you are cursed from the ground ... it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth'.¹⁹⁹ Despite this judgement, *Yahweh* gives Cain the assurance that 'if anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold', and *Yahweh* 'put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him'.²⁰⁰

¹⁹¹ Huffmon 1985:109-111.

¹⁹² Miller 1974:169-171.

¹⁹³ Genesis 4:23-24.

¹⁹⁴ Westermann 1984:335-337.

¹⁹⁵ Genesis 4:3-4.

¹⁹⁶ Although commentators generally speak of "God" when deliberating Genesis 4, the Hebrew text throughout refers to יהוה.

¹⁹⁷ Genesis 2:7.

¹⁹⁸ Herion 1995:53-54, 56-57.

¹⁹⁹ Genesis 4:11-12.

²⁰⁰ Genesis 4:15.

As the Cain narrative is generally regarded as the aetiological legend of the Kenites, aspects thereof are transferred to the Kenites. Brock-Utne²⁰¹ explains that the firstborn and first crops were offered as sacrifice at the beginning of the new season. When a dry season follows with the loss of productivity, the farmer – in a bid to regain productivity – engaged in the widespread custom of human sacrifice. Brock-Utne²⁰² transfers this practice to the Cain narrative and suggests that it could reflect on the Kenites who were known for their blood revenge. Nolan,²⁰³ however, indicates that there is no evidence that the Kenites ever engaged in human sacrifice. He proposes that the Cain narrative was created as a polemic against the practice of human sacrifice. Mendenhall²⁰⁴ denotes that Genesis 4 cannot 'be construed as evidence of blood vengeance in early Israel'; it may, on the other hand, be a reaction against blood feuds²⁰⁵ of desert tribes, particularly the Kenites. Although being ardent followers of *Yahweh*, the Kenites were excluded from any official capacity in the cult of Israel. The Cain narrative explicitly excludes Cain "from the face of *Yahweh*",²⁰⁶ thereby, implicitly, including the Kenites in this preclusion.²⁰⁷

In Genesis 4:2 Cain is said to be 'a worker of the ground'. The woman, Eve, attributes the birth of Cain to the expulsion of man from the garden. Despite Lamech's teaching that the ground has been cursed,²⁰⁸ *Yahweh* does not – according to Genesis 4:11 – curse the soil, but explains the consequences of Cain's actions.²⁰⁹ According to Nolan,²¹⁰ one of the objectives of the Cain narrative is to elucidate the Kenites' nomadic lifestyle and their alienation from the soil. Their lack of land, furthermore, reflects a time in history when nomadism was a necessity to be a committed follower of *Yahweh*. The Cain and Abel saga, therefore, reflects the life of nomadism of the Kenite Bedouin tribe.

'Cain's mark is the most apparent symbol of his ambivalent and marginal character. Regardless of whether the author intended some "physical" identifier, the mark is a "stigma" of sorts.

²⁰¹ Brock-Utne 1936:213-215.

²⁰² Brock-Utne 1936:207.

²⁰³ Nolan 1982:23-24.

²⁰⁴ Mendenhall 1973:74-75.

²⁰⁵ Blood feud: an avenger of blood is an individual responsible for avenging the death of a relative. Biblical legislators attempted to accommodate an existing convention and to restrict the practice to some extent. 'The killing of one clan member was construed by the remaining members not only as a shedding of the group's blood but as misappropriation of blood which properly belonged to the entire group' (Sperling 1992:763).

²⁰⁶ Genesis 4:14. Compare Jeremiah 35:19, 'shall never lack a man to stand before me'. The pronouncement is addressed to the Rechabites who were related to the Kenites. Nikolsky (2002:205) indicates that this statement 'constitutes an explicit promise from God to the house of Rechab that their family shall exist forever'.

²⁰⁷ Nolan 1982:39.

²⁰⁸ Genesis 5:28-29.

²⁰⁹ Combs 1988:282, 286.

²¹⁰ Nolan 1982:14, 41, 47.

But, although it denotes Cain as a "murderer", God designates him in this way precisely in order that *no one shall kill him* (Gen. 4:15).²¹¹ There is no indication what the actual mark or sign was, but reminds of ancient customs observed by manslayers in other parts of the world. Tribal marks serve to protect a person and indicate to which tribe he belongs. Such marks are common amongst groups who preserved the particular tribal system.²¹² Each member of the tribe was protected by such a mark.²¹³ The Kenites as metalworkers had a rather unusual life-style due to their particular trade. It seems that they benefited from a protective tattoo, to which both the Cain and Abel story and the *Song of Lamech* allude.²¹⁴ There are even today clans of coppersmiths among primitive tribes, protected by a special sign, among whom it is considered a grave offence to harm.²¹⁵ The special sign of *Yahweh* identified the Kenites and they worshipped *Yahweh* under his protection. The mark furthermore obliged them to avenge the blood of a slain brother.²¹⁶

The generation that precedes Cain is "Man", born from the soil, and "Woman", born from Man. Cain's wife abruptly appears in Genesis 4:17. A solution to her sudden appearance would be that she was also his mother. Human origins thus originate from an incest myth which, at the same time, is the archetype of the sacred marriage.²¹⁷ According to rabbinic legend, Cain was the son of Sammael, the brilliant character who was hurled from heaven into the realm of darkness. He seduced Eve and she gave birth to his son Cain. After the fratricide, *Yahweh* put one letter of the alphabet on Cain's arm as protective symbol, and the sign of exoneration on his brow. Legend had it that a horn grew from his forehead.²¹⁸ In accordance with rabbinic legend, the *Zohar*²¹⁹ indicates that the mark of Cain 'was one of the twenty-two letters of the Torah, and God set it upon him to protect him'.²²⁰

Consistent with legend, Cain was the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites, and through his conduct they became alienated from the soil. However, by virtue of his descendant Tubalcain, they came forward as nomad metalworkers from the South, protected by the sign of *Yahweh* – the mark of Cain.

²¹¹ McNutt 1999:55.

²¹² An example is found among Bedouins of today who wear their hair in a particular fashion. In parts of Africa the tribal mark consists of a tattooed pattern on some part of the body (Frazer 1923:33).

²¹³ Frazer 1923:33-34.

²¹⁴ Miller 1974:169.

²¹⁵ Allon 1971:906.

²¹⁶ Nolan 1982:16.

²¹⁷ Wyatt 1999c:317.

²¹⁸ Rappoport & Patai 1966:194, 197.

²¹⁹ See "Zohar" incorporated in a footnote in § 4.1, as well as a footnote on the Kabbalah in the same paragraph.

²²⁰ Sperling & Simon 1931:137.

At the end of this chapter, Table 1 provides a synopsis of the characteristics of, and information on the Kenites, and Table 2 a synopsis of the Kenite hypothesis and relevant aspects – discussed hereafter.

5.3 Kenite hypothesis

Miller²²¹ denotes that 'the origins of the worship of Yahweh are shrouded in mystery' and that it probably reaches as far back as the Late Bronze Age. The name of the deity was important for the Israelite community, both to identify the deity and 'also because of its character as a kind of theologoumenon for him'.²²² According to Budde,²²³ the first task of a true historian is to understand tradition, yet, traditions of nations regarding their own origins 'are devoid of all historical value'. Attempts by scholars to find the core of the ethical development of the *Yahweh*-religion, as presented by Moses, have completely failed.²²⁴

In 1872 the Dutch historian of religion, Cornelis P Tiele, advanced the idea of the Kenite hypothesis. He identified *Yahweh* as the god of the desert, whom the Kenites and related groups venerated, before the Israelites did. Bernard Stade elaborated the idea in 1887, but it was Karl Budde²²⁵ who developed the classic formulation of the theory in Germany. According to this hypothesis, a Moses-type figure gained knowledge about *Yahweh* through his Kenite²²⁶ father-in-law, Jethro, a Midianite priest,²²⁷ who – consistent with a tradition in Exodus – worshipped *Yahweh*.²²⁸ Mount Sinai was *Yahweh*'s sacred abode, therefore he was worshipped by the people who dwelt in his territory: the Midianites and Kenites²²⁹ – the latter probably a branch of the Midianites.²³⁰ A fundamental difference existed between the Kenites and the Israelites therein that the Israelites had chosen *Yahweh* as their God, whereas the Kenites had served their god from time immemorial.²³¹ In its classical form the hypothesis assumes that the Israelites became acquainted with the cult of *Yahweh* through Moses.²³² It seems

²²¹ Miller 2000b:1.

²²² Miller 2000b:1. Theologoumenon/theologoumenon is a theological doctrine that sheds light on the connections among different dogmas – an authoritative official statement of ecclesiastical belief – but does not represent a revealed truth or historical verification (Deist 1990:75, 258).

²²³ Budde 1899:1-2.

²²⁴ Budde 1899:35.

²²⁵ Budde 1899:17-25, 35-38, 52-60. For bibliographic references on relevant work by Tiele and by Stade, see van der Toorn (1999e:912).

²²⁶ Judges 1:16; 4:11.

²²⁷ Exodus 2:16, 21; 3:1; 18:1.

²²⁸ Exodus 18:10-12.

²²⁹ Budde 1899:18-19.

²³⁰ Presumably on account of different traditions, Moses' father-in-law is termed a Midianite (Ex 2:16-21; 18:1) and a Kenite (Jdg 1:16; 4:11).

²³¹ Budde 1899:35.

²³² Van der Toorn 1999e:912.

probable that, at the beginning of his sojourn in Midian,²³³ Moses was initiated into *Yahweh*-worship by his priestly father-in-law, eventually being confronted by *Yahweh* himself from the burning bush.²³⁴ This Moses introduced *Yahweh* to a group migrating from Egypt to Palestine, and equated *Yahweh* with their ancestral divine traditions. In time to come the migrants acquainted the tribes of Judah with *Yahweh*.

The British scholar Rowley²³⁵ developed Budde's hypothesis. He argues that 'Yahweh was the God of the Kenites before the days of Moses', and that Jethro was a priest of *Yahweh*. The Israelites accepted *Yahweh* as their God, mainly on account of *Yahweh*'s action to save them from the power of the Egyptians, and not on account of Moses' mediation of the Kenite religion. *Yahweh* thus meant something quite different to the Israelites than to the Kenites. It is therefore 'not surprising that Israel Yahwism had a new quality and was lifted to a new level'.²³⁶ Moses could only contemplate a religion that expressed itself in a form of worship that could be taken over from the Kenites, but infused with a new spirit. It is furthermore unlikely that Jethro – if he was a priest of some other god and not of *Yahweh* – would have offered a sacrifice to *Yahweh* [*Elohim*]. Rowley²³⁷ denotes that a feast, similar to the Passover, had been observed among the Kenites in their "*Yahweh*" cult before the time of Moses. Passover was a feast from antiquity, but separate from the Feast of Unleavened Bread, with which it was later associated.

A strong point of this classic hypothesis is the recurring biblical tradition of *Yahweh*'s geographical link with the South:

Deuteronomy 33:2, 'The Lord came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran.'

Judges 5:4, 'Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom.'

Psalms 68:8, 'the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain,
before God, the One of Sinai,
before God, the God of Israel'.

Habakkuk 3:3, 'God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran.'

²³³ Exodus 2:15-22.

²³⁴ Exodus 3.

²³⁵ Rowley 1967:43-48.

²³⁶ Rowley 1967:44.

²³⁷ Rowley 1967:47.

As discussed in the previous paragraph – 5.2 – the Kenites dwelled in the South, in the region of the Midianites. A strong tradition links them to Cain as their eponymous ancestor. This tradition explains their metalworking abilities and their alienation from the soil – they were a roaming, nomad group. The Kenites were, furthermore, allegedly attributed with a symbol or mark that protected them and distinguished them from other groups.²³⁸ Albertz²³⁹ indicates that *Yahweh* was a southern Palestinian mountain god, worshipped by the freedom-loving nomadic tribes, 'before he became the god of liberation for the Moses group'. *Yahweh*, who had his home in the mountainous regions south of Palestine, was thus worshipped by the nomadic Midianites and Kenites. Later traditions disguised any connection between the Mountain of God and the Midianites, and thus of any pre-Israelite worship of *Yahweh*. If *Yahweh* – as all indications are – emanated from the South, the question arises how the northern Israelites – and maybe even other nations – became acquainted with him. Scholars conjecture that the Kenites, as well as other marginal groups, moving as metal traders and smiths along caravan routes, brought *Yahweh* to the North.²⁴⁰

This theory – that the Yahwistic cult originated in the South – is supported by the thesis propounded by a number of scholars, namely that the name *Yahweh* emanated from the southern regions. The origin of the designation *Yahweh* is discussed in paragraph 4.2. One of the suggestions by scholars is that the name *Yahweh* developed from a well-known Arabic interjection *Ya* combined with *huwa* – the third person masculine personal pronoun; *Ya-huwa* thus meaning 'Oh He'. The god concerned is therefore spoken of as the mystical "He". Ancestors of the North Sinaitic tribes may have called their god "He", and worshipped him with the cultic cry *Ya-huwa* – "Oh He". Mowinckel²⁴¹ indicates that divine names which have originated elsewhere from cultic exclamations, have been attested. Ringgren²⁴² denotes that there are approximately fifteen occurrences on inscriptions of the Nabataean divine name *'hy*. Scholars have also suggested that Moses came across this Nabataean name as the name of the local deity of Hereby, the Mountain of God.²⁴³ There is, however, a long time lapse separating these inscriptions and the time of Moses.

The divine epithet "He-of-the-Sinai" – זה סיני מפני יהוה – appears in the Hebrew Bible in Judges 5:5 where it is a qualification of *Yahweh*, and is a parallel to the designation "God of

²³⁸ Miller 1974:169.

²³⁹ Albertz 1994:52-53.

²⁴⁰ Van der Toorn 1999e:913.

²⁴¹ Mowinckel 1961:132-133.

²⁴² Ringgren 1986:511.

²⁴³ Exodus 3:1.

Israel". Before he was the God of Israel, *Yahweh* was the Lord of Sinai. This construction has an analogy in the Nabataean "He-of-the-Šara-Mountain". The original name of the deity – "He" – has been replaced by the designation '*dAširat*'. Psalm 68:9 is a quotation of Judges 5:5. These two texts indicate that a tradition of a god "*Yahweh*-he-of-the-Sinai" existed. Deities were originally specified according to their cult-place.²⁴⁴

Axelsson²⁴⁵ denotes that, apart from the geographical pointer in the relevant texts – which indicates that "*Yahweh* came forth from the South"²⁴⁶ – a second element depicts the natural phenomena that accompanied these events. *Yahweh*'s coming from the South, with the concurrent epiphany descriptions, does not, however, suggest a feature in these texts which is inherent to an epiphany genre, but rather an independent element of tradition that was assimilated into the epiphany account. These depictions of *Yahweh*'s theophany seem to have no connection with *Yahweh*'s divine revelation on Mount Sinai, and therefore no association with the Sinai tradition in Exodus. Consequently Sinai – regarding these particular "epiphany texts" – probably refers to a region, rather than to a specific mountain. The belief that *Yahweh* dwelled on Mount Sinai was possibly due to *Yahweh*-veneration there. There is no clear indication where Mount Sinai is situated. The different epiphanies indicate that *Yahweh* came from the territory where 'the oldest worship of YHWH that is detectable in the OT is attested'.²⁴⁷ All the relevant names link directly, or indirectly, with Edom.

Genealogically the Edomites are the nation closest to the Israelites.²⁴⁸ Scholars, however, differ about what the actual relationship between the Edomites and Israelites was. Although biblical sources signify that the early Edomites had a developed centralised monarchy, they were primarily a nomadic group right into the thirteenth century BC.²⁴⁹ With the exception of the copper mining areas of the Feinan region, scant archaeological evidence has been found of any population group – either sedentary or nomadic – in Edom during the Middle Bronze and Late Bronze Ages. However, sites have been found for the Iron I period, with an increased population during Iron Age II. A considerable number of these sites appear to be agricultural

²⁴⁴ Niehr 1999b:387. Masoretic Text: Psalm 68:9; English Standard Version: Psalm 68:8.

²⁴⁵ Axelsson 1987:56-59.

²⁴⁶ See earlier reference in this paragraph to the texts from Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4; Psalm 68:8; Habakkuk 3:3.

²⁴⁷ Axelsson 1987:59. *Yahweh* was seen 'as coming from various parts of a cohesive territory around the northern part of the Gulf of Aqaba, running from the northeastern part of the Sinai Peninsula, over the mountainous areas south of Judah across the Wadi el-'Araba, and down to the northwestern border of the Arabian peninsula' (Axelsson 1987:59).

²⁴⁸ See Genesis 25:24-26 for the birth of Esau and Jacob; Esau is called Edom, father of the Edomites – Genesis 36:1, 8-9; Jacob is renamed Israel, father of the Israelites – Genesis 35:10.

²⁴⁹ Kunin 1995:186.

settlements.²⁵⁰ As from the thirteenth century BC the Transjordanian area – south of the Jabok River – began to be resettled, mainly by Ammonite, Moabite, Edomite and Israelite cultures.²⁵¹ The first known Edomite settlement was located on the Arabah road, indicating a link with Tell el-Kheleifeh near the Gulf of Aqaba. There are also important connections with larger Edomite towns in the eastern highlands.²⁵²

Despite Edom and Israel's "brotherhood" relationship, Edom was symbolised as 'the most evil of enemies deserving judgment and wrath of Yahweh'.²⁵³ It seems, however, as if the Deuteronomist intentionally opposed the customary disgust of and hate for Edom. Deuteronomy 23:7 states that an Edomite should be treated as a fellow Israelite, and not as a pagan alien.²⁵⁴ Knowledge and appreciation of the important connection and essential similarity between the Israelite and Edomite religions may have been a decisive element that influenced the Deuteronomist to readily accept the Edomites into the Israelite religious community. The Deuteronomist, furthermore, places a much higher value on the Edomites than on the Ammonites or Moabites; the Edomites were later admitted to the Israelite worshipping community. Although *Yahweh* is linked to the land of Edom it does not necessarily imply that the Edomites venerated *Yahweh* as their god.²⁵⁵ Van der Toorn²⁵⁶ indicates that, by the fourteenth century BC, 'groups of Edomite and Midianite nomads worshipped Yahweh as their god', before the Israelites became acquainted with the cult of *Yahweh*. It could, therefore, be deduced that – as *Yahweh* "came forth from the South" – he became the major God of Israel owing to an Edomite-Midianite influence.

The Kenite hypothesis is also supported by data obtained from Egyptian records. These records – as indicated hereafter – are discussed in paragraphs 2.6 and 4.3.4. Fourteenth and thirteenth century BC Egyptian texts mention '*Yhw* [*Yahu*] in the Land of the *Shasu*'.²⁵⁷ Papyrus Anastasi VI – ca twelfth century BC – links the *Shasu* (or *Shosu*) tribes and Edom,²⁵⁸ while thirteenth and twelfth century BC records of Ramesses II and Ramesses III²⁵⁹ identify Mount Seir and Seir with the *Shasu* nomads. Although these texts do not directly connect

²⁵⁰ MacDonald 1992:296.

²⁵¹ MacDonald 1994:236.

²⁵² Lapp 1994:226.

²⁵³ Lapp 1994:216.

²⁵⁴ Bartlett 1989:182. Deuteronomy 23:7: 'You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother'.

²⁵⁵ Bartlett 1989:184, 198-199.

²⁵⁶ Van der Toorn 1995:245-246.

²⁵⁷ See footnotes in § 4.3.4.

²⁵⁸ See footnotes in § 2.6.

²⁵⁹ See footnotes in § 2.6.

Edom and Seir – the latter a mountainous region identified with Edom²⁶⁰ – they do mention that both regions were peopled by *Shasu*. These two regions are also frequently coupled in the Hebrew Bible.²⁶¹ According to this information, it thus seems that *Shasu* Bedouins, who roamed the Sinai regions, could be linked to Edom in southern Transjordan and Seir. These Bedouins were known as unruly people, disrupting the peaceful mountain regions of Canaan.²⁶² The said texts also connect *Yahu* to the "land of the *Shasu*", while biblical texts associate *Yahweh* with Seir and Edom.²⁶³ It could thus be deduced that *Yahu* was known by the *Shasu*, and probably venerated by them. The *Shasu* are also connected with Seir and Edom, and Edom with the Kenites and Midianites. It is likewise conceivable that among the *Shasu* there were Edomites, Midianites, Kenites and related marginalised groups. Many scholars have identified the Kenites as being related to the Edomites.²⁶⁴ The Kenites were considered non-Israelite.²⁶⁵ In a document, dated ca 1000 BC, an Egyptian official asks for help against an oppressor, who had been with "those of Seir". Together with the other Egyptian texts – referred to in this paragraph – this document confirms at least intermittent relations between Egypt and an inhabited Edom/Seir from the thirteenth into the tenth century BC. It is, however, difficult to date Edom from biblical evidence.²⁶⁶

Van der Toorn²⁶⁷ agrees that it could tentatively be concluded that the "*Shasu* Bedouins of *Yahu*" should be sought in the regions of Edom and Midian. An Edomite connection – concerning *Yahweh* – was probably also established in Northern Israel. References to *Yahweh*'s origins from the South occur in texts from the Northern Kingdom.²⁶⁸ Inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud – an outpost of Northern Israel – also mention "*Yahweh* of Teman". Paradoxically, the belief that *Yahweh* came from the South was at home in the North.²⁶⁹ Scholars theorise that king Saul – a man from Edomite descent – introduced *Yahweh*, as the Edomite god from the South, into Israel.²⁷⁰ By reason of their particular trade – which brought about that they were bound to a migratory existence – the Kenites and associated groups of metalworkers had

²⁶⁰ Negev & Gibson 2001:454. See footnotes in § 2.6 in connection with Edom and Seir.

²⁶¹ Biblical links are, for example, in Numbers 24:18; Judges 5:4.

²⁶² Zevit 2001:118.

²⁶³ See biblical texts in this paragraph that link *Yahweh* with the South.

²⁶⁴ Bartlett 1989:198.

²⁶⁵ Van der Toorn 1995:236.

²⁶⁶ MacDonald 1994:232-233.

²⁶⁷ Van der Toorn 1995:245-246.

²⁶⁸ References to "Seir and Edom" in the *Song of Deborah* (Jdg. 5:4), "Sinai" in Psalm 68:8 and "Teman" in Habakkuk 3:3.

²⁶⁹ Van der Toorn 1995:246.

²⁷⁰ Human 1999:496-497. See also § 5.1.

the opportunity to spread their religious beliefs. Some scholars connect the Proto-Israelites with the *Shasu* and also with the *habiru*.²⁷¹

Between the late thirteenth and late twelfth centuries BC, parts of western Asia were laid waste through drought and famine. The dominance of Egypt over Canaan disintegrated and international trade dwindled. As a consequence of these events Canaanites, *Shasu*, and other groups moved into the central highlands and Judean hills. Small isolated villages, structured around traditional kin-based groups, were founded.²⁷² During the eighth and seventh centuries BC Kenite caravans probably played an important role in the channelling of southern trade through Jerusalem to Assyrian provinces. The Balaam oracle²⁷³ suggests that some Kenites were deported by Assyria – possibly in the period 734-733 BC during the war of Tiglath-pileser III²⁷⁴ against the Arabs.²⁷⁵

Heber, the Kenite and a metal craftsman, separated from the Kenites and pitched his tent "far away" in the northern regions where, according to Judges 4:11, he settled at the "Oak in Zaananim"²⁷⁶ near Kedesh.²⁷⁷ Heber seems to have been the head of an isolated family, although there is an allusion in the text²⁷⁸ 'to a tribal subdivision that had broken away from the parent tribe ... and wandered far afield in search of pasture'.²⁷⁹ He probably personified this nomadic subdivision – *heber*; thus originally being a group of principally nomadic families roaming together, and linked by a special bond from the time of their communal wanderings.²⁸⁰ Soggin²⁸¹ is of the opinion that the "separation of Heber, the Kenite from the descendants of Hobab", better fits the description of a clan than of an individual who broke away from the main group. Heber, as a name, appears only three times in the biblical text, and always in a context where a clan is listed.²⁸² In the older West Semitic languages – such as at

²⁷¹ See § 2.4 and § 2.5 for information on the *habiru*.

²⁷² Nakhai 2003:140-141. When Egypt dominated Canaan, they forced Canaan to provide them with agricultural products, livestock, raw materials and manufactured goods. Forced labour was also implemented (Nakhai 2003:140-141).

²⁷³ Numbers 24:22.

²⁷⁴ See footnote in § 2.7 for information on Tiglath-pileser III.

²⁷⁵ Halpern 1992:19.

²⁷⁶ Zaananim was a border point in the territory of Naphtali (Jos 19:33) and also the site where Sisera was slain (Jdg 4:11-22). The exact location of Zaananim is unknown, but could be identified possibly with the site Khan et-Tujjar, a caravan station on the road from Beth-shan to Damascus (Van Beek 1962b:926).

²⁷⁷ Kedesh was a Canaanite town in the eastern Galilee, in Naphtali (Mihelic 1962:4-5), situated in the Jezreel Valley (Malamat 1962:145).

²⁷⁸ Judges 4:11, 17, 24.

²⁷⁹ Malamat 1962:145. See also § 5.2.

²⁸⁰ Malamat 1962:146.

²⁸¹ Soggin 1981:90-91.

²⁸² Genesis 46:17; Numbers 26:45; 1 Chronicles 4:18.

Mari and Ugarit – the word *hibrum* appears, but also in the context of a clan. A single exception was found in a text from Ebla, with the personal name *habari*. Heber is denoted as a descendant of Hobab [Jethro], father-in-law of Moses, and as a husband of Jael.²⁸³ According to the *Song of Deborah*, Jael killed the Canaanite Sisera.²⁸⁴ The narrator initially portrays Heber's actions as treasonous to Israel – 'there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite'²⁸⁵ – but, later, his wife Jael is twice called blessed.²⁸⁶ In Judges 4 and 5 Heber is regularly portrayed as subordinate to Jael. His name appears with "Jael, wife of Heber", or he is not mentioned at all.²⁸⁷ The narrator condemns Heber through silence.²⁸⁸ Thus Heber, as a Kenite – who probably was a devotee of *Yahweh* – had the opportunity to spread his belief in the northern regions of Palestine. Jehonadab ben Rechab, a descendant of the Rechabites – a marginal group connected to the Kenites – appeared in Northern Israel; the Yahwist faith could thus have been spread also by the Rechabites in the North.

In the *Song of Deborah* only six tribes from the central and northern hill country are listed who came forth to fight. Non-tribal economic and political alliances existed between the other neutral tribes and neighbouring Canaanites. The fighting highlanders were, however, politically independent and economically self-sufficient. There are indications in Judges 5 that the Israelite tribes profited²⁸⁹ from the trade of the caravan²⁹⁰ operators, who crossed the hills of Palestine and travelled along the Jezreel Valley. Yet, travel on highways was stopped by Canaanites compelling travellers to take byways. Caravan trade was entirely to the benefit of the ruling elite. These were some of the grievances causing war between the Israelite tribes and the Canaanites.²⁹¹ Recent anthropological research by scholars emphasises the role of independent entrepreneurs, particularly in long-distance trade. During the second millennium BC privately operated caravans were a common feature. The long-term threat to travellers and the stifling of caravan movements and other traffic were, among others, a cause of conflict and 'is not an incidental detail in the poem [Judges 5]; it was the *casus belli*'.²⁹² Sisera

²⁸³ Judges 5:24.

²⁸⁴ Judges 4:17-22; 5:24-27.

²⁸⁵ Judges 4:17.

²⁸⁶ Judges 5:24.

²⁸⁷ Judges 4:17, 21; 5:24. In Judges 4:18, 22; 5:6, Jael is mentioned without referring to her husband.

²⁸⁸ Nysse 1992:94.

²⁸⁹ Exorbitant tolls were imposed; there was outright plunder; Canaanite Sisera and his allies restrained caravan traffic through the Plain of Jezreel. Israelite highlanders were provoked into war to protect their economic interests (Schloen 1993:20).

²⁹⁰ See an explanation of "Caravans", incorporated in a footnote in § 2.9.

²⁹¹ As described in the *Song of Deborah*, Judges 5.

²⁹² Schloen 1993:18, 20, 23-25. *Casus belli* is 'an act or situation that is used to justify a war' (Wehmeyer 2005:220).

and his allies expected to plunder silver (Judges 5:19), female slaves (Judges 5:30), dyed and embroidered textiles (Judges 5:30). Archaeologists indicate that these spoils are typical caravan commodities, and thus do not refer to booty expected from the Israelite villagers who were decidedly impoverished in comparison to the Canaanite lowlanders.²⁹³

The Midianites – normally portrayed as the arch-enemies of Israel²⁹⁴ – were evidently among those who celebrated the victories of *Yahweh* and the Israelite villagers over the Canaanites – as depicted in Judges 5:10-11. Although Midian is not referred to by name in these texts, it is obvious that Midianite leaders would have been among them, 'since by all accounts the Midianites were caravaneers *par excellence*'.²⁹⁵ It also seems that the caravan traders from the Negev and North-West Arabia had friendly dealings with the Israelite villagers of the hill country, and perhaps may even have intermarried with them. Heber the Kenite – husband of Jael, who killed Sisera – is denoted as a descendant of Moses' father-in-law Hobab²⁹⁶ – also known as Jethro, the Midianite priest.²⁹⁷ There is thus obviously an association between the Midianites and Kenites. It is significant that it was a Kenite – and not an Israelite – who conquered the enemy.²⁹⁸

'Early Israelite traditions preserve a memory of close association with the Midianites.'²⁹⁹ The origin of the name *midyan* is unknown. The genealogy in Genesis 25:2 includes two descendants of Abraham's wife Keturah, *midyan* and *medan*. Both these cognates appear in Greek sources of the Hellenistic Period as names of towns east of the Gulf of Aqaba.³⁰⁰ Biblical accounts of the Midianites of the Late Bronze Age are presented as "a seemingly ubiquitous people" who were found in the Sinai regions, Egypt, Moab and Edom, as well as on the north-south trade routes. They are associated with or related to the Edomites, Kenites, Ishmaelites, Hagarites and Kenizzites. There are also some connections with the Amalekites and Moabites – and maybe even with the Ammonites.³⁰¹ Dumbrell³⁰² suggests that, considering the puzzling features of its geographic distribution, rather than depicting Midian as a land, the name should be applied as 'a general term for an amorphous league of the Late Bronze Age, of wide

²⁹³ Schloen 1993:30.

²⁹⁴ See, for example, Judges 6.

²⁹⁵ Schloen 1993:26.

²⁹⁶ Judges 4:11.

²⁹⁷ Exodus 3:1.

²⁹⁸ Schloen 1993:26-27, 30-31. See Judges 5:24-27.

²⁹⁹ Schloen 1993:31.

³⁰⁰ Mendenhall 1992b:815.

³⁰¹ Dumbrell 1975:323.

³⁰² Dumbrell 1975:323, 327.

geographical range'. The Keturah-tribes,³⁰³ such as Midian, controlled the Arabian desert. Midian featured predominantly in this area and, together with the Ishmaelites, were found astride the main trade routes.³⁰⁴ The territories of Edom, Seir, Moab, Reuben and the Sinai Peninsula have been surveyed intensively in recent years. Archaeological remains of Midian revealed a developed civilisation at the end of the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age. These discoveries include a fortified citadel, extensive irrigation systems and characteristic pottery.³⁰⁵ After the Judges period the Midianites seemed to have disappeared from the biblical historical scene. From the eleventh century BC onwards the Ishmaelites gained prominence in the Transjordanian area.³⁰⁶

It is clear that Midian dominated the South and that it had a significant influence over a wide region. Those tribes who grouped with Moses probably travelled between Egypt and Midian along major caravan routes – controlled by Midian – northwards. "The social implications of long-distance trade involve not just the intertwining of different ethnic groups or the growth of disparities in wealth and status, but also opportunities for the communication of new ideas."³⁰⁷ Therefore, if Yahwism originated amongst the Kenites and Midianites – which, according to the Kenite hypothesis, seems likely – this cult could have spread through the Transjordan and the highlands of Canaan, along caravan routes from the South. This "caravan hypothesis" – as Schloen³⁰⁸ calls his theory – of long-distance trade, is but only one factor in the complexities of the emergence of Israel. The highland population that eventually came forth as "Israel" probably comprised a mixture of indigenous hill country inhabitants, pastoralists from the South and East, as well as lowland peasant farmers from the West.³⁰⁹

The Kenite hypothesis alludes to Moses' contact with Jethro, a Midianite priest.³¹⁰ After his escape from Egypt, Moses became acquainted with Jethro and married his daughter Zipporah. Jethro thus became his father-in-law.³¹¹ Moses' marriage to Zipporah – daughter of a Midianite priest – therefore had the implication that the descendants of Moses were of mixed Midianite/Kenite and Israelite (Levite) blood. This Jethro was also known as Reuel,³¹² or

³⁰³ Genesis 25:1-4.

³⁰⁴ Dumbrell 1975:323, 327, 330-331.

³⁰⁵ Cross 1998:63-64.

³⁰⁶ Dumbrell 1975:330-331.

³⁰⁷ Schloen 1993:36.

³⁰⁸ Schloen 1993:36-37.

³⁰⁹ Schloen 1993:31-32, 36-37.

³¹⁰ Exodus 3:1.

³¹¹ Exodus 2:15-21; 3:1; 4:18; 18:1, 5, 12.

³¹² Exodus 2:16-18.

Hobab.³¹³ According to the Hebrew Bible, 'Jethro was a priest of Yahweh in a unique capacity'.³¹⁴ After 'Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD [*Yahweh*] had done to Israel', and declared 'now I know that the LORD [*Yahweh*] is greater than all gods',³¹⁵ the following Hebrew text states that 'Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God [*Elohim*] ... to eat bread before God [*Elohim*].'³¹⁶ The Kenite hypothesis implies that the Midianite priest Jethro was associated with a pre-Mosaic *Yahweh* cult, and that Moses was introduced by Jethro to the beliefs and rituals of this cult. This concept, therefore, contends that Yahwism has Midianite – and Kenite – roots. Moses furthermore received practical advice from Jethro.³¹⁷ Slayton,³¹⁸ however, asserts that 'it is doubtful that the concept of Yahwistic worship sprang from the Midianites'.

Different names for Jethro are recorded in the Hebrew Bible. He is twice called Reuel,³¹⁹ and in Judges 4:11 he is named Hobab, although Numbers 10:29 indicates that Hobab is actually Reuel's son. Several explanations have been proposed for this confusion in names. The various names may have come from different traditions or sources, or Jethro may have been known by divergent names and titles given to him by the different Midianite clans.³²⁰ Reuel was also the name of a son of Esau³²¹ and was one of the three major Edomite tribes. Hobab was the 'eponymous ancestor of a Kenite clan that settled in the Negeb among the tribe of Judah'.³²² This clan possibly belonged to the Edomite tribe Reuel, before they relocated to Judah. Moses' Midianite father-in-law, also known by the name Reuel, may therefore be linked to the Edomite tribe Reuel.³²³ Hobab was thus most likely Moses' brother-in-law. Moses requested Hobab – who was familiar with the territory – to accompany them when they set out to the Promised Land.³²⁴ Hobab's response is not recorded.³²⁵ According to the

³¹³ Judges 4:11.

³¹⁴ Slayton 1992:821. Exodus 18:1, 7-11.

³¹⁵ Exodus 18:9a, 11a.

³¹⁶ Exodus 18:12. The contents of Exodus 18:1-27 is ascribed to the Elohist, but mixed with the J-narrator (Boschhoff et al 2000:104), which explains – to a certain extent – the reference to *Yahweh* and to *Elohim* in the same context.

³¹⁷ Exodus 18:13-27.

³¹⁸ Slayton 1992:821.

³¹⁹ Exodus 2:18; Numbers 10:29.

³²⁰ Slayton 1992:821.

³²¹ Genesis 36:4, 10, 13, 17; 1 Chronicles 1:35, 37.

³²² Knauf 1992b:693.

³²³ Knauf 1992b:693-694.

³²⁴ Numbers 10:29-32.

³²⁵ Launderville 1992:234-235.

Zohar,³²⁶ Jethro – the father-in-law of Moses – descended from Cain and was therefore, according to tradition, called a Kenite.³²⁷

A temple dated from the Israelite Monarchical Period was discovered at Tel Arad.³²⁸ When the Israelites built their altar in the tenth century BC, it was constructed on a platform that may have been a twelfth century BC Kenite shrine. Judges 1:16 mentions that the Kenites settled in the Negeb of Arad. This shrine was erected in the middle of the territory and was thus well positioned to serve inhabitants of the eastern Negeb in their cultic practices. While the text in Judges, in the Hebrew Bible, refers to the descendants of Moses' Kenite father-in-law, the Septuagint³²⁹ adds that Hobab, the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, settled in the Negeb.³³⁰ Finkelstein³³¹ indicates that the small unfortified site at Tel Arad could be connected to the Kenites that settled in the "Negeb near Arad". Cross³³² denotes that Midianite epic sources point to the possibility of a pre-Israelite sanctuary of *Yahweh* in the mountainous regions east of the Gulf of Elath. Events in early Israel's epic cycle revolve around a number of sanctuaries, including an old sanctuary in the South.

Scholars speculate that Hobab – an eponym of a Kenite tribe [or clan] – practised priestcraft and ritual, and erected a shrine with an altar and מצבֹוֹת³³³ in the Negeb. It is therefore possible that the Kenite Hobab-family – through their relation to Moses – attended to important functions in the early Israelite priesthood and worship.³³⁴ Allon³³⁵ likewise assumes 'that this venerated family served as priests in the sanctuary' in the Negeb. Nolan³³⁶ mentions that Cain, the alleged eponymous ancestor of the Kenites, brought his sacrifice directly to *Yahweh*,³³⁷ a role which was later fulfilled by the priest. He furthermore indicates that the phrase "from the face of *Yahweh*"³³⁸ is actually a technical term to explain the Kenites' exclusion

³²⁶ See "Zohar", incorporated in a footnote in § 4.1.

³²⁷ Sperling & Simon 1931:108. Judges 1:16.

³²⁸ See discussion in § 2.14.2.

³²⁹ See footnote in § 3.2.2 on the Septuagint.

³³⁰ Herzog 2001:171.

³³¹ Finkelstein 1988:39.

³³² Cross 1998:46.

³³³ *Massebot* or standing stones: see § 2.14.1.

³³⁴ Herzog 2001:171.

³³⁵ Allon 1971:907.

³³⁶ Nolan 1982:33, 40.

³³⁷ Genesis 4:3.

³³⁸ See also Genesis 4:14.

later from the cultic function. Van der Toorn³³⁹ denotes that in an 1862 publication,³⁴⁰ the author defends the view that *Yahweh*, as the god of the Kenites, was worshipped as a solar god in the form of a metal image.

Although Fensham³⁴¹ is inclined to side with those scholars who criticise the concept of the Kenite hypothesis, he nonetheless theorises that, as the result of Moses' meeting with his Midianite [or Kenite] father-in-law, a treaty was formed between the Israelites and Kenites. He indicates that the relationship between the Kenites and the Israelites is one of the most discussed and difficult problems in the Masoretic Text, which records only a few scattered details. The Hebrew Bible furthermore signifies that a friendship existed between the Kenites and the Israelites; intermarriage may have justified an affinity between them. Fensham³⁴² poses the question whether such a relation was possibly based on a treaty between two equal groups. When Saul schemed to attack the Amalekites, he warned the Kenites who subsequently left the particular region of the Amalekites.³⁴³ The reason for Saul's action could be the existence of a treaty of "covenant love" between the Kenites and Israelites. Exodus 18 probably forms the basis for Saul's approach. According to the tradition preserved in this chapter, 'Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God'.³⁴⁴ This action could indicate that God was witness to the forming of a treaty, which in the Ancient Near East was usually accompanied by a sacrifice to a god, or gods. According to biblical tradition, a sacrifice was brought at the making of the Covenant at Sinai.³⁴⁵

"Defensive alliance" treaties were customary in the Ancient Near East. Two relevant parties pledge their mutual assistance in the case of hostility from a third party. Probably as a result of such a treaty between the Israelites and Kenites, Jael – the wife of Heber, the Kenite – aided Israel against the onslaught of the Canaanites.³⁴⁶ In a letter discovered at Mari the making of a covenant between the Idamaras and Hanaeans is mentioned. During this ceremony an

³³⁹ Van der Toorn 1995:246-247.

³⁴⁰ F W Ghillany wrote in 1862, under the pseudonym Richard van der Alm, his *Theologische Briefe an die Gebildeten der Deutschen Nation*, vol 1, 216, 480. Ghillany may have been the first to advance the Kenite hypothesis, but Tiele was the first to present the hypothesis in an acceptable form (Van der Toorn 1995:247).

³⁴¹ Fensham 1964:51-52.

³⁴² Fensham 1964:52-54.

³⁴³ 1 Samuel 15:6.

³⁴⁴ Exodus 18:12.

³⁴⁵ Exodus 24:5.

³⁴⁶ Judges 4:17-22; 5:24-27.



ass was slaughtered, probably meant as sacrifice to the gods, while part of the sacrificial animal was utilised for a communal meal.³⁴⁷

Although Van der Toorn³⁴⁸ agrees that the Kenite hypothesis establishes a connection among different sets of data – namely the absence of *Yahweh* from West Semitic epigraphy, the topographical link with the South, the Kenite association with Moses, and the positive evaluation of the Kenites in the Hebrew Bible – he mentions that it has a weakness in its disregard for the "Canaanite" origins of Israel. He indicates that the view of the hypothesis, that the Israelites became Yahwists under influence of Moses during their sojourn in the Wilderness, and that they brought their newly acquired religion to Palestine, ignores the fact that the majority of Israelites were already established in Palestine. Furthermore, the historicity of Moses is problematic. It was only in later traditions that he became the symbol of the "*Yahweh-alone*" movement. Although it is "highly plausible" that the Kenites introduced the Israelites to the worship of *Yahweh*, it is unlikely that this was done outside the borders of Palestine.

Notwithstanding the fact that the biblical tradition portrays the Kenites as loyal supporters of the Israelites and Yahwism, McNutt³⁴⁹ denotes that they were never fully incorporated into the Israelite society. In Numbers 24³⁵⁰ it was predicted that the Kenites would disappear – an instance in which they are viewed unfavourably. She furthermore mentions that, although the Kenites presumably had connections with nomadic or semi-nomadic metalsmiths, they are never explicitly identified as such.

Wyatt³⁵¹ is of the opinion that 'the so-called Kenite hypothesis can hardly be regarded as certain ... , and with regard to its attempt to explain the rise of Mosaic-Yahwism, it must be regarded as being very flimsy' He suggests that the cult of *Yahweh* rose to national importance during the reign of David. He may even have imposed this cult upon his northern subjects, who evidently remained devoted to *El* as their major god. With the rise of the Deuteronomistic School in the North the Yahwists naturally insisted that it was "their" God *Yahweh*, and not *El*, who had performed the acts of the exodus and the conquest.

³⁴⁷ Fensham 1964:53-54.

³⁴⁸ Van der Toorn 1999e:912-913.

³⁴⁹ McNutt 1993:407.

³⁵⁰ Numbers 24:21-22.

³⁵¹ Wyatt 2005:10.

Albright³⁵² indicates that, in their efforts to reconstruct biblical history, scholars attribute homogenous material to different independent sources. An example is the Kenite material in Exodus, Numbers and Judges. Scholars misconstrue the nature of early Israelite historical tradition, with the result that a "state of chaos" generally exists among scholars regarding the relation between the Israelites and the Kenites. Early Israelite oral traditions – as reflected in the Hebrew Bible – are usually confusing. For instance, the biblical text depicts three different names for Moses' father-in-law, namely Jethro, Reuel and Hobab. He is furthermore described as being a Midianite and a Kenite – a fact which complicates the problem. Scholars applied several techniques in an endeavour to clarify these disparities. Superficial attempts to harmonise the text or to appropriate the variants to different sources, have not solved the issue. Albright³⁵³ identifies Hobab as a Midianite and son-in-law of Moses, a smith by profession, belonging to the clan of Reuel. Obvious contradictions are evidently the result of scribal errors and misunderstandings. Where possible, the origin of variations should be determined. Texts should, furthermore, be analysed 'in the light of modern knowledge in order to reach a reasonable solution of the present apparent dilemma'.³⁵⁴

Childs³⁵⁵ denotes that the classic medieval Jewish commentators had a problem with the role Jethro plays in the narrative. They found it unacceptable that a foreign priest offers a sacrifice to the God of Israel, unless he was a proselyte. The description in Exodus, however, implies that Jethro, who worshipped *Yahweh*, played the leading role to initiate the Israelites into the cult of *Yahweh*. He furthermore mentions that the Kenite hypothesis experiences serious problems, and that scholars – in their method of analysis – make no attempt to trace a history of tradition, but rather piece together bits of information from the Hebrew Bible. Scholars who explain the Jethro tradition as a cult aetiology have a more acceptable approach. Exodus 18 'retains many elements from the oldest level of the tradition'.³⁵⁶ Jethro, a priest from the foreign Midianite nation, takes the lead in a common cult meal. The confession of Jethro³⁵⁷ forms the climax of this chapter. He is nowhere portrayed as an idolater who becomes a Yahwist. Speculations by scholars that *Yahweh* was originally connected only to Sinai, and not to the exodus tradition, remain highly hypothetical. According to the opinion of Childs,³⁵⁸ one cannot speak of a Midianite layer of tradition, but rather of two points of focus in the

³⁵² Albright 1968:38-42.

³⁵³ Albright 1968:42.

³⁵⁴ Albright 1968:38.

³⁵⁵ Childs 1974:322-326.

³⁵⁶ Childs 1974:323.

³⁵⁷ Exodus 18:11.

³⁵⁸ Childs 1974:326.

Midianite tradition, namely the revelation of the name, and the common cult. The linking of these two matters in the narrative was done only much later in the history of tradition. At that stage the connection between the exodus and Sinai had already been well established.

Abba³⁵⁹ indicates that there is no general agreement amongst biblical scholars regarding the credibility of the Kenite hypothesis. The fact that Jethro officiated at the sacrifice which followed the news of *Yahweh's* deliverance of Israel, does not necessarily suggest that the Israelites adopted the religion of the Kenites, but it does imply that Moses gained from them knowledge of the divine name *Yahweh*, which he later identified with "the God of their fathers".

Houtman³⁶⁰ argues that, although the Kenite hypothesis 'has been expounded with a great deal of vigour and imagination by Rowley',³⁶¹ and has been accepted by many scholars, 'this is not owing to a lack of detractors'. An analysis of the relevant contents in Exodus leads to the conclusion that no components included in the material makes a Midianite origin for *Yahweh* probable. Jethro's confession³⁶² is no proof that he was a *Yahweh* worshipper. According to Houtman,³⁶³ Exodus 18:12 'does not mention that Jethro made sacrifices ... and he is not presented as the one who initiates Moses into the secrets of religion but as the one who counsels Moses in legal matters'. If it should be illustrated that *Yahweh* was originally the god of the Midianites, many questions arise, such as, was *Yahweh* a storm, mountain or fire deity.

Albertz³⁶⁴ denotes that there are indications that the God whom Moses introduced to the exodus group came from the mountainous region south of Palestine, and that he was venerated there before he became the Israelite God. Moses became acquainted with this god – *Yahweh* – through the mediation of his Midianite father-in-law, Jethro. In the light of later enmity between the Israelites and Midianites, it is unlikely that – although there are disparities in the traditions regarding Moses' father-in-law – an affiliation between Moses and the Midianites would have been fabricated. Even though the biblical text does not explicitly refer to Jethro as a priest of *Yahweh*, his invite to the Israelites to a sacrificial meal for *Yahweh* [*Elohim*], on the Mountain of God, suggests that 'we may suppose that the Midianites or Kenites were

³⁵⁹ Abba 1961:320-321.

³⁶⁰ Houtman 1993:96-97.

³⁶¹ British scholar who developed Budde's hypothesis. See Rowley earlier in this paragraph.

³⁶² Exodus 18:11.

³⁶³ Houtman 1993:97.

³⁶⁴ Albertz 1994:51-55.

already worshippers of Yahweh before the Exodus group joined them'.³⁶⁵ The god *Yahweh*, who was a southern Palestinian mountain god, is therefore older than Israel. It is thus feasible that Moses became acquainted with this god through the mediation of his Midianite – or Kenite – father-in-law. *Yahweh* later became the god of liberation for the Moses group. In an attempt to disguise any link between the Mountain of God and the Midianites – and thus any pre-Israelite worship of *Yahweh* – it seems as if Moses arrived with his group at a completely unknown place. This tendency – deliberately obscuring any earlier historical connections with the Mountain of God – may be on account of "Sinai" previously being a mountain sanctuary which was visited by nomadic tribes – particularly also Midianites – from this region.

West³⁶⁶ mentions that 'the Kenite hypothesis obviously has its strengths and should not be rejected out of hand'. A weakness of this theory is, however, that it fails to explain the firm and ancient J-tradition, according to which *Yahweh* had been known by the Hebrew ancestors before the time of Moses. This hypothesis, likewise, does not explain how Moses could have influenced the Hebrews to leave Egypt under guidance of a totally unfamiliar god. In the view thereof that a number of tribal groups were not involved in the exodus, it is thus likely that at least one of these groups worshipped *Yahweh* in the pre-Mosaic period. Scholars have identified this element with the southern Palestinian tribe of Judah. It is, therefore, in the light of the geographical proximity of the Kenites and Judahites, easy to envisage a *Yahweh* kinship between these two groups.

Jagersma³⁶⁷ denotes that the different names of Moses' father-in-law indicates that more than one version of the tradition is involved in the account of Moses in Midian. This strengthens an argument – regarding Moses' positive contact with the Midianites – that an historical background could be presupposed, particularly considering a later hostile attitude towards the Midianites. He is, however, unconvinced that Moses came in contact with Yahwism in Midian, and it seems highly improbable that the origin of Yahwism should be searched for in Midian. Apart from one allusion in the Hebrew Bible, there is no information on the religion of the Midianites and Kenites, and therefore the 'so-called Kenite hypothesis has a very weak foundation'; there is also no certainty of any evidence 'for the divine name *Yahweh* outside Israel before the time of Moses'.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ Albertz 1994:52.

³⁶⁶ West 1981:159.

³⁶⁷ Jagersma 1994:39.

³⁶⁸ Jagersma 1994:39.

According to Hyatt,³⁶⁹ despite some logical arguments in favour of the Midianite-Kenite theory on the origin of Yahwism, scholars have raised their doubts concerning this hypothesis. Although Jethro is called a priest of Midian, he is never indicated as a priest of *Yahweh*; neither does the Hebrew Bible directly denote *Yahweh* as the deity of the Midianites or Kenites. Difficulties have also been encountered in the interpretation of Exodus 18 being a ceremony in which the Israelites were prompted into the worship of *Yahweh*.

Mowinckel³⁷⁰ argues that 'it is certainly a fact that both Qenites and Midianites were worshippers of *Yahweh*'. Some scholars interpret biblical sources as indicating that the Kenites introduced Moses to the name and cult of *Yahweh*, while other scholars identify the Midianites as the original worshippers of *Yahweh*. To substantiate his argument, Mowinckel³⁷¹ refers to the aetiological legend that Cain was the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites, and that every member of the clan wore the special protection mark of *Yahweh*. Mowinckel³⁷² furthermore mentions that 'in the legend in Exod. 18³⁷³ we are explicitly told that this Jethro [Moses' Midianite priestly father-in-law] instructed Moses in the ordinances and laws of *Yahweh* [*Elohim*]'. He indicates that it is improbable that the Kenites and Midianites were the only worshippers of *Yahweh* in the pre-Mosaic period. It is more feasible to conjecture that all the North Sinaitic tribes were acquainted with the name of *Yahweh*, and took part in his annual feast.³⁷⁴

As the Kenites are associated with Arad, and also linked to Moses and his in-laws who were connected to the Midianite priesthood, Halpern³⁷⁵ deduces that the Kenites may well have officiated at the Israelite sanctuary at Arad, as well as at the high place near Kedesh³⁷⁶ in Naphtali. He does, however, denote that there is no sure sign of an earlier altar at Arad, before the shrine built by David or Solomon. Although later ostraca at Arad attest to the presence of

³⁶⁹ Hyatt 1980:78-79.

³⁷⁰ Mowinckel 1961:124.

³⁷¹ Mowinckel 1961:124.

³⁷² Mowinckel 1961:124.

³⁷³ Exodus 18:13-23.

³⁷⁴ Mowinckel 1961:124-125. During the annual feast for the god of Kadesh-Sinai, there probably would have been a general peace among the Sinaitic tribes – a *treuga Dei*. The Amalekites were excluded from the *treuga Dei*. They were in all likelihood newcomer intruders in the region, and were known as an "ill-reputed robber tribe". They possibly represented the real camel-breeding Bedouins, with a lifestyle in opposition to the older sheep-breeding and goat-breeding semi-nomads of that region. According to Exodus 17:16, *Yahweh* was in a permanent war with Amalek (Mowinckel 1961:125).

³⁷⁵ Halpern 1992:19.

³⁷⁶ See discussion on the Kenite Heber in this paragraph (§ 5.3).

priestly Korahites, there is no indication that the Kenites played any role there. A Midianite-Kenite cultic tradition may, however, have necessitated a tent-shrine.³⁷⁷ Despite unsubstantiated links between any Kenites related to Moses and the Arad temple, there are intimations that the Kenites experienced a special relationship with *Yahweh* – particularly *Yahweh's* promise to their eponymous ancestor, Cain, for divine protection. Halpern³⁷⁸ mentions that in an unpublished paper, Cross³⁷⁹ suggests that an Israelite migration through the Edomite territory inevitably would have meant contact with the Midianites. A further northward journey would obviously have followed the route controlled by Midianite traders. Cross has identified a strong strain in the Pentateuch condemning the Midianite traditions of the Mosaic Levites. The P-source portrays the Midianites as Israel's archenemies.³⁸⁰ Recollections of Midianite domination in this region probably inspired this tradition. In Samuel³⁸¹ an association between the Kenites and Amalekites is implied. The question is, therefore, 'what fuses Midian to the Kenites, and the Kenites to Moses?'³⁸²

Anderson³⁸³ is of the opinion that it is not impossible that the name *Yahweh* was known before the time of Moses. Although scholars attempt to illustrate the alleged occurrence of forms of the name – such as *Ya* – elsewhere than in Israelite context, conclusive results have not been attained.³⁸⁴ Moses' acquaintance with the name *Yahweh*, as demonstrated by the Kenite hypothesis, is more convincing. Advocates of this hypothesis stress that it was the Midianite priest Jethro, rather than Moses, who officiated at a sacrifice to *Yahweh*. It was also Jethro who advised Moses how he could ease the burden of his religious commission. The supposition that the Kenites and later Israelites were bound by a common devotion to *Yahweh*, could explain the Kenites' alliance with Israel during an invasion of Canaan.³⁸⁵

Smith³⁸⁶ speculates that 'some form of direct cultural contact may account for the adoption of *Yahweh* in Judah'. Numerous scholars have indicated that the origin of *Yahweh* should be sought in the southern territories of Seir, Edom, Teman and Sinai. The worship of *Yahweh*

³⁷⁷ A twelfth century BC "temple" – apparently a tent-shrine, similar to the biblical Tabernacle – has been uncovered at Timnah (see § 2.14.1 on the Timnah Valley and a description of Timnah incorporated in a footnote in § 2.2). The temple was characterised by "Midianite" pottery; excavators also found a copper snake (Halpern 1992:20). See § 5.2 for a brief discussion of this discovery.

³⁷⁸ Halpern 1992:20-21.

³⁷⁹ Frank Moore Cross.

³⁸⁰ Numbers 31:1-12.

³⁸¹ 1 Samuel 15:5-6.

³⁸² Halpern 1992:21.

³⁸³ Anderson 1962:409-410.

³⁸⁴ See discussions in this regard in § 4.2.

³⁸⁵ See discussion in this paragraph in connection with the account of Jael's killing of the Canaanite Sisera.

³⁸⁶ Smith 2001:145-146.

spread from the South to the central and northern highlands. This could be attributed to some kind of contact, such as caravan traders, from the South. In the *Song of Deborah*³⁸⁷ trade is mentioned as one of the problems leading to the conflict with the Canaanites. In Judges 5:14 a positive indication of kinship between the tribe of Ephraim and the southern tribe Amalek is signified;³⁸⁸ this implies a cultural connection between the inhabitants of the central hill country associated with Ephraim and Amalek, a tribe from the South. It is possible that the traders included Amalekites who later settled in the hill country. Similarly the southern Kenites could have spread their influence to northern sites, such as Shiloh and Bethel.

De Moor³⁸⁹ mentions that, regarding the early history of Yahwism, the work of the School of Albright tends to be rather fragmentary and is actually no more 'than collections of learned essays on various relevant topics'.³⁹⁰ He is of the opinion that Budde³⁹¹ formulated the best methodological point of departure. In his research Budde appropriated Ancient Near Eastern documents to monitor his interpretations of the Israelite sources. De Moor,³⁹² however, denotes that ancient traditions relating to *Yahweh's* "march from the South", contain no description of the exodus or the revelation at Sinai, and thus no link with Moses, therefore 'Moses was not the founder of the Yahwistic religion'.³⁹³ . . . This alone renders the so-called Kenite hypothesis about the origin of Yahwism a lot less attractive'.³⁹⁴ He furthermore indicates that this hypothesis is generally supported by scholars due to the identification of the land of the *Shoso* (*Shasu*) with biblical Seir in Edom.³⁹⁵ The *s'rr* in the Egyptian records is, however – according to De Moor³⁹⁶ – erroneously identified with the Seir in the southern regions of Palestine. The Egyptian name – *s'rr* – is spelled differently than the biblical designation, and should be sought much further north. As mentioned in paragraph 4.3.4, De Moor³⁹⁷ states that, although the word "*Shosu*" – attested in Ugaritic – means "robber", this does not imply that all *Shosu* [*Shasu*] were outlaws. As they resembled the *habiru* in many ways, the two terms could refer to the same people. Impoverished vagrants of the fourteenth to thirteenth centuries BC – called *habiru* or *shasu* – were, at times, employed as mercenaries. He

³⁸⁷ Judges 5.

³⁸⁸ The English translation (in the ESV) of Judges 5:14 reads: 'From Ephraim their root they marched down into the valley.' The Masoretic Text reads: מְנֵי אֶפְרַיִם שָׂרְשָׁם בְּעַמְלֵק; out of Ephraim they came whose root is in Amalek.

³⁸⁹ De Moor 1997:5-7.

³⁹⁰ De Moor 1997:5.

³⁹¹ See discussion of Budde's formulation earlier in this paragraph.

³⁹² De Moor 1997:124-125, 310-311.

³⁹³ De Moor 1997:263.

³⁹⁴ De Moor 1997:310.

³⁹⁵ See discussions in § 2.6 and § 4.3.4.

³⁹⁶ De Moor 1997:124-125, 310-311.

³⁹⁷ De Moor 1997:9, 115, 117.

concludes that present hypotheses have to suffice as long as no authentic documents from the Late Bronze Age are available to attest to the origin of Yahwism.

Axelsson³⁹⁸ is of the opinion that it is reasonable to acknowledge that some link existed between the *Shasu* of Seir and the Israelite God *Yahweh*. The *Shasu* were present in a large area of the southern parts of Palestine, and particularly in those regions associated with *Yahweh*. Biblical poetic texts inform us of the geographical origin of *Yahweh*, which includes a reference to Seir. Several important southern clans composed the original tribe of Judah, which included the Calebites and Kenites. In old genealogies the Calebites are connected with Seir; a tradition which is more or less contemporary with the Egyptian texts which connect the *Shasu*, Seir and *Yhw*. It is thus plausible that the Calebites, and related groups from Seir, were identical with the *Shasu*. Axelsson³⁹⁹ thus concludes that it would have been these associated groups from Seir, as well as the Kenites from an adjacent area, who brought the cult of *Yahweh* with them when they migrated into the territory of Judah.

Thompson⁴⁰⁰ mentions that the reality of Aramaean migrations⁴⁰¹ by the end of the second millennium BC has no historical support and is merely hypothetical. No evidence of Aramaeans in the South has yet been found, or that they were in any way related to the *Shasu*. There is also no proof that the *Shasu* originated in the Arabian Peninsula or in Edom. He indicates that the Egyptians often used the term "*Shasu*" in a generic sense which does not necessarily refer to a specific ethnic group. He furthermore denotes that 'the relationship between the historical group and the narrative individual is always vicarious and never equivocal. It is wholly illegitimate, without contrary indication, to see this eponymous element as indicative of a more serious historiographical intention'.⁴⁰² De Moor⁴⁰³ indicates that Thompson maintains that the exodus narrative is characteristic of a "pseudo-historical folktale". Thompson⁴⁰⁴ confirms his view that attempts to authenticate the Egyptian setting and trustworthiness of the biblical narratives, have not met with much success. According to him, identification of the

³⁹⁸ Axelsson 1987:178-179.

³⁹⁹ Axelsson 1987:179.

⁴⁰⁰ Thompson 1977:159.

⁴⁰¹ Thompson probably alludes to the migration of Abraham and his kin. Kemuel, son of Nahor the brother of Abraham, was the 'father of Aram' – thus the Aramaeans (Gn 22:20-21). Millard (1992:345) mentions that biblical and Assyrian texts refer to people called Aramaeans who lived in some regions of Syria from the end of the second millennium BC. The *Shasu* – who may be linked to the *habiru* – seemingly wandered over a wide region, and could therefore be sought both in the South and the North. Both these groups may be connected to the Aramaeans and the Hebrews. Genesis 14:13a refers to 'Abram the Hebrew'. See also § 2.4 and § 2.5.

⁴⁰² Thompson 1977:160.

⁴⁰³ De Moor 1997:208.

⁴⁰⁴ Thompson 1999:317-318.

habiru with the biblical Hebrews does not have any substance. He also refers to the confusion of divine characters in Exodus. For example, in Exodus 3:1 Moses led his father-in-law's flock to the Mountain of *Elohim*. In the very next verse a messenger of *Yahweh* appears. The regularity and consistency of variance and fluidity of the divinities in the patterns of the early pentateuchal narratives can hardly be seen as insignificant or accidental.

Polk⁴⁰⁵ denotes that there is a long history of cross-links between the Edomites and Benjaminites. The Hebrew Bible indicates that the Benjaminites, the "mighty men", were highly skilled warriors.⁴⁰⁶ Scholars connect both the Benjaminites and the *habiru*, mentioned in documents from Mari,⁴⁰⁷ to the early Hebrews.⁴⁰⁸ Yet, a link between certain nomadic groups in the first half of the second millennium BC and the name Benjamin – which could be either "son of the north" or "son of the south" – is ambiguous. There are discrepancies between the actual observance of the tribe Benjamin and the depiction of its appearance in Canaan. Clans which formed this tribe might have emerged from outside Canaan. Joshua – an Ephraimite – probably played a dominant role in the establishment of the Benjaminite clans in Cisjordan. One could thus readily assume that there was a close association between the Ephraimite and Benjaminite clans. In the *Song of Deborah*⁴⁰⁹ a clear link is indicated between these two groups.⁴¹⁰ Similarly, a possible connection between the Edomites and Benjaminites could have led to the southern Edomites being instrumental in spreading the cult of *Yahweh* to the North – the Ephraimites were in the North.

Lemche⁴¹¹ mentions that an early Benjaminite migration is unlikely as they are not mentioned in any Late Bronze Age documents. It should, however, be kept in mind that Akkadian cuneiform and Egyptian records referred to nomads as *Sutu* and *Shasu*, respectively. A study by a social anthropologist⁴¹² indicates that the inhabitants of Beitin – ancient Bethel in the territory of Benjamin – consider themselves to be descendants of migrants from the Arabian Peninsula. According to Lewy,⁴¹³ the tribe of the Benjaminites – probably known as the *TUR-meš-ia-mi-na* – are mentioned in some texts from the royal archives of Mari. They were ruled by

⁴⁰⁵ Polk 1979:9.

⁴⁰⁶ 1 Chronicles 12:1-2, 16-18, 29.

⁴⁰⁷ For more information, see § 2.4.

⁴⁰⁸ Negev & Gibson 2001:317.

⁴⁰⁹ Judges 5:14.

⁴¹⁰ Schunk 1992:671.

⁴¹¹ Lemche 1994:180-183.

⁴¹² Abdul Lutfiyya made a study of modern Beitin – ancient Bethel. Lutfiyya, A M 1966. *Baytin. A Jordanian village* (Lemche 1994:182).

⁴¹³ Lewy 1962:266. See also § 2.4.

chieftains and elders, and were renowned for their military ability. They possibly migrated from Mesopotamia and Haran to Palestine. Lemche⁴¹⁴ furthermore denotes that, with regard to the conquest narratives in the book of Joshua, there is no proof that the Benjaminites migrated to Central Palestine – or even conquered the area – between 1800 BC and 1500 BC.

According to various ancient references to the Benjaminites, it thus seems that they moved over a vast area of the Ancient Near East. They were evidently nomads, considered as *Shasu*. A history of cross-links with the Edomites – as indicated by Polk⁴¹⁵ – could thus imply that they were knowledgeable about the southern worship of *Yahweh*, and maybe instrumental in the spreading thereof. My theory – as discussed in paragraph 4.2 – of possible *Ya*-related cults in various areas of the Ancient Near East, before the emergence of the Israelite Yahwist religion, may thus be tenable.

5.4 Moses figure and traditions

'No portion of the Bible is more complex and rigorously debated than the story of Moses.'⁴¹⁶ Beegle⁴¹⁷ mentions that, as no extra-biblical records refer to Moses or the exodus, the historicity thereof – as proclaimed by the Hebrew Bible – depends solely on the evaluation of the biblical accounts in question. Early Jewish and Christian traditions believed that the Pentateuch was an historical record composed by Moses himself. At the other end of the scale are scholars who claim that Moses was only a legendary figure. In the biographical elements connected to the life of Moses we find a mixture of a 'few historical facts and a mass of legendary matter'.⁴¹⁸ Later editors of the Hebrew Bible attempted to compose a complete account of his life from collections of disparate data. Moses features more prominently than most biblical figures in art, music and literature. The portrayal of Moses with horns is well known.⁴¹⁹ Various participants and onlookers observe and interpret events differently, therefore it is likely that two or more divergent traditions developed fairly soon after the exodus and Sinai events.⁴²⁰ Frazer⁴²¹ indicates that 'there seems to be no sufficient reason to doubt that in these broad outlines the tradition concerning him [Moses] is correct' – he is much closer to the borderline of history than the patriarchs. Van Seters⁴²² denotes that scholars should take

⁴¹⁴ Lemche 1994:182.

⁴¹⁵ Polk 1979:9.

⁴¹⁶ Beegle 1992:909.

⁴¹⁷ Beegle 1992:909-910. See reference to, and footnote on Hecataeus, later in this paragraph.

⁴¹⁸ Widengren 1969:7.

⁴¹⁹ Houtman 1999:597.

⁴²⁰ Beegle 1992:910-911.

⁴²¹ Frazer 1923:263.

⁴²² Van Seters 1994:15.

cognisance thereof that the narrative reflects the author's own time to a great extent, and that he addresses the 'ideological and theological concerns of his audience'.

The virtues of Moses form a crucial component of the tradition in the Hebrew Bible. His ministry is represented as a model for all later leaders in Israel; he identified with the suffering of his people, in contrast to his act of violence in Egypt. He furthermore – according to tradition – enjoyed a kind of intimate relationship with *Yahweh* 'and there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face ...'.⁴²³ This bond was opposed to that of the prophets who had to depend on dreams and visions. The individual tales, within the structure of the Moses saga, probably circulated amongst Israel's narrators. Some scholars suggest that the "Moses chronicle" was written by David's scribes as a history of the world, with the Kingdom of David at its centre. Although Moses is presented as the hero, the construction could imply that David was the "New Moses".⁴²⁴ It was only in later tradition that Moses became the legendary ancestor of the Levitical priests. His historical role is highly problematic, and his real importance remains an enigma.⁴²⁵

Moses' name is an Egyptian hypocoristicon,⁴²⁶ composed from the verb *mšī* – "bear", "give birth to".⁴²⁷ The biblical writer presumably did not realise that his name was Egyptian, and based the name on the Hebrew verb *מָשָׂה* – *māšâ* – "to draw out".⁴²⁸ The Egyptian name *Mose* appears at times with the name of a god, such as *Toth*, in the form Tuthmosis.⁴²⁹ Egyptian names among Moses' descendants point to a link with Egypt. Miriam was probably an historical figure, but not the sister of Moses. It seems that Aaron was only a legendary ancestor of the later Aaronite priesthood.⁴³⁰ Consistent with tradition, Moses was a Levite, and thus a descendant of Jacob.⁴³¹ According to calculations by Finegan,⁴³² Moses' birth might have been in the year 1526 BC, thus the last year of reign of pharaoh Ahmose, who could thus have been the ruler under whom the newborn Hebrew boys were under threat of death.⁴³³ At

⁴²³ Deuteronomy 34:10.

⁴²⁴ Coats 1993:80, 91, 111, 113, 173, 191.

⁴²⁵ Van der Toorn 1995:247-248.

⁴²⁶ See § 2.3.

⁴²⁷ Widengren 1969:8.

⁴²⁸ Exodus 2:10. Hebrew *מֹשֶׁה*, Moses, and *מוֹשֵׁי־מֵי־הַיָּם*, to pull out (of the water) (Holladay 1971:218).

⁴²⁹ Tuthmosis means "Toth is born" (Beegle 1992:911).

⁴³⁰ Widengren 1969:8.

⁴³¹ Kohath, the son of Levi (Ex 6:16), and grandson of Jacob (Gn 29:34), was the person who "went down into Egypt" (Gn 46:3, 7-8, 11). He lived hundred and thirty-three years (Ex 6:18). Kohath's son Amram (Ex 6:18), Moses' father (Ex 6:20), lived hundred and thirty-seven years (Ex 6:20).

⁴³² Finegan 1998:228-229, 231, 244. For more information on how the calculations were done, see the aforementioned pages.

⁴³³ Exodus 1:22.

the age of forty Moses fled to Midian.⁴³⁴ This act of Moses would then correlate with the reign of Thutmose II.⁴³⁵ Taking alternative data into consideration, Finegan⁴³⁶ estimates that 1330 BC was Moses' year of birth; that he died in the year 1210 BC, at the age of hundred and twenty years.⁴³⁷ Houtman⁴³⁸ mentions that, according to Deuteronomy 34:5-6, Moses' death and burial were 'under striking and mysterious circumstances'. There is also no indication how he died. Various extra-biblical traditions describe Moses' death.⁴³⁹ Although Moses' name fits in with the circumstances of the Exodus narrative, it is not sufficient to identify Moses as an historical figure.⁴⁴⁰

Death reports in the Hebrew Bible are characteristic in the narratives about illustrious ancestors, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and Joshua. Moses' strength is highlighted at the end of his life; 'his eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated'.⁴⁴¹ Although Moses' age was not as lengthy as that of figures in the primeval history, it should be seen as a complete and full period. Despite the indication that he was still full of strength, his speech in Deuteronomy 31 was that of an "old, feeble man". He is nevertheless singled out as an authoritative leader that could never be equalled. The reference to Moses' death as a punishment for his defiance at Meribah⁴⁴² was obviously a justification for the problem that a strong leader did not enter the Promised Land.⁴⁴³

De Moor⁴⁴⁴ proposes that a certain Beya – whom he identifies with Moses – was the "real ruler" of Egypt in the late Nineteenth Dynasty.⁴⁴⁵ He suggests that Beya is a Semite name – possibly Yahwistic. See also paragraph 4.3.4 in connection with Beya.

Amram, a biblical figure without a narrative, from the house of Levi,⁴⁴⁶ is said to be Moses' father.⁴⁴⁷ He appears only in late genealogical lists.⁴⁴⁸ His name in the genealogy of

⁴³⁴ Exodus 2:11-15; Acts 7:22-24, 29.

⁴³⁵ Reign of Thutmose II, 1493-1479 BC (Finegan 1998:228); according to Clayton (1994:100) he reigned 1518-1504 BC.

⁴³⁶ Finegan 1998:244.

⁴³⁷ Deuteronomy 34:7.

⁴³⁸ Houtman 1999:595-596.

⁴³⁹ See Houtman (1999:595) for information on the different extra-biblical traditions.

⁴⁴⁰ Beegle 1999:911.

⁴⁴¹ Deuteronomy 34:7.

⁴⁴² Numbers 20:2-13.

⁴⁴³ Coats 1993:76-79, 81.

⁴⁴⁴ De Moor 1997:214-227.

⁴⁴⁵ Nineteenth Dynasty: 1293-1185 BC (Clayton 1994:98).

⁴⁴⁶ Exodus 2:1; Numbers 26:58-59.

⁴⁴⁷ Exodus 6:20.

⁴⁴⁸ 1 Chronicles 6:1-3.

Exodus 6⁴⁴⁹ is probably the result of the combination of three or four genealogical sources. By entering his name in this list, a distinct Levitical family was established that could fulfil a specific function in the conquest of the land.⁴⁵⁰

Jochebed, a Levite woman, was the wife of Amram and the mother of Aaron, Moses and Miriam. She appears by name only in the genealogies of Exodus 6 and Numbers 26.⁴⁵¹ In the latter genealogy she is described as the sister of Amram's father, 'the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt'.⁴⁵² The marriage between Amram and Jochebed violates the priestly laws which prohibit such a relationship between a man and his father's sister.⁴⁵³ Her ancestral lineage, however, establishes a legitimacy of Aaron as priest in the family of Levi.⁴⁵⁴ Rowley⁴⁵⁵ mentions that scholars at times suggest 'that the name of Moses' mother is the Achilles' heel of the whole Kenite theory of Yahwism', as her name appears to be compounded with the name *Yahweh*. This implies that she received a *Ya*-theophoric name before the birth of Moses, and therefore it cannot be conjectured that Moses introduced the name of *Yahweh* to the Israelites in Egypt. A counter argument notes that the name Jochebed is found only in late sources, and there is also no certainty that it is in fact a Yahwistic theophoric name. There even may have been intermarriage between some Israelite tribes and *Yahweh*-worshipping Kenite tribes, who entered Palestine during the Amarna Age.⁴⁵⁶ Kenite and Levite families could thus have become associated, hence bringing a Kenite name into a Levite home. Sarna⁴⁵⁷ denotes that the traditions concerning Moses' parents probably belong to an early time, and 'were not reworked in the light of subsequent legislation'. He furthermore indicates that no other Hebrew personal name with the component *Yo* – יו – has been attested before the time of Moses. If, however, Jochebed did have a Yahwistic name, it could explain Moses' flight to Jethro; Moses would thus have had some Kenite blood from his mother's side. The name *Yahweh* could therefore have been known among the Israelites in Egypt, even though *Yahweh* was not the God they worshipped.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁴⁹ Exodus 6:16-18.

⁴⁵⁰ Wright 1992:217.

⁴⁵¹ Exodus 6:20; Numbers 26:59.

⁴⁵² Numbers 26:59.

⁴⁵³ Leviticus 18:12.

⁴⁵⁴ Burns 1992a:871.

⁴⁵⁵ Rowley 1950:159-160.

⁴⁵⁶ Pharaoh Amenhotep IV took the name Akhenaten early in his reign (1350-1334 BC). He led in a new period in the Egyptian history, known as the Amarna Age, and was also responsible for the so-called Akhenaten monotheism. See § 2.5 and *Excursus 4*, at the end of § 8.8.1, for brief discussions on the Amarna Age and the Akhenaten monotheism, respectively.

⁴⁵⁷ Sarna 1971:130.

⁴⁵⁸ Rowley 1950:160.

Berman and Carlebach⁴⁵⁹ indicate that, according to the Aggadah,⁴⁶⁰ Jochebed was named so because her face was like the "splendour of glory". She was born during the journey to Egypt and was hundred and thirty years of age when she gave birth to Moses. Her youth returned to her and all the wrinkles disappeared.⁴⁶¹ Her husband divorced her because of the command that all male children be killed. After she remarried him she gave birth to Moses. Jochebed is, furthermore, identified with the midwife Shiphrah,⁴⁶² because "the Israelites were fruitful in her days", and with Jehudijah – Hodiah⁴⁶³ – the Jewess, because "she brought Jews into the world". Jochebed survived all her children, and at the age of two hundred and fifty years she was permitted to enter the promised land with Joshua.

Although the chronicle of the birth and raising of Moses is free from supernatural elements, it is nonetheless more likely to belong to the realm of folklore than that of history. After his birth Moses' mother hid him to avoid that her son be killed on account of the Egyptian decree.⁴⁶⁴ She put him in 'a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. ... and placed it among the reeds by the river bank', where the pharaoh's daughter found him. Moses later became the princess's son.⁴⁶⁵ Similar tales have been recounted of founders of dynasties, such as that of the exposure of the infant Sargon⁴⁶⁶ in a basket of bulrushes on the river. This chronicle closely resembles the legend of Moses, but is, to all appearances, much older than the Hebrew tradition. The authors of Exodus were probably acquainted with the birth legend of Sargon, and modelled their narrative according to it.⁴⁶⁷ The tale of Moses is also reminiscent of an old custom to test the legitimacy of children by throwing the infant into the water. There is no hint in the biblical narrative that Moses' legitimacy was doubtful, although later Jewish law condemned marriages such as that of Amram and his paternal aunt, as incestuous.⁴⁶⁸

Sargon's birth legend is recounted in an Akkadian document known as the *Autobiography of Sargon*;⁴⁶⁹ the document probably dates from the early first millennium BC. It gives an

⁴⁵⁹ Berman & Carlebach 1971:130.

⁴⁶⁰ Aggadah or Haggadah, see footnote in § 4.1.

⁴⁶¹ *Genesis Rabbah* 94:9 in the Haggadah (Berman & Carlebach 1971:130). An explanation of *Genesis Rabbah* is incorporated in a footnote on Rabbi Haninah in § 3.2.1.

⁴⁶² Exodus 1:15.

⁴⁶³ 1 Chronicles 4:19.

⁴⁶⁴ Exodus 1:15-16.

⁴⁶⁵ Exodus 2:1-10.

⁴⁶⁶ For a description of Sargon, see footnote in § 2.4.

⁴⁶⁷ Frazer 1923:264-266.

⁴⁶⁸ Frazer 1923:268-269.

⁴⁶⁹ Arnold & Beyer 2002:75. See § 3.9 for a brief discussion of the birth legend.

explanation of the rapid rise of Sargon I of Akkad, the first great Semitic ruler of Mesopotamia. According to various legends, Sargon was born in the town of Azipiranu on the Euphrates. He began his career as cup-bearer to the king of Kish,⁴⁷⁰ and later became the ruler over a vast region, including southern Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Mari, Ebla, Nineveh and the Mediterranean.⁴⁷¹

Scholars have described Exodus 2:11-15 as a literary bridge between the birth story and Moses in Midian. It does not reflect any special traditional material. The scene of Moses' Egyptian childhood – with his knowledge of his Hebrew identity – and the oppression provide a motive for Moses' flight and sojourn in a foreign country. The narrative has parallels in the patriarchal stories.⁴⁷² In an attempt to reconstruct the historical circumstances, the Yahwist applied existing traditions, augmented by folkloristic features, such as the Egyptian oppression, to be comparable of Solomon's enslavement of non-Israelites to perform hard labour.⁴⁷³ On account of discontinuity in the biblical text, the reader is not informed on Moses' raising, education and connections with the Egyptian and Hebrew communities. Scholars speculate that the reason he fled to Midian was that, being with a nomadic tribe, increased his chances to remain undetected. Moses' flight from Egypt has a parallel in the Egyptian legend of Sinuhe.⁴⁷⁴ The latter was a high-ranking court official who, for political reasons fled through Canaan to Syria. He married the daughter of a Syrian leader. Although there are many similarities in the two chronicles, the legend of Sinuhe does not, however, give insight into the origin and meaning of the Moses narrative.⁴⁷⁵ Moses' flight from Egypt into the Wilderness is significant therein that it sets the stage for the elucidation of the divine name to Moses.⁴⁷⁶

Two important events are narrated in Exodus regarding Moses' exile in Midian. The first event relates to his marriage to a daughter of a Midianite priest, and secondly to his

⁴⁷⁰ See footnote in § 2.4.

⁴⁷¹ Levin 2002:359-360.

⁴⁷² Compare with Genesis 24 and 29. The general scene in Midian (Exodus 2:11-15) is the same as that of the patriarchal stories. The "hero" arrives in a foreign country, encounters shepherds and the daughter – or daughters – of a particular family at a well. He assists them, is invited into the family circle, and subsequently marries one of the daughters (Van Seters 1994:31).

⁴⁷³ Van Seters 1994:30-33. See page 33-34 for a comparison by Van Seters of the various historical analogies.

⁴⁷⁴ Several Egyptian Middle and New Kingdom (Middle Kingdom 2040-1782 BC; New Kingdom 1570-1070 BC) hieratic papyri and limestone ostraca (see footnote in § 2.14.2) were used for the composition of *The Story of Sinuhe*. It was evidently used as a set text in the Egyptian classrooms. Sinuhe was brought up in a palace; he overhears a plot to kill the king and fearing that he might be implicated, flees into the desert. He is received well in Syria and is later recalled to Egypt, where he receives honours and a tomb (Clayton 1994:82). The tale is a literary masterpiece that became a classic example of prose in ancient Egypt (Arnold & Beyer 2002:76). "Hieratic" – a cursive form of hieroglyphics (Deist 1990:114).

⁴⁷⁵ Provan et al 2003:127.

⁴⁷⁶ Janzen 1979:233.

commission to lead his people out of Egypt. Coats⁴⁷⁷ is of the opinion that 'the kernel of tradition about Moses in Midian' lies in the marriage story. His flight to Midian and the marriage serves as a connection between his birth and subsequent adoption-story, and the account of Moses at the Mountain of God receiving his commission.⁴⁷⁸ An older tradition about marriage lies behind the plot of the narrative. In Genesis 29 – according to the marriage tradition – the relationship between the bridegroom and his father-in-law is emphasised, and not the relationship between the groom and his bride. In Exodus 18:1-7 Moses' father-in-law brings Moses' wife and children to meet him in the Wilderness, 'but the focal point of this reunion is between Moses and his father-in-law',⁴⁷⁹ while his wife and children are practically ignored. Exodus 18 furthermore links the Mountain of God and Jethro – Moses' father-in-law. The traditions about the exodus, which were originally unrelated to the name of *Yahweh*, are thus connected to the traditions about a Midianite cult of *Yahweh*. It therefore seems that the goal of the marriage tradition is to explain the origin of the relationship between Moses and his father-in-law that subsequently led to the initiation of Moses into the cult of *Yahweh*.⁴⁸⁰

The origin of Moses' wife Zipporah is laden with uncertainty. The oldest tradition-layer mentions that he had a non-Israelite wife.⁴⁸¹ In Exodus 2:16-22 she is referred to as Zipporah, 'the daughter of the Midianite priest Reuel'. Zipporah is mentioned only briefly when she saves her husband – Moses – in a strange and dangerous situation. She wards off a divine attack by performing a particular ritual: she cuts off her son's foreskin, touched Moses' "feet" – probably a euphemism for his genitals – with it and said 'Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me'.⁴⁸² Scholars have proposed various solutions to solve this text which is loaded with difficulties, such as Zipporah's adoption of a male role to perform the circumcision of her son. After their meeting with Moses, Zipporah and her sons disappear from the narrative,⁴⁸³ indicating that the significant family consists of Moses and Jethro, his father-in-law.⁴⁸⁴ The Kenites are thus related to Moses through his Kenite wife, and consequently to the Levite tribe to which Moses belonged.⁴⁸⁵ Robertson Smith⁴⁸⁶ mentions that, according to Exodus 12:43-49 – which explains the institution of the Passover – all male Israelites were to be

⁴⁷⁷ Coats 1993:22-24.

⁴⁷⁸ Exodus 3:1-4:18.

⁴⁷⁹ Coats 1993:25.

⁴⁸⁰ Coats 1993:25, 28, 30.

⁴⁸¹ Widengren 1969:8.

⁴⁸² Exodus 4:24-26.

⁴⁸³ Exodus 18:1-9.

⁴⁸⁴ Burns 1992b:1105.

⁴⁸⁵ Nolan 1982:40.

⁴⁸⁶ Robertson Smith 1969:609-610.

circumcised before they could keep the Passover. Uncircumcised, they would be regarded as polluting *Yahweh's* land.⁴⁸⁷ Both the circumcision and Passover thus denote a new period in Israel's history. The rite of circumcision evidently had not been performed on Moses. The ritual carried out by Zipporah – touching Moses' genitals with her son's foreskin – presumably symbolised an act of circumcising Moses.

According to Numbers 12:1, 'Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, ...'. "Cush" was the term used by the ancient Israelites to refer to the region south of Egypt, later called Ethiopia by the Greeks and Romans. The territory comprised more or less of the area between the first and sixth cataracts of the Nile. The borders, however, fluctuated throughout the centuries. The name "Ethiopians" is derived from Greek meaning "burnt face", thus obviously referring to black people. It is, therefore, possible that Moses' Cushite wife was a black woman. The text in Numbers provides no clarity on the negativity of Miriam and Aaron against the Cushite woman. The foreign ancestry of the woman is emphasised, but she remains anonymous. Some scholars argue that Cushite does not refer to the country Cush in Africa, but should be identified with "Cushan" or "Midian" of Habakkuk 3:7; the implication thus being that Miriam and Aaron refer to Moses' Midianite wife Zipporah. The reference to Cushan, which is linked in Habakkuk 3:7 to Midian is, however, questionable. Overwhelming biblical citations seem to indicate that "Cushite" refers to the region Cush, south of Egypt.⁴⁸⁸ Cush is the eponymous ancestor of the Cushites, but is also related to Nimrod,⁴⁸⁹ and has therefore been identified as the ancestor of a Mesopotamian group, the Kassites, who ruled in Babylonia until the twelfth century BC.⁴⁹⁰

Moses, as the principal character in the exodus tradition and ensuing sojourn of the Israelites in the Wilderness, played a crucial role in these traditions, which advance that the Israelites were introduced to *Yahweh* by the mediation of Moses. The revelation to Moses of *Yahweh's* proper name – as in Exodus 3:14 – and the subsequent indication – as in Exodus 6:3 – that *Yahweh* did not make himself known by that name to the patriarchal fathers, is significant for our perception of the Yahwist religion of the Israelites.⁴⁹¹ A literary analysis of Exodus 3 and 4 – describing the encounter between *Yahweh* and Moses, and the following "call" of Moses –

⁴⁸⁷ During the Passover they ate of the produce of the land (Robertson Smith 1969:609).

⁴⁸⁸ Lokel 2006:538-539, 541.

⁴⁸⁹ Genesis 10:8.

⁴⁹⁰ Johnson 1992:1219.

⁴⁹¹ According to Exodus 6:3 *Yahweh* appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as אֱלֹהֵי שְׂרָיָה – *El Shadday* – and not as יְהוָה. The question of the implications in terms of the covenant made by *Yahweh* with Abram (Gn 12:1-3) and *Yahweh's* revelation in Exodus 6:3 pertains to a theological debate, and cannot be researched within the scope of this thesis.

is fundamental to understand the J-narrator in the Moses tradition, and the connection of this tradition to that of the patriarchs preceding it. This matter, concerning the J and E sources,⁴⁹² continues to be debated.⁴⁹³ Seitz⁴⁹⁴ indicates that no two other passages – than Exodus 3:1-4:17 and 6:2-9 – proved to be more important for the source-critical method. A significant problem in these passages thus is the claim in Exodus 6:3 that God had not previously been known by his proper name *Yahweh*. Moses was therefore – according to this text – the first person to whom God revealed his proper name. Hence, this Name was unknown to the patriarchal ancestors. The appearance of the proper name *Yahweh* in Genesis is consequently an anachronism, recognised as such by the ancient reader, who drew neither historical nor theological conclusions. God reveals the divine name to Moses, אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה.⁴⁹⁵ However, Mowinckel⁴⁹⁶ points out that a person who knew the deeper meaning of the name of a deity, "knew" the deity in question. According to Exodus 3:14-15, it was not the name of God – *Yahweh* – which was revealed to Moses, but the deeper meaning of this name. The J-tradition thus maintains that the interpretation of the name was hidden in the name itself. Therefore, Exodus 3 'does not support the theory that the name of *Yahweh* was not known to the Israelites before Moses'.⁴⁹⁷ See chapter 4 – paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 – for a discussion of the divine name, as disclosed to Moses.

The advent of *Yahweh* confronting Moses from a burning bush⁴⁹⁸ was constructed in the context of Midianite traditions, although a Midianite setting for this theophany tradition is actually irrelevant. Exodus 3:1 describes Moses tending the flocks of his father-in-law, a Midianite priest. After *Yahweh's* commission to Moses, he returns to his father-in-law seeking permission to leave. Moses is therefore also tied into the larger context of the Midianite priest father-in-law traditions.⁴⁹⁹ A later theophany of *Yahweh* is described in Exodus 19 when 'Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God⁵⁰⁰ ... there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast ... Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD [*Yahweh*] had descended on it in fire ... the whole mountain trembled greatly'.⁵⁰¹ Earthquakes were associated with theophany, therefore the

⁴⁹² See § 8.2 in connection with the pentateuchal sources.

⁴⁹³ Van Seters 1994:35-36.

⁴⁹⁴ Seitz 1999:145, 147, 150.

⁴⁹⁵ Exodus 3:14.

⁴⁹⁶ Mowinckel 1961:126.

⁴⁹⁷ Mowinckel 1961:126.

⁴⁹⁸ Exodus 3:1-6.

⁴⁹⁹ Coats 1993:27.

⁵⁰⁰ Exodus 19:17.

⁵⁰¹ Exodus 19:16, 18.

earthquake mentioned in Amos 1:1 is significant for theological as well as seismological reasons. This particular earthquake has been attested in the archaeological record. Solid evidence has been established, inter alia, at Hazor, as well as at Jerusalem where a landslide – on account of the earthquake – involved a part of the Mount of Olives and the Kidron Valley. In this particular instance 'the importance of Amos's authentication for the history of Israelite prophecy cannot be overstated'.⁵⁰²

Rowley⁵⁰³ denotes that there is no evidence that polytheism in Israel developed into monotheism by natural evolution. There is also no evidence that Moses practised monotheism in the sense that he denied the existence of more than one god, or that he was a polytheist therein that he worshipped many gods. It may, however, be stated that Moses planted the seed of monotheism. Scholars, such as Albright⁵⁰⁴ – who advanced the thesis – identify Moses as the founder of the monotheistic Israelite religion. There are also scholars who support a theory of a Mosaic revolution during the thirteenth century BC.⁵⁰⁵ Dever⁵⁰⁶ mentions that there are no external witnesses to Moses,⁵⁰⁷ and that 'the notion of a revolutionary new religion that emerged complete overnight and never required or underwent revolutionary development is ... unconvincing'. He endeavours to reconcile a probably "mythical-Moses" of the biblical texts with a possible historical "Moses-like figure".

Davies⁵⁰⁸ refers to the exodus as 'one of a number of alternative immigration stories', without historical basis or explanation. He furthermore indicates that many Judeans most likely went to Egypt at the end of the sixth century BC – some as garrison troops. A number of these Semitic servicemen probably returned later from Egypt to settle in Yehud – maybe even under a leader with the Egyptian name Moses. A fourth century BC Egyptian chronicle – preserved in Hecataeus⁵⁰⁹ – mentions that the Jewish priesthood was established by an Egyptian, by the

⁵⁰² Freedman & Welch 1994:188-189, 196.

⁵⁰³ Rowley 1963:42-44.

⁵⁰⁴ Albright, W F 1957. *From Stone Age to Christianity: monotheism and the historic process*. 2nd ed. New York: Doubleday.

⁵⁰⁵ Human 1999:495.

⁵⁰⁶ Dever 2003:235.

⁵⁰⁷ See a later footnote in this paragraph, concerning the historian Hecataeus, and his documented reference to Moses.

⁵⁰⁸ Davies 1992:119-120. Philip Davies is recognised as one of the minimalists (see § 8.9) who claim, inter alia, that the Hebrew Bible was composed during the Persian or Hellenistic periods.

⁵⁰⁹ Hecataeus of Abdera was a Hellenistic ethnographic historian functioning more or less during 300 BC, at the time of Ptolemy I Soter. He treats different features of Jewish history and culture, particularly also emigration from Egypt and some aspects of the Mosaic law. This is the first documented reference to Moses in pagan literature (Holladay 1992:108). Ptolemy I Soter – Meryanum Setepenre – acted as satrap in Egypt for the period 305-282 BC (Clayton 1994:208). A satrap was a holder of provincial governorship (Oxford University Press 1964b:788).

name of Moses, who founded Jerusalem. There is thus the likelihood of people emigrating from Egypt to Palestine, identifying with the dominant culture of Yehud. They may have contributed to this culture their own claim grounded on an escape from Egypt. Speiser⁵¹⁰ mentions that the spiritual history of the political entity Israel was bound to operate in the shadow of the dominating figure of Moses.

Whereas it remains problematic to recognise any historical substance as such, in the patriarchal narratives, the exodus chronicle – on the other hand – points to signs of a monarchical or later composition. Circumstantial evidence in the account of the exodus has been debated by scholars; some who reject its value for historical purposes, while other scholars accept some sort of departure from Egypt by certain antecedents of the Israelites. The names of, inter alia, Moses, Aaron and Phinehas are not Hebrew, but Egyptian, thus suggesting an Egyptian background for at least some Israelites. It is unlikely that an ancient group would have fabricated a tradition presenting its ancestors as slaves. Some of the archaic poems in the Hebrew Bible recall the exodus,⁵¹¹ thereby intimating its historical value. It is, however, significant that both the divine names *Yahweh* and *Elohim* are presented in these poems to indicate the God responsible for their liberation from Egypt.⁵¹² Dijkstra⁵¹³ is of the opinion that one cannot 'deny the existence of a group of Hebrews or Levites in the Egyptian Delta or an Exodus experience witnessed in biblical tradition'. The Moses group probably settled at first in Transjordan, and some of them later moved to the central hill country of Israel and Judah.

Through the ages, the sin of Moses, as described in Num 20:1-13, has been regarded as one of the Gordian knots⁵¹⁴ of the Bible.⁵¹⁵ According to this text, Moses sinned therein that he did not believe *Yahweh*; the punishment being that he would not lead the Israelites into the "promised land".⁵¹⁶ Medieval Jewish commentators gave different explanations of the biblical account.⁵¹⁷ Some modern scholars are of the opinion that the "sin of Moses" has been obscured deliberately in order not to detract from the glory of Moses. The possibility exists that

⁵¹⁰ Speiser 1964:L.

⁵¹¹ Exodus 15; Numbers 23-24.

⁵¹² Smith 2004:19-20.

⁵¹³ Dijkstra 2001a:110.

⁵¹⁴ Gordian knot: a difficult, or impossible, task or problem. The expression originated from a legend in which king Gordius tied a very complicated knot and said that whoever undid it would become the ruler of Asia. It was Alexander the Great who cut through the knot with his sword (Wehmeier 2005:644).

⁵¹⁵ Milgrom 1983:251.

⁵¹⁶ Numbers 20:12.

⁵¹⁷ Milgrom (1983:251-252) mentions that explanations of the biblical account by Jewish commentators can be summarised as follows: Moses' action of striking the rock – twice – instead of speaking to it; his character which showed a blazing temper, cowardice and callousness; his words which seemingly indicated that he doubted *Yahweh*.

the episodes – related in Exodus 17 and Numbers 20 – of Moses' drawing water from the rock are variants of the same tradition. It seems that the "sin of Moses" possibly lies therein that he ascribed miraculous powers to himself and Aaron, defying *Yahweh* and denying the essence of *Yahweh's* existence. *Yahweh* commanded Moses to 'tell the rock before their [Israelites] eyes to yield its water',⁵¹⁸ but Moses struck the rock twice with his staff. The magical rite in Egypt always comprised certain words that had to be recited, as well as certain actions that had to be performed. Mesopotamian magic also combined incantation and gesticulation. Moses performs his miracles in silence without reciting any formula. The pentateuchal narrators thus distinguish Moses from his Egyptian counterparts, as they foresaw that "his speaking to the rock" could have been perceived by the assembled people as an incantation by a magician. The narrators thus 'constrained (Moses) to speechlessness during the performance of a miracle, a practice which contrasted sharply – deliberately so – with the wonder-workers of other nations'.⁵¹⁹

Numbers 21:4-9 records the incident when *Yahweh* sent fiery serpents among the Israelites. On instruction of *Yahweh*, Moses made a bronze serpent, set it on a pole so that anyone, who was bitten by a serpent and looked at the bronze serpent, would live. This image was therefore created to cure snakebites. *Yahweh* is thus 'the deity responsible for healing through the symbolic instrument of the bronze snake'.⁵²⁰ During his religious reforms, king Hezekiah⁵²¹ 'broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it'.⁵²² The Masoretic Text states that the name of the object was *nēḥuštān* – נחשתן, which is clearly a wordplay on the words bronze or copper, *nēḥōšet* – נחשת – and serpent, *nāḥāš* – נחש.⁵²³ Scholars indicate that this object represented a deity which clearly formed part of the Judean pantheon in Jerusalem, and was probably the deity of healing – related to the Greek god *Asclepios*,⁵²⁴ which was represented by a snake symbol. Serpent figures made from copper or bronze have been found at various sites in the Ancient Near East.⁵²⁵ Knight⁵²⁶ mentions that the serpent was also the symbol of *Eshmun*, the Canaanite god of healing. Coats⁵²⁷ deliberates that there was some connection between this *nēḥuštān*,

⁵¹⁸ Numbers 20:8.

⁵¹⁹ Milgrom 1983:251-252, 255, 258-261, 264.

⁵²⁰ Hendel 1999:746.

⁵²¹ Hezekiah reigned in Judah 715-686 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:197).

⁵²² 2 Kings 18:4.

⁵²³ Holladay 1971:235.

⁵²⁴ See also footnote in § 3.3 on "Serpent symbolism".

⁵²⁵ Handy 1992:1117.

⁵²⁶ Knight 1981:34.

⁵²⁷ Coats 1993:139.

the rod in Moses' hand that turned into a serpent – *nāḥāš* – in Egypt, and the *nāḥāš* who challenged Eve in the garden. The important aspect is, however, that – in the incident described in Numbers – the serpent functions as an instrument of healing. It is obvious that Moses would have been able to make the bronze serpent as he probably learned the art of copper moulding from the Kenites.

Characteristics involving style, genre, lexical stock and a distinctive theological tendency, clearly indicate a variety of authorial voices in the books of Genesis and Exodus. The history concerning the divine name and the calling of Moses, reports exceptionally complex events. Seitz,⁵²⁸ therefore, supports a different understanding of the character of the levels of tradition and their relationship to one another.

5.5 Evaluation of the Kenite hypothesis

Scholars have disparate views regarding the Kenite hypothesis.⁵²⁹ A number of aspects concerning this hypothesis are considered in a positive light by scholars, while particular facets thereof are evaluated negatively.

Van der Toorn⁵³⁰ refers to the absence of the name *Yahweh* in West Semitic epigraphy, as well as the biblical topographical link with the South, which positively connects *Yahweh* with the southern regions where the Kenites and Midianites dwelt. Moses became acquainted with the god *Yahweh* through his Kenite association. The Kenites were related to the Midianites, and were probably a clan of this tribe. According to Albertz,⁵³¹ the God whom Moses introduced to the exodus group was venerated in the mountainous areas south of Palestine before he became the God of Israel. He also mentions that the Hebrew Bible deliberately obscures any earlier historical connections with Sinai – the Mountain of God, depicted in the exodus tradition – as it was probably previously a mountain sanctuary visited by nomadic groups from this region, such as the Midianites and Kenites. Although this suggestion by Albertz is appealing, it does seem – according to the Hebrew Bible – that the "holy mountain", Mount Sinai (or Horeb), was situated outside the Midianite territory;⁵³² Exodus 18:27 is rather explicit in this regard: 'Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he [the father-in-law, a Midianite/Kenite] went away to his own country'. The question is, therefore, whether this

⁵²⁸ Seitz 1999:160-161.

⁵²⁹ See § 5.3 for a brief discussion of a number of these views.

⁵³⁰ Van der Toorn 1999e:912.

⁵³¹ Albertz 1994:51-55.

⁵³² Exodus 3:1; 4:27; 18:5.

tribe would have travelled some distance into the Wilderness to worship their god. On the other hand, there is no reason why such a sanctuary could not have existed and been frequented by nomadic groups who roamed over large areas.

West⁵³³ denotes that the southern Palestinian tribe of Judah has been identified as one of the tribal groups who were not involved in the exodus. In the light of the geographical proximity of the Kenites and Judahites, a *Yahweh* kinship between these two groups could thus easily be envisaged. Smith⁵³⁴ agrees that such a cultural contact could account for the adoption of *Yahweh* in Judah. The spreading of the cult of *Yahweh* from the South to the central and northern highlands could be attributed to contact with caravan traders – particularly Midianites – in these regions. Some Kenite families presumably also settled in the northern regions; Heber, the Kenite, is an example of such a migration.⁵³⁵

Despite Van der Toorn's⁵³⁶ acknowledgement of *Yahweh*'s topographical link with the South, and the positive evaluation of the Kenites in the Hebrew Bible, which renders the Kenite hypothesis in a positive light, he mentions that a weakness of this theory is its disregard for the "Canaanite" origins of Israel. According to the classic formulation of the hypothesis, the Israelites became Yahwists under influence of Moses during their sojourn in the Wilderness. Van der Toorn⁵³⁷ points out that, at that stage, the majority of Israelites were already established in Palestine. He does, however, agree that the Kenites probably introduced the Israelites to the worship of *Yahweh*, but then, within the borders of Palestine. He furthermore indicates that, should the Kenite hypothesis be maintained, then only in a modified form. With regard to Van der Toorn's view, I wish to point out that, according to my assessment, Kenite influence – via Moses – on the Israelite tribes of the exodus, need not be in conflict with any possible effect the Kenites had on the religion or cult of the Israelite tribes who were settled in the central and northern areas of Palestine. It has been established archaeologically, as well as in biblical references, that the Kenites were associated with Arad and the Negeb in the South, the region where Moses became acquainted with them. At the same time they were nomadic, and as travelling metal traders could have spread their Yahwistic belief and cult over a wide region from south to north – thereby making contact with those Israelites who had Canaanite origins.

⁵³³ West 1981:159.

⁵³⁴ Smith 2001:145-146.

⁵³⁵ Judges 4:11. See also § 5.3.

⁵³⁶ Van der Toorn 1999e:912-913.

⁵³⁷ Van der Toorn 1999e:912-913.

Egyptian records that link *Yhw* [*Yahu*] to the "land of the *Shasu*", also connect this Bedouin group to Seir and Edom.⁵³⁸ Scholars generally identify this "land of the *Shasu*" with biblical Seir in Edom. In the light of ancient traditions relating to *Yahweh*'s "march" from the southern regions – particularly also from Edom and Seir – it could thus be deduced that *Yahu* [*Yahweh*] was known by the *Shasu*, and probably venerated by them. Similarly, scholars recognise the Kenites as being related to the Edomites. De Moor,⁵³⁹ however, disagrees that the *s'rr* in the Egyptian records could be identified with the Seir in the southern regions of Palestine, but should be sought much further north. Axelsson,⁵⁴⁰ on the other hand, acknowledges a reasonable probability that a link existed between the *Shasu* of Seir and the Israelite [or Kenite] God *Yahweh*. He furthermore denotes that related groups from Seir – such as the Kenites and Calebites – could be associated with the *Shasu*. These groups could thus have brought the cult of *Yahweh* with them when they migrated into the territory of Judah. According to Thompson,⁵⁴¹ there is no evidence that the *Shasu* originated in the Arabian Peninsula, or in Edom. He also indicates that the Egyptians often used the term "*Shasu*" in a generic sense, thereby not referring to a specific ethnic group. Van der Toorn,⁵⁴² however, is of the opinion that it could tentatively be concluded that the "*Shasu* Bedouins of *Yahu*" should be sought in the regions of Edom and Midian.

In accordance with information from Egyptian records,⁵⁴³ I agree with scholars – such as Van der Toorn⁵⁴⁴ – that the *Shasu* should be identified as a Bedouin group who could be linked to the territory of Edom and adjacent Seir. As biblical records⁵⁴⁵ mention that *Yahweh* came forth from the southern regions – particularly also mentioning Edom and Seir – it therefore seems tenable that the *Shasu* could have venerated *Yahweh* in these vicinities. It, furthermore, appears that different clans were associated with the *Shasu* and could have been integrated with them; these may include southern marginal groups.

Childs⁵⁴⁶ indicates that early Jewish commentators found it unacceptable that a foreign Midianite priest – Jethro – offered a sacrifice to the God of Israel. Jethro played a leading role in a common cult meal; he is nowhere portrayed as an idolater who became a Yahwist.

⁵³⁸ See discussions in § 2.6 and § 4.3.4.

⁵³⁹ De Moor 1997:124-125, 310-311.

⁵⁴⁰ Axelsson 1987:178-179.

⁵⁴¹ Thompson 1977:159-160.

⁵⁴² Van der Toorn 1995:245-246.

⁵⁴³ See discussions on and reference to the relevant Egyptian records in § 2.6 and § 4.3.4.

⁵⁴⁴ Van der Toorn 1995:245-246.

⁵⁴⁵ See § 5.3 for reference to these records

⁵⁴⁶ Childs 1974:322-326.

According to Abba,⁵⁴⁷ the fact that Jethro – Moses' father-in-law and a Midianite priest – officiated at the sacrifice which followed the news of *Yahweh's* deliverance of Israel, does not necessarily imply that the Israelites adopted the religion of the Kenites. Houtman⁵⁴⁸ argues that Jethro's confession that 'the LORD [*Yahweh*] is greater than all gods',⁵⁴⁹ is no proof that he was a *Yahweh* worshipper. Albertz,⁵⁵⁰ however, mentions that, in the light of later enmity between the Israelites and Midianites, it is unlikely that a tradition would have been fabricated that Moses became acquainted with *Yahweh* through the mediation of his Midianite priestly father-in-law. Jagersma⁵⁵¹ agrees that the later hostile attitude towards the Midianites – as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible – strengthens the argument that an historical background, regarding Moses' positive contact with the Midianites, could be presupposed. He is, nevertheless, not convinced that Moses came in contact with Yahwism in Midian, or that the origin of Yahwism should be searched for in Midian. He rather is of the opinion that the 'so-called Kenite hypothesis has a very weak foundation'.⁵⁵² Hyatt⁵⁵³ denotes that Jethro was never indicated as a priest of *Yahweh* or that *Yahweh* was signified as the deity of the Midianites or Kenites. He mentions that, despite logical arguments in favour of the Kenite hypothesis on the origin of Yahwism, scholars have raised their doubts concerning this theory. Mowinckel,⁵⁵⁴ on the other hand, argues that 'it is certainly a fact that both Kenites and Midianites were worshipers of *Yahweh*'. To substantiate his argument he refers to the aetiological legend that Cain was the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites, and that every member of this clan wore the special protection mark of *Yahweh*.

Scholars – such as Albright⁵⁵⁵ – point out the confusion that exists regarding Moses' father-in-law's three different names, namely Jethro, Reuel and Hobab; he is also described as a Midianite and a Kenite. Early Israelite oral traditions – as reflected in the Hebrew Bible – are, however, often contradictory and generally confusing. Several explanations have been proposed by scholars regarding this inconsistency. To my mind, it should also be taken into consideration that the Kenites were connected to the Midianites, probably being a clan of the latter, and that Reuel – the name of an Edomite tribe – may be an indication that Jethro was

⁵⁴⁷ Abba 1961:320-321.

⁵⁴⁸ Houtman 1993:97.

⁵⁴⁹ Exodus 18:11.

⁵⁵⁰ Albertz 1994:51-55.

⁵⁵¹ Jagersma 1994:39.

⁵⁵² Jagersma 1994:39.

⁵⁵³ Hyatt 1980:78-79.

⁵⁵⁴ Mowinckel 1961:124.

⁵⁵⁵ Albright 1968:38-42.

linked to this tribe. Likewise, Hobab was the 'eponymous ancestor of a Kenite clan'.⁵⁵⁶ It is thus clear that an intermingling of tribes and clans eventually would have led to divergent traditions. A blend of J and E⁵⁵⁷ documents furthermore contributed to various traditions being recorded. Albright⁵⁵⁸ denotes that, where possible, the origin of variations should be determined. As I have indicated earlier in paragraph 5.3, scholars have proposed several explanations for the confusion in names. Although Albright⁵⁵⁹ does not agree with "superficial attempts to solve these discrepancies," different traditions or sources might very well have been appropriated during the redactional process.

Thompson⁵⁶⁰ refers to the inconsistency of the appearance of divine characters in Exodus; in verses succeeding one another, the names *Yahweh* and *Elohim* occur. He is of the opinion that the regularity and consistency of variance and fluidity of the divinities in the patterns of the early pentateuchal narratives can hardly be seen as insignificant or accidental. With regard to Thompson's comment, the different pentateuchal documents⁵⁶¹ applied in the narratives should be taken into consideration.

McNutt⁵⁶² mentions that, although the Hebrew Bible portrays the Kenites as loyal supporters of the Israelites and Yahwism, they were never fully incorporated into the Israelite society. It was also predicted that they would eventually disappear. Halpern⁵⁶³ denotes that there are, however, indications that the Kenites experienced a special relationship with *Yahweh* – particularly with regard to his promise to their eponymous ancestor – Cain – for divine protection.⁵⁶⁴

Shortcomings of this hypothesis are: the different names and titles of Moses' father-in-law; the prediction in Numbers 24⁵⁶⁵ that the Kenites would disappear – later Israelite traditions do not refer to the Kenites; Jethro was a Midianite priest, but it is nowhere stated that he was a priest of *Yahweh*; Mount Sinai – the Mountain of *Yahweh/Elohim* – was outside the Midianite territory; the Egyptian and biblical *s'rr* could possibly refer to different areas; uncertainty

⁵⁵⁶ Knauf 1992b:693.

⁵⁵⁷ See § 8.2 on the pentateuchal sources.

⁵⁵⁸ Albright 1968:38.

⁵⁵⁹ Albright 1968:38-42.

⁵⁶⁰ Thompson 1999:317-318.

⁵⁶¹ See § 8.2.

⁵⁶² McNutt 1993:407.

⁵⁶³ Halpern 1992:19.

⁵⁶⁴ See also discussions in this regard in § 5.2.

⁵⁶⁵ Numbers 24:21-22.

concerning Jethro's role; the ancient traditions relating to *Yahweh's* appearance from the South have no reference to the exodus or the revelation at Sinai; the hypothesis' inability to explain the firm ancient tradition in Genesis concerning *Yahweh*; the disregard of the Canaanite origin of the Israelites; apart from one allusion in the Hebrew Bible, there is no information available on the religion of the Kenites.

In their support for the Kenite hypothesis, some scholars make particular assumptions, which are not necessarily correct. Exodus 18:12 mentions that Jethro 'brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God [*Elohim*]'. Scholars, such as Albertz,⁵⁶⁶ indicate that Jethro invited the 'Israelites to a sacrificial meal for *Yahweh*'. He states furthermore, 'then we may suppose that the Midianites or Kenites were already worshippers of *Yahweh* before the Exodus group joined them'. With reference to Jethro's counselling of Moses in legal matters, Mowinckel⁵⁶⁷ denotes that, 'in the legend in Exodus 18 we are explicitly told that this Jethro instructed Moses in the ordinances and laws of *Yahweh*'; Exodus 18:15-20 refers consistently to *Elohim*. Mowinckel⁵⁶⁸ also argues that every member of the Kenite clan wore the special protection mark of *Yahweh*. According to Genesis 4:15, *Yahweh* 'put a mark on Cain'; there is, however, no reference to his descendants. Although the Book of Exodus – in particular – consists of a mixture of pentateuchal traditions, that complicates the analysis of these traditions, scholars should guard against the arbitrary reading of *Yahweh* into the text, or the making of unsubstantiated deductions.

In accordance with theories proposed by Budde and other scholars – taking particular discrepancies and shortcomings into account – I evaluate the Kenite hypothesis, in general, positively.

Summarily I therefore advance – basically in agreement with the classic formulation of the Kenite hypothesis – that a Moses-type figure gained knowledge about, and was initiated into, *Yahweh*-worship through his Kenite/Midianite priestly father-in-law Jethro. The Hebrew Bible professes that Moses spent some time with Jethro, taking his daughter in marriage. *Yahweh* confronts Moses, revealing the meaning of his proper Name, and declaring that Moses' ancestors did not know him by this Name. After Moses' return from Egypt with the "escap-ees", Jethro is portrayed positively in Exodus 18, when bringing a sacrifice and stating that

⁵⁶⁶ Albertz 1994:51-52.

⁵⁶⁷ Mowinckel 1961:124.

⁵⁶⁸ Mowinckel 1961:124.

Yahweh is greater than all the gods. It seems – as Budde denotes – that the tradition in Exodus implies that Jethro worshipped *Yahweh*. These particular "Israelite" tribes thus became acquainted with the cult of *Yahweh* through Moses, who equated *Yahweh* with the God of their fathers. The southern Palestinian tribe of Judah became knowledgeable about *Yahweh* through cultural contact with the Kenites, as well as through later contact with the "escapees" who settled in Judah. The northern tribes – particularly also those with Canaanite origins became acquainted with *Yahweh* through contact with Kenite and Midianite metal traders and travellers, as well as Kenite and other southern marginal groups who settled in the North.

A strong point of this classic hypothesis is the recurring biblical tradition of *Yahweh*'s topographical link with the South. As denoted in Deuteronomy 33:2, Judges 5:4, Psalm 68:8 and Habakkuk 3:3, *Yahweh* came from Sinai, Seir, Mount Paran, Edom and Teman. Zechariah 9:14 also refers to *Yahweh*'s march from the South – basically portrayed as a Storm God. Extra-biblical Egyptian records that link *Yhw* to the "Land of the *Shasu*", and the *Shasu* to Edom and Seir, corroborate *Yahweh*'s – *Yhw*'s – association with, at least, Seir and Edom.

I therefore conclude that – unless, or until, data emerge that contradict theories regarding *Yahweh*'s emergence from the South, and thus also the Kenite hypothesis – I am in agreement with the thesis that the origin of *Yahweh* should be sought in the southern territories, namely in the regions of Seir and Edom, and among the Kenites, Midianites, Edomites and related marginal groups.

5.6 Adoption of the *El*-figure by *Yahweh*

Van der Toorn⁵⁶⁹ mentions that some scholars argue that, despite many attributes of *Yahweh* which are normally ascribed to *Ba'al*, *Yahweh* was originally more like *El* than like *Ba'al*. *El*-names in the patriarchal narratives in Genesis⁵⁷⁰ are frequently used as epithets of *Yahweh*. Scholars therefore surmise that *Yahweh* and *El* were associated at an early stage, and explain this connection by assuming that *Yahweh* was originally an *El*-figure. Van der Toorn⁵⁷¹ is, however, of the opinion that any speculations regarding the identification of *Yahweh* with *El* should be examined critically. It should also be kept in mind that *El*'s role – as Canaanite high god – had become largely insignificant at the beginning of the Iron Age; this explains why there are no traces in the Hebrew Bible of polemics against *El*. It could thus be argued

⁵⁶⁹ Van der Toorn 1999e:916-917.

⁵⁷⁰ Names, such as "Everlasting God" – אֵל עוֹלָם (Gn 21:33); "God Almighty" – אֵל שַׁדַּי (Gn 17:11; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3); "God Most High" – אֵל עֲלִיּוֹן (Gn 14:18, 22).

⁵⁷¹ Van der Toorn 1999e:917.

that an identification of *El* as *Yahweh* was based on *El*'s decline. Apart from the name, *Yahweh* inherited different attributes of *El*.⁵⁷² Cross⁵⁷³ mentions that *El*, as the proper name of a non-Israelite Canaanite deity, hardly ever appears in the Masoretic Text. The prophet Ezekiel – in his oracle on Tyre⁵⁷⁴ – 'describes Canaanite *El* in excessively mythological terms'.⁵⁷⁵ Ezekiel applies *'ēlōhîm* parallel to *'ēl*. In the biblical tradition the name *El* is often used as an alternate name of *Yahweh*. The distribution of *El* as a proper name equivalent to *Yahweh* is, however, irregular. This practice was implemented frequently in the earliest poetry of Israel; in the late literature only Second Isaiah – apart from Job – uses *El* excessively as a proper name of the God of Israel.

Various biblical and extra-biblical sources seemingly indicate that the origin of the god *Yahweh* should be sought amongst the high gods of the Canaanite religion, as well as amongst the clan deities of the patriarchal families.⁵⁷⁶ According to Miller,⁵⁷⁷ the hypothesis of Frank Cross represents the most plausible reconstruction of the origins of *Yahweh*. Cross⁵⁷⁸ explains that 'the term *'il* appears to have had the general appellative meaning "god", "deity", in the early stages of all the major branches of the Semitic family of languages'. The Ugaritic texts indicate without doubt that *'Ilu, El*, was the proper name of the head of the Canaanite pantheon. Although also used as an appellative, *'Il*, as a proper name, normally appears in mythic and epic texts, pantheon lists and temple records. *'Il*, furthermore, often emerges in the earliest sources of Old Akkadian; it is also found in Old South Arabic as a divine proper name. Scholars have noted that the general use of the element *'Il* in Akkadian theophorous names seems to indicate that a deity *'Il* – later identified as Semitic *El* – 'was the chief divinity of the Mesopotamian Semites in the Pre-Sargonic Period'.⁵⁷⁹ Apart from the use of *'Il* as a generic appellative, its appearance as a proper name in the earliest strata of Semitic languages may be an indication that this designation belongs to Proto-Semitic.⁵⁸⁰

The most likely etymology of the word *'ēl, 'il*, is derived from a root *'wl*, meaning "to be strong" or "to be pre-eminent".⁵⁸¹ As, likewise mentioned by Van der Toorn⁵⁸² (above),

⁵⁷² See also § 3.8.1 and § 3.8.2.

⁵⁷³ Cross 1974:253-254, 258-260.

⁵⁷⁴ Ezekiel 28:2.

⁵⁷⁵ Cross 1974:253.

⁵⁷⁶ Miller 2000b:24.

⁵⁷⁷ Miller 2000b:24.

⁵⁷⁸ Cross 1974:242. See also discussion of Canaanite *El* in § 3.7.

⁵⁷⁹ Cross 1974:243.

⁵⁸⁰ Cross 1974:242-244.

⁵⁸¹ Cross 1974:244.

⁵⁸² Van der Toorn 1999e:916-917.

Cross⁵⁸³ notes that a series of names or appellatives beginning with the element *'el* – combined with a substantive or adjective – appear in the patriarchal narratives in Genesis. These relevant epithets were preserved in the tradition as names by which *Yahweh* was called. At the same time, the two traditions preserved in Exodus⁵⁸⁴ 'retained the memory that the name *Yahweh* was not revealed until the Mosaic age'.⁵⁸⁵ According to these texts, there was continuity between the religion of the fathers and the later Yahwistic faith of Israel. These texts in Exodus indicate that the two religions belonged to two stages in an historical development. Cross,⁵⁸⁶ furthermore, indicates that 'El in biblical tradition is often used simply as an alternate name of *Yahweh*'. The use thereof as a proper name for Israel's God has particular implications for the history of religion. 'The wide overlap in attributes, epithets, and names of *Yahweh* with El suggests that *Yahweh* originated as an El figure, splitting apart from the old god as the cult of Israel separated and diverged from its polytheistic context.'⁵⁸⁷

'The epithet *'El Shaddai*, while the most frequent of these epithets, is the most enigmatic.'⁵⁸⁸ The element *shadday* appears in different divine name formations. It seems that the noun is derived from the word for "mountain" or "breast".⁵⁸⁹ Lutzky⁵⁹⁰ argues in favour of such a derivation. Any "*El Shadday*" is noted to be a "god of the Wilderness". Late Bronze Age deities – with the name-element *Shadday* – which are associated with hunting and the Wilderness, have been attested. In their present form, biblical references to *Shadday* or *El Shadday* are exilic, or mostly post-exilic – consistently used as an epithet for *Yahweh*. The P-source⁵⁹¹ formulated a theory regarding the "salvation history" of Israel, according to which *Yahweh* revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but not under his real name; he revealed himself as *El Shadday*.⁵⁹² A post-exilic fictitious list of the heads of Israelite clans contains three names that include the element "*Shadday*".⁵⁹³ These names appear in the generation that precedes Moses' contemporaries, and therefore suggests that it was constructed in accordance with Exodus 6:3.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁸³ Cross 1974:255-256.

⁵⁸⁴ Exodus 3:14-15; 6:2-3.

⁵⁸⁵ Cross 1974:256.

⁵⁸⁶ Cross 1974:258.

⁵⁸⁷ Cross 1974:260.

⁵⁸⁸ Cross 1974:256.

⁵⁸⁹ Cross 1974:256-257.

⁵⁹⁰ Lutzky 1998:15-36. See § 3.2.1 for a discussion of this argument.

⁵⁹¹ See § 8.2.

⁵⁹² Genesis 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; Exodus 6:3.

⁵⁹³ Shede'ur, father of Elizur, from Reuben (Nm 1:5); Zurishaddai, father of Shelumi'el, from Shimeon (Nm 1:6); Ammishaddai, father of Ahiezer, from Dan (Nm 1:12).

⁵⁹⁴ Knauf 1999b:750-751.

Cross⁵⁹⁵ indicates that the modern discussion of the religion of the patriarchs was initiated by Albrecht Alt in a "brilliant essay" published in 1929.⁵⁹⁶ He expanded on the theory of Alt who isolated a group of 'epithets in which the god is identified by the name of the patriarch'.⁵⁹⁷ They are called the "gods of the fathers". Although these gods were originally distinct deities, they were – in the development of Israel's traditions – coalesced into a single family god by artificially linking them genealogically to the fathers; they were concurrently assimilated to *Yahweh*. These deities were later identified as the god of the fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob – known as God Almighty, *El Shadday*. Exodus 3:13-15 clearly indicates continuity between the religion of the fathers and the Yahwistic faith of later Israel. Early reconstructions by scholars, such as Robertson Smith and Julius Wellhausen, who attempted to recreate the pre-Yahwistic stage of the tribal ancestors, were repudiated by Alt. Formidable barriers obstruct any approach to the Patriarchal Age. Early epic traditions of Israel, transmitted orally over an abyss of time, hardly reflect the religious milieu of their origin. These traditions were shaped – more or less uncontrolled – by written sources. Alt recognised that archaeological data bearing on the second millennium BC exhibited a different picture to that previously painted by older historians. These data clearly indicate 'that the religion of Israel's neighbors was on a very much more sophisticated level than that being predicated for the pre-Mosaic tribes'.⁵⁹⁸

According to Cross,⁵⁹⁹ an analysis of the patriarchal traditions gives an indication of the essential traits of this religion. The religious type, "the god of the fathers", differs radically from the cults of the Canaanite deities. The "god of the father" is designated by the name of the patriarch – and thus the name of the founder of his cult – but is not attached to a shrine. There is a special relation between the patriarch and the "god of the father". This deity was therefore the patron of the clan. The particular traits of the patriarchal gods anticipate some characteristics of the cult of *Yahweh*, which provides continuity between the old religious forms and the new emergent Yahwism. Although Alt has made a significant contribution to the research of the patriarchal religion, by distinguishing a particular type of god among the multitude of Ancient Near Eastern deities, this analysis has, nonetheless, raised a number of questions. It is unlikely that the patriarchal god was nameless, apart from his designation by the eponym of the clan. Although these deities belonged to pastoral or nomad tribes, they

⁵⁹⁵ Cross 1962:225-227.

⁵⁹⁶ *Der Gott der Väter*. Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament III, 12.

⁵⁹⁷ Cross 1962:226.

⁵⁹⁸ Cross 1962:225.

⁵⁹⁹ Cross 1962:227-228, 231-232.

were probably imported ancestral gods, not belonging to popular sanctuaries. In conclusion, Cross⁶⁰⁰ denotes that 'the popularity of the cult of 'El in the Semitic community in Sinai, Egypt, and Seir, gives some plausibility to the notion that Yahweh was an 'El figure ... (and) if 'El and Yahweh were related as we have suggested, many of the puzzling features of the cult of Jeroboam would have immediate explanation'.⁶⁰¹

Miller⁶⁰² judges the reasoning of Cross as 'the most extensive and far-reaching to date, (it) serves to illuminate and clarify the continuities between the god of the fathers and Canaanite *El* and Yahweh, god of Israel'. He mentions furthermore that Cross proposes an answer to the basic question, whence *Yahweh*? Cross' hypothesis is based on careful analysis of different kinds of data; he reaches the conclusion that *Yahweh* was originally a cultic name of *El*. *Yahweh* could also have been an epithet of *El* as a patron deity of the Midianites or Kenites. The divine *El* names in Genesis point to the worship of the Canaanite high god *El* in the patriarchal religion. These names are various liturgical or cultic titles for Canaanite *El*. The characteristics of this Canaanite deity made the identification with the patriarchal gods natural, particularly as the god of the father – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – might have been Amorite *El*. When *El* was eventually ousted from his place in the divine council,⁶⁰³ the god *Yahweh* would have split off from *El*. *Yahweh* was thus in origin an *El*-figure, and throughout the history of Israel's religion the various *El* names continued to be acceptable titles for *Yahweh*.⁶⁰⁴

Curtis⁶⁰⁵ finds it regrettable that the Ugaritic texts do not shed more light on the 'absolute origins of the cult of Yahweh'. These texts may, however, be relevant to a very early period in the development of Yahwism; particularly regarding the Patriarchal Period, before the ancestors of the Israelites came into contact with the cult of *Yahweh*. The Ugaritic texts – ca 1400-1350 BC – date not more than a century earlier from an accepted date for the exodus. They obviously reflect beliefs held by Canaanites. One of the reasons for the suggestion by scholars that Canaanite *El* and *Yahweh* became equated, is the assumption that there was no tension between the cults of *El* and *Yahweh*. It is difficult to pinpoint a time and place when an assimilation of these two deities took place. After the exodus the God of the fathers – *El* – was

⁶⁰⁰ Cross 1962:257.

⁶⁰¹ See Cross (1962:257-258) for an elucidation of his suggestion concerning the cult of Jeroboam.

⁶⁰² Miller 2000a:381.

⁶⁰³ Psalm 82. In the earliest traditions of Israel, many characteristics and functions of *El* are similar to those of *Yahweh*. In Psalm 82 *Yahweh* acts as judge in the court of *El*, and the psalm portrays a general picture of *Yahweh* as head of the Divine Council. The early cultic establishment of *Yahweh* – the Tabernacle and its appurtenances – all reflect Canaanite models, particularly the Tent of *El* (Cross 1973:72).

⁶⁰⁴ Miller 2000a:379-381.

⁶⁰⁵ Curtis 1985:116.

identified with *Yahweh*. Later biblical writers reversed the process by suggesting that the ancestors of Israel – without realising it – actually worshipped *Yahweh*, whom they knew as *El* or the God of the fathers. It is possible that *Yahweh* adopted the attribute of fatherhood from *El* who stood – as the "father god" *El* – in a kinship relationship with his tribal worshippers. As *Yahweh* took over the attributes of *El*, he was regarded as the original creator, the heavenly king.⁶⁰⁶ It is, furthermore, not improbable that tribal gods of the migrating patriarchs would have been characterised by their association with a particular tribe, rather than a locality.⁶⁰⁷

Guillet⁶⁰⁸ denotes that the history regarding *El* is rather obscure. 'As a common name it designates the divinity in almost the whole Semitic world'. It seems to have been the supreme deity, particularly in Phoenicia and Canaan. The question is whether *El* was not rather the individual deity of each of the different Semitic clans, and eventually degraded into one of the figures of the pagan pantheon. The Hebrew Bible attests that the patriarchs called their god *El*, albeit under different titles.⁶⁰⁹ *El 'Elyôn* – God Most High – was the god of Melchizedek, king of Salem.⁶¹⁰ This *El* was treated identical with the God of Abraham, the Lord [*Yahweh*] God Most High.

Deist and Du Plessis⁶¹¹ mention that Exodus 6:2-3 distinguish between the cultus of the patriarchs and the religion identified from the time of Moses. Joshua,⁶¹² furthermore, differentiates between the ancestors who venerated other gods, and the group who gathered at Shechem after their entry into the Promised Land. According to Samuel,⁶¹³ the Hebrews and Israelites were not essentially the same people. Scholars generally agree that different tribes, with various backgrounds – and not necessarily related – eventually grouped together to form the Israelite nation. Some of these tribes venerated *El*, yet, it is reasonable to expect traces of Yahwism transmitted to the *El*-religion. In the light of similarities between *El* and *Yahweh*, it is thus conceivable that some traditions claim that *Yahweh* was actually the deity who was worshipped from the beginning.

⁶⁰⁶ Curtis 1985:116-118.

⁶⁰⁷ A process of identification of the patriarchal gods with *El* is seen, inter alia, in the revelation to Jacob at Bethel (Gn 28:12-17). "The tribal gods (thus), being identified with various manifestations of El, merged into a "God of the Fathers" who was, in fact, El' (Curtis 1985:116).

⁶⁰⁸ Guillet 1973:206.

⁶⁰⁹ Titles, such as *El 'Elyôn*, אֱלֹהֵי יוֹן (Gn 14:18, 22); *El Rōi*, אֱלֹהֵי רֹאִי (Gn 16:13-14); *El Shadday*, אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי (Gn 17:11; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3); *El Bethel*, אֱלֹהֵי בֵּתֵל (Gn 35:7); *El 'Olām*, אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם (Gn 21:33). See also earlier footnote in this paragraph.

⁶¹⁰ Genesis 14:18-20. See explanatory footnote on Melchizedek at the end of § 3.6.

⁶¹¹ Deist & Du Plessis 1981:7-12, 20, 29.

⁶¹² Joshua 24:2.

⁶¹³ 1 Samuel 14:21.

Van Seters⁶¹⁴ argues that the term 'ēl is ambiguous therein that it could be the name of the god *El*, or a generic appellative for "deity". In some instances in the Hebrew Bible it is apparent that *El* is a proper name synonymous with *Yahweh*. The question arises what the significance of this usage is – particularly in Genesis – and whether it indicates 'that the Israelite god *Yahweh* is being identified with a quite distinct deity *El* who is known to us from the mythological texts of ancient Ugarit'.⁶¹⁵ Genesis 46:3 is cited as evidence that *El* was a patriarchal deity. *El* epithets in Genesis should be explained in terms of the criterion of Israelite liturgical tradition.

De Moor⁶¹⁶ is of the opinion that if powerful people – such as Ahab and Jezebel⁶¹⁷ – who obviously had polytheistic sympathies, deemed it wise to give Yahwistic names to their children,⁶¹⁸ ordinary citizens would have followed suit. This occurrence, to avoid the introduction of pagan elements in personal names, seems to indicate that Yahwism would have been the official religion in Israel, from at least the ninth century BC onwards. Before the time of David, theophoric biblical personal names – in all the tribes of Israel – showed preference for *El*, and not for *Yahweh*. However, the later popularity for Yahwistic names started much earlier than the establishing of Zion as national centre of worship of *Yahweh*. The absence of the name *Yahweh* from Ancient Near Eastern god lists is usually interpreted as an indication that the God of Israel was an unknown god who had come forth from the desert. The earliest accounts of this march from the South are, however, products from the North – and thus Elohistic. Some scholars interpret the tradition of the South as an indication that *Yahweh* was the name of the tribal god of some early Israelites; in Canaan this god *Yahweh* would have merged with *El*. De Moor⁶¹⁹ does not find this explanation totally satisfactory. He denotes that 'the idea of a fundamental contrast between a nomadic YHWH and a sedentary El' should be abandoned, and concludes that 'if YHWH and El were the same God, and if he was the God of the fathers, it would seem a valid approach to put greater trust in the Yahwistic and Elohistic sources of Genesis'. This is, however, not a convincing method to deal with the

⁶¹⁴ Van Seters 1980:222, 224, 229-230.

⁶¹⁵ Van Seters 1980:222.

⁶¹⁶ De Moor 1997:12, 39, 323-325.

⁶¹⁷ Ahab was king of Israel, ca 874-853 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:196). 1 Kings 17:29, 31b state, Ahab the son of Omri, 'he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him'.

⁶¹⁸ Ahaziah, son and successor of Ahab (1 Ki 22:51); his name means, "*Yahweh* has seized" (Thiel 1992a:107). Joram, brother and successor of Ahaziah, thus son of Ahab (2 Ki 8:16); his name means "*Yahu* is high". Athaliah descends from Omri. In 2 Kings 8:26 she is indicated as the granddaughter of Omri – thus presumably the daughter of Ahab; 2 Kings 8:18 refers to Jehoram's wife [Athaliah], the daughter of Ahab. The meaning of the name Athaliah is controversial, since it cannot be traced to Hebrew. If derived from Akkadian, it could mean, "*Yahweh* has manifested his glory" (Thiel 1992b:511).

⁶¹⁹ De Moor 1997:323. See De Moor (1997:323-325) for an explanation of his point of view.

'problem of how Canaanite El became YHWH in Israel'; further investigation should start with the name *Yahweh* itself.⁶²⁰ De Moor's⁶²¹ thesis is 'that YHWH was a manifestation of El and that early Israel worshipped El as the highest God who had dwarfed all other deities, including Baal'.

According to MacLaurin,⁶²² the Hebrew slaves in Egypt probably worshipped *El*, who, in the hypostasis of *El Shadday*, was venerated in Canaan as the god of the fathers. There is also the possibility that the ancestors worshipped *Yah* –who might have been identified with *El* – before they left Canaan; a Ugaritic text mentions, 'the name of my son is *Yaw-el*'.⁶²³ Moses was introduced to the deity *Yah* by the Midianites. Both *El* and *Yah* might therefore have been recognised before the Hebrew ancestors left Canaan.

Seitz⁶²⁴ mentions that, although Exodus 6:3 explicitly states that the proper name *Yahweh* was not revealed until the time of Moses, this name *Yahweh* does appear in Genesis. This anachronism could be explained thereby, that the narrator was fully knowledgeable about the divine Name at the time when he related his "history" – as were his readers; he was therefore not concerned – from an historical perspective – to elucidate this anachronism. Regarding the ancestors, God appeared as *Yahweh* and as *El Shadday*. Various authorial voices are involved in the books of Genesis and Exodus, therefore the different levels of tradition should be analysed with regard to their character and relationship to one another. Cassuto⁶²⁵ is of the opinion 'that the names *YHWH* and '*Elohim* merely indicate two different facets of His [God's] activity or two different ways in which He reveals Himself to mankind'.

It seems that the tradition of *El* (𐤇𐤍) as the god of the exodus survives in particular passages,⁶²⁶ 'where to regard 'ēl as nothing more than a poetic or archaizing allusion to 'ēlōhim or Yahweh begs the question'.⁶²⁷ Smith⁶²⁸ observes that according to these specific texts *El*, who has freed them from Egypt, was 'for them like the horns of the wild ox'.⁶²⁹ This description correlates with the animal attributes of Canaanite *El* in Ugarit, reflected in his title "Bull *El*".

⁶²⁰ De Moor 1997:323, 325.

⁶²¹ De Moor 1997:191.

⁶²² MacLaurin 1962:460.

⁶²³ Refer to Ugaritic VI AB IV 14 (MacLaurin 1962:460). See discussion in § 4.3.5 concerning a deity name *Yw* in Ugarit.

⁶²⁴ Seitz 1999:146-147, 159, 161.

⁶²⁵ Cassuto 1961:88.

⁶²⁶ Numbers 23:22; 24:8; Psalm 106:19-22.

⁶²⁷ Wyatt 2005:9.

⁶²⁸ Smith 2002:21, 27.

⁶²⁹ Numbers 23:22.

Ugaritic texts therefore provide a background for the development of the Israelite religion. Dijkstra⁶³⁰ agrees that 'El was the original God of Israel', and that somewhere in the history of Israel *Yahweh* became the God of Israel – the name *El* thus evolved into a title of *Yahweh*. Burnett⁶³¹ denotes that the character of *Elohim* in Genesis is depicted as the personal deity of Israel's ancestors. The relationship is typified by the patriarch's obedience, as well as the protection and guidance on the part of *Elohim*. 'The disclosure of the name of the *'ēlōhîm* in Exod 3:13-14 completed the portrayal of the patriarchal deity in Genesis. The god whom Israel's ancestors called *'ēlōhîm* is *Yahweh*, the god of Moses'.⁶³²

L'Heureux⁶³³ indicates that scholars have made different attempts to reconstruct the process that led to the belief in *Yahweh* that became normative in ancient Israel. In this practice various degrees of significance have been assigned to the cult of *El*. He is of the opinion that Cross made the most creative contribution to this debate in his suggestion that *Yahweh* was an *El*-figure right from the start; *Yahweh* thus being an epithet or cult name of *El*. This basic thesis can thus be commended; the strongest argument in favour of this theory being the inexplicability that the worshippers of the "gods of the fathers" accepted *Yahweh* as the god of the tribal league during the period of the Judges. Later, as the cult of *Yahweh* developed historically, and the characteristic features of Yahwism emerged, *Yahweh* separated from *El* to become a distinct deity. Scholars have, however, not reached consensus as to how *El* traditions were absorbed by Yahwism.

5.7 *Yahweh-El: an ancestral god*

De Moor⁶³⁴ mentions that 'the ancient Canaanites believed that great heroes and kings were joined to their divine patron after their death'; the implication being that the "divine presence" of celebrated persons returned to its Creator. During the first half of the second millennium BC an ancestor of one of the proto-Israelite tribes probably received the divine name *Yahwi-Ilu* – a common Amorite personal name. "*Ilu*" indicates that this person was united with the Canaanite deity *Il/Ilu* after his death.⁶³⁵ According to De Moor,⁶³⁶ it is plausible that the name *Yahweh* was derived from *Yahwi-Ilu*. However, this does not imply that *Yahweh*

⁶³⁰ Dijkstra 2001a:102.

⁶³¹ Burnett 2001:137.

⁶³² Burnett 2001:149.

⁶³³ L'Heureux 1979:56-59.

⁶³⁴ De Moor 1997:368-369.

⁶³⁵ According to a Ugaritic legend, king Kirtu (or Keret), and other deified Ugaritic ancestors were united with *'Ilu* (De Moor 1997:368). See footnote in § 3.2.1 concerning the legend of Kirtu/Keret. See also footnote in the same paragraph incorporating a description of Danel.

⁶³⁶ De Moor 1997:368.

was originally a human being. As these heroes and kings became manifestations of *Ilu/El* only after their death, the divine *Yahweh-El* would therefore be a specialisation of *El*. The "divine name" of the deified ancestor thus exhibited a new identity.

As a result of *Ba'al*'s growing popularity in northern Canaan during the Late Bronze Age, *Ilu/El* became more or less redundant. Traditions indicate that *El* had devoted followers among the early Israelites in southern Canaan. It became necessary to distinguish between this "southern" *El* and his weaker "northern" namesake who was fading into oblivion. For the early Israelites their concept of *El* was in the form of *Yahweh-El*, their own ancestral manifestation of *El*. 'Thus the El of the fathers was essentially the same God as YHWH',⁶³⁷ this is illustrated in the ancient traditions of Israel where the names *Yahweh* and *El(ohim)* are still found. The patriarchs and devotees of the early Davidic dynasty venerated their deified ancestors alongside *Yahweh*. Standing stones supposedly facilitated communication with the spirits of the dead. It could thus be assumed that *Yahweh* was not a foreign deity who merged with *El* in Canaan, but that he was a manifestation of *El* from the beginning. It is, however, not possible to pinpoint when the *El*-deity, *Yahweh-El*, came into being. The historical "time origin" of *Yahweh* therefore remains unattainable.⁶³⁸

Dedan – also named *Datan* or *Ditan* – was one of the ancestors of the royal families of Ugarit and Assyria. According to Ugaritic texts, he was deified. *Dedan* takes a prominent place in some Ugaritic ritual texts related to the cult of the dead. The spirits of the royal ancestors – the *Rephaim* of the earth – are called the assembly of *Dedan*.⁶³⁹ The parallelism between the "assembly of *Dedan*" and the "*Rephaim* of the earth/Netherworld", indicates that he was considered to be the first deified royal ancestor.⁶⁴⁰

The term *'ôb*, which scholars agree relates to necromancy and the conjuration and consultation of the spirits of the dead, is attested seventeen times in the Hebrew Bible. Its etymology and precise meaning are still debated. In the Ancient Near East, necromancy was part of the Cult of the Ancestors. By prayer and supplication the dead patriarch was consulted by the family who sought advice and assistance. There is a detectable semantic affinity between the Hebrew term *'ôb* and the designations for the spirits of the dead in other cultures and

⁶³⁷ De Moor 1997:369.

⁶³⁸ De Moor 1997:333, 368-369.

⁶³⁹ Ugaritic text *KTU*² 1.161 (Spronk 1999a:232).

⁶⁴⁰ Spronk 1999a:232.

languages.⁶⁴¹ In both Ugarit and Mesopotamia the spirits of the dead were objects of culture veneration. They could be summoned by means of magical incantation; specific necromantic rituals are known. The majority of the occurrences of *'ôb* in the Hebrew Bible are in contexts of pronouncements against idol worship. "The equating of the ancestor cult and idol worship is a clear indication that the ancestors were the object of cultic veneration by their descendants."⁶⁴² Any Israelite who followed the practices of the ancestral cult was cultically unclean.⁶⁴³ People who had an *'ôb* in them – and thus serve as medium – were capital offenders in Israel and subject to death by stoning.⁶⁴⁴ The *'ôb* in the Masoretic Text primarily signifies the deified spirits of the ancestors, and thus the cultic representation of the ancestors – the ancestral image.⁶⁴⁵

L'Heureux⁶⁴⁶ explains that, although the expression *rp'm qdmym* was documented at Ugarit, the application of the term *rp'm* as reference to the "shades of the dead", was a relatively late development. In an earlier period this term referred to members of an elite group of chariot warriors. These warriors constituted the *marzēah* of *El*. The term *rapi'ūma* was also applied to deities 'who gathered around *El* to celebrate the mythic counterpart of the earthly *marzēah* of *El*."⁶⁴⁷ The *Rephaim* were thus also connected to the status of *El*. It seems that some of the *rapi'ūma* had a special relationship with *Ba'al*. Van der Toorn⁶⁴⁸ mentions that *Rakib-El* is known to have been the deity of the kings of a Neo-Hittite dynasty – Sam'al – in South-east Anatolia. Some scholars identify the name as meaning "charioteer of *El*". It is also possible that *Rakib-El* was associated with the storm god *Hadad* – or *Ba'al* – who is known by the epithet "Rider-of-the-Clouds".

The term *rēpā'īm* – רפאים – occurs mostly in the poetical and "historical" books of the Masoretic Text. The term designates the spirits of the dead and is also related to Ugaritic *rpum*, a name for the deified royal ancestors. Several references in the Hebrew Bible designate the ancient inhabitants of Palestine as *Rephaim*; they were characterised by their enormous size.⁶⁴⁹ *Og*, of unknown etymology, is attested twenty-two times in the Hebrew Bible

⁶⁴¹ Similarities, such as Ugaritic *rpum*; Phoenician *rp'm*; Hebrew *rēpā'īm* (*Rephaim*) (Tropper 1999:807).

⁶⁴² Tropper 1999:808.

⁶⁴³ Leviticus 19:31.

⁶⁴⁴ Leviticus 20:27.

⁶⁴⁵ Tropper 1999:806-809.

⁶⁴⁶ L'Heureux 1979:227-228.

⁶⁴⁷ L'Heureux 1979:228.

⁶⁴⁸ Van der Toorn 1999c:686.

⁶⁴⁹ Rouillard 1999:692.

as the king of Bashan,⁶⁵⁰ along with the Amorite king Sihon. Og is referred to as one of the survivors of the *Rephaim*.⁶⁵¹ Og was huge in stature, as befitted the race of the giants.⁶⁵² The Ugaritic Kirtu legend⁶⁵³ contains two references to the *Rephaim*. Regarding biblical material, Isaiah 14:9 is observed as a key text. The *Rephaim* are mentioned in parallelism with "all the leaders of the earth" and "all the kings of the nations". The royal character is thus evident. The *Rephaim* – who belonged to the Netherworld – were leaders and kings in life, now without power. "Transcending the boundaries of time, space, and morality, the community of the *Rephaim* embraces all the royal dead."⁶⁵⁴

One of the proposed aspects associating biblical *Rephaim* and Ugaritic *rpum* is their role as healers. Although there are clear links in the portrayals of *Rephaim* in biblical and Ugaritic texts, they also diverge significantly. Biblical prose texts present them as an ethnic group of giants who were former inhabitants of Canaan and Transjordan, while poetic texts – where *Rephaim* are connected with death – have an obvious Ugaritic link. Ugaritic *rpum* who travelled in chariots on their way to feasting, are, however, not paralleled in the Hebrew Bible. The word *rpum* is connected to the word *rp*, "heal", which seemingly suggests that they were healers. Notwithstanding this proposal, there is no evidence in either Hebrew, Phoenician or Ugaritic texts that indicate a healing role for the *Rephaim*.⁶⁵⁵

The early inhabitants of Moab were also considered to be *Rephaim*; they probably occupied most of Transjordan. The term *Rephaim* might have been a general designation for the mythical inhabitants of southern Syria and Transjordan, before habitation by the Ammonites and Moabites. Biblical texts present the *Rephaim* as a 'conglomerate consisting of various ethnic groups, each with its own characteristics'.⁶⁵⁶ Scholars previously, erroneously, linked the *Rephaim* to the *teraphim*.⁶⁵⁷ Schnell⁶⁵⁸ mentions that the tradition of the "aboriginal

⁶⁵⁰ For example, Numbers 22:33. Bashan was a region east of the Jordan River, bounded by Mount Hermon in the north.

⁶⁵¹ Deuteronomy 3:11; Joshua 12:4; 13:12.

⁶⁵² Deuteronomy 3:11. The remark about his bed, which was preserved in Rabbat Ammon, is taken as a reference to a Dolmen tomb (Del Olmo Lete 1999:638). Dolmens are megalithic structures, consisting of a stone chamber, created by the erection of two or more massive vertical stones and one, or more, massive "roof" stones. Although scholars agree that dolmens are tombs, conclusive proof of such a deduction has not, as yet, been produced. Dolmens occur from the British Isles into the Near East. Huge dolmen "fields" are found in the Jordan Valley. There is no evidence as to who built the dolmens; their age ranges from 7000-3000 BC. These phenomena are linked to the *Rephaim* (Swauger 1992:220-221).

⁶⁵³ See footnote in § 3.2.1.

⁶⁵⁴ Rouillard 1999:696.

⁶⁵⁵ Williams 2005:266-267, 274.

⁶⁵⁶ Rouillard 1999:698. See Genesis 14:5; Deuteronomy 2:10-11, 20; Joshua 17:15.

⁶⁵⁷ Rouillard 1999:693, 695-699. *Teraphim*: see footnote in § 2.13, subtitle "Female figurines".

⁶⁵⁸ Schnell 1962:35.

giants" probably originated from Hebrew folklore, partially inspired by the megalithic structures of the Neolithic period, found in Transjordan; the *Rephaim* are commonly – but not exclusively – associated with this region.

The Hebrew Bible refers to *Rapha* – רפא/רפיה – an ancestor of various warriors who battled with David.⁶⁵⁹ The *Rapha*, translated as "giants", have been linked to the *Rephaim* and are interpreted as deities whose cult centre was in Gath. The Hebrew word *hārāpā* – "the healer" – connects the ancestor of a distinguished guild of Philistine soldiers with the *Rephaim*. *Rapha*, likewise, refers to a Canaanite underworld deity.⁶⁶⁰ The *Rephaim* are not extinct souls, but their life has little substance.⁶⁶¹ They have no wisdom or understanding⁶⁶² and cannot praise God.⁶⁶³ Isaiah 14:9 suggests that they are the aristocracy of the dead.⁶⁶⁴

5.8 Adoption of the *El*-figure by *Yahweh*: an evaluation of hypotheses

Certain aspects of the theory of Alt – developed by Cross – have merits for the reconstruction of the origin of Yahwism. In Exodus 6:2-3 a clear distinction is made between the religion of the fathers and the religion since the time of Moses. Exodus 3, 4 and 6 repeatedly refer to the "god of the fathers", while in Exodus 6:3 *Yahweh* explicitly indicates that 'by my name the LORD [*Yahweh*] I did not make myself known to them' [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob]. In the light of the identification of the "god of the fathers" – as revealed in Exodus 6 – there is credibility in the theory of Alt that the patriarchs venerated *El*, particularly by the name *El Shaddai*. Cross does, however, indicate that the religious type, "the god of the fathers", differs radically from the cults of the Canaanite deities. The suggestion that particular traits of the patriarchal gods anticipate some characteristics of the cult of *Yahweh*, is conceivable.

Cross reaches the conclusion that *Yahweh* was originally a cultic name of *El*, and that *Yahweh* could also have been an epithet of *El* as patron deity of the Midianites and Kenites. Cross, furthermore, contemplates that *Yahweh* was thus in origin an *El*-figure. One of the reasons for the suggestion that Canaanite *El* and *Yahweh* became equated, is the assumption that there was no tension between the cults of *El* and *Yahweh*; there are also no polemics against *El* in

⁶⁵⁹ 2 Samuel 21:16, 18, 20, 22; 1 Chronicles 20:4, 6, 8. The Hebrew spelling of *Rapha* in the four verses in 2 Samuel, is רפיה, while the spelling in 1 Chronicles is רפא. One of the meanings in Holladay (1971:344) of רפיה is, "fade away"; רפא, רפאים is indicated as legendary pre-Israelite inhabitants of Palestine; ghosts (of the dead).

⁶⁶⁰ Becking 1999e:687.

⁶⁶¹ Schnell 1962:35.

⁶⁶² Proverbs 9:18; 21:16.

⁶⁶³ Psalm 88:10.

⁶⁶⁴ Schnell 1962:35. See also Isaiah 26:14.

the Hebrew Bible. This hypothesis likewise claims that, as attributes, epithets and names of *Yahweh* overlap with those of *El*, it substantiates the theory that *Yahweh* originated as an *El*-figure, and that, in the light of similarities between *El* and *Yahweh*, it is credible that *Yahweh* was actually the deity that was worshipped from the beginning.

Despite the merits of the hypothesis of Cross and other scholars, I cannot completely agree with their theory. As indicated earlier in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.5, a strong point of the Kenite hypothesis is the recurring biblical traditions describing *Yahweh*'s "march" from the South, as well as Egyptian records linking *Yahu* to Seir and Edom, suggesting early knowledge of *Yahweh* in these regions. The hypothesis of Cross does not really give an indication where *Yahweh* came from. If he originated from, or as an *El*-figure, it still does not explain where the name *Yahweh*, or the perception of the Deity, came from. Moses was introduced to the meaning of the name *Yahweh* and was advised that the patriarchs knew God by another name – mainly as *El Shadday*. According to this information, it does seem that *Yahweh* and the god of the fathers – known as *El* or *El Shadday* – were the same God. I would suggest that *Yahweh* "from the South" did not originate from an *El*-figure, but that *El* might have been an epithet or cultic name for *Yahweh*. See paragraph 5.9 – Résumé and Conclusion – for a motivation of this suggestion by me.

Regarding the suggestion – specifically by De Moor – that the name *Yahweh* was derived from the name *Yahwi-Ilu* – a deified ancestor of one of the proto-Israelite tribes – it is unlikely that the name *Yahweh* would have been elicited from the name of a deified ancestor.

5.9 Résumé and conclusion

As indicated in my hypothesis – and also referred to in paragraph 4.3.14 – in accordance with the Kenite hypothesis, I theorise that *Yahweh* was venerated by the Kenites and Midianites before the time of Moses. Although there are sparse references to the Kenites and related marginal groups in the Masoretic Text, an analysis of the Kenites – as far as available information permits – indicates that various facets concerning these people substantiates the plausibility of this particular hypothesis.

As expressed by Handy,⁶⁶⁵ to explain religious traditions with virtually no reliable source material available, does seem audacious. Scholars attempt to create a coherent picture of Israel's

⁶⁶⁵ Handy 1994:3-4.

religion, yet, there is no general tradition that can be authenticated. Although traditions are at variance, the Hebrew Bible declares a natural development of the religion itself. As Kuenen⁶⁶⁶ points out, our concept of Israel's religious history depends completely on our judgement of the Hebrew Bible. Scholars are generally in agreement that the historical books were written centuries after the events they record. It is, therefore, totally unlikely that the relevant oral traditions would have remained unbiased and free from external influences after such a long time. Texts in their present form are thus not mere reconstructions of incidents, but would have been influenced by conditions and matters that dominated the exilic and post-exilic periods; the time – generally accepted by scholars – when Israel's history was mainly recorded. Although 'the Hebrew Bible presents a quite clear schematic outline of the history of Israelite religion',⁶⁶⁷ this traditional biblical view can hardly be called historical.

The Hebrew Bible, furthermore, gives a fairly explicit picture of the manner in which *Yahweh* – as the God of the Israelites – revealed himself to the patriarchs and to Moses, and thereby, thus an account of the origin of the Israelite religion. Three different recitals in the Pentateuch about this significant historic event are an indication that beliefs were at variance. According to the Yahwist narrator, people began to call upon the name of *Yahweh* as early as the time of the birth of Enosh.⁶⁶⁸ Exodus 3:14-15⁶⁶⁹ records that God revealed himself to Moses by the name *Yahweh*, stating that he is 'the LORD [*Yahweh*], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'. The Priestly account⁶⁷⁰ declares that God said to Moses, 'I am the LORD [*Yahweh*]. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty [*El Shadday*], but by my name the LORD [*Yahweh*] I did not make myself known to them'. In another revelation God told Jacob, 'I am the LORD [*Yahweh*], the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac'.⁶⁷¹ Contrary to earlier accounts in Genesis, the Priestly record – Exodus 6:2-3 – creates the impression that the name *Yahweh* was revealed to Moses for the first time. The Pentateuch thus supports a twofold tradition about the disclosure of *Yahweh*, and consequently of the origin of Yahwism.

Dijkstra⁶⁷² is of the opinion that the Israelites and their religion – thus also belief in *Yahweh* – originated more or less simultaneously on the soil of Canaan. Knowledge about Canaanite

⁶⁶⁶ Kuenen 1882a:11.

⁶⁶⁷ Mayes 1997:51.

⁶⁶⁸ Genesis 4:26 (Boshoff et al 2000:88). Enosh was the son of Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve; this record referring to *Yahweh* thus dates to the time before the Flood.

⁶⁶⁹ Elohist account (Boshoff et al 2000:104).

⁶⁷⁰ Exodus 6:2-3 (Boshoff et al 2000:162).

⁶⁷¹ Genesis 28:13. Yahwist and Elohist accounts mixed (Boshoff et al 2000:88).

⁶⁷² Dijkstra 2001a:92-93.

religions therefore contributes to a better perception of the religion of the early Israelites. Dijkstra⁶⁷³ also denotes that two independently developed religions of Canaan and Israel fused into a new religion in certain regions of Palestine; the cult of *Yahweh* from the southern desert regions thus merged with the local Canaanite cults. However, as the accounts in the Hebrew Bible are historically unattainable, the question remains where the Deity *Yahweh* came from. According to Lemche,⁶⁷⁴ *Yahweh* could probably originally be pinpointed in the Sinai Peninsula, thereafter being "brought" to Palestine between the end of the Late Bronze Age and the emergence of the Israelite Monarchy. Although not substantiated by extra-biblical epigraphic sources, the rise and establishment of Yahwism – as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible – is the only original evidence we have relating to the worship of *Yahweh*.

From the limited information available that explicitly refers to the Kenites, as well as from other relevant subject matter gleaned, scholars have formulated a possible – and, maybe even probable – scenario regarding the origin of the Kenites and characteristics of this group.

They are mainly distinguished as a nomadic or semi-nomadic tribe of coppersmiths who inhabited the region south of Tel Arad. In 1894 Bernard Stade identified the Cain narrative of Genesis as the aetiological legend of the Kenites.⁶⁷⁵ The name Cain – קַיִן – is derived from the word קָנִיתִי, *qānītī*, meaning "gotten" or "acquired".⁶⁷⁶ In Numbers 24:21-22 Cain – קַיִן – is associated with the Kenites – קֵינִי. The name has its etymology in a root *qyn*, which means "spear". In later Aramaic and Arabic the root means "smith". In cognate Semitic languages the word refers to "tinsmith" or "craftsman". In the genealogical lists of antediluvian heroes, Kenan – *Qênān* – is named as the son of Enosh; the latter being a son of Seth, son of Adam.⁶⁷⁷ *Qênān* could be interpreted as meaning "smith", "javelin" or "little Cain". In the primeval history recorded in Genesis, examples of linear⁶⁷⁸ and segmentary⁶⁷⁹ genealogies are found. Some scholars consider Genesis 4:17-22⁶⁸⁰ to be the tribal genealogy of the Kenites, thereby accepting Cain as the eponymous ancestor of this tribe. The Kenite genealogy might have been an independent source of their origin which was later incorporated into the Genesis text. According to Exodus 3:1 and Judges 1:16, there is also a connection between the Midianites

⁶⁷³ Dijkstra 2001a:95-96.

⁶⁷⁴ Lemche 1988:253.

⁶⁷⁵ Nolan 1982:14.

⁶⁷⁶ When Eve 'conceived and bore Cain' she declared 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD' (Gn 4:1).

⁶⁷⁷ Genesis 5:9-14; 1 Chronicles 1:1-2.

⁶⁷⁸ A single line of descent is followed, tracing only significant ancestors (Kunin 1995:182).

⁶⁷⁹ The lines of descent from a particular ancestor are traced (Kunin 1995:182).

⁶⁸⁰ An example of a linear genealogy (Kunin 1995:182).

and Kenites; the latter were perhaps a clan of the Midianites. 1 Chronicles 2:55 furthermore links the Kenites and the Rechabites.

Linear genealogies consist of lists of seven or ten lineal descendants which segment into three lines. In Genesis 4:17-22 seven linear descendants are recorded from Cain to Lamech, concluding with the three sons of Lamech. The generations from Cain to Lamech⁶⁸¹ correspond with those from Kenan to Lamech.⁶⁸² The Sethite genealogy – Genesis 4:25-26 – was probably retained by the redactor as it links Seth's name to the commencement of the worship of *Yahweh*. This line – perceived as moral and religious – is in opposition to the Cainite line which represents good and evil that runs through the whole history of mankind. Although Seth never intermarried with the daughters of Cain, his children – who were called the "sons of God" – became iniquitous and took the "daughters of man" as their wives; thus, from the seed of Cain, the giants were born. Different writers employed particular genealogical forms, with the aim of an express message for their specific readers. The Chronicler⁶⁸³ presumably included most of the genealogical material from the book of Genesis with the intention to convey his version of the history of ancient Israel, thereby specifying Israel's place among the nations. Genealogies in Genesis might have been constructed originally by linking names which have been obtained from early Near Eastern mythological traditions and legends; mythical names were probably used to "fabricate" a biography of the ancestors. Biblical genealogies also denote tribal origins and interrelationships.

Some scholars suggest that Genesis 4:17-24 originally functioned as the genealogy of the Kenite tribe. Numbers 24:21-22, as well as Judges 4:11 also link Cain and the Kenites. Other scholars – such as Westermann⁶⁸⁴ – however, negate the theory that Cain was the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites. In the development of this genealogy⁶⁸⁵ the beginning of urban civilisation is described with the report of the building of the first city. The genealogy concludes with the seventh generation – the three sons of Lamech. These sons represent different occupational groups, which, to a certain extent, required mobility. The occupations and characteristics of the Kenites correspond with those of the sons of Lamech. Jabal, the first son of Lamech, was the 'father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock'.⁶⁸⁶ Jubal, the second

⁶⁸¹ Genesis 4:17-18.

⁶⁸² Genesis 5:9-25.

⁶⁸³ 1 Chronicles 1.

⁶⁸⁴ Westermann 1984:333.

⁶⁸⁵ Genesis 4:17-24.

⁶⁸⁶ Genesis 4:20.

son, was 'the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe'.⁶⁸⁷ The last son, Tubal-cain, was 'the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron'.⁶⁸⁸

The Kenites – a non-Israelite community or clan – frequented the Wilderness of Sinai. They were tent dwellers and livestock breeders, as well as musical specialists. Their main occupation could, however, be associated with that of Tubal-cain who is identified as the founder of metallurgy, and therefore the first metallurgist. The etymology of the term "Kenite" implies that they were migrating smiths. In Arabic, Syriac and Palmyrene the root *qyn* can form the basis for words meaning "to forge", "metalworker". The traditions of the Kenites – as tent dwellers, herders, musicians and metalworkers – thus depict Cain as their eponymous ancestor.

The Kenites wandered in the Sinai, the Negeb, Midian, Edom, Amalek and northern Palestine. They later settled in the Negeb, where a region was named after them. They may have dwelt near Punon, one of the main sources of copper,⁶⁸⁹ or in the mountains of Edom and Midian – also close to rich copper deposits. Their presence in the southern regions is confirmed by an ostrakon discovered at Arad – in the Negeb – wherein the place name Kinah is mentioned. Kinah, which was situated not far from Arad, may be linked to the colonisation by Kenites of the eastern part of the Beer-sheba Valley. During excavations at Arad, Yohanan Aharoni identified a village in Stratum XII⁶⁹⁰ as an establishment of the Kenites. A raised platform – probably an altar – was also revealed in the centre of the uncovered village. This altar may reflect a priestly background of this clan.⁶⁹¹ During the tenth century BC the Israelites built an altar at Arad using stones of the previous altar. Dever,⁶⁹² however, disagrees that this site had any Late Bronze Age occupation.

It seems that the Kenites and other semi-nomadic tribes who dwelt in the South, held a kind of monopoly on copper mining and the production of copper artefacts. The southern Arabah, Sinai and Punon were important sources of copper. A large number of metal objects and remains of copper metallurgy – dated back to the beginning of the fourth millennium BC – have been uncovered during excavations at Tel Arad. Egyptians exploited the mines in Sinai and, in the Early Iron Age, at Timnah. A smelting camp and copper smelting furnaces and

⁶⁸⁷ Genesis 4:21.

⁶⁸⁸ Genesis 4:22.

⁶⁸⁹ Numbers 24:21 refers to the Kenites who "dwelt in the rock".

⁶⁹⁰ Dated twelfth to eleventh century BC (Herzog et al 1984:4).

⁶⁹¹ Herzog et al 1984:1, 3, 6.

⁶⁹² Dever 2003:29.

relevant metallurgical equipment were found in the Timnah Valley. Egyptians operated the mines and smelters jointly with the local inhabitants. A small Semitic-type sanctuary, as well as a high place, close to the site, has also been uncovered. This twelfth century BC Egyptian *Hathor* temple⁶⁹³ shows distinct Semitic features. Finds at the temple include a copper snake with a gilded head; this was probably a Midianite votive serpent. During the thirteenth century BC the Hittites discovered a process to extract iron from its ores. The Hittite Empire, however, collapsed by the end of that century. Scholars have suggested that the Kenites were a group of metalworkers who had left the Hittite Empire with its downfall and introduced the art of metallurgy to the Israelites.

The nature of mining and trade in metal products prevented the smith from establishing a permanent domicile or to become involved in agriculture. They usually moved on when the supply of ore was exhausted. 'Metallurgists in antiquity, as a rule, formed proud endogenous lines of families with long genealogies', and their technical lore 'was handed down and guarded jealously from generation to generation'.⁶⁹⁴ According to the *Song of Deborah*,⁶⁹⁵ it is clear that the Kenites dwelled in tents and kept cattle. Evidence of their nomadic tendencies can be recognised in certain textual references.⁶⁹⁶ The curse on Cain from the soil⁶⁹⁷ was probably perceived by the Kenites as the origin of their nomadic lifestyle. This particular way of living as nomads suited the Kenites' profession as metalworkers and coppersmiths. Scholars have noted that the "community" of the Kenites was identical to nomadic units at Mari. In some Mari documents specific terminology for tribal units appear that has been borrowed from West Semitic. An example is the term *hibrum* – Hebrew *heber* – which refers to a smaller separate tribal unit of closely linked families within the larger unit of the clan or tribe. The name "Heber" – the Kenite – seemingly personifies a nomadic subdivision that had broken away from the parent tribe.⁶⁹⁸

Tribal custom prescribed that in a tribal community members were protected, irrespective of them having done right or wrong. In the Hebrew Bible are repeated references to a highly developed nomadic code of honour. As the Cain narrative is generally regarded as the

⁶⁹³ See § 2.14.1 for a brief discussion of this temple.

⁶⁹⁴ Frick 1971:285.

⁶⁹⁵ Judges 5. This poem is dated the end of the twelfth century BC.

⁶⁹⁶ Moses' Midianite – or Kenite – father-in-law kept flocks (Ex 3:1); Heber, the Kenite, pitched his tent at Kedesh (Jdg 4:11); Jael, wife of Heber, lived in a tent (Jdg 4:17-18); at the time of Saul the Kenites lived in the Wilderness of Judah and avoided the arable soil (1 Sm 15:4-8); the Rechabites – who were related to the Kenites – lived in tents in opposition to agriculture (Jr 35).

⁶⁹⁷ Genesis 4:11-12.

⁶⁹⁸ Judges 4:11.

aetiological legend of the Kenites, aspects thereof are transferred to the Kenites. Brock-Utne⁶⁹⁹ assigns the widespread custom of human sacrifice – in a bid to regain productivity after a dry season – to the Cain narrative, and suggests that it could reflect on the Kenites who were known for their blood revenge. Nolan,⁷⁰⁰ however, denotes that there is no evidence that the Kenites ever engaged in human sacrifice. Cain received a mark or sign from *Yahweh*, in order that "no one shall kill him".⁷⁰¹ Although there is no indication what the actual mark was, tribal marks – in ancient customs – served to protect a person and signify to which tribe he belonged. It seems that the Kenites benefited from such a protective tattoo. The mark furthermore obliged them to avenge the blood of a slain brother.⁷⁰²

The biblical tradition gives the impression that a close link existed between the Midianites and Kenites. Midian descended from Keturah, another wife of Abraham, whom he took after the death of Sarah. Midian appears to be the only ideologically significant group of the Keturite tribes. They were pastoral nomads who lived on the east side of the Gulf of Aqabah. The Hebrew Bible portrays Midian positively,⁷⁰³ as well as strongly negatively.⁷⁰⁴ Although scholars typified Midianites as Bedouin nomads and traders travelling by camel caravan, it has become clear that they had a 'complex and highly sophisticated society'.⁷⁰⁵ Metalworking was also a distinctive feature among certain Midianites.

The pattern in traditional Middle Eastern Bedouin societies is more or less consistent with those of East African pastoral societies where smiths and artisans are viewed with some fear. They are often spurned and observed as dangerous sorcerers with supernatural powers. Smiths and tinkers were considered to be from inferior tribes. In myths and traditional stories, smiths are characterised as being both human and divine. Smiths and other artisans were probably marginalised, as they did not fully participate in economic activities, such as agriculture or pastoralism. These borderline characteristics can be identified in the biblical portrayals of the Kenites, Midianites, Rechabites, and other marginal groups.

The idea of the Kenite hypothesis was advanced in 1872 by the Dutch historian of religion, Cornelius P Tiele, who identified *Yahweh* as the god of the desert, whom the Kenites and

⁶⁹⁹ Brock-Utne 1936:207, 213-215.

⁷⁰⁰ Nolan 1982:23-24.

⁷⁰¹ Genesis 4:15.

⁷⁰² Nolan 1982:16.

⁷⁰³ Moses' father-in-law and Midianite priest suggests a positive attitude towards Midian (Ex 3:1).

⁷⁰⁴ See, for example, Numbers 22:4-7; 25; 31; Psalm 83.

⁷⁰⁵ Mendenhall 1992b:817.

related groups venerated before the Israelites worshipped *Yahweh*. Bernard Stade elaborated on the concept, but it was Karl Budde who developed the classic formulation of the theory. According to this hypothesis, a Moses-type figure gained knowledge about and was initiated into the cult of *Yahweh* by his father-in-law, Jethro, a Midianite priest – later also referred to as a Kenite. Mount Sinai was *Yahweh*'s sacred abode, therefore he was worshipped there by the Midianites and Kenites who dwelt in his territory. According to Albertz,⁷⁰⁶ *Yahweh* was a southern Palestinian mountain god, worshipped by nomadic tribes. Later traditions disguised any connection between the Mountain of God and the Midianites, and thus of any pre-Israelite worship of *Yahweh*. Van der Toorn⁷⁰⁷ denotes that 'in its classical form the hypothesis assumes that the Israelites became acquainted with the cult of *Yahweh* through Moses', who equated *Yahweh* with their ancestral divine traditions. The British scholar Rowley later expanded Budde's theory. Rowley argues that Jethro was a priest of *Yahweh* and that it is unlikely – if he was a priest of some other god – that he would have offered a sacrifice to *Yahweh* [*Elohim*].⁷⁰⁸ The Israelites accepted *Yahweh* as their God, mainly on account of *Yahweh*'s action to save them from the power of the Egyptians, and not on account of Moses' mediation of the Kenite religion. *Yahweh* thus meant something quite different to the Israelites than to the Kenites.⁷⁰⁹

A strong point of this classic hypothesis is the recurring biblical tradition of *Yahweh*'s geographical link with the South. Particular texts⁷¹⁰ in Deuteronomy, Judges, Psalms and Habakkuk depict *Yahweh*'s theophany as he came forth from the southern regions, namely Sinai, Seir, Mount Paran, Edom and Teman. Zechariah 9:14⁷¹¹ portrays *Yahweh* as the Storm God marching forth in the whirlwinds of the South. The Kenites dwelled in the South, in the vicinity of the Midianites and Edomites. Biblical references and archaeological data – as mentioned earlier – connect the Kenites to Arad and the Negeb.

⁷⁰⁶ Albertz 1994:52-53.

⁷⁰⁷ Van der Toorn 1999e:912.

⁷⁰⁸ Exodus 18:10-12.

⁷⁰⁹ Rowley 1967:44.

⁷¹⁰ Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4; Psalm 68:8; Habakkuk 3:3.

⁷¹¹ Zechariah 9:14,

'Then the LORD [*Yahweh*] will appear over them,
and his arrow will go forth like lightning;
The LORD GOD [*Yahweh Adonai*] will sound the trumpet
and will march forth in the
whirlwinds of the south.'

The theory that the Yahwistic cult originated in the South is supported by the thesis proposed by a number of scholars, that the name *Yahweh* emanated from the southern regions.⁷¹² One of the suggestions by scholars is that the name *Yahweh* developed from a well-known Arabic interjection *Ya*, combined with *huwa* – the third person masculine personal pronoun. Ancestors of the North Sinaitic tribes may have worshipped their god with the cultic cry *Ya-huwa*, "Oh, He".

The Kenite hypothesis is furthermore substantiated by data obtained from Egyptian records.⁷¹³ Texts in these records refer to '*Yhw* [*Yahu*] in the land of the *Shasu*'.⁷¹⁴ The *Shasu* Bedouins are likewise identified with Edom, Mount Seir and Seir in these texts. Although these texts do not directly connect Edom and Seir – the latter a mountainous area associated with Edom – they do mention that both regions were peopled by *Shasu*. It therefore seems that the *Shasu*, who roamed the South, could be linked to Edom in southern Transjordan and Seir. The reference – "*Yahu* in the land of the *Shasu*" – could thus signify that *Yahu* was known by the *Shasu*, and probably venerated by them. It is also conceivable that there were Edomites, Midianites, Kenites, and related marginal groups among the *Shasu*. Genealogically the Edomites are the nation closest to the Israelites. Van der Toorn⁷¹⁵ denotes that, by the fourteenth century BC, 'groups of Edomite and Midianite nomads worshipped *Yahweh* as their god', before the Israelites became acquainted with the cult of *Yahweh*. It could, therefore, be deduced that *Yahweh* became the major God of Israel owing to an Edomite-Midianite influence.

Paradoxically, references to *Yahweh*'s origins from the South occur in texts from the Northern Kingdom.⁷¹⁶ Inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud – an outpost of Northern Israel – also mention "*Yahweh* of Teman". The Kenites and associated groups of metalworkers had – by reason of their particular trade and migratory existence – the opportunity to spread their religious beliefs. Heber, the Kenite and a metal craftsman who separated from the Kenites, pitched his tent in the northern regions. Similarly, Jehonadab ben Rechab, a descendant of the Rechabites – a marginal group connected to the Kenites – appeared in Northern Israel. The Yahwist faith could thus have been spread to the North by groups such as families of Heber and Jehonadab ben Rechab.

⁷¹² The origin of the name *Yahweh* [YHWH] is discussed in § 4.2.

⁷¹³ See discussions in § 2.6 and § 4.3.4.

⁷¹⁴ See footnotes in § 4.3.4.

⁷¹⁵ Van der Toorn 1995:245-246.

⁷¹⁶ References to "Seir and Edom" in the *Song of Deborah* (Jdg. 5:4), "Sinai" in Psalm 68:8 and "Teman" in Habakkuk 3:3.

The Midianites are associated with or related to the Edomites, Kenites, Ishmaelites, Hagarites and Kenizzites. There are also some connections with the Amalekites and Moabites – and maybe even with the Ammonites. The origin of the name *midyan* is unknown. The genealogy of Genesis 25:2 includes two descendants of Abraham's wife Keturah, *midyan* and *medan*. The Keturah-tribes, such as Midian, controlled the Arabian desert. Midian dominated the South and had a significant influence over a wide region. Major caravan routes to the North were controlled by Midianites. Schloen⁷¹⁷ mentions that long-distance trade involved, not only the intertwining of different ethnic groups, 'but also opportunities for the communication of new ideas'. According to the "caravan hypothesis" – as Schloen⁷¹⁸ calls his theory – it is plausible that the Yahwistic cult could have spread through the Transjordan and the highlands of Canaan along the caravan routes from the South.

The Kenite hypothesis alludes to Moses' contact with Jethro, a Midianite Priest. Moses married Jethro's daughter Zipporah, which had the implication that the descendants of Moses were of mixed Midianite/Kenite and Israelite (Levite) blood. Slayton⁷¹⁹ denotes that 'Jethro was a priest of Yahweh in a unique capacity'. After 'Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD [*Yahweh*] had done to Israel', he declared 'now I know that the LORD [*Yahweh*] is greater than all the gods'.⁷²⁰ According to Exodus 18:12, Jethro brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God [*Elohim*]. The contents of Exodus 18:1-27 is ascribed to the Elohist, but mixed with the J-narrator, which explains – to a certain extent – the reference to *Yahweh* and to *Elohim* in the same context. Scholars – such as Houtman⁷²¹ – experience difficulties with the role of Jethro, and argue that there is no proof that he was a *Yahweh* worshipper. Fensham⁷²² suggests that the tradition preserved in Exodus 18 – the burnt offering and sacrifices brought by Jethro to God – could indicate that God was witness to the forming of a treaty between the Israelites and the Kenites. In the Ancient Near East the forming of treaties were usually accompanied by a sacrifice to a god, or gods. "Defensive alliance" treaties were also customary in the Ancient Near East. Probably as a result of such a treaty between the Israelites and the Kenites, Jael – the wife of Heber, the Kenite – aided Israel against the onslaught of the Canaanites.⁷²³

⁷¹⁷ Schloen 1993:36.

⁷¹⁸ Schloen 1993:36-37.

⁷¹⁹ Slayton 1992:821. Exodus 18:1, 7-11.

⁷²⁰ Exodus 18:9a, 11a.

⁷²¹ Houtman 1993:96-97.

⁷²² Fensham 1964:51-54.

⁷²³ Judges 4:17-22; 5:24-27.

The different names for Jethro – as reflected in the Hebrew Bible – are confusing; he is also called Reuel and Hobab. At the same time he is referred to as a Kenite and a Midianite. Several explanations have been proposed for this confusion in names and titles. Reuel was the name of a son of Esau and was one of the three major Edomite tribes. Moses' Midianite father-in-law, therefore, may possibly be linked to the Edomite tribe Reuel. Hobab was the 'eponymous ancestor of a Kenite clan that settled in the Negeb among the tribe of Judah'.⁷²⁴ This clan could have belonged to the Edomite tribe Reuel, before they relocated to Judah.

In their evaluation of the Kenite hypothesis, scholars have disparate views. The main objections are as follows: the different names and titles of Moses' father-in-law; the prediction in Numbers 24⁷²⁵ that the Kenites would disappear – later Israelite traditions do not refer to the Kenites; Jethro was a Midianite priest, but it is nowhere stated that he was a priest of *Yahweh*; Mount Sinai – the mountain of *Yahweh/Elohim* – was outside the Midianite territory; the Egyptian and biblical *s'rr* could possibly refer to different areas; uncertainty concerning Jethro's role; the ancient traditions relating to *Yahweh's* appearance from the South have no reference to the exodus or the revelation at Sinai; the hypothesis' inability to explain the firm ancient tradition in Genesis concerning *Yahweh*; the disregard of the Canaanite origins of the Israelites; apart from one allusion in the Hebrew Bible, there is no information available on the religion of the Kenites.

However, despite objections against the Kenite hypothesis, many scholars support this theory. In agreement with my thesis, and in accordance with the Kenite hypothesis, I advance that the origin of *Yahweh* – and thus Yahwism – should be sought in the southern regions of Palestine amongst the Kenites, Midianites, Edomites and related marginal groups. Biblical references to *Yahweh's* march from the South, extra-biblical Egyptian texts linking *Yhw* [*Yahweh*], the *Shasu*, Edom and Seir, and the possible origin of the name *Yahweh* in the same regions, thus substantiate the basic concept of the Kenite hypothesis.

The discussion on the Kenite hypothesis – paragraph 5.3 – is followed by the paragraph – 5.4 – concerning the Moses figure and traditions. The Kenite hypothesis is evaluated only thereafter – paragraph 5.5. The motivation for this particular order of the paragraphs pertains to the significance of Moses in respect of the Kenite hypothesis. However, regarding this

⁷²⁴ Knauf 1992b:693.

⁷²⁵ Numbers 24:21-22.

résumé, I consider it to be more appropriate that the synopsis of the Kenite hypothesis is followed directly by a summary of the evaluation thereof – as above.

Scholars generally agree that the historicity of Moses and the exodus depends solely on the assessment of the biblical accounts in question. While early Jewish and Christian traditions believed that the Pentateuch was an historical record composed by Moses himself, some scholars claim that Moses was only a legendary figure. Editors of the Hebrew Bible attempted to compose a complete account of his life from collections of disparate data. It is obvious that different chronicles developed fairly soon after the exodus and Sinai events. According to tradition, Moses enjoyed a kind of intimate relationship with *Yahweh*. Van der Toorn⁷²⁶ denotes that his historical role is highly problematic and that his real importance remains an enigma.

Moses' name is an Egyptian hypocoristicon, composed from the verb *mš* – "bear", "give birth to". Egyptian names among his descendants point to a link with Egypt. De Moor⁷²⁷ proposes that a certain Beya – whom he identifies with Moses – was the "real ruler" of Egypt in the late Nineteenth Dynasty.⁷²⁸ Consistent with tradition, Moses was a Levite and thus a descendant of Jacob. Some scholars suggest that 1330 BC could be an estimated birth date for Moses. He died at the age of hundred and twenty years. There is no indication how he died. The reference to Moses' death as a punishment for his defiance at Meribah, was obviously a justification for the problem that a strong leader did not enter the Promised Land.

Amram – from the house of Levi, and who appears only in late genealogical lists – is said to be Moses' father. Jochebed, wife of Amram and mother of Aaron, Moses and Miriam, was also a Levite woman. In Numbers 26:59 she is described as the sister of Amram's father. The marriage between Amram and Jochebed violates the priestly laws which prohibit such a relationship between a man and his father's sister. Her ancestral lineage, however, establishes a legitimacy of Aaron as priest in the family of Levi. Jochebed's name appears to be compounded with the name *Yahweh*. If her name is in reality a Yahwistic theophoric name, this might be on account of intermarriage between some Israelite tribes and *Yahweh*-worshipping Kenite tribes. If Moses thus had some Kenite blood from his mother's side, it could explain

⁷²⁶ Van der Toorn 1995:247-248.

⁷²⁷ De Moor 1997:214-227.

⁷²⁸ 1293-1185 BC (Clayton 1994:98).

his flight to Jethro. The name *Yahweh* could therefore have been known among the Israelites in Egypt, even though *Yahweh* was not the God they worshipped.

The chronicle of Moses' birth and raising is more likely to belong to the realm of folklore than that of history. After his birth his mother hid him in a basket of bulrushes daubed with bitumen and pitch, and placed him among the reeds by the river bank. The pharaoh's daughter found him there and he later became her son. Similar tales have been recounted of founders of dynasties. The birth legend of Sargon the Great of Akkad⁷²⁹ is a chronicle that closely resembles the saga of Moses. The authors of Exodus were probably acquainted with this Akkadian legend, and modelled their narrative according to it. Similarly, Moses' flight from Egypt to Midian and his sojourn in a foreign country is parallel – to a certain extent – to the Egyptian legend of Sinuhe.⁷³⁰

Two important events are narrated in Exodus regarding Moses' exile in Midian. The first event relates to his marriage to a daughter of a Midianite priest, and secondly to his commission to lead his people out of Egypt. According to an old marriage tradition, the relationship between the bridegroom and his father-in-law is emphasised – and not the relationship between the groom and his bride. Although Moses' wife and children meet him in the Wilderness – as narrated in Exodus 18 – 'the focal point of this reunion is between Moses and his father-in-law'.⁷³¹ It thus seems that the goal of the marriage tradition is to explain the origin of this relationship, which subsequently led to the initiation of Moses into the cult of *Yahweh*.

The origin of Moses' wife Zipporah is uncertain; the oldest tradition-layer mentions that he had a non-Israelite wife. She is referred to as the daughter of the Midianite priest Reuel. In a strange situation she saves Moses from a divine attack by the adoption of a male role to perform a circumcision on her son; she then touched Moses' genitals with her son's foreskin. After their meeting with Moses in the Wilderness, Zipporah and her sons disappear from the narrative; the significant family now consists of Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro. The Kenites are thus related to Moses – and consequently to the Levite tribe – through his Kenite wife. Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses on account of his Cushite wife. "Cush" was the term used by the ancient Israelites to refer to the region south of Egypt. The Cushites were called Ethiopians by the Greeks – meaning "burnt face" and thus obviously referring to

⁷²⁹ See § 3.9 for a brief discussion of the birth legend of Sargon.

⁷³⁰ See footnote in § 5.4, briefly describing the legend of Sinuhe.

⁷³¹ Coats 1993:25.

black people. It is, therefore, possible that Moses' Cushite wife was a black woman. Some scholars argue that Cushite should be identified with Cushan or Midian; the implication thus being that Miriam and Aaron refer to Moses' Midianite wife, Zipporah. Overwhelming biblical citations, however, seem to indicate that "Cushite" refers to the region south of Egypt.

Moses, a principal character in the Exodus chronicle, played a crucial role in the tradition which advances that the Israelites were introduced to *Yahweh* by the mediation of Moses. The revelation to Moses of *Yahweh*'s proper name – as in Exodus 3:14 – and the subsequent indication – as in Exodus 6:3 – that *Yahweh* did not make himself known by that name to the patriarchal fathers, is significant for our perception of the Yahwist religion of the Israelites. An important problem in these passages – which concern the J and E sources – is the claim in Exodus 6:3 that God had not previously been known by his proper name *Yahweh*. The appearance of the name *Yahweh* in Genesis is consequently an anachronism. According to Exodus 3:14-15, it was not the Name, but the deeper meaning thereof, which was revealed to Moses. This matter continues to be debated. The advent of *Yahweh* confronting Moses from a burning bush was constructed in the context of Midianite traditions. Moses is tied into the larger framework of the Midianite priest father-in-law; he tends his father-in-law's flock, and seeks his permission to return to Egypt.

Exodus 19 describes a theophany of *Yahweh* when 'Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God ... there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast ... Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD [*Yahweh*] had descended on it in fire ... the whole mountain trembled greatly.'⁷³² Earthquakes were associated with theophany.

'Through the ages, the sin of Moses, as described in Num 20:1-13, has been regarded as one of the Gordian knots of the Bible.'⁷³³ According to this text, Moses sinned therein that he did not believe *Yahweh*; the punishment being that he would not lead the Israelites into the "Promised Land". The possibility exists that the episodes of Moses' drawing water from the rock – as related in Exodus 17 and Numbers 20 – are variants of the same tradition. Moses possibly ascribed miraculous powers to himself and Aaron. Numbers 21:4-9 recounts the incident when *Yahweh* sent fiery serpents among the Israelites. On instruction of *Yahweh*, Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole so that anyone who was bitten by a serpent

⁷³² Exodus 19:16-18.

⁷³³ Milgrom 1983:251.



and looked at the bronze serpent would live. *Yahweh* is thus 'the deity responsible for healing through the symbolic instrument of the bronze snake'.⁷³⁴ The Masoretic Text states that the name of the bronze serpent, which king Hezekiah broke into pieces during his religious reforms, was *nēḥuštān*, which is clearly a wordplay on the words for bronze or copper – *nēhōšet* – and serpent – *nāḥāš*. There might have been some connection between this bronze serpent, the rod in Moses' hand that turned into a serpent – *nāḥāš* – in Egypt, and the *nāḥāš* that challenged Eve in the garden.⁷³⁵

Whereas it remains problematic to recognise any historical substance as such in the patriarchal narratives, the exodus chronicle – on the other hand – points to signs of a monarchical or later composition. While some scholars reject the value of the account of the exodus for historical purposes, other scholars accept some sort of departure from Egypt by certain antecedents of the Israelites. It is unlikely that an ancient group would have fabricated a tradition presenting its ancestors as slaves. Some archaic poems in the Hebrew Bible recall the exodus, thereby intimating its historical value. Davies,⁷³⁶ however, refers to the exodus as 'one of a number of alternative immigration stories', without historical basis or explanation. He suggests that many Judeans most likely went to Egypt at the end of the sixth century BC, returning later from Egypt – maybe even under a leader with the Egyptian name Moses – to settle in Yehud. He refers to a fourth century BC Egyptian chronicle – preserved in Hecataeus⁷³⁷ – which mentions an Egyptian by the name of Moses, who established the Jewish priesthood.

Rowley⁷³⁸ denotes that there is no evidence that polytheism in Israel developed into monotheism by natural evolution. There is also no evidence that Moses practised monotheism in the sense that he denied the existence of more than one god, or that he was a polytheist therein that he worshipped many gods. He did, however, plant the seed of monotheism. Although there are no external witnesses to Moses, Dever⁷³⁹ endeavours to reconcile a probably "mythical-Moses" of the biblical texts with a possible historical "Moses-like figure".

De Moor⁷⁴⁰ indicates that 'the ancient Canaanites believed that great heroes and kings were joined to their divine patron after their death'. During the second millennium BC, an ancestor

⁷³⁴ Hendel 1999:746.

⁷³⁵ See § 5.4 for the wordplay in Hebrew.

⁷³⁶ Davies 1992:119-120.

⁷³⁷ See footnote in § 5.4 on Hecataeus.

⁷³⁸ Rowley 1963:42-44.

⁷³⁹ Dever 2003:235.

⁷⁴⁰ De Moor 1997:368-369.

of one of the proto-Israelite tribes probably received the divine name *Yahwi-Ilu*. According to De Moor,⁷⁴¹ it is plausible that the name *Yahweh* was derived from *Yahwi-Ilu*. The word *'ôb*, which is attested in the Hebrew Bible, relates to necromancy and the conjuration and consultation of the spirits of the dead. The term *rēpā'îm* – also attested in the Masoretic Text – designates the spirits of the dead, and is related to Ugarit *rpum*, a name for the deified royal ancestors. Og, king of Bashan, is referred to in the Hebrew Bible as one of the survivors of the *Rephaim*. *Rapha*, translated as "giants", have been linked to the *Rephaim*.

Some scholars argue that *Yahweh* and *El* were associated at an early stage, and explain this connection by assuming that *Yahweh* was originally an *El*-figure. It should, however, be kept in mind that the role of *El* – as Canaanite high god – became largely insignificant at the beginning of the Iron Age. This diminished role probably explains why there are no traces in the Hebrew Bible of polemics against *El*.

Various biblical and extra-biblical sources seemingly indicate that the origin of the god *Yahweh* should be sought amongst the high gods of the Canaanite religion, as well as amongst the clan deities of the patriarchal families. Frank Cross expanded on the theory of Albrecht Alt who isolated a group of 'epithets in which the god is identified by the name of the patriarch'.⁷⁴² These deities are called the "gods of the fathers". Although they were originally distinct deities, they were – in the development of Israel's traditions – coalesced into a single family god by artificially linking them genealogically to the fathers; they were concurrently assimilated to *Yahweh*. These deities were later identified as God Almighty, *El Shadday*. A series of names or appellatives beginning with the element *El*, appear in the patriarchal narratives in Genesis; Cross⁷⁴³ also explains the term *'el*. The epithets – as in Genesis – were preserved in the tradition as names by which *Yahweh* was called. At the same time, the two traditions preserved in Exodus⁷⁴⁴ 'retained the memory that the name *Yahweh* was not revealed until the Mosaic age'.⁷⁴⁵ According to these texts, there was continuity between the religion of the fathers and the later Yahwistic faith of Israel. The epithet *El Shadday* is the most frequent of these epithets; *Shadday* is seemingly derived from the word for "mountain" or "breast". Biblical references to *Shadday* or *El Shadday* are mostly post-exilic and are consistently used as an appellative for *Yahweh*.

⁷⁴¹ De Moor 1997:368.

⁷⁴² Cross 1962:226.

⁷⁴³ Cross 1974:242-244.

⁷⁴⁴ Exodus 3:14-15; 6:2-3.

⁷⁴⁵ Cross 1974:256.

Early epic traditions of Israel, transmitted orally, were shaped – more or less uncontrolled – by written sources and hardly reflect the religious milieu of their origin. According to Cross,⁷⁴⁶ an analysis of the patriarchal traditions gives an indication of the essential traits of this religion. There is a special relation between the patriarch and the "god of the father", who is designated by the name of the patriarch. This deity was therefore the patron of the clan. The particular traits of the patriarchal gods anticipate some characteristics of the cult of *Yahweh*, which provides continuity between the old religious forms and the new emergent Yahwism. Miller⁷⁴⁷ judges the reasoning of Cross as 'the most extensive and far-reaching to date'; it illuminates and clarifies 'the continuities between the god of the fathers and Canaanite *El* and *Yahweh*', and thereby he (Cross) reaches the conclusion that *Yahweh* was originally a cultic name of *El*. *Yahweh* could likewise have been an epithet of *El* as a patron deity of the Midianites and Kenites. *Yahweh* was thus – according to this hypothesis – in origin an *El*-figure; throughout the history of Israel's religion the various *El* names continued to be acceptable titles for *Yahweh*.

Guillet⁷⁴⁸ raises the question whether *El* was not rather the individual deity of each of the different Semitic clans, and eventually degraded into one of the figures of the pagan pantheon. De Moor⁷⁴⁹ denotes that initially all the tribes of Israel showed a preference for *El* theophoric biblical personal names; the popularity for Yahwistic names, however, started much earlier than the establishing of Zion as national centre of worship of *Yahweh*. According to MacLaurin,⁷⁵⁰ there is the possibility that the ancestors worshipped *Yah* – who might have been identified with *El* – before they left Canaan. In Egypt the Hebrew slaves probably worshipped *El*, who, in the hypostasis of *El Shadday*, was venerated in Canaan as the God of the fathers. L'Heureux⁷⁵¹ is of the opinion that, as the cult of *Yahweh* developed historically, and the characteristic features of Yahwism emerged, *Yahweh* separated from *El* to become a distinct deity.

As indicated in the evaluation of the hypothesis of Cross, certain aspects of this theory have merits for the reconstruction of the origin of Yahwism. There is credibility in the thesis of Alt that the patriarchs venerated a deity known by *El*-epithets, mainly as *El Shadday*, also known as the "god of the father(s)". However, I cannot agree with the suggestion that

⁷⁴⁶ Cross 1962:227-228, 231-232.

⁷⁴⁷ Miller 2000a:381.

⁷⁴⁸ Guillet 1973:206.

⁷⁴⁹ De Moor 1997:12, 39.

⁷⁵⁰ MacLaurin 1962:460.

⁷⁵¹ L'Heureux 1979:56-59.

Yahweh was originally a cultic name or epithet of *El*, and that *Yahweh* originated from an *El*-figure – thereby suggesting that *Yahweh* emanated from a Canaanite deity.

I am well aware of the general consensus amongst scholars – and in agreement therewith – that the Israelite nation practised syncretism, particularly regarding specific Canaanite deities, such as *Ba'al* and *Asherah*. I also support the view that, although *Yahweh* was perceived as the national god of the Israelite nation at a certain stage, he was not venerated in a monotheistic context by the pre-exilic Israelites. My interpretation of the biblical texts is, however, that *Yahweh* was the dominant Entity – albeit amongst supporters of the "*Yahweh*-alone movement". I therefore find it inconceivable – as mentioned above – that *Yahweh* would have originated from *El*, who was in reality a Canaanite deity. As recorded in Exodus 6:3, *Yahweh*, in his revelation to Moses, indicated that he appeared to the patriarchal fathers as *El Shadday*, but that he did not disclose his proper name, *Yahweh*, to them. Therefore, for a reason unbeknown to us – apart from a number of references that may, or may not, be authentic – the patriarchs knew *Yahweh* mainly by his *El*-epithets. I thus propose that *El* was a cultic name, or an epithet, of *Yahweh* – not the other way around. The patriarchs who migrated from Mesopotamia, through Syria to Canaan, would *en route* have encountered Canaanite *El* who, therefore, would have been a familiar name later. The theory of Cross gives no explanation for the recurring biblical tradition which indicates that *Yahweh* came forth from the "South". *El* was established mainly in the northern regions of Palestine and Syria.

I furthermore support the theory that inhabitants of, and migrants in, the South became knowledgeable about *Yahweh*, and worshipped him, either as *Yahu* or *Yahweh*. At a particular point in time *Yahweh* disclosed his name – also to those tribes who venerated him as *El Shadday*, an epithet of *Yahweh*.

In agreement with my hypothesis, I theorise that *Yahweh* was venerated by the Midianites, as well as marginal southern tribes, such as the Kenites. In the following chapter a number of these marginal tribes are discussed.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Table 1 and Table 2 – synopsis of characteristics of the Kenites and synopsis of the Kenite hypothesis – follow hereafter.

Table 1. Synopsis of characteristics of, and information on, the Kenites

- Scholars suggest that the Cain narrative of Genesis 4 is the aetiological legend of the Kenites.
- Cain is therefore also the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites.
- The word Cain – קַיִן – is associated with Kenite – קֵינִי; the root *qyn* means spear, tinsmith, craftsman.
- Some scholars suggest that "Cain" is another name for the Kenite tribe and is thus their primal ancestor; other scholars negate such an affiliation, or that the Kenites had any connection with Cain.
- There is, however, no positive evidence that the Kenites associated themselves with Cain as their eponymous ancestor.
- Heber, the Kenite – identified with the sons of Hobab, Moses' father-in-law – is said to have separated from Cain; the Kenites and Cain are thus connected in Judges 4:11.
- Many traits of the Kenites could associate this tribe with Cain.
- The Kenites are linked to the three sons of Lamech – and thus to Cain – through their occupations, namely as tent dwellers who had livestock, as musicians and as metalworkers.
- They were a non-Israelite clan or community.
- There was a close connection between the Kenites and Midianites; the Kenites lived among the Midianites and might have been a clan of the latter.
- The Kenites are also linked to the Rechabites and to the post-exilic scribes (see 1 Chronicles 2:55).
- They were metalworkers and coppersmiths who may have held a kind of monopoly on copper mining and the production of copper artefacts.
- They may have been a group of metalworkers who left the Hittite Empire with its downfall at the end of the thirteenth century BC.
- Metallurgical traditions preserved by, inter alia, the Kenites, could also be traced back to prehistoric times.
- They made their livelihood as metal craftsmen; as migrating smiths they wandered in the Sinai, the Negeb, Midian, Edom, Amalek and northern Palestine.
- They probably introduced mining and metallurgy to the Israelites, and maybe even to the Edomites.
- As nomads or semi-nomads they followed a nomadic lifestyle, alienated from the soil; nomadic tribes of metalworkers were known from the early second millennium BC.
- They lived in the Negeb, south of Arad; a region in the Negeb was named after them.



- They may have "dwelt in the rock" (according to Balaam's song), not far from Punon – one of the main sources of copper.
- The Kenites are linked to the cities Arad and Kinah in the Negeb.
- The Hebrew Bible refers to the cities of the Kenites in the southern Judean hill country; probably including Kinah, and possibly Kain on the border of the Wilderness of Judah.
- They entered Palestine with the tribe of Judah and held a recognised place in Israelite society; they showed loyalty to Israel during the exodus.
- A raised platform – probably an altar – in the centre of Arad could have been an establishment of the Kenites; it may reflect the priestly background of this clan.
- Moses was probably introduced to *Yahweh* by Kenite mediation; the Kenites were however excluded from any official capacity in the cult of Israel.
- Moses borrowed the casuistic type of law from the Kenites.
- Moses probably learned the art of copper crafting from the Kenites, which he employed when he fashioned the copper serpent.
- The special sign of *Yahweh* – which could have been a protective tattoo – safeguarded the Kenites; it was a grave offence to harm them. They thus worshipped *Yahweh* under his protection.
- They were known for their blood revenge; this mark of *Yahweh* obliged them to avenge the blood of a slain brother.
- Marginal characteristics are attributed to Kenites, Midianites and Rechabites in biblical portrayals.

Table 2. Synopsis of the Kenite hypothesis and relevant aspects

- In 1872 Cornelis P Tiele advanced the idea of the Kenite hypothesis; in 1887 Bernard Stade elaborated the idea; Karl Budde developed the classic formulation of the theory during the late nineteenth century; Rowley elaborated on Budde's hypothesis later during the twentieth century.
- Budde theorised that a Moses-type figure gained knowledge about *Yahweh* through his Kenite father-in-law Jethro – a Midianite priest, who, according to tradition, worshipped *Yahweh*.
- After his initiation into the cult of *Yahweh*, Moses was confronted by *Yahweh* himself from the burning bush.
- Moses – who was thus initiated into *Yahweh*-worship by Jethro – introduced *Yahweh* to a group migrating from Egypt to Palestine; he equated *Yahweh* with their divine ancestral traditions.
- This group later acquainted the tribes of Judah with *Yahweh*.
- The Midianite priest Jethro, was a priest of *Yahweh* in a unique capacity; see Exodus 18:1, 7-12.
- Jethro rejoiced for all the good *Yahweh* had done to Israel, declaring that *Yahweh* was greater than all the gods (Ex 18:11a).
- Jethro brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to *Elohim* [or maybe to *Yahweh*]; E and J sources are mixed in Exodus 18.
- According to Rowley, Jethro was a priest of *Yahweh* and offered a sacrifice to *Yahweh* [*Elohim*].
- The burnt offering and sacrifices brought to God by Jethro could indicate that God was witness to a treaty between the Kenites and Israelites.
- Apart from introducing Moses to the cult of *Yahweh*, Jethro also gave him practical advice.
- The Kenites – probably a clan of the Midianites – served *Yahweh* as their god from time immemorial; the Israelites chose *Yahweh* as their God.
- Rowley argues that the Israelites accepted *Yahweh* as their God, mainly on account of his action to save them from the power of Egypt, and not by Moses' mediation of the Kenite religion.
- In its classical form the hypothesis, however, assumes that the Israelites became acquainted with the cult of *Yahweh* through Moses.
- The Kenites were a roaming, nomadic group of metalworkers who moved as metal traders along caravan routes to the North; they probably spread their religious belief along these routes; Heber – the Kenite and a metal craftsman – settled in the North.

- Caravan traders from the South crossed the hills of Palestine and travelled to the Jezreel Valley; the cult of Yahwism could thus have spread through Transjordan and the highlands of Canaan, along Midianite caravan and trade routes.
- The Midianites – who also venerated *Yahweh* – were caravan traders, *par excellence*, covering vast areas.
- The strong tradition that links the Kenites to Cain as their eponymous ancestor, explains their metalworking abilities and alienation from the soil.
- The Kenites' association with Cain attributes them, allegedly, with a special protection mark or symbol of *Yahweh*.
- The name *Yahweh* emanated from the southern regions and therefore supports the Kenite hypothesis.
- Biblical tradition links *Yahweh* with the South, namely with Sinai, Seir, Mount Paran, Teman and Edom; the South was the abode of the Kenites and Midianites.
- The Kenites settled in the Negeb of Arad.
- The Kenite hypothesis is supported by Egyptian data that link *Yhw* [*Yahweh*] to the land of the *Shasu*; the *Shasu* are connected to Seir and Edom; the Kenites and Midianites are also associated with Edom.
- *Yahweh* came forth from Seir and Edom in southern Transjordan.
- One can therefore deduce that *Yhw* [*Yahweh*] was known by the *Shasu* and probably venerated by them.
- It is thus conceivable that there were Edomites, Midianites, Kenites, and related marginal groups among the *Shasu*.
- Some scholars indicate that the Edomites and Kenites were related.
- Mount Sinai was *Yahweh's* sacred abode; he was worshipped by the people who dwelt in his territory.
- *Yahweh* was a Palestinian mountain god worshipped by the nomadic Midianites, Kenites and Edomites, who roamed the southern regions of Palestine.
- A small unfortified site at Tel Arad could be connected to the Kenites. An Israelite temple at Tel Arad was built on a possible twelfth century BC Kenite shrine; this shrine would have been in the middle of the territory and thus well positioned to serve inhabitants of the eastern Negeb in their cultic practices.
- Midianite epic sources point to the possibility of a pre-Israelite Yahwistic sanctuary in the mountainous region east of the Gulf of Elath.
- The concept that Moses was introduced to the cult of *Yahweh* by the Kenites/Midianites thus contends that Yahwism has Kenite/Midianite roots.