3.1 Introduction

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

Myths are attempts of man to penetrate the unknown and are personifications of the unconscious and preconscious processes describing man's awakening to the universe. When he encounters the unknown, man projects an archetypal\(^1\) image which involves his instincts.\(^2\) Myth can also be defined as a 'traditional narrative usually involving supernatural or imaginary persons and often embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomena'.\(^3\) The mystery of the coming into being of the universe is a central problem for all mythologies.\(^4\) Myths narrate origins in the primordial\(^5\) time\(^6\) and are developed to explain natural phenomena.\(^7\) It is significant that the very nature of man – under varying circumstances and in different worlds – 'is apt to hit upon similar explanations of the phenomena everywhere threatening and upholding his life'.\(^8\) Myths are also 'products of early philosophy, reflecting on the nature of the universe', or they could be political, modelled to unite different worshipping groups into one social or political structure.\(^9\) Although myths can operate as the basic structure of cultural systems and religious beliefs, some mythological literature acts as polemical vehicle for contentious beliefs and views.\(^10\)

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

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\(^1\) Archetype: an original pattern or perfect example of which actual things are copies (Deist 1990:20). 'An archetype is a universal thought form or disposition to perceive the world in certain ways' (Naudé 1986:756).
\(^2\) Naudé 1986:754-757, 760.
\(^3\) Kruger 2001a:47-48.
\(^4\) Willis 1993:18.
\(^5\) Primordial: see relevant footnote in § 1.3.
\(^6\) Kruger 2001a:48.
\(^7\) Jay 1996:35.
\(^8\) Montcrieff 1994:2.
\(^9\) Robertson-Smith 1969:19.
\(^10\) Kruger 2001b:214.
\(^12\) Jay 1996:1.
Symbols of mythology are instinctive creations of the psyche that have survived into modern times. Strange rituals associated with primitive tribes, as well as with ancient civilisations, have actually led people across those difficult "thresholds of transformation" concerning the conscious and unconscious life. Mythologies are stories that incorporate supernatural elements and that people believe.

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

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

14 Culture is defined as 'a basic pattern of thought around which the symbolic systems develop' (Kunin 1995:19).
15 Jay 1996:1, 4, 8.
17 That is, myth was a 'subjective and coherent articulation of past and present events' (Kunin 1995:41).
18 Kunin 1995:42.
19 As an example: the legend of Esther in the Hebrew Bible probably originated in the harems around a shrewd woman and intrigue at the Persian court. The biblical version has been reshaped to elucidate the Purim festival (Gaster 1969:xxxi).
20 As an example: the narrative of Ham, who looked upon Noah's nakedness (Gn 9:20-27), was written at a time when Palestine was a vassal of Egypt who was regarded as a son of Ham (Gn 10:6). The story, likewise, signifies the subjugation of Canaan – also a son of Ham – by the Israelites (Gaster 1969:xxxii).
22 Folklore comprises those beliefs, customs, stories and sayings of a community that have been passed on from one generation to another (Deist 1990:98). For example, the notion that the earlier inhabitants of Palestine were giants pertains to the belief held by many people to account for megaliths (Gaster 1969:xxxvii).
23 Myths may function to: explain natural phenomena, control natural forces (by making sacrifices influencing the gods), bind a clan or tribe or nation together, record a historical event of a tribe or nation in a mythologised form, give descriptions of landmarks, justify a social structure, and control people (Jay 1996:3-4).
24 Kruger 2001a:52.
society, by, for example, justifying the authority of elders or chieftains.\textsuperscript{25} Yet, Dever\textsuperscript{26} asks the question whether morality, faith and the life of a religious community could be 'predicated on myth'. He nonetheless indicates that the essence of folk religion is not orthodox theology, but symbol, ritual and myth.\textsuperscript{27} According to Vehse,\textsuperscript{28} myth is the obvious alternative to history. The main purpose of historical myths is to transmit a message which is independent of historical accuracy, but rather suggests how people thought about events that had happened. Moye\textsuperscript{29} indicates that by the incorporation of independent mythical narratives with histori- cised genealogies, history is created from myth. Kunin\textsuperscript{30} mentions that 'the historical elements within a body of myth are seen as only incidentally historical'. Myth and history can co-exist; therefore the mythical nature of texts need not be affected by the potential historicity of texts. There is interplay between the two. In the case of biblical texts, there is no structural difference between "mythological" and "historical" texts. The biblical text provides both a conscious and an unconscious framework for viewing reality.\textsuperscript{31}

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

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{} Kruger 2001b:227.
\bibitem{} Dever 1997a:46.
\bibitem{} Dever 2005:61.
\bibitem{} Vehse 1995:440.
\bibitem{} Moye 1990:598.
\bibitem{} Kunin 1995:40.
\bibitem{} Kunin 1995:44. For example: the narrative of Joseph (Gn 37-50) is a myth characterised by the doubling of most – if not all – elements of the story, for example, Joseph dreams two dreams and the pharaoh and his servant each dreams two dreams. This pattern of double structure serves to cloud the underlying [mythological] structure (Kunin 1995:135).
\bibitem{} Van Dyk 2005:875.
\bibitem{} Van Dyk 2005:877.
\bibitem{} Van Dyk 2005:875.
\bibitem{} Van Dyk 2005:872-873, 875, 877.
\end{thebibliography}
Narrated "sacred history" gives meaning to, and stabilises the chaos of human, or secular and profane, existence. Myth, ritual and social structure validate existence in society. Being exposed to hostile environments, groups and communities are more likely to survive than individuals are. An epic describes a struggle between two groups. This encounter usually entails a physical confrontation, where some cunning is exercised. A mythic epic involves the conflict between two groups of deities. Creation is the result of such a combat. In the Genesis creation narratives a mythical background appears everywhere. It is widely acknowledged that the elements and traditions in Genesis 1-11 are very similar to those in corresponding Ancient Near Eastern myths. These traditions cannot be treated differently from those in the Hebrew Bible, even if the latter is monotheistic in contrast to the Ancient Near Eastern polytheism. Jason points out that the only examples of mythic epic that the biblical literature could be compared with are ancient written texts and, unfortunately, no in situ oral material. On the other hand, 'mythologies are littered with symbolic references and objects'. By interpreting these symbols the deeper meaning behind a myth could be clarified.

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

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38 An epic describes a struggle between two clans, tribes or nations, as well as between classes of beings, such as a conflict between divinities and human beings, or humans and monsters (Jason 1995:282). An epic is a long poem or narrative recounting the achievements of a hero, or heroes (Hanks 1992:164).
39 Jason 1995:282. One of the most important creation myths is the Babylonian Enuma Elish. See footnote on the Babylonian creation myth and Marduk in § 2.14.6. This epic has a definite political intent, as Marduk, deity of Babylon, is elevated to the supreme god of Babylon (Van Reeth 1994:74).
40 Skinner 1930:52. Reference to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Genesis 2:10-14 clearly indicates that the earthly paradise was in the region where these rivers flow. Therefore, it is inevitable that the myth took its shape in Mesopotamia – watered by these two rivers – although it probably originated in a dry country like Palestine. On the other hand, the account of the Flood is reminiscent of an alluvial country, such as the Euphrates Valley (Skinner 1930:56). The numerous mythological elements in the biblical creation narratives are, in their own right, a matter of research and shall, therefore, not be discussed in this thesis.
41 Kruger 2001a:50.
45 Jay 1996:10, 12, 23.
made contact. Although the existence of a monotheistic Yahwistic faith since the time of the patriarch Abraham is professed in the Hebrew Bible, general consensus has been reached by scholars that these early tribes – and the later Israelite nation – practised a syncretic-type religion, particularly influenced by the Canaanite religion and mythologies. Walker indicates that two forms of Yahwism were practised. In the Canaanite naturalistic semblance Yahweh was identified with Asher, the moon god, whose consort's emblem – the asherah pole – was placed alongside the altars for Yahweh. The other type of Yahwism was Mosaic and ethical. This form of veneration was introduced into Palestine by those tribes under the influence of Moses. Since the discovery of the Ugaritic texts, which are unquestionably the most important source of information on the Syro-Palestinian religions and pantheons, many aspects in the Hebrew Bible have been clarified. Canaanite deities were worshipped not only in Syria-Palestine; their influence reached as far as Egypt.

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

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47 Walker 1958:262.
48 See § 2.8.
49 Asiatic workers – most likely brought as prisoners from Syria to Egypt and working mainly near Thebes and Memphis – worshipped deities of the Canaanite pantheon. The influence emanating from these workers, in the fourteenth to thirteenth century BC, probably resulted in some Canaanite deities being worshipped in Egyptian temples. When compatible, the Canaanite deities later partly merged with the Egyptian deities. Similarly, aspects of Egyptian deities appeared in Canaan; a frequent example is the so-called Hathor wig (Hestrin 1991:55); see also the footnote on Hathor in § 2.14.1.
50 Rose 1972:717. Collectors of mythologies are known as mythographers (Rose 1972:718). Mythography is the representation of myths in painting or sculpture (Oxford University Press 1964b:587).
51 An allegory is a literary device – even a genre – 'that makes extensive use of figurative or symbolic language to expound a subject or tell a story' (Deist 1990:8).
52 Oden 1992:946.
53 Robertson Smith was regarded as one of the foremost scholars of his generation. In his travels to Arabia, he not only mastered Arabic – which he could speak fluently – but became intimately acquainted with the common people. These influences played a role in the preparation for the Lectures on the Religion of the Semites which was first published in 1889. He later became editor-in-chief of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Muilenburg
late nineteenth century. In his lectures on Semitic religion he declared 'it may be affirmed with confidence that in almost every case the myth was derived from the ritual and not the ritual from the myth'.

Elicited from this theory is a definition offered by scholars during the twentieth century that myths are traditional stories that originated from and were passed on in a communal context. A French scholar, Lévi-Strauss, compared myth with language and music. He suggested that, as phonemes55 'only produce meaning in their interrelationships with one another',56 the various elements in myth relate to one another. Evidence from Canaanite myths discovered in Ugarit57 persuaded Cross58 of the bankruptcy of all attempts to prove that Israelite religion is discontinuous with the religions of Israel's neighbors, and hence discontinuous with a mythological tradition'.59 A pattern discernible in a substantial amount of literature in the Hebrew Bible concerns the divine warrior.60 A combination of mythical and historical traditions are, according to Cross,61 characteristic of Israelite religion, as he states 'in Israel, myth and history always stood in strong tension, myth serving primarily to give a cosmic dimension and transcendent meaning to the historical, rarely functioning to dissolve history.' In the light of decades of research, it is remarkable that some scholars refuse to pay attention to the redefining of myth, on the assumption that the biblical must be firmly separated from the non-biblical, in particular from the mythological world.62

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

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55 Phonemes are the basic sound units in language (Oden 1992:953).
57 See § 2.8.
60 For example: Psalms 29, 77, 89, 93; Isaiah 51:9-11.
61 Cross 1973:90.
64 Wolfgang Speyer, known as a leading expert on forgery in Mediterranean antiquity (Droge 2003:135).
3.2 Asherah/Athirat and synonymous female deities

3.2.1 Occurrence in Ancient Near Eastern religions

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

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

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

\(^{66}\) Margalit 1990:265.


\(^{68}\) Day 2000:42-43.

\(^{69}\) Day 1986:385. Ebla texts dated ca 2350 BC. See also § 2.3.

\(^{70}\) Also known as Aširatum, consort of the lunar deity Amurru (Lipiński 1972:103).

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

\(^{72}\) ca 1850-1831 BC (Day 1986:386).

\(^{73}\) Day 1986:386.

\(^{74}\) Wyatt 1999a:100.

\(^{75}\) Dated 1792-1750 BC. See footnote on Hammurapi in § 2.4.

\(^{76}\) Day 1986:386.

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

\(^{78}\) Lipiński 1972:104.

\(^{79}\) Dated fourteenth century BC. See § 2.5.
The Babylonian *Aṭīrat*, called *bēlet sēri*, has chthonic features similar to the Underworld goddess *Geštinanna*. Both are connected to the god *Amurrus*. *Geštinanna* was regarded as his consort at times. *Aṭīrat*, portrayed as West Semitic solar deity, has been identified in Babylonia with *Geštinanna* as they both have the same fate, spending half of their lives in the Underworld. The Sumerian myth, *Inanna's descent to the Netherworld*, recounts *Geštinanna's* compulsory stay in the Underworld.

The solar deities, *Šapšu* and *Aṭīrat*, are the only two deities of the Ugaritic pantheon called *rabbatu*. In Palestine, during that period, the sun was considered to be a female deity. According to Lipiński, *Aṭīrat* could have been venerated as a solar goddess at Taanach. A fifteenth century BC Akkadian letter found at Taanach mentions prince *Abdi-*Aširti, or *Abdi-*Ašrati – servant-of-*Aṭīrat* – and also refers to *umman* (*u-ma-an*) *Aširat*, meaning "wizard of *Aṭīrat*", an expression designating a diviner. This title can be compared to that of one of the prophets (*āpīlam*) of Šamsā, mentioned in a letter from Mari.

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

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81 Chthonic deity refers to a deity of the Netherworld (Deist 1990:44).
82 *Geštinanna* was known in Mesopotamia and Sumer. She was goddess of justice, heaven and hell, intelligence, creativity and water. It is "She who keeps records in the Underworld" and is the "Lady of the Vine" (Ann & Imel 1993:330).
83 See footnotes on the solar deity *Shamash* in § 2.4 and § 2.14.6. A fragment of a Ugaritic hymn to the sun goddess *Šapšu* reveals aspects that can be compared with *Aṭīrat*. The sun appears every morning in the east, disappears at night in the west, travelling through the Netherworld to appear again the next morning in the east. The belief that the sun was a female deity is attested by a Phoenician ivory relief exhibiting a winged sun-disc and feminine head with *Hathor* curls (Lipiński 1972:106). See footnotes on *Hathor* in § 2.13 and § 2.14.1. The name *Geštinanna* means "Grapes of Heaven"; *Šapšu*, apparently, was particularly fond of wine (Lipiński 1972:117-118).
84 Lipiński 1972:109. See footnotes in § 2.3 and § 2.4 on *Inanna*.
85 The title *rbt* (*rabbatu*) reveals a particular "community of honour" between *Šapšu* and *Aṭīrat* (Lipiński 1972:116-117).
86 ca fifteenth century BC.
87 According to inscribed clay tablets found at Taanach (Lipiński 1972:105). See § 2.13 and subparagraph on Taanach.
89 Albright 1944:16, 18.
90 Šamaš (*Shamash*) was an Akkadian solar deity, venerated by the Assyrians and Aramaeans. Šamaš was a son of the lunar deity *Sīn* (Van Reeth 1994:227). See also relevant footnotes in § 2.4 and § 2.14.6.
91 Lipiński 1972:105.
92 Lipiński 1972:104.
to suckle newborn gods.\textsuperscript{93} From ancient Arabian sources \textit{Atirat} is attested as a well-known solar goddess and consort of the moon deities, 'Amm and \textit{Wadd}.\textsuperscript{94} These sources include several South Arabian inscriptions, a North Arabian stela and a few Arabian Thamudic personal names. The three main deities of the old Arabian pantheon were the star god, moon god and sun goddess. In the Arabian kingdom of Qatabān the principle god was 'Amm – meaning "uncle" – the lunar deity. A territory of this kingdom, called \textit{d-`trt}, meaning "that of \textit{Atirat}", was devoted to her. The lunar deity \textit{Wadd} – meaning "loving" – of the kingdoms Ma’in and Awsan, was worshipped together with \textit{Atirat} in the temple there. An inscription from Ma’in mentions a month called \textit{d-`trt}, "the one of \textit{Atirat}" – the name clearly owing to a feast celebrated during that month in honour of her. Three gods of Taymā’ in North Arabia – \textit{Salm źi Mahram}, \textit{Sîn-gallā} and 'Ašīrā’ are mentioned in an Aramaic inscription. \textit{Sîn-gallā} – meaning "\textit{Sîn} the Great" – is normally considered to have been the lunar deity. The affinity to the Babylonian moon god \textit{Sîn} probably dates to the period 553-544 BC when the Babylonian king Nabonidus, a fervent worshipper of \textit{Sîn}, sojourned in Taymā’. \textit{Sîn} most likely replaced the local lunar deity whose consort was 'Ašīrā’.\textsuperscript{95}

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

Margalit\textsuperscript{99} suggests that the Ugaritic word \textit{atr} and its Hebrew cognate 'ašērâ were originally common nouns meaning "wife, consort". Literally, it means "she-who-follows-in-the-footsteps (of her husband)". From a Sumerian inscription, dedicated to Hammurapi,\textsuperscript{100} Canaanite \textit{Athirat}'s Amorite counterpart \textit{Ašratu(m)} was the wife (\textit{aššat}) of \textit{Amurru}, the warrior and storm god, son of \textit{Anu}.\textsuperscript{101} Her role and function as fertility goddess is reflected in an

\textsuperscript{93} Fulco 1987b:492.
\textsuperscript{94} Day 1986:397.
\textsuperscript{95} Lipiński 1972:101-103.
\textsuperscript{96} Lipiński 1972:110.
\textsuperscript{97} Lipiński 1972:116.
\textsuperscript{98} Margalit 1990:269-270, 273.
\textsuperscript{99} See relevant footnote in § 2.4.
\textsuperscript{100} The Sumerian cuneiform sign for "heaven" is \textit{an}, which is also the name of the Sumerian god of the heaven. His Babylonian counterpart is \textit{Anu}, considered as the personified heaven (Hutter 1999a:388).
Whenever Amurru and Ašratu are cited together, the rule of "male first" is invariably followed. This literary convention reflects a practice attested in both Mesopotamia and Canaan regarding divine married couples. In Ugaritic, as in Arabic, the noun 'ṭr (footstep, trace) is used as a preposition meaning "following, after". Margalit draws the conclusion that it thus stands to reason that a common-noun aṭrt, contextually determined as meaning "wife, consort", should contain the notion of "following-in-the-footsteps of ... ".

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

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

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

103 Margalith 1990:274.

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

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

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

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

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


110 The names mean "Dawn" and "Dusk", respectively (Margalith 1994:110). After their birth – according to the Ugaritic text – the twin gods left for the desert to live among the stones and trees. As the desert was not capable of sustaining life, the gods hunted on the fringe of the desert (Hadley 2000:45-46).
progeny of El, born from two wives. This nurse, "The Lady", the "Great Mother goddess", is none other than Asherah-and-Rahmaya.\textsuperscript{111} The two figurines, as well as the ivory, all represent the same mythological theme of a 'divine mother suckling two (semi-)divine twins'.\textsuperscript{112} Suggestions that Rhmy refers to the two goddesses Athirat and Anat have been disputed. The name could refer to a completely independent goddess, equivalent to the Akkadian goddess $^d$sa-sá-ra-tum – meaning womb.\textsuperscript{113} This suggestion has, however, been superseded by the idea that $^d$sa-sá-ra-tum should rather be equated with ktrt, the birth goddess.\textsuperscript{114} A number of other cult objects excavated at Ekron include painted animal figurines, as well as a stylised head with birdlike facial features. This head is characteristic of Ashdoda, a female figurine found at Ashdod.\textsuperscript{115} 'Ashdoda is a hallmark of the mother goddess in the Aegean cult.'\textsuperscript{116} Cultic inscriptions excavated at Tel Miqne – ancient Philistine city of Ekron – indicate that the Canaanite Asherah was worshipped there. The most important inscription reads 'sanctified to Asherat, for the shrine and oil'.\textsuperscript{117}

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{113} In the Hebrew Bible rhm means "womb" (Margalith 1994:112).

\textsuperscript{114} Day 1986:390.

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{118} Lipinsky 1972:117.

\textsuperscript{119} Fulco 1987b:492.

\textsuperscript{120} Day 1986:387-388.
Sidon, mentioning three times the "fisherman of Athirat". The gods of Tyre were known at Ugarit by the thirteenth century BC. According to a mythological text [from Ras Shamra], 'the hero Keret made a pilgrimage and offered a vow to Asherah of Tyre'.

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

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

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121 Lipiński 1972:110.
122 Text on a clay tablet, inscribed with the alphabetic cuneiform script (Guirand 1996:74). See also § 2.8.
123 Texts concerning Phoenician mythology, found at Ras Shamra, do not relate only about deities, but also contain legends about god-like heroes. Keret, king of Sidon, was the son of El and a soldier of the goddess Šapas. He had a beautiful son, Danel, who was another mythological hero (Guirand 1996:79).
125 Punic was the language of the Carthaginians. The Punic character – treacherous and perfidious – was attributed to the Carthaginians by the Romans (Oxford University Press 1964:b:716). Carthage was an ancient city near Tunis on the North African coast, founded by the Phoenicians and destroyed during the Punic wars [third century BC] (Oxford University Press 1987:247). In an excavation project, three inscriptions from a temple wall at the Tuscan port Pyrgi – two in the Etruscan language and one in Punic – were found, dedicated to the Phoenician deity Astarte. This find proves that there was an important Punic colony in this Etruscan port during the early fifth century BC (Charles-Picard 1983:297-298, 308).
128 Qudšu is a name meaning "holiness" or "sanctuary". The personification of sanctuaries in divine names is well-attested among the Semites' (Day 1986:388).
129 From the Nineteenth Dynasty [1293-1185 BC] the Egyptian mythology knew a goddess Qudšu. Her roots were apparently in the Semitic world. She was usually depicted between the gods Min and Resheph, the latter being a Semitic god. In the Egyptian documents Qudšu – whose attribute was the lion – was only an epithet of the goddess Anat. As Qudšu (Anat), she was the consort of Amurru, the god of the West. In the Egyptian texts Amurru had the name Resheph. They appeared together at harvest time in the sacrifice of the ass. The god Min was identified with the god Pan of the Greeks. Min was the protector of travellers in the desert (Guirand 1996:38, 76).
hand and flowers in the other; in some instances she has serpents in both hands, her erotic character being distinctively emphasised. On a relief discovered at Thebes, she is called qdš-\-'strt-\-'nt indicating a fusion with the Canaanite goddesses Astarte and Anat. Wyatt mentions that the name on this relief reads qdš [and not qdš], and argues that there is 'no justification for identifying the goddess of the stelae with Athirat'. According to Cornelius, "Qudšu" is identified on stelae by hieroglyphs as qdš/qdšt, and he proposes that the name be read as "Qedeshet", without suggesting any pronunciation.

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

131 Wyatt 1999a:100.
132 Cornelius 2004:45. Qedeshet is indicated by various titles on iconographic material, such as "Ke(d)jesbet, lady of heaven", "Qedesh, lady of heaven, mistress of all the gods, eye of Ra, without her equal", "Qedeshet, lady of heaven, great of magic, mistress of the stars" and "Qedeshet, beloved of Ptah". The titles of Qedeshet, Anat and Astarte are very stereotyped – especially referring to "lady of heaven", "mistress of the gods" – but as Cornelius (2004:80-84) points out, only Qedeshet is called the "beloved of Ptah".
134 Supreme deity of the Canaanite pantheon. See § 3.7.
135 The Ba' al myth explains that Asherah kept herself busy with maternal and domestic affairs: she worked with a spindle, washed her clothes and cooked food in a cauldron – all to charm the good-natured El (Korpel 2001:131).
136 Day (1986:387) indicates that 'there is a direct line of connection' between the view of Athirat's seventy sons and the later Jewish concept of the 'seventy guardian angels of the nations' (Dt 32:8; 1 Enoch 89:59; 90:22-25). The "sons of God" (Dt 32:8) reflect the Canaanite idea of the "sons of El" – bn 'il. Albright (1968:121) adds that Asherah also had the designation Qâniyatu 'elîma, "she who gives birth" to the gods. In an earlier Ugaritic myth she presumably destroyed the Sea Dragon, thereby enabling El to create the earth.
137 Fulco 1987b:492.
began to decline as she systematically merged with Anat. She finally lost her position as independent goddess in all Canaanite religions outside Israel, only materialising at times as a member of the triad of goddesses, together with Anat and Astarte.\textsuperscript{138}

It is problematic to establish the "real" or "original" meaning of the name "Asherah", and actually quite irrelevant. The relevance of a word, name or title is to verify the way it has been employed in a given context and to discover the hidden codes. Asherah is regarded as both a divine name and a noun, and more likely as a word "functioning" as a divine name.\textsuperscript{139}

Binger\textsuperscript{140} proposes that "Asherah" is the official name-title of the primary goddess of the Ugaritic pantheon and that this name-title denotes her as female counterpart of the male supreme god – be it El, Ba’al or Yahweh. Hadley\textsuperscript{141} indicates that the origin of the cult of Asherah (Athirat) is probably in Mesopotamia where she was introduced as Ašratu or Ašratum by the Amorites.\textsuperscript{142} Many proposals have been advanced regarding the etymology of Ugaritic Athirat and Hebrew Asherah, yet, the meaning and derivation of the terms remain uncertain.

According to the Priestly tradition in Exodus 6:3, אֱלֹהִי שִׁלְדַּי\textsuperscript{143} is the deity who was worshipped by the pre-Mosaic patriarchal people who did not yet know Yahweh, or his name. The word אֱלֹהִי occurs forty-eight times in the Masoretic Text, mainly in early poetic and late archaic texts. To determine the identity of the deity, evidence from extra-biblical texts should be utilised. אֱלֹהִי is generally derived from a Proto-Semitic word "tad", meaning "mountain". 'A metaphysical\textsuperscript{144} extension of the primitive meaning',\textsuperscript{145} from the Hebrew אֱלֹהִי, is obviously "breast."\textsuperscript{146} If, in contrast to the customary interpretation identifying Semitic deities – such as Yahweh and El – with a mountain, the etymology for "breast" is favoured, Lutzky\textsuperscript{147} theorises that אֱלֹהִי was originally the name or epithet of a goddess before becoming a biblical epithet of Yahweh/El. Lutzky\textsuperscript{148} examines the possibility that אֱלֹהִי, as a goddess epithet, is more specifically that of Asherah. The feminine morphene -(a)y\textsuperscript{149} existed in early West Semitic texts,
particularly poetic texts, in the names of deities and mythical beings. A goddess nursing was a divine act. Many decades ago scholars suggested that יד was the name of a fertility deity, linked to כשם, "breast". In this instance the name יד expressed the nurturant aspect of the "great mother" visually represented with large multiple breasts. יד could thus be ‘an androgynous fertility deity incorporating the image of Asherah (who is associated with nursing), consistent with the androgynous monotheism of Gen. 1'.

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

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

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

152 Lutzky 1998:35.
Athirat/Asherah, Anat and Astarte, as well as the Mesopotamian goddess Inanna-Ishtar, seem
to have fused. Egyptian Athirat – called Qudshu – was probably an assimilation of the attrib-
utes of other north-eastern goddesses. Likewise, Athirat's consort Ba'al was most likely not
merely Ba'al-Hadad, but a combination of several gods.  

3.2.2 Occurrence in the Masoretic Text and Israelite religion

The goddess ḥrXa (Asherah) – masculine plural ḥyrXa – was worshipped in Palestine at the
time when the Israelites established themselves there. Through the centuries she was popular
among the Northern Israelites and Judeans alike, even being venerated by kings and
queens.  

Various suggestions have been made by scholars over a period of time
and conclusions drawn regarding the meaning of Asherah in the Hebrew Bible. Some schol-
ars equate Asherah with the goddess Astarte or her symbol, while others maintain that
Asherah was not the name of a deity but a cult object. As early as 1889, Robertson Smith claimed
that Asherah always denoted a wooden pole. Other scholars had an image, a tree or a
phallic symbol in mind. The Dutch scholar, Kuenen argued that Asherah signified both a
goddess and a cult object symbolising her. She was not to be equated with Astarte. The
view of Kuenen is still widely accepted today and consistent with interpretation of biblical
data and Ancient Near Eastern archaeological evidence. Since the discovery of the inscrip-
tions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom the possibility of a female consort for Yah-
weh has been extensively debated. In both instances reference is made to "Yahweh and his
Asherah".  

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

153 Fulco 1987b:492.
154 Lipiński 1972:112.
156 Robertson Smith 1969:188. He specifically refers to Deuteronomy 16:21, 'You shall not plant any tree as an
Asherah beside the altar of the Lord your God that you shall make', and draws the conclusion that Deuteronomy
referred to 'either a living tree or a tree-like post' and argues that either form was probably originally admissible
(Robertson Smith 1969:188).
157 Kuenen 1882a:88-93.
158 The people of the Ancient Near East – and particularly the Israelites – hardly made any distinction between a
deity and its image or symbol (Kuenen 1882a:89).
159 See § 4.3.9 and § 4.3.10 for a discussion on these contentious inscriptions and the implication of the phrase
"Yahweh … and his Asherah" – possibly referring to Asherah being his consort.
160 Margalit 1990:284. See also discussion in § 3.2.1.
Ugaritic interpretation does not include "walk" or "stride", but only "follow". The Hebrew 'šr is a common noun – "footstep", as well as a denominative verb 'šr – "to follow" (behind), particularly in the case of the Pi’el\textsuperscript{161} form of the verb.\textsuperscript{162} Apart from the morphology of the word 'šrh pointing to a common noun, the literary-idiomatic context indicates a divine person with the proper name Asherah.\textsuperscript{163} Akkadian, Phoenician and Aramaic terms corresponding to the Hebrew ‘ašērā, ’ašērīm and ’ašērōt, designate a shrine, chapel or sanctuary.\textsuperscript{164} Day,\textsuperscript{165} however, indicates that although the meaning of "chapel" or "cella" is attested in other Semitic languages it does not appear elsewhere in Hebrew and should therefore be rejected.

Kletter\textsuperscript{166} states that Asherah was an undeniable component of the official cult of Judah, introduced into the Jerusalem temple by the Judean kings as a foreign, but not forbidden cult.\textsuperscript{167} Regarding Josiah’s\textsuperscript{168} reform, the Hebrew Bible states, 'and he brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD'.\textsuperscript{169} Many debates evolve around the problematic word ‘ašērā in the Masoretic Text. It seems to indicate a wooden cult object, a pole, a tree or a stone that can "stand",\textsuperscript{170} be "made",\textsuperscript{171} be "set up",\textsuperscript{172} be "planted",\textsuperscript{173} "cut down",\textsuperscript{174} "uprooted",\textsuperscript{175} "burned",\textsuperscript{176} "brought out",\textsuperscript{177} "destroyed",\textsuperscript{178} "made into dust",\textsuperscript{179} "taken away"\textsuperscript{180} and "broken into pieces".\textsuperscript{181} The word ‘ašērā occasionally indicates the name of a goddess.\textsuperscript{182} Vriezen\textsuperscript{183} is of the opinion that, on the basis of all the aforementioned texts, it could be

\textsuperscript{161} Pi’el is often the causative form of the verb.
\textsuperscript{162} Vermaak 2001:58.
\textsuperscript{163} Margalit 1990:266.
\textsuperscript{164} Lipiński 1972:116.
\textsuperscript{165} Day 1986:392.
\textsuperscript{166} Kletter 2001:200.
\textsuperscript{167} Deuteronomy 16:21; 1 Kings 15:13; 2 Kings 21:7; 23:4, 7; 2 Chronicles 33:3-5. 19. Asherah was also closely associated with the "host of heaven"(2 Ki 17:16; 21:3; 23:4).
\textsuperscript{169} 2 Kings 23:6. Verse 7 reads: 'And he broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes who were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah'. The Hebrew word בָּתֵּן is translated in the ESV by "hangings"; Holladay (1971:51) interprets it as "woven garment". Day (1986:407) mentions that בָּתֵּן is probably cognate with the Arabic batt, "woven garment".
\textsuperscript{170} 2 Chronicles 34:4.
\textsuperscript{171} 1 Kings 14:15; 16:33; 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3; 2 Chronicles 33:3; Isaiah 17:8.
\textsuperscript{172} 2 Kings 17:10; 2 Chronicles 33:19.
\textsuperscript{173} Deuteronomy 16:21.
\textsuperscript{174} Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:5; Judges 6:25-26, 28, 30; 2 Kings 23:14; 2 Chronicles 14:2; 31:1.
\textsuperscript{175} Micah 5:13.
\textsuperscript{176} Deuteronomy 12:3; 2 Kings 23:6, 15.
\textsuperscript{177} 2 Kings 23:6.
\textsuperscript{178} 2 Chronicles 19:3.
\textsuperscript{179} 2 Kings 23:6; 2 Chronicles 34:4, 7.
\textsuperscript{180} 2 Chronicles 17:6.
\textsuperscript{181} 2 Chronicles 34:4.
\textsuperscript{183} Vriezen 2001:73.
deduced that the 'ašērā was an object used in the cult, placed next to the altars and next to the pillars dedicated to Ba’al.

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

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

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184 Vriezen 2001:73. For a discussion of the sacred tree symbol and stylised tree, see Hestrin (1991:50-59) and Dever (2005:226-229). Olyan (1988:4) mentions that the deuteronomistic polemic against the "asherah" is found mainly in 'rhetorical speeches concerning the sins of Israel and/or Judah against Yahweh' (for example 2 Ki 17:16-17).
186 Jeroboam’s golden calves are a prime example of an inherent Israeliite cultic feature which was later rejected as Canaanite (Evans 1995:201). See § 2.14.4.
188 Smith 1990:154.
190 1 Kings 14:23; 16:33; 2 Kings 17:16.
191 Korpel 2001:141.
192 Korpel 2001:141. During the first millennium BC מִסְפָּר and מִסְפָּר were regarded symbols of Ba’al. The trees associated with these מִסְפָּר should, therefore, represent Ba’al’s wife Anat (see § 3.3). In Israel, however, fertility resided in Asherah as El, and not Ba’al, was held to be the supreme God. The Ugaritic myths denote Asherah as wife of El, the elderly chief god of the Canaanite pantheon (Korpel 2001:130, 141). As El was associated with wisdom, the "Tree of Knowledge" may be linked to him, as the "Tree of Life" to Asherah. The asherah-pole of the goddess was a surrogate tree of life (Kruger 2001a:65). Korpel (2001:141-142) furthermore indicates that the original reading of Hosea 14:9 (not the translation in verse 8) is of some importance:

‘Ephraim, what have I to do with your idols?
It is I who is his Anat and his Asherah!'
common in the Ancient Near East. Popular Judean pillar figurines do not seem to represent a tree and there is also no definite proof that Asherah had a pillar-shaped body. Olyan is of the opinion that biblical and extra-biblical evidence indicates that the asherah was not a living tree, but maybe a pole in some cases and otherwise a stylised tree, such as a date palm. According to Day, there is strong evidence suggesting that 'ašērā in the Hebrew Bible was a 'wooden pole symbolizing the goddess Asherah', yet, he acknowledges that several references in the Masoretic Text denote the goddess herself. Concerning the epigraphic finds at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom, he favours the view that the phrase "Yahweh and his Asherah" implies that a 'cult symbol rather than the goddess Asherah (is) directly the source of blessing alongside Yahweh'.

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

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

It is I who is like an always green cyprus, from me comes your fruit!'—in this text Anat and Asherah seem to be identified with each other, both compared with a luxuriant fruit-bearing tree. This idea stems from Wellhausen (Wellhausen, J 1963. Die kleinen Propheten: übersetzt und erklärt. 4. Unveränderte Aufl. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter).

See § 2.13 under the subtitle "Female figurines".


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

Day 2000:52.

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


Miller 2000a:204.

Miller 2000a:204.

Vermaak 2001:43-44, 47.
is generally accepted that the *asherahs* were cult objects symbolizing or representing the goddess Asherah'. On the basis of the verbs in the Hebrew Bible connected to the word "asherah" he is of the opinion that it was a manmade object and not a living tree. Nouns used in conjunction with "asherah" are "high place", "graven/carved image", "pillar", "altar" and "incense altar". Certain English translations for "asherim" are "groves" or "living trees". This interpretation probably followed the Septuagint which has a term "althos" which was translated as "groves", and in some of the Mishnah texts associated with living trees. Proposals of sacred asherah-poles in the form of stylised trees have no supportive archaeological material. Vermaak has, however, another proposal, suggesting that 'asherah in the Hebrew Bible as a cult object refers to a certain type of ancient game board.' The "shield board game" or the "game of fifty-eight holes" was played throughout the Ancient Near East. These boards, the asherahs, were made of ivory or baked clay and several have been excavated at numerous places. The games were probably played by the Israelites not fully understanding the impact these games might have on their religious lives. These boards were possibly regarded as cult objects of the mother goddess. The majority of the people probably did not comprehend the metaphysical significance of these games and as the magic took control of them only a few realised the implication thereof.

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

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

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

209 Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:5.

210 2 Chronicles 14:4-5; Isaiah 17:8.

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

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


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

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

217 See footnote on "metaphysics" in § 3.2.1.

218 Vermaak 2001:62. If these game boards were cult objects of Asherah, as suggested by Vermaak (2001:43-62), the religious implication would be that Asherah controlled fertility, and that the lives and livelihood of the ancient people were dependent on the outcome of this game, therefore relinquishing – in the case of the Israelites – dependence on Yahweh.
From a very early period the tradition of a sacred tree symbol formed part of most Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Depictions of this tree are found in Iran, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and some Mediterranean countries. In Palestine it appears on a variety of pottery vessels. The sacred tree, as a source of life, symbolises growth and revival. The evergreen oak and the terebinth seem to have been the principal sacred trees for the ancient Israelites. Both these trees are still common in the region that was known as Palestine. Epiphanies of Yahweh – or his messengers – repeatedly took place under trees; Yahweh appeared to Moses in a bush. The tactic of reducing oracle-giving trees – which was a place of manifestation of the divine – to just wood, was repeated time and again. From the eighth century BC trees were considered to be a danger to monotheism in general and particularly to Yahwism. According to Lipiński, the earliest biblical texts imply that asherah was a "woody spot" or a "Canaanite sacred grove" of considerable size. Exodus 34:13 commands that the "asheries" (plural) be cut down, thus designating the sacred groves of the Canaanites.

In her discussion of Isaiah 57:3-13 Susan Ackerman indicates that the predominant image in these verses is sexual. The citizens of Jerusalem as well as the city are pictured as a harlot. The people are involved in sexual intercourse under the trees. They are accused of lusting among the terebinths and 'under every green tree'. Many motifs used for the two themes – creation and garden of God – in the composition of Genesis 2-3, are common with examples

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

220 Hestrin 1991:54.

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

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

223 Exodus 3:1-5.


226 Keel 1998:54-56.

227 Lipiński 1972:112.


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


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

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

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

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232 הָוָה (Hawwah) or הָיָה (haya); see § 3.3.
233 Such as aspects of the serpent, the nakedness of the couple and the punishments of the man and woman (Wallace 1985:184).
235 Vriezen 2001:74-75.
236_twbc (standing stones) were also used for non-cultic purposes, for example as a treaty-stone (Gn 31:44-45), a tombstone (Gn 35:20) or a boundary-stone (Is 19:19) (Vriezen 2001:74).
237 Miller 1986:239.
238 Miller 1986:244.
239 Miller 1986:239-241, 244-246.
By the presentation of a court case, Edelman poses the question of 'proving Yahweh killed his wife'. She sketches the scenario of a suit filed in the heavenly court on behalf of Asherah's former earthly worshippers against Yahweh, the prime suspect in the murder of his wife Asherah. This exposition by Edelman is based on Zechariah 5:5-11. In a vision disclosed to Zechariah ben Iddo, Yahweh revealed his intention to kill Asherah – according to Edelman. The contents of a sealed hpa show a woman, identified as הַרְשָׁשִׁית, "Wickedness", simultaneously representing Yahweh's "wife" in "human form", as well as her cult statue. The lead cover of the metallic ephah confined this "divine being" indefinitely. 'The land of Shinar', in verse 11, could literally mean Babylonia or be a metaphor for the "exile". The vision could indicate that Asherah was "murdered" or permanently "confined to a coffin". It is on record – in commensuration with Edelman's interpretation – that Asherah used to be beside Yahweh in the Jerusalem Temple, and from graffiti and figurines it is known that the Judean people were quite attached to her prior to the Exile. There is, however, no attestation of her presence in the Persian-era Jerusalem Temple. Production of popular Judean pillar figurines terminated at the same time. Approximately five hundred years later Asherah is replaced by a human mother who gave birth to Yahweh's divine Son. This mother is virtually elevated to the position of Asherah, even reintroducing the practice of figurines in her worship. Edelman concludes that by 'using an alternative form of scholarship, issues concerning how meaning is determined when reading an ancient text, the development of monotheism with the resulting need to reinterpret older Yahwistic texts, and how to understand divine motivations are explored. ... The case remains unresolved, as do answers to the issues'.

3.2.3 Queen mother and the cult of Asherah

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

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

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


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

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

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

The most explicit link for a queen mother with any cultic activity is expressed in 1 Kings 15:13. King Asa removed his mother Maacah – the queen mother – as אשת, as 'she had

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246 Ackerman 1993:385-386.
247 1 Kings 2:19.
250 For example, 1 Kings 14:21; 15:2, 10.
251 Zeruah, mother of Jeroboam (1 Ki 11:26) and Jezebel (1 Ki 21:4-7).
252 Szikszai 1962:975.
253 Holladay 1971:54.
254 Ackerman 1993:388.
256 Olyan 1988:74.
257 See also 2 Chronicles 15:16.
made an abominable image for Asherah.'\(^{259}\) Ackerman\(^ {260}\) points out that scholars have suggested that the alien element of Asherah worship had been introduced by Maacah into the Judean cult. The only substantiation for this claim is Maacah’s presumed foreign ancestry. As indicated in paragraph 3.2.2, multiple texts\(^ {261}\) suggest that it was the norm in Judah during the ninth to seventh centuries BC to worship both Yahweh and Asherah in the Jerusalem Temple. In the same vein, the queen mother Jezebel – frequently accused of introducing the alien cult of Asherah into the religion of the Northern Kingdom – worshipped Asherah, as an element of the state cult,\(^ {262}\) in her capacity as הורנה.

Nehushta, queen mother of Jehoiachin,\(^ {263}\) may also have been a participant in the cult of Asherah. Her name is most probably derived from the root שׁנָא, "serpent".\(^ {264}\) Human names appropriated from the animal kingdom were common in the Semitic world. Nehushta probably carried an epithet of Asherah, whose association with serpents is well attested in many sources.\(^ {265}\) Maacah, Athalia and Nehushta from Judah, together with Jezebel from the Northern Kingdom, are four queen mothers identified in the Hebrew Bible as devotees of Asherah. Scholars have noted that queen mothers from the South figured more prominently in the royal court than those from the North.\(^ {266}\) To understand the role of the queen mother in the South, Ackerman\(^ {267}\) proposes that 'if the Judean royal ideology holds that Yahweh is the adopted father of the king,\(^ {268}\) then is it not possible that the adopted mother of the king is understood to be Asherah as seen by many "as the consort of Yahweh"? Yahuw is thus perceived as surrogate father of the king and Yahuw's female consort, Asherah, as surrogate mother. Should this be true, the implication is that the Judean queen mother was seen as the "earthly

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\(^{259}\) 1 Kings 15:13.
\(^{260}\) Ackerman 1993:390-392.
\(^{261}\) See footnotes on various relevant texts in § 3.2.2.
\(^{262}\) 1 Kings 16:33 reports that Ahab erected an asherah in Samaria, participating in Ba’al and Asherah worship.
\(^{263}\) 2 Kings 24:8. Jehoiachin reigned three months in Jerusalem (597 BC) (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:197). The city was besieged by king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Jehoiachin gave himself up to Nebuchadnezzar, together with his wives, mother, servants, officials and palace officials. He was taken prisoner and all the temple treasures were carried off to Babylon (2 Ki 24:10-15).
\(^{264}\) See § 3.3 on Eve.
\(^{265}\) See § 3.2.1 for Asherah’s identification with Qudšu, the serpent-bearing goddess. In Proto-Semitic texts, Asherah is called "the Lady of the serpent" (Ackerman 1993:397).
\(^{266}\) Ackerman 1993:396-399.
\(^{267}\) Ackerman 1993:400.
\(^{268}\) In the Egyptian culture the king of Egypt was regarded as a god as from the early Old Kingdom, as “the divine principle of rule upon earth”. He did not die, but continued to rule in the existence after his death. His confidence as god-king contributed to Egypt’s dominance in the early ancient world. The king was the god Horus, and later became the son of Re (see footnotes describing Re/Ra in § 2.5 and § 2.7) (Wilson 1962:59). Horus, the sky god, took on the form of a falcon whose right eye was the sun and left eye the moon (Willis 1993:44).
counterpart of Asherah" – the king's heavenly mother – and, therefore, depicted as patron of Asherah, consequently being the second most powerful person in the royal court.\footnote{269}

Lipiński\footnote{270} indicates that towards the end of the tenth century BC Maacah, the Judean queen mother, had made a מֶלֶךְ תָּמִיר – a phallic emblem or ithyphallic idol\footnote{271} – for the asherah of Jerusalem. This asherah was probably a pagan shrine. The מֶלֶךְ תָּמִיר should be connected to the root bli, "to protrude". In the Septuagint it is translated by "coition".\footnote{273}

3.2.4 Synopsis and conclusion: Asherah and synonymous female deities

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

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

\footnote{269} Ackerman 1993:400-401.
\footnote{270} Lipiński 1972:113.
\footnote{271} מֶלֶךְ תָּמִיר (transcribed as mipleṣet) is described in Holladay (1971:209) as a "disgraceful image". See 1 Kings 15:13; 2 Chronicles 15:16. King Manasseh of Jerusalem built an asherah that contained an idol or emblem (Lipiński 1972:113), a מֶלֶךְ תָּמִיר (transcribed as pāsîl) (2 Ki 17:41) (Holladay 1971:294). Manasseh transferred the מֶלֶךְ תָּמִיר with its shrine to the Jerusalem Temple of Yahweh (Lipiński 1972:113).
\footnote{272} An ithyphallic symbol refers to the phallus carried in Bacchus festivals, a metre used for Bacchic hymns, a poem in this metre or a licentious poem (Oxford University Press 1964a:463).
\footnote{273} Lipiński 1972:113.
\footnote{274} Kletter 2001:198.
\footnote{275} Korpel 2001:127.
probably brought to Mesopotamia by migrating Amorites. The el-Amarna Letters refer to the king of Amurru (Amorites) as Abdi-Aširta, "servant of Aširta" (Asherah).

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

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

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

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

276 Chthonic refers to the Netherworld, the place of the dead (Deist 1990:44, 169). See footnote in § 3.2.1.
277 See Geštinanna and relevant footnote in § 3.2.1.
Asherah – or Athirat – referred to as El’s consort in the Ugaritic texts, is also known as ‘Elat, "goddess". She is depicted in the texts as a kind of matriarch. A nurse of the twins Shahar and Shalem – progeny of El, born from two wives – is identified as Asherah-and-Rahmaya, the "Great Mother goddess". Suggestions that Rahmaya refers to Anat and Athirat have been disputed. Rhmy is probably another name for Athirat. The Ugaritic word ‘atrt and Hebrew cognate 'ašērā were originally common nouns meaning "wife", "consort", literally meaning "she-who-follows-in-the-footsteps" (of her husband).

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

Korpel\textsuperscript{279} is of the opinion that the Asherah mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic Asherah are identical. She was creatress and great mother next to her husband El. Asherah was familiar in ancient Israel as her name was linked to that of El, who was an Israelite God. She must have been acceptable to many Israelites who were in need for at least one goddess next to Yahweh-El. As El was presented as the mighty "Ba’al"\textsuperscript{280} the pair Asherah-Baal came into being as an alternative to a rigid concentration on one God'.\textsuperscript{281} Scholars have reached a reasonable agreement accepting that Asherah in the Masoretic Text refers to both an independent goddess and her wooden cult symbol. Taking into consideration the dominant position she has in the Hebrew Bible, as well as explicit references to her and Yahweh,\textsuperscript{282} she is the only likely candidate in the syncretistic religious practices of Iron Age Judah and the Northern Kingdom. Korpel\textsuperscript{283} indicates that, particularly within family religion, 'Asherah kept her own, characteristic position, next to YHWH-El. Up till now there is no evidence that she played an important role in the official cult'.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{279} Korpel 2001:149.
\textsuperscript{280} Ba’al meaning "lord".
\textsuperscript{281} Korpel 2001:150.
\textsuperscript{282} Inscriptions at Kuntillet’Ajrud and Khirbet ’el-Qom. See discussions in § 4.3.9 and § 4.3.10.
\textsuperscript{283} Korpel 2001:146.
\end{flushright}
Research on, and discussion of similar deities with cognate names – particularly with reference to Athirat/Asherah – active in various pantheons spread widely over the Ancient Near East, substantiates my theory on pre-Israelite Ya-religions. Research on the emergence of Athirat/Asherah in all the main pantheons of the Ancient Near East, clearly indicates that there was interchangeability among the various nations and an acceptance of foreign deities and rituals. Therefore, Ya-related names – attested from extra-biblical sources\textsuperscript{284} and discovered over a large region in the Ancient Near East – to my mind, indicate the possibility of a type of Ya-religion practised by different peoples in the pre-Israelite period. In addition thereto, the position should be ascertained of marginal groups maintaining a monotheistic Yahwism, in contrast to a syncretism practised by the Israelites. Therefore it is essential to take cognisance of the role of Ancient Near Eastern deities – particularly Asherah and Ba’al – in these syncretistic customs, with due consideration of information from extra-biblical sources, the Masoretic Text and archaeological finds. In conclusion, I wish to affirm Miller's\textsuperscript{285} words that 'the question of the place of the goddess in the history of Yahweh will probably always remain an elusive one.' Similarly, the influence of Asherah and the Canaanite religion on the compilation of the Masoretic Text should not be overlooked.

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

3.3 Relevant female deities

Cornelius\textsuperscript{286} indicates that with the literally thousands of iconographic representations of women from the Ancient Near East, scholars have to ascertain which of these figures are goddesses. Thereafter, the goddess's name and function in society and religion have to be established. She can be identified by, inter alia, her wings, a horned\textsuperscript{287} or Egyptian-type\textsuperscript{288} crown, particular gestures and what she is holding in her hands.\textsuperscript{289}

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

\textsuperscript{284} See discussion in § 4.3.
\textsuperscript{285} Miller 1986:247.
\textsuperscript{286} Cornelius 2004:4-5.
\textsuperscript{287} See footnotes on "horns" in § 2.3 and § 2.14.3.
\textsuperscript{288} See footnotes on Hathor in § 2.13, subtitle "Taanach", and § 2.14.1.
\textsuperscript{289} See description in § 3.2.1 and § 3.3 of Qedeshet/Qudšu holding snakes or flowers.
\textsuperscript{290} Haag et al 1994:19.
goddess lies behind Eve. A Sumerian cuneiform sign \textit{TI} signifies both the words "life" and "rib", referring to a female named \textit{NIN.TI}, which could be interpreted as "Lady of Life" or "Lady of the Rib". The Sumerian \textit{NIN.TI} is structurally similar to the aetiology\textsuperscript{292} for the designation \textit{环卫}, that is, Eve, which is connected to the word \textit{々} or \textit{々々}, meaning life, to live.\textsuperscript{293} This association could have led to the legend that Eve had been moulded from the rib of the first man, Adam.\textsuperscript{294} The Sumerian myth furthermore recounts that \textit{Ninhursag} created \textit{NIN.TI} when \textit{Enki}\textsuperscript{296} had a pain in his rib.\textsuperscript{297} According to tradition, a significant link exists between a name and its function, therefore suggesting that the name \textit{环卫} is etymologically\textsuperscript{298} related to \textit{々}.\textsuperscript{299} Eve – known as \textit{Hawwah} \textit{环卫} – was recognised in Phoenicia, Mesopotamia and Sumer as mother, guardian and goddess. As Phoenician goddess of the Underworld she was invoked in inscriptions and possibly identified with \textit{Ishtar}.\textsuperscript{300} In the Persian mythology \textit{Meshian\i{}} was celebrated as the first woman and creator of life.\textsuperscript{301} On a votive stela from the Carthaginian necropolis\textsuperscript{302} a goddess \textit{Hw\i{}} is invoked, "Great Lady, \textit{Havvat}, Goddess, Queen (?)" \textit{(rht hwt 'lt mkt ...).} \textit{Hw\i{}} could be related to the Hurrian \textit{Hebat}, the consort of the Hurrian storm god \textit{Teshub}\textsuperscript{303} [or \textit{Tsehub}].\textsuperscript{304} \textit{Hebat} or \textit{Heba} is also indicated as a variant of \textit{Ishtar}. Hittite myths, likewise, link her to the storm god \textit{Teshub} as his consort. Hittite god-lists moreover name her "queen of heaven,\textsuperscript{305} \textit{Hebat} of Halba, \textit{Hebat} of Uda, \textit{Hebat} of Kizzuwatna". In Hittite prayers she is addressed as "Sun goddess of Arinna". Although there is no evidence that the biblical \textit{Hawwah}, Eve, has been derived from the divine \textit{Hebat}, such a possibility should not be precluded.\textsuperscript{306} The Old Babylonian \textit{Atra-Has\i{s}}\textsuperscript{307} epic seems to give a

\textsuperscript{291} Wyatt 1999c:316.
\textsuperscript{292} Aetiology (or Etiology) is an explanation offered on origins, therefore explaining an incomprehensible phenomenon by means of a quasi-historical answer (Deist 1990:87).
\textsuperscript{293} Genesis 3:20, 'The man called his wife's name Eve [々々], because she was the mother of all living [々]; 々々, transcribed as \textit{Hawwah}, 々 or 々々, transcribed as \textit{haya}.
\textsuperscript{294} Gaster 1969:21. Genesis 2:21-22, 'So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man'.
\textsuperscript{295} See footnote in § 2.4 on \textit{Ninhursag}.
\textsuperscript{296} See footnote in § 2.3 on \textit{Enki}.
\textsuperscript{297} Fishbane 1987b:199.
\textsuperscript{298} Etymology is 'the scholarly study of the historical development of the meanings of words and phrases' (Deist 1990:88).
\textsuperscript{299} Wyatt 1999c:316.
\textsuperscript{300} See § 3.4 and footnote on \textit{Ishtar} in § 2.4.
\textsuperscript{301} Ann & Imel 1993:326, 329, 338.
\textsuperscript{302} Necropolis or cemetery; Carthage: see § 3.2.1, footnote on "Punic".
\textsuperscript{303} See § 3.5 on storm gods.
\textsuperscript{304} Wyatt 1999c:317.
\textsuperscript{305} See § 3.4.
\textsuperscript{306} Patai 1992:160-161.
\textsuperscript{307} \textit{Atra-Has\i{s}} appears as wise man and hero in the Old Babylonian Flood Myth. The Sumerian god \textit{Enlil} – who symbolised the forces of nature (see footnote in § 2.5) – became intolerant of the clamour of the human beings, which kept him awake. After several warnings \textit{Enlil} sent a massive flood. \textit{Enki} (see footnote in § 2.3) advised \textit{Atra-Has\i{s}} beforehand to build a boat to save himself and his family. In some versions of the myth \textit{Atra-Has\i{s}
thematic, as well as literal parallel to the Genesis title הַרְאָה who is אָמָם כָּלְּ בָּרִי "mother of all the living" – which is similar to "bēlet-kala-ilī", "mistress of all the gods", a title bestowed on the creator goddess Mami. There is thus the possibility that the hidden figure of the mother goddess Mami lies behind the character of Eve. In such an instance the Masoretic Text demythologised the function of the goddess Mami without doing away with all her attributes, but ascribed it to the first woman and human mother. Eve is thus not only created, but also creator. A transparent added image is superimposed upon her.

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

is called Ziusodra. The world was submerged in a massive flood by rains lashing down seven days and nights. Atra-Hāsîs, his family and animals on the boat were saved. Utnapishtim is the name of the hero in the version of the flood myth related in the Gilgamesh Epic (Storm 2001:32). The title, הַרְאָה כָּלְּ בָּרִי, transcribed as 'ēm kol-ḥay'. Genesis 3:20.

308 The generic word for a venomous snake in the Masoretic Text is שלחן. Cognate Semitic names are the Ugaritic ṣḥṣ (serpent) and Arabian ḥamāš (serpent). The word שלחן appears thirty-one times in the Masoretic Text (Hendel 1999:744). The plural form שלחנת in Amos 9:3 refers to a sea-serpent, crocodile or dragon [Leviathan]. The bronze serpent idol referred to in 2 Kings 18:4 was שלחן (Holladay 1971:235). 310 Hendel 1999:746-747. Cornelius (1997a:221, 222-225, 229) points out that artists are more than just illustrators, as they also function as interpreters. Therefore it is interesting to note the way the serpent of Genesis 3 was understood and subsequently represented visually. The question that had to be addressed was whether it was a real serpent that could talk and walk upright. By their elucidation, visual artists not only illustrate, but also comment on and interpret the text. In some representations a winged female serpent (fifteenth century), a serpent with the head of a woman (twelfth century) or a serpent with the body of a woman is depicted. This could be an exposition of the serpent as Eve. Sjöberg (1984:222-223) is of the opinion that שלחן in Genesis 3 was clearly an animal that originally had four legs. The general meaning of שלחן is a reptile and therefore it may have been a chameleon that seduced Eve.
narrative wherein only God, man and a serpent deity are involved. The similarity was seen as that of Eve being a serpent goddess. According to rabbinical literature, Rabbi Aha states that *ḥāwā' – related to *ḥewyā' – is a justification for Eve’s name. Bury and others mention that the declaration of the man (Adam) that Eve is "the mother of all living" proves that she was a serpent ancestress. The rabbis also indicated that poison or dirt, which was carried through to her descendants, had been injected into Eve by the serpent.

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

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320 Boyarin 1993:88-89. Rabbi Haninah comments in addition that ‘when the woman was created, the Satan was created with her’ (Boyarin 1993:89). The creation narrative is discussed in the rabbinical Genesis Rabbah. See also footnote in § 3.2.1, incorporating an explanation of the Babylonian Talmudic sedarim. Neusner (1985:xii-xiii) indicates that ‘Genesis Rabbah presents the first complete and systematic Judaic commentary to the book of Genesis’. It is a composite document compiled ca AD 400. According to Rabbi Joshua ben Qarhah the serpent conceived a passion for Eve. It seems the rabbis studied the material in an attempt to answer some baffling questions concerning a fixed tradition.
322 Genesis 3:20.
323 Montefiore & Loewe 1938:306. The dirt injected by the serpent was removed from the Israelites by the acceptance of the Law.
324 Serpent symbolism was more diverse in Egyptian and Mesopotamian, than in Canaanite and Phoenician mythology and iconography (Hendel 1999:744-745). The serpent is associated with the Greek god of healing Asclepios, and is preserved in the physician’s caduceus which shows the serpent entwined around the staff of the Greek god Hermes (Landman 1939:484). The serpent is commonly associated with magic and incantations – particularly the cure or avoidance of snakebites. Symbolic connections, apart from healing, protection and regeneration, include sexuality. The meanings are, however, unclear (Hendel 1999:744-745).
325 In Egyptian mythology the serpent appears as an adversary or a protector, signifying life and regeneration or death and non-existence. The venomous *Uraeus serpent [cobra] protected Egyptian kings and gods (Hendel 1999:744-745).
326 Ackerman 1993:397-398.
327 Cornelius 2004:45-47. See also § 3.2.1 for a description of Qedeshet (Qudšu).
328 *נהרניס, transcribed as seraphim. Isaiah 6:2-3.
329 Mettinger 1999a:742-743. In the Masoretic Text the word *נהרניס appears three times in the Pentateuch and four times in Isaiah. Etymologically it refers to “the one who burns”. Iconographic evidence indicates that the
The Ancient Near Eastern people regarded the serpent as the embodiment of wisdom and, therefore, uncovering the way to knowledge. The wisdom element surrounding the serpent may also serve as a parody on the wisdom schools, showing the dire consequences of their over-reliance on wisdom and failure to observe the direct ordinances of Yahweh.\textsuperscript{330} Deist\textsuperscript{331} is of the opinion that the serpent could be allegorically interpreted as human wisdom in the event of Genesis 2 and 3 originating during the reign of David and Solomon.

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{330} Kruger 2001b:230.
\textsuperscript{331} Deist 1986:86.
\textsuperscript{332} Ancient Jewish legends developed around the mythical and mystical figure of \textit{Lilith}, probably to resolve the inconsistency of two different creation narratives in Genesis. According to the rabbis, \textit{Lilith} was created as Adam’s first wife – in accordance with the first creation narrative in Genesis 1:27. When \textit{Lilith} left Adam, Eve was created – in concurrence with the second creation narrative in Genesis 2:22-23. For a detailed description of the figure of \textit{Lilith}, see Mondriaan (2005:752-762).
\textsuperscript{333} Storm 2001:50.
\textsuperscript{334} Gaster 1969:579.
\textsuperscript{335} Day (2000:136-141) mentions that there are dubious allusions to \textit{Anat} in the Hebrew Bible. Scholars have suggested that the sound of shouting/singing – ’\textit{annôt} – in Exodus 32:18 refers to the goddess \textit{Anat}. However, this is speculation without supporting evidence. Scholars likewise argue that ‘the description of Deborah in Judges 5 has been influenced by imagery associated with the goddess \textit{Anat} found in the Ugaritic texts’; in this instance five parallels are indicated, inter alia, that, like \textit{Anat}, Deborah was a leader of warriors (Day 2000:137). A number of scholars maintain that the expression, ‘I look upon a virgin’, in Job 31:1 is an allusion to the ”virgin \textit{Anat}”. Day (2000:140) is not convinced that the woman in the ”Song of Songs” – as has been claimed – is the goddess \textit{Anat}. See footnote in § 3.2.1 on Rahmy, a possible reference to the virgin \textit{Anat}.
\textsuperscript{336} Day (2000:132-136) is of the opinion that possible references to \textit{Anat} mainly occur in place names, such as Beth-anath (Jos 19:38; Jdg 1:33); Beth-anoth (Jos 15:59); Anathoth (Jos 21:18; 1 Ki 2:26; Is 10:30; Jr 1:1; 11:21, 23; 32:7, 8, 9). The name Shamgar ben \textit{Anat} appears twice in the book of Judges (Jdg 3:31; 5:6). According to 1 Samuel 31:10 Saul’s armour was taken to the temple of \textit{Ashtaroth} at Beth-shan after his death. There is the possibility that the temple in question was that of \textit{Anat} which has since been discovered at Beth-shan.
the Ugaritic texts that she has ever been a reproductive deity. Handy indicates that narratives allegedly signifying Anat's fertility role are so damaged that scholars are inconclusive about this function. Some Ugaritic texts describe Anat and Ba'al copulating, announcing the birth of bovine children, yet, she is also depicted as his virgin sister and his consort. The Egyptians – with their well-structured hierarchy of gods – apparently found the coexistence of three goddesses, Asherah – consort of El – together with Anat and Astarte, both sisters and wives of Ba'al, very confusing. Of all the deities represented in narratives concerned with Ba'al, Anat appears as the most active and physically powerful. Day mentions that mythological texts portray Anat as a volatile and independent warrior and hunter; she was active in male spheres of combat and hunting. In a well-known Ugaritic text her bloodthirsty nature is explicitly exhibited. Phoenician inscriptions found in Cyprus mention Anat on a spearhead, thus attesting to her martial associations. Anat's vengeance on her enemies has been compared by scholars to Yahweh's action on a number of occasions, as described in the Hebrew Bible. Cassuto notes that notwithstanding her shocking cruelty towards her enemies, she was regarded as goddess of life and fertility. The epithet, "mother of nations" is applied to Anat in some Ugaritic writings. This designation may be an allusion to the perception of fertility. 'Her beauty and grace were deemed the acme of perfection.' During the Hellenistic Period she was identified with the Greek warrior and virgin goddess Athena.

337 Day 1999:36-37. 
342 See footnote in § 3.2.1 on the "legend of Aqhat" and the symbol of Ugaritic masculinity. 
343 KTU 1.3 ii:3-30 (Day 1999:37). According to this passage in the Ugaritic Ba'al myth, Anat 'wreaks havoc on her enemies', being up to her knees in their blood (Day 2000:141). Stern (1994:120-124) indicates that there are striking points of contact between the "bloodbath" text and Psalm 23. The following are mentioned: the deity, Anat, arranges tables for her soldiers, while the enemy soldiers are in the house (Ps 23:5 'You [the deity Yahweh] prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies'); some of Anat's slaughter takes place in a valley (Ps 23:4 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil'); Anat pours "oil of peace" (Ps 23:5b 'you anoint my head with oil'); much of the "bloodbath" action takes place in Anat's house where the gates are closed but open later to receive her favoured warriors, soldiers and heroes (Ps 23:6b 'and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD'). Psalm 23 clearly has a mythic background, the Anat text being 'a source of poetic inspiration for a Hebrew poet' … but, in this instance 'the "bloody imagery of Yahweh" has receded into the background' (Stern 1994:123-124). 
347 Cassuto 1971:65. Athena was a protector during war and charitable in time of peace. She was responsible for the arts, literature and practical arts. Athena was identified with Anātīs (see discussion in this paragraph on Anahīta) and with Minerva, the Roman and Etruscan war goddess (Ann & Imel 1993:154, 195).
Inscriptions of Ramesses II\(^{348}\) provide Egyptian evidence for Anat, called the "Mistress or Lady of Heaven". Ramesses claimed her support in battle in his right to universal rule. He furthermore professes a mother-son relationship with her.\(^{349}\) A deity Anat-Yahu is mentioned in fifth century BC Aramaic Elephantine texts.\(^{350}\) The Hyksos\(^{351}\) were probably instrumental in the cult of Anat reaching Egypt. Anat was regarded as one of the greatest goddesses in Egypt during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties.\(^{352}\) Yahu (Yahweh) was the prime deity worshipped by the Jews of Elephantine. Anat-Yahu, literally meaning Anat of Yahu, seems to indicate that Anat was seen as Yahweh's consort. Despite opposing arguments, reasonably conclusive evidence indicates that Anat was Ba' al's consort. Thus, if Yahweh could be equated with Ba' al, it would be natural to surmise Anat being Yahweh's consort. These Elephantine Jews also worshipped Anat-Bethel, Ḥerem-Bethel and Eshem-Bethel. In a treaty, ca 675 BC, between Esar-haddon of Assyria and Baal, king of Tyre, a deity Anat-Bethel is attested. In the light of Anat-Bethel being the name of a deity, the same could be said of Anat-Yahu, and therefore it seems 'indubitable that the goddess Anat, in the form of Anat-Yahu, did function as Yahweh's wife amongst the Jews at Elephantine in the fifth century BCE'.\(^{353}\)

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

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\(^{349}\) Day 1999:40.

\(^{350}\) See discussion on Anat-Yahu in § 4.3.13. See § 2.14.5 for a discussion on the Jews at Elephantine.

\(^{351}\) For an explanation of the Hyksos Period, see footnote on seraphim, § 3.3.


\(^{353}\) Day 2000:142-144.

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

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

\(^{356}\) Guirand 1996:311.

\(^{357}\) Ann & Imel 1993:317.

\(^{358}\) Known as Ahura-Mazda[h], or alternatively as Ormazd. Ahura was the highest divine entity in Zarathustra's teachings in ancient Persia. As creator of the sky, earth and men, he was, according to ancient inscriptions, the greatest of the gods. The evil spirit Ahriman was his opponent (Dresden 1962a:72). Zarathustra (Zarathushtra) was the prophet in ancient Iran and founder of the Zoroastrian religion in the sixth century BC (Dresden
of ancient Persia. Apart from being *Ahura*’s daughter, she was also his consort.\(^{359}\) *Ahurani* was beneficial for healing and prosperity.\(^{360}\)

### 3.4 Queen of Heaven

*A goddess called *Queen of Heaven* appears briefly in Jeremiah 7:17-18, and then again in Jeremiah 44:15-24.\(^{361}\) Jeremiah attributes the catastrophe of the Exile to the veneration of the *Queen of Heaven*,\(^{362}\) while the women of Jerusalem and Judah ascribe the disaster to their lack of offerings to the *Queen of Heaven*.\(^{363}\)

Currently the most popular view regarding the identity of the *Queen of Heaven* is that the designation refers to *Astarte*. Apart from being called "Lady of Heaven" – along with *Anat, Ishtar* and *Qudšu/Asherah* – *Astarte* is the Canaanite goddess 'most frequently associated with the heavens'.\(^{364}\) The name of the deity *Astarte* is found in Ugaritic as ’ttrt (*Athtart*), in Phoenician as ’šttrt (*Ashtart*) and in Hebrew ’Aštōret (singular) or ’Aštārôt (plural). The masculine form ’Athtar, *Ashtar*, is probably the name of the planet Venus, and of the Akkadian goddess *Ishtar*. The male deity is thus the morning star while, as in the Greek tradition, the goddess is the evening star.\(^{365}\) *Ashtart* is often mentioned in the Ugaritic texts, but only rarely in the mythological texts.\(^{366}\) In the Hebrew Bible she is referred to as *Ashtaroth* of the Philistines and *Ashtoreth* of the Phoenician Sidonians.\(^{367}\) The plural form *Ashtaroth* in 1 Samuel 31:10 could be interpreted as the singular *Ashtoreth*; the intensive plural is occasionally used in the Hebrew Bible for divinities or divine-like phenomena.\(^{368}\) The altered plural form *Ashtaroth*
could also be a deliberate scribal distortion of Astarte.\textsuperscript{369} Ashtoreth – who was actually Astarte – was known in Canaan as the "Great Goddess", and as the Ancient Near Eastern "Queen of Heaven".\textsuperscript{370} She was known to the Assyrians and Babylonians as Ashtar, goddess of fertility and love.\textsuperscript{371} Astarte, as chief Phoenician goddess at Tyre and Sidon, was taken along to new colonies established by the Phoenicians.\textsuperscript{372} Astarte’s influence and prominence were not confined to the Mesopotamian and Palestinian cults, but may have reached as far as Edom. Although the deities to whom the Edomites dedicated their votive plaques and figurines are not easy to identify, some may represent the goddess Astarte, who was probably known in Edom along with the Canaanite deities Ba’al/Hadad and El.\textsuperscript{373} One of the four temples in the Egyptian city Per-Ramesses\textsuperscript{374} was that of Astarte, placed to the east – a direction appropriate for a Semitic goddess.\textsuperscript{375}

Sumerian Inanna\textsuperscript{376} and Akkadian Ishtar were the major Mesopotamian goddesses of love, war and the planet Venus. The Semitic name Ishtar was pronounced Eshtar in earlier times. Ishtar is derived from the masculine ‘attar,\textsuperscript{377} and attested as the Canaanite feminine Astarte. As patroness of independent women and prostitutes she was also the spouse and lover of the king with whom she participated in the ritual of sacred marriage.\textsuperscript{378} Ishtar was probably called Išhara during the marriage rites. \textsuperscript{d}Išhara,\textsuperscript{379} one of the names of Ishtar/Inanna, is also written Aššara or Eššara. Her astrological constellation was the scorpion.\textsuperscript{380} She was often portrayed with horns\textsuperscript{381} of the crescent moon – believed to govern growth and rebirth\textsuperscript{382} – and

\textsuperscript{369} Hadley 1997:172.
\textsuperscript{370} Astarte was also known as Innin, Inanna, Nana, Nut, Anat, Anahita, Ishtar, Isis, Au Set, Ishara, Asherah, Astarte, Attoret, Attar and Hathor. Each name of this multi-named "Divine Ancestress", denoted – in the various languages and dialects – veneration for her as "Great Goddess" (Stone 1979:124).
\textsuperscript{371} Negev & Gibson 2001:61.
\textsuperscript{372} Astarte had a temple in Memphis, Egypt, and temples at Carthage. An alabaster statuette of her had been found in Spain (Cavendish 1985:168).
\textsuperscript{373} Bartlett 1989:194.
\textsuperscript{374} The famous city Per-Ramesses, capital of Ramesses II [1279-1212 BC], was applauded on a stela in the great temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel, as well as in poetical compositions preserved on papyri. Papyrus Anastasi II refers to the temple of Astarte (Finegan 1998:236). In Papyrus Anastasi III the city Pi-Ramessu – House of Ramesses – is praised, inter alia, as follows: ‘I have found it well very, very excellently. It is a perfect estate, without equal, with the layout of Thebes. Re himself is the one who founded it’ (Hallo & Younger 2002:15).
\textsuperscript{375} Finegan 1998:236.
\textsuperscript{376} Inanna was the daughter of the moon god Nanna/Sin and his wife Ningal. Inanna was the sister of the solar deity Utu/Shamash. She was depicted as the wife of various fertility gods, as well as the wife of An, the sky god (Abusch 1999:452). See also footnotes on Inanna and Eštar in § 2.3; see footnotes on Shamash in § 2.4 and § 2.14.6 and the discussion in § 3.6.
\textsuperscript{377} ‘Attar was a masculine deity from southern Arabia and Ugarit (Abusch 1999:452).
\textsuperscript{378} Abusch 1999:452-453.
\textsuperscript{379} ḫara or dingir ḫara: see footnote on dingir\textsuperscript{d} – an Akkadian determinative sign – in § 3.2.1.
\textsuperscript{380} Becking 1999c:450.
\textsuperscript{381} See footnotes in § 2.3 and § 2.14.3 for the function of horns.
\textsuperscript{382} Cavendish 1985:170.
as a naked woman with long hair, holding her breasts. Some scholars interpret the rain goddess – identified by her complete nudity – as being Ishtar. Akkadian cylinder seals portray the storm god and his consort, the rain goddess – bringer of rain. Both are mounted on a lion-griffin, the storm god preceded by a naked goddess. Van Loon indicates that the Syrian Ishtar – or Astarte – is normally depicted in partial nudity. Clay figurines of Ishtar/Inanna/Astarte from the Mesopotamian area portray her in a characteristic breast-offering pose, known among archaeologists as the "Ishtar pose". This pose suggests her function of nourishment. As described in Jeremiah 44, Judeans were reluctant to abandon her – probably considering the fertility feature. Ishtar was known as "Goddess of Love", "Mother goddess with bountiful breasts" and "Goddess of War".

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

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384 Dated ca 2275-2150 BC.
385 Van Loon 1990:364. Griffin (also known as griffon or grivphon): 'a creature with a lion's body and an eagle's wings and head' (Wehmeier 2005:655). See § 2.13, subtitle “Bull figurines”, as well as the relevant footnote on the "naked rain goddess" in the same paragraph.
386 Van Loon 1990:363.
389 See discussion and footnote in § 3.2.1 on Shahar and Shalem and Margalith's (1994:110) identification of the names as referring to Dawn and Dusk. Dahood (1958:88), however, does not identify the Morning Star and Evening Star with Shahar and Shalem.
390 See footnote in § 3.2.1 for an explanation of "androgynous" and "hermaphrodite".
392 KTU 1.2.III.1-24 and KTU 1.6.1.43-67 (Heiser 2001:355).
393 Isaiah 14:12a.
394 See § 3.2.1 on Shahar and Shalem.
396 Heiser 2001:356.
of the dawn before the actual appearance of the sun over the horizon, Venus could be understood as being brought forth by the dawn (Šāhar) in astronomical, not genealogical terms. The author of Isaiah 14:12 obviously refers to Venus – the morning star – by its epithet "Shining One", and therefore "Dawn" is not personified in Isaiah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

401 See § 3.6 on astral deities.

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

403 Deuteronomy 22:5 forbids a woman to dress like a man, and vice versa; it could be linked to the idea of Shaushka changing peoples’ sexuality (Hutter 1999b:759).
unknown in ancient Israel as she was linked to the Queen of Heaven. Archaeological material indicates that she was familiar within the biblical environment.404

Symbols and figures on seals may serve as criteria for chronology. Assyrian iconography on seals, found in Israel and dated between the eighth and seventh centuries BC, exhibits a goddess – identified as Ishtar – within a circle. Depictions of Ishtar on first millennium monumental works are uncommon. Mesopotamian literature refers to her with various designations, mostly relating to her different cult centres. These epithets represent her diverse characters – each portrayal with its own peculiarities. ‘Anthropomorphic405 representations of Ištar found in Israel depict her only within a circle.’406 She is identified by stars – regarded as her symbols – as well as light radiating from her, often standing on a lion. Iconographic representations of Ishtar frequently show her together with women – thus corroborating the role she played in the cult particularly carried out by women.407 In conclusion, Ornan408 indicates that Assyrian iconography substantiates the prominent role Ishtar played in both Israel and Judah. She and Astarte are the most plausible candidates for identification with the Queen of Heaven. Pinnock409 mentions that small jars – dated between 1800 and 1650 BC – have been excavated at Syrian Ebla. These jars were decorated with unusual superimposed bird heads and naked female figurines with grotesque faces.410 The jars are not very refined and ‘probably the expression of a popular, rather than official religious activity, related to the cult of Ištar, the great patron deity of Old Syrian Ebla’.411

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

404 Hutter 1999b:758-759.
405 Anthropomorphic: see relevant footnote in § 1.2.
406 Ornan 2001a:239.
408 Ornan 2001a:251.
410 For a further description, see § 2.3.
413 During the reign of Hoshea in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (730/29-722/21 BC), Samaria was besieged and captured by the Assyrians. This put an end to the state of Israel. A number of Israelites were deported and replaced by inhabitants from Babylon, Hamath, Cuthah and a few other cities. A syncretistic-type of Yahweh-worship ensued (Jagersma 1994:159-160). See description in 2 Kings 17:24-33.
Heaven in Judah has to be identified with the Canaanite Ashtoreth, also known as Astarte. Her veneration by the Judeans included burning incense to her, pouring out libations to her and preparing cakes for her—latter activity being the strongest evidence that her cult was of Mesopotamian origin. However, this is not an indication that the practices in Judah were established in their original Mesopotamian form. Elements from the Mesopotamian religion became intermingled with the syncretistic Palestinian cults. Nevertheless, although the title "Queen of Heaven" in the Hebrew Bible could refer to the Palestinian Astarte, it is unlikely that associations with Ishtar would have been absent. The offering of cakes or loaves was an important feature in the devotion to many different deities, particularly to the Mesopotamian Ishtar, who had 'a special relation to the planting and harvesting of cereal crops in Mesopotamia'.

According to Rast, there are two possibilities regarding the cakes prepared for the goddess. In Judah the cult was particularly associated with women, but could have involved entire families.

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

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

415 Scholars are obviously not clear on the identification of the Queen of Heaven. On the one hand, they accept Canaanite Astarte to be the likely candidate, yet, at the same time, indicating that "preparing cakes for the Queen of Heaven" is evidence for her Mesopotamian origin—and therefore recognise her as Ishtar. During the Hellenistic and Roman periods she was identified with Venus-Aphrodite (Negev & Gibson 2001:61). Venus, goddess of love and beauty, was associated with the Greek fertility goddess Aphrodite (Van Reeth 1994:10, 261).
417 Rast 1977:171-172. The dough could have been formed by hand in the shape of a goddess (figurine) or in a symbol representing her, such as a star or crescent. The second possibility is the employing of a mould in a particular shape. A mould, portraying a nude female, was excavated at Mari. For more information on the 'dough that was knead' and the 'cakes that were baked', see Rast (1977:167-176).
418 The loyalty of the women to this cult (Jr 44:17-19) 'raises questions about the marginal status of women in the Yahwistic cultus affirmed in the Law and Prophets of the Hebrew Bible' (Schmitz 1992:587).
419 Ackerman 1992:8-10, 16.
420 For a discussion of the possibility to identify Anat as the Queen of Heaven, and reasons for rejecting such an identification, see Ackerman (1992:13-20).
421 Ackerman 1992:34.
422 For a detailed discussion of the various relevant texts, see Müller (2001:429–432).
the asherah-pole became totally obscured in the time of the Deuteronomist and Chronicler, Astarte was de-deified in the biblical text. She is identified as a foreign deity in the Deuteronomistic History. The Chronicler either did not know of the existence of Astarte in Israel, or felt she was irrelevant for the history of Israel and Judah. It is significant that Astarte shifted from a well-known and widely-worshipped deity in Palestine to a Hebrew fertility idiom423 and eventually 'total silence on the part of the latest biblical writers'.424 Astarte and Ba’al are sometimes paired in the biblical text, usually in a negative, polemical sense. The term "Ba’al and Astarte" is a symbolism of polytheism in general, rather than referring to the deities in particular.425

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

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

3.5 Storm gods and warrior gods

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

423 An idiom in Deuteronomy (Dt 7:13; 28:4, 18, 51) refers to the fertility of the flock. The flock's productiveness is called "ashteroi (astartes)" (Fulco 1987a:471). In the present form of the texts all indications of earlier deities seem to have been lost. In the case of disobedience, Yahweh will make the fruit of the livestock and the ground the spoil of the Neo-Babylonians (Müller 2001:432).
426 Ackerman 1992:34-35.
428 De Villiers 2002:622.
Since the second millennium BC the storm was conferred on a particular divinity in the Assyro-Babylonian mythology. This divinity, Adad – god of lightning and the tempest – let loose the storms and the winds. At the same time, he brought the beneficent wind with its abundant rains. He also had the prerogative to reveal the future. His associate in these various functions was the goddess Shala.\(^{429}\) In the Assyrian version of the Flood Myth in the *Gilgamesh Epic*,\(^{430}\) Adad is the one who brought about the storm and rains. Adad and the solar deity Shamash\(^{431}\) were often linked as guardians of the heavens. They were the two gods invoked by divination\(^{432}\) priests, and, together with Marduk\(^{433}\) – god of Babylon – were considered the triad of divine judges.\(^{434}\) Adad was related to Dagan\(^{435}\) with whom he shared his consort Shala. Scholars have suggested that Adad and Dagan were originally one god, and that Adad, "thunder", was the initial title of Dagan.\(^{436}\) Ba’al as ‘a-da is attested in second millennium BC Ebla texts and in the ca 1800 BC Egyptian Execration Texts.\(^{437}\)

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

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

\(^{430}\) See footnote in § 3.3 on Atra-šaši, and discussion in § 3.9 on the *Gilgamesh Epic*.

\(^{431}\) See relevant footnote in § 2.4 on Shamash, and discussion in § 3.6.

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

\(^{433}\) See relevant footnotes on Marduk in § 2.14.6 and in § 3.1.

\(^{434}\) Adad functioned as a ‘god of oracles and judgement’ (Greenfield 1999:378).

\(^{435}\) See relevant footnote on Dagan in § 2.3.


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

\(^{440}\) Maier 1992b:11. Zeus was the supreme deity on Olympus in Greece (Willis 1993:132).
The logogram $d^IM$ for the Sumerian god *Ishkur* was applied when writing the name *Adad* and versions thereof, such as *Haddu/Ba’lu*, Hurrian *Teshup* and Hittite *Tarhunza*. The name *Hadda* – written $d^à-da$ – appears in Eblaite god-lists and is also known as a theophoric element in personal names. In the course of the Mesopotamian history, during the Old Babylonian Period, the names of $d^à-da$ and the solar goddess $d^UTU$ appear together as guarantors in treaties. *Adad/Hadad* of Aleppo was later assimilated into the Mesopotamian pantheon and appeared with the *sibitti* – the *Pleiades* – among witnesses to treaties. The main sanctuary of *Haddad* was in Aleppo. Neither the Akkadian texts, nor later Aramaic inscriptions, afford an advanced mythology of *Hadad*. Ugaritic mythological and epic texts provide information on his role in the West Semitic pantheon.

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

441 See footnote on Akkadian determinative in § 3.2.1.
442 See § 2.3 on Ebila.
443 See theophoric name in footnote on "hypocoristicon" in § 2.3.
444 *Pleiades*: in Greek mythology the seven daughters of *Atlas* turned into a constellation on their deaths. The Pleiades is a conspicuous constellation or cluster of stars in Taurus (Oxford University Press 1964b:677). *Atlas* was one of the Greek legendary titans [a large person with great strength] who were punished for rebelling against the Greek god *Zeus*; as punishment he had to support the heavens with his head and hands (Oxford University Press 1964a:64). Taurus is the bull constellation of the zodiac, including the Pleiades and Hyades (Oxford University Press 1964b:904).
446 Greenfield 1999:379. The headdress is a conical crown with two horns projecting from the front (Fulco 1987c:32). Three pairs of third millennium BC bronze figurines were excavated in the Plain of Antioch. The male figures carry maces and spears – weapons appropriate for gods of lightning and thunder (Van Loon 1990:364). See footnotes in § 2.3, § 2.14.1 and § 2.14.3 on "horns".
448 Onomastics: the study of the history and origin of names, especially names of people (Wehmeier 2005:1020).
449 The root $qrb$ appears in proper names in Ugaritic, Amorite, Phoenician, Punic, Palmyrene, Old South Arabic and Akkadian (Barré 1999:519).
lightning-bolt is called a "spear". Lightning is associated with the theophany\(^450\) of *Yahweh*, often in combination with thunder, cloud and an earthquake.\(^452\) Kuenen\(^453\) states that the Book of Amos contains numerous utterances mentioning light and fire as symbols of *Yahweh* and evidence of his presence. In addition thereto, Miller\(^454\) indicates that fire was significant in the mythology of the Ancient Near East – particularly in that of Syria-Palestine. Fire was used against the enemies of the gods and became a significant element in the historical traditions, particularly in holy wars. According to Ancient Near Eastern tradition, the storm god was the executive deity who delegated power to the king.\(^455\)

Albertz\(^456\) mentions that in the symbolism of the Ancient Near East 'the bull had long taken on religious connotations … the storm god *Adad* was depicted as a "horned wild bull" or "great wild bull of heaven and earth".' A number of portrayals show him standing on the back of a bull.\(^457\) Common terracotta plaques have been excavated representing the storm god standing on a bull, which may be an indication of 'the increasing popularity of the theme in the Old Babylonian period'.\(^458\) Since time immemorial the sound of thunder has been compared with that of a bull's roaring and stamping, and the bull has thus been associated with rain.\(^459\) In the Ugaritic texts *Ba’al* was at times represented as a bull, although the title "bull" was actually reserved for the god *El*.\(^460\) Identifying the deity which is shown in combination with a bull is complicated by the fact that similar features are occasionally shared by the storm and the moon gods. Apart from sharing the image of the bull, both deities are associated with fertility and regeneration. It is often difficult to determine whether the storm god is represented with lunar features, or vice versa. 'The interchanging of divine attributes between different deities … does not contradict ANE religious concepts, as the polytheistic theology conceived the world as being simultaneously governed by several divine entities.'\(^461\) The possible fusion of different divine images into one icon can be perceived in first millennium religious history\(^462\)

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\(^{450}\) Habakkuk 3:11.

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

\(^{452}\) Barré 1999:519.

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

\(^{454}\) Miller 2000a:18-23.

\(^{455}\) Mendenhall 1973:223.

\(^{456}\) Albertz 1994:144.

\(^{457}\) Albertz 1994:144.

\(^{458}\) Ornan 2001b:15.

\(^{459}\) Van Loon 1990:364.

\(^{460}\) Albertz 1994:144.

\(^{461}\) Ornan 2001b:24-25.

\(^{462}\) Ornan 2001b:25. A basalt statue of a storm god mounted on a bull has been found at Hazor. On the assumption that a combination of emblems – representing different deities – is embodied in a supreme god, scholars have suggested that this statue could be a representation of *El*, head of the Canaanite pantheon. In the Ugaritic literature he is referred to as "bull *El*" (Ornan 2001b:17).
particularly in respect of the Israelite religion. According to the nineteenth century Dutch scholar Kuenen, Yahweh was venerated in the form of a young bull; therefore, priests and other devotees of the golden calves accepted that they were worshipping Yahweh.

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

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463 Kuenen 1882a:235. Golden calves were set up in sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel (1 Ki 12:25-32).
464 The name Haddu – that is, Hadad or Adad – for Ba’al, was used only in sacred texts (De Moor 1977:187).
465 The genitive indicates the domain or the object controlled, for example, bēl-ḥarrān means "lord of Harrān", referring to the moon god Sin (De Moor 1977:182-183). Sin resided in Harran (Stol 1999:782).
467 Mount Zaphon is located approximately 40 km north of Ugarit at Jebel el-Aqra’ in the northern region of Canaan; it is the highest mountain in Syria, 1759 m above sea level. The Hebrew word for “north” – הים (šāpōn) – is probably derived from the name of the mountain (Day 1992a:545). De Moor (1997:147) mentions that according to Job 26:7 and Psalm 89:12 – God appears to be the creator of Zaphon. Job 37:22 likewise states that the gold covering God with splendour originates from the Zaphon.
469 Yam represented the “sea” and the unruly forces of chaos; he was the equivalent of the Mesopotamian Tiamat – see footnote in § 2.14.6 on Marduk, Apsu and Tiamat. With the aid of magical weapons, Ba’al fought and killed Yam. Ba’al proclaimed himself king (Willis 1993:65). For a detailed discussion of the Ba’al myths and Ba’al cycle (seasonal cycle affecting the fertility of the land) see Day (1992a:545-547).
470 Mot was god of death and a primeval earth monster. He attempted to usurp Ba’al’s kingship, but was killed by Anat (see § 3.3 on Anat). This episode is a follow-up on the previous Ba’al myths concerning Yam. See Willis (1993:65) for details.
472 Smith 1990:42-43.
473 Beel Shemesh (Ba’al Shamem) refers to the heaven(s) or sky (Holladay 1971:375).
474 The name Melqart means "King of the City". He appears as the god of the first millennium BC Tyre. Some scholars identify Melqart as the Ba’al worshipped on Mount Carmel and mocked by Elijah (1 Ki 18:20-40). On a ninth to eighth century BC stele – dedicated to the king of Aram – Melqart has the emblem of a warrior god (Ribichini 1999:563). Olyan (1988:62-63) argues that Ba’al Shamem appears to be the Ba’al of Carmel. A
manifested meteorologically. He had power over the storm and could bring about "evil wind".

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

The entire area inhabited by Canaanites was dedicated to the worship of *Ba’al*. The cult of *Ba’al*, along with other Canaanite gods, was adopted by the Egyptians during the time of the Middle Kingdom. The various Syro-Palestinian population groups each had their own *Ba’al* – as indicated in literary documents – a deity who was 'of fundamental significance for the human existence'. In the various texts *Ba’al* appears mostly in association with the other gods. Myths concerning *Ba’al* are found in the Ugaritic, Hittite and Egyptian second century BC inscription from Carmel was found on a statue of Zeus Heliopolis linking *Ba’al* to the god of Carmel. In agreement with the Nabatean Zeus Helios – identified with *Ba’al Shamem* – Zeus Heliopolis has both storm and solar attributes. Olyan (1988:63) points out that according to Sanchuniathon, the storm god was 'the king par excellence'. During the sixth century BC Sanchuniathon wrote a history of Phoenicia which has been partially preserved – via Philo of Byblos – in Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica* (Fulco 1987d:73-74). Eusebius (ca 260-339) was bishop of Caesarea and the first major historian of the church (Lyman 1990:325).

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


Niehr 1999a:370.


Niehr 1999a:370.

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


Herrmann 1999a:133.

For a discussion of various inscriptions referring to *Ba’al*, see Herrmann (1999a:134-135).
tradi
tions. The most comprehensive mythological series from Ugarit incorporates six tablets written by a person named Ilimilku. Ugarit also furnishes the largest amount of cultic material.\footnote{De Moor 1977: 189-190. For a discussion of cultic and mythological material, see De Moor (1977:189-192).}

Although \textit{Yahweh} was the God acting predominantly in the sphere of history, 'Ba'al held a unique position among the inhabitants of Palestine'.\footnote{Herrmann 1999a:138.} The pattern of the seasons and the regular return of fertility were experienced as an indication of \textit{Ba'al}'s power.\footnote{Herrmann 1999a:138.} As a divine name, \textit{Ba'al} appears seventy-six times in the Hebrew Bible. Authors and redactors of the Masoretic Text generally show a basic aversion to idols. It was not their intention to reveal in detail the character or peculiarities of the Canaanite religion. 'They were inclined to speak of Baal and his worship in pejorative terms.'\footnote{Mulder 1977:193. As an example: }\textit{Baal-berith} was the god of Shechem.\footnote{Judges 8:33; 9:3-4.} It is not clear whether \textit{El-berith}\footnote{2 Kings 1:2, 6, 16.} has to be identified with \textit{Baal-berith} or whether there were two gods, each with his own temple, at Shechem. Likewise, \textit{Baal-zebub} is mentioned as the god of the Philistine city Ekron.\footnote{Mulder 1977:193-194.} \textit{Baal-peor}\footnote{Numbers 25:3, 5; Deuteronomy 4:3; Psalm 106:28; Hosea 9:10.} was venerated on the mountain Peor in Moab and his cult was characterised by 'sacral prostitution and by eating a sacrificial meal, by means of which an intimate relationship was established between the god and his worshippers'.\footnote{Mulder 1977:194.} A conflict was prevalent between \textit{Yahweh} and \textit{Ba'al} even before the Israelite settlement in Canaan.\footnote{Numbers 25:1-5.} Later an even greater encounter took place under the Omrides.\footnote{1 Kings 16:31-33; 18:17-40.} Mulder furnishes a detailed exposition of \textit{Ba’al} worship in Israel as depicted in the Masoretic Text. Rituals and customs of the \textit{Ba’al} religion were condemned by the prophets. The Israelites and Judeans were forbidden to take part in any facet of this religion.\footnote{Mulder 1977:195-198.} On account of the similarity between \textit{Yahweh} and \textit{Ba’al} 'many of the traits ascribed to Yahweh inform us on the character of the Palestinian Baal.'\footnote{Mulder 1977:200.} According to Herrmann,\footnote{Herrmann 1999a:138. See § 3.8 regarding attributes ascribed to \textit{Yahweh} and \textit{El/Elohim}.} \textit{Yahweh}'s sphere of influence in the Israelite religion 'gradually widened to
eventually include what had once been the domain of Baal as well’. This 'rise in importance
was only possible, in fact, through the incorporation of traits that had formerly been character-
istic of Baal only.’ Notwithstanding the absorption of Ba’al traits by Yahweh – as pointed out
by Herrmann500 – all indications are that the Judeans carried on with syncretistic religious
practices, probably worshipping Yahweh alongside Ba’al.501

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

500 Herrmann 1999a:138.
501 The various attributes of Yahweh – of which some were evidently taken over from Ba’al – are discussed in
§ 3.8.
502 Smith 1990:21, 49.
503 Examples of language derived from El, Ba’al and Asherah are exhibited in Genesis 49:25-26; Deuteronomy
504 Yahweh presented as the Storm God is elucidated in, inter alia, 1 Samuel 12:18; Psalm 29; Jeremiah 10:11-16;
14:22; Amos 4:7; 5:8; 9:6. See § 3.8 for attributes ascribed to Yahweh.
505 A number of texts that exhibit Divine Warrior traits are Psalms 50:1-3; 97:1-6; 104:1-4; Habakkuk 3:8-15.
See § 3.8 for attributes ascribed to Yahweh.
507 Exodus 19:9, 16-19.
508 Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 68:4, 7-8, 33; Habakkuk 3:8.
510 Exodus 3:2-3.
511 Budde 1899:28.
512 Fretheim 1991:55. Examples in the Masoretic Text of such an appearance are in Genesis 15:17 and in Exo-
dus 3:2-4.
513 Miller 2000a:18.
514 Miller 2000a:18, 21.
515 Kuenen 1882a:44-45.
of Israel”. Houtman\textsuperscript{516} suggests that the theophany of \textit{Yahweh} on Mount Sinai could indicate a volcanic eruption,\textsuperscript{517} although it is unlikely that people would reside in the vicinity of an active volcano.\textsuperscript{518}

The Akkadian word \textit{ūmu}, day – which corresponds to the Hebrew \textit{בָּית}, "day" – has an additional meaning, "storm" – and often appears in divine designations. The Akkadian \textit{ūmu}, storm, was frequently used with theophanic\textsuperscript{519} connotations. Therefore, in the light of the Akkadian \textit{ūmu},\textsuperscript{520} Niehaus\textsuperscript{521} interprets Genesis 3:8 'in the wind of the storm' and not 'in the cool of the day'. \textit{Yahweh} advances in the theophany of the storm wind. Niehaus\textsuperscript{522} indicates that if his interpretation is correct, it affects other terms in this Genesis text: it will not be the voice of \textit{Yahweh} the man and woman heard, but the 'thunder of his stormy presence'.

According to Obermann,\textsuperscript{523} the designation "Rider-of-the-Clouds" was applied to \textit{Ba’al} long before it became an appellative of \textit{Yahweh}. The epithet \textit{rkb} \textit{rpt} refers to \textit{Ba’al} driving his "chariot of clouds", also probably meaning "Rider-upon-the-Clouds". When driving in his chariot, \textit{Ba’al} goes out to distribute rain, but at the same time it sets \textit{Ba’al} in the position of a warrior god. In Habakkuk 3:8 \textit{Yahweh} is said to drive a horse-drawn chariot.\textsuperscript{524} Miller\textsuperscript{525} suggests that 'the clouds are the war chariot of the storm god as he goes to do battle'. The word \textit{aliyan} – translated as "victorious", "almighty" – is often used in the \textit{Ba’al} mythology, followed by other epithets, such as "Rider-upon-the-Clouds". \textit{Aliyan} never occurs as an independent divine name.\textsuperscript{526} A West Semitic term \textit{ḥurpatum} appears in a text from Mari. This term seems to be indirectly related to both the Hebrew and Ugaritic words for "cloud", insofar as it appears in descriptions of a storm god's presence.\textsuperscript{527} In most Semitic languages the root \textit{rkb} – "to mount (upon)" – is applied mainly for chariot driving, and not for riding on an

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Houtman 1993:119.
\item Exodus 19:18. See also Habakkuk 3:6.
\item See a previous reference in this paragraph to the theophany of \textit{Yahweh}, combined with thunder, cloud, and earthquakes.
\item See footnote on "theophany" earlier in this paragraph (§ 3.5).
\item According to Niehaus (1994:264), the Akkadian \textit{ūmu} (storm) has a Hebrew cognate in a second description of \textit{⇥}, as "storm". See also Holladay (1971:131) for \textit{⇥}, interpreted as "storm", "wind", "breath".
\item Niehaus 1994:264.
\item Niehaus 1994:264.
\item Obermann 1949:319. See Psalm 68:33.
\item Herrmann 1999c:704.
\item Miller 1973:41.
\item Dijkstra 1999:18-19.
\item See also footnote in § 2.14.1, as well as the discussion by Fleming (2000:484-498) of Mari’s large public tent and priestly tent sanctuary. According to Exodus 19:16, \textit{Yahweh} appeared in ‘thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud [\textit{⇥\textit{lun}}] on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast’. Holladay (1971:278) indicates \textit{⇥\textit{lun}} as rain clouds (\textit{Jr 4:13}) and \textit{⇥\textit{lu}} as clouds or a mass of clouds (\textit{Gn 9:13}).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
animal. Similarly, the divine name Rakib-Il and epithets such as "Rider-upon-the-Clouds" relate to a chariot-driving warrior and not to the imagery of a riding horseman. However, late third millennium BC – and later, particularly during the eighth to seventh century BC – figurines of riding horsemen have been found in Palestine. These figurines usually functioned in domestic and funerary contexts, venerated on the level of family religion. This may be an indication that these figurines depicted a divine protector. A statue found in Ammon – dated seventh to sixth century BC – bears the inscription "Yarachazar, chief of the horse", probably indicating this person's function as chief of the cavalry.

Prinsloo indicates that, while many scholars are of the opinion that Habakkuk 3 has its literary parallel in the Canaanite epic literature, other scholars seriously doubt such a suggestion. Nevertheless, exegetes generally acknowledge an Ancient Near Eastern background of Habakkuk 3 'without over-emphasising the Mesopotamian or Canaanite background'. To a large extent, consensus has been reached amongst scholars that Habakkuk 3:3-15 is an archaic theophany, resembling other theophanies in the Hebrew Bible. Habakkuk 3:3-7 describes Yahweh's triumphant march from the "South" distinctly portraying him as a heavenly warrior. Although storm god motifs – clouds, winds, lightning and storm – are absent in Habakkuk 3:3-7 and Deuteronomy 33:2, they do appear in the archaic theophanies of Judges 5:4 and Psalm 68:8-10. A blinding light associated with the appearance of Yahweh clearly depicts Yahweh as a solar deity.

Habakkuk 3 gives a description of a theophany with accompanying natural phenomena. The "Lord of Light" is described as a Divine Warrior; the plague – רבד – went before him and pestilence – רע – followed on his heels. Although Ugaritic ritual texts indicate that Resheph – רשף – who has been linked to war, the underworld and metalworking, was worshipped in Ugarit, there is 'too little material to draw any final conclusions'.

528 Rakib-Il / Rakib-El: see also description in § 3.6.
531 Prinsloo 2001:484.
533 Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 68:7-8.
534 South-eastern regions of Canaan: Sinai, Mount Paran, Seir, Teman.
536 Habakkuk 3:5 (ESV: Hab 3:4). The plague – רבד – mentioned in Habakkuk, is indicated by Holladay (1971:68) as bubonic plague. Compare 1 Kings 8:37; Jeremiah 14:12. רבד was the master of epidemics (Ex 9:3; Jr 21:6). רע and רבד could be seen as two 'personali zed natural powers, submitted to Yahweh' (Xella 1999:703).
Qôs was the national deity of the Edomites and is attested in the names of their kings, Qaus-malak. His official status is indicated on the Horvat 'Uza ostracon in some Edomite administrative correspondence from the first half of the sixth century BC. Archaeological findings at a seventh to sixth century BC building complex excavated at Horvat Qitmit, have been interpreted as an Edomite sanctuary where Qôs and an unnamed consort were worshipped. Although the majority of references to Qôs is Idumaean, his name appears in Egyptian listings of names which were possibly those of Shasu clans from the thirteenth century BC. As indicated in previous paragraphs, the Shasu clans were connected to Edom and Seir. At the same time Egyptian records point to a possible link between these clans and 'Yhw in the land of the Shasu'. The southern part of Edom later developed into the Nabatean cultic centre of Petra. Dū-Šarā – "The One of the Sharā-Mountains" – was the Nabatean national deity and probably corresponded to the deity Qôs.

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

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

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538 Horvat Qitmit is approximately 10 km south of Arad (Knauf 1999a:675). See § 2.14.2 for more information on Arad.
539 Idumaea was not an organised distinct administrative district before the early fourth century BC (Knauf 1999a:675).
540 Knauf 1999a:674-675.
541 See § 2.4, § 2.5 and § 2.6 for more information on the Shasu.
542 See § 4.3.4.
543 Knauf 1999a:676-677.
544 Knauf 1999a:677.
545 Bartlett 1989:200-204.
546 Miller 1973:1, 64-65, 74.
or reinforce their positions in the divine pantheons, and to secure order in the universe. Therefore, Israel's belief was that their wars were in fact "the wars of Yahweh". As 'commander of the armies of heaven and earth' he fought for Israel. Literary material from the Hebrew Bible — which could be reasonably dated — provides "valuable historical control". Early Israelite poetry contains the earliest literary remains of its history. The final blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy incorporates the vision of Yahweh the Warrior. The victory "Song of Deborah" — dated late twelfth or early eleventh century BC — basically concentrates on the 'victory of Yahweh and his armies over the enemies of Israel'. Psalm 68 contains war songs and war poetry celebrating the victory of Yahweh. In the psalm he is portrayed with his "heavenly chariots and entourage" — 'thousands upon thousands'. The glorious deeds of Yahweh, the Warrior, are vividly described in the "Song of Moses", the "Song of the Sea". Habakkuk 3 emphasises the mythological conflict between Yahweh and the chaos forces of the sea and death. The theophany of Yahweh correlates with that described in Deuteronomy 33, Judges 5 and Psalm 68, while a parallel to Canaanite and Mesopotamian mythology can be recognised. Besides the above-mentioned poetic material, the image of Yahweh is portrayed as warrior in Joshua 10, 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18. In conclusion,

547 'In this interrelation of the cosmic and the historical, such fundamental matters as kingship, salvation, creation, and the building of temples were related to and depended upon the military activities of the gods and their armies' (Miller 1973:64).
548 Miller 1973:64.
549 Deuteronomy 33:2-5, 26-29. The structure of the poem consists of a theophany of Yahweh and his heavenly army (Dt 33:2-3), the establishment of kingship (Dt 33:4-5) and Israel's settlement in the land (Dt 33:26-29) (Miller 1973:75).
550 Judges 5.
551 Miller 1973:87. Judges 5:2 could be an allusion to the Nazirites and therefore the earliest reference to their custom and law. Samson (Jdg 13-16), was linked to the Nazirite vow. His strength and ability as warrior could indicate that the Nazirites were a type of "holy warriors" (Miller 1973:88-89).
552 There are indications that at least parts of the psalm are placed in a cultic context; Yahweh's battle is against cosmic enemies (Miller 1973:103-104, 111).
554 Exodus 15. Yahweh's deliverance of his people is recounted, but in a different type of theophany. This song 'preserves a familiar mythic pattern: the combat of the divine warrior and his victory at the Sea' (Miller 1973:113, 117).
555 Habakkuk 3:3-15.
556 Miller 1973:118-119. Habakkuk 3:5 exhibits the closest parallel to Marduk's march with his servants (see relevant footnote incorporating Marduk, § 2.14.6); the servants at times being the gods of plague and pestilence. Egyptian inscriptions, however, attest that he was venerated as warrior god in Egypt (Handy 1994:109). Resheph was adopted at the court of pharaoh Amenophis II [1453-1419 BC] and was regarded as a special protector during military operations. He is also attested at third millennium BC Ebla and may have been related to the royal necropolis as a chthonic god (see footnotes in § 3.2.1 and § 3.2.4 referring to chthonic). Habakkuk 3:5 describes that Resheph followed on God's heels (Xella 1999:701, 703).
Miller\textsuperscript{558} observes that from an early period Israel conceived the idea of *Yahweh* being a Divine Warrior – a perception which, depicted in apposite language, dominated Israel's faith.

Cross\textsuperscript{559} agrees with Miller that the Hebrew Bible portrays *Yahweh* as Divine Warrior. He discusses Psalm 24 as depiction of *Yahweh* as the Warrior-King. He notes that 'the language of holy war and its symbolism may be said to be the clue to an adequate interpretation of Psalm 24 and its place in the cultic history of Israel'.\textsuperscript{560} Epithets such as *yahwē sēbāʾ ŏt*, 'stem from the old ideology of the league, from the Songs of the Wars of Yahweh'.\textsuperscript{561} As early as the pre-monarchical period, the concept of *Yahweh* as warrior was possibly linked to the idea of *Yahweh* as king. His dwelling was on Zion, which symbolised security. This security was 'rooted in Yahweh's presence there as king and in his power as creator and defender'.\textsuperscript{562}

Lang\textsuperscript{563} mentions that the ancient world often represented the king as the deity's human war leader. Both *Yahweh* and the Sumerian god *Ningirsu*\textsuperscript{564} represented a common type of deity in the ancient world – the tutelary deity of the state. In this capacity they shared the same responsibility – 'to secure royal victory in battle';\textsuperscript{565} the national god was therefore also the warrior god. This ideology was dominant in Iron Age Israel and its neighbours. Mesopotamian images and texts typify the divine warrior's participation in human warfare. Biblical traditions narrating the Hebrew conquest of Palestine closely resemble these depictions.\textsuperscript{566}

Battles between Ancient Near Eastern nations were deduced as battles between patron gods, leading to the ideology of a "holy war". This concept was shared by Israel\textsuperscript{567} and therefore *Yahweh*’s attribute as warrior was identified with his name.\textsuperscript{568} The practice of extermination in tribal feuds also contributed to the idea of a holy war.\textsuperscript{569} Celestial beings that formed *Yahweh*’s entourage and fought his battles signified the "hosts", in the title "Lord of Hosts".\textsuperscript{570}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\setcounter{enumi}{558}
\item Miller 1973:171.
\item Cross 1973:91-111.
\item Cross 1973:99.
\item Cross 1973:99.
\item Ollenburger 1987:56, 72-73.
\item Lang 2002:47.
\item *Ningirsu*, son of *Enil* (see footnote in § 2.3) and patron of Lagash – prominent Sumerian city – had his temple in this city. He was concerned with irrigation which brought about fertility, but was also known as warrior god. His attribute was a club, flanked by two S-shaped snakes (Guirand 1996:60).
\item Lang 2002:49.
\item Lang 2002:49-50. See Lang (2002:50-52) for a comparison between the Mesopotamian depictions and Joshua’s conquest of Jericho, as described in the Hebrew Bible.
\item Judges 11:23-24; 2 Kings 18:33-35.
\item Glatt-Gilad 2002:64. Exodus 15:3.
\item Gerstenberger 2002:156.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The interplay between God's identity and his reputation – two aspects of his name – is illustrated in psalms concerning the Warrior God.⁽⁵⁷¹⁾ His military power goes hand in hand with the enhancement or preservation of his reputation.⁽⁵⁷²⁾ Appeals to this military power probably had their origins in cultic liturgy linked to military events. A plea to God's honour was made through "prophetic intercession". The expectation of the appellant was veiled in the perception that God was 'concerned about his honor in the eyes of the nations'.⁽⁵⁷³⁾ Israel's exile brings shame upon God's reputation. Concern for his reputation is explicitly expressed by Deutero-Isaiah.⁽⁵⁷⁴⁾ The close connection between God's exalted reputation and Israel's salvation in battle is expressed in various liturgical texts in the Psalms.⁽⁵⁷⁵⁾ *Yahweh*, as Divine Warrior, fought for the tribes.⁽⁵⁷⁶⁾

Taking war very seriously, Israel undoubtedly had a pre-battle rite – or maybe a number of pre-battle ceremonies.⁽⁵⁷⁷⁾ It was common practice for a priest or prophet to determine beforehand whether *Yahweh* approved the attack or not. Details of the different customs are, however, unknown.⁽⁵⁷⁸⁾ Psalm 18 designates *Yahweh* as a rock, fortress, shield, high tower [stronghold] and 'the horn of my salvation'.⁽⁵⁷⁹⁾ The "horn of my salvation" was not merely a symbolic image but in fact actual horns – as those used by Zedekiah in the rite before the battle.⁽⁵⁸⁰⁾ These horns⁽⁵⁸¹⁾ – as a liturgical device – allude to divine strength that brings about victory. The purpose of the rite is an attempt to facilitate the process for a sign from *Yahweh*, thereby raising the morale of the warriors when convinced that a victory is in the making which has been cultically inaugurated.⁽⁵⁸²⁾

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

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⁽⁵⁷¹⁾ Psalms 44:5; 48:10; 72:1-3; 79:9-10.
⁽⁵⁷⁴⁾ Isaiah 48:11; 52:5.
⁽⁵⁷⁶⁾ Gerstenberger 2002:146.
⁽⁵⁷⁷⁾ Examples are: Moses holding up his staff for the massacre of Amalek (Ex 17:8-16); Joshua pointing his javelin towards Ai (Jos 8:18-29); warriors are described as consecrated ones (Is 13:3).
⁽⁵⁷⁸⁾ Psalm 20, as an example, is clearly divided into two sections: the first is a prayer for the king before the battle, and the second a 'shout of assurance that victory is guaranteed' (Stacey 1982:471).
⁽⁵⁷⁹⁾ Psalm 18:2.
⁽⁵⁸⁰⁾ Zedekiah, a prophet who promised king Ahab [reigned in Israel 874/3-853 BC] victory in the battle against the Aramaeans. The prophesying by four hundred cultic prophets took place on the threshing floor outside Samaria. During the ecstatic activities of the prophets, Zedekiah placed the horns of iron on his head – symbolising great power (compare Dt 33:17) and thus victory for the king (MacLean 1962b:947). See 1 Kings 22:1-28 and 2 Chronicles 18:1-27.
⁽⁵⁸¹⁾ See relevant footnotes in § 2.3 and § 2.14.3 on the meaning and function of "horns".
to this ritual are found in cuneiform literature. The temple of Adad\textsuperscript{583} in Mari\textsuperscript{584} probably contained such weapons with which the deity fought Tiamat,\textsuperscript{585} the mythical dragon of the sea. Some biblical texts illustrate the idea of a divine weapon.\textsuperscript{586} Throughout the Ancient Near East the myth of the divine warrior's successful battle against the chaos monsters was well known. The Ugaritic "Ba’al and Yam myth" recounts the conflict between the storm god Ba’al and the sea god Yam. Psalm 74 alludes to the Creator God's battle with the sea. In the book of Job\textsuperscript{587} the antagonism between God, the sea, Rahab\textsuperscript{588} and the "Fleeing Serpent", is pointed out.\textsuperscript{589} References to Rahab in the Hebrew Bible should be read against the background of the Ancient Near Eastern mythology describing the victory over the powers of chaos, which are represented as monsters. Texts in the Hebrew Bible relate to a concept of a battle between Yahweh and chaos, prior to creation.\textsuperscript{590} The chaos-battle mythology reveals much of the worldview of the ancient warrior societies.\textsuperscript{591}

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

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

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\textsuperscript{583} See previous discussion in this paragraph and also footnote in § 2.3.

\textsuperscript{584} See § 2.4 for a discussion of Mari.

\textsuperscript{585} See footnote in § 2.14.6.

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

\textsuperscript{587} Job 26:10-13.

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

\textsuperscript{589} Lang 2002:55-59.

\textsuperscript{590} Spronk 1999b:684-685.

\textsuperscript{591} Lang 2002:61.

\textsuperscript{592} Hiebert 1992:879.

\textsuperscript{593} Hiebert 1992:879.

\textsuperscript{594} Miller 1973:48.

\textsuperscript{595} See § 3.3 for a discussion of the Ugaritic goddess Anat.
the centre of a series of battles. The question arises whether the warrior attributes of *Yahweh* developed independently, or under influence of the image of the Canaanite *Ba’al*. The concept "host of heaven" originated from the metaphor of *Yahweh* as Warrior. In combat *Yahweh* was assisted by warriors and an army. In the Israelite religious history, the "host of heaven" indicated the divine assembly gathered around the heavenly King, *Yahweh*. The illustration of *Yahweh* seated on his throne with "all the host of heaven" gathered on his right and left hand sides, is appropriated from terrestrial depictions. The idea of a divine council underlies Isaiah 6 wherein *Yahweh* carries the title "Lord of Hosts". Texts in Deuteronomy and Psalms exhibit an astral concept of the "host of heaven" and understood it as the "sun, moon and stars". Israelites and Judeans alike were reproached for their veneration of the "astralised host of heaven". Altars for the worship of the "host of heaven" in the Jerusalem Temple were removed during Josiah's cult reform. The exact meaning of the "host of heaven" in post-exilic texts remains vague.

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

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596 Miller 1973:24, 50.
598 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18.
599 Isaiah 6:3, 5.
600 Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3.
601 For example: Psalm 148:2-3.
602 2 Kings 21:3, 5; Jeremiah 8:2; 19:13. Astral worship specifically forbidden in Israel implies knowledge of such veneration (Saggs 1978:91).
603 2 Kings 21:5; 23:4-5.
606 See descriptions in Job 1-2; Daniel 7; Zechariah 3.
Although hierarchy could seldom be seen as "open-ended" at the upper level.\textsuperscript{608} In the Canaanite pantheon El and Asherah were acting as highest authority. El was designated with wisdom, as well as being arbiter of justice. The actions of both divine and human beings were subject to the justice of El. Psalm 82 condemns all members of the divine council to death for abusing their offices.\textsuperscript{609}

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

The designation Yahweh Sebaoth – יהוה משאתה – functioned prominently as a cultic name in Shiloh and Jerusalem, and is attested from the pre-monarchical to post-exilic times.\textsuperscript{615} This epithet meaning "hosts of heaven", "armies", or similar depictions, is closely connected to the...
idea of the "holy war". The designation can thus be translated as "Lord of Hosts", and probably alludes to either the armies of Israel or heavenly hosts. The use of the Zebaoth designation in Hebrew can be traced back as far as pre-monarchic Shiloh. There are indications of early cultic activity at Shiloh, from the Middle Bronze II period onwards. Therefore, the temple at Shiloh should be understood against a Canaanite background. Although some scholars attempt to trace Yahweh Sebaoth back to Canaanite Resheph – Resheph the soldier, or Resheph the lord of the army – evidence points to El features in the deity worshipped at Shiloh. In the Hebrew Bible the term is attested in those books which represent a tradition linked to the theology promoted at the Jerusalem Temple. It thus seems that the designation "Sebaoth" was closely linked to Zion and the Temple, and 'that Yahweh Zebaoth was conceived as enthroned in invisible majesty on the cherubim throne in the Solomonic Temple'. A further aspect of the Zion-Sebaoth theology was the idea that the Temple was the junction between heaven and earth; therefore Yahweh could be located simultaneously on earth and in heaven. The designation Sebaoth also occurs in passages in which the divine council plays a role.

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

616 Deist 1990:223.
618 1 Samuel 1:9; 3:3.
619 A description of Resheph is incorporated in a footnote in § 3.2.1, and also in an earlier footnote in this paragraph.
620 Psalms (fifteen times), Proto-Isaiah (fifty-six times), Haggai (fourteen times), Zechariah (fifty-three times), and Malachi (twenty-four times) (Mettinger 1999b:921).
621 Mettinger 1999b:922.
622 Mettinger 1999b:920-923.
624 See footnote in § 2.3.
625 Some of these names are attested in the Mari letters (see § 2.4 on the "Mari documents"), and other forms in Ugaritic, Phoenician, Ammonite and the Hebrew Bible (Choi 2004:19-20).
627 Choi 2004:19-27. See these pages for the relevant discussion.
Evidence from the use of ršp in various regions (therefore) suggests that yhwh šebbā’ôt is a genuine construct chain, used to point out and highlight a specific aspect of the deity's nature. In this instance Yahweh's character as warrior and 'supreme commander of armies' is accentuated.

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

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628 Choi 2004:27.
630 It became practice in Assyria to write the name of the god Aššur as AN.ŠÁR – signs designating a primeval deity in Babylonian theogonies. Babylonian Anšar and Kišar – meaning "whole heaven" and "whole earth" – preceded the deities Enlil (see footnote in § 2.3) and Ninlil. Through an intelligent move the Assyrian Aššur – not figuring anywhere in the Babylonian pantheon – appeared as head of the Babylonian pantheon, gradually adopting everything belonging to Enlil. Ninlil – Enlil's wife – became the Assyrian Mullisu (Livingstone 1999:108-109). Ninlil was known in Mesopotamia and Sumer as ancient goddess of the earth, sky, heaven and the Underworld. She was patron of the city of Nippur (see footnote in § 2.4); her emblems were the serpent, the heavenly mountain, the stars and a stylised tree; she later assimilated with Ishtar; in Babylon she was called Belit or Belit-matate; she gave birth to the moon god (Ann & Imel 1993:342). “Theogony”: a myth telling of the birth and genealogy of the gods (Deist 1990:258).
633 See footnote in § 1.2.
634 Grayson 1992b:753.
635 It is significant that the theophoric element (see footnote on "hypocoristicon" in § 2.3) Ashur appears in a number of Assyrian kings' names, such as Ashur-uballit I (1363-1328 BC), Ashur-resh-ishi I (1132-1115 BC), Ashur-bel-kala (1073-1056 BC), Ashur-dan II (934-912 BC), Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC), Ashurbanipal (died 627 BC) and his son Ashur-til-ilani (Gwaltney 1994:85-88, 100).
deified city Assur, which — according to analysed evidence — was built on a holy spot of pre-historic times.\footnote{Assur was built on an impressive natural hill, and therefore — as place of strategic significance — its "holiness" was exploited therein that it had the character of a city and of a god (Livingstone 1999:108).} Aššur was regarded as the Assyrian Enlil — the latter, as god of Nippur,\footnote{See footnote in § 2.4 on Nippur.} being one of the most important figures in the Babylonian pantheon. Sennacherib\footnote{Sennacherib — monarch of the Neo-Assyrian Empire during 704-681 BC — tried to maintain control of Babylonia by procuring the throne of the dual monarchy (Arnold 1994:59).} attempted to replace the cult of the great god Marduk in Babylon by the similar cult of Aššur — Aššur thus taking the place of Marduk.\footnote{The Assyrians did not require conquered peoples to worship Ashur, as they respected local deities, but for propaganda purposes declared that these deities abandoned their worshippers (Livingstone 1999:109).} It is noteworthy that Amurru — the eponymous god of the Amorites — was also perceived as warrior and storm god. These nomadic peoples of the western desert settled in Mesopotamia in the latter part of the third millennium BC. Although introduced into the Mesopotamian pantheon at a late stage, Amurru was nevertheless presented as son of \textit{An}\footnote{Van der Toorn 1999a:32.} — supreme god of the sky in the Babylonian mythology.\footnote{Storm 2001:19.}

### 3.6 Astral deities

Astral deities were not an unfamiliar phenomenon for the ancient Israelites.\footnote{Genesis 37:9; Deuteronomy 4:19; 2 Kings 23:5.} A number of references in the Hebrew Bible indicate that \textit{Yahweh} is Lord of the sun, moon and stars.\footnote{Psalm 148:3; Ecclesiastes 12:2; Isaiah 13:10; Jeremiah 31:35; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:10; 3:15.} The Babylonian creation epic — the \textit{Enuma Elish}\footnote{See footnotes in § 2.14.6 and § 3.1 for explanatory notes on Marduk and the \textit{Enuma Elish}, respectively.} — describes that Marduk was the one who set the heavenly bodies in order and divided the constellations of the zodiac and months of the year among the great gods. The Babylonians recorded the positions of the sun, the moon and the planets Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Saturn and Mars to the date of a birth. The constellations became the objects of a religious cult.\footnote{Zatelli 1999:202.} The term תּוּלְזָמִים\footnote{The term תולזמים appears only in 2 Kings 23:5 in the Hebrew Bible, referring to prohibited astral cults. The Masoretic Text furnishes scant information on specific constellations.}\footnote{Job 9:9 Bear and Orion; Job 26:13 fleeing serpent; Job 38:31 Pleiades and Orion; Job 38:32 \textit{mazzārôt} and Bear; Isaiah 13:10 'For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed light'; Amos 5:8 Pleiades and Orion.} appears only in 2 Kings 23:5 in the Hebrew Bible, referring to prohibited astral cults. The Masoretic Text furnishes scant information on specific constellations.\footnote{Zatelli 1999:203.} 'Once the threat of idolatry had faded away' the
Zodiacal constellations were widely promoted within the Judaic culture. The zodiac was set into the background of rabbinical literature. Zodiac symbols are portrayed on the mosaic floors of several synagogues of the Roman and Byzantine periods. On the mosaic floor of the sixth century Beth Alpha synagogue – in Israel’s Jezreel Valley – the Greek solar god Helios rides his four-horse chariot. Around him is the light of the moon and the night sky is sprinkled with stars. This, and other zodiacs on synagogue floors, illustrate an ancient Israelite tradition of retaining elements of pagan sun worship in their own worship. The identification of Yahweh with the sun is supported in a number of biblical passages. The epithet "Lord of Hosts" could intimate that Yahweh was in command of all the stars, and therefore also associated with the sun.

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

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

652 Passages such as Deuteronomy 33:2 'The Lord came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran'; Psalm 80:3 'Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.'
653 1 Samuel 4:4.
655 Rabbi Hanina was a Babylonian who studied in Palestine with Rabbi Judah-ha-Nasi; the latter died before AD 230 (Roussin 1997:83).
656 See "Babylonian Talmud" and "Tractates", incorporated in footnotes in § 3.2.1 and § 3.2.2. This specific debate is recorded in the Tractate Shabbat 156b (Roussin 1997:83).
657 Rabbi Johanan lived in Tiberias ca AD 250 (Roussin 1997:83).
659 The Greek solar deity.
composition and not merely an inadvertent copying of a pagan model.  

Practice of magic, astrology and angel worship among the Jews has been attested.  

Of the high priest's robe, Josephus writes, 'the vestment of the high priest being made of linen signified the earth; the blue denoted the sky, being like lightning in its pomegranates, and in the noise of the bells resembling thunder. … . Each of the sardonyxes declares to us the sun and the moon; … . And for the twelve stones, whether we understand by them the months, or whether we understand the like number of the signs of that circle which the Greeks call the Zodiac, we shall not be mistaken in their meaning. 

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

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661 When analysed in terms of the structure of the Sefer HaRazim, the symbolism of the synagogue pavement compositions becomes clear. The earthly realm is represented in the lowest level, the celestial sphere in the centre is epitomised by the Helios-in-zodiac panel and the highest sphere – the Torah Shrine panel – symbolises where Yahweh resides (Roussin 1997:93). Sefer: Jewish medieval literature (Epstein 1959:230).  
663 Flavius Josephus (AD 37 - ca 100), son of a priestly Jewish family, later became a Roman citizen and author. His first work was The Wars of the Jews and in approximately AD 93 he completed the Antiquities of the Jews (Whiston 1960:vii, ix).  
664 Whiston 1960:75.  
666 Psalms 18:10-11; 68:17, 33; 104:3; Habakkuk 3:8. The following verses in the Hebrew Bible refer to heavenly "horses and chariots" (Jr 4:13), "horses and chariots of fire" (2 Ki 2:11; 6:17) and 'the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun' (2 Ki 23:11).  
667 Prinsloo 2001:479.  
668 Habakkuk 3:3-7.  
In the Masoretic Text, the word *Shemesh* – שמש – does not actually reflect a divine name. The Canaanite solar cult is, however, revealed in place names, such as Beth-shemesh,\(^6^7\) En-shemesh\(^6^7\) and Ir-shemesh.\(^6^7\) These names probably maintain the memory of sanctuaries which were earlier devoted to the solar deity.\(^6^7\) Lipiński\(^6^7\) is of the opinion that 'the lack of evident traces of solar worship in Hebrew anthroponomy\(^6^7\) seems to indicate that the cult of the sun was not very popular in Syria-Palestine in the Iron Age, contrary to Egypt and to Mesopotamia'.\(^6^7\) The Deuteronomist refers to "the host of heaven"\(^6^7\) and "the sun, the moon and the constellations"\(^6^7\) worshipped during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon.\(^6^8\) This led scholars to theorise that an Assyrian astral cult 'was imposed upon Judah as a symbol of subjection and vassalage'.\(^6^8\) Shimige was the Hurrian solar deity that had much in common with Shemesh. Shimige took note of the acts of man, blessed the righteous and punished the evildoer. As divine judge he was often involved in treaties. His cult was not limited to Anatolia as he was also venerated along the Phoenician coast.\(^6^8\)

Taylor\(^6^8\) suggests that the Israelites did indeed consider the sun as an icon or symbol of Yahweh. Close examination of the Taanach cult stand\(^6^8\) shows, inter alia, the *asherah* as a cult symbol next to a "portrait" of the goddess herself – the goddess had therefore not been separated from her cult symbol. On the one tier of the stand a horse with sun disc on its back is depicted, and on another tier, two cherubim. The two cherubim protect a vacant space with the invisible deity, Yahweh, between them – represented by his symbol, the sun.\(^6^8\) Images on the cult stand have recently been identified by scholars as the Canaanite *Ba’al* and *Asherah*.

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\(^6^7\) Joshua 15:10; 21:16.
\(^6^7\) Joshua 15:7; 18:17.
\(^6^7\) Joshua 19:41.
\(^6^7\) Lipinsky 1999:764-765.
\(^6^7\) Lipinsky 1999:765.
\(^6^7\) Anthroponomy is the 'study of the laws that govern the relationship between man and his environment' (Deist 1990:14).
\(^6^8\) Seemingly contrary to Lipinski's point of view, Ezekiel 8:16-18 mentions, inter alia, 'men with their backs to the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun toward the east'. Lipinski (1999:765), however, interprets Ezekiel's vision as having the meaning that the men 'were not sun-worshippers, but devotees of Yahweh'.
\(^6^8\) 2 Kings 21:3.
\(^6^8\) 2 Kings 23:5.
\(^6^8\) Judean kings: Manasseh (687/86-642/41 BC) and Amon (642/41-640/39 BC) (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:197).
\(^6^8\) Lipinsky 1999:765.
\(^6^8\) Van der Toorn 1999d:773. See brief referral to *Shamash* and solar mythology in Qohelet further on in this paragraph.
\(^6^8\) Taylor 1994:53-54, 58.
\(^6^8\) For a discussion of the Taanach cult stand, see § 2.13, subtitle "Taanach".
\(^6^8\) In congruence with the Jerusalem Temple, the depictions on the Taanach stand symbolise the seemingly empty shrine – Holy of Holies – where the invisible *Yahweh* dwelled (1 Ki 6:23-28). The expression "the Lord [Yahweh] of Hosts who sits on the cherubim" (1 Sm 4:4; 2 Sm 6:2) is 'virtually synonymous with the theology of the Jerusalem Temple' (Taylor 1994:58, 60).
Taylor, however, argues that the subjects on the tiers are Yahweh – and not Ba’al – and Asherah. Therefore, according to this interpretation, Asherah is understood to be Yahweh’s consort. The Tanaach horse – an animal associated with Yahweh – and its sun disc are reminiscent of ‘the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord … and he [Josiah] burned the chariots of the sun with fire’. The horses and chariots were placed at the entrance of the Temple ‘facing eastwards, towards the gate by which Yahweh, the God of Israel, has entered the sanctuary’. Thus, the sun’s chariot was Yahweh’s vehicle. The ancient idea of a chariot of the sun was born from the perception that the sun is a wheel turning through the heavens – as attested by the legend of Elijah being carried up to the heaven in a chariot and horses of fire.

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

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687 Taylor (1994:53-55, 61) comes to this conclusion in the light of the particular portrayals on the cult stand, as well as the inscriptions at Kuntillet ’Ajrud and Khirbet ’el-Qom mentioning Yahweh and his Asherah. (See § 2.9 and § 2.10, as well as § 4.3.9 and § 4.3.10 for a discussion of the finds and the inscriptions). Within the context of the Israelite religion, it was rather Yahweh than Ba’al, who was closely associated with Asherah.
688 2 Kings 23:11. See also discussion of the “Horse figurines” in § 2.13 under the same subtitle.
690 Read also Habakkuk 3:8 in this respect.
691 2 Kings 2:11-12; 6:15, 17.
692 Rakib-El was the holy patron of the Aramaic dynasty of Zinçirli (Lipiński 1999:765).
693 Lipiński 1999:765. 2 Kings 2:11-12.
694 Lipiński 1999:766.
695 Deuteronomy 33:2 and Habakkuk 3:3-4 describe Yahweh’s coming as the rising of the sun. According to Isaiah 59:19 and Ezekiel 43:2, 4; 44:1-2 his glory comes from the east, ‘while Isaiah 60:19 announces that Yahweh’s Glory will replace the sunlight when the new Jerusalem will arise’ (Lipiński 1999:766).
696 Genesis 1:14-18; Joshua 10:12-14; 2 Kings 20:9-11; Job 9:7; Psalms 74:16; 104:19; 136:7-9; 148:3-6; Jeremiah 31:35.
698 The Book of Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew Bible.
instructed the righteous in wisdom and was specifically associated with concepts like justice, time and life – similar themes to those found in *Qohelet*.\(^{700}\)

In his discussion of Psalm 104, Dion\(^{701}\) argues that much of this psalm has been procured from Egyptian and Syrian traditions 'reclaiming for the God of Israel an important part of the common theology of the ancient Near East.' Some of its elements reflect Akhenaten's\(^{702}\) legacy and the literary tradition of the Amarna solar deity. Many symbols and phrases, typical of Ancient Near Eastern storm gods, have also been incorporated into Psalm 104 – the two traditions of storm and solar deities harmoniously blended by the psalmist. Appearances of *Yahweh* in Psalm 104\(^{703}\) 'are reminiscent of various aspects of the epiphanies of the storm god',\(^{704}\) with lightning as its main iconic attribute. The legacy of solar worship in Egypt has been adjusted to the character of *Yahweh*. The Egyptian *Hymn to the Aten*\(^{705}\) has something in common with Psalm 104.\(^{706}\) Dion\(^{707}\) notes that many place names containing the element "*Shemesh*", as well as various horse figurine artefacts with a disc object between their ears, are an indication that solar worship was deeply ingrained in Palestine when the new nation Israel emerged. Under the Israelite Monarchy some solar symbolism had been assimilated by Yahwism before the violent reaction of the deuteronomists and seventh century BC prophets. Depictions in Psalm 104 are reminiscent of the pairing of storm and solar deities in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Pairing of these two gods is in recognition of "their joint supremacy". Dion\(^{708}\) concludes that Psalm 104 is explicitly addressed to *Yahweh*, the only God of post-exilic Judah, although many motifs in this psalm are borrowed from traditions and imagery of deities other than the God of Israel.\(^{709}\)

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

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\(^{700}\) Gericke 2003:244, 251.  
\(^{701}\) Dion 1991:44.  
\(^{702}\) See discussion on Akhenaten's "monotheism" in *Excursus 4*.  
\(^{703}\) Psalm 104:3-4, 7.  
\(^{704}\) Dion 1991:51.  
\(^{705}\) See *Excursus 4* for a discussion of the *Aten* – the cult of the sun disc. This hymn – a piece of Egyptian religious poetry – was discovered at Tell el-Amarna on the west wall of the tomb of Ay (Dion 1991:58). Ay, a vizier, was the father of Nefertiti – a lady of non-royal blood – who married Akhenaten (see *Excursus 4*) (Clayton 1994:121).  
\(^{706}\) For a comparison of the *Aten Hymn* and Psalm 104, see Dion (1991:60).  
\(^{707}\) Dion 1991:64-65.  
\(^{708}\) Dion 1991:69.  
\(^{709}\) For a detailed discussion of Psalm 104 and the influence of Ancient Near Eastern mythologies on the compilation of the psalm, see Dion (1991:43-71).  
\(^{710}\) Smith 1990:120-121.
not perceive it as polemical, but as an attestation of the glory of God. The sun is a positive indication of order in *Yahweh’s* creation.

Josephus\(^{711}\) mentions that the devotion of the Essenes\(^{712}\) took a particular form, ‘for before sunrising they speak not a word about profane matters, but put up certain prayers which they had received from their forefathers, as if they made a supplication for its rising.’\(^{713}\)

Inhabitants of southern Mesopotamia were aware of the link between the phases of the moon and the tides and consequently interpreted the moon as being responsible for the water supply to the fields and all living entities. Therefore the moon god, ‘in addition to his role as illuminator of the night’,\(^{714}\) was regarded as a fertility deity. This aspect of the deity was reflected in the powerful and virile bull, visualised in the similarity between the bull’s horns and the so-called ”horns” of the ”new” moon, ’symbolising the eternal cycle of nature’.\(^{715}\) By the end of the Old Babylonian Period\(^{716}\) the association of the bull with the lunar deity began to diminish in visual representations, while the connection between the bull and the storm god became more prevalent.\(^{717}\) A phenomenon in the imagery of the Ancient Near East is the ’sharing (of) identical emblems by different deities’.\(^{718}\) Some creatures may represent the distinctive features of the deities who ”control” them – such as the bull and the storm god – and at the same time shed light on comparable characteristics that personified other deities. In this regard the horns of the bull and the ”horns” of the lunar deity are a typical example.\(^{719}\)

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

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\(^{711}\) Whiston 1960:476.

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

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

\(^{714}\) Ornan 2001b:3.

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


\(^{718}\) Ornan 2001b:3.

\(^{719}\) Ornan 2001b:3.
describing the lesser astral bodies – the stars, constellations or "hosts of heaven" – were often grouped together. At the same time, the terminology "hosts of heaven" in the Hebrew Bible, was indicative of the inclusion of all luminaries. Symbols on seals, as well as evidence in the Hebrew Bible, bear witness that the cult of the "hosts of heaven" was widespread in seventh century BC Judah. According to the Deuteronomist, astral cults in Judah increased significantly during the seventh and sixth centuries BC.

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

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

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720 Schmidt 1999:585. Genesis 37:9 is an example.
721 Examples are Deuteronomy 4:19; 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18; Nehemiah 9:6; Isaiah 40:26; Jeremiah 8:2; 19:13; Daniel 8:10, 13.
723 Documents from Mari at the beginning of the second millennium BC (Stol 1999:782).
725 *Šîn* was visualised as an old man with a long beard, the colour of lapis-lazuli. In the evening he got into his barque, which appeared in the form of a brilliant crescent moon, and travelled through the nocturnal sky. Due to his illumination of the night he was the enemy of criminals (Guirand 1996:57).
726 See footnote on *Enlil* in § 2.3.
727 See footnote in § 3.5, incorporating *Ninlil*. The moon god, *Nanna/Šîn*, was born from an illicit union of *Enlil* and *Ninlil* (Stol 1999:783).
730 Ur was an important Sumerian city during the third millennium BC and beginning of the second millennium BC. Apart from Babylon, it is the best known Mesopotamian site in the Hebrew Bible, particularly connected to Abraham (Gn 11:31). It is well known for its *ziggurat* (see footnote in § 2.4) constructed by Ur-nammu, founder of the Third Dynasty (2112-2094 BC). Ur-nammu dedicated the *ziggurat* to the moon god *Nanna/Šîn*. The
Nanna/Sîn. The Assyrians considered the moon god of Haran as a special patron to extend their boundaries.\footnote{Keel 1998:68.} The name is attested as a theophoric\footnote{See "theophoric name" incorporated in a footnote on "hypocoristicon" in § 2.3.} element in Assyrian and Babylonian personal names.\footnote{Personal names such as Sanherib [Sennacherib], Sanballat and Shenazzar (Stol 1999:782).} The cult was promoted by Nabonidus\footnote{Nabonidus: Babylonian ruler 555-539 BC (Bodine 1994:33).} who gave Sîn designations such as "Lord/King of the Gods", "God of the Gods".\footnote{Stol 1999:782-783.} The lunar emblem of Haran – of Aramaean origin – portrays the moon god in a boat. The symbol of a crescent on a pole was common in southern Mesopotamia during the first half of the second millennium BC.\footnote{Keel 1998:68, 87, 101.}

The Hebrew Bible attests the admiration of man for the multitude of stars created by God,\footnote{For example, Genesis 1:14-16; Job 9:7-9; Psalms 8:3; 147:4; 148:3-5; Jeremiah 31:35.} yet, in the Ancient Near East stars were widely regarded as gods. Likewise, the existence of astrological references in the Hebrew Bible cannot be denied, 'often hidden in the most ancient layers of the text, revealing deified aspects of cosmic phenomena as distinguished from mere physical/natural elements'.\footnote{Lelli 1999:811.} For example, traces of superstition and divination associated with star cults – probably from Mesopotamian origin – are present in the astral dream of Joseph.\footnote{Genesis 37:9.} Likewise, Joshua 10:12-13 could be interpreted as an incantation prayer uttered in a context of astrological conjecture.\footnote{Lelli 1999:812.} In post-exilic tradition, the non-religious observation of stars – influenced by Hellenistic science – 'gradually became a form of astrological and astronomical speculation'\footnote{Lelli 1999:813.} partly applied by rabbis.\footnote{Most of the rabbis' discussions in this connection concerned the determination of holy days (Lelli 1999:813).} At the same time Babylonian astral divination was common among post-exilic Jews. Reference to the stars as a prophetic symbol in Daniel 8-10 is an allusion to those Jews who submitted to Hellenistic paganism.\footnote{Lelli 1999:810-814.} It is, however, extremely problematic to identify the particular sources underlying the Yahwistic lunar symbolism, as an 'admixture of Mesopotamian and west Asiatic lunar traditions throughout the Levant' – although well documented – spans several centuries.\footnote{Schmidt 1999:588.}

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

\footnote{Keel 1998:68.}

\footnote{See "theophoric name" incorporated in a footnote on "hypocoristicon" in § 2.3.}

\footnote{Personal names such as Sanherib [Sennacherib], Sanballat and Shenazzar (Stol 1999:782).}

\footnote{Nabonidus: Babylonian ruler 555-539 BC (Bodine 1994:33).}

\footnote{Stol 1999:782-783.}

\footnote{Keel 1998:68, 87, 101.}

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

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

\footnote{Genesis 37:9.}

\footnote{Lelli 1999:812.}

\footnote{Lelli 1999:813.}

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

\footnote{Lelli 1999:810-814.}

\footnote{Schmidt 1999:588.}
Shalem – as the deity Šalim from Ugaritic texts – was probably the divine power symbolised by Venus as the Evening Star. The divine name Šalim is found in personal names of the earliest known Mesopotamian Semites and later Amorites. It also occurs in place names and as a theophoric element in some Israelite personal names. Shagar (Morning Star) and Shalem (Evening Star) were offspring of the Canaanite El and two "women" he encountered at the seashore. Speculative connections link Shalem with the alleged cult of the Venus star in Jerusalem and the cult of Melchizedek. Further links have been suggested with the Star of Bethlehem.

3.7 Canaanite El

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

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

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745 Place names, such as Jerusalem: yērušālaim (Huffmon 1999b:755).
746 Theophoric personal names, such as David’s sons Absalom (‘Abšālôm) and Solomon (Šēlōmōh) (Huffmon 1999b:755).
747 See § 3.2.1 and footnote in § 3.2.1 on Shagar and Shalem.
748 Abram’s encounter with Melchizedek is recounted in Genesis 14:18-20. He is described as king of Salem [later Jerusalem] and priest of God Most High (‘ēl ‘elyôn). It is not possible to determine whether the image of this priest-king was devised by the author of Genesis 14, or whether he was known as such in certain Jewish circles. The name Melchizedek means "King of Righteousness". Apart from Genesis 14, his name appears in Psalm 110:4 in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in the Letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament (Heb 5:6; 6:20; 7:17) (Astour 1992b:684-686).
leader of the pantheon. Several epithets describe El as father and creator, as well as the "ancient one" or the "eternal one". El could create by modelling from clay, by a spoken word, or even by sexual intercourse. Even so, the creation of a new human being was considered to be by way of a mental process wherein both El and Asherah participated, and not by their physical interaction. Ancient kings boasted that they were the physical offspring of deities. An important Ugaritic text – the hieros gamos – recounts the birth of Shagar and Shalem, twin sons of El and his two wives. In the Ugaritic Ba’al texts, El behaves "passively and ineffectually" although other texts imply that El was very important in Ugarit.

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

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753 Handy 1994:69.
754 Cross 1974:245.
756 Hieros gamos: sacred marriage; marriage between a divine and human being (Deist 1990:114).
757 Shagar and Shalem: Dawn and Dusk; see discussion in § 3.2.1.
758 Cross 1974:246.
759 See § 3.5 for a discussion of Ba’al.
761 Mullen 1980:84, 92-93.
762 L’Heureux 1979:3-8.
763 For a detailed discussion of internal evidence supporting the alleged degradation of El, see L’Heureux (1979:4-28).
764 See L’Heureux (1979:18-26) for a discussion and suggested interpretation of the Ugaritic text CTA 1.
765 For a discussion of the comparative mythological material, see L’Heureux (1979:29-49).
766 In the Hittite myths Kumarbi was the father of the gods. On a partially preserved tablet the victory of the weather god Teshub – Hittite version of Ba’al/Hadad – over Kumarbi, is recounted (Willis 1993:66).
Sanchuniathon’s work preserved by Eusebius, and Hesiod’s *Theogony*. The above-mentioned evidence is, however, far from being conclusive.

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

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

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

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


770 Mullen 1980:134.

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


773 Herrmann 1999b:275.

774 Herrmann 1999b:275.

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

Bartlett indicates that 'the deity El was almost certainly known in Edom', as attested by inscriptions on seals found at Tawilan and Petra consecutively bearing the names sm’il and 'Abdi-’el.

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

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

Excursus 1: Israelite religion and syncretism
Dever denotes that religion could be defined as a 'verbal and non-verbal structure of interaction with superhuman being(s)', and Deist describes syncretism as 'the reconciliation and subsequent conflation of (parts of) two (or more) distinct religious systems on the basis of elements common to

777 Bartlett 1989:196, 211.
778 Tawilan – north of Petra – has been identified with a seventh to sixth century BC unfortified agricultural Edomite village (Negev & Gibson 2001:494).
779 Petra – the famous capital of the Nabateans – is situated in a valley of the mountains of West-Edom (Cohen 1962c:772).
780 L’Heureux 1979:49.
782 Genesis 26:24; 31:53, 28:13, 38:10, 40:5; Exodus 3:6; see also Exodus 3:15, 16; 4:5.
784 See § 3.8.2 for attributes ascribed to Elohim in the Masoretic Text.
785 See § 3.8.1 for attributes ascribed to Yahweh in the Masoretic Text.
786 'Bull El his father, king El who created him' (CTA 3.5.43; 4.1.5; 4.4.47) and 'Is not he your father, who created you' (Dt 32:6) (L’Heureux 1979:49).
787 El: CTA 3.5.38; 4.4.41; 4.5.66; 10.3.6 and biblical Daniel 7:9 (L’Heureux 1979:49).
788 A standard epithet of El: "the kind one, the god of mercy" and biblical ' … the Lord, a god merciful and gracious, slow to anger' (Ex 34:6) (L’Heureux 1979:49).
789 The title "Eternal King", assigned to El, is equivalent to the Hebrew title (מלך גלים) applied to biblical Yahweh in Psalm 10:16 and Jeremiah 10:10 (L’Heureux 1979:49-50). See § 3.8.1 for attributes ascribed to Yahweh in the Masoretic Text.
791 Deist 1990:250.
them both (or all).’ Dever\textsuperscript{792} furthermore, mentions that the modern concept of ancient Israelite religion sketches an idealistic, romantic portrait, which, however, obscures the reality of that religion. He distinguishes at least two religions, namely "folk" religion and "official" or "state" religion. Although the latter presupposes 'that the state had the power to enforce religious conformity',\textsuperscript{793} it is doubtful whether that happened. Various expressions of beliefs and practices in Israel were tolerated under the rubric of "Yahwism". Israelite religion is an example of a cultural phenomenon. Miller\textsuperscript{794} indicates that 'any effort to describe the religion of ancient Israel' has to conclude that 'there was not a single understanding or expression of what the religion was'.

According to Boshoff,\textsuperscript{795} a responsible interpreter of the biblical text should take into account all aspects that influenced the forming of the text. The background of believers constitutes the historical, geographical, sociological, cultural and religious environment. History of religion entails an 'historical investigation of developments, changes and dynamics within or among religions'.\textsuperscript{796} Two distinct religio-historical approaches to the Hebrew Bible, at the beginning of the twentieth century, can be recognised, namely the predominantly German religionsgeschichtliche Schule\textsuperscript{797} and the Myth and Ritual School.\textsuperscript{798} There is currently a significant growth in publications regarding Israel's religious history. Scholars suggest a variety of approaches to the religio-historical problems in the Hebrew Bible, all of which are 'to a great extent dependent upon the results of other disciplines'.\textsuperscript{799} The biblical texts are, however, a primary source for the history of the Israelite religion. Albertz\textsuperscript{800} indicates that the development of the history of the Israelite religion as a discipline is complex and often described in a variety of perspectives. It should not be defined as merely a history of ideas or of the spiritual, but should be 'presented as a process which embraces all aspects of the historical development'.\textsuperscript{801} The period before the formation of the state is, particularly, "burdened with uncertainties". Consistent with the information in the Hebrew Bible, the Israelite religion has a beginning in history; however, such a claim remains a problem. According to the Pentateuch, 'there was a prelude to the religion of Israel in the religion of the patriarchs'.\textsuperscript{802}

Cross\textsuperscript{803} is of the opinion that scholars should not only trace the origin and development of Israel's religion, but also its emergence from a Canaanite past, its furtherance from this past, its new emergence and 'subsequent changes and evolution'. Israelite religion evolved from Ancient Near Eastern religions, particularly from the religious culture of Canaan. Due to archaeological research, the history of Israel has become part of that of the Ancient Near Eastern world. It is, therefore, now possible to describe the religion of Israel from an Ancient Near Eastern point of view, notably West Semitic mythology and cult. It should also be kept in mind that 'Israel as a nation was born in an era of extraordinary chaos and social turmoil'.\textsuperscript{804}

\textsuperscript{792} Dever 2005:4-5, 8.
\textsuperscript{793} Dever 2005:5.
\textsuperscript{794} Miller 2000b:46.
\textsuperscript{795} Boshoff 1994:121-123, 126, 129.
\textsuperscript{796} Boshoff 1994:122.
\textsuperscript{797} This school is associated with the name of Hermann Gunkel (Boshoff 1994:123).
\textsuperscript{798} The Myth and Ritual School is connected to the name of SH Hooke (Boshoff 1994:123). See also the reference in § 3.1 to the link between this school and the nineteenth century scholar Robertson Smith.
\textsuperscript{799} Boshoff 1994:129.
\textsuperscript{800} Albertz 1994:3,11, 23-25.
\textsuperscript{801} Albertz 1994:11.
\textsuperscript{802} Albertz 1994:25.
\textsuperscript{803} Cross 2004:8.
\textsuperscript{804} Cross 2004:11.
Scholars generally agree that the main function of the Israelite cult was to actualise the tradition. Seasonal feasts celebrated the great redemptive acts of the past, and at the same time traditions were renewed. The Deuteronomist, Deutero-Isaiah, Ezekiel and the Complaint Psalms were probably concerned to reinterpret Israel’s cult and thereby authenticate Israel’s tradition.\(^{805}\) The cult dominated the existence of the Israelite people, being also the medium to express their spiritual and cultural life. The cultic process was influenced by various factors in the selection, developing, altering and preserving of traditions. Historical events were interpreted as the saving deeds of Yahweh, and therefore the very existence of the Hebrew Bible is indebted to the Israelite cult. Canaanite and other foreign influences constantly threatened the cult. In the expressing of the theophany of Yahweh, ancient Canaanite material was used, slightly altered.\(^{806}\) Lemche\(^{807}\) is of the opinion that Israelite religion can only be sought in the Hebrew Bible; the religion described there is quite different from that which was present in Palestine during the biblical period. Biblical scholars generally apply the term "Israelite religion" in a questionable way.

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

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

\(^{805}\) Childs 1962b:75, 77.
\(^{807}\) Lemche 1994:165.
\(^{808}\) Van der Toorn 1998:14.
\(^{809}\) For a discussion of the various figurines found in Israel, see § 2.13, subtitle "Female figurines".
\(^{810}\) Van der Toorn 1998:18.
\(^{813}\) Coogan 1987:115-116,120.
\(^{814}\) Obermann 1949:318-319. Two examples of appropriated Canaanite cultic language are, firstly, "Rider-of-the-Clouds" (an epithet applied to Ba‘al long before the time of the Israelites) and, secondly, "Creator of heaven
Zevit\textsuperscript{815} mentions that, within its dynamic social system, Israelite religion was regarded as a complicated phenomenon 'characterized by a complexity not easily described'. Non-Yahwistic theophoric names convey loyalty to deities other than Yahweh, and at the same time displayed public knowledge of other deities. Most Israelites knew Yahweh as their patron deity, 'knew his consort Asherah, and knew other deities as well to whom they referred by (the) general idioms'\textsuperscript{816} – such as "sons of gods", "other gods". These "other deities" were probably worshipped through similar, but different, rites; the same god might even have been venerated at various places for disparate reasons. Evidence that more than one deity was worshipped is usually in the form of paired appurtenances, such as two steles for two deities at the temple of Arad.\textsuperscript{817} According to Berlinerblau,\textsuperscript{818} recent studies challenge the assumption that "popular religion", in the Israelite context, comprised of a unified, homogenous group which stood apart from a unified homogenous "official religion". In ancient Israel the official religion was largely that which is presented in the Hebrew Bible. There are many indications in the Masoretic Text of overt hostility by the authors towards the institutions of power and their religious affinities. In some instances the legitimacy of the Monarchy is called into question.\textsuperscript{819} It could, however, be assumed that biblical Yahwism was at some point an "official religion". It thus seems that the religious social structure of ancient Israel consisted of two interrelated layers; official religion being the religion of the orthodoxy who wielded power against the "others", who comprised the popular religious groups – the latter being women, non-privileged economic classes and heterodoxies.\textsuperscript{820}

As indicated earlier in paragraph 3.2.2, Miller\textsuperscript{821} mentions that, although the Hebrew Bible condemns the veneration of any other deity alongside Yahweh, polemics in the Hebrew Bible and the extent of the reaction from the prophets and deuteronomists regarding the worship of other gods signify the existence of syncretism among the Israelites. According to Hadley,\textsuperscript{822} Asherah, denoted as a goddess in her own right during the Monarchical Period, developed into an object during the Exile. She furthermore mentions that it is possible to trace the process by which this evolution took place. The goddess Astarte – who was presumably worshipped on a large scale in Palestine – was demoted and depersonalised to a fertility idiom in the Hebrew Bible by the Deuteronomist, and moved to total silence by the latest biblical writers.

**Excursus 2: Israelite women and religion**

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

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\textsuperscript{815} Zevit 2001:646.
\textsuperscript{816} Zevit 2001:652.
\textsuperscript{817} Zevit 2001:587, 608, 646, 652-653.
\textsuperscript{818} Berlinerblau 1996:21, 31, 33, 44.
\textsuperscript{819} Examples are 2 Samuel 12; 1 Kings 3:2-3; 11:5-13; 15:5.
\textsuperscript{820} Berlinerblau 1996:44.
\textsuperscript{821} Miller 1986:239.
\textsuperscript{822} Hadley 1997:169, 171, 178.
\textsuperscript{823} Zevit 2001:268, 271.
Mesopotamian and Israelite women, particularly also regarding their cultic practices. Religion dominated social life. Unfortunately, most available data on women were written from an "aristocratic context". The household of the average daily-labourer or slave obviously would have been different.  

Popular belief – which differs from folk religion – 'is a multicolored collection of convictions', which originated from official religious doctrine, fantasy and folklore. Folk religion basically consisted of beliefs and intuitions, incorporated into religious experiences and teachings, as well as some cultic rituals. Official religion – practised by the upper class – enjoyed prestige, and folk religion, popularity. Although sorcery was punishable in both Israel and Mesopotamia, it was impossible to eradicate the phenomenon. Both witchcraft and sorcery were applied by women to take revenge for their social subordination. The art of divination was important within folk religion. In Mesopotamia this science flourished. Women, however, rarely practised it; a career as interpreter of signs could hardly be combined with motherhood. In Israel, knowledge of the future rested in the priests who made use of the Urim and Thummim.  

Regarding official religion, Israelite women were basically completely excluded from any means of communication with the divine world. Women and the underprivileged were, seemingly, never permitted to officiate at ceremonies or administer any rituals. In folk religion the situation was, however, different. The spirituality of a woman was at times powerful in the area of divination. Dreams provided insight into the counsel of the gods. Women often had significant dreams – mainly symbolic image dreams – which could perhaps be ascribed to them being more receptive. According to Mesopotamian sources, female prophets received their messages through direct divine inspiration. Mesopotamians often called these prophets "a mad person". In Israel there were fewer female prophets than in Mesopotamia.  

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

825 Van der Toorn 1994:112.
826 Divination: see footnote in § 2.4.
827 See Urim and Thummim incorporated in a footnote in § 3.6.
830 A well-known example of female necromancy is found in 1 Samuel 28, when the Israelite king Saul visited the female diviner from Endor.
832 Berlinerblau 1996:34.
Meyers\textsuperscript{834} mentions that the Hebrew Bible is mainly the result of an unrepresentative, small segment of the Israelite population. Priestly activity and editors played a significant role in the compilation of the text. Consequently, 'the few fragments of information about women come from sources removed both hierarchically and demographically from the lives of most women'.\textsuperscript{835} As women were never included in the priesthood, they were never part of the ruling elite. This exclusion – to a great extent – of women as individuals or as groups from the Hebrew Bible could signify that the information it does contain may be distorted or a misrepresentation of the lives of women removed from urban centres. Berlinerblau\textsuperscript{836} speculates that women might have practised forms of cult different – in some ways – from the male-centred "official Yahwism".

Carol Christ\textsuperscript{837} discusses the political and psychological significance of a goddess symbol among women and the effect of male symbolism of God on women. Religions focused on the worship of a male God create motivations 'that keep women in a state of psychological dependence on men and male authority'.\textsuperscript{838} For women, the goddess is a divine female that could be invoked in prayer and ritual; she is the symbol of life and death; she represents the legitimacy and beauty of female power; she reflects the sacred power within women and nature – linking birth and death cycles. In a goddess-centred ritual of magic and spell-casting, she personifies power and energy. Through the juxtaposition of Eve and Mary, patriarchal religion enforces the view that female initiative and will are evil. Although Carol Christ concentrates on the idea of a "goddess symbol" for the modern woman, her reasoning could very well have been applicable in the lives of the ancient Israelite women, particularly considering the numerous female figurines that have been excavated in Israelite – and specifically Judean – context.

Zevit\textsuperscript{839} denotes that from the ninth century BC onwards the Israelites venerated at least one goddess represented by an assortment of pillar figurines. These figurines, as well as plaques representing animate beings, are of the most significant sources of information regarding the Israelite religion. They were probably employed for prayer and ritual, and as a group, perceived as objects associated with fertility. Being so popular, they most likely were implemented in the practice of private, individual cults. Daviau\textsuperscript{840} mentions that particular artefacts\textsuperscript{841} provide confirmation of Iron Age religious activities. Unfortunately, artefacts concerning "domestic cult" are not well known. Those finds that do appear in a domestic setting are 'evidence of religious activities practised by family members in the home'.\textsuperscript{842} The pattern of official and domestic cult practices was not unique for Iron Age Israel and Judah and could be compared with similar practices which were widespread in the Ancient Near East. According to texts from the Hebrew Bible, as well as from Mesopotamian and Ugaritic literature, cultic activities were assigned to the roof or an inner room.\textsuperscript{843}

\textsuperscript{834} Meyer 1988:11-13.
\textsuperscript{835} Meyer 1988:12.
\textsuperscript{836} Berlinerblau 1996:34.
\textsuperscript{837} Christ 1979:274-275, 278, 282-283.
\textsuperscript{838} Christ 1979:275.
\textsuperscript{839} Zevit 2001:267, 271-273.
\textsuperscript{840} Daviau 2001:199-201.
\textsuperscript{841} Artefacts, such as ceramic figurines, fenestrated stands, chalices, rattles and four-horned altars excavated at a temple or small shrine site (Daviau 2001:199).
\textsuperscript{842} Daviau 2001:199.
\textsuperscript{843} According to Jeremiah 19:13 'all the houses on whose roofs offerings have been offered to all the host of heaven', and Jeremiah 32:29 'the houses on whose roofs offerings have been made to Baal and drink offerings have been poured out to other gods'.
As discussed in paragraph 3.2, it is clear that Asherah – albeit the goddess herself, or her cult symbol – was venerated by the majority of Israelites. If Christ’s reasoning is valid, concerning the need of women for a goddess symbol, Asherah would have been particularly favoured by Israelite women. This scenario is attested in 2 Kings 23:7, referring to ‘the women (who) wove hangings for Asherah’. Similarly, it seems that the Israelite and Judean queen mothers had the official responsibility to dedicate themselves to the cult of Asherah. As indicated in paragraph 3.2.3, ‘the prohibition and polemics against Asherah and her cult symbol attest to their popularity in the cult of Yahweh in Iron Age Israel’. The adoration in Judah of the Queen of Heaven – generally identified as Canaanite Astarte – confirms her veneration by Judean women, who burned incense to her, poured out libations to her and prepared cakes for her. Jeremiah attributes the catastrophe of the Exile to the veneration of the Queen of Heaven, while the women in turn blame the disaster to their lack of offerings to the Queen of Heaven. The cakes prepared for the goddess – and thus for her cult – was particularly associated with women, and therefore probably involved the whole family. In the light of the loyalty of the women to the cult of the Queen of Heaven, Schmitz questions ‘the marginal status of women in the Yahwistic cultus affirmed in the Law and Prophets of the Hebrew Bible’.

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

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

844 This dedication is attested in 1 Kings 15:13 when the Judean king Asa removed the queen mother – his mother Maacah – as ‘she had made an abominable image for Asherah’.
847 See also § 3.4.
849 Bird 1987:397.
850 Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) was a German scholar who, together with Karl Graf, proposed the classic pentateuchal Source Hypothesis (West 1981:64). See also § 8.2.
853 Ezekiel 8:14. Tammuz was a deity of Mesopotamian origin who, according to Ezekiel, was introduced into the Jerusalem Temple. Women wailed over the death of this god (Alster 1999:828).
skills and training, particularly concerning the restriction of priestly functions to males. However, apart from maintenance roles, women probably had additional responsibilities, such as weaving and sewing of vestments, hangings and other materials for cultic use, as well as the preparation of cultic meals for rituals, and cleaning duties. Dijkstra\textsuperscript{856} denotes that the Hebrew Bible mostly portrays "women and worship" negatively. The 'religious life with its daily rites in domestic and local places of worship was much more embedded in the social life of ordinary people, women included, than later tradition would indicate'. As the biblical authors were proponents of a monotheistic movement, an already patriarchal culture and religion were portrayed even more dominantly male. The participation of women in the official religion was downplayed and therefore complicates the assessment of women's involvement in the religion and cultus of ancient Israel.

3.8 Divine attributes in the Masoretic Text

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

Lang\textsuperscript{859} indicates that 'the Hebrew God ranks as the most distinguished deity on record in human history' … and that 'no other deity can boast a biography comparable to that of the Hebrew God'. In his book,\textsuperscript{860} The Hebrew God: portrait of an ancient deity, Lang\textsuperscript{861} indicates that he endeavoured to present a 'comprehensive and convincing account of the Hebrew God, … that sums up and completes previous research'. He appropriates research done by Georges Dumézil\textsuperscript{862} to classify the portrayals of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible. Dumézil developed the "trifunctional theory", according to which a 'tripartite system underlies both the divine world and human society'.\textsuperscript{863} According to Dumézil, deities may be categorised in "sovereignty and

\textsuperscript{855} For a discussion of the inclusion of women in cultic activities, see Miller (2000b:201-207).
\textsuperscript{856} Dijkstra 2001c:164-165, 188.
\textsuperscript{857} Dijkstra 2001c:165.
\textsuperscript{858} In this regard, § 3.2.1, § 3.3, § 3.4, § 3.5 and § 3.6 in particular, are relevant.
\textsuperscript{859} Lang 2002:vii.
\textsuperscript{860} Lang 2002: see bibliography in this thesis for details.
\textsuperscript{861} Lang 2002:vii-viii.
\textsuperscript{862} A scholar renowned in the history of religions.
\textsuperscript{863} Lang 2002:4.
the sacred", "physical power and the military", "fertility", thus corresponding to the three basic human social classes, namely 'wisdom, war, and wealth'. Lang's analysis is divided into five sections, "Lord of Wisdom", "Lord of War", "Lord of the Animals", "Lord of the Individual – the Personal God" and "Lord of the Harvest".

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

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

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

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

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864 Lang 2002:4-5.
865 Lang 2002:v-vi.
866 § 3.8.1 and § 3.8.2.
867 Lang's research, as presented in his book The Hebrew God: portrait of an ancient deity.
3.8.1 Summary of attributes ascribed to Yahweh

Storm God: relevant terminology

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


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


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

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

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

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

Warrior God: relevant terminology

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


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

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

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

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

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

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

Sun stood still; sent darkness, shade; prevent sun/moon to strike you: Jos 10:12; Ps 105:28; 121:5-6; Is 43:14; Ezek 32:7.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Temple; Zion; musical instruments; sing: Ps 30; 33:2-3.
Lord of hosts: relevant terminology


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


Judge: relevant terminology

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


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

Redeemer: relevant terminology

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

Father: relevant terminology

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

3.8.2 Summary of attributes ascribed to El/Elohim

Storm God: relevant terminology

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

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


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

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

Broke the sea monsters: Ps 74:13-14.
Wings: Ps 36:7; 57:1; 63:7.

Warrior God: relevant terminology
Shield; sword; weapons of war: Ps 7:12-13; 47:9; 76:3.
Bow; arrows: Ps 7:12-13; 60:4; 64:7; 76:3.
Helmet; trumpet; banner: Ex 19:19; Ps 60:4, 7.
Chariots; horses: Dt 33:26; Ps 68:17.
Stronghold; fortress; tower; rock; mountain; guard: Ex 3:1; 2 Sm 23:3; Ps 42:9; 46:7, 11; 48:3; 59:16-17; 61:2-3; 62:2, 6-7; 78:35; 141:8.
Battle; wars; army; march; captives: 1 Chr 5:22; 12:22; 14:15; Neh 4:20; Ps 68:7, 18.

Solar God: relevant terminology
Established heavenly lights: Gn 1:3, 14; Ps 76:16.
Light; shine (face); tent for the sun: Job 29:3; Ps 19:4; 36:9; 43:3; 44:3; 50:2; 67:1; 80:3.

Creator God: relevant terminology
Creator; established mountains: Gn 1; 2:3; 27:28; Dt 4:32; Job 35:10; Ps 65:6; 68:15; 78:54.
Heavens made by a word: Ps 74:16.

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

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

Judge: relevant terminology
Judge: Job 21:22; Ps 7:11; 50:4, 6; 58:11; 67:4; 75:7; 76:8-9; 82:1, 8.
Justice; righteousness: Dt 32:4; Ps 7:11; 48:10; 50:6; 58:11.
Divine council; law: Ps 37:31; 40:8; 82:1.

Redeemer: relevant terminology
Redeemer; salvation; fountain of life; protects; helper; trust; listen: Lv 26:12; Ps 20:1; 36:9; 50:23; 51:14; 54:1, 4; 56:11; 66:19; 78:35; 79:9; 85:4.
3.8.3 Inference from summaries of attributes; some other characteristics

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

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

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

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868 § 3.8.1 and § 3.8.2.
869 See § 3.5 for a discussion of Aššur.
870 Guirand 1996:57.
871 Handy 1994:77-78.
873 In the Ugaritic Ba’al cycle (KTU 2 1.1-6) there are three main sections: the conflict between Ba’al and Yam; Ba’al who has become king builds a "house" (temple/palace) on Mount Zaphon; Ba’al’s conflict with Mot, the god of the Underworld (Day 2000:91). For more information, see discussion in § 3.5.
875 See § 3.3 regarding Anat.
876 CTA 3.2.3-30; KTU 1.3 II.
877 See, for example, a footnote in § 3.3 where the "bloodbath" text of Anat is compared with Psalm 23.
878 See Smith (1990:61-64), for a discussion of two of these parallel passages.
passages. However, 'since Anat is not attested in the Bible excepting in a few personal names, the lack of contact between her cult and that of Yahweh forestalls any theory of direct dependence.' The common language may have been derived from a third source. As mentioned earlier, Lang indicates that the king was often represented as the human war leader of the deity. As the Deity of the State, *Yahweh* had the responsibility to secure royal victory in battle. During the royal enthronement a special weapon – the warrior deity's weapon – was handed over to the new king. Divine warfare terminology was inherited by the Israelites from its neighbours. War legends 'are particularly characteristic of traditions relating to the exodus from Egypt and the conquest of the promised land'. Apart from human battles, the Divine Warrior – notably *Yahweh*, also in his capacity as Storm God – wages a successful battle against beings which represent chaos. Celestial beings – who formed *Yahweh*'s entourage and fought his battles – signified the "hosts" in his title "Lord of Hosts". Biblical texts cite overwhelming references to *Yahweh* as "Lord of Hosts".

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

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

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879 Smith 1990:63.
880 Lang 2002:47, 49, 55, 57.
881 Compare Psalm 110:2; *Yahweh* sends his mighty sceptre.
882 Lang 2002:49.
883 Lang 2002:36.
scribes and administrators – is a figure also involved in the wisdom tradition. He points out that translations in the Hebrew Bible refer to her as "Wisdom" and that relevant evidence for the wise God and wisdom goddess is found in the Book of Proverbs.\textsuperscript{887} Day,\textsuperscript{888} however, discounts such a suggestion, indicating that 'there is not a scrap of evidence that any such goddess ever existed'. Smith,\textsuperscript{889} on the other hand, proposes that the Canaanite goddess Asherah may be a candidate for the female figure of Wisdom. Lang,\textsuperscript{890} furthermore, poses the question why the Yahweh-alone editors did not discard Proverbs 1-9 altogether in the redaction process. This text – as a so-called "school text"\textsuperscript{891} – remained a widely known piece of literature for many centuries. It even reverberates in a number of early Jewish writings. Ben Sira\textsuperscript{892} maintains that the voice of Wisdom is heard when the Law is read in the synagogue. Hadley\textsuperscript{893} denotes that, according to Proverbs 8:22-31, Lady Wisdom declares that 'The LORD [Yahweh] possessed me at the beginning of his work …', and that she was therefore the first of all Yahweh's creations. Some scholars suggest that Wisdom existed independently of Yahweh. In the Book of Proverbs particular reference is made to the "knowledge" and "wisdom" received from Yahweh.\textsuperscript{894} The fear of the Lord has a paradigmatic role in connection with wisdom.\textsuperscript{895} The fear of a deity is also found in the Babylonian wisdom literature and in later Egyptian compositions.\textsuperscript{896}

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

\textsuperscript{887} See particularly Proverbs, chapters 1-9.
\textsuperscript{888} Day 1995:69.
\textsuperscript{889} Smith 1990:94-95.
\textsuperscript{890} Lang 1999:903.
\textsuperscript{891} Christians, from late antiquity up to the Middle Ages, never created their own curriculum for schools, but learned to read and write by utilising pagan literature, such as the poetry of Homer or Virgil. Proverbs 1-9 was similarly employed as a "school text" (Lang 1999:903).
\textsuperscript{892} Ben Sira, or Yeshua ben Eleazar ben Sira, a professional scribe – thereby implying a wise man or sage – wrote during the early second century BC in Jerusalem his Wisdom; also known as The Wisdom of Ben Sira, or The Book of Sirach. It is one of the earliest, and certainly the longest of the deuterocanonical or apocryphal books of the Old Testament. The book contains, inter alia, moral, cultic and ethical sayings, theological and philosophical reflections, and observations about life and customs (Di Lella 1992:931-932).
\textsuperscript{893} Hadley 1995:236.
\textsuperscript{894} See, for example, Proverbs 2:5-6.
\textsuperscript{896} Day 1995:67.
\textsuperscript{897} Compare, for example, Isaiah 42:14; 46:3; 49:15.
\textsuperscript{898} Smith 1990:99.
\textsuperscript{899} Examples are: Athtar is mother, ‘itr’um; Shamash is my mother, ummi-šamaš; lord is mother, a-da-na-um-mu (Smith 1990:99).
The same applied for a goddess. There is, to a certain degree, the lack of gender language for *Yahweh* in the Hebrew Bible, which could be attributed to the avoidance of anthropomorphic imagery for *Yahweh*. This tendency is found mainly in the priestly and deuteronomistic traditions. *Yahweh* was portrayed as a male God without a consort. Israelite society also perceived *Yahweh* 'as embodying traits or values expressed by various gendered metaphors and as transcending such particular renderings'.

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

The concept of androgyny is unexpected in the Hebrew Bible, yet in Job 38 *Yahweh* confronts Job with a rhetorical question:

'Has the rain a father,

or who has begotten the drops of dew?

From whose womb did the ice come forth

and who has given birth to the frost of heaven?'

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

901 Stone 1979:120, 123-124.
904 Pagels 1979:107, 117.
905 For a description, see "androgynous" and "hermaphrodite" incorporated in a footnote in § 3.2.1.
906 Job 38:28-29.
passage refers to two parents. Wyatt presumes that in Job it is the same deity Yahweh – identified with El Shadday, or El; the latter who appears in the bulk of the poem – who acts in both paternal and maternal roles in the formation of the natural world. The language is metaphorical and is in accordance with idioms in other Ancient Near Eastern religions. In the said passage the Deity is represented as androgynous. Implicit references to androgyny are found in Isaiah, and particularly in Genesis 1:27:

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

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

911 Documents from Amarna, Qatna, Taanach and Ugarit. The use of ilânû in the Amarna Letters in Canaanite vassal correspondence, was recognised as a parallel to biblical 'êlôhîm (Burnett 2001:7-8).
912 For a discussion of some of these parallels, see Burnett (2001:24-53).
913 Burnett 2001:53.
914 Examples are: אל דת אלוהים (Ps 68:36); אלהים אל הרוח (2 Ki 19:4) and אלהים אלות (Jos 3:10); אלוהים אלהים אלות (Dt 32:17), אל,'כל אלהים אלות (Dt 32:21) and אלהים כל אלהים (Hs 8:6) (Burnett 2001:55-56).
references to Shadday (שדוא). A significant feature of the book is the appropriation of the designation 'ělōaḥ which appears at least once in most chapters.\footnote{Examples of the designation הָלֹאֵח in the book of Job, are the following: Job 3:4, 23; 4:9; 5:17; 6:4, 8; 10:2; 11:7; 12:4, 6; 15:8; 16:20, 21; 19:6, 21, 26; 21:9, 18; 22:12, 26; 27:3, 8, 10; 28:23; 29:2, 4; 31:6; 33:12, 26; 35:10; 36:2; 37:15; 39:17; 40:2.}

The Hebrew word 'ělōaḥ is derived from 'ilāh-, which could be a secondary form of the Semitic word 'il-. Elohim – as the Jewish designation of God – represents an expansion of Eloah. As a theophoric element, and as an appellative, Eloah is absent from both Ugaritic and biblical personal names. It does, however, appear in Arabian and Aramaic names. While the name Eloah is relatively unimportant, Elohim, which is a prominent name in the Hebrew Bible, is also absent in proper names. In comparison with the plural form Elohim, the number of occurrences of Eloah in the Hebrew Bible is considerably lower. The appellative function of Eloah is apparent in several passages.\footnote{In an appellative function הָלוֹאֵח or הָלֹאֵח appears in: Deuteronomy 32:15, 17; 2 Samuel 22:32; 2 Chronicles 32:15; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalms 18:32; 114:7; Isaiah 44:8; Daniel 11:37-39; Habakkuk 1:11 (Pardee 1999:287).}

Pardee\footnote{Pardee 1999:287.} is of the opinion that its role in Habakkuk 3:3 is debatable. He argues that in the context of Habakkuk 3 – 'Eloah has come from Teman, Qadosh [the Holy One] from Mount Paran' – the phrase is obviously monotheistic and refers to Yahweh. It is, however, not clear whether 'God / (the) Holy One' or 'a god / a holy one' is a parallelism, or whether the expression applies a common noun as an epithet of Yahweh, or employs a divine name equivalent to Yahweh.

In their concept of God the Israelites ascribed an anthropomorphic nature to God: he possesses hands, ears, eyes, fingers, feet, a mouth and other bodily parts; God is also capable of feelings resembling those of humans. 'An anthropomorphic vision of God underlies many of Israel's religious institutions.'\footnote{Van der Toorn 1999b:361-362. Some texts in the Hebrew Bible, however, 'stress the difference between God's divinity and man's humanity'.\footnote{Van der Toorn 1999b:362. An example of such a text is, Numbers 23:19, 'God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.'} On account of his heavenly nature, God transcends humans; the concept of his invisibility is linked to his celestial being. As an adjective, Elohim occurs as a term for "the spirits of the dead". The apparition or spirit of Samuel is described as "'ělōhîm coming up from the earth".\footnote{Van der Toorn 1999b:361-364. For a discussion of deified ancestors, ancestral spirits and Yahweh-El, an ancestral God, see § 5.7.} As there is no clear division between human and divine in the Ancient Near East, the word 'ělōhîm can be used in the sense of "divine" or "exceptional".\footnote{Van der Toorn 1999b:361-364. For a discussion of deified ancestors, ancestral spirits and Yahweh-El, an ancestral God, see § 5.7.}
In Northern Israel the term 'ělōhîm had a special significance in their national cultus. Jeroboam I\(^{923}\) made two golden calves – bull statues – which represented the Deity and which he set up in the sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel.\(^{924}\) In a worship credo, 'ělōhîm is associated with these bull statues: 'Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.'\(^{925}\) The concept of a plurality of gods – 'ělōhîm – is not foreign to the exodus tradition and traces thereof are found throughout this book. Furthermore, an apparent link between the ark and the exodus formula,\(^{926}\) merits consideration. In 1 Samuel 4:8 the Philistines – with reference to the ark – mention the gods, אֶלֹהִים, who struck the Egyptians with various plagues.\(^{927}\)

Burnett\(^{928}\) maintains that 'the 'ělōhîm cult-formula cited in Exod 32:4, 8; 1 Sam 4:8; and 1 Kgs 12:28 was a well established religious tradition of common-Israelite heritage, which had been featured in the central worship of premonarchic Israel'. This exclusive role of 'ělōhîm suggests that the term had a particular status as divine designation among the northern Israelites; a status which became authoritative in their national cultus. Plural 'ělōhîm originally denoted Yahweh and his divine entourage. With Jeroboam's appropriation of the "worship-formula" the prominence of 'ělōhîm as a title for Israel's God, was reinforced.\(^{929}\)

Scholars noted apparent differences in the use of Yahweh or Elohim in the Psalter. Numerous appearances of the Tetragrammaton in the so-called Elohist Psalter\(^{930}\) cannot be overlooked, although the virtually exclusive appearance of Elohim is found in these psalms – Psalms 42-83. An analysis of the three groups of psalms\(^{931}\) in the Elohist Psalter indicates a distribution of Yahweh among all three groups. Simplistic theories by scholars – such as, the redactional insertion of Yahweh; superficial editing by Elohist redactors who overlooked instances of Yahweh; 'or the substitution of the generic term Elohim for the original proper name YHWH with occasional re-infiltration of the proper name\(^{932}\) – should be avoided. The Elohistic inclination should also be separated from a fear to pronounce the Tetragrammaton –

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\(^{923}\) Jeroboam I was the first king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel; 931/930- 910/909 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:196).
\(^{924}\) 1 Kings 12:28-30.
\(^{925}\) 1 Kings 12:28. This liturgical formula is associated with the bull [calf] image in the account of Aaron's rebellion in Sinai, when he declared: 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt' (Ex 32:4) (Burnett 2001:80).
\(^{926}\) See previous footnote regarding the liturgical formula associated with the bull image in Sinai.
\(^{927}\) Burnett 2001:79-80, 86, 92.
\(^{928}\) Burnett 2001:105.
\(^{929}\) Burnett 2001:105, 119.
\(^{930}\) The so-called Elohist Psalms; Psalms 42-83.
\(^{931}\) The three groups are: first collection of Korahite Psalms (Psalms 42-49); second Davidic Psalter (Psalms 51-72); Asaph Psalms (Psalms 50, 73-83) (Hossfeld & Zenger 2003:50). For a discussion of the appearance of Elohim and Yahweh in these groups, see Hossfeld & Zenger (2003:42-50).
\(^{932}\) Hossfeld & Zenger 2003:50.
an observance which only began later.\textsuperscript{933} Hossfeld and Zenger\textsuperscript{934} are of the opinion that the 'purposefully-used name for God, YHWH, is not indicative of a secondary redaction, but an expression of theological thinking that typically reveals itself only as a theological tendency in these texts'.

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

The appearance of the name *Yahweh*, *Yahweh Elohim*, or *Elohim*, in the Hebrew Bible depends on a particular tradition and, in some instances, possibly on the preference of the redactor. Despite the declaration in Exodus 6:3, '… but by my name the LORD [*Yahweh*] I did not make myself known to them' [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob], the name *Yahweh* or *Yahweh Elohim* appears close to two hundred times in Genesis.\textsuperscript{935} Smith\textsuperscript{936} mentions that, with regard to Genesis, the name *Yahweh* could have been substituted by another term for God, without affecting the substance of the particular passage. Different titles were used when God revealed himself to the patriarchs,\textsuperscript{937} yet, 'God has many titles, but only one name, LORD (YHWH)'.\textsuperscript{938} It is clear, from deliberations in this and some previous paragraphs,\textsuperscript{939} that *Yahweh* is an infinite-dimensional God, into whom all the attributes of the Ancient Near Eastern deities are integrated.

3.9 Influence of myths and legends on the Masoretic Text

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

\textsuperscript{933} Hossfeld & Zenger 2003:35-36, 42-51.
\textsuperscript{934} Hossfeld & Zenger 2003:50.
\textsuperscript{935} Smith 1968:105.
\textsuperscript{936} Smith 1968:105.
\textsuperscript{937} Titles of God in the patriarchal narratives: "God Most High", מָלֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם (Gn 14:18-20, 22); "God of heaven", מֹאֲסֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם (Gn 24:3, 7); "Everlasting God", חָיוֹן הַשְּׁמִימָה (Gn 21:33); "God Almighty", מָלֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם (Gn 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3) (Smith 1968:107).
\textsuperscript{938} Smith 1968:107.
\textsuperscript{939} See § 3.5, § 3.6 and § 3.8.1.
influence on their perception of Yahweh and Yahwism, and particularly influenced related traditions. It is therefore necessary that I take note of relevant myths and legends that clearly had an effect on the Israelite traditions, and the compilation thereof in the Masoretic Text.

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

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

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940 Kruger 2001a:47-48. See also § 3.1 for a discussion of "myth".
943 Cross 1973:90.
944 See also footnote in § 1.5.
945 Silver 1974:9, 311.
948 Wyatt 2005:173.
should therefore be classified as myth; history and myth not being opposing terms⁹⁴⁹ — myth being one of the main vehicles by which biblical writers did their theologising.⁹⁵⁰ A French scholar, Lévi-Strauss⁹⁵¹ — who compared myth with language and music — was concerned with the logic of myth, and wrote that 'myth grows spiral-wise until the intellectual impulse which has produced it is exhausted'.⁹⁵² He indicates that myth presents an intricate mass of data, and that the interpreter should get to the deep structure of the myth, for which he shall need a sensitivity to assess the complexities thereof.⁹⁵³ The meaning of a story is discovered only when it is in relationship 'with alternate forms and presentations of the myth'.⁹⁵⁴ Gaster⁹⁵⁵ denotes that myths and chronicles in the Hebrew Bible ‘are paradigms of the continuing human situation we are involved in, … [and] myth, as an extension of existential experience, is thus the natural language of Religion'.

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

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

Wyatt⁹⁵⁸ refers to the Chaoskampf⁹⁵⁹ tradition wherein the deity battles with a sea monster, gains a kingdom in victory, and becomes a hero. This myth cuts through Hebrew literary traditions and forms the paradigm of creation, Genesis 1; redemption from Egypt, Exodus 15; redemption to come, Isaiah 27:1. Psalm 89 relates Yahweh’s victory in the primeval battle

⁹⁵¹ See also reference to Lévi-Strauss in § 3.1.
⁹⁵² Williams, R B 1977:280.
⁹⁵⁵ Gaster 1969:xxxiv, xxxvi.
⁹⁵⁶ Sjöberg 1984:218.
⁹⁵⁷ Mondi 1990:149.
⁹⁵⁸ Wyatt 2005:168.
⁹⁵⁹ The Chaoskampf tradition occurs primarily in the Ugaritic Ba’al cycle of myths (KTU 1.1-6) (Wyatt 2005:168). See also CTA 3.2.3-30, KTU 1.3 II and § 3.5 for Ba’al’s battle with Yam and Mot. Apart from the deities Yam and Mot, there are passing references in the Ugaritic texts to a number of chaos demons defeated by Ba’al (Mondi 1990:171).
granting the king security to rule. Divine kingship is thus attained through the cosmic struggle and the subsequent establishing of the world order.

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

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

961 Mondi 1990:177.
962 See footnote in § 3.1. The text consists of seven tablets, probably composed during the eleventh century BC (ANET 60-72, 501-503) (Arnold & Beyer 2002:31-50). Some scholars maintain that, due to the composition being dated the twelfth to eleventh century BC, the possibility that the creation narratives in the Hebrew Bible borrowed concepts from this epic, should be excluded (Sjöberg 1984:218).
964 See footnotes in § 2.14.6 and § 3.1.
966 See earlier footnote in this paragraph. Six tablets excavated at Ugarit contain a conflict myth – the *Ba’al cycle* myth. The tablets are dated the first half of the fourteenth century BC. Ilumiku is indicated as the scribe responsible for the preserving of the myth (Arnold & Beyer 2002:50-62).
968 *Rahab*: Job 9:13; 26:12; Psalm 89:10; Isaiah 51:9. A mythological sea serpent or dragon. Functions similarly to an originally Canaanite chaos monster, the Leviathan. In the Hebrew Bible *Rahab* appears as a sea monster defeated during creation, or as a metaphorical name for Egypt (Day 1992c:610). See also footnote in § 3.5. *Leviathan*: Job 3:8; Psalm 74:14; Isaiah 27:1. A mythological sea serpent or dragon personifying the chaos waters. Mentioned in the Ugaritic texts, Hebrew Bible and Jewish literature. The name means "twisting one". The *Leviathan*’s defeat is associated with *Yahweh* – particularly in a creation context (Day 1992b:295). *"Sea monster":* Psalm 74:13.
969 A clay tablet from Nippur (see footnote in § 2.4) and a fragment from Ur (see footnote in § 3.6), are both inscribed with Sumerian text. A third fragment, translated into Akkadian, is dated ca 600 BC. Although the fragments of these texts represent different versions of the myth, they are, nonetheless, all renderings of the original story. A list of cities are also given. The god *Enki* (see also footnote in § 2.3) is portrayed as the saviour of mankind. Eridu was his first city (Jacobsen 1981:513-514, 519).
971 See § 8.2 for a brief discussion of the P-source.
two stories, they represent an analogous style of a peculiar and unusual character. A parallel to Elohim's divine command on the six successive days of creation in Genesis 1 is found in the Memphis creation narrative.

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

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

972 In both traditions chronology plays a role; precise figures for the length of reigns and life spans of persons are listed – extraordinarily large figures (Jacobsen 1981:527-528).
973 Arnold & Beyer 2002:63-65. Ptah, the god of crafts was worshipped at Memphis in Egypt. He fashioned gods and kings out of precious metals. He created by thinking and speaking out aloud the names of all the gods (Willis 1993:39).
974 Von Rad 1972:63-64.
976 Cassuto 1961:72-73.
979 For information on Enki, see footnote in § 2.3, and an earlier footnote in this paragraph.
980 See footnote in § 2.4.
981 The date of the composition is unknown, but there are copies dated the first half of the second millennium BC (Arnold & Beyer 2002:15-19).
984 See also discussion on "Eve" in § 3.3.
Mesopotamian myth – "council of the heavenly beings", "life-giving waters" (rivers), "abundant fertility", "trees of supernatural quality and great beauty".  

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

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

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986 Skinner 1930:52.
987 Genesis 2:17; 3:3-5.
990 Hestrin 1991:54. The life-giving tree was also depicted in Egypt. A wall painting from the burial chamber of Pharaoh Tutmosis III portrays the ruler being suckled by a breast protruding from a sycamore tree (Hestrin 1991:54).
993 Wyatt 1999c:316. See § 3.3 for a discussion of Eve.
Three different major Flood chronicles have survived: the Sumerian Flood story, the eleventh tablet of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, and the *Athra-Ḫasis Epic*. Details of these narratives indicate clearly that they are intimately related to the biblical flood story, and, indeed, that the Babylonian and biblical accounts of the flood represent different retellings of an essentially identical flood tradition\(^994\).

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

Samson, of the Book of Judges,\(^999\) has been compared with Gilgamesh.\(^1000\)

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

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\(^995\) The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is composed in Akkadian, and relates the adventures of Gilgamesh who ruled ca 2600 BC in Uruk. The narrative is recorded on twelve tablets. Various episodes of the epic may have circulated as early as 2100-2000 BC. At some stage the independent narratives were woven into a whole. Major Mesopotamian sites continue to yield copies and fragments of the epic. As no complete edition has survived from any single site, scholars have created a composite version. The different narratives share major characters and specific episodes, but obviously address different audiences. See Sasson (1992:1024-1027) for a discussion of this epic. Uruk (biblical Erech) was one of the prominent Sumerian cities in the lower part of Mesopotamia. The Sumerian deity *An-Anu* was the highest god in the pantheon at Uruk. Kish (see footnote in § 2.4), being the first seat of Mesopotamian kingship after the Flood, was succeeded by Uruk as centre of power. Gilgamesh (originally Bilgamesh in Sumerian) is the best known king of the First Dynasty of Uruk (Bodine 1994:22, 24, 29). His name might be of Kassite or Elamite origin. A real national hero did become, at times, the centre of different legends of deities and supernatural beings. Mythologically he was regarded as a type of solar god (Spence 1994:249).  
\(^996\) *Utnapishtim* built a large reed boat which allowed him to survive the Flood. He was accompanied by his family and pairs of all the animals. See Arnold & Beyer (2002:66-70) for a translation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.  
\(^997\) Wright 1996:321. Parallels between the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Garden of Eden narrative are, inter alia, the creation of *Enkidu* – a counterpart of Gilgamesh – out of clay; *Enkidu’s* association with the animals; the subsequent appearance of a woman – a harlot – who engages him in sex after which he becomes very wise, like a god. The epic furthermore deals with immortality – a possibility which is foiled by a snake (Wright 1996:321).  
\(^998\) Speiser 1964:26.  
\(^1000\) Bury et al 1925:429.  
Qohelet, illustrating the dependence of the latter on Gilgamesh. Both compositions 'compare the shallowness of human achievement to the wind ... [and] both employ the unusual image of the threefold cord'.

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

A fragmentary tablet of the first Sumerian tradition of the Flood has been found in the ruins of Nippur. In this legend the king and the priest Ziusudra – "Long of Life" – is introduced where the latter is carving a god to worship and consult as an oracle. Ziusudra is saved in a boat during the deluge which lasted seven days. He was informed beforehand of the verdict reached by the gods to destroy mankind. This account has been recorded in the Sumerian
The Sumerian King List, which contains documents of historiographic character. Instead of poems or epics – as in the case of the previous two chronicles – the King List was published for chronological and historical purposes. Sumer's history is divided into two periods: before the Flood, and after the Flood.

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

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

Genesis 11:1-9 records the account of the "tower of Babel" as an explanation for all the different languages in the world. This text represents a Sumerian equivalent, although there is no certainty about the translation of a key phrase in the Sumerian epic, Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta.
A first millennium BC Akkadian document known as the *Autobiography of Sargon*, explains the unexpected and rapid rise of Sargon the Great, first great Semitic ruler of Mesopotamia. He was the founder of the Dynasty of Akkad. This document contains a birth legend of Sargon, explaining that he was an illegitimate son of a priestess. She abandoned her baby; as priestess she was not permitted to bear children. Written in the first person, the composition mentions, inter alia,

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

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

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

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

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1016 Translation of this composition is in Arnold & Beyer (2002:75-76).
1017 Exodus 2:2-10.
1018 See footnote in § 2.4.
1019 Cooper 1985:34. Genesis 37:1-11 recounts that Joseph, as a young boy, dreamt that the sheaves in the field bowed before his sheaf, and that 'the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down' to him (Gn 37:9).
leadership, prior to the Old Babylonian Period. Although these two "dream narratives" have no specific details in common, they may, even so, have some common ancestor. Batto mentions that "myth" is generally recognised within the primeval narratives of Genesis 1-11, while, to suggest that the story of the exodus may also be a myth, is not easily accepted. In the exodus chronicle 'myth is replaced by historical consciousness, . . . . Biblical religion is at core historical'. Although biblical revelation frequently revolved around historical events, it should be recognised that myth – even more than history – served as an agency of biblical revelation. The question is whether the exodus was conceived as an historical event within biblical tradition, or whether this tradition presented it as a timeless story. Batto indicates that the different literary strands in the Pentateuch portraying the Israelites' escape from Egypt, compels scholars 'to conclude that we are dealing primarily with a developing literary tradition that owes as much – or more – to myth as to history'.

Wenham indicates that, although 'Genesis shares many of the theological presuppositions of the ancient world', most of the chronicles therein are presented as an alternative world view to that which is generally accepted in the Ancient Near East. Genesis 1-11 essentially challenges ancient beliefs about God, the world and mankind. The Hebrew writer probably appropriated familiar mythological motifs, adapted into an original story of his own. The Israelite textual material displays a tendency to moderate mythical elements in traditions inherited by them. Myths in Genesis 1-11, as well as chronicles in the Book of Joshua, provide explanations for certain existing phenomena. There is, however, a vast difference between the explanation of the myths, and that of the conquest narratives. Many traditions are behind present-day biblical texts, which provided the author with his basic material. In the final product the different components have been blended to such an extent that there is not much hope for a successful recovery. Vehse denotes that the primary purpose of narratives is to convey a message. Historical myths, therefore, are independent of historical accuracy, but
suggest how people thought about happenings. Scholars generally agree that the historical books in the Hebrew Bible are "historicised myth" or "mythologised history".\textsuperscript{1030}

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

\section*{3.10 Résumé and conclusion}

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

Since the discovery of innumerable extra-biblical texts – as discussed in Chapter 2 – it has come to light that the mythologies and legends of the different Ancient Near Eastern peoples – particularly the Canaanites – had a significant effect on the religion of the Israelites, as well as on many biblical texts that were obviously influenced by these ancient – notably Mesopotamian – myths and legends. Myths narrate origins in the primordial time\textsuperscript{1032} and are

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Dever 1997a:21.}
\footnote{Boshoff et al 2000:53.}
\footnote{Kruger 2001a:48.}
\end{footnotes}
developed to explain natural phenomena. Some mythological literature could also act as a polemical vehicle for controversial beliefs and views. A collection of myths is generally inherent in religion. Some biblical texts and narratives could be clarified by comparison of literary parallels of the Ancient Near East. Myth and religion cannot readily be separated; myth may be an obvious alternative to history. Myth and history can co-exist; therefore the mythical nature of texts need not be affected by the potential historicity of texts. Myth, ritual and social structure validate existence in society.

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

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

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

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

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1033 Jay 1996:35.
1036 Kunin 1995:23-24, 44.
1037 Oden 1992:946.
also known as Athiratu or Athirtu. She appears in different mythologies, covering more or less the whole region of the Ancient Near East. The earliest known reference to Asherah is in texts from Ebla, dated ca 2350 BC. She furthermore emerges in the Mesopotamian cult as Ashratu, consort of the Amorite storm and warrior god Amurru. Both Asherah and Geštinanna – goddess of the Underworld – with whom Asherah was equated, were regarded as consorts of Amurru. Depicted as a solar deity, Asherah spent her nights with Geštinanna in the Netherworld. Ašratum, characterised as a goddess of the nomads, was often referred to as Ašratum bēlet sēri, "Lady of the Steppe". Athirat, venerated in Arabia as solar deity, was a consort of the Arabian moon gods, 'Amm and Wadd. Canaanite Athirat may therefore have been originally a solar deity and thus consort of the Semitic moon god Yřh. An early Ugaritic text indicates her as the solar deity Athiratu, "who treads the heavens from end to end". At a later stage she lost her solar character to become a maritime goddess – Athirat. Ugaritic texts furthermore refer to her as Canaanite El's consort, also know as 'Elat. The Ugaritic word atrt, and Hebrew cognate 'ašērā, were originally common nouns meaning "wife", "consort", literally denoting "she-who-follows-in-the-footsteps" (of her husband). Athirat was also known in Egypt as Qudšu. A relief from Thebes in Egypt refers to gdš'-strt-'nt, indicating a fusion with the Canaanite goddesses Astarte and Anat. She finally lost her position in all Canaanite religions, but maintained it as Asherah in the religion of the Israelites.

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

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

\[1040\] Kletter 2001:199.
indicate a wooden cult object, a pole, a tree or a stone. Vriezen\textsuperscript{1042} is of the opinion that, on the basis of a number of descriptions in the Hebrew Bible referring to 'ašērā, it could be deduced that it was an object used in the cult placed next to the altars and next to the pillars dedicated to Ba‘al. A sacred tree or pole was presumably treated as a symbol of this goddess. Some scholars conceive that, in certain cases, the sacred pole or tree-trunk had a masculine phallic character. Cult statues made of wood were common in the Ancient Near East.

According to Korpel,\textsuperscript{1043} the Asherah mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic Asherah are identical. She was familiar in ancient Israel as her name was linked to El, who was an Israelite God. She was probably acceptable to many Israelis as a goddess next to Yahweh-El. When the dominant position she has in the Hebrew Bible is taken into consideration, she is the only likely candidate in the syncretistic religious practices of Iron Age Judah and the Northern Kingdom. Archaeological finds interpreted as remains of a ḥâmēr or an 'ašērâ, and an altar, could be an indication that both Yahweh and "his Asherah" were worshipped alongside each other in that particular sanctuary, each with its own cult object.\textsuperscript{1044} Miller\textsuperscript{1045} denotes that, regarding the question of a goddess in the Israelite religion, one cannot declare unreservedly 'that one of the distinctive features of the worship of Yahweh was the absence of any consort in the cult or theology associated with Yahweh'. Since the discovery of the inscriptions – "Yahweh and his Asherah" – at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom, the possibility of a female consort for Yahweh has been debated extensively. Despite ongoing debates, scholars have reached reasonable agreement, accepting that Asherah in the Masoretic Text refers to both an independent goddess and her wooden cult symbol.

It has become clear that the ancient Israelite cult made far more allowances in religious beliefs and practices than admitted by the exilic and post-exilic editors of the Masoretic Text. Although the queen mother – הָבָּרָה – held no official office within the Judean and Israelite monarchies, she nevertheless had an official status. Ackerman\textsuperscript{1046} proposes that the queen mother had the official responsibility to dedicate herself to the cult of Asherah, the mother goddess. The most explicit link indicating such a cult activity is expressed in 1 Kings 15:13, when king Asa removed his mother Maacah, as 'she had made an abominable image for Asherah'. The queen mother Jezebel – frequently accused of introducing the alien cult of

\textsuperscript{1042} Vriezen 2001:73.
\textsuperscript{1043} Korpel 2001:149.
\textsuperscript{1044} Vriezen 2001:74-75.
\textsuperscript{1045} Miller 1986:239.
\textsuperscript{1046} Ackerman 1993:388.
Asherah into the religion of the Northern Kingdom – most likely worshipped Asherah as an element of the state cult in her capacity as אשתה. Maacah, Athalia and Nehushta from Judah, together with Jezebel from the Northern Kingdom, are four queen mothers identified in the Hebrew Bible as devotees of Asherah.

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

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

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

Although the Masoretic Text has no direct reference to the Ugaritic goddess Anat, there are a few possible allusions to her. In the Ugaritic texts she is portrayed as a consort of Ba'āl, and

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1047 Williams, A J 1977:358.
there is also a conceivable intimation that she was, in addition, a fertility goddess. The narratives signifying this reproductive role are, however, so damaged that scholars are inconclusive about this function. The Ugaritic mythological texts present Anat, foremost, as a volatile and independent warrior and hunter. Her bloodthirsty nature is explicitly demonstrated in a well-known Ugaritic text. Her vengeance on her enemies has been compared to Yahweh's actions on a number of occasions. Scholars have indicated striking points of contact between this Ugaritic "bloodbath" text and Psalm 23. According to Stern, it is thus clear that Psalm 23 has a mythic background, the Anat text being 'a source of poetic inspiration for a Hebrew poet'.

The fertility goddess Anahita is a figure of ancient Persian myth. She was also identified with the planet Venus. In the Zend-Avesta she is known as a goddess of war and is possibly comparable to Anat.

The prophet Jeremiah attributes the catastrophe of the Exile to the veneration of a goddess, called the Queen of Heaven, who appears briefly in two passages in Jeremiah. The women of Jerusalem and Judah, however, attribute this disaster to their lack of offerings to the Queen of Heaven. Currently most scholars identify her with Canaanite Astarte, who – apart from being called "Lady of Heaven" – is frequently associated with the heavens. This link with the heavens is also connected to Anat, Ishtar and Qudšu/Asherah. The masculine form 'Athar, 'Ashtar, is probably the name of the planet Venus; the latter also a personification of the Akkadian goddess Ishtar – the male deity thus being the Morning Star, and the goddess the Evening Star. In the Hebrew Bible she is referred to as Ashtarat of the Philistines and Ashtoret of the Phoenician Sidonians. The Assyrians and Babylonians identified her as Ashtar, goddess of fertility and love. Sumerian Inanna and Akkadian Ishtar were major goddesses of love, war and the planet Venus. In Canaan she was attested as Astarte. Clay figurines from Mesopotamia portray her in a characteristic breast-offering pose, known among archaeologists as the "Ishtar pose". As described in Jeremiah 44, Judeans were reluctant to abandon her – probably due to the fertility feature.

An Old Babylonian goddess of Mari – Dīrītum – was initially a manifestation of Ishtar, later establishing her own identity and rising to prominence in the Mari pantheon. The ideographic

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1049 Persian cults and myths are known to us through the Zend-Avesta (Oxford University Press 1964b:1020).
form of the name of Shaushka – an important Hurrian goddess – was "IŠHTAR(-ka). She was associated with Ishtar of Nineveh, with whom she shared some distinctive features. As she was linked to the Queen of Heaven her character was probably not unknown among the Israelites.

Mesopotamian literature refers to Ishtar with various designations, mostly relating to her different cult centres. Representations of her depict her within a circle. She is identified by stars – regarded as her symbols – as well as light radiating from her, often standing on a lion. She is frequently shown together with women – thus corroborating the role she played in the cult essentially carried out by women.

After 722 BC the Neo-Assyrian Empire imposed an official state religion on Israel introducing some Mesopotamian cults, probably including that of Ishtar. Consequently her cult was also brought into Judah. Her veneration by the Judeans included burning incense to her, pouring out libations to her and preparing cakes for her.1051 Although the title Queen of Heaven in the Hebrew Bible probably refers to the Palestinian Astarte, it is unlikely that associations with Ishtar – who was particularly related to the planting and harvesting of cereal crops in Mesopotamia – would have been absent. The ideology of the Judeans incorporated various religious practices in their worship, thereby anticipating all aspects of favourable divine power.

The major Ancient Near Eastern deities – notably the storm, warrior and solar gods – share common characteristics. It is, therefore, hardly possible to compartmentalise them separately.

In the Assyro-Babylonian mythology the storm was conferred on the divinity, Adad – god of lightning, tempest, storms and winds. At the same time he was responsible for abundant rains, and had the prerogative to reveal the future. According to the Assyrian version of the Flood myth, Adad was accountable for the storms and rains that brought about the flood. Adad and the solar deity Shamash were often linked as guardians of the heavens, and together with Marduk – god of Babylon – were considered the triad of divine judges. Adad and the Phoenician grain god Dagan shared the consort Shala. Adad was also known as Hadad among the Aramaeans and Amorites, as Adad by the Mesopotamians, and as Haddu among the Canaanites. He was likewise worshipped as warrior god, particularly by the Assyrians.

1051 Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17-19.
Hadad/Adad, whose main sanctuary was in Aleppo, was later assimilated into the Mesopotamian pantheon and appeared with the *sibitti* – the Pleiades\(^{1052}\) – among witnesses to treaties. A number of kings from the Syrian area had the name Ben-Hadad. Apart from a possible exception – Hadad-rimmon – the divine designation "Hadad" never appears in the Hebrew Bible.

The storm god has a distinctive iconography. In the Akkadian period *Adad* was portrayed with a thunderbolt and mace on the back of a lion-dragon – and also on the back of a bull. He wears a conical headdress and is bearded. The Ugaritic storm god *Ba‘al* was represented with a thunderbolt, a spear touching the ground with streaks of lightning at its other end, wielding a mace in his right hand. Although lightning was never depicted independently of the storm god, it was deified in Mesopotamia. Associated with the storm god as his symbol, lightning functioned as a weapon of *Yahweh* in his portrayal as Storm God or Warrior God. Poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible refer to *Yahweh*’s "arrows", and the lightning-bolt is called a "spear". It is furthermore identified with the theophany of *Yahweh*, often in combination with thunder, cloud and an earthquake.

The Canaanite storm god was known as *Ba‘al* or *Ba‘al Hadad*. The word *ba‘lu* is a Semitic noun meaning "lord" or "owner". Characteristics of a storm god were repeatedly linked to *Ba‘al*, who was undoubtedly the national god in Ugarit, although *El*, the father of the gods, was head of the pantheon. The goddess *Anat* is indicated in the Ugaritic texts as *Ba‘al*’s principle consort. According to the content of the *Ba‘al* myths, *Yam*, *Mot* and *Ba‘al* were the three competing sons of *El*. In his battle with *Yam* – who represented the sea and the unruly forces of chaos – *Ba‘al* eventually achieved victory over chaos, thereafter controlling the weather. *Ba‘al Shamem* – as a concept of a god of heaven – developed during the first millennium BC in the North-West Semitic religions. The epithet "God of Heaven" was later equated with *Yahweh* in the Judaeo-Israelite religion. The entire area inhabited by Canaanites was dedicated to the worship of *Ba‘al*. Myths concerning *Ba‘al* are found in Ugaritic, Hittite and Egyptian traditions; the Ugaritic texts contribute to the largest amount of relevant cultic material.

Although *Yahweh* acted predominantly as national God of the Israelites, *Ba‘al* held a unique position among the inhabitants of Palestine – and thus also among the Israelites. As a divine

\(^{1052}\) See footnote in § 3.5.
name, *Ba’al* appears seventy-six times in the Hebrew Bible. Authors and redactors of the Masoretic Text generally show an aversion to idols, speaking of *Ba’al* and his worship in pejorative terms. Even before the Israelite settlement in Canaan, a conflict was prevalent between *Yahweh* and *Ba’al*. An even greater encounter later took place under the Omrides. Rituals and customs of the *Ba’al* religion were condemned by the prophets. On account of the similarity of characteristics between *Yahweh* and *Ba’al*, many of the attributes ascribed to *Yahweh* familiarise us on the character of the Palestinian *Ba’al*. Yet, despite the absorption of *Ba’al* traits by *Yahweh*, all indications are that the Judeans carried on with syncretistic religious practices – probably worshipping *Yahweh* alongside *Ba’al*. Some of the older Israelite poems juxtapose imagery associated with El and Baal in the Ugaritic texts and apply this juxtaposition of attributes to *Yahweh*.105

Descriptions of *Ba’al’s* theophany in the storm, or his character as a warrior, are explicitly linked in some iconography. Biblical material, however, presents *Yahweh* as Divine Warrior, with power over the storm. *‘Yahweh wields the most terrible of weapons, the lightning’*, he appears in the storm and rides on the storm, and reveals himself in the storm, fire, smoke and cloud. His dwelling is on Mount Sinai where storms gather around the peaks on the mountain.

The designation ”Rider-of-the-Clouds” was applied to *Ba’al* long before it became an appellative of *Yahweh*. When driving in his chariot, *Ba’al* goes out to distribute rain, but at the same time it sets *Ba’al* in a position of a warrior god. In Habakkuk 3:8 *Yahweh* is said to drive a horse-drawn chariot. The word *aliyan* – translated as ”victorious”, ”almighty” – is often used in the *Ba’al* mythology, followed by epithets, such as ”Rider-upon-the-Clouds”. Similarly the divine name *Rakib-Il* relates to a chariot-driving warrior. Habakkuk 3:3-7 describes *Yahweh’s* triumphant march from the ”South”, distinctly portraying him as a heavenly warrior. A blinding light associated with the theophany of *Yahweh* clearly depicts him as a solar deity. In Habakkuk 3 the ”Lord of Light” is described as a divine warrior; the plague – *דָּרַך* – went before him and pestilence – *זָרַע* – followed on his heels.

*Qôs*, the national deity of the Edomites, is attested in the names of their kings, *Qaus-malak*. The Arabic word *qaus* – ”bow” – which is the deified weapon of the storm god or warrior

105 Numbers 25:1-5.
1051 Kings 16:31-33; 18:17-40.
god, is the etymon of $Qôs$. Although the majority of references to $Qôs$ are Idumaean, his name appears in Egyptian listings of names that were possibly those of $Shasu$ clans from the thirteenth century BC. These clans were associated with Edom and Seir.\textsuperscript{1057} At the same time Egyptian records point to a possible link between the $Shasu$ and $'Yhw$ in the land of the $Shasu$\textsuperscript{1058}. This connection between $Yhw$ and the $Shasu$ from Edom and Seir is significant in the light of Yahweh's "triumphant march from the South".\textsuperscript{1059} It is furthermore a substantiation of the Kenite hypothesis, according to which Yahweh was venerated by the Kenites and Midianites before Moses became acquainted with Yahweh. My hypothesis is in accordance with this proposal by scholars. Knauf\textsuperscript{1060} indicates that $Qôs$ is presented as closely related to Yahweh, and therefore he poses the question 'could the two have originally been identical?' Considering the number of features that coincide, this argument by Knauf is not implausible. At a Nabatean shrine, $Qôs$ is represented on a throne flanked by bulls with a thunderbolt in his left hand – presumably indicating that he was a storm god.

The Divine Warrior is, according to Miller,\textsuperscript{1061} 'one of the major images of God' in the Hebrew Bible. In the religious and military experience of Israel, the perception of God as warrior was of paramount importance. Israel believed that their wars were in fact "the wars of Yahweh", seeing that Ancient Near Eastern deities fought wars to maintain or reinforce their positions in the divine pantheons. Early Israeliite poetry incorporates visions of Yahweh the Warrior. In Psalm 68 Yahweh is portrayed with his "heavenly chariotry and entourage". In various poetic material the glorious deeds of Yahweh, the Warrior, are vividly described. Israel's perception of Yahweh being a Divine Warrior dominated their faith. This concept of Yahweh was possibly also linked to the idea of Yahweh as King. The ancient world often represented the king as the deity's human war leader; it was the deity's responsibility 'to secure royal victory in battle'.\textsuperscript{1062} Battles between Ancient Near Eastern nations were comprehended as battles between patron gods, leading to the ideology of a "holy war". Celestial beings that formed Yahweh's entourage and fought his battles signified the "hosts", in the title "Lord of Hosts". God's honour and Israel's salvation in battle were closely connected.

Israel undoubtedly had a pre-battle rite. It was common practice for a priest or prophet to determine beforehand whether Yahweh approved the attack or not. Horns – as a liturgical

\textsuperscript{1057} See discussions in § 2.4, § 2.5 and § 2.6.
\textsuperscript{1058} See § 4.3.4.
\textsuperscript{1059} Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4; Habakkuk 3:3.
\textsuperscript{1060} Knauf 1999a:677.
\textsuperscript{1061} Miller 1973:1.
\textsuperscript{1062} Lang 2002:49.
device – were used, in some instances, before a battle. Horns symbolised divine strength that brought about victory. The enthronement of a king included the ritual handing over of a special weapon, which was perceived as the weapon of the warrior god.

The concept "hosts of heaven" originated from the metaphor of *Yahweh* as warrior. In combat *Yahweh* was assisted by warriors and an army. The "hosts of heaven" thus indicated the divine assembly gathered around the heavenly King, *Yahweh*. The question arises whether any distinction can be made between the "hosts of heaven" and the "divine council". The concept of the assembly of the gods – or the divine council – was a common religious motif in the Ancient Near East. In the Canaanite pantheon *El* and *Asherah* were acting as the highest authorities. The actions of both divine and human beings were subject to the justice of *El* – who was designated with wisdom and was also arbiter of justice. Psalm 82 condemns all members of the divine council to death for abusing their offices. The constitution and function of the divine assembly in the Israelite religion exhibit a similarity to the Canaanite and Phoenician divine councils.

The designation *Yahweh Sebaoth* – יְהֹוָה צְבָאֹת – meaning "hosts of heaven", "armies" or similar depictions, is closely connected to the idea of the "holy war". This epithet can thus be translated as "Lord of Hosts". It seems that this appellation was intimately linked to Zion and the Temple – 'Yahweh Zebaoth was conceived as enthroned in invisible majesty on the cherubim throne in the Solomonic Temple'.

When the Assyrians became the might in the Ancient Near East, *Aššur* – their national god – took the central place. To ease the substitution of major gods to *Aššur* in the dominant position, he was identified with the Old Babylonian god *Anšar*, and thereby became the "Lord of the gods". *Aššur* was above all a warrior god who accompanied the armies into battle. He was mostly represented as a winged disc, or mounted on a bull, or floating through the air. A well-known illustration shows him in a winged sun disc firing a bow. The sun disc was the representation of a chariot travelling through the sky. It is significant that *Aššur*, as warrior god, was also portrayed with the attributes of the storm god (*Adad*) and of the solar god (*Shamash*). It seems, therefore, that he was at the same time warrior, solar and storm god. The god *Aššur* was considered the deified city Assur, which was built on a holy spot of prehistoric times.

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Astral deities were not an unfamiliar phenomenon for the ancient Israelites. A number of references in the Hebrew Bible indicate that Yahweh is Lord of the sun, moon and stars. The epithet "Lord of hosts" could intimate that Yahweh was in command of all the stars. The Babylonian deity Marduk divided the constellations of the zodiac and months of the year among the great gods. The constellations became the objects of a religious cult. In the Hebrew Bible astral cults were prohibited. At a later stage, within the Judaic culture, zodiacal constellations were widely promoted. Mosaic floors of several synagogues of the Roman and Byzantine periods portray zodiac symbols, illustrating 'an ancient Israelite tradition of retaining elements of pagan sun worship in their own worship'.

The compositions on the pavements in Palestinian synagogues represent the twelve signs of the zodiac arranged around Helios – the Greek solar god – who was always in the centre of the composition in the chariot of the sun; Yahweh is usually portrayed in a chariot of clouds. Helios, in solar worship, was venerated mainly by individuals.

In the Masoretic Text, the word Shemesh – שמש – does not actually reflect a divine name. The Canaanite solar cult is, however, revealed in place names, such as Beth-shemesh. The lack of evident traces of solar worship in Hebrew anthroponomy seems to indicate that the cult of the sun was not very popular in Syria-Palestine in the Iron Age, contrary to Egypt and to Mesopotamia.

The astral bodies were apparently venerated during the reigns of the Judean kings Manasseh and Amon. Scholars therefore theorise that the Assyrian astral cult was enforced upon Judah as a symbol of vassalage. Taylor suggests that the Israelites did indeed consider the sun as an icon or symbol of Yahweh. The horse on the Taanach stand and its sun disc are reminiscent of 'the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to house of the Lord … and he [Josiah] burned the chariots of the sun with fire'. The sun's chariot was Yahweh's vehicle. The ancient idea of a chariot of the sun was born from the perception that the sun is a wheel turning through the heavens – as attested by the legend of Elijah being carried up to the heaven in a chariot and horses of fire. Lipiński argues that 'there can be little doubt that the sun was conceived in biblical times as a vivid symbol of Yahweh's Glory'. Shamash – Shemesh – in Mesopotamian solar mythology instructed the righteous in wisdom, and was specifically associated with concepts like justice,
time and life – themes found in the book of Qohelet. In this book the "sun imagery" appears frequently in the phrase "under the sun", suggesting possible allusions to solar symbolism and mythology.

The ancient peoples – who were aware of the link between the phases of the moon and the tides – interpreted the moon as being responsible for the water supply to the fields and all living entities. Therefore the lunar deity, apart from being illuminator of the night, was regarded as a fertility god. This aspect was reflected in the powerful and virile bull – particularly in the similarity between the bull's horns and the so-called "horns" of the "new" moon, symbolising the cycle of nature. יִרְחָ – יִירָח – the most common biblical Hebrew word for "moon" or "moon god" appears close to thirty times in the Hebrew Bible. יִרְח and terms describing the lesser astral bodies – the stars, constellations or "hosts of heaven" – were often grouped together. The terminology "hosts of heaven" in the Hebrew Bible was, at the same time, indicative of the inclusion of all luminaries. According to the Deuteronomist, astral cults in Judah increased significantly during the seventh to sixth centuries BC.

In the Mesopotamian tradition the lunar deity was known by the name Nanna, Suen and Ash-imbabbar. Suen, written as Sin, is attested in lexical texts from Ugarit and Ebba. Documents from Mari refer to Sin of Haran. The "night luminaries" controlled the heavens as well as an alien world. It represented the life cycle of birth, growth, decay and death. The cultic calendar was determined by the movements of the moon, which was awarded a prominent place in Mesopotamian myth and ritual. In the Assyro-Babylonian mythology the lunar deity occupied the main position in the astral triad, with Shamash and Ishtar – the sun and the planet Venus, respectively – as its children. Haran was the cult centre of Nanna/Sin. The moon god of Haran was considered by the Assyrians as a special patron to extend their boundaries. The lunar emblem of Haran portrays the moon god in a boat. The symbol of a crescent on a pole was common in southern Mesopotamia during the first half of the second millennium BC. In both the history of ancient Mesopotamian religions and early Syrian traditions the lunar deity enjoyed widespread popularity.

In the Ancient Near East stars were widely regarded as gods. Astrological references in the Hebrew Bible are often hidden in the most ancient layers of the text. Babylonian astral divination was common among post-exilic Jews. It is, however, extremely problematic to identify the particular sources underlying the Yahwistic lunar symbolism. The births of the twins Shagar (Morning Star) and Shalem (Evening Star) – offspring of Canaanite El and two
"women" he encountered at the seashore – are recounted in an important Ugaritic text, the hi-

eros gamos. Speculative connections link Shalem with the alleged cult of the Venus star in

Jerusalem and the cult of Melchizedek.

The etymology of the word, or name El, 'el, 'il(u) – meaning God/god – has not been deter-
mined conclusively. 'Ilu, as an appellative for deities, has been attested in Ancient Mesopo-
tamia, as well as in Ugaritic texts. In these texts El is denoted as a distinct deity, who – to-
gether with Asherah – held the highest authority in the Syro-Palestinian mythology. Several
epithets describe El as father, creator, the "ancient one" or the "eternal one". Despite El's im-
plied importance in Ugarit, the Ugaritic Ba'al texts indicate El's passive and ineffectual be-
haviour. Yet, gods were powerless to undertake any assignment without his permission.

There are indications in various mythological texts that Ba'al – who actively rose to kingship
– probably dethroned the older and less virile El in order to secure this position. External evi-
dence involving the strife between El and Ba'al is based mainly on parallels in comparative
mythological material. The assembly of the gods was a familiar religious theme in the An-
cient Near Eastern cultures; the divine council of El – the assembly of gods – is attested in the
Ugaritic myths. The bull – a designation of El – is a metaphor expressing his divine dignity
and strength.

The relationship between the God of Israel (Elohim) and the Canaanite god El is to a great
extent centred upon the religion of the patriarchs. The religious traditions in the patriarchal
narratives of Genesis distinguish two types of reference to the deity: "God of the fathers" –
which links the god to an ancestor – or a full formula, "The God of Abraham, the God of
Isaac, the God of Jacob". The deity, identified by the name of the clan, was thus worshipped
by those families. Biblical Elohim, as well as Yahweh, portrays many features that could pos-
sibly have been derived from Canaanite El.

As indicated in discussions in this chapter, deities with cognate – and often similar – names
appeared in several pantheons. In concordance herewith, different attributes merged in par-
ticular deities. Contact between the Israelite nation and the other Ancient Near Eastern peo-

dles resulted therein that all the features of the various deities were later conferred upon the
Hebrew God. Attributes of biblical Elohim and Yahweh – as depicted in the Hebrew Bible –
have been summarised from a selection of relevant texts.
It is apparent from an analysis of this synopsis that, apart from all the other characteristics associated with Yahweh, the Israelites perceived him predominantly as a Storm, Warrior and Solar God. In this regard there is a resemblance with the Assyrian warrior god Ashur, who was also identified as storm god and solar god. Both Yahweh and Elohim are portrayed in the Hebrew Bible as Creator and Father – epithets that are linked to Canaanite El. Biblical texts cite overwhelming references to Yahweh as "Lord of Hosts"; celestial beings – who formed Yahweh's entourage and fought his battles – signify the "hosts" in this title. Both Yahweh and Elohim are indicated in the texts as Shepherd, King and Redeemer. Matters concerning "justice" and "righteousness" mainly refer to Yahweh. The Hebrew God was a wise administrator and legislator in the eyes of the Israelite scribes. Ancient Syrian mythology could be recognised in the tradition of a wise creator deity. Lang\(^{1071}\) suggests that relevant evidence for the wise God and wisdom goddess is found in the Book of Proverbs.

The Hebrew Bible occasionally applies a female metaphor to describe Yahweh or Yahweh's actions. Attributing female roles and metaphors to "male" deities was not an unknown concept in the Ancient Near East. The lack of gender language for Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible could be attributed to the avoidance of anthropomorphic imagery for Yahweh. Some scholars – such as Stone\(^{1072}\) – allege that a goddess was venerated at the very beginnings of religion, and it therefore signifies that 'God was a woman'. Implicit references to androgyny in the Hebrew Bible are found in Job 38,\(^{1073}\) Isaiah,\(^{1074}\) and particularly in Genesis 1:27. In their concept of God the Israelites ascribed an anthropomorphic nature to God.

The appearance of the name Yahweh, Yahweh Elohim, or Elohim in the Hebrew Bible depends on a particular tradition and, in some instances, possibly on the preference of the redactor. Scholars have noted apparent differences in the use of Yahweh or Elohim in the Psalter. Numerous appearances of the Tetragrammaton in the so-called Elohist Psalter cannot be overlooked. Various theories have been proposed by scholars to resolve this occurrence. Hossfeld and Zenger\(^{1075}\) are of the opinion that the 'purpose-fully used name for God, YHWH, is not indicative of a secondary redaction, but an expression of theological thinking that typically reveals itself only as a theological tendency in these texts'.

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\(^{1071}\) Lang 2002:24-26.
\(^{1072}\) Stone 1979:120, 123-124.
\(^{1073}\) Job 38:28-29.
\(^{1075}\) Hossfeld & Zenger 2003:50.
Legendary and mythical matter forms an integral part of the Hebrew Bible, and was thus also a fundamental component of the Yahwistic religion of the Israelites. As discussed in previous paragraphs in this chapter, it is evident that the Israelites – in their concept and practising of their religion, be it in their veneration of Yahweh or of other deities – were basically influenced by surrounding cultures and religions. It is therefore inevitable that myths and legends of their neighbours affected traditions documented in the Masoretic Text. Many legends in the Hebrew Bible developed to account for anomalies in the biblical text. Familiar ancient legends were recast and edited by later redactors. Some biblical narratives could, therefore, be clarified by comparing them with parallels from those nations with whom they were continuously in contact. As an historical source, the Hebrew Bible is to a large extent unreliable.

The creation narratives in Genesis, and particularly the sequential Garden of Eden chronicle, have various parallels and comparable themes in the Ancient Near Eastern literature. Creation myths primarily describe the cosmic struggle and ensuing battle with chaos monsters, subsequently establishing world order. Well-known creation myths are the Akkadian text of the *Enuma Elish* – or *Epic of Creation* – and the Sumerian *Eridu Genesis*. The Ugaritic *Ba’al* cycle myth is compared with Yahweh’s battle with the sea monsters. A mythological background appears everywhere in the Garden of Eden narrative, with symbols derived from ancient religious traditions. Some scholars believe that the Sumerian myth – *Enki* and *Ninhursag* – about the loss of paradise is a parallel to the loss of the Garden of Eden. Corresponding themes include the "Tree of Life" and the "Tree of Knowledge".

Three major flood chronicles that have survived are the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Atra-Hasis Epic* and the Sumerian flood story; the latter is recorded in the *Sumerian King List*. In each of the three narratives the counterpart of Noah – *Utnaphistim*, *Atra-Hasis* and *Ziusudra*, respectively – is forewarned of an impending massive flood intended to destroy mankind. All three survive in a boat. Archaeological finds at the Mesopotamian cities Kish and Ur revealed major flood deposits, dated ca 3300 BC. It is apparent that, apart from a few cities on high mounds, everything in the Delta would have been wiped out.

The account of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9, is represented in a Sumerian equivalent. The birth legend of Sargon the Great – founder of the Dynasty of Akkad – is preserved in the *Autobiography of Sargon*. There is an unmistakeable parallel between this birth legend and that of Moses. A Sumerian account of Sargon's rise to power mentions that his ascendency
was foretold to him in a dream. This legend is reminiscent of the dreams of Joseph in Genesis 37 — the sheaves in the field bowed before his sheaf, and the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him.

Batto\textsuperscript{1076} mentions that, although biblical revelation frequently revolved around historical events, it should be recognised that myth — even more that history — served as an agency of biblical revelation. The Hebrew writer probably appropriated familiar mythological motifs, adapted into an original story of his own. The primary purpose of narratives being to convey a message therefore renders them independent of historical accuracy.

With regard to discussions in this chapter, particularly concerning the widespread appearance of the same or cognate deities, as well as the analyses of attributes associated with \textit{Yahweh}, it is clear that the different Ancient Near Eastern communities had a significant influence on the Israelite nation — specifically with reference to their religion.

My theory, that a semblance of \textit{Ya}-veneration in various areas of the Ancient Near East was possible — and maybe even probable — is substantiated by the outcome of the earlier deliberations in this chapter. Similarly to the appearance of an \textit{Asherah}/\textit{Athirat}-type deity in different pantheons, a \textit{Ya}-type deity may have been venerated by numerous peoples. In this regard, see the discussions in paragraph 4.3. According to the Kenite hypothesis — as discussed in Chapter 5 — the Kenites, as well as the Midianites, had worshipped \textit{Yahweh} before Moses and the Israelites became acquainted with him. Being nomad metalworkers, the Kenites and other marginal groups connected to them — genealogically or by intermarriage — had the opportunity to travel over large areas, and even relocate, thereby spreading their religious beliefs. A religion, similar to their \textit{Yahweh}-veneration, could thus have emerged elsewhere.

The various ancient deities were normally linked to a particular attribute. As the previous discussions indicate, storm and warrior characteristics were often observed in the same deity. In some instances the deity also exhibited solar traits. A summary of the attributes associated with either \textit{Yahweh} or \textit{Elohim}, as depicted in a selection of biblical texts, clearly indicate that \textit{Yahweh} was notably regarded as a Warrior God, as well as a Storm God and Solar God. These, in addition to all the other different attributes of the various deities, culminated into the Being of \textit{Yahweh}. He was probably venerated by the individual Israelite tribes in accordance

\textsuperscript{1076} Batto 1992:102.
with a particular characteristic. Knowledge of the Israelites’ perception of *Yahweh* assists me to reach a conclusion regarding my hypothesis on the development of Yahwism.

In the chapter hereafter the origin, analysis and interpretation of the name YHWH are reviewed. These deliberations are closely connected to the Being of *Yahweh*, into whom all the attributes of ancient deities have culminated. A number of extra-biblical finds, concerning possible *Ya*-related religious practices, are briefly discussed in the following chapter. A review of these finds substantiates my theory that it is conceivable that such a form of worship was indeed practised.

Map 1 and Map 2 appear on the next two pages, respectively indicating places connected to the designation *Asherah/Atirat* and cognate names, and places linked to the manifestations of the *Queen of Heaven*. 
Map 1. Occurrence of the name Asherah or related forms

The map indicates places connected to the designation Asherah/Atirat and analogous goddesses are discussed in Paragraph 3.2.1. The different epithets are denoted in italics.
The map indicates places connected to manifestations of the Queen of Heaven, attested in either epigraphic finds or other references. The different designations of the Queen of Heaven – as denoted in italics on the map – are discussed in paragraph 3.4.