



## CHAPTER 4

### NAME YHWH AND RELATED FORMS

#### 4.1 Introduction

It is obvious in the portrayal of *Yahweh* in the Masoretic Text that the various attributes and characteristics of the numerous Ancient Near Eastern deities – as discussed in the previous chapter – were conferred on him. In the following deliberation – in Chapter 5 – on the origin of *Yahweh* and Yahwism, it is clear that *El* also played a significant role in the Israelites' interpretation of their religion – particularly in the case of the patriarchs and northern tribes. This was probably due to their knowledge of Canaanite *El*, the deity who was also commented on in the previous chapter.

According to tradition, the exodus group – liberated from Egypt – were the first Israelites to become acquainted with *Yahweh*. Although there is no information on their pre-Yahwistic religion, they probably had their own family gods and took part in the worship of Semitic or Egyptian regional gods. This group's special contact with *Yahweh* and subsequent sojourn through the Wilderness brought about a unique relationship. The question remains, however, who this god was and where he came from.<sup>1</sup>

Moses was the first "Israelite"<sup>2</sup> to be confronted by *Yahweh* – a god who came from a territory which did not form part of the later Israelite region. According to Exodus 3,<sup>3</sup> Moses asked this God his name and was told, 'אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה'.<sup>4</sup> Janzen<sup>5</sup> states that a name embodies its actual history and future. Thus, regarding the name of Israel's God, *Yahweh*, 'the biblical narrative taken as a whole could be read as an explication of what is in the name *Yahweh*'.<sup>6</sup> The Hebrews interpreted "name" as "character"; thus, to profess *Yahweh's* Name was to describe his character.<sup>7</sup> Exodus 3:13-15 unequivocally declares that the revelation of God under the name *Yahweh* 'was fundamental to the theology of the Mosaic age'.<sup>8</sup> Divine names personify the perception of the devotees of a particular deity. Therefore, the name of a deity normally represents an epithet of that deity, although the meaning thereof had later mostly been

---

<sup>1</sup> Albertz 1994:49.

<sup>2</sup> According to tradition, as narrated in the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites did slave labour in Egypt; Moses was born from so-called Israelite parents in Egypt. See § 5.4 on Moses.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 3:13.

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 3:14, 'I AM WHO I AM'

<sup>5</sup> Janzen 1979:227.

<sup>6</sup> Janzen 1979:227.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 33:19.

<sup>8</sup> Cole 1973:20.

forgotten. As a rule, the epithet was elicited from a characteristic or function of the deity, or its relation to the tribe – or nation – or surroundings.<sup>9</sup> Some Ancient Near Eastern deities were distinguished by the multiplicity of their names and titles.<sup>10</sup> To guard against the unwarranted invocation of their names by devotees, certain deities had hidden or secret names.<sup>11</sup> As divine names were sacred, and guarded against profane use, new designations were created for regular practice.<sup>12</sup> Names were symbolic to the ancient Israelites, as illustrated in the etymologies<sup>13</sup> of many Israelite names in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>14</sup> The name of the Israelite God was furthermore attached to a place, and this place was reserved for worship. The Deuteronomist connected the name to the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>15</sup>

The name of the Israelite God, **אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה**<sup>16</sup> – as revealed to Moses – mostly appears in the Hebrew Bible in the form of the Tetragrammaton,<sup>17</sup> **יְהוָה**. Due to later reluctance to utter this divine name, the correct pronunciation thereof is uncertain.<sup>18</sup> As the name is so closely related to God, the misuse of the name is prohibited.<sup>19</sup> A substitute title, **אֲדֹנָי**, was eventually vocalised.<sup>20</sup> As a general word for "lord", "master" or "owner", **אֲדֹנָי** was used, for instance, by a servant for his master or by a subject for his king, while **אֲדֹנָי** – as a plural of intensity – was used for God.<sup>21</sup> MacLaurin<sup>22</sup> indicates that "Adon", lord, as an epithet of *Yaw*,<sup>23</sup> can be dated much earlier than what is recognised by scholars, and 'its substitution for YHWH in the Bible may represent the revival of a very ancient tradition'.<sup>24</sup> God's name, *Yahweh*, has

<sup>9</sup> Cohon 1950:579.

<sup>10</sup> As an example, the fifty names of the Babylonian deity *Marduk* (see footnote on *Marduk* in § 2.14.6 and § 3.1) in the *Enuma Elish* (see footnote in § 3.1) (Huffmon 1999a:610).

<sup>11</sup> Huffmon 1999a:610.

<sup>12</sup> Cohon 1950:579.

<sup>13</sup> Etymology: see footnote in § 3.3.

<sup>14</sup> Mowinckel 1961:125.

<sup>15</sup> Coats 1993:18.

<sup>16</sup> Exodus 3:14, 'I AM WHO I AM'.

<sup>17</sup> The Tetragrammaton is the four consonant letters, YHWH, used in the Hebrew Bible to indicate the Israelite God's name; pronounced *Yahweh* (Deist 1990:256).

<sup>18</sup> From the time of the Hellenistic Period Jews were reluctant to pronounce the name of their God. When the Masoretes laid down the pronunciation of the Name they vocalised the Tetragrammaton, which falsely lead to the reading "*Jehovah*". On the basis of late antiquity transcriptions it is deduced that the correct pronunciation is "*Yahweh*" (Albertz 1994:49-50). The Masoretes were medieval Jewish biblical scholars involved in the copying, vocalisation and punctuation of the text of the Hebrew Bible, working in either Palestine or Babylon (Deist 1990:152).

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 24:10-15.

<sup>20</sup> Huffmon 1999a:611. Lord or **אֲדֹנָי** ('*ādōn*), **אֲדֹנָי** ('*ādōnāy*). See Psalm 114:7 wherein **אֱלֹהִים** (God) is **אֲדֹנָי** (the Lord); Genesis 15:2, **אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה** (my Lord, *Yahweh*).

<sup>21</sup> Loewen 1984:206.

<sup>22</sup> MacLaurin 1962:449-450.

<sup>23</sup> See discussion of *Yaw/Yw* in § 4.3 on extra-biblical sources concerning related forms of the name *Yahweh*.

<sup>24</sup> MacLaurin 1962:450.

virtually become 'an independent entity, separate from God'.<sup>25</sup> Cohon<sup>26</sup> indicates that Judaism endeavoured to 'discover the essential being and nature of God', thereby discovering his "true" Name. By the application of names for deities, polytheistic religions differentiate these deities from one another, while monotheism – with its emphasis on the uniqueness of God – needs no names to distinguish God from other deities.<sup>27</sup>

In both Hellenistic and rabbinic Judaism, 'the recognition that God transcends all names is paradoxically coupled in Jewish thought with the persistence to invoke Him by the right name'.<sup>28</sup> In Hellenistic as well as rabbinic literature, the Tetragrammaton was substituted by other names, due to the growing sense of God's transcendence. In the light of Leviticus 24:16, the rabbis encompassed the Tetragrammaton with 'awesome sanctity'.<sup>29</sup> The practice of theurgic<sup>30</sup> uses of the name – which was widely spread among the Jews – was opposed by the rabbis. Despite rabbinic opposition Jewish people had a strong belief in the 'almighty potency of the name'.<sup>31</sup> Gnostics<sup>32</sup> applied the Tetragrammaton and other divine names for magic purposes. The rabbis advised that the "Name" existed next to God before creation. The Kabbalists<sup>33</sup> taught that creation came through the combination of letters in the Divine Name, while, according to the Haggadah,<sup>34</sup> God delivered Israel from Egypt through a

---

<sup>25</sup> Huffmon 1999a:611. The Name has therefore become a hypostasis (see footnote in § 3.2.2), although the cult is offered in the "presence of the Lord", and not in the "presence of the name of the Lord". Notwithstanding the Deuteronomist's conception that God cannot inhabit the Tabernacle or Temple in a polytheistic fashion, or be present in a cult statue, he perceived that God's name or glory could be present in both the Temple and Tabernacle (Huffmon 1999a:611).

<sup>26</sup> Cohon 1950:581.

<sup>27</sup> Cohon 1950:583.

<sup>28</sup> Cohon 1950:583.

<sup>29</sup> Cohon 1950:583-584, 592.

<sup>30</sup> Theurgy: magic performed with the aid of good spirits (Deist 1990:260).

<sup>31</sup> Cohon 1950:592, 594.

<sup>32</sup> Gnosticism was a philosophical and religious movement during the first to sixth centuries among Jews, and particularly among Christians. Their philosophy taught 'that man is saved only by a special knowledge of God' (Gnosis), and that the world could be saved only 'through the secret knowledge of the supreme Deity' (Deist 1990:105-106).

<sup>33</sup> Kabbalah – or Cabbalah – is the Hebrew word meaning "tradition" (of hidden knowledge). Initially it referred to the legal traditions of Judaism and later to the Jewish mystical tradition. The practice developed during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and concentrated on the 'system of esoteric mystical speculation' (Blau 1980:3). The Kabbalah was based on revelation in the Hebrew Bible; texts were interpreted by the application of different hermeneutic techniques. The Zohar – the classic document of the Kabbalistic tradition – was compiled approximately 1290 (Blau 1980:3). Hermeneutics is a theoretical reflection on textual interpretation or on methods of exegesis (Deist 1990:113).

<sup>34</sup> Haggadah is a noun derived from the Hebrew root **הגיד**, "to show", "to announce", "to tell" (Porton 1992:19). As the narrative section of the Talmud (see footnote in § 3.2.2 on the Mishnah and the Talmud) it comprises an anecdote or parable giving a free interpretation of the Law (Deist 1990:110). According to the concordance of the Babylonian Talmud, Haggadah carries the meaning of utterance, giving evidence or testimony, biblical exegesis or the non-legal section of rabbinic thought (Porton 1992:19). The Haggadah includes a brief description of the exodus from Egypt, which is specifically read during the Passover service. In reply to the traditional four questions recited by the youngest participant in the Passover, answers are read from this section (Isaacson 1979:85).

seventy-two-letter name. These imprudent speculations concerning the "Name" were looked upon with disdain by the Rationalists.<sup>35</sup> Maimonides<sup>36</sup> considered 'the twelve lettered name'<sup>37</sup> inferior in sanctity to the Tetragrammaton'.<sup>38</sup>

The Hebrew Bible refers to the Israelite God by a number of names, titles and epithets. The way Israel thought about the "Name of God" was fundamentally not different to the way they thought about human personal names, but, at the same time, within the context of the Ancient Near Eastern world and its divinities. A name represented something beneficial. Knowledge of a name had effective power, therefore, to know the name of a god – or a human being – opened the possibility of appeal. Magic and incantations exploited this knowledge for manipulation purposes. According to biblical tradition, Israel cultically appealed to God only by the name "Yahweh". However, different non-Yahwistic divine names and titles were implemented – as indicated in the Hebrew Bible – when referring to the Israelite God.<sup>39</sup> The convergence of various groups<sup>40</sup> from which Israel emerged, is reflected in the attributes and titles of the Israelite God in the Hebrew Bible. *El*, the "creator-god" – as described in the Ugaritic texts – reflects some expression of the late second millennium BC Canaanite religion. For many polytheistic communities, *El* became a personal divine figure. He was an "international" character<sup>41</sup> and head of the Ugaritic pantheon,<sup>42</sup> therefore it could be expected that the 'term should be an element in many divine names'.<sup>43</sup> אֱלֹהִים<sup>44</sup> – 'ēlōhîm – is the word

<sup>35</sup> Rationalism is the belief that human reason is the only source of true knowledge (Deist 1990:213).

<sup>36</sup> Moses Maimonides – 'the profoundest religious thinker and intellect of his time' (Epstein 1959:208) – was born in 1134 in Cordova. New masters of Spain forced Moses ben Maimon, a non-Moslem, to flee the country. In Cairo he wrote his acclaimed *Guide for the Perplexed*, 'which laid the foundations for the entire development of Jewish philosophy and remained the exemplar of reasoning faith even for those who could not follow Maimonides all along the line' (Epstein 1959:208). Maimonides (1134/5-1204) was the leader of the School of Rationalists (see footnote above). Much influenced by Greek philosophy, his main purpose was to forge a synthesis between Jewish traditions and the Aristotelian philosophy (Oxford University Press 1987:1026). Aristotle (384-322 BC) was a Greek philosopher who wrote numerous works, inter alia, on "logic" (invented by him) and "rhetoric" (Oxford University Press 1964a:57).

<sup>37</sup> The "twelve-lettered name" was supposedly composed [by the triplication] of the word אֱהִיָּה – in Exodus 3:14 – to yield twelve letters; these letters were used as a substitute for the Tetragrammaton (Cohon 1950:596-597).

<sup>38</sup> Cohon 1950:593, 595-597.

<sup>39</sup> For example, *El-Elyôn* (God Most High, Gn 14:22), *El-'Olām* (Everlasting God, Gn 21:33), *Elohim* (God, Job 38:7) (Rose 1992:1004-1007).

<sup>40</sup> Israel came into being by the amalgamation of nomadic or semi-nomadic groups, as well as sedentary populations in regions of arable land (Rose 1992:1004).

<sup>41</sup> Rose 1992:1004.

<sup>42</sup> See discussion in § 3.7.

<sup>43</sup> MacLaurin 1962:443.

<sup>44</sup> 'ēlōhîm is a plural formation of 'elōah [אֱלֹהִים], an extended form of the Semitic noun 'il (Van der Toorn 1999b:352).

generally used for "God" in the Hebrew Bible with a variety of meanings.<sup>45</sup> Apart from the generic application of the word *'el*, god, it developed as a proper name for the Hebrew God. The Israelite perception of "God" shares many characteristics with the beliefs of its neighbours.<sup>46</sup>

The author of Genesis 21<sup>47</sup> treats the name *El Olam* – אֵל עוֹלָם – as a divine epithet for *Yahweh*. Until a number of decades ago most occurrences of *El*-titles in the patriarchal narratives – such as *El Olam* – were observed by scholars as 'relics of divinities belonging to a pre-Israelite or "proto-Israelite" – or at the very least, pre-Yahwistic – stratum of the history of biblical religion'.<sup>48</sup> The *El* of Genesis was seen merely as an appellative. After the discovery of the Ugaritic texts, this "*El*" was associated with the "creator god" of Ugarit. *El Olam* of Beer-sheba<sup>49</sup> is therefore presently regarded to be one of many local hypostases<sup>50</sup> of the Canaanite *El*, later identified with *Yahweh*.<sup>51</sup> The appellative *El roi* – אֵל רֹאִי – is attested only once in the Hebrew Bible,<sup>52</sup> and is probably a 'pseudo-archaic divine name inserted by a later redactor'.<sup>53</sup> Within this particular context, some scholars regard *El-Roi* as a form of *El* venerated by the Abraham clan; however, other scholars are of the opinion that it was merely an invention of the redactor.<sup>54</sup> The word *elyon* – עֲלִיּוֹן – means "to ascend". In the Hebrew Bible it is used either to describe something that is "spatially higher," or mainly as reference to the "most high" deity.<sup>55</sup> The term in the Masoretic Text is generally understood to be an

<sup>45</sup> 'All the gods of Egypt' (Ex 12:12) refers to a plurality of deities, while the reference to a single being such as "*Chemosh* is the *'ēlōhīm* of Moab" (1 Ki 11:33) is more frequently used; in the latter instance a plural of majesty is employed (Van der Toorn 1999b:352-353).

<sup>46</sup> Van der Toorn 1999b:353, 361. For a discussion of various characteristics of God, see Van der Toorn (1999b:361-363).

<sup>47</sup> Genesis 21:22-34 narrates Abraham's encounter with Abimelech – the Philistine king – at Beer-sheba. According to Genesis 21:33, Abraham 'called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God' (אֵל עוֹלָם) (De Pury 1999a:288). Genesis 21:32, 34 refer to the Philistines. These "Sea Peoples" settled on the Mediterranean coast of Palestine only as late as approximately the twelfth century BC (Greenfield 1962:791-792). The narrative clearly indicates a later tradition; Abimelech could not have been a Philistine king when encountered by Abraham.

<sup>48</sup> De Pury 1999a:288.

<sup>49</sup> Genesis 21:33.

<sup>50</sup> Hypostasis: see § 3.2.2. Deist and Du Plessis (1981:10-11) are of the opinion that each of the various clans – who worshipped *El* during the Patriarchal Age – referred to *El* in a separate way. Within their own group they spoke about "the God (*El*) of their fathers". Elsewhere this God was called either *Elyon* (Abraham clan), *El Shadday* (Isaac clan) or *El Olam* (Jacob clan).

<sup>51</sup> De Pury 1999a:288-289.

<sup>52</sup> *'Ēl ro'î*, translated as god of vision or seeing, was the name given by Hagar to the divine messenger she encountered in the Wilderness (Gn 16:13). Genesis 16 gives a description of Sarah's pregnant maid, Hagar, who retreated to the desert after Sarah had demanded her dismissal (De Pury 1999b:291).

<sup>53</sup> De Pury 1999b:291.

<sup>54</sup> De Pury 1999b:291-292.

<sup>55</sup> In Psalm 89:27-28 the king is indicated. *Elyon*, as a divine name, appears in some instances on its own (Ps 9:2; Is 14:14), or in combination with other divine names – such as *Yahweh* or *Elohim* (Ps 7:17; 57:2; 73:11) – and even in combination with lesser divine elements, such as in Psalm 82:6 (Elnes & Miller 1999:293).

epithet for *Yahweh*. Some scholars argue that this epithet 'may conceal a reference to a separate deity, possibly an older god with whom *Yahweh* came to be identified'.<sup>56</sup> The name *Elyon* is attested in Aramaic, Phoenician, Ugaritic and Greek extra-biblical literature.<sup>57</sup> Some other epithets that refer to the Hebrew God are שרִי,<sup>58</sup> אֲבִיר,<sup>59</sup> פֶּחַד<sup>60</sup> and צְבָאוֹת.<sup>61</sup> Loewen<sup>62</sup> mentions that the singular form *El* – God – appears in isolation in a few expressions,<sup>63</sup> but is mostly seen in composite names, such as "God Almighty"<sup>64</sup> and "God, the Most High".<sup>65</sup> The singular *el*, applied to other gods, does not appear in many places in the Masoretic Text.<sup>66</sup> Epigraphic finds attest that the Israelites not only adopted the language of the Canaanites, but also the advanced religious culture and vocabulary.<sup>67</sup>

Moses' 'proclamation of a definite God, known to their ancestors'<sup>68</sup> as a deliverer, probably represented an attempt by Moses to consolidate the Hebrew confederacy'.<sup>69</sup> MacLaurin<sup>70</sup> is of the opinion that the Hebrew priests and Levites, and maybe a number of community leaders, used the "synthetic name", *Yahweh*, whereas the common people continued to refer to their god as *Adon Elohim*, *Yah* and *Hū*'. The name *Yahweh* was probably introduced by scribes into the text of the Hebrew Bible – beside existing divine names – during the seventh century BC and exilic literary activity. Pre-exilic writers generally referred to *Yahweh* as divine name, while post-exilic writers replaced the name by *Elohim* and *Adonai*.

#### 4.2 Name YHWH: origin, analysis and interpretation of the designation YHWH

While tending his father-in-law's flock,<sup>71</sup> Moses<sup>72</sup> was confronted by God<sup>73</sup> speaking from a burning bush.<sup>74</sup> When Moses requested God to let him know his Name, 'God said to Moses,

<sup>56</sup> Elnes & Miller 1999:293.

<sup>57</sup> Elnes & Miller 1999:294. For a discussion of the character and role of *Elyon*, see Elnes & Miller (1999:294-298).

<sup>58</sup> *Shadday*, Almighty; Exodus 6:3.

<sup>59</sup> *Abir*, Mighty One; Genesis 49:24; Psalm 132:2, 5; Isaiah 49:26; 60:16.

<sup>60</sup> *Pahad*, fear; Genesis 31:42, 53.

<sup>61</sup> *Sebaoth*, hosts; 1 Samuel 17:45. יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת illustrates *Yahweh* as "Lord of Hosts" in a position of power and control. For a discussion of *Shadday*, *Abir*, *Pahad* and *Sebaoth*, see Rose (1992:1005-1006, 1008-1009).

<sup>62</sup> Loewen 1984:202-203.

<sup>63</sup> Genesis 31:13, 'the God [*El*] of Bethel'; Numbers 12:13, 'O God [*El*] please heal her'.

<sup>64</sup> *El Shadday*, אֵל שַׁדַּי.

<sup>65</sup> *El Elyon*, אֵל עֵלְיוֹן.

<sup>66</sup> Deuteronomy 32:12; Judges 9:46; Isaiah 46:6.

<sup>67</sup> Obermann 1949:318-319.

<sup>68</sup> Exodus 6:3.

<sup>69</sup> MacLaurin 1962:461.

<sup>70</sup> MacLaurin 1962:448, 461. The name *Yahweh* would have been applied at least by the leaders; a ninth century BC inscription on the Moabite Mesha Stele (see § 4.3.8) refers to Israel's God *Yahweh*.

<sup>71</sup> Exodus 3:1.

<sup>72</sup> For a discussion on Moses see § 5.4.

<sup>73</sup> 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (Ex 3:6).

<sup>74</sup> Exodus 3:2-5.

I AM WHO I AM.<sup>75</sup> For many decades scholars have been intrigued by this phrase, "אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה", and have endeavoured to propose a plausible explanation for the word יהוה, known as the Tetragrammaton.

Obermann<sup>76</sup> indicates that for more than two thousand years the name of God has been researched, with many resultant formulated speculations. From antiquity, until not so many decades ago, the name was analysed mainly with the purpose to determine the subjective perception thereof.<sup>77</sup> In modern times scholars approach the problem from a philological<sup>78</sup> viewpoint. An objective and historical inquiry is done concerning the morphologic<sup>79</sup> pattern, the etymology<sup>80</sup> of the word, and probable pronunciation. Reasonable consensus has been reached amongst scholars regarding major aspects of the problem. Scholars deliberate that the word "YHWH" originally 'denoted a descriptive appellation or an epithet of the God of Israel, which in the course of time fell into oblivion'.<sup>81</sup> The word was pronounced *Yahweh*, and not *Jehovah* as was initially believed on the basis of the vocalisation of the Masoretes.<sup>82</sup> The word represents an imperfect finite verb, probably from the causative<sup>83</sup> stem formed from the root *hwy* – "to be", "to exist" – possibly from a root related to *ḥwy-ḥyy*, "to live". The latter suggestion is supported on the basis of many instances in Semitic antiquity of divine names which have developed from epithets.<sup>84</sup> It has been a custom among Hebrews to refer to their God by way of various appellations.<sup>85</sup> A shortcoming in the postulation of the word YHWH being an imperfect finite verb – thus, as of necessity, an imperfect verb of the third person – is the problem of the formula אֲנִי יְהוָה<sup>86</sup> which appears frequently in the Masoretic Text. This sentence embodies a third person imperfect verb with a first person pronoun as

<sup>75</sup> Exodus 3:14, אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה.

<sup>76</sup> Obermann 1949:301.

<sup>77</sup> The subjective perception of the Name entails discovering the 'religious and theological conveyance to the worshippers' as manifested in the Hebrew Bible (Obermann 1949:301).

<sup>78</sup> Philology is 'the scholarly study of written records with a view to establishing, in each case, the best reading of the text and the meaning of that best reading' (Deist 1990:192).

<sup>79</sup> Morphology: the study of form; the study of the distribution and function of the structural linguistics (language units) of one or more languages, and of grammatical rules that relate units of meaning to units of sound (Deist 1990:162).

<sup>80</sup> Etymology, see relevant footnote in § 3.3.

<sup>81</sup> Obermann 1949:302.

<sup>82</sup> See "Masoretes" in a footnote on the vocalisation of the Tetragrammaton by the Masoretes in § 4.1. The Masoretes combined the consonants of the Tetragrammaton with the vocals of 'ādōnāy; the *ḥaṭṭēf pataḥ* of 'ādōnāy became a *shewa*, because of the *yodh* of *yhwh* (Van der Toorn 1999e:910).

<sup>83</sup> A causative verb expresses a cause (Wehmeier 2005:224).

<sup>84</sup> Names of Ancient Near Eastern deities that have developed from appellatives are such as *Shamash*, *Ba' al*, *El*, *Milkom* (Obermann 1949:302).

<sup>85</sup> Names, referring to the Hebrew God, that were frequently used are such as *'ēlyōn* (Most High), *šaddai* (Almighty), *rōḱēb* ' *šāmayim* (Rider of the Heavens) and *yōšēḥ hak-kērūbīm* (Dweller on the Cherubim) (Obermann 1949:302).

<sup>86</sup> אֲנִי יְהוָה, 'anī yahwē – I am the LORD – examples of this formula in the Masoretic Text are, Exodus 6:6, 7, 8, 29; 7:5, 17; 12:12; 14:4, 18; 15:26; 16:12; Numbers 3:13, 41, 45.

subject, an unattainable construction. The scribe of Exodus 3:14 could have endeavoured to solve the problem by 'transposing the alleged third person into a corresponding form of the first person'.<sup>87</sup> The dilemma has been extenuated to some extent by the discovery of two Phoenician inscriptions.<sup>88</sup> These inscriptions are written in the form of a monologue<sup>89</sup> – the subject invariably employs the first person singular pronoun in combination with a third person finite verb. Scholars suggest that the inscriptions deal with an infinitiv absolutus, and not a finite verb. However, Obermann<sup>90</sup> is of the opinion that in both instances the participle plus pronoun have been applied. Therefore a sentence, similar to אֲנִי יְהוָה, was used in the Phoenician inscriptions without involving a finite verb or a third person. He furthermore suggests that, whatever 'the structure analysis of the new pattern [in the Phoenician inscriptions] might be, it puts the name of the God of Israel in an entirely new light',<sup>91</sup> as it is unlikely that legitimate phrases in Old Phoenician were unknown in ancient Hebrew.<sup>92</sup> The name YHWH was probably an ancient epithet of the God of Israel, capable of conveying a threat, promise, warning or hope.<sup>93</sup>

Freedman and O'Connor<sup>94</sup> point out that an important biblical tradition links the Tetragrammaton – the personal name of God – to Moses. The correct pronunciation of this name probably disappeared from Jewish tradition during the Middle Ages. During the Second Temple Period it was regarded unspeakably holy and therefore not suitable for public readings; it continued, however, to be used privately. Modern scholars try to recover the pronunciation and generally agree that the word is pronounced "Yahweh". Freedman<sup>95</sup> argues that YHWH is a verb derived from the root *hwy*>*hwh*, appearing in biblical Hebrew as *hyh*, which is in agreement with recognised linguistic laws. He likewise analyses YHWH as a *hif'il*<sup>96</sup> imperfectum third person masculine singular form of the verb, translated as 'he causes to be, he brings into existence, he brings to pass, he creates'.<sup>97</sup> Apart from the Tetragrammaton,

<sup>87</sup> Obermann 1949:303.

<sup>88</sup> Two Phoenician inscriptions have been uncovered during excavations at Karatepe in southern Anatolia [modern Turkey in ancient Asia Minor] (Obermann 1949:301).

<sup>89</sup> The king – recounting his many achievements, which were to the benefit of his kingdom and subjects – consistently applied the first person pronoun "I" (Obermann 1949:303).

<sup>90</sup> Obermann 1949:303.

<sup>91</sup> Obermann 1949:304. See Obermann (1949:303-304) for a discussion of the Phoenician inscriptions.

<sup>92</sup> Obermann 1949:304.

<sup>93</sup> Obermann 1949:307-308.

<sup>94</sup> Freedman & O'Connor 1986:500.

<sup>95</sup> Freedman 1960:151.

<sup>96</sup> *Hif'il* is the causative form of the verb. Freedman (1960:152) argues that this viewpoint – as advanced in the relevant paragraph to which this footnote refers – is in accordance with Exodus 3:13-15 which 'directly associates the Tetragrammaton with the root *hyh*', although YHWH is vocalised as a *qal* – instead of a *hif'il* – in the Masoretic Text. The *qal*-formation of the verb describes an action or a condition.

<sup>97</sup> Freedman 1960:152.

extended forms of the name of God<sup>98</sup> are present in Exodus. In an attempt to determine the original structure of the Name – as either the Tetragrammaton, or one or more of the extended forms – Freedman<sup>99</sup> observes that 'the term "name" itself is not a decisive criterion',<sup>100</sup> and that YHWH was part of a longer expression. In the latter instance, second millennium BC evidence of Ancient Near Eastern onomastics<sup>101</sup> 'point unmistakably in this direction'.<sup>102</sup> Childs<sup>103</sup> questions Freedman's arguments and points out that even on the assumption that the name YHWH elicited originally from a proto-Semitic *hif'il* – on the basis of extra-biblical parallels – 'there is no clear evidence that in the biblical tradition this connection with the *hiphil* was ever made'.

Mowinckel<sup>104</sup> disagrees with Freedman's argument<sup>105</sup> that YHWH – as first and common element in short sentences – came forth as the abbreviated "Name" of God. Likewise, it is unfounded to presume that Moses was the "inventor" of the Tetragrammaton. Although the Priestly Source<sup>106</sup> states that Moses was the first person to whom the name YHWH was revealed,<sup>107</sup> the earliest Israelite historian – the Yahwist<sup>108</sup> – implemented the name *Yahweh* as early as the patriarchal narratives. Gianotti<sup>109</sup> endorses Mowinckel's viewpoint indicating that for the biblicalist the 'name YHWH was known as early as the time of Enosh'.<sup>110</sup> Regarding the tension between early passages in the patriarchal narratives referring to *Yahweh*,<sup>111</sup> and the declaration in Exodus 6:2-3 – hundreds of years later – scholars have suggested to translate the latter as follows, 'And God spoke to Moses, and said to him: I am Yahweh. And I showed myself to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob in the character of El Shaddai, but in the character expressed by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them.'<sup>112</sup> It was thus 'the character expressed by the name that was withheld from the patriarchs and not the name

<sup>98</sup> Extended forms of the name of God are, for example, found in Exodus 3:13-15.

<sup>99</sup> Freedman 1960:152.

<sup>100</sup> The term "name" is applied equally to names – as we conceive the word "name" – and to titles and descriptive formulas (Freedman 1960:152).

<sup>101</sup> See relevant footnote in § 3.5.

<sup>102</sup> Freedman 1960:152. In this regard Freedman agrees with Albright (W F Albright 1948, in *JBL* 47, 377-381) that the longer expressions are derived from a litany 'describing the covenant God in a series of affirmations beginning with the word *yahweh*', which – as the first and common element in the series – was the "logical and inevitable" abbreviation for the name of God (Freedman 1960:152).

<sup>103</sup> Childs 1974:62-63.

<sup>104</sup> Mowinckel 1961:121.

<sup>105</sup> See discussion in previous paragraph.

<sup>106</sup> See § 8.2 for a brief discussion of pentateuchal sources.

<sup>107</sup> Exodus 6:2-3.

<sup>108</sup> Known as the J-source. See § 8.2.

<sup>109</sup> Gianotti 1985:38.

<sup>110</sup> Genesis 4:26. Enosh was the son of Seth, the third son of Adam (Gn 4:25-26).

<sup>111</sup> Passages such as Genesis 12:1, 4; 13:4.

<sup>112</sup> Gianotti 1985:38.

itself'.<sup>113</sup> Mowinckel<sup>114</sup> suggests that for Moses to legitimise himself and his God to the pharaoh and the Hebrew elders, he had to identify this god. He had to reveal the god's cult name.<sup>115</sup> The common "I am ..." epiphany formula was used throughout the Ancient Near East. Therefore, for the God of Moses to introduce himself, he did so by means of the traditional formula "I am ...". Yet, instead of declaring, "I am *Yahweh*" an explanation of the name is given. According to Exodus 3:14, the deeper meaning of the name of God was revealed to Moses.

The Yahwist School has 'found the essential feature of Yahweh's nature expressed. He is the god who "is", *hāyā* in the fullest meaning of the word'.<sup>116</sup> For the Hebrews the verb *hāyā* – "to be" – does not just mean "to exist", but indicates, "being active". Seitz<sup>117</sup> is of the opinion that, although Exodus 6:3 indicates that Moses was the first person to whom God made his proper Name known, while the Name has been narrated as early as "the time of Enosh" – Genesis 4:26 – we are clearly dealing with different "authorial voices". The narrator of the Genesis stories obviously 'operates with full knowledge of the divine name, as do his readers, and therefore is not bothered by what, from a historical perspective, is the introduction of an anachronism'.<sup>118</sup> Seitz<sup>119</sup> draws the conclusion that the Masoretic Text was never concerned with historical time, therefore, the Name that was hypothetically unknown could be dramatically "revealed". There is no explanation for the appearance of the Tetragrammaton as early as Genesis 2:4.

Mowinckel<sup>120</sup> disputes the explanation of the Tetragrammaton – as accepted by many scholars – being a *hif'il* imperfectum third person masculine singular of the verb *hāyā* < *hāway*. The idea of "he who brings into existence" or "causes to be" is too abstract and philosophical regarding a "primitive" pre-Mosaic age. He furthermore indicates that in ancient Semitic nomenclature a name containing a verbal construct – whether imperfectum of perfectum – would always be in the abbreviated form. The full form contained a subject of the verb, which indicated some designation of the god. To his knowledge, no divine name in the ancient Semitic world consisted of a verb only.

---

<sup>113</sup> Gianotti 1985:38.

<sup>114</sup> Mowinckel 1961:122-127.

<sup>115</sup> In a society with a polytheistic background, to know a particular god required of devotees to know the name of that god (Mowinckel 1961:122).

<sup>116</sup> Mowinckel 1961:127.

<sup>117</sup> Seitz 1999:161.

<sup>118</sup> Seitz 1999:147.

<sup>119</sup> Seitz 1999:150.

<sup>120</sup> Mowinckel 1961:128-129.

Mowinckel<sup>121</sup> finds it 'neither convincing nor probable' that *yah* was the original form of the name *Yahweh* – as suggested by some scholars. The later *yô-*, as first element in theophoric<sup>122</sup> names, can only be explained as a contraction of *yā(h)u*; the original form of such names therefore being *yāhu-*.<sup>123</sup> Mowinckel<sup>124</sup> thus states that, in his opinion, 'the form Yahu is older than *Yahwa/æ*', as *Yahwa/æ* is never found as the first element of theophoric names. The only evidence of the form *yahwa/æ* (*yhwh*) older than those in the fifth century BC Neo-Babylonian transcriptions<sup>125</sup> is the name *yhwh* on the Mesha Stele.<sup>126</sup>

Goitein,<sup>127</sup> on the other hand, is of the opinion that the name *Yāh* – a primordial word – is older than *Yahweh*, and in all likelihood, was administered also outside Israel. It was therefore necessary that a new and distinctive name for the God of Israel became known. The Name, interpreted as *yahwā* – the imperfectum of *hwy* – developed from the duplication of *Yāh*.<sup>128</sup> The Name means 'the One who loves passionately and helps those that worship Him, while, at the same time, demanding exclusive devotion to Himself.'<sup>129</sup> Goitein<sup>130</sup> furthermore mentions the plausibility of Moses being the first to pronounce the name *Yahweh*.

Walker<sup>131</sup> agrees with Goitein that *Yāh* was an older divine name<sup>132</sup> from which *Yahweh* developed – thus being an extended form of *Yāh*; and, being so, excludes the possibility of יהוה being a third person imperfectum, or even a participle. With a few exceptions, ancient divine names were names of natural forces or objects, such as the solar god or lunar god. It is therefore less than likely that *Yāh* was an exception. The moon god *Yārēah* was venerated in Canaan from Neolithic times. In Egypt the moon god *I- -H* is mentioned in the Pyramid texts and in the sixteenth century BC *Book of the Dead*. Theophoric personal names have been

<sup>121</sup> Mowinckel 1961:129-131.

<sup>122</sup> See footnote on "hypocoristic" and "theophoric names" in § 2.3.

<sup>123</sup> The suggestion that the original *yāhu-* was later contracted into *yô-*, is demonstrated by the contraction of *yhw-* to *yw-* in names such as *Yahunatan*>*Jonatan* and *Yahuyada*>*Yoyada*. The initial *yāhu-* and *yô-* and final elements *-yāhu* and *-ya* in compound names, are supported by Assyrian transcriptions *yaū-*, *ya-* and *-yāu*, *-yaū* and *-ya*, as well as fifth century BC Neo-Babylonian transcriptions *yahû-*, *yāhu-* and *yāhû-* (Mowinckel 1961:130).

<sup>124</sup> Mowinckel 1961:130-131.

<sup>125</sup> See earlier footnote in this paragraph.

<sup>126</sup> See § 4.3.8 for a brief discussion of the Mesha Stele, also known as the Moabite Stone.

<sup>127</sup> Goitein 1956:1-9.

<sup>128</sup> Goitein 1956:9.

<sup>129</sup> Goitein 1956:9.

<sup>130</sup> Goitein 1956:9.

<sup>131</sup> Walker 1958:262-265.

<sup>132</sup> *Yāh* is more than an abbreviation of *Yahweh*, and occurs in the Masoretic Text as an ancient divine name. Examples are, in "The song of Moses" (Ex 15:2) – 'My strength and my song is *Yāh*'; in the ancient "Oath of Moses" (Ex 17:16) – 'Hand to the throne of *Yāh*'; and in a likely Davidic fragment in Psalm 68:19 [Ps 68:18 in the ESV], 'That *Yāh* God might dwell (there)' (Walker 1958:262).

found with *I-H* and later with only *I-H*. These signs correspond to the Semitic *aleph* and *yodh*. Moon, as *Y-H*, has been found only when modified into *Yāh*. Walker<sup>133</sup> suggests that *YH* of the Tetragrammaton comes directly from the Egyptian *I-H* – being *Yah* – while *WH* is an added epithet. An established custom in Egypt gave the epithet "One", Egyptian "W-", to a supreme deity. He therefore surmises 'that, whether through Semitic or through Egyptian, the Kenite "*Yāh*"<sup>134</sup> became "*Yah-weh*", meaning "*Yah-One*", with tacit monotheistic implication'.<sup>135</sup> For the Israelites in Egypt another god with the added epithet "One" would have signified little. To suggest the superiority of *Yahweh* over all other gods, an added interpretation of the Name was therefore necessary. During his sojourn with the Kenites, Moses doubtlessly became aware of the similar sounding "*Yahweh*" and the Egyptian "*I-W-I*", "I am", with possible vocalisation "*IaWeI*", "*Yawey*". If God's Name is "I AM", he is the One who exists and is powerful. *Yahweh* is therefore equated to Egyptian "*Yahwey*", translated into Hebrew '*Ehyeh* – אֶהְיֶה – "I AM". In effect Moses thus changed the etymology of "*Yahweh*" 'in the spiritual interests of enslaved Israel. ... Ex 3<sub>14</sub> does not assert that God's name is "HE IS", "Yihyeh", but that it does positively assert that God's name is "I AM", "EHYEH".<sup>136</sup>

Mowinckel<sup>137</sup> suggests that, to ascertain the original meaning of the name *Yahu*, an explanation of the name *Ya-huwa* should be explored. *Ya* was a well-known Arabic interjection, and *huwa* the third person masculine personal pronoun, "Oh, He". In this instance "He" is a designation of God, as attested among the Hebrews in the personal name 'Abihu.<sup>138</sup> *Ya-* could be an abbreviated form of *yahu*, and if *hu'* is the personal pronoun, the name *Yahu* could mean, "*Yahweh* is He". The God concerned could therefore be spoken of as "He", the mystical "He" whose essence and being we cannot see and understand. Mowinckel<sup>139</sup> presents the possibility that prehistoric ancestors of the North Sinaitic tribes called the god of Qadesh-Sinai, "He". During an annual feast these tribes celebrated for this god, the worshippers met their god with the cultic cry "Oh He" – *ya-huwa*. This cry of exclamation and invocation gradually became a symbolic designation, and eventually his name. Divine names, which have originated elsewhere from cultic exclamations, have been attested. In accordance with the abbreviation

<sup>133</sup> Walker 1958:264-265.

<sup>134</sup> See § 5.3 for a discussion of the Kenite hypothesis.

<sup>135</sup> Walker 1958:264.

<sup>136</sup> Walker 1958:265.

<sup>137</sup> Mowinckel 1961:131-132.

<sup>138</sup> Scholars generally agree that proper names containing 'abi as first element, are theophoric names (see footnote in § 2.3 on hypocoristicon and theophoric names). The name 'abi 'el therefore being "(My) Father is (the) God", 'abiyah(u), "My Father is *Yahweh*", and 'Abihu could thus only be interpreted as "(My) Father is He". See Exodus 6:23; 24:1 for reference to Abihu (Mowinckel 1961:131).

<sup>139</sup> Mowinckel 1961:132-133.

*huwa* into *hu* – third person masculine personal pronoun – *yahuwa* could be abbreviated into *yahu*. The abbreviation *yahu* appears regularly as first and final element of compound theophoric personal names. During the festival for the god, when the worshippers would exclaim the coming of the god, it could be that the first syllable of the name was stressed: *yáhuwa*, *yáhuwa*! The abbreviated form *yahwa* could thus easily be explained from such an accentuation.

Abba<sup>140</sup> agrees that the Arabic *huwa* was probably the original Semitic form of the pronoun "he"; therefore, the original cultic cry would be *ya-huwa*. There are indications that the name *Yahweh* is extremely ancient, acquiring new significance during the exodus. In the archaic form the ה [in הוה] was retained but later replaced by י – as in the verb הוה with which the name is connected. This modification took place long before the time of Moses. Cognate languages retain the ה; it could thus be intimated that the Tetragrammaton emanated from a time when Hebrew was close to kindred languages. The revelation given to Moses was therefore not 'the revelation of a new and hitherto unknown name; it was the disclosure of the real significance of a name long known'.<sup>141</sup> Exodus 3 explicitly connects the verb הוה – an archaic form of הוה – with *Yahweh*.

According to Eerdmans,<sup>142</sup> the Name was a symbol of thunder – a dreaded natural phenomenon – and could even have been regarded as one of the elements of a thunderstorm.<sup>143</sup> He mentions that 'this conception of the name as an onomatopoeia<sup>144</sup> of thunder points to a pronunciation Ja-hu, with stress on the second syllable'.<sup>145</sup> It is also significant that a later formula for praising the Lord was "Hallelu-jah" – thus containing the abbreviated *Jah/Yāh* and not the Tetragrammaton.<sup>146</sup>

Brownlee<sup>147</sup> mentions that the Hebrew slaves in Egypt may have been totally demoralised and fully resigned to their bondage. They would not protest lest the oppressor intensified their

<sup>140</sup> Abba 1961:322-324.

<sup>141</sup> Abba 1961:323.

<sup>142</sup> Eerdmans 1948:22-23.

<sup>143</sup> See § 3.5 for a discussion of storm gods. *Yahweh* was attributed with, inter alia, storm god characteristics (see § 3.8.1).

<sup>144</sup> Onomatopoeia: the imitation of sounds, or words of which the sounds imitate the sounds produced by their referents; the latter being a particular object to which attention is directed by means of the utterance of a word (Deist 1990:178, 215).

<sup>145</sup> Eerdmans 1948:22.

<sup>146</sup> Eerdmans 1948:19. Examples of the abbreviated form יה are found in Psalms 77:12; 89:9; 102:19; Isaiah 38:11, and of הללויהה in Psalms 106:1; 111:1; 112:1; 113:1; 135:1; 146:1; 147:20; 148:1; 149:1,9; 150:1,6.

<sup>147</sup> Brownlee 1977:45.

hard labour. The revelation of God's Name to Moses, interpreted in the light of Exodus 3:12 – 'I will be with you' – brought the necessary assurance to the Hebrews that God would act. This understanding of the ineffable NAME may be directly relevant to a host of passages in the Hebrew prophets, especially in the contexts of threats and promises, where "I am *Yahweh*", may appropriately mean, "I am he HE who makes things happen".<sup>148</sup> Clements<sup>149</sup> indicates that the ancient people attached a special sanctity to the name of a deity, thereby being able to invoke his aid. Knowledge of the Name of the Hebrew God intimated a privileged relationship. The revelation of the divine Name to Moses served as an authentication to the Hebrews in Egypt. Since the Hebrew verb "יהוה" could be taken either as present or as future tense, this designation 'contains a strong overtone of future action'.<sup>150</sup>

MacLaurin<sup>151</sup> mentions that the traditional interpretation of יהוה is given on account of the revelation אהיה אשר אהיה. Should this be a verbal form – as generally agreed – it would require a first person singular verb in the *qal* formation, whereas the prefix in יהוה is a third person, probably indicating a *hif'il*. The root of the verb is *hyh* – "to be" – without any evidence of ever being *hwh*. Some scholars recognise in the root of יהוה a cognate of the Ugaritic-Assyrian root *hwy*, "to reveal, to proclaim"; a noun formed from this root is believed to be a magical term. Thompson<sup>152</sup> mentions that the causative of this verb does not occur elsewhere in Hebrew, however, 'the name could be a unique or singular use of the causative stem'.

There is the possibility that priestly scribes played a role 'in obscuring the true meaning of the sacred name'.<sup>153</sup> Innumerable attempts have been made to explain this Name, yet it is evident 'that the root of the word cannot be determined'.<sup>154</sup> *Yahweh* is not some prehistoric term, but a sacred Name given to people in historic times. It is therefore 'unthinkable that the meaning, if any, should have been lost with some obscure root which must be sought in the cognate languages'.<sup>155</sup> The meaning was probably clear to all up till such time that tradition prevented ordinary people to pronounce the Name – being too sacred, or that the pronunciation became obsolete for some other reason.<sup>156</sup> Exodus 3:15 is obviously a reply to Moses' question who the God was who confronted him. The application in verse 14 of the first person singular of

---

<sup>148</sup> Brownlee 1977:45.

<sup>149</sup> Clements 1972:23.

<sup>150</sup> Clements 1972:23.

<sup>151</sup> MacLaurin 1962:440-442.

<sup>152</sup> Thompson 1992:1011.

<sup>153</sup> MacLaurin 1962:440.

<sup>154</sup> MacLaurin 1962:441.

<sup>155</sup> MacLaurin 1962:441-442.

<sup>156</sup> MacLaurin 1962:442.

the verb "to be" is clearly a later interpolation explaining the divine name *Yahweh*. In the original passage there was, therefore, no attempt to explain the meaning of *Yahweh*. In the Hebrew Bible *'ehyeh* – as reference to God – appears only once elsewhere, in the Book of Hosea. The prophet Hosea is commanded to call his third son *lō'-'ammî* – 'for you are not my people and I am no *'ehyeh* to you'.<sup>157</sup> Mayes<sup>158</sup> points out that the basic formula describing the covenant founded at Sinai is "You are my people, and I am your God".<sup>159</sup> The command to Hosea is an undeniable declaration that the covenant is no longer in force. In formulating the strict parallelism in the interpretative sentence Hosea uses a verbal form for the divine name which is found only in Ex. 3.14.<sup>160</sup> This formulation could thus be read "I am not your I-AM (*'ehyeh*)".

Driver<sup>161</sup> endeavoured to collect all extra-biblical material relating to the Tetragrammaton<sup>162</sup> to deduce thereby what the original form of the word was. He mentions that information in the Masoretic Text is of little value due to a succession of redactional adaptations. The text has probably been altered to suit the view of the editors. The question is whether the original form of the Name was יהוה, יהו, or יה; whether these forms are abbreviations of a longer form or whether יהוה is the extended form of shorter forms. Scholars generally regard יהוה to be the original name from which other forms were derived. The Moabite Stele<sup>163</sup> confirms this view to some extent. However, it is not viable to consider shorter forms – such as יהו and יה – to be abbreviations of יהוה. No other Semitic group abbreviates the names of their gods and it is unimaginable that a name as sacred as יהוה would be commonly abbreviated. Primitive names given to deities are normally short and difficult to explain; 'their origin and meaning are hidden in the mists of antiquity'.<sup>164</sup> The primitive *Yā(w)* or *Yā(h)* could thus have become *Yahwéh*. The initial shorter forms were probably ejaculatory in origin, which could easily have been prolonged – when shouted in moments of excitement or ecstasy – to *ya(h)wá(h)*, *ya(h)wá(h)y* or similar forms. With the development of a new idea worshipping one national God, the old name – under which he had been venerated as a tribal god, or one of many gods – underwent a change. The original *Yā*, developing in elongated exclamatory forms, rapidly became fixed in the imagination of the devotees as *Yahweh* and was ultimately treated as a

<sup>157</sup> Phillips & Phillips 1998:82. Hosea 1:9.

<sup>158</sup> Mayes 1969:29.

<sup>159</sup> The covenant in more or less similar wording is found, for example, in Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 26:17-18.

<sup>160</sup> Mayes 1969:29.

<sup>161</sup> Driver 1928:7, 22-25.

<sup>162</sup> For information on the extra-biblical material relevant to the Tetragrammaton, see Driver (1928:7-22).

<sup>163</sup> See § 4.3.8 for a brief discussion of the Moabite (or Mesha) Stele.

<sup>164</sup> Driver 1928:23.

verbal form. The origin and denotation of the primitive name had been, without doubt, long forgotten. It seems that in the early stages the Tetragrammaton was not as sacred never to be uttered, although avoided in daily use. If it had not been so the author could not have been acquainted with it.<sup>165</sup>

Gianotti<sup>166</sup> evaluates various interpretations of the divine Name. He discusses the following viewpoints: the "unknowable", the "ontological",<sup>167</sup> the "causative", the "covenantal" and the "phenomenological".<sup>168</sup> Some scholars perceive the name *Yahweh* as manifesting the unknowable or incomprehensibility of God. The only passage in the Hebrew Bible which attempts to explain the name *Yahweh*<sup>169</sup> does not succeed – the Name remains a mystery. Other scholars maintain that the name *Yahweh* in Exodus 3 'reveals God as the Being who is absolutely self-existent, and who, in Himself, possesses essential life and permanent existence'.<sup>170</sup> This view – the ontological – is apparently based on the translation of Exodus 3:14 in the Septuagint.<sup>171</sup> Gianotti<sup>172</sup> regards the Septuagint as a "serviceable" human translation of the Pentateuch by Jewish scholars – but not inspired. The primary discernment of Exodus 3:14 should be from a contextual comprehension of the passage, as well as an analysis of the meaning and application of the term יהוה and its imperfectum, אהיה. Gianotti<sup>173</sup> reaches the conclusion that Exodus 3:14 'does not support an "ontological" or "existence" view'. Proponents of the causative<sup>174</sup> view state that the word יהוה could be derived only from the verbal root *hwy* – in the causative (*hif'il*) and not the *qal* imperfectum. Gianotti<sup>175</sup> objects to this viewpoint and argues that phrases, such as יהוה אלהים or יהוה יהוה,<sup>176</sup> would be extremely difficult to understand if יהוה was regarded as a *hif'il*. According to the covenantal view, the God of the Mosaic Covenant is seen in the name *Yahweh*. The repeated introductions – 'I am *Yahweh*' – to the commandments, give credibility to this view. In the last instance, Gianotti<sup>177</sup> discusses the phenomenological view. Advocates of this view interpret the divine Name

<sup>165</sup> Driver 1928:24-25.

<sup>166</sup> Gianotti 1985:40-48.

<sup>167</sup> Ontology is a branch of philosophy with the aim to provide a theory of absolute being and existence. An ontological argument is an argument for 'the existence of God on the ground that the existence of the idea of God necessarily involves the existence of God' (Deist 1990:178).

<sup>168</sup> Phenomenology is 'a method of philosophical inquiry concentrating on describing the essence of objects as they present themselves to human consciousness' (Deist 1990:192).

<sup>169</sup> Exodus 3:14-15.

<sup>170</sup> Gianotti 1985:41-43.

<sup>171</sup> See footnote in § 3.2.2 on the Septuagint.

<sup>172</sup> Gianotti 1985:42.

<sup>173</sup> Gianotti 1985:43.

<sup>174</sup> See earlier footnote in this paragraph on "*hif'il*".

<sup>175</sup> Gianotti 1985:44.

<sup>176</sup> Exodus 34:6.

<sup>177</sup> Gianotti 1985:45-48.

*Yahweh* as meaning 'that God will reveal Himself in His actions through history'.<sup>178</sup> The covenantal view is implicit herein. The occurrence of the name *Yahweh* in the second creation narrative<sup>179</sup> indicates God's active involvement from the beginning of history. The significance of the imperfectum – אהיה – thereby becomes clear; אהיה is God's promise that He will redeem the children of Israel.<sup>180</sup> The name *Yahweh* intimates God's particular relationship with Israel in both his retributive acts and acts of redemption, thereby 'manifesting His phenomenological effectiveness in Israel's history'.<sup>181</sup>

According to Van der Toorn,<sup>182</sup> the construct *ywhw* has been established as the primitive form. Abbreviated – hypocoristic – forms, such as *Yah*, *Yahû*, *Yô* and *Yěhô* are secondary regional predilections. *Yw* is found predominantly in a Northern Israelite context, while *Yh* is mainly Judean. *Yhw* was probably originally Judean, but at the same time not unknown among Northern Israelites.<sup>183</sup> The transcription "*Yahweh*" 'is a scholarly convention',<sup>184</sup> based on some Greek transcriptions. Thierry<sup>185</sup> indicates that a word *Yahô* was at some time in existence but was not considered the true pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton, which always had its own vocalisation. To establish the origin of the pronunciation of YHWH, Thierry<sup>186</sup> examined some patristic writings. Jerome<sup>187</sup> – one of the Church Fathers – made this remark, "The name of the Lord in Hebrew language contains four letters, Yod He Waw He; it is the proper name of God and can be pronounced as *Yahô*."<sup>188</sup> Thierry<sup>189</sup> maintains that evasive answers are often given in biblical narratives, especially in theophanies. Exodus 3:14 focuses all the attention on the concept "I am", and with the continuation of the same answer a firm parallelism is formed between "I am" – אהיה – and "*Yahweh*" – יהוה. The author of Exodus 3:14 most likely knew the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton and explained it the way he comprehended it. From Moses' time the Israelites probably pronounced the divine Name *Yahweh*.

<sup>178</sup> Gianotti 1985:45.

<sup>179</sup> Genesis 2:4-25.

<sup>180</sup> Gianotti 1985:46.

<sup>181</sup> Gianotti 1985:48.

<sup>182</sup> Van der Toorn 1999e:910.

<sup>183</sup> Compare the inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud; see § 4.3.9 for a discussion of these inscriptions.

<sup>184</sup> Van der Toorn 1999e:910.

<sup>185</sup> Thierry 1948:30-31.

<sup>186</sup> Thierry 1948:32-34.

<sup>187</sup> Jerome (Eusebius Hieronymus) (ca 347-419/20) was a scripture scholar, translator, polemicist and ascetic. He was especially known for his translations and revisions of the biblical books (McHugh 1990:484-485).

<sup>188</sup> Thierry 1948:34.

<sup>189</sup> Thierry 1948:37-39, 42.

Hayward<sup>190</sup> attempts to provide a solution to the question whether '*Memra*<sup>191</sup> forms part or the whole of the background to the Johannine *Logos*'.<sup>192</sup> Evidence from the Neofiti I<sup>193</sup> and other Targums<sup>194</sup> indicates that *Memra* is an exegetical term for the Name revealed to Moses by God, and consequently our understanding of *Memra* is that it directly represents this Name. *Memra* probably originated in pre-Christian times and therefore it cannot be ruled out that the evangelist John made use of it. However, the question remains whether he knew of the *Memra*, in the light of the problem whether the Fourth Gospel is Hellenistic or Jewish. Nevertheless, John probably knew of the *Memra* – which stood for God's presence in past and future creation, representing his mercy, redemption and covenant – but fashioned it by his own ideas. Even though it may have been used in John's Prologue, *Memra*, thus, 'does not, by itself, account for the whole of the *Logos*-doctrine'.<sup>195</sup>

Coetsee<sup>196</sup> regards the well-known "I am" or "*Ego eimi*" pronouncements of Jesus in the Gospel of St John, as 'one of the most intriguing and theologically controversial issues in the Johannine debate'. In his discussion to ascertain the relationship between the *Ego eimi* sayings in John 8-9 and Exodus 3:13-17, Coetsee<sup>197</sup> comes to the conclusion that the "*Ego eimi*" in John 8 'is definitely a technical expression in the mouth of Jesus whereby He explicitly claims ... his identification with the messianic Servant of the Lord',<sup>198</sup> as well as his unity with *Yahweh*.<sup>199</sup> Segal<sup>200</sup> discusses a striking similarity between Jesus' "I am" pronouncements<sup>201</sup> and claims of magicians in the magical papyri.<sup>202</sup> He indicates that the Gospel writers were

<sup>190</sup> Hayward 1979:17, 21, 25, 31-32.

<sup>191</sup> *Memra* means "utterance", "word", 'God's creative intelligence and power' (Deist 1990:154).

<sup>192</sup> The Greek word "*logos*" is described by Deist (1990:147) as 'word, intelligence, intellect, God's reflections within himself before and during creation, and hence Christ as the mediator of creation.'

<sup>193</sup> Neofiti I: a complete text of the Palestinian Targum is contained in the Codex Neofiti I, which is housed in the Vatican Library. This codex is important for its marginal and interlinear glosses (Hayward 1979:16).

<sup>194</sup> Targum, meaning "interpretation", is an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible, dating from late pre-Christian to early Christian times (Deist 1990:253).

<sup>195</sup> Hayward 1979:31-32.

<sup>196</sup> Coetsee 1986:171-176.

<sup>197</sup> Coetsee 1986:174-176.

<sup>198</sup> Coetsee 1986:174. Coetsee (1986:171-176) draws a comparison between John 8-9 and Isaiah 42-43.

<sup>199</sup> Jesus' essential unity with *Yahweh*, the Covenant God of the Hebrew Bible, is recognised both in terms of Exodus 3:13-17 and Isaiah 42-43 (Coetsee 1986:176).

<sup>200</sup> Segal 1981:349, 351, 356, 367, 369, 372.

<sup>201</sup> Segal's argument is based on declarations by Jesus Himself, or by any of the crowd, that He is the Son of God, and on acts of healing by Jesus that were regarded by Scribes, Pharisees and the common people to be performances of magic – thereby placing Him in the same category as the Hellenistic magicians. See for example, Matthew 8:28-29; 9:6, 32-34; 13:41; Mark 2:10, 28; 3:11; 5:7-8; Luke 8:28.

<sup>202</sup> Scholars named a body of papyri from Greco-Roman Egypt *The Greek magical papyri*. It consists of various magical spells and formulae, rituals and hymns. These texts date mainly from the second century BC to the fifth century AD. The texts represent only a small number of all the magical spells that once existed. Literary sources refer to a large number of magical books in antiquity, wherein these spells were collected. Unfortunately

sensitive to any charges of magic brought against Jesus.<sup>203</sup> Such charges are a clever example of social manipulation. There is no indication that Jesus wished to claim the title of magician. To maintain the purity of religion, religious leaders often point out firm distinctions between magic and religion. In the magical papyri the terms "magic" and "magical" are used and the practitioners call themselves *magoi*,<sup>204</sup> "magicians". 'As in the magical papyri, the mix of overtly magical claims with clearly religious desire of individual divinization makes it impractical to distinguish between magic and religion.'<sup>205</sup>

Regarding the Tetragrammaton as perceived by Jewish mysticism and explained in the Zohar,<sup>206</sup> Sperling and Simon<sup>207</sup> mention that 'it is a postulate of the Zohar that the Biblical name *YHWH* – the so-called tetragrammaton – has an intimate, if unspecified, connection with the primordial<sup>208</sup> Thought. It is the chosen instrument for rendering the Thought intelligible or realisable to the human mind.' According to the Zohar, the development of the grades<sup>209</sup> corresponds with both the development of the created universe and the emergence of a certain name – the Tetragrammaton – which is the unifying element.<sup>210</sup>

On the basis of the "Great Tautology", *אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה*,<sup>211</sup> Moses Maimonides<sup>212</sup> 'presents an account of God in terms of a distinctive application of the categories of agent and act' in his *Guide of the Perplexed*.<sup>213</sup> In the application of his particular categories he encountered the concept of "divine existence" and had to respond appropriately. God created our world by

---

most of these books have disappeared. An example is the episode of the burning of the magical books in Ephesus (Acts 19:19). The extant Greek magical papyri are original documents and primary sources (Betz 1986:xli-xlii).

<sup>203</sup> Examples of Jesus' healings and the negative response of the crowds are in Matthew 9:1-8; 32-34; Luke 8:26-39; 11:14-23; John 7:10-21; 8:48-59; 10:19-21. See also Matthew 12:22-30; Mark 3:20-30; Luke 11:14-23. The exorcism stories have been edited so that the question of Jesus' power could be discussed. 'The scribes are represented as believing that Jesus' power is not from God but from Beelzebul' (Segal 1981:367).

<sup>204</sup> The *magoi* were people from the Hellenistic world who had no real connection with Persia, although it were the members of the Persian priestly clan who called themselves *Magi*. Although "magic" in Roman laws was always mentioned in a negative context, theurgy (see footnote in § 4.1) represented 'the force that transformed "magical" acts into acceptable religion in the Roman Empire' (Segal 1981:356, 364).

<sup>205</sup> Segal 1981:372.

<sup>206</sup> See relevant footnote on the Zohar and Kabbalah in § 4.1.

<sup>207</sup> Sperling & Simon 1931:383.

<sup>208</sup> See relevant footnote in § 1.3.

<sup>209</sup> The grades of the Zohar constitute a hierarchy, each being superior to the one that follows. The grade that follows is conditioned by the grade above it. The Zoharic language refers to "upper" and "lower" grades. In the scheme of the Zohar the Tetragrammaton has a special connection with the grade of *Tifereth* – meaning the proper name. The grade *Tifereth* was the originator of the *Neshamah* – the moral consciousness, the highest of the three grades of the soul. By inspiration Moses was 'able to grasp the connection between the grade and the Name fully and clearly' (Sperling & Simon 1932:402-406, glossary).

<sup>210</sup> Sperling & Simon 1931:383.

<sup>211</sup> Exodus 3:14.

<sup>212</sup> See footnote on Maimonides in § 4.1.

<sup>213</sup> Broadie 1994:473.

an act of will, and is therefore also capable of creating a world totally different from ours. This knowledge 'sets a limit to what we can learn about God by a consideration of the natural order'.<sup>214</sup> Maimonides wished to attain knowledge about God by investigating a world in which God had put an insignificant part of himself. According to Maimonides, we therefore 'would be seeking insight into the divine nature on the hopelessly inadequate basis of just one manifestation of God's agency'.<sup>215</sup> He vigorously defends the doctrine of divine incorporeality. As expressed in Exodus 33:23<sup>216</sup> the true reality of God's existence cannot be grasped. Nevertheless, 'we can acquire a knowledge of God which is sufficient to enable us to embark on a proof of his existence'.<sup>217</sup> Maimonides indicates that all attributes ascribed to God, are attributes of his actions and not of his essence. Similarly, all the names of God are derived from actions, with the exception of one name, *Yahweh*. Yet, 'the Tetragrammaton does signify God in respect of a divine act, though, unlike the acts from which the other names of God derive, the Tetragrammaton does not signify an act of a kind of which any human being is capable'.<sup>218</sup> Maimonides furthermore indicates that – although not clear how it should be translated – the "Great Tautology", **אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה**, refers to divine existence. **אֱהִיָּה** in the imperfectum signifies an ongoing action. He interprets the Tetragrammaton as the Name through which the Israelites were to 'acquire a true notion of the existence of God'.<sup>219</sup> The Name implies that God's existence is identical with his essence. Linking God's existence and his essence is based on the concept of the absolute oneness of God. The "Great Tautology" provided Maimonides' philosophy with a framework wherein a fuller notion of God developed. This theory of Maimonides – as developed in the *Guide of the Perplexed* – cannot, however, be claimed to be the Jewish concept of the God of Israel.<sup>220</sup>

In his discussion of the dialogue between two great intellectuals, the Jewish Martin Buber and the Christian Paul Tillich,<sup>221</sup> Novak<sup>222</sup> suggests 'that Jewish-Christian dialogue is most intellectually fruitful when engaging in philosophical exegesis of the Bible'. Novak<sup>223</sup> argues that the respective philosophical exegeses and interpretations of Exodus 3:14<sup>224</sup> by Buber and

<sup>214</sup> Broadie 1994:474.

<sup>215</sup> Broadie 1994:474.

<sup>216</sup> Exodus 33:23, '... but my face shall not be seen'.

<sup>217</sup> Broadie 1994:476.

<sup>218</sup> Broadie 1994:477.

<sup>219</sup> Broadie 1994:481.

<sup>220</sup> Broadie 1994:473-488.

<sup>221</sup> Martin Buber and Paul Tillich knew each other for over forty years, starting in Germany during the turbulent period after World War I. Both died in 1965. Buber – eight years Tillich's senior – seemed to have been the teacher and Tillich the student (Novak 1992:159).

<sup>222</sup> Novak 1992:159.

<sup>223</sup> Novak 1992:159.

<sup>224</sup> **אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה**.

Tillich enrich and expand each other. This text 'is the basis for a tradition of theological interpretation that is the historical context for both Buber's and Tillich's philosophical exegesis'.<sup>225</sup> According to the classic rabbinic interpretation of this text, God states that God's being-there is God's being-with God's people, while the classic Hellenistic interpretation in the Septuagint<sup>226</sup> is incomplete therein that it does not indicate the relationship between Israel and the Absolute Being: "I am he who is" or "I am Being". Despite Buber's existentialist<sup>227</sup> classic, *I am Thou*,<sup>228</sup> 'that expresses the radical antimetaphysical primacy of temporal relationality',<sup>229</sup> his interpretation of Exodus 3:14 shows remarkable similarity to the Hellenistic interpretation. Buber refers to the eternal revelation of God which is present in the "here and now". A relationship with the self-revealing and self-concealing God had to be conducted, however, regarding the latter, Buber, somehow, could not indicate how this relationship was to be constituted, and therefore 'could not in truth constitute divine transcendence'.<sup>230</sup> In his *Theology of Culture*,<sup>231</sup> Tillich rejects the logic of either the cosmological or the ontological<sup>232</sup> proof of the existence of God. He argues 'for God to be present as God, God must be experienced in God's self-concealed absence as well. Without that, God's transcendence gets lost in the intimacy experienced in God's self-revelation as *mitsein* (being-with) in the I-thou relationship'.<sup>233</sup> For Tillich, the relation 'had to have the precondition of our experienced need to affirm the unconditional, even when we cannot apprehend it',<sup>234</sup> while for Buber, revelation need have no real preconditions.<sup>235</sup> The clearest focus of Jewish-Christian dialogue – as achieved by Buber and Tillich – may be found in their respective interpretations of Exodus 3:14. Characteristic of their dialogue, not one side was convinced that it had the truth. They were interested in teaching, as well as learning. They were both open to the possibility that the Hebrew Bible still speaks the truth. Their involvement in philosophy – although its influence is more apparent in Tillich than in Buber – enabled this dialogue. Without philosophy – and fundamentally ontology – neither could have read the Hebrew Bible the way they did. 'Accordingly, they vividly demonstrated that the most intellectually enriching

---

<sup>225</sup> Novak 1992:161.

<sup>226</sup> See footnote in § 3.2.2 on the Septuagint.

<sup>227</sup> Existential or existentialist 'refers to constant confrontation with choices' – existentials – as a general attribute of human existence (Deist 1990:90).

<sup>228</sup> Contrary to the assumption that everything Buber wrote after 1923 was to be regarded as a footnote to *I am Thou*, his interpretation of Exodus 3:14 did change, being a major shift away from his Platonic-like approach. A next edition was published in 1957 (Novak 1992:164).

<sup>229</sup> Novak 1992:163.

<sup>230</sup> Novak 1992:166.

<sup>231</sup> Published in 1959.

<sup>232</sup> See footnote earlier in this paragraph.

<sup>233</sup> Novak 1992:168.

<sup>234</sup> Novak 1992:168.

<sup>235</sup> Novak 1992:159-173.

Jewish-Christian dialogue may well be the open philosophical exegesis of scripture, in which both Jews and Christians have – in one way or another – heard God's word.<sup>236</sup>

Adam received power to name the created animals in the garden, and later he also named his companion. Throughout Genesis naming, or the changing of the names of certain people, played an important role.<sup>237</sup> The significance of a name within the Israelite society and culture in general, should be distinguished from the significance of a name utilised for a particular purpose in a specific biblical narrative context.<sup>238</sup> Therefore, the interpretation of the names of God [*Yahweh*] and the significance thereof should be approached in the same way as the interpretation of the names of biblical characters – particularly when different names are applied in the same context. In a dialogue between *Yahweh* and Moses a list of divine attributes of *Yahweh* are given,<sup>239</sup> repeated and amended in other biblical texts<sup>240</sup> to serve various purposes. In certain narratives specific alternative names of God appear.<sup>241</sup> Different designations of God thus vary – depending on the context – and thereby imply a particular characteristic of God. Literary conventions of biblical authors and editors may also – to a certain extent – have played a part in the application of a specific name.<sup>242</sup> Rabbinic comment – which attempted to read something into the texts before them – on Exodus 34:6 and Exodus 3:14,<sup>243</sup> is a reminder 'of how far biblical names conceal as much as they reveal'.<sup>244</sup>

The phrase in Exodus 3:14 – אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה – has intrigued scholars for many decades. At the same time, they endeavour to analyse the Tetragrammaton – יְהוָה – and submit a plausible

<sup>236</sup> Novak 1992:174.

<sup>237</sup> For example: Abram changes to Abraham (Gn 17:5); Sarai to Sarah (Gn 17:15); Jacob to Israel (Gn 32:28); Benoni to Benjamin (Gn 35:18); Joseph to Zaphenath-paneah (Gn 41:45).

<sup>238</sup> Exodus 1:8 refers to the "king of Egypt", while Exodus 1:11 mentions the "Pharaoh". This may simply be a stylistic variant, or the narrator of the specific passage intended to convey a particular message (Magonet 1995:81).

<sup>239</sup> Exodus 34:6-7,

'... the Lord [*Yahweh*], a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, ...'

<sup>240</sup> Biblical texts are, for example, Numbers 14:18; Psalms 86:5; 103:8-13; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:3.

<sup>241</sup> Examples are: in the dialogue between Abraham and Melchizedek (Gn 14:17-24) the names *El Elyon* [God Most High] and *Yahweh El Elyon* are used; Naomi refers to *Shadday* [Almighty] (Ruth 1:20-21); *Yahweh Sebaoth* [Lord of hosts] (Is 1:24).

<sup>242</sup> Magonet 1995:80-82, 95-96.

<sup>243</sup> Rabbinic interpretation of Exodus 34:6 reads: 'Said Rabbi Aba bar Memel: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: You wish to know my name? I am named according to my actions. At different times I am called El Shaddai, Tzevaot, Elohim, YHWH. When I judge the creation I am called Elohim; when I wage war against the wicked I am called Tzevaot; when I suspend judgment for a person's sins I am called El Shaddai; and when I show mercy to my world I am called YHWH – for the term YHWH refers only to the *middat harahamim*, the attribute of mercy, as it says YHWH YHWH a God of mercy and compassion' and therefore, according to *Exodus R.* 3.6 [see explanatory notes on the Talmud and Mishnah incorporated in footnotes in § 3.2.1 and § 3.2.2], Exodus 3:14 declares: 'I am that I am – I am named according to My actions' (Magonet 1995:95-96).

<sup>244</sup> Magonet 1995:95.

explanation for the word. Lately, the problem has been approached from a philological point of view. A more objective and historical enquiry is being done. The following may be deduced from different arguments by scholars. One of their main concerns seems to be the paradox of the word יהוה being an imperfect finite verb – probably from the causative stem, *hif'il* – and therefore, of necessity, an imperfectum of the third person,<sup>245</sup> while the formula אני יהוה – which appears frequently in the Masoretic Text – thus embodies a third person imperfectum (יהוה) with a first person pronoun (אני) as subject – an unattainable construction. Scholars generally agree that the verbal form אהיה אשר אהיה (Ex 3:14) requires a first person singular verb in the *qal* formation. The third person prefix in יהוה probably indicates a *hif'il*. No consensus has, however, been reached by scholars regarding the analysis of the word יהוה. On the basis of many instances in Semitic antiquity where divine names developed from epithets, the word *Yahweh* could have been formed from the root *hwy* – to be, to exist – possibly related to *hwy-hyh*, to live. He is the God who "is" – the active God – *hāyā*, in the all-inclusive meaning of the word. In agreement with Gianotti's<sup>246</sup> opinion – regarding the name יהוה in the second creation narrative – God's active involvement is indicated from the beginning of history, thereby clarifying the significance of the imperfectum אהיה. Despite innumerable attempts to explain the Name, it is evident 'that the root of the word cannot be determined'.<sup>247</sup> General consensus has, however, been reached that the word is pronounced *Yahweh*.

The epiphany formula "I am ..." was customary throughout the Ancient Near East. However, instead of declaring to Moses "I am *Yahweh*", an explanation of the Name is given, thereby revealing the deeper meaning thereof. The name *Yahweh* was probably an ancient epithet of the God of Israel, capable of conveying a warning, threat or promise. The added interpretation of the Name suggested *Yahweh*'s superiority over all other gods. The verb יהוה could be either present or future tense, and therefore 'contains a strong overtone of future action'.<sup>248</sup> As MacLaurin<sup>249</sup> indicates, *Yahweh* is a sacred name given to the people in historic times – not some prehistoric term of which the meaning became lost. Being extremely ancient, the name *Yahweh* acquired new significance during the exodus. The archaic form יהוה was modified to יהי before the time of Moses. The revelation given to Moses was therefore of a name long known. In Exodus 3 the verb יהוה is explicitly connected with יהוה. However, due to a

<sup>245</sup> Scholars generally agree that the word יהוה is an imperfectum third person masculine singular of the verb, translated as "he causes to be", "he brings into existence", "he brings to pass", "he creates".

<sup>246</sup> Gianotti 1985:46.

<sup>247</sup> MacLaurin 1962:441.

<sup>248</sup> Clements 1972:23.

<sup>249</sup> MacLaurin 1962:441-442.

succession of redactional adaptations, information in the Masoretic Text – probably altered to suit the view of the editors – is of little value.

Scholars disagree whether the original form of the Name is an abbreviation of a longer construct, or whether יהוה is the extension of shorter forms. According to Van der Toorn,<sup>250</sup> יהוה [*Yahweh*] was the established primitive form, while abbreviations, such as *Yah*, *Yahû*, *Yô* and *Yěhō* are secondary regional preferences. Nonetheless, *Yahweh* – interpreted as *yah-wā*, the imperfectum of *hwy* – could have developed from the duplication of the primordial word *Yāh*. However, according to Mowinckel,<sup>251</sup> a name containing a verbal construct – in the ancient Semitic nomenclature – would always be in the abbreviated form. He therefore finds it improbable that *Yāh* was the original form of the name *Yahweh*. At the same time he suggests that the original meaning of the name *Yahu* – as an explanation of the name *Ya-huwa* – should be explored. *Ya* was a well-known Arabic interjection, and *huwa* the third person masculine personal pronoun, "he". Ancient North Sinaitic tribes could have worshipped their god with the cultic exclamation *yá-huwa* – Oh, He. The abbreviated *yahwa* could thus be explained from the accentuation of *yáhuwa*. It is, however, unimaginable that a name as sacred as *Yahweh* would be abbreviated in forms, such as *Yā(w)* or *Yā(h)*. The shorter words were probably ejaculatory in origin and could easily have been prolonged. Therefore, the veneration of a tribal god *Ya* – or *Yā(w)*, *Yā(h)* – could have developed into *Yahweh* – ultimately treated as a verbal construct – with the new idea worshipping one national God. According to an established custom in Egypt, the epithet "One" – Egyptian "W-" – was bestowed upon a supreme deity. Contact existed between the Egyptians and Sinaitic tribes, such as the Kenites. The Egyptian "*I-W-I*", "I am" – vocalised as "*IaWeI*", "*Yawey*" – possibly influenced the Kenite god *Yāh* to become *Yah-weh*, "*Yah-One*", with monotheistic implications. During his sojourn with the Kenites, Moses doubtlessly became aware of the similar sounding *Yahweh*, and Egyptian "*I-W-I*", "I am", which he translated into "Hebrew"<sup>252</sup> אֲדֹנָי, "I AM".

In the light of extra-biblical references to older *Ya*-related names, which have been discovered over a wide region of the Ancient Near East, it seems likely that a longer Name *Yahweh* developed from such abbreviated forms/or form – probably from a Kenite god *Yāh*. A number

<sup>250</sup> Van der Toorn 1999e:910.

<sup>251</sup> Mowinckel 1961:129-132.

<sup>252</sup> I am aware of the fact that it is an anomaly to refer to "Hebrew" wherein Moses translated the Egyptian "*I-W-I*", as Moses probably did not speak a Hebrew such as that is known from the Masoretic Text, although he obviously spoke a similar Semitic dialect.

of extra-biblical references to the Name *Yahweh* and *Ya*-related names are discussed in the next paragraph, 4.3.

It seems to me that Maimonides in his reasoning – centuries before the present scholarly debates – has a credible elucidation of the elusive אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה, namely that the true reality of God's existence cannot be grasped. The Tetragrammaton implies that God's existence is identical with his essence, which is based on the concept of the absolute oneness of God. Maimonides furthermore indicates that, to attain knowledge about God, we 'would be seeking insight into the divine nature on the hopelessly inadequate basis of just one manifestation of God's agency'.<sup>253</sup>

### 4.3 Extra-biblical sources concerning the name YHWH or related forms

#### 4.3.1 Introduction

Research on the appearance of analogous Ancient Near Eastern deities – particularly with reference to *Athirat/Asherah* – indicates that these deities were active in widely spread pantheons,<sup>254</sup> suggesting the acceptance in these pantheons of foreign deities and rituals. This phenomenon, as well as the interchanging of beliefs and traditions among the various nations, signifies that these peoples migrated continuously and extensively from one place to another. Epigraphic finds recovered over a large area of the Ancient Near East include references to a number of *Ya*-related names. These names may be an indication of a type of *Ya*-religion practised by different groups in the pre-Israelite period. According to the Kenite hypothesis,<sup>255</sup> Moses was introduced to *Yahweh*-worship by the Kenites/Midianites who, in all likelihood, venerated *Yahweh* long before the Israelites did. Therefore it cannot be excluded that a god, comparable to the Kenite god *Yahweh*, was worshipped elsewhere in the Ancient Near East. The Kenites – who were nomadic peoples – may have spread their religious belief, or analogous deities, such as *Ya*, may have had a common origin in some distant past.

Binger,<sup>256</sup> however, indicates that 'extra-biblical material has a number of common potential errors and problems'. As generally accepted by scholars, biblical material has undergone various redactions. On the other hand, this tendency would not be expected in the case of extra-biblical material. An individual scribe presumably used a standard orthography<sup>257</sup>

---

<sup>253</sup> Broadie 1994:474.

<sup>254</sup> See discussion in § 3.2.1.

<sup>255</sup> See discussion in § 5.3.

<sup>256</sup> Binger 1997:26.

<sup>257</sup> Orthography: a system of writing and (correct) spelling (Deist 1990:181).

throughout, being consistent in his spelling of individual words. However, it cannot be assumed that all scribes spelled words the same way. A scribe may have been dyslexic, sloppy or perfect or even writing his own language or dialect. Since the interpretation of a text often depends on the reading of one letter or word, scribal errors could lead to misinterpretation or the incorrect reading of a word or text. Akkadian – as the *lingua franca* of the Ancient Near East during the Bronze Age and beginning of the Iron Age – particularly seems to have been subject to large orthographical discrepancies. The language was written in syllabic cuneiform.<sup>258</sup> Words could be written in a number of different ways, probably depending on the size of the tablet and how learned the scribe wanted to appear. The accidental absence of a single wedge could lead to an incorrect reading of a word by scholars.<sup>259</sup> At the same time 'it is not unusual to encounter scholars whose arguments are based on what is hidden in a lacuna<sup>260</sup> – and reconstructed by the scholar – or who build their arguments on elaborate emendations, claiming misspellings and faulty grammar on the part of the ancient scribe'.<sup>261</sup> The state of preservation of archaeological material could also lead to errors in the interpretation of texts. Most tablets are fragmentary with corroded surfaces and damaged edges. Piecing correct fragments together can keep scholars occupied for decades.<sup>262</sup>

A number of finds pertaining to *Ya*-related names are discussed merely briefly in the following paragraphs. Each one of these finds requires specialised research which cannot be addressed as such in this thesis. The reader should keep this in mind when evaluating the following reviews.

#### 4.3.2 Ebla

The remarkable discovery of approximately eighteen thousand texts from the royal archives of the third millennium BC Tell Mardikh-Ebla<sup>263</sup> has significant advantages for both Ancient Near Eastern and biblical studies. Data supplied by these texts indicate a syncretism between Sumerian-Akkadian deities and gods of Ebla. Pettinato<sup>264</sup> points out references in the texts to, inter alia, *Il* and *Ya*. *Il*, applied as a generic term for "god", also denotes a specific divinity

---

<sup>258</sup> Syllabic cuneiform consists of a separate sign for each syllable of a word. Wedge-shaped symbols were used for cuneiform script on stone and clay (Deist 1990:63, 249).

<sup>259</sup> Binger 1997:26-27.

<sup>260</sup> Lacuna/gap: a place where something is missing in a piece of writing, in a theory, an idea (Wehmeier 2005:825).

<sup>261</sup> Binger 1997:27.

<sup>262</sup> Binger 1997:26-28.

<sup>263</sup> See § 2.3 for information on Tell Mardikh-Ebla.

<sup>264</sup> Pettinato 1976:48.

*Il/El* known from Ugaritic texts. *Ya* could be understood as a hypocoristicon.<sup>265</sup> He furthermore indicates that 'the alternation of personal names such as *Mi-kà-Il/Mi-kà-Yà*, *En-na-Il/En-na-Yà*, *Iš-ra-Il/ Iš-ra-Yà* amply demonstrates that at Ebla at least *Ya* had the same value as *Il* and points to a specific divinity'.<sup>266</sup> Before the reign of Ebrum,<sup>267</sup> personal names incorporated the theophoric<sup>268</sup> element *-Il* while, from the time of Ebrum onwards, *-Il* was replaced by *-Ya*. New developments in West Semitic religious notions made provision for the upsurge of *Ya*, which could also be deliberated as a shortened form of *Yaw*.<sup>269</sup>

Archi<sup>270</sup> dismisses Pettinato's claim<sup>271</sup> that the alternation of *-IL* and *-Ya* in personal names indicates that *Ya* had the same value as *Il* as a deity at Ebla, as well as being a shortened form of *Yaw*. Archi<sup>272</sup> indicates that '*ya* is a very common hypocoristic ending ... used with Semitic and non-Semitic names'. Hypocoristic names are usually forms of endearment that later became common usage, and 'have nothing to do with Yahwism'.<sup>273</sup> Thus, the alternating of *Il* with *Ya* as it appears in the names of one or more persons does not indicate the exchange of one divine element for another. *El* was a "live deity" in Ebla and if *-ya* was also a divine element in a name it would imply two names for a person, each petitioning a different deity.<sup>274</sup> Archi<sup>275</sup> therefore concludes that *-ya* is simply a diminutive form not representing any "specific deity". Even during the so-called "religious revolution" in the time of Ibrum [Ebrum] and his son, *-ya* never superseded *-Il*; numerous *-ya* names might be ascribed to scribal convention. Theophoric *-Il* names are to be expected in Ugaritic and Amorite personal names. If there were an Amorite or West Semitic god *Yahweh*, 'he did not correspond to what *Yahweh*

<sup>265</sup> See footnote on hypocoristicon in § 2.3.

<sup>266</sup> Pettinato 1976:48.

<sup>267</sup> The names of five kings appear in the Eblaite texts. These are subdivided into two groups. In the second group are two kings, Ibrum [Ebrum] and Ibbi-Sipish – the latter being the son of Ibrum. Both probably had long reigns. According to information on some of the tablets – although not easy to evaluate – it seems that Ibrum of Ebla and Sargon of Akkad are mentioned in the same commercial text (Matthiae 1980:165-167). Sargon of Akkad is dated 2334-2279 BC (Bodine 1994:33). This date is significant regarding the increase in the application of the theophoric element *-Ya* in personal names. See also footnote in § 2.3 regarding Eberum.

<sup>268</sup> See description of a theophoric name, incorporated in a footnote on "hypocoristicon" in § 2.3.

<sup>269</sup> Pettinato 1976:48.

<sup>270</sup> Archi 1979:556-566.

<sup>271</sup> Pettinato 1976:48.

<sup>272</sup> Archi 1979:556.

<sup>273</sup> Archi 1979:557.

<sup>274</sup> Archi 1979:558. According to Pettinato (1976:48) the theophoric element *-Il* was incorporated in personal names before the reign of king Ebrum while, from the time of Ebrum onwards, this practice was replaced by incorporating *-Ya* in personal names. Therefore, Archi's argument – that the exchange of one divine element for another implies two names for a person, each petitioning a different deity – is not tenable. In agreement with Pettinato's reasoning – wherein he refers to different periods of time regarding the incorporation of the two "theophoric" elements – it is hardly likely that the same person(s) could be involved.

<sup>275</sup> Archi 1979:559.

meant for Israel'.<sup>276</sup> Archi,<sup>277</sup> furthermore, indicates that the interchange between the names *El* and *Yahweh* was not uncommon among the Hebrews. After a comparison between, inter alia, institutions, literary works and place names of Ebla and ancient Israel, Archi<sup>278</sup> finally concludes that the tradition of the patriarchs 'is not the tradition of the Eblaite state'. Freedman<sup>279</sup> is of the opinion that the Ebla tablets do not hold the origins of Israel.

In his reaction to Archi's article,<sup>280</sup> Pettinato<sup>281</sup> repudiates Archi's arguments, indicating that he eagerly expected a "new structure", but 'all these expectations will be dashed if there is no guarantee of the competence and professional qualification of the one tackling such a many-sided argument'. He furthermore mentions that Archi 'is not an assyriologist, nor a sumerologist, nor a semitist, nor a biblicist, nor a historian of religion'.<sup>282</sup> Pettinato<sup>283</sup> denies that he identified the Eblaite *Ya* or *Yaw* with the biblical *Yahweh*. The supposition that the interchanging of the elements *-il* and *-ya* in personal names allude to the same persons, is hardly sufficient evidence to come to such a conclusion. Pettinato<sup>284</sup> indicates that his statement that the *-ya*-element supplanted *-il* during the reign of Ebrum is statistically justifiable. He concludes that 'one cannot overlook the tendency permeating the whole article<sup>285</sup> to cancel even the remote relationship between Ebla and the Bible'.<sup>286</sup>

Sperling<sup>287</sup> agrees that similarities in the cultures and languages of third-millennium BC Ebla, second-millennium BC Mari and first-millennium BC Israel appear, but indicates that the interpretation of elements in personal names in texts from Ebla as reference to *Yahweh* have not won general acceptance amongst scholars. Arguments in favour of possible extra-biblical allusions to a god analogous to *Yahweh*, however, do not resolve the question of the origin of *Yahweh*-worship. Van der Toorn<sup>288</sup> denotes that the name *Yahweh* has not been discovered in any Semitic text older than 1200 BC and that *Yahweh* was not worshipped outside Israel.

---

<sup>276</sup> Archi 1979:560.

<sup>277</sup> Archi 1979:559-560.

<sup>278</sup> Archi 1979:566.

<sup>279</sup> Freedman 1980:202.

<sup>280</sup> Archi 1979:556-566.

<sup>281</sup> Pettinato 1980:203.

<sup>282</sup> Pettinato 1980:203.

<sup>283</sup> Pettinato 1980:204. In reaction to Pettinato's article (Pettinato 1976:44-52), Archi (1979:559-560) deduces that 'the presence of a form of *Yahweh* in Amorite personal names at all is, in fact, a problem. ... if there were an Amorite or more generally a West Semitic god named *Yahweh*, he did not correspond to what *Yahweh* meant for Israel'.

<sup>284</sup> Pettinato 1980:204.

<sup>285</sup> Article of Archi (1979:556-566).

<sup>286</sup> Pettinato 1980:215.

<sup>287</sup> Sperling 1987:2-3.

<sup>288</sup> Van der Toorn 1999e:910-911.

Van der Toorn<sup>289</sup> is furthermore of the opinion that Pettinato's claim of the shortened form *Ya* for *Yahweh* in the Ebla texts is unsubstantiated.<sup>290</sup> The "mysterious god" *Ya* is not mentioned in any list of gods or offerings. 'His cult at Ebla is a chimera'.<sup>291</sup> Wiseman<sup>292</sup> agrees that there is no evidence that names with a hypocoristic ending *-ya* refer to a divine name *Yah(weh)*. Dahood<sup>293</sup> mentions that five people in the Hebrew Bible carry the name *yôbâb*<sup>294</sup> – probably interpreted as "Yo is the door". He argues that in all likelihood a god *Yo* was worshipped by the early Arabs, Edomites and Canaanites. Therefore it is not improbable that a god *Ya* was venerated by the Eblaites, 'since the long *a* in Eblaite becomes long *o* in southern dialects, the equation *yā* equals *yō* can readily be granted'.<sup>295</sup> This does not, however, sanction the equalising of Eblaite *Ya* with biblical *Yahweh*.

Scholars generally disagree with Pettinato's claim that the hypocoristic *-ya* in some Eblaite texts indicates a deity at Ebla, equivalent to the god *Il*. This is a debatable question. Although there is not sufficient evidence to support the allegation of a god *Ya* in the Eblaite pantheon, such a suggestion should not be rejected out of hand.

### 4.3.3 Mari

Excavations at Tell Hariri – the ancient Syrian city Mari<sup>296</sup> – yielded approximately twenty-five thousand cuneiform tablets from the archives of the palace of king Zimri-Lim.<sup>297</sup> Texts mention, inter alia, the *ḫabiru*<sup>298</sup> and the tribe of the Benjaminites. Scholars link both groups to the Hebrews. Descriptions in these texts of movements of nomadic peoples in the vicinity of Mari are important for the understanding of the Patriarchal Period. Sasson<sup>299</sup> indicates that some Mari institutions have successfully compared with those found in the Hebrew Bible, yet, 'attempts to use Mari documentation to confer historicity on the patriarchal narrative have

<sup>289</sup> Van der Toorn 1999e:911.

<sup>290</sup> Pettinato (1980:204), however, denies that he equated *Ya* with *Yahweh*. With regard to Archi's reaction (1979:559-560) on his article (Pettinato 1976:44-52), Pettinato mentions that 'Archi apparently let himself be carried away by enthusiasm and ascribed to me the identification of Eblaite *Ya* or *Yaw* with biblical *Yahweh*'.

<sup>291</sup> Van der Toorn 1999e:911.

<sup>292</sup> Wiseman 1982a:295.

<sup>293</sup> Dahood 1981:607-608.

<sup>294</sup> Jobab, the youngest son of Joktan, and hence the name of an Arabian group (Gn 10:29); Jobab, the second king of Edom, from the northern capital Bozrah (Gn 36:33); Jobab, king of the Canaanite city Madon in northern Palestine, was defeated by Joshua (Jos 11:1; 12:19); two Benjaminites were named Jobab (1 Chr 8:9, 18) (Dahood 1981:607).

<sup>295</sup> Dahood 1981:607.

<sup>296</sup> See a discussion of Mari in § 2.4.

<sup>297</sup> See footnote in § 2.4 on Zimri-Lim.

<sup>298</sup> See § 2.4 and § 2.5 for a discussion of the *ḫabiru*.

<sup>299</sup> Sasson 1962:570-571.

largely failed'. However, Mari's onomastics contribute to arguments in favour of dating the patriarchs in the second millennium BC.<sup>300</sup>

As indicated in paragraph 4.3.2, the term or name *El/Il* was well known in the West Semitic world, either as a designation for a "god", or as head of the Ugaritic pantheon. It should thus be expected to be an element in numerous divine names during the second millennium BC. One of these divine names is *El Shadday*,<sup>301</sup> God Almighty. According to Genesis 12:1, the patriarch Abram was confronted by *Yahweh* who promised him land and a nation. At a later stage *El Shadday* made a covenant with him in this regard<sup>302</sup> which was subsequently repeated to Jacob.<sup>303</sup> The name *Shadday* may be found amongst proper names at Mari, such as *Ša-du-um-la-bi*, *Ša-du-la-ba*, *Ša-du-um-la-ba*. It is therefore possible that Abram, en route from Haran to Canaan, passed Mari and that *El Shadday* was revealed to him. Although Genesis 12:1 refers to *Yahweh*, there is no real evidence that Abram encountered *Yahweh* at that stage. The Tetragrammaton was probably unknown at Mari, unless it could be identified with a name such as *Ia-wi-el*. In addition hereto, Mari names that have been found are such as *Ya-hwu-malik* which seems to mean "*Malik* lives", or *Ya-hw/u-dagan* interpreted as "*Dagan* lives".<sup>304</sup> MacLaurin<sup>305</sup> is of the opinion that a name *Yau* was known at Mari. Some names incorporating the element *-ya* have been identified as those of rulers or officials at Mari. These names include *Ḫaya-Abum*,<sup>306</sup> *Yaphur-Lim*<sup>307</sup> and *Yarim-Addu*.<sup>308</sup>

Although a name such as *Ia-wi-el* may be identified as being related to *Yahweh*, there is no such direct indication. The Benjaminites, who apparently played a major role at Mari<sup>309</sup> and have been linked to the Hebrews, could have been responsible for a connection between this *Ia-wi-el* and the Israelite *Yahweh*, although this does not seem likely. According to the Kenite

<sup>300</sup> Sasson 1962:571. See footnote in § 3.5 on onomasticon.

<sup>301</sup> אל שדי

<sup>302</sup> Genesis 17:1.

<sup>303</sup> Genesis 35:11. See also Genesis 48:3.

<sup>304</sup> MacLaurin 1962:440, 443-444.

<sup>305</sup> MacLaurin 1962:444.

<sup>306</sup> *Ḫaya-Abum* was probably a governor of a province of Mari. Royal letters 151 and 152 must have been written by him (Heimpel 2000:90). The archives of the palace of Zimri-Lim include diplomatic letters sent to the Mari court by officials and are dated to the first quarter of the second millennium BC (Negev & Gibson 2001:317).

<sup>307</sup> *Yaphur-Lim* wrote royal letter 118. He reported to king Zimri-Lim about taking *Ḫana* troops from one point to another within the territory of Mari; he was probably an official of the king (Heimpel 2000:91).

<sup>308</sup> *Yarim-Addu* is mentioned in royal letter 151. He provided grain for the troops under *Ḫaya-Abum*'s command (Heimpel 2000:91).

<sup>309</sup> Texts found at Mari refer to the Benjaminites – inter alia – in census texts, in literary texts referring to a Benjaminite rebellion and in correspondence of the Benjaminite kings (Durand 1992:531-532, 534-535).

hypothesis,<sup>310</sup> the Hebrews/Israelites became acquainted with *Yahweh* through the Kenites/Midianites in the South. Despite the fact that the name *Ia-wi-el* incorporates two theophoric elements, *ya-* and *-el*, Mari texts do not refer to a deity with a *ya*-related name.

#### 4.3.4 Egyptian records

A thirteenth century BC Egyptian text,<sup>311</sup> as well as Amenhotep III's fourteenth century BC Topographical List,<sup>312</sup> mention '*Yhw* [*Yahu*] in the Land of the *shasu*, providing the earliest evidence for the god *Yahweh* and linking him with these nomadic people',<sup>313</sup> namely the *Shasu/Shosu*. In the earliest known reference to the land of Edom,<sup>314</sup> the inhabitants were called the *Shasu* [or *Shosu*] tribes of Edom.<sup>315</sup> As mentioned earlier in paragraph 2.6, additional Egyptian evidence from Ramesses II<sup>316</sup> and Ramesses III<sup>317</sup> connects the "land of the *Shosu*" and Seir. It is furthermore apparent from this evidence that both Edom and Seir were peopled by the *Shasu*. A strong tradition in the Hebrew Bible likewise links Edom and Seir.<sup>318</sup> According to Egyptian sources, the *Shasu* appeared over a widespread area, but were identified as coming forth from Edom in southern Transjordan.<sup>319</sup> The *Shasu*, as the *ḥabiru*, were unruly people disrupting the Canaanite regions and city-states.<sup>320</sup> In time to come – during the twelfth century BC – the *Shasu* fully integrated into the Canaanite culture.<sup>321</sup> The later Israelite community probably included groups such as the *ḥabiru* and *Shasu*-Bedouins. It thus seems that the origin of *Yahweh* worship should be searched for – as early as the end of the fifteenth century BC [or beginning of the fourteenth century BC] – among the *Shasu* of Edom and the regions of Mount Seir.<sup>322</sup> Hasel,<sup>323</sup> however, mentions that although scholars cite a correlation between the *Shasu* and the name *Yahweh* – based on the Kenite

<sup>310</sup> See discussion in § 5.3.

<sup>311</sup> During the reign of Ramesses II (Van der Toorn 1999e:911); dated 1279-1212 BC (Clayton 1994:146).

<sup>312</sup> The Topographical List from Soleb in Nubia (Nakai 2003:141), which is dated during the reign of Amenophis III (Van der Toorn 1999e:911); Amenophis III is the same person as Amenhotep III (Aldred 1998:10), dated 1386-1349 BC (Clayton 1994:112).

<sup>313</sup> Nakai 2003:141.

<sup>314</sup> This reference is recorded in the Egyptian Papyrus Anastasi VI. See footnote in § 2.6 on this papyrus and the relevant reference.

<sup>315</sup> See § 2.6 for a discussion of the *Shasu/Shosu* tribes, their connection with Edom and Seir, and their possible link with the *ḥabiru* (see descriptions in § 2.4 and § 2.5).

<sup>316</sup> During the thirteenth century BC pharaoh Ramesses II [1279-1212 BC] was described as 'a fierce raging lion, who has laid waste to the land of the Shosu, who has plundered Mount Seir with his valiant arm' (Bartlett 1989:41-42). See footnote in § 2.6.

<sup>317</sup> In the twelfth century BC Ramesses III [1182-1151 BC] boasts that 'I brought about the destruction of Seir among the Shosu tribes. I laid waste their tents with their people, their belongings, and likewise their cattle without number' (*ANET*<sup>3</sup> 262) (Bartlett 1989:42). See footnote in § 2.6.

<sup>318</sup> Bartlett 1989:41-42, 178. Links in the Hebrew Bible are, for example, in Numbers 24:18; Judges 5:4.

<sup>319</sup> Zevit 2001:118.

<sup>320</sup> De Moor 1997:117, 123, 177.

<sup>321</sup> Nakai 2003:140-141.

<sup>322</sup> Nakai:2003:141.

<sup>323</sup> Hasel 2003:28-29.

hypothesis,<sup>324</sup> which is not conclusive – there is no certainty whether "Seir *Yhw*" refers to a region, city or mountain. Despite the scepticism of scholars such as Hasel, it is significant that early poetry in the Hebrew Bible links *Yahweh* with the South – Seir, Edom, Paran, Sinai and Teman.<sup>325</sup>

Although scholars generally agree that the literary sources from the time of Ramesses II and Ramesses III refer to the *Shasu* and Seir in the same texts – implying that the *Shasu* were from the region of Seir – some scholars disagree that this "Seir" refers to the territory in Edom. Biblical Seir is indicated both east and west of Wadi Arabah, identified with Edom. Egyptian sources do not indicate the location of Seir, but it does seem to be close to their territory.<sup>326</sup> It should be kept in mind that the Egyptians were operative in various areas of the Ancient Near East throughout their history. An indication that Seir is close to Egyptian territory, therefore, does not dismiss the possibility that this "Seir" refers to Seir in Edom. MacDonald<sup>327</sup> indicates that the *Shasu* represented a social class which was partially sedentary and partially nomadic, regularly engaging in mercenary work or "free-booting". The raid on Seir by Ramesses III could be linked to the Egyptian mining interests at Timnah.<sup>328</sup>

Astour<sup>329</sup> questions the validity of regarding the Seir in specific Egyptian texts<sup>330</sup> as being the Seir in Edom. Seir in the relevant Egyptian texts was written with a duplicated -r, while it is written with one -r in other Egyptian texts. Identifiable place names which appear with the Seir in question<sup>331</sup> all belong to central Syria. The name *Yahwe/Yiha* [*Yahu*] – which is included in these lists – should thus be located in the same general region. Egyptian sources describe these areas as "heavily infiltrated" by *Shasu* Bedouins. Therefore, according to Astour,<sup>332</sup> 'whatever the connection between the place name and the divine name, the occurrence of the former in Egyptian records cannot be used as evidence for an early presence of the latter in Edom'. Hess<sup>333</sup> indicates that the spelling of the place name *Yh(w)* is close to the Hebrew name *y-h-w-h*; a similarity in these names could thus be possible with 'the likelihood

<sup>324</sup> See discussion in § 5.3.

<sup>325</sup> Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 68:7-8; Habakkuk 3:3.

<sup>326</sup> MacDonald 1994:231. Literary sources from the time of Ramesses II (see earlier footnote in this paragraph) refer to Mount Seir; the latter has been identified as a mountain on the borders of the territory of Judah, and Seir as the region south-east of the Dead Sea – thus, the territory of the Edomites (Negev & Gibson 2001:454).

<sup>327</sup> MacDonald 1994:231-232.

<sup>328</sup> See § 2.14.1 and relevant footnote.

<sup>329</sup> Astour 1962:971.

<sup>330</sup> A list of Asiatic place names in Ramesses II's temple in Nubia, in Amenhotep III's Topographical List and in Ramesses III's topographic catalogue (Astour 1962:971).

<sup>331</sup> Seir written with the duplicated -r.

<sup>332</sup> Astour 1962:971.

<sup>333</sup> Hess 1991:181-182. The Egyptian consonants *y* and *h* probably correlate with the Hebrew *yodh* and *he*.

that this place name is the earliest extrabiblical attestation of the name Yahweh'.<sup>334</sup> Numerous theophoric toponyms, known from Israelite tribal regions, are constructed with the name 'l'.<sup>335</sup> Throughout Israel's history, toponyms composed with *yhwh* are virtually unattested. This probably reflects a reluctance to attach the name of *Yahweh* to one particular place.<sup>336</sup> De Moor<sup>337</sup> agrees with Astour that the *Shosu*-land *s'rr* is incorrectly identified with biblical Seir, as 'the Egyptian determinative'<sup>338</sup> renders it impossible to conclude that this is the oldest attestation of *Yahweh* as a deity or a mountain'.<sup>339</sup> Egyptian interpreters could have been misled by the expression '*m yhwh*', which could be understood either as "the people (named) *Yahweh*", or "the people of (the god) *Yahweh*". It could thus be deduced – according to De Moor<sup>340</sup> – that the Egyptian inscriptions<sup>341</sup> may refer to *Yahweh* [*Yh(w)*] as 'the name of an aggressive semi-nomadic group bothering Egypt from the fourteenth century onwards', and that they should be sought much further north than Edom.

In one of the Amarna Letters<sup>342</sup> Abi-Milku, mayor of Tyre, is warned against the *Ia-we* by the Egyptian king. The latter would hardly have been bothered to alert Abi-Milku against an unimportant individual. This *Ia-we* was thus either a generic name – like the *Shosu-Yhw* of the Egyptian texts – or the leader of a group of formidable enemies.<sup>343</sup> As indicated earlier in this paragraph, there seems to have been a connection between the *Shasu* and the *ḥabiru*.<sup>344</sup> As the *ḥabiru* were also employed as mercenaries 'it is therefore very tempting to connect this "Iawe" with the warriors of YHWH'.<sup>345</sup>

According to Van der Toorn,<sup>346</sup> archaic poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible<sup>347</sup> 'have preserved the memory of a topographical link between Yahweh and the mountain area south of Edom. In these theophany texts Yahweh is said to come from [inter alia] Seir. ... The biblical

<sup>334</sup> Hess 1991:182.

<sup>335</sup> Toponyms with 'l [the divine name *el*] are, for example, Eltolad (Jos 15:30), Jezreel (Jos 15:56), Eltekon (Jos 15:59), allotted to the tribe of Judah; Eltekeh (Jos 19:44) allotted to the tribe of Dan (Jos 19:40) (De Moor 1997:34-39).

<sup>336</sup> De Moor 1997:38. The Egyptian "place name" *Yh(w)* is dated decades earlier than the allocation of Israelite tribal places and the time of David; crossing of the Jordan ca 1240/1220 BC; David ca 1011/10-971/70 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:195-196).

<sup>337</sup> De Moor 1997:117, 124-126.

<sup>338</sup> See footnote on "determinatives" in § 2.7.

<sup>339</sup> De Moor 1997:124.

<sup>340</sup> De Moor 1997:125.

<sup>341</sup> See earlier footnotes in this paragraph.

<sup>342</sup> See § 2.5.

<sup>343</sup> De Moor 1997:125-126.

<sup>344</sup> See also § 2.6.

<sup>345</sup> De Moor 1997:126.

<sup>346</sup> Van der Toorn 1995:244-245.

<sup>347</sup> See relevant texts in an earlier footnote in this paragraph.

evidence on the topographical background of Yahweh is supported by the reference to the land of the Shasu-beduins of Yahu'. Van der Toorn<sup>348</sup> assumes that the Egyptian *s'rr* can be interpreted as *s'r*. Therefore it may be "tentatively concluded" that these *Shasu*-Bedouins of *Yahu* could be placed in the area of Edom and Midian. Dever<sup>349</sup> denotes that the *Shasu* – known from Egyptian texts – were positioned in southern Transjordan and seemingly linked to a *Yahweh*-cult there. Bartlett<sup>350</sup> argues that the *Shasu* clearly could be located in Edom and Seir, although they were not necessarily limited to those areas. Some scholars link the Horites with Seir.<sup>351</sup> Younker<sup>352</sup> mentions that – according to Egyptian sources – the *Shasu* were depicted as a social class rather than an ethnic group, which was divided into tribes, or clans, and led by chieftains. Due to their ubiquitous appearance they were also found near Ammon, as indicated in the Toponym List of Ramesses II.<sup>353</sup>

De Moor<sup>354</sup> identifies a certain Beya as the "real ruler" of Egypt in the declining years of the Nineteenth Dynasty.<sup>355</sup> Beya was his Semitic name – possibly a Yahwistic name, while this "ruler's" Egyptian name was *R'-mssw-h' m-ntrw*.<sup>356</sup> De Moor<sup>357</sup> proposes to identify Beya with Moses. Hess,<sup>358</sup> however, indicates that, although the final syllable in the name seems to be a hypocoristic ending *-ya*, 'no contemporary West Semitic texts have names with this suffix interpreted as Yahweh.' Furthermore, a certain Peya appears in two letters<sup>359</sup> found at Amarna.<sup>360</sup> The name Peya – resembling Beya<sup>361</sup> – is Egyptian; the hypocoristic being *piyy*. Therefore, Beya could be an Egyptian and not a West Semitic name with a common hypocoristic ending. The antiquity of the form *Ya(h)* appears in many sources, for instance, the Palestine list of Tuthmosis III<sup>362</sup> refers to *Ba-ti-y-a*, "the house of *Ya*".<sup>363</sup> Bithiah

<sup>348</sup> Van der Toorn 1995:245.

<sup>349</sup> Dever 1997a:40.

<sup>350</sup> Bartlett 1989:76, 78.

<sup>351</sup> See Genesis 36:20-30. Lists of the clans of two generations link the Horites and Seir, and refer to, inter alia, 'the sons of Seir in the land of Edom' (Gn 36:20-21). The name "Horite" has been connected with the Hurrians, a non-Semitic people from northern Mesopotamia (Bartlett 1989:76).

<sup>352</sup> Younker 2003:164-165.

<sup>353</sup> This list was originally of a fifteenth century BC origin and includes a group of six names in "the land of the *Shosu*", which clearly seems to be located in Edom, Moab and the northern Moabite plateau, which bordered and, at times, included Ammon (Younker 2003:164-165).

<sup>354</sup> De Moor 1997:214-227.

<sup>355</sup> Nineteenth Dynasty: 1293-1185 BC (Clayton 1994:98).

<sup>356</sup> The name means: Ramesses-is-the-manifestation-of-the-gods (De Moor 1997:215).

<sup>357</sup> For a detailed discussion of De Moor's arguments, see De Moor (1997:214-227).

<sup>358</sup> Hess 1991:182.

<sup>359</sup> Two letters from Gezer, EA 292 and 294 (Hess 1991:182).

<sup>360</sup> See § 2.5 on the Amarna Letters.

<sup>361</sup> In two occurrences (lines 42 and 51 in letter EA 292) the name can be read as *bé-e-ia* (Hess 1991:182).

<sup>362</sup> Tuthmosis III, dated 1504-1450 BC (Clayton 1994:104).

<sup>363</sup> MacLaurin 1962:451.

– בתיה – was the daughter of a pharaoh and the wife of Mered, descendant of Judah.<sup>364</sup> According to Dahlberg,<sup>365</sup> her name is an indication that she was a worshipper of *Yahu*.

Archaeological surveys in Edom indicate thinly-spread agricultural settlements. No Iron I site or Edomite town – even early Iron II – has yet been excavated. The first known Edomite settlement was located on the Arabah road.<sup>366</sup> Recent historical and archaeological research indicates an Edom that prospered as a national entity only in the latter part of the Iron age.<sup>367</sup>

#### 4.3.5 YW: deity name from Ugarit

Remains of the ancient city Ugarit in northern Syria were identified at Ras Shamra.<sup>368</sup> A cuneiform alphabetical script, revealed on the excavated tablets,<sup>369</sup> is of great significance for the research on the development of the Canaanite script and literature, being close to biblical Hebrew.<sup>370</sup> The majority of the texts are of mythological character, furnishing information on the religion of Syria and Canaan in the first half of the second millennium BC.<sup>371</sup>

The single occurrence of the name *Yw* – as *yw'elt* – appears in a damaged mythological text from Ugarit, with a suggested reading " ... the name of my son is *yw'Elat* [or *Yw*, the son of 'Elat, wife of *Il*]"<sup>372</sup>. The rest of the text refers to *Ym* (*Yam*),<sup>373</sup> the deity of the sea. Scholars suggest that *yw* could be a by-form of *ym*, or that it may be a shortened form of an imperfect *hwy* verb.<sup>374</sup> De Moor<sup>375</sup> mentions that according to these mythological texts, *Ilu*, *Yw/Yammu* and *Ba'lu* were all involved in a struggle for control over the kingship of the pantheon. A number of years ago, De Moor<sup>376</sup> agreed with scholars that it was extremely unlikely that there was a link between a Ugaritic god *Yw* and the Israelite God *Yahweh*. He has, however, since then changed his conviction and indicates that 'little can be said against the identification from a philological<sup>377</sup> point of view'.<sup>378</sup> He suggests that the word *yw* might represent

<sup>364</sup> 1 Chronicles 4:17.

<sup>365</sup> Dahlberg 1962a:443.

<sup>366</sup> Lapp 1994:217, 226.

<sup>367</sup> Lapp 1994:219.

<sup>368</sup> See § 2.8 for a discussion of Ugarit and the Ras Shamra tablets.

<sup>369</sup> Kapelrud 1962c:728.

<sup>370</sup> Negev & Gibson 2001:524.

<sup>371</sup> Kapelrud 1962c:725-726, 729.

<sup>372</sup> *KTU* 1.1:IV.13 (Hess 1991:182).

<sup>373</sup> For a description of the important Ugaritic *Ba'al* myths – a cycle of three interrelated episodes – dealing, inter alia, with *Yam*, see Willis (1993:65).

<sup>374</sup> Hess 1991:182.

<sup>375</sup> De Moor 1997:108.

<sup>376</sup> De Moor 1997:165-166.

<sup>377</sup> See footnote in § 4.2 on philology.

<sup>378</sup> De Moor 1997:165.



*yawê* < *yahwê*, a jussive<sup>379</sup> of *hwy*. De Moor<sup>380</sup> furthermore mentions that 'in very early epigraphical Hebrew personal names the name of YHWH is written as *Yw*. ... [therefore] we can no longer reject the possibility that the Ugaritic god *Yw* is identical to YHWH', with the result that some peculiarities in the *Ba'al*-myth appear in a new light. Abba<sup>381</sup> argues that there is no evidence that the name *Yw'elt* – which occurs only once in the Ugaritic texts – refers to the Israelite God. It appears that *Yahweh* was a name unique to Israel, and any identification to the contrary 'based upon a single reference is highly improbable'.<sup>382</sup> Hess,<sup>383</sup> likewise, indicates that the fragmentary nature of the Ugaritic text renders 'any certainty of identification impossible' and, unless further evidence becomes available, *Yw* should be discounted as a divine name. Van der Toorn<sup>384</sup> agrees that the singular name *Yw* – with unknown vocalisation in a damaged text – 'cannot convincingly be interpreted as an abbreviation for *Yahweh*'.

According to MacLaurin,<sup>385</sup> Hebrew theophoric names seem to indicate that, in both Hebrew and Ugaritic, *YH/YW* was an independent divine name. At an early stage Canaanite *-aw* became *-ô*, with the result that the unaccented *Yaw* in Hebrew theophoric names became *Yô* – as in *Yo-hanan*. However, in Ugaritic – for example – the accented independent name *Yaw* did not undergo this change. Likewise, *YHW* – representing *Ya(h)w* – became *Yahu* or *Yaho*. *YHW* is therefore an earlier form of the Tetragrammaton and not an abbreviation thereof, and thus 'only another way of writing the earliest form *YW*'.<sup>386</sup> Greek evidence supports the view that the original form of the Tetragrammaton may have been *Yau* or *Yah*. Eusebius<sup>387</sup> refers to a god *Yeuô* which was worshipped at Gebal,<sup>388</sup> approximately 1000 BC, and Clement of Alexandria<sup>389</sup> quotes a form *Yao*.<sup>390</sup> Scholars have suggested to identify *Yw* with the Phoenician deity '*Ienw* referred to by Eusebius'.<sup>391</sup>

---

<sup>379</sup> Jussive: a verb form expressing an order (Wehmeier 2005:806).

<sup>380</sup> De Moor 1997:165-166.

<sup>381</sup> Abba 1961:321.

<sup>382</sup> Abba 1961:321.

<sup>383</sup> Hess 1991:183, 188.

<sup>384</sup> Van der Toorn 1995:244.

<sup>385</sup> MacLaurin 1962:452. Examples are *Jehu* (*YH* is *HW/YH* is He), *Elihu* (*El* is *HW/El* is He), *Adonijah* (*Adon* is *YH*), as well as *Asherel* (*Asher* is *El*), *Daniel/Dan-el* in Ugaritic (*El/God* is judge).

<sup>386</sup> MacLaurin 1962:453. For a discussion of the changes that took place in these theophoric forms, see MacLaurin (1962:449-460).

<sup>387</sup> See footnote on the name *Melqart* in § 3.5 for information on the history written by Eusebius.

<sup>388</sup> Gebal was an ancient Phoenician coastal city, the centre of trade and shipbuilding. It exported various products. As one of the most ancient cities in the Ancient Near East, its history can be traced back to Neolithic times. Rulers during the nineteenth to eighteenth centuries BC were Semites and probably Amorites (Kapelrud 1962a:359).

<sup>389</sup> Clement of Alexandria (ca 160-215) was a Christian writer who sought connections between Christianity and the Greek culture. It appears that he headed an independent school that presented Christianity as the true philosophy (Wagner 1990:214).

<sup>390</sup> MacLaurin 1962:459.

<sup>391</sup> Hess 1991:182-183. See earlier footnote in this paragraph with reference to *Melqart* and Eusebius.

#### 4.3.6 Akkadian text from Ugarit

Names found in the area of ancient Israel containing the divine element *yw/yh/hw* are normally automatically evaluated as being "Yahwist". The question arises whether names are Yahwist when derived from non-Israelite periods – such as the Bronze Age – and from cultural contacts other than Israelite.<sup>392</sup>

An Akkadian text<sup>393</sup> from Ugarit describes the manumission of a woman called *eli-ia-wa*.<sup>394</sup> In an Israelite context the obvious translation would be "my god is Yahweh". As the name is from a non-Israelite context it is unlikely that the theophoric element is derived from Yahweh, but more likely from another god, such as Ugaritic *Yaw*.<sup>395</sup> A similar example is found from a Hittite name in a Hittite treaty.<sup>396</sup> Therefore, 'a divinity, bearing the name of Yahweh or Yaw in the north of the Syrian-Palestinian area, in the Bronze Age' could equally be justified.<sup>397</sup> However, if Yahweh is not an exclusive Israelite name it loses its significance as an indicator to biblical monotheism pertaining to a Yahweh-cult, and 'Yahweh, in both the Bronze Age and early Iron Age, becomes just another god of the Syrian-Palestinian area'.<sup>398</sup>

Spelling and other errors are a possibility in any given text. Scholars should not, however, base their arguments on reconstructions, claiming "faulty grammar" on the part of the ancient scribe. Texts – particularly those on clay tablets – are often found fragmentary, with corroded surfaces and damaged edges. These factors can contribute to the possible misinterpretation of texts.<sup>399</sup> Pardee<sup>400</sup> mentions that he has 'observed the absence of specific links' between Ugaritic and known Mesopotamian texts. Scholars often assume that versions of Ugaritic texts are translations of unattested original Akkadian texts. He has, however, found very few Akkadian loan words in the Ugaritic language and was impressed by the general purity of Ugaritic. He concludes that 'the Ugaritic texts we have reflect an old West Semitic tradition'.<sup>401</sup>

<sup>392</sup> Binger 1997:34.

<sup>393</sup> RS 8.208. *ANET*:546 (Binger 1997:34).

<sup>394</sup> The name may contain a double suffix *yy*, referring to an Egyptian deity *ilyy* (Binger 1997:34).

<sup>395</sup> It is unlikely that a Ugaritic scribe would have written *Yw* instead of *Ym* by mistake (Binger 1997:34-35).

<sup>396</sup> A treaty (*PDK*, text no 9.1.19-20) between Ḫattušilis III, king of Hatti and Bentišina, king of Amurru, reads: *ga-áš-šù-li-ja-ù-i-e* – I have given the daughter of the king, Gašullijaue (Binger 1997:34).

<sup>397</sup> Binger 1997:35.

<sup>398</sup> Binger 1997:35.

<sup>399</sup> Binger 1997:27-28.

<sup>400</sup> Pardee 2001:233.

<sup>401</sup> Pardee 2001:233.

#### 4.3.7 Personal names from Alalakh and Amarna

Late Bronze Age cuneiform collections from Alalakh and Amarna include, inter alia, personal names *ia-we-e* and *ia-we*, respectively.<sup>402</sup>

The ancient site of Alalakh is identified with Tell Atchana in northern Syria. It lies on the fertile Amuq plain, next to the Orontes river. Alalakh commanded the east-west and north-south trade routes, providing an important contact with the eastern Mediterranean commercial world. Seventeen levels – dating from 3100 BC to 1200 BC – were excavated at the site. Levels VII and IV yielded hundreds of cuneiform texts. These texts facilitated the process of reconstructing the society at Alalakh. Structures uncovered at Level VII were, inter alia, a palace, a temple and a city gate. This period – dated the end of the eighteenth century BC – covered the reigns of three kings. A cuneiform archive discovered in Level IV is dated one or two centuries later. An inscription on a broken statue identifies Idrimi<sup>403</sup> and relates his life. Analysis of texts from Alalakh contributes to the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>404</sup> Several parallels with passages in the Hebrew Bible have been found.<sup>405</sup> Texts furthermore refer to the *ḥabiru*.<sup>406</sup> Hess<sup>407</sup> is of the opinion that the term "*ḥabiru*" in the Alalakh texts differs from references to the "Hebrews" in the Hebrew Bible. He indicates 'that the comparative method must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. It is not possible to generalize'.<sup>408</sup>

A personal name *ia-we-e*, 'with a possible identity with Yahweh',<sup>409</sup> appears in one of the many census lists among the Akkadian texts excavated from the Late Bronze stratum IV of Alalakh.<sup>410</sup> These lists reveal individuals – as well as their corresponding functions – who had 'an alignment in that society according to classes and sub-groups'.<sup>411</sup> The Late Bronze

<sup>402</sup> Hess 1991:181.

<sup>403</sup> The inscription relates the story about a prince (Idrimi) who flees his country when his father is murdered. He returns after seven years to re-establish his rule. His building activities – which are recorded in the inscription – include a palace; probably to be identified with a thirty-three room structure found on the site. His statue was found in the latest level of Alalakh. The city was destroyed ca 1200 BC (Hess 1994:200-201). This inscription, as well as several other inscriptions recovered from Stratum IV, mention the name "Canaan". According to the Idrimi-inscription, he fled to the "land of Canaan" – taking with him his mother's relatives – where he stayed until he could reclaim his kingdom (Killebrew 2005:95).

<sup>404</sup> Hess 1994:200-201.

<sup>405</sup> Parallels in texts from Alalakh and those in the Hebrew Bible are, inter alia, political treaties, the rise of David's kingship compared to that of Idrimi, economic and social conditions, the concept of "release" during the Jubilee year, family customs and the inheritance of family estates by daughters. For a detailed discussion of parallel texts, see Hess (1994:201-205).

<sup>406</sup> Hess 1994:205-208. See also reference to, and discussion of, the *ḥabiru* in § 2.4, § 2.5 and § 2.6.

<sup>407</sup> Hess 1994:210.

<sup>408</sup> Hess 1994:210.

<sup>409</sup> Hess 1991:186.

<sup>410</sup> Hess 1991:186. The name occurs on line 12 of Alalakh Text 196, B.M. 131537 (Hess 1991:186). Scholars generally accept that stratum IV covers the period ca 1550-1473 BC (Green 1983:183).

<sup>411</sup> Green 1983:181.

society is described as Hurrian,<sup>412</sup> while the Middle Bronze Age is referred to as Old Babylonian. The usage of Hurrian terms when referring to certain groups, cause linguistic problems for the biblical scholar.<sup>413</sup> The "Census Lists" tablets provide useful information regarding the *maryanne*<sup>414</sup> and other groups.<sup>415</sup> Texts, particularly of Level IV, contain many Hurrian personal names and loan words contributing to the knowledge of the Hurrian language.<sup>416</sup> The name *ia-we-e* is unusual for Late Bronze Age names known from Alalakh and elsewhere. However, similar names do occur in Middle Bronze Age Mari and other places. These names form part of the Amorite language stratum<sup>417</sup> and have been grouped together as *ia-PI* type names, which could be forms of the *ḥwy* root, "to live". It always appears as the verb and first element in a sentence name, followed by the name of a deity<sup>418</sup> or a hypocoristic suffix.<sup>419</sup> The *PI*-sign has the possibility of different values,<sup>420</sup> though the reading '*wi*' is useful if *ia-wi* is associated with the HWY root',<sup>421</sup> and understood as either the *Qal* or *Hif'il*<sup>422</sup> form of the verb.<sup>423</sup>

<sup>412</sup> Hurrians: a group of people widely dispersed throughout most of the Ancient Near East. In the Hebrew Bible they are referred to as Horites, Hivites and Jebusites. Certain social customs of the Patriarchal Age can be traced back to the Hurrians (Speiser 1962:664).

<sup>413</sup> Hess 1991:187.

<sup>414</sup> In both Egyptian and cuneiform texts the term *maryanne* refers to young men, heroes or attendants who were actually chariot-warriors. They were high-rank individuals (Green 1983:184-190).

<sup>415</sup> Apart from the *maryanne*, the census lists refer to *eḥele*, who occupied a place next in rank to the *maryanne*. The term *šūzubu* – free persons with no feudal obligations – designate certain groups among the *eḥele*. The *ḥanniaḥḥe* was an important group with occupations such as weavers, tanners, potters, blacksmiths and musicians. The rural poor of Alalakh were called the *sabē/sabū*. The *ḥabiru* in Alalakh were referred to as "organised military" who controlled certain areas in the state (Green 1983:184-203). It is 'evident that they [the *ḥabiru*] exercised considerable influence on the society as a whole' (Green 1983:198). According to Astour (1992a:144) the *ḥabiru* – who were normally described as a 'despised assemblage of refugees, fugitives, and outlaws without civil rights' – appear to have been bearers of arms and a tribal unit of which a considerable number of men owned chariots, therefore ranking them on the same level as the *maryanne*. The analysis of these different groups (as mentioned above) provide important information on the social structure of Alalakh IV. For a detailed discussion of these groups, see Green (1983:184-203).

<sup>416</sup> Astour 1992a:144. Evidence of Hurrian influence 'makes it reasonable to believe that these people who were already a representable proportion of the population in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, were being continually infused with fresh arrivals ... and subsequently emerged as the dominant political and cultural force at Alalakh' (Green 1983:202).

<sup>417</sup> The Amorite language stratum is a name for West Semitic dialects of the Middle Bronze Age (Hess 1991:187).

<sup>418</sup> Examples are: *ia-wi-<sup>d</sup>IM*, *ia-wi-<sup>d</sup>Dagan* and *ia-wi-AN* (Hess 1991:187). For an explanation of <sup>d</sup>*dingir*, see footnote in § 3.2.1.

<sup>419</sup> Examples are *ia-wi-<sup>u</sup>um* and *ia-wi-ia* (Hess 1991:187). Hypocoristicon: see footnote in § 2.3.

<sup>420</sup> The syllabary of the Ugaritic scribes is typical for the Late Bronze northern Syrian and Anatolian text corpora, with a mixture of Akkadian sign values, such as the *PI*-sign values. The choice of a particular sign for the representation of a specific phonetic sequence is often the result of scribal training (Huehnergard 1989:23, 32). For a discussion of the different values of the *PI*-sign, see Huehnergard (1989:391-393).

<sup>421</sup> Hess 1991:187.

<sup>422</sup> See footnote in § 4.2 on the *Hif'il* and *Qal* formations of the verb.

<sup>423</sup> Hess 1991:187.

Hess<sup>424</sup> argues that *ia-wi* may be related to the Alalakh name *ia-we-e* – the latter being an analogous name with a vowel shift in the Amorite from  $\bar{i}$  to  $\bar{e}$ . There is also the possibility that the name extends into the break on the tablet, followed by a divine name spelled with an initial *-e*, or a hypocoristic suffix *e-a* – thus forming *ia-we-e* or *ia-we-e-a*. As *ia-wi* is associated with the *hwy* root, followed by a divine name, it could mean "the deity is", "the deity becomes" or "the deity causes to be". Hess<sup>425</sup> concludes that the *ia-wi* forms in personal names – as well as the name *ia-we-e* from Alalakh – 'are not divine names but early verbal forms', and 'is not to be identified with Yahweh', but rather be identified as an Amorite verbal form.

The personal name *ia-we* appears in a Late Bronze Age cuneiform text recovered at Amarna. De Moor<sup>426</sup> is tempted to connect the name – as a possible generic name, like the *Shosu-Yhw* of the Egyptian texts – with *Yahweh*. This name occurs in one of the fourteenth century BC Amarna Letters.<sup>427</sup>

A letter<sup>428</sup> from Abimilki,<sup>429</sup> leader of Tyre, was sent to the Egyptian king. The letter was written mainly in a typical formulaic manner with a description of Abimilki's subservience and complaints about the king of Sidon's refusal to permit Abimilki access to wood or water. Two cuneiform signs on line 8 have been read as *ia-we*.<sup>430</sup> The Egyptian king warned Abimilki to be aware of *ia-we*. As the king would hardly have taken the trouble to alert Abimilki against some unimportant individual, this *ia-we* was either a generic name<sup>431</sup> or that of the leader of a group of formidable enemies. Abimilki repeatedly had trouble with the *ḥabiru*<sup>432</sup> as well as with prince Aziru of Amurru,<sup>433</sup> who employed *ḥabiru* as mercenaries.<sup>434</sup>

<sup>424</sup> Hess 1991:187-188.

<sup>425</sup> Hess 1991:188.

<sup>426</sup> De Moor 1997:126.

<sup>427</sup> See § 2.5 for a discussion of the Amarna Letters discovered in a royal archive at Tell el-Amarna. There was official diplomatic correspondence among these texts– written in Akkadian – between the Egyptian pharaohs and their Palestinian vassals, as well as between Assyrian and Babylonian rulers (Goren et al 2002:196). See also § 4.3.4.

<sup>428</sup> Amarna Letter EA 154. The text comprises 29 lines of two or three words each. (Hess 1991:183). The letter is dated ca 1350 BC (De Moor 1997:125).

<sup>429</sup> Abimilki is also known as Abi-Milku, mayor of Tyre (De Moor 1997:125). Tyre was the main seaport on the Phoenician coast, comprising two harbours, of which one was situated on an island. The city actively took part in sea-trade which eventually led to the Egyptian campaigns to control the Phoenician coast (Wiseman 1982f:1227).

<sup>430</sup> Hess 1991:183.

<sup>431</sup> A generic name like the *Shosu-Yhw* of the Egyptian texts (De Moor 1997:126). See § 4.3.4.

<sup>432</sup> *ḥabiru*: see § 2.4, § 2.5 and § 2.6.

<sup>433</sup> The term "*amurru*" first appeared in Old Akkadian sources as a general indication of "the West", with specific reference to the west wind and the geographical areas lying to the west of Mesopotamia. The term frequently refers to the inhabitants of the western region in an ethnic sense (Mendenhall 1992a:199).

<sup>434</sup> De Moor 1997:126.

De Moor<sup>435</sup> mentions that it 'is therefore very tempting to connect this "Iawe" with the warriors of YHWH' indicating that if his hypothesis proves to be correct, there is a strong possibility that *Yahweh's* people were *habiru* serving prince Aziru. De Moor<sup>436</sup> adds that 'this early connection between the Amorites [Amurru] and the Proto-Israelites is far from unlikely'.

The question arises whether this *ia-we* is 'the divine name *Yahweh*, or an early form of it, preserved in a personal name?'<sup>437</sup> Line 8 of the letter in question is only partially preserved. The cuneiform sign *ia* is followed by the *PI* sign. In the Akkadian texts from Ugarit the *PI* sign is normally transliterated as *wa*, *we*, *wi*, *wu*, or as *ya*, *ye*, *yi*, *yu*, and not as *pi*.<sup>438</sup> However, this sign can be read as *pi* in proper names in the Amarna texts. Should this interpretation be correct, the particular name cannot be equivalent to, or related to, *Yahweh*, but could possibly be read as *ia-pu* – the place name Joppa, which is spelt elsewhere in the Amarna texts as *ia-pu*.<sup>439</sup> One of the points in favour of reading *ia-pi/ia-pu* as a place name – instead of *ia-we* – is the context of the letter. According to Abimilki, he also had problems with Sidon, a coastal city in the region of Tyre. Another coastal city, Joppa, therefore also might have been involved in some sort of conflict. It should be noted that the first part of the word is lost and for that reason it is not possible to determine whether the word is a place name, a personal name or a common noun.<sup>440</sup> Hess<sup>441</sup> concludes that 'it is unlikely that the signs written in EA 154, line 8, were intended to spell a personal name reflecting the divine name *Yahweh*'.

#### 4.3.8 Mesha Stele

The Mesha Inscription or Moabite Stone must be one of the most well-known of Ancient Near Eastern inscriptions relating to the text and substance of the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>442</sup>

The Mesha Stele is a black basalt slab with an inscription written in the Moabite language, which resembles the language of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>443</sup> It is generally dated ca 840-820 BC.

<sup>435</sup> De Moor 1997:126.

<sup>436</sup> De Moor 1997:126.

<sup>437</sup> Hess 1991:183.

<sup>438</sup> Hess 1991:183-184. See earlier footnote in this paragraph on sign values, such as the *PI*-sign.

<sup>439</sup> Arguments in favour of this reading are discussed by Hess (1991:184-186).

<sup>440</sup> The reading could even be such as *ba-ia-wa*. Bayawa was a city leader and scribe of Amarna Letters EA 215 and 216 (Hess 1991:186).

<sup>441</sup> Hess 1991:186.

<sup>442</sup> Tidwell 1996:490. See *ANET* 320-21; *KAI* 181 (Ehrlich 2001:63).

<sup>443</sup> This stele was discovered in Jordan in 1868. The stone – which is approximately one metre in height – contained thirty-four lines in ancient alphabetic script, analogous to the Paleo-Hebrew script. Unfortunately, local Bedouins shattered the stone and distributed it among tribal leaders when news spread about German and French interest. Fortunately, a French scholar had made a type of facsimile impression – a "squeeze" – of the inscription prior to its destruction. More or less two-thirds of the stone was eventually retrieved and completely reconstructed (Arnold & Beyer 2002:160). The inscription could have been written just before the Israelite king

The text, written in the name of Mesha<sup>444</sup> – king of the Moabites – describes his successful campaign against the Israelites during the reign of Jehoram.<sup>445</sup> This inscription has a direct bearing on the contents of 2 Kings 3:14-27 in the Hebrew Bible, which mentions that Mesha came in revolt against the Israelites on account of tribute the Moabites had to pay to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Hebrew text furthermore describes that Jehoram went into coalition with Jehoshaphat of Judah, and the king of Edom, to attack Mesha.<sup>446</sup> According to the biblical text,<sup>447</sup> the Israelites were able to overcome the Moabites and destroy their land. The biblical account ends on a strange note, reporting the withdrawal of the Israelites although they actually conquered the Moabites, as Mesha 'took his oldest son who was to reign in his place and offered him for a burnt offering on the wall'.<sup>448</sup> Child sacrifice was prohibited for the Israelites. The Moabite inscription, however, claims Mesha's victory as a reason for the withdrawal of the Israelites. Although the Mesha Stele's authenticity was initially questioned it is highly unlikely that the correct form of letters of the ninth century BC could have been forged. The different accounts of the outcome of the battle 'can be explained in terms of the propagandistic nature which usually holds true for official political texts', and 'there are enough resemblances to assume that the Moabite stone and the text of 2 Kings 3 refer to the same historical events'.<sup>449</sup> 'In fact, the MI [Moabite inscription] as a whole reads almost like a narrative from the Hebrew Bible.'<sup>450</sup>

The significance of this inscription lies therein that it explicitly mentions 'Israel', its God 'Yahweh', its king 'Omri', as well as 'his son' and 'his house'.<sup>451</sup> Certain biblical place names

---

Ahab's death – ca 853/852 BC – or approximately a decade later. Line 8 refers to Omri's son – Ahab. The language of the inscription could initially only be compared to classical Hebrew and certain Phoenician texts. Some significant texts have since been discovered providing comparative material (Dearman & Mattingly 1992:708).

<sup>444</sup> Mesha succeeded his father who reigned for thirty years in Moab (lines 2 and 3 of the inscription). Apart from the description of his campaign against the Israelites, the inscription on the stele records Mesha's building of towns and regulating the water supply. 'His rebellion may have been an attempt to gain direct control of his considerable wool trade with Tyre' (Wiseman 1982e:763). See 2 Kings 3:4.

<sup>445</sup> The inscription refers to the son of Omri – Ahab – but the biblical text mentions Jehoram, son of Ahab, who reigned in the Northern Kingdom 852-841 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:196).

<sup>446</sup> 2 Kings 3:6-9.

<sup>447</sup> 2 Kings 3:21-26.

<sup>448</sup> 2 Kings 3:27.

<sup>449</sup> Scheffler 2000:86.

<sup>450</sup> Dearman & Mattingly 1992:709.

<sup>451</sup> A translation of relevant lines reads as follows:

Ia (1) I am Mesha, the son of Chemosh [-yatti], the king of Moab, the Di(2)bonite.

... ..

Ib And I made this high-place for Chemosh in Karchoh,

... ..

IIa Omr(5)i was the king of Israel,  
and he oppressed Moab for many days,  
for Chemosh was angry with his Ia(6)nd.

... ..

are also mentioned.<sup>452</sup> It is the earliest known West Semitic text mentioning *Yahweh*. It describes the command to Mesha from *Chemosh*<sup>453</sup> to take all the "vessels" of *Yahweh* from Nebo – probably referring to an Israelite sanctuary there – and place it before *Chemosh*. *Yahweh* is evidently 'not presented here as a Moabite deity' but 'as the official god of the Israelites, worshipped throughout Samaria, as far as its outer borders'.<sup>454</sup> Nebo, situated in north-western Moab, was a border town. This inscription is linguistically, religiously and historically important on account of its close relation to the Hebrew Bible.<sup>455</sup> It suggests significant similarities between *Yahweh* and *Chemosh*, relating to character and their relationship with their devotees.<sup>456</sup>

A literary analysis<sup>457</sup> indicates that Mesha's successes were not recorded at random on the inscription, but several literary devices were used to enliven a well-constructed text. However, from an historical point of view, certain problems can be pointed out.<sup>458</sup> Smelik<sup>459</sup> suggests a reconstruction of the historical events. Scholars postulate 'a complex historical scenario about the creation of a Moabite kingdom out of some smaller territorial entities under Mesha, king of Dibon'.<sup>460</sup> On account of the close relationship between the Moabite and Hebrew languages, the meaning of certain items of vocabulary is confirmed mutually in the two languages.<sup>461</sup> Parker<sup>462</sup> speculates whether the authors of the books of Kings had made use of

---

IId      And Chemosh said to me:  
          Go, take Nebo from Israel!  
          And I w(15)ent in the night,  
          and I fought against it from the break of dawn until noon,  
          and I to(16)ok it,  
  
          and I killed [its] whole population,  
          ....  
          for I had put it to the ban for Ashtar Chemosh.  
          And from there, I took th[e ves](18)sels of YWHH,  
          and I hauled them before the face of Chemosh'

(Smelik 1992:63-65).

<sup>452</sup> Biblical place names, mentioned on the stele, are: Gad (Nm 1:14), Ataroth (Nm 32:34), Dibon (Nm 32:34), Aroer (Nm 32:34), Baal-meon (Nm 32:38), Kiriathaim (Jos 13:19), Bezer (Dt 4:43), Nebo (Nm 33:47), Arnon (Nm 21:13), Beth-diblaththaim (Jr 48:22) and Horonaim (Is 15:5) (Lemaire 2004:368).

<sup>453</sup> See footnote on *Kamoš* in § 2.3.

<sup>454</sup> Van der Toorn 1999e:911.

<sup>455</sup> Thompson 1982:789.

<sup>456</sup> Miller 2000b:216. For example, when *Chemosh* is displeased with his people, he forsakes them, delivers them to their enemies and ultimately saves them; *Chemosh* commanded Mesha in words similar to those used by *Yahweh* (Thompson 1982:789).

<sup>457</sup> For a detailed literary analysis, see Smelik (1992:59-73).

<sup>458</sup> Relevant historical problems are discussed by Smelik (1992:73-92).

<sup>459</sup> Smelik (1992:90-92).

<sup>460</sup> Zevit 2001:620.

<sup>461</sup> Tidwell (1996:490-497) discusses, for instance, the reference in the inscription to the *hmslt b' rnn* that Mesha built.

<sup>462</sup> Parker 2000:357-376.

royal inscriptions. He reaches the conclusion that 'evidence to date does not support claims that the authors of Kings [books of Kings] used royal epigraphic monuments as sources for their history', however, new finds 'could significantly alter the picture'.<sup>463</sup> Yet, in the light of the Mesha inscription, it appears that the composers of Kings did have access to an Israelite king list.<sup>464</sup> Long and Sneed<sup>465</sup> propose a socio-literary reading of 2 Kings 3. Sociological criticism focuses on the entire biblical society, and not only on the royalty and elites. 'Biblical literary criticism, which is primarily synchronic and attentive to the final form of the text, reacts to the unending fragmentation that characterizes the older source criticism.'<sup>466</sup> The text of 2 Kings 3 is an excellent example to demonstrate the potential of a socio-literary reading. The Deuteronomistic History was composed mainly to exonerate *Yahweh* from the idea of the Mesopotamian and other gods' domination and to justify the acts of *Yahweh* – as has been demonstrated in 2 Kings 3.<sup>467</sup> Garbini<sup>468</sup> points to discrepancies in the chronology as recorded in the biblical text, and that as furnished by the Mesha inscription. He mentions that although this external information seems to contradict the biblical text, it allows us to recover an earlier arrangement in the biblical text, 'before the chronological framework produced by the Deuteronomistic redactor'.<sup>469</sup> Relying solely on non-biblical evidence, the religious profile of Israel can be described to some degree. Mesha refers to the 'vessels of YHWH' from Nebo, thereby testifying 'to Yhwh being an Israelite deity, worshipped in a Transjordanian sanctuary in disputed territory'.<sup>470</sup>

Regarding the debate about the inscription – *bytdwd* – found on fragments excavated at Tel Dan,<sup>471</sup> a "proof-text" has been identified on the Mesha Stele by Lemaire. Both expressions have been found on ninth century BC texts. The Tel Dan debate concerns the interpretation of *bytdwd* as "house of David".<sup>472</sup> Lemaire<sup>473</sup> proposes that – after studying the Mesha Stele minutely – the damaged section at the end of line 31, should be read '*Beth-[Da]vid*', thereby designating the kingdom of Judah. This implies that David should be considered the founder of the Judean kingdom. He indicates that this reference to '*Beth-David*' has been confirmed

---

<sup>463</sup> Parker 2000:375.

<sup>464</sup> Parker 2000:376.

<sup>465</sup> Long & Sneed 2004:253. See Long and Sneed (2004:257-271) for a detailed discussion of their literary and sociological analysis of 2 Kings 3.

<sup>466</sup> Long & Sneed 2004:253.

<sup>467</sup> Long & Sneed 2004:267, 271.

<sup>468</sup> Garbini 1988:33-37.

<sup>469</sup> Garbini 1988:37.

<sup>470</sup> Davies 1992:70-71.

<sup>471</sup> For a discussion of this inscription and the ensuing debates, see § 2.14.4.

<sup>472</sup> Ehrlich 2001:62-63.

<sup>473</sup> Lemaire 2004:367-369.

– to some degree – by the phrase '*Beth-David*' on the Tel Dan stele, which intimates that this expression was part of the Levant's<sup>474</sup> diplomatic language.<sup>475</sup> Halpern<sup>476</sup> denotes that the existence of a David should no longer be debated, although revisionists continue to dispute the existence of a central Israelite state.

#### 4.3.9 Kuntillet 'Ajrud

The discovery of the inscriptions and drawings at Kuntillet 'Ajrud<sup>477</sup> brought to the fore the significance of a consort for deities in the Ancient Near East – and in particular for *Yahweh*. Inscriptions, as well as miscellaneous drawings on two pithoi,<sup>478</sup> have since generated numerous debates and scholarly interest. The particular 'phrase ... *yhwh* ... *w'srth*, with its tantalizing implications of a Yahwistic polytheism' has caused a surge of publications in scholarly journals.<sup>479</sup>

As indicated in paragraph 2.9, various drawings appear on both sides of pithos A, as well as the benediction:

'may you be blessed by Yahweh  
of Shomron [Samaria] and his Asherah'.<sup>480</sup>

On another storage jar – probably placed at the gate as a votive – a second inscription reads:

'Amaryo said: Tell my lord, may you be well  
and be blessed by Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah.  
May he bless and keep you and be with you.'<sup>481</sup>

These inscriptions, referring to "*Yahweh* ... and his *Asherah*", raise the question whether the Israelite God, *Yahweh*, had a consort, and seem 'to suggest quite explicitly that Yahweh did have a consort'.<sup>482</sup> Taylor<sup>483</sup> is of the opinion that a substantial number of Israelites believed that *Yahweh* had a partner or spouse. Many scholars agree that these epigraphic finds, as well as supporting evidence – such as the Taanach cult stands<sup>484</sup> – endorse the view 'that the

<sup>474</sup> Levant: eastern part of the Mediterranean with its islands and neighbouring countries (Oxford University Press 1987:970).

<sup>475</sup> Lemaire 2004:369.

<sup>476</sup> Halpern 1997:314.

<sup>477</sup> For a description of the site –also known as Horvat Teman – see § 2.9, as well as Zevit (2001:370-405).

<sup>478</sup> Pithoi: see footnote in § 2.9.

<sup>479</sup> Margalit 1990:274.

<sup>480</sup> Scheffler 2000:102.

<sup>481</sup> Scheffler 2000:105.

<sup>482</sup> Taylor 1994:53.

<sup>483</sup> Taylor 1994:53.

<sup>484</sup> See § 2.13 under the subtitle "Taanach".

goddess Asherah was worshipped as the consort of Yahweh in both Israel and Judah during the period of the Israelite monarchy'.<sup>485</sup> Current perspectives on the history of the Israelite religion have been influenced significantly by these inscriptions, as well as those discovered at Khirbet 'el-Qom.<sup>486</sup> These finds also 'provide evidence for topographically distinct manifestations of Yahweh'.<sup>487</sup> According to Korpel,<sup>488</sup> the crude language of these blessing formulas, as well as the surroundings where they were discovered, gives an indication of folk religion. It furthermore exhibits the possible theology and mode of worship that was prevalent in Israel.<sup>489</sup>

Zeev Meshel,<sup>490</sup> the excavator at the site of Kuntillet 'Ajrud, suggests that the site was a religious centre that may have served as a wayside shrine for Israelite kings on their journeys to Elat and Ezion-geber, as well as for pilgrims travelling to southern Sinai. The remains at the site indicate a connection with Northern Israel. Occupied only for a few years, it was probably inhabited by a small group of priests. Typological and palaeographic analysis points to a period during the reign of Joash,<sup>491</sup> king of Israel. The site may also have been frequented by local tribes as a place of pilgrimage. Theophoric names with the element *yw*<sup>492</sup> – characteristic for Yahwistic names of the Northern Kingdom – suggest that travellers from there were the principal users of this road station. The formula "*Yahweh* and his *Asherah*" may have been written on behalf of the king or an official of the court. It is therefore significant that the greeting is in the name of "*Yahweh* of Samaria", suggesting that *Yahweh* and his consort were worshipped in Samaria.<sup>493</sup> Cultic rites practised in the domestic cult by ancient Israel seemingly included a goddess, presumably identified with *Asherah*, symbolising 'a divine being in which several goddesses (*Asherah*, *Astarte* and *Anat*) are conflated'.<sup>494</sup>

The popularity of syncretistic Yahwism during the eighth century BC possibly influenced the prophet Hosea<sup>495</sup> to appropriate the idea and imagery implied by "*Yahweh* and his *Asherah*"

<sup>485</sup> Hadley 1997:169.

<sup>486</sup> See § 4.3.10 for a discussion on Khirbet 'el-Qom.

<sup>487</sup> Van der Toorn 1992:80. These inscriptions refer to "*Yahweh* of Shomron [Samaria]" and "*Yahweh* of Teman".

<sup>488</sup> Korpel 2001:147.

<sup>489</sup> Mayes 1997:65.

<sup>490</sup> Meshel 1992:108-109.

<sup>491</sup> ca 801-786 BC (Meshel 1992:109).

<sup>492</sup> Personal names, such as Obadyaw, Shem'yaw, Hilyaw, Amaryaw, 'Aziyaw, Shakanyaw and Eliyaw, are attested in the inscriptions (Dijkstra 2001b:21).

<sup>493</sup> Dijkstra 2001b:19, 21, 29. See also 1 Kings 16:33; 2 Kings 13:6.

<sup>494</sup> Vriezen 2001:80. See also the discussion on "Female figurines", as subtitle in § 2.13.

<sup>495</sup> Kuntillet 'Ajrud was occupied during the mid-ninth to mid-eighth century BC (Dever 2005:160). Although the period of Hosea's ministry is described in Hosea 1:1, it is significant that four Judean kings and only one Israelite king, Jeroboam, is named, while Hosea's entire ministry was in the Northern Kingdom. The prophecy of

and implement it as the 'cornerstone of a new Israelite theology',<sup>496</sup> wherein *Yahweh* has a "wife", named Israel. The prophet, thus, substitutes *Asherah* by Israel.<sup>497</sup> The writings of Hosea were probably a polemical response to Israel's religious syncretism threatening to transform Yahwism into a Canaanite fertility cult. If Israel is *Yahweh's* wife, she owes him respect, obedience, fidelity and love. *Yahweh*, in return, is obliged to care for and shelter Israel.<sup>498</sup> The husband-and-wife imagery was particularly useful to reflect the potential relationship between *Yahweh* and Israel, notably as applied within the ideological and theological dialogues as expressed by the prophetic books. Therefore, in their discourses, the literati of ancient Israel utilised the marital metaphor as a way to understand and communicate the nature of Israel's relationship with *Yahweh*. The book of Hosea was most likely – like most, if not all, biblical texts – written by male literati for an exclusively male readership.<sup>499</sup>

Both the sacred marriage – *hieros gamos*<sup>500</sup> – and the sacred tree, or Tree of Life, which equals the *Asherah*, stand at the centre of Jewish mysticism.<sup>501</sup> The Holy of Holies is called the bedchamber for the *hieros gamos*, which has its roots in old Jewish traditions, and is reflected in various sources in a figurative, symbolic way.<sup>502</sup> The *Asherah* of Kuntillet 'Ajrud was seemingly worshipped with the "full array of rites", as described, inter alia, in 2 Kings 23:7. This text mentions that the women wove "hangings" – or "vestments" – for the *Asherah*. This practice was also well known in other Ancient Near Eastern temples. Beautifully woven cloth was found at the site of Kuntillet 'Ajrud, 'undoubtedly used in the local cult'.<sup>503</sup>

---

the fall of the house of Jehu (Hs 1:4), which occurred with the death of Zechariah, son of Jeroboam II, in 746 BC, is possibly an indication that Hosea began his ministry in 747 BC, shortly before the death of Jeroboam II (Smart 1962:651). According to Kitchen and Mitchell (1982:196-197) Zechariah's reign is dated 753-752 BC and Hosea's ministry ca 755-722 BC.

<sup>496</sup> Margalit 1990:283.

<sup>497</sup> Margalit 1990:279, 283-284.

<sup>498</sup> Margalit 1990:285-286.

<sup>499</sup> Ben Zvi 2004:363-366.

<sup>500</sup> See footnote in § 3.7. The sacred marriage, which was usually a sexual union or marriage between a god and goddess, was mostly connected with some form of fertility cult. In the ancient Mesopotamian religions it could also be a consummation between human beings representing a deity. Some scholars believe that a common fertility cult was practised in the Ancient Near East including the worship of a Great Mother goddess – personifying fertility – and her young spouse who died seasonally and was resurrected, embodying growth (Klein 1992:866, 869). For further discussions of the sacred marriage rites in the Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian religions, see Klein (1992:866-869).

<sup>501</sup> Jewish mysticism or so-called Kabbalah (Cabbalah): see footnote in § 4.1. 'The Kabbalah literature revolves around the ideas of *hieros gamos* and the sacred tree' (Weinfeld 1996:515). For a discussion of these phenomena within the Kabbalah, see Weinfeld (1996:515-529).

<sup>502</sup> Weinfeld 1996:520-522. Christian sources reflect the idea of "sacred marriage", as expressed, inter alia, in Revelation 21:2, 'I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband'.

<sup>503</sup> Weinfeld 1996:526.

Emerton<sup>504</sup> speculates on the religious implications of the phrases "*Yahweh* of Samaria" and "*Yahweh* of Teman". The former is obviously an indication that *Yahweh* was worshipped in Samaria – the phrase probably written by a traveller from there. Teman could denote the South in general, but – as the name is associated with Edom – could refer to a region of Edom or, could have been used as a synonym of the land of Edom.<sup>505</sup> The blessing that makes use of the name "*Yahweh* of Teman", therefore, obviously invoked the protection of the God who came from the southern region.<sup>506</sup> Peckham<sup>507</sup> is of the opinion that the eclectic dedications might have been left by merchants from Phoenician Tyre. These tradesmen were renowned for their overland trade dealings with Edom and Arabia.<sup>508</sup> Dijkstra,<sup>509</sup> however, indicates that the texts and drawings were probably 'randomly scribbled by bored clerks' who used this road station as a local administrative office. Although the pithoi have been reassembled by excavators almost completely in their original shape, it does not necessarily imply that the inscriptions and paintings were made on the intact storage jars. Large sherds from broken storage jars could have been used as "scrap paper". Fragments of similar "rough drafts" have been found. The drawings, in different coloured ink, were made by skilled, as well as less skilled, artisans. The script of the inscriptions is, however, of skilled quality and it is, therefore, unlikely that it had been left by travellers or shepherds.<sup>510</sup>

Regarding some of the drawings on pithos A (see Figure 4 hereafter), depicting a cow suckling a calf, *Bes*-like figures and a lyre-player, various interpretations have been suggested.

Zevit<sup>511</sup> mentions that the drawings were made with thin and wide lines, the latter possibly indicating the importance of a particular character. The randomly scattered figures – some superimposed on one another – may be without any meaning. Overlapping figures could be an indication of unsophisticated art, such as discovered in prehistoric caves. The one scene

---

<sup>504</sup> Emerton 1982:9.

<sup>505</sup> Unless – as suggested by the Kenite hypothesis – *Yahweh* was worshipped in the South by nomadic groups, and this cult was to be found in Edom and continued as late as 800 BC, the reference to Teman at Kuntillet 'Ajrud indicates that *Yahweh* had come from the southern region which belongs to him in a special way (Emerton 1982:9-10). Habakkuk 3:3 mentions that 'God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran'.

<sup>506</sup> Emerton 1982:19.

<sup>507</sup> Peckham 2001:23.

<sup>508</sup> A sixth century BC Phoenician inscription from Saqqara reads, 'I have blessed thee by Baal Zaphon', implying a wish as well as being a statement (Emerton 1982:2).

<sup>509</sup> Dijkstra 2001b:26.

<sup>510</sup> Dijkstra 2001b:26.

<sup>511</sup> Zevit 2001:381, 383, 385, 387.

on pithos A is dominated by two *Bes*-like<sup>512</sup> figures, which are easily recognisable with their feathered crowns, stylised leonine features, square-cut beards and the typical lion tail between



Figure 4. Pithos A: Cow suckling her calf, *Bes*-like figures, lyre-player and inscription (Scheffler 2000:102)<sup>513</sup>

their legs. 'The 'Ajrud *Bes* figures have uncharacteristic, but not unattested, humanoid torsos.'<sup>514</sup> Due to the popularity of this motif on various artefacts in Syria-Palestine, the figures on pithos A can be identified easily but, unfortunately, give little indication of their meaning. A borrowed *Bes* figure – in countries other than Egypt – could easily be plied according to local traditions. Therefore, Zevit<sup>515</sup> is of the opinion that 'in the 'Ajrud context, they signified, but did not necessarily represent, a likeness of YHWH'. Dever<sup>516</sup> indicates that the *Bes*-figure on the left is apparently male, while the figure with the breast on the right seems to be female. *Bes*, being an androgynous<sup>517</sup> deity, could appear either as male or female. As an apotropaic<sup>518</sup> deity – who wards off evil – *Bes* was very popular, both in Egypt and in the Levant. His presence at Kuntillet 'Ajrud is therefore not surprising.

<sup>512</sup> *Bes*, the Egyptian god or demon was personified as a bandy-legged deformed dwarf, or as a lion-man. His animal hair, ears, tail, and ugly human face was more like that of a lion than a human dwarf. He played instruments, such as the flute, harp and tambourine, danced or wielded a sword and knife to protect pregnant women and those giving birth. *Bes*-gods were often depicted in an erotic context, exhibiting an enormous phallus. These representations allegedly brought about pregnancy and childbirth (Te Velde 1999:173).

<sup>513</sup> Available in the public domain at [www.bibleorigins.net/KuntilletAjrudYahwehAsherah.html](http://www.bibleorigins.net/KuntilletAjrudYahwehAsherah.html).

<sup>514</sup> Zevit 2001:387. During the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Ages, *Bes* figures were very popular in Syria-Palestine. They are widely attested on different artefacts, such as ivories, amulets and drinking utensils. On artefacts found in Syria-Palestine, *Bes* is presented with and without the feathered crown (Zevit 2001:387-388).

<sup>515</sup> Zevit 2001:388-389. Zevit (2001:389) mentions that the 'identification with YHWH is not inherent in the drawings' but is derived from a deliberation of the depictions as a whole.

<sup>516</sup> Dever 2005:163-167.

<sup>517</sup> A description of "androgynous" is incorporated in a footnote in § 3.2.1.

<sup>518</sup> Apotropaism: see footnote in § 2.12.

Margalit,<sup>519</sup> however, denotes that, 'despite some superficial resemblance', the figures cannot be interpreted as *Bes* as they are bovine and not leonine. The phrase "*yhwh.šmrn.w'šrth*" was intended to describe the male and female figures. The objective of the artist was thus 'to represent a male bovine deity and his smaller bovine consort in a traditional "man-and-wife" posture, reflecting the basic meaning of the term *asherah*'.<sup>520</sup> In the abovementioned phrase,<sup>521</sup> *Asherah* functions as a common noun meaning "wife, consort". The smaller figure appears to be standing behind the larger figure, thus portraying the divine couple as referred to in the inscription as "*Yahweh* of Samaria and his *Asherah*" – his consort. The word '*šrh*' intimates "she-who-follows (her husband)".<sup>522</sup> The idea of "walking behind" was part of the marital metaphor. A faithful wife was "an *asherah*" who followed her husband. The Canaanite storm god *Ba'al*<sup>523</sup> – a term meaning husband, master, lord – was *Yahweh*'s main competitor in Canaan for Israel's affections. The act of following *Ba'al* could signify the married woman walking behind her husband, alluding to the nuptial aspect and influence of the *Ba'al-Astarte* fertility cult. The main mythological role of the Ugaritic goddess *Athirat* – Israel's *Asherah*<sup>524</sup> – was to be the consort of the supreme Canaanite god *El*. Therefore the phrase "*Yahweh* ... and his *Asherah*" could literally mean "*Yahweh* and his consort".<sup>525</sup>

Day<sup>526</sup> differs from the views mentioned above therein that "his *Asherah*", interpreted as the goddess *Asherah*, should 'be rejected, since in biblical Hebrew (unlike some other Semitic languages) personal names are unknown with a pronominal suffix. ... [the] most probable view, [is therefore] namely, that *Asherah* denotes the name of a cult object'.<sup>527</sup> The *Asherah* in the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions – as a cult object symbolising the goddess – could thus, alongside *Yahweh*, have been invoked as a source of blessing. Day<sup>528</sup> furthermore indicates that these particular texts 'reflect a religious syncretism in which *Asherah* was closely related to *Yahweh*, presumably as his consort'. Since *Asherah* originally had been *El*'s consort, and *El* and *Yahweh* were equated in Israel, it stands to reason that, in certain circles, *Asherah* would have been regarded *Yahweh*'s consort. Hadley<sup>529</sup> agrees that, on account of the

<sup>519</sup> Margalit 1990:274-284.

<sup>520</sup> Margalit 1990:275.

<sup>521</sup> *yhwh.šmrn.w'šrth*.

<sup>522</sup> See discussion in § 3.2.1, in this regard.

<sup>523</sup> See discussion in § 3.5.

<sup>524</sup> See discussion of *Athirat/Asherah* in § 3.2.1.

<sup>525</sup> Margalit 1990:284. For arguments in favour of identifying the two figures as man-and-wife, see Margalit (1990:288), and for arguments against such an identification, see Margalit (1990:289).

<sup>526</sup> Day 1986:391-393.

<sup>527</sup> Day 1986:392. See § 3.2.2 for a discussion of the possibility that "*Asherah*" in the Hebrew Bible refers to a cult object.

<sup>528</sup> Day 1986:392-393.

<sup>529</sup> Hadley 2000:124.

pronominal suffix, it is unlikely that "his *Asherah*" in the inscriptions refers to the goddess. Emerton<sup>530</sup> mentions that it is not unlikely that in some forms of Israelite religion – popular or official – *Asherah* may have been the wife of *Yahweh*. However, in accordance with Day and Hadley – as mentioned above – he indicates that a pronominal suffix attached to a personal name is not consistent with the Hebrew idiom. The *Asherah* of the inscriptions does not offer direct proof that she was the consort of *Yahweh*.

According to Taylor,<sup>531</sup> continuity could be assumed between the *Asherahs* of the Taanach cult stands<sup>532</sup> and of the inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. The cult stands show the *asherah* as a cult symbol alongside a "portrait" of the goddess, therefore not separating the symbol and the goddess. Should the inscriptions thus refer only to a cult symbol named "*asherah*", it could imply *Yahweh's* association with the goddess herself.

Dever<sup>533</sup> indicates that, apart from the *Bes*-like figures on pithos A, there is also a drawing of a semi-nude female seated on a type of "lion-throne"<sup>534</sup> which is often associated with kings and deities in Ancient Near Eastern iconography. He argues 'explicitly that both the inscriptions and the female figure, although by different hands, refer to the goddess *Asherah*, in this case coupled with *Yahweh* as "his" consort'.<sup>535</sup> A large collection of inscriptional evidence from the Iron Age indicates that *Asherah* was frequently referred to as the "Lion Lady".<sup>536</sup> Zevit<sup>537</sup> identifies this particular figure as a lyre-player. As she is portrayed seated, possibly on a characteristic "leonine cherub", she may represent a goddess, however, this does not validate the divinity of the lyre player.

In addition to these drawings on pithos A, there is also a depiction of a cow with a suckling calf, as well as another scene of two ibexes<sup>538</sup> nibbling on a tree – the symbol of fertility. Drawings on pithos B are, inter alia, characters in a processional scene, presumably in

---

<sup>530</sup> Emerton 1982:13-14, 19.

<sup>531</sup> Taylor 1994:53-54.

<sup>532</sup> See § 2.13, subtitle "Taanach".

<sup>533</sup> Dever 2006:470.

<sup>534</sup> "Lion thrones", similar to the one in the drawing on pithos A, were common in Ancient Near Eastern iconography. They were never associated with ordinary human beings, but always with deities or kings. Lions were the symbols of ferocity and were often represented as cherubs with wings – symbols of divine presence and power. A low footstool was nearly always in front of the throne. In the case of the drawing at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, there is no footstool – the figure's feet are dangling in the air. The claw-like feet, panelled sides and slightly tilted back are an indication that this is not the familiar "side chair". Although primitive, it seems clear what the "artist" had in mind, therefore a female deity in a cult centre could only be *Asherah* (Dever 2005:164-165).

<sup>535</sup> Dever 2006:470.

<sup>536</sup> Dever 2005:166.

<sup>537</sup> Zevit 2001:386-387.

<sup>538</sup> See footnote in § 2.13 under the subtitle "Lachish ewer".

gestures of prayer. Taylor<sup>539</sup> mentions that these gestures of devotion are undeniably skyward – maybe towards the sun. He believes that many 'Israelites considered the sun a symbol or icon of Israel's God, Yahweh'. Several biblical passages refer to the Israelites' veneration of the sun.<sup>540</sup> For a detailed discussion of the different drawings and inscriptions, see Zevit.<sup>541</sup>

North<sup>542</sup> speculates whether the inscriptions under discussion are in the true sense "cultic", and whether the inscription on pithos A was intended for the particular drawings. Graffiti in antiquity differ from that known in modern times. A large proportion of graffiti from ancient times are cultic. The graffiti from Kuntillet 'Ajrud could be an expression of popular religion or syncretism. The 'combining of two incompatible divinities could therefore have been the kind of ignorant syncretism which does not point to any real existing "cultus" at all'; however, the 'Ajrud inscriptions are 'too distinct to be dismissed as random'.<sup>543</sup> Yet, an average worshipper may have formulated a pious petition "for *Yahweh* ... and his symbol".

#### 4.3.10 Khirbet 'el-Qom

A burial cave, close to Khirbet 'el-Qom,<sup>544</sup> dated ca 725 BC, yielded the following inscription:

'For 'Uriyahu the governor (or the rich), his inscription.

Blessed is 'Uriyahu by Yahweh.

From his enemies he has been saved

By his a/Asherah.

(Written) by 'Oniyahu.<sup>545</sup>

Together with this inscription is a distinctly carved open, outstretched human hand, as symbol of good luck.<sup>546</sup> The hand-symbol and "blessing formula" on the carving is probably a wish for prosperity from "the hand of *Yahweh*".<sup>547</sup> Linguistic and palaeographic difficulties were encountered with the deciphering of the inscription. Apart from vertical grooves on the

---

<sup>539</sup> Taylor 1994:53, 90.

<sup>540</sup> Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 23:5, 11; Jeremiah 8:2; Ezekiel 8:16.

<sup>541</sup> Zevit 2001: 381-405. See also Dever (2005:160-167).

<sup>542</sup> North 1989:118, 124, 133-137.

<sup>543</sup> North 1989:134.

<sup>544</sup> See § 2.10.

<sup>545</sup> Dever 2005:131-132.

<sup>546</sup> This hand resembles the much later Islamic "Hand of Fatima" (Dever 2005:132). See footnote in § 2.10 on "Hamza".

<sup>547</sup> Dever 2005:131-133. For examples in the Hebrew Bible, see footnote in § 2.10.

substrate of the carving, which could be read as parts of letters, the letters are well defined as well as blended.<sup>548</sup>

Zevit<sup>549</sup> indicates that the inscription was written by Abiyahu,<sup>550</sup> who refers to an important episode in Uryahu's<sup>551</sup> life. The tomb belonged to the prosperous Uryahu, on whose behalf Abiyahu interceded, entrusting him to *Yahweh* by invoking the name of a goddess, *Asherah*. The nature of the incantation suggests that *Asherah* stood in such a relationship to *Yahweh* – who was the healer – that an appeal invoked in her name could influence *Yahweh*. In antiquity the "hand of blessing" – as in the carving – had the same power as a talisman to ward off evil. It does, however, seem that the left hand – in this case – is probably unrelated to the "hand of Fatima",<sup>552</sup> but possibly represents the left hand of Uryahu, extended to grasp the supporting hand of *Yahweh* – or maybe even that of Abiyahu. Zevit<sup>553</sup> concludes that any discussion of the religion of the Israelites should 'take into account that most Israelites, Yahwists in the main, knew their patron to whom they called by name, knew his consort *Asherah*, and knew other deities as well'.

Margalit<sup>554</sup> theorises that the Khirbet 'el-Qom inscription – as well as those at Kuntillet 'Ajrud – provide sufficient evidence of the *Ba'al-Astarte* fertility cult and its 'paradigmatic man-and-wife symbolism' in the life the Israelites. He furthermore indicates that seemingly devout Yahwists, such as Uriyahu, worshipped *Yahweh* as if he were *Ba'al*, a fertility deity in need of a female partner. *Yahweh* was not necessarily replaced by *Ba'al*, but rather transformed into *Ba'al's* image. Mayes<sup>555</sup> mentions that the deuteronomic proclamation, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord [*Yahweh*] our God, the Lord [*Yahweh*] is one',<sup>556</sup> is not only an affirmation of the oneness of *Yahweh* – in contrast to the 'multiplicity of the manifestations of Baal or El' – but rather a rejection of prevalent Israelite religious practice wherein *Yahweh* was worshipped in different forms and manifestations. The question arises whether the inscriptions indicate that *Yahweh* did have a consort, or whether we are 'dealing with a plurality of gods ... [which]

---

<sup>548</sup> Zevit 2001:360-361. See Zevit (2001:360-370), North (1989:124-127) and Meshel (1992:103-109) for a detailed discussion of this inscription.

<sup>549</sup> Zevit 2001:368-369.

<sup>550</sup> Dever (2005:131-132) interprets the name of the "author" of the blessing as 'Oniyahu, and not Abiyahu.

<sup>551</sup> Dever (2005:131-132) interprets the name of the prosperous – or the governor – as 'Uriyahu, and not Uryahu.

<sup>552</sup> See earlier footnote in this paragraph, as well as a footnote in § 2.10 on "Hamza".

<sup>553</sup> Zevit 2001:652.

<sup>554</sup> Margalit 1990:281, 283.

<sup>555</sup> Mayes 1997:62.

<sup>556</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4.

might even reflect a "Polyjehwism" which belies the confessional statement contained in Deuteronomy 6:4'.<sup>557</sup>

Archaeological finds, such as the inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom, are according to Vriezen,<sup>558</sup> a clear indication that the names of gods, such as *Asherah*, do appear alongside the name of *Yahweh*.

#### 4.3.11 Amorite onomastics<sup>559</sup>

Bedouin invaders from the north-western Syrian plains are often referred to as Amorites in Akkadian and Sumerian texts.<sup>560</sup> Amorite parallels to certain personal names in early biblical history have been identified. It is, however, significant that some of these cognates disappeared from the name tradition, of which the most prominent are the names of the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob. No conclusive evidence has been found for an Amorite cognate of the name Isaac. Only one Abraham and one Jacob appear in the Hebrew Bible. Amorite parallels provide an important chronological framework for the name traditions underlying early biblical narratives. As in Hebrew, Amorite names have meaning. At the same time, Amorite proper names are valuable for research in biblical onomastics.

Regarding the much-debated matter of the form and meaning of the Tetragrammaton, the question may be raised whether Amorite evidence contributes to this issue. Many scholars interpret the divine name יהוה as a prefix form of a verb, derived from the verb *hāyā*.<sup>561</sup> There is, however, no supporting evidence for a corresponding divine name in Amorite. There is only one definite occurrence in Amorite of a verb phrase name that functioned as a divine name, namely *<sup>d</sup>ia-ak-ru-ub- DINGIR/el/il – El blessed*.<sup>562</sup> If the name form underlying the Tetragrammaton is of verbal origin, the variation of long and short forms can be matched by a corresponding variation in Amorite one-constituent names of verbal type ... . However, Amorite cannot explain why in Hebrew the longer form יהוה only occurs as a one-constituent divine name, never as a component of a noun phrase or verb phrase name.<sup>563</sup> Personal names – of which approximately six thousand have been collected – are the only direct evidence

<sup>557</sup> Human 1999:493.

<sup>558</sup> Vriezen 2001:79-80.

<sup>559</sup> Onomastics: see footnote in § 3.5.

<sup>560</sup> Texts dated from the latter part of the Old Akkadian Dynasty (ca 2500-2355 BC) and the Ur III Dynasty (2112-2004 BC) (Bodine 1994:27,36).

<sup>561</sup> See discussion in § 4.2.

<sup>562</sup> Knudsen 1999:202, 205, 208-209, 221. Parallels for Amorite names have been found at, inter alia, Mari and Alalakh. See Knudsen (1999:209-210).

<sup>563</sup> Knudsen 1999:211. For Amorite parallels of biblical names, see discussion in Knudsen (1999:211-221).

available for the Amorite language as no written archives or writing system is known for Amorite. Most of these personal names are "sentence names" which include verbs, as well as other parts of speech. They are characteristic of Amorite, while one-word names are predominant elsewhere. The central theological vocabulary of biblical Hebrew mainly consists of lexical components of Amorite origin.<sup>564</sup> Apart from the one-word names Saul, David and Solomon, in the Israelite royal lines, both Amorite sentence-names – Rehoboam, Jeroboam – and one-word names such as Asa, Omri, do occur.<sup>565</sup>

Van der Toorn<sup>566</sup> mentions that the Amorite theophoric anthroponyms<sup>567</sup> incorporating the element *Yahwi-* or *yawi-* are the 'only North-West Semitic evidence that can be plausibly linked to the name Yahweh'. However, names such as *Ya(h)wi-ila* – meaning "God is present" – 'do not, ..., attest to a cult of Yahweh among certain Amorites; they merely elucidate the etymology of his name'. Nonetheless, scholars have indicated that *Ya*-related names do appear outside the Israelite precincts. The element *Ya-u* occurs in some Amorite proper names of the First Babylonian and Kassite Periods.<sup>568</sup> The annals of Tiglath-pileser III<sup>569</sup> of Assyria refer to a certain Azriyau of Jaudi, who seemingly was a North-Syrian prince.<sup>570</sup> Egyptian records of the New Kingdom<sup>571</sup> bear witness to a toponym *Ya-h-wa* in a Bedouin area of Syria.<sup>572</sup> During the eighteenth to sixteenth centuries BC some Amorite anthroponyms from Mari – *Yahwi-ki-Addu* and *Yahwi-ki-An*<sup>573</sup> – may be read as having a Yahwistic theophoric element.<sup>574</sup> Excavations at biblical Dan yielded an amphora handle with the name ImmadiYo – meaning "God is with me" – stamped on it. The theophoric ending *Yo* corresponds with *Yahu* in Judah – an ostrakon discovered in the Negev has the name Immadi-Yahu inscribed on it. Epigraphic and pottery analyses date the amphora handle to the time of Jeroboam II.<sup>575</sup>

<sup>564</sup> Examples are *šdq*, *yṯ'*, *ḥsd*, *'mn* (Mendenhall 2004:14).

<sup>565</sup> Mendenhall 2004:14-16.

<sup>566</sup> Van der Toorn 1995:244.

<sup>567</sup> Anthroponym: combining form (in nouns, adjectives and adverbs) connected with humans (Wehmeier 2005:53), hence anthroponyms: human (personal) names.

<sup>568</sup> Walker 1958:262. An Amorite, Sumu-abum, established a dynasty at Babylon in 1894 BC. Prior to the fall of Babylon to the Hittites, the Kassites had appeared as foreign invaders in western Babylon and had incorporated all of Babylonia into a single unified Kassite Dynasty by 1475 BC (Arnold 1994:47, 51-52).

<sup>569</sup> Tiglath-pileser III is dated 745-727 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:197).

<sup>570</sup> Mowinckel 1961:125.

<sup>571</sup> The New Kingdom is dated 1570-1070 BC (Clayton 1994:5).

<sup>572</sup> Zevit 2001:687.

<sup>573</sup> According to Zevit (2001:687) these anthroponyms may be read as "*Yahweh* is like *Addu*" and "*Yahweh* is like *El*". *Addu* is also known as the storm god *Adad*, and *An*, the Sumerian god of heaven, was the equivalent of *El*, the head of the Canaanite pantheon (Van Reeth 1994:8-9, 19-20, 71).

<sup>574</sup> Zevit 2001:687.

<sup>575</sup> Biran 1994a:199, 201. The reign of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom is dated 782-753 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:197).



#### 4.3.12 *Yahweh* from Hamath

When the inhabitants of Hamath<sup>576</sup> defected to a king named Azri-Yau, the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III gained control in 738 BC over nineteen districts of this powerful kingdom. This particular incident was recorded in various Assyrian chronicles. One of the tablets describing the event was broken, but restored to read 'Izri-Yau the Judean'. Scholars suggest that Izri-Yau could be a phonetic variant of Azri-Yau,<sup>577</sup> who is identified as the biblical Azariah,<sup>578</sup> a form of the name of king Uzziah<sup>579</sup> of Judah. The word for Judean on the tablet is distinct. However, it seems unlikely that the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and not the Northern Kingdom of Israel, would have been allied with the North-Syrian Hamath.<sup>580</sup> Dalley<sup>581</sup> argues that, according to the chronology of the Judean kings, Uzziah had died by 740 BC, therefore Uzziah/Azariah could not be the Azri-Yau – or Izri-Yau – mentioned in the 738 BC Assyrian campaign. She furthermore indicates that research done by Nadav Na'aman resulted in fragments being rearranged and joined, reading "of my frontier and Judah", instead of "Izri-Yau the Judean". Dalley<sup>582</sup> thus concludes that a ruler Azri-Yau – with a *Yahweh*-bearing name – was allied with Hamath and had no association with either Israel or Judah. He probably ruled Hatarikka, a small state between Aleppo and Hamath. It seems, therefore, that in 738 BC a ruler in North Syria had a name compounded with the name *Yahweh*.

During ca 722 BC Samaria fell to the Assyrians. Mutiny in the heart of Assyria motivated Samaria to join an anti-Assyrian coalition – probably around 720/719 BC – led by Yau-bi'di, king of Hamath. Dalley<sup>583</sup> indicates that this example reinforces the suggestion that *Yahweh*

---

<sup>576</sup> Hamath, a city on the bank of the Orontes River in North Syria, was on one of the main trade routes to the South. The city was initially controlled by Solomon (2 Chr 8:3), later conquered by Jeroboam II (2 Ki 14:28) and thereafter by the Assyrians, who settled some of Hamath's inhabitants in Samaria where they worshipped their deity *Ashima* (2 Ki 17:24,30). Excavations yielded inscriptions in Hittite hieroglyphs, Aramaic and cuneiform. During Greek and Roman times the city was known as Epiphaneia (Millard 1982:450-451). *Ashima* was a deity of uncertain identity, worshipped by the people of Hamath. The common interpretation is that the word is an Aramaic form, meaning "the Name". A possible reference to *Ashima* in the Hebrew Bible is found in Amos 8:14: "ʾašmat šomrôn ... ." The general translation is "shame [guilt] of Samaria", but "*Ashima* of Samaria" is the more likely expression (Fulco 1992:487). According to Ann and Imel (1993:320-321) *Ashima* was introduced into Samaria, possibly by the people of Hamath who brought her images with them. Her name was applied during oath taking. She may be associated with *Ashima Baetyl* [*Bethel*], who was a mother goddess worshipped by the Aramaic-speaking Jews at Elephantine (see § 4.3.13). She was regarded as a consort of *YHW*.

<sup>577</sup> See also reference to Azri-Yau in § 4.3.11.

<sup>578</sup> According to 2 Kings 15:1 Azariah began his reign in Judah during the reign of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom. Kitchen and Mitchell (1982:197) indicate that Azariah reigned 767-740/39 BC. After his death he was succeeded by his son Jotham (2 Ki 15:5-7).

<sup>579</sup> Compare 2 Kings 15:1-3 and 2 Chronicles 26:1-4. Uzziah – which means "*Yahweh* is my strength" – is an alternative form for Azariah – "*Yahweh* has helped". The two Hebrew words "strength" and "help" were apparently interchangeable and became almost synonymous (Baker & Millard 1982:1232).

<sup>580</sup> Dalley 1990:23.

<sup>581</sup> Dalley 1990:23-24.

<sup>582</sup> Dalley 1990:24, 26.

<sup>583</sup> Dalley 1990:26-27.

was worshipped in North Syria during the mid to late eighth century BC. Halpern<sup>584</sup> affirms that there certainly was a king with the Yahwistic name Iaubi'di in Hamath during the eighth century BC. A third example – not from cuneiform sources – is recorded in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>585</sup> King Tou – or Toi<sup>586</sup> – of Hamath, sent his son Hadoram – or Joram<sup>587</sup> – to congratulate king David, who had defeated the whole army of Hadadezer of Zobah.<sup>588</sup> Dalley<sup>589</sup> mentions that, unless Hadoram changed his name to Joram as a mark of respect when he went to Jerusalem, his name could be an indication that the people of Hamath adopted *Yahweh*-worship when they came under influence of the Israelites – 'or we may suppose that the worship of Yahweh was already indigenous in Hamath'.

It is unlikely that Azri-Yau and Yau-bi'di were two Israelite residents who became rulers in two different Syrian states, neither taking on a new name of the adopted nation's divine patronage.<sup>590</sup> Dalley<sup>591</sup> suggests that it is more probable 'that Azri-Yau and Yau-bi'di were indigenous rulers of two north Syrian states where Yahweh was worshipped as a major god'. There is the possibility that *Yahweh* was introduced in Hamath by Hebrews moving northwards from Sinai. Alternatively, it may have happened with the expansion of Israel under Jeroboam II during the eighth century BC. Most scholars, however, generally accept that the border of Israel did not extend as far as Hamath. According to 2 Kings 14:25, Jeroboam II – king of Israel – 'restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah'.<sup>592</sup> This statement suggests that the domain of the Northern Kingdom reached into the territory of Hamath, but only as far as the town Labu on its southern border.<sup>593</sup> Therefore,

---

<sup>584</sup> Halpern 2001:190.

<sup>585</sup> 1 Chronicles 18:9-10; 2 Samuel 8:9-10.

<sup>586</sup> Toi or Tou, king of the Syrian city-state Hamath, was a contemporary of the Israelite king David. The political significance of Toi's gift to David is not quite clear from the text in the Hebrew Bible. Some scholars interpret it that Hamath became a vassal state of David, whereas other scholars suggest that Israel and Hamath became allies. Toi, or Tou, is a well-attested Hurrian name, while his son's name, given as Hadoram (1 Chr 18:10) and as Joram (2 Sm 8:10), is Semitic; this is an indication of the complex cultural situation in Hamath during that period (Pitard 1992a:595). The reign of David is dated 1011/10-971/70 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:196).

<sup>587</sup> Joram – an abbreviated form of Jehoram – is the Israelite form of Hadoram. Joram could be a diplomatic name, reflecting Israel's influence in Hamath. Therefore, 'both names can be considered authentic references to the son of Tou' (Fretz 1992:17).

<sup>588</sup> Zobah, also known as Aram-Zobah, was a powerful Aramaean kingdom of southern Syria during the eleventh century BC. Three accounts of conflicts between Zobah and Israel are found in the Hebrew Bible (1 Sm 14:47; 2 Sm 8:3-8; 10:1-19). According to the accounts in 2 Samuel, it seems that Zobah was a dominant state in Syria during the latter part of the eleventh century BC, controlling most of the minor states surrounding it (Pitard 1992b:1108).

<sup>589</sup> Dalley 1990:27.

<sup>590</sup> It was the custom in the Ancient Near East that a god's name was an element in a king's name. Either the name of the national patron deity was used as divine element, or that of another major deity whose worship was important in that country (Dalley 1990:28).

<sup>591</sup> Dalley 1990:29.

<sup>592</sup> Halpern 2001:186. Scholars recognise a relationship between 2 Kings 14:25 and Amos 6:14.

<sup>593</sup> Halpern 2001:191.

when records found outside Israelite territory mention a person whose name is compounded with *Yahweh*, it should not be assumed that this person came from Israel or Judah, but rather from a Syrian city 'where people worshipped Yahweh as a major god in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC'.<sup>594</sup> Eerdmans<sup>595</sup> is also of the opinion that these kings of Hamath adopted Yahwistic names. Freedman and O'Connor<sup>596</sup> denote that, apart from the name of *ia-ú-bi'-di* – of which the meaning of the name is unclear – other names from East Semitic sources may also contain the Tetragrammaton.

Van der Toorn<sup>597</sup> believes that Dalley's claims that *Yahweh* was worshipped as "major god" in Northern Syria cannot be substantiated. He mentions that 'Yahweh was not worshipped in the West-Semitic world – despite affirmations to the contrary.' The three Yahwistic names from Syria – Azri-Yau, Yau-bi'di and Joram – comprise a remarkably small "body of evidence" that cannot be sustained. Yahwistic names are, furthermore, seldom found outside Israel.<sup>598</sup> *Ashima* was a North Syrian deity and thus the god of the people of Hamath.<sup>599</sup> Van der Toorn<sup>600</sup> concludes that the 'absence of the name 'Yahweh' in West-Semitic epigraphy (excepting the Mesha Stela) agrees well with the biblical evidence on Yahweh's origins'.

#### 4.3.13 *Anat-yahu* and the Elephantine papyri

Important papyri texts and documents, in no less than seven languages and scripts, were discovered on the island of Elephantine, situated in the Nile River,<sup>601</sup> opposite the ancient village of Syene.<sup>602</sup> These papyri describe, inter alia, the lives of a group of Jewish mercenaries and their families, who lived there during the sixth and fifth centuries BC. Although their date of arrival at Elephantine is unknown, they were well established by 525 BC.<sup>603</sup> Excavations at Elephantine revealed a Jewish temple<sup>604</sup> from Persian times where sacrifices were offered to *YHW*.<sup>605</sup> This temple was destroyed in 410 BC by the priests of *Khnum*<sup>606</sup> on Elephantine,

<sup>594</sup> Dalley 1990:32.

<sup>595</sup> Eerdmans 1948:25.

<sup>596</sup> Freedman & O'Connor 1986:508-509.

<sup>597</sup> Van der Toorn 1999e:910-911.

<sup>598</sup> Van der Toorn 1992:86, 88-89.

<sup>599</sup> Van der Toorn 1992:86. See 2 Kings 17:29-30.

<sup>600</sup> Van der Toorn 1995:244.

<sup>601</sup> For a description of Elephantine, see § 2.14.5. For a discussion of the papyri collections and its contents, see Porten (1996:1-27), as well as § 2.14.5.

<sup>602</sup> See description and footnote on Syene in § 2.14.5.

<sup>603</sup> See footnote on a papyrus, dated 407 BC, in § 2.14.5.

<sup>604</sup> See § 2.14.5 for a description of the temple.

<sup>605</sup> Instructions for the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is set out in the Passover Papyrus, dated 419 BC (Rosenberg 2004:6).

<sup>606</sup> *Khnum* was the ram-headed Egyptian god, who controlled the annual rising of the Nile (Willis 1993:39). See also a description of *Khnum* in a footnote in § 2.14.5.

who solicited the aid of Egyptian troops.<sup>607</sup> Despite a petition to the governor of Judah for assistance for the rebuilding of the temple, there was no support from Jerusalem. The Persian governor of Judah, however, granted permission for the reconstruction on certain conditions.<sup>608</sup>

These Jewish mercenaries probably originated from the former Northern Kingdom of Israel, which came – together with Judah – under the rule of Egypt after the death of Josiah.<sup>609</sup> Jewish soldiers were now fighting under Egyptian instruction and could also possibly have been taken to serve in Egypt. Stationed on Elephantine, they erected a shrine, probably on the lines of the Solomonic Temple.<sup>610</sup> These Jews were excluded from participation in any activities in Judah, which, in all likelihood, caused tension between them and the Jerusalem Jews.<sup>611</sup> The inhabitants of the seventh century BC former Northern Israel consisted mainly of Israelites and Aramaeans who shared Aramaic as their common language. They worshipped a multitude of deities. This religious pluralism was presumably carried over to Elephantine,<sup>612</sup> where the fifth century BC Jewish inhabitants were in many ways 'a syncretistic, non-traditional community'.<sup>613</sup>

The Aramaic papyri, from both Elephantine and Syene, were compiled over a period of no more than a century. This was during the years of Persian domination<sup>614</sup> with Aramaic as *lingua franca* of the Empire. The documents were written by skilled scribes for Jews and Aramaeans, as well as for settlers sharing the Aramaic language. These documents consist of letters and contracts.<sup>615</sup> Several of the legal documents and letters have references to, inter alia, 'YHW the God dwelling (in) Elephantine the fortress' and 'the Temple of YHW'.<sup>616</sup> Added

---

<sup>607</sup> See § 2.14.5 for a discussion of this incident.

<sup>608</sup> See § 2.14.5.

<sup>609</sup> Josiah, king of Judah, died in 609 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:197); 2 Kings 23:28-30.

<sup>610</sup> Rosenberg 2004:12.

<sup>611</sup> Ben Zvi 1995:141.

<sup>612</sup> Van der Toorn 1992:95. The deportees to Northern Israel came mainly from the northern regions of Babylon and North Syria (2 Ki 17:24) (Van der Toorn 1992:92). Their religious pluralism is evident, as described in 2 Kings 17:24-41.

<sup>613</sup> Lindenberg 2001:153.

<sup>614</sup> 539-331 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:198).

<sup>615</sup> Porten 1996:74.

<sup>616</sup> Porten 1996:80. See also the following references to YHW in the relevant Aramaic documents:

'the temple of YHW in Elephantine' (Porten 1996:107, 147).

'YHW the God' (Porten 1996:108, 137).

'priests of YHW the God' (Porten 1996:130).

'the Temple of YHW the God which is in Elephantine the fortress' (Porten 1996:140).

'praying to YHW the Lord/God of Heaven' (Porten 1996:142).

'on the altar of YHW the God' (Porten 1996:143, 147).

'YHW the God of Heaven' (Porten 1996:144).

'the Temple of YHW the God which is in Elephantine' (Porten 1996:146).

to these, the significance of a recorded oath in the name of *Anat-Yahu* – 'by the place of prostration and by AnatYHW'<sup>617</sup> – in the Elephantine papyri has influenced scholars' interpretation of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom inscriptions.<sup>618</sup> These epigraphic discoveries, which refer to "*Yahweh* and his *Asherah*," have shaped current views on the history of Israelite religion significantly.<sup>619</sup> Much has been written and discussed in recent years regarding the possibility that *Asherah*<sup>620</sup> was worshipped as female consort of *Yahweh*.<sup>621</sup> A large number of scholars support this theory, while other scholars disagree that any allusion to *Asherah* in the Israelite context is a reference to the Canaanite deity herself, but rather to a cult object symbolising her, and therefore, these scholars do not support the view that *Yahweh* had a female consort. Despite attempts by some scholars to interpret *Anat* in the "oath text" as a noun instead of a proper name, Van der Toorn<sup>622</sup> accepts that 'the evidence is unequivocal: the Jews of Elephantine knew a goddess Anat consort of Yahu'. He is therefore of the opinion that, in the light of the finds at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom, there are conclusive arguments to reconsider the origin and function of *Anat-Yahu*. Contrary to Van der Toorn, Maier<sup>623</sup> comprehends *Anat* – in the "oath text" context – as a noun meaning "providence", "sign" or "time". Therefore, *Anat-Yahu* should be read "providence/sign of *Yahweh*". *Anat* is thus a hypostasised<sup>624</sup> aspect or quality of *Yahweh*.

Although *Anat*<sup>625</sup> was known as goddess in Egypt, there is no evidence for her veneration in Israel, and apart from personal names, she is not depicted in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, lack of

---

'Temple of *YHW* the God' (Porten 1996:146, 151, 196, 217).

'the priests of *YHW*' (Porten 1996:147).

'swore to me by *YHW* the God in Elephantine' (Porten 1996:159).

'you swore to me by *YHW*' (Porten 1996:160).

'servitor to *YHW* in Elephantine' (Porten 1996:205).

'servitor to (of) *YHW* the God' (Porten 1996:212, 216, 223, 237, 241, 242, 245, 248, 251).

'Temple of *YHW*' (Porten 1996:213, 249).

'servitor of *YHW*' (Porten 1996:246).

'servitor of *YHW* the God dwelling (in) Elephantine the fortress' (Porten 1996:246).

<sup>617</sup> The following Aramaic "Oath Text" was discovered on an Elephantine papyrus: due to the lack of conclusive documents or witnesses regarding the transaction for a donkey, the court ordered a certain Menahem to swear in respect of the deal. The oath was written on a piece of papyrus scrap. The particulars of 'the oath (by the deity *Herem*?, in/by the place of prostration, and by *AnathYHW*) are quite unique and raise questions of religious symbiosis and swearing by a non-Jewish deity' (Porten 1996:266). For a detailed discussion of this Aramaic text, see Porten (1996:266-267).

<sup>618</sup> See § 4.3.9 and § 4.3.10.

<sup>619</sup> Van der Toorn 1992:80.

<sup>620</sup> See § 3.2 on *Asherah*.

<sup>621</sup> See the discussions on the veneration of female figurines in § 2.13, subtitle "Female figurines", the portrayal of *Asherah* – and the possible intimation of *Yahweh* – on the Taanach cult stand (in the same paragraph), as well as that on the occurrence of *Asherah* in the Masoretic Text, in § 3.2.2.

<sup>622</sup> Van der Toorn 1992:81.

<sup>623</sup> Maier 1992a:226.

<sup>624</sup> See footnote in § 3.2.2.

<sup>625</sup> For a discussion of *Anat/Anath*, see § 3.3.

biblical evidence for *Anat* intimates the absence of a cult devoted to her.<sup>626</sup> Prior to the translation of the Ugaritic texts<sup>627</sup> little was known about a Semitic goddess *Anat* in Syria-Palestine. These texts were the first to give a description of the deity. Although she was initially considered to be a fertility goddess, it is now evident that she was a war goddess,<sup>628</sup> 'depicted in the Ugaritic mythological texts as a volatile, independent, adolescent warrior and hunter'.<sup>629</sup> In the well-known Ugaritic "bloodbath" text,<sup>630</sup> her bloodthirsty nature is explicitly exhibited. There are striking points of comparability between this text and Psalm 23.<sup>631</sup> The etymology of her name has been extensively debated, with no conclusive results. Evidence at hand indicates her North-West Semitic origin.<sup>632</sup> She evidently developed amongst the North-Syrian Aramaeans and was introduced into Egypt during the mid-second millennium BC by the Hyksos<sup>633</sup> – Semitic-speaking people from the Levant who infiltrated Egypt and eventually took over.<sup>634</sup> At Avaris<sup>635</sup> she was honoured as the consort of a deity *Sutekh*.<sup>636</sup> After the expulsion of the Hyksos, her cult continued to flourish in Egypt.<sup>637</sup> During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties<sup>638</sup> she appeared in the Egyptian sources as a significant goddess of war who was incorporated into the Egyptian mythology.<sup>639</sup> It seems that Ramesses II<sup>640</sup> had a special preference for *Anat*. Statues depicting the pharaoh with the goddess have been found, as well as inscriptions wherein she is being petitioned. Egyptian representations of *Anat* portray her clothed, wearing a crown, either sitting or standing, armed or

<sup>626</sup> Smith 1990:61.

<sup>627</sup> See § 2.8, Ras Shamra tablets: Ugarit.

<sup>628</sup> Handy 1994:102-105.

<sup>629</sup> Day 1999:37.

<sup>630</sup> According to a passage in the *Ba'al* myth texts, *Anat* was up to her knees in blood when she wreaked havoc on her enemies (Day 2000:141).

<sup>631</sup> For an explanation of the points of contact between the "bloodbath text" (*KTU* 1.3ii:3-30) and Psalm 23, see footnote in § 3.3.

<sup>632</sup> Day 1999:36.

<sup>633</sup> The Hyksos Period refers to a time of political turmoil in Egypt. The Hyksos ruled in Egypt ca 1650-1570 BC (Hoffmeier 1994:270). See also § 3.3.

<sup>634</sup> Hoffmeier 1994:270.

<sup>635</sup> The Hyksos – meaning "rulers of the foreign lands" – ruled Egypt from the city of Avaris. The site of this city has not yet been found, but it probably lay near Qatana in the eastern delta (Oliphant 1992:50).

<sup>636</sup> *Sutekh*, also known as *Set*, *Seth*, was the evil brother of the Egyptian god *Osiris*. He finally became the incarnation of the spirit of evil, and was in eternal opposition to the spirit of good. He was rough and wild – an abomination to the Egyptians. He was the personification of the arid desert, in opposition to the fertile earth. Under the domination of the Hyksos, *Set* was identified with their own warrior god *Sutekh*. They had a temple built for him in their capital Avaris. *Set* was depicted as a beast with a thin, curved snout, straight square-cut ears and a stiff forked tail (Guirand 1996:19-20).

<sup>637</sup> Guirand 1996:76.

<sup>638</sup> Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties: 1570-1185 BC (Clayton 1994:98).

<sup>639</sup> Day 1986:388-389. Violent quarrels between the Egyptian gods *Horus* – the sky god who took on the form of a falcon – and *Seth* – see footnote in this paragraph – were occasionally central elements in Egyptian myths. In a letter to the divine council during such a quarrel, *Neith* – goddess of war and hunting – proposed that two foreign goddesses, *Anat* and *Astarte*, be given to *Seth* as compensation for his renouncing of the throne to *Horus* (Willis 1993:44, 51).

<sup>640</sup> Ramesses II reigned during the Nineteenth Dynasty (1279-1212 BC) (Clayton 1994:146).

unarmed. She was closely associated with *Ashtoreth*.<sup>641</sup> An inscription on a relief from Thebes – in Egypt – refers to *qds'-strt-'nt* indicating a fusion with the goddesses *qudšu/athirat* [*ashtoreth*]<sup>642</sup> and *astarte*.<sup>643</sup>

Maier<sup>644</sup> mentions that inscriptions referring to *Anat* come primarily from Cyprus. One of these inscriptions – from Lapethos, dated the fourth century BC – is a Phoenician-Greek bilingual. In the Phoenician section *Anat* is identified with *Athena*,<sup>645</sup> who is mentioned in the Greek section. *Anat* is called "the refuge of the living". Evidence from Palmyra indicates that the memory of *Anat* probably continued until the third century AD. She was also, presumably, one of the goddesses incorporated in the composite deity *Atargatis*<sup>646</sup> – the Syrian deity who was eventually venerated throughout the Mediterranean world.

*Anat-Yahu* is not mentioned otherwise than in the Elephantine papyri. Therefore, in the light of the virtual absence of the worship of *Anat* in Palestine and Phoenicia, 'it is unlikely that the association of *Anat* with Yahweh (*Yahu*) has ancient roots in Israel'.<sup>647</sup> On the surface it thus seems that *Anat-Yahu* was created by the Egyptian Jews living in a syncretistic environment. It is, however, improbable that a Jewish minority group – who otherwise preserved their traditional religious culture – would invent a new deity. The goddess, on the other hand, has a parallel in *Anat-Bethel*,<sup>648</sup> which is mentioned twice in Neo-Assyrian treaties<sup>649</sup> that precede the Elephantine documents by more than two centuries. The origins of *Anat-Bethel* – who was introduced into Egypt by West Semitic immigrants – may, therefore, shed some light on the roots of *Anat-Yahu*.<sup>650</sup>

<sup>641</sup> Maier 1992a:226.

<sup>642</sup> *Qudšu* was an Egyptian fertility deity, at times seen in the form of the Egyptian *Hathor* (Willis 1993:51). See *Hathor*, incorporated in a footnote in § 2.13 – subtitle "Taanach" – as well as in a footnote in § 2.14.1.

<sup>643</sup> Day 1986:389.

<sup>644</sup> Maier 1992a:226.

<sup>645</sup> See footnote in § 3.3.

<sup>646</sup> *Atargatis*, the Syrian goddess, was worshipped in Hellenistic and later times. Her main cult centre was in the Syrian city Hierapolis-Bambyke, north-east of Aleppo. She was widely known as *Dea Syria*. Her name is of Aramaic origin, with elements of the names of *Astarte* (see § 3.4) and *Anat*. Greek inscriptions from Hierapolis indicate that she was the consort of the West Semitic deity *Hadad* (see § 3.5). She was depicted as a mermaid, surrounded by dolphins (Carroll 1992:509).

<sup>647</sup> Van der Toorn 1992:83.

<sup>648</sup> The name *Anat-Bethel*, or *Anat of Bethel*, signifies "*Anat*, the consort of *Bethel*". The name *Bethel* – "House of *El*" – originally may have referred to open cult places (Röllig 1999:174).

<sup>649</sup> Esarhaddon's Treaty – the treaty between the Assyrian king Esarhaddon and Baal I, the king of Tyre – mentions <sup>d</sup>*Ba-a-ti-dingir.meš* and <sup>d</sup>*A-na-ti-Ba-a[a-ti-dingi]r.meš*, probably pronounced *Bayt-'el* and *Anat-Bayt-'el*. This treaty was probably concluded after the conquest and destruction of Sidon in 676 BC. The same names appear in the list of divine witnesses invoked in the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon in 672 BC (Van der Toorn 1992:83). The text of the treaty between Esarhaddon and Baal I can be found in Borger, R, *Die Inschriften Assarhaddons Königs von Assyrien*, AfO Beiheft 9, 1956, 109 § 69 iv 6, and that of the Succession Treaty as text no 6 in Parpola, S & Watanabe, K, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, 1988 (Van der Toorn 1992:99).

<sup>650</sup> Van der Toorn 1992:83.

Although *Bethel* is mentioned in the list of oath-gods in the Neo-Assyrian treaties, it does not necessarily mean that this deity was of Mesopotamian origin. Several Aramaic personal names of the Neo-Babylonian<sup>651</sup> and Achaemenid periods<sup>652</sup> are composed with the name of *Bethel*,<sup>653</sup> which could indicate that the god was venerated by the Aramaeans who were in contact with the Jewish community at Elephantine. A lengthy prayer – partly preserved on Papyrus Amherst – by an Aramaic community in Egypt, invoked the god *Bethel* as their saviour.<sup>654</sup> Besides *Yahweh*, *Bethel* was also worshipped by the Elephantine Jews as *Ešem-Bethel*<sup>655</sup> and *Anat-Bethel*. These three deities probably formed a kind of triad with *Anat-Bethel* as the mother and *Ešem-Bethel* the son. In a judicial declaration *Herem-Bethel* is mentioned possibly as another hypostasis of this Aramaic god.<sup>656</sup> The cult of *Bethel* and *Anat-Bethel* – as Aramaean deities – was probably confined to North Syria. Their presence in Egypt would imply that they were brought there by North Syrian Aramaeans.<sup>657</sup> Although scholars dispute the likelihood that *Bethel* was worshipped by the Israelites in their homeland, Jeremiah 48:13 mentions, 'then Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence'. A comparison with *Chemosh*, the supreme god of the Moabites, 'suggests that Bethel played a prominent role in Israel'.<sup>658</sup>

The deportees who came to live in seventh century BC Northern Israel maintained their religious traditions, but also adopted *Yahweh* – the deity of their new country – into their pantheon. 'They feared the Lord [*Yahweh*] but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away.'<sup>659</sup> It is therefore possible that *Bethel* was introduced into Israel at this time of "religious cross-fertilisation", with the result that *Yahweh* was subsequently identified with other major deities, such as *Bethel*. *Anat-Yahu* could thus have been created on the model of *Anat-Bethel* by the Aramaean deportees who had adopted *Yahu* [*Yahweh*] into their cult. Many elements of the diversified population of

<sup>651</sup> Neo-Babylonians: during the ninth century BC, the Chaldeans of southern Babylon were mentioned for the first time in cuneiform sources. By the middle of the eighth century BC they became contenders for the Babylonian throne, advancing a transition from Kassite to Chaldean political domination (Arnold 1994:57).

<sup>652</sup> Achaemenids: Persian dynasty founded by Cyrus the Great in the sixth century BC. His successors, Darius I and Xerxes I, created the great Persian Empire (Oxford University Press 1964c:1380).

<sup>653</sup> An example is: *É.DINGIR<sup>mes</sup>-da-la-*, "Bethel saved me"; compare *byt'ldlny* (Röllig 1999:174).

<sup>654</sup> Röllig 1999:174. Papyrus Amherst 63 xii 11-19, an Aramaic version of Psalm 20, signifies Aramaean influence on the religion of the Israelites (Van der Toorn 1992:91).

<sup>655</sup> The god *Ešem* – or *Ašim* – occurs as a theophorous element (see "theophoric name" incorporated in a footnote in § 2.3) in Aramaic anthroponyms (see "anthroponomy" incorporated in a footnote in § 3.6) from Egypt. *Ašim* could be identical with the god *Ašima* from Hamath (see "*Ašima*" incorporated in a footnote in § 4.3.12) (Van der Toorn 1992:86).

<sup>656</sup> Röllig 1999:174.

<sup>657</sup> Van der Toorn 1992:85-87.

<sup>658</sup> Röllig 1999:175.

<sup>659</sup> 2 Kings 17:33.



the seventh century BC Northern Israel and its religious pluralism recurred at Elephantine in the fifth century BC. Both Elephantine and Syene were colonised by Jews and Aramaeans worshipping those gods who were venerated in Northern Israel two centuries earlier. Therefore, despite referring to Elephantine as a Jewish – Judean or Judahite – colony, the religion of the inhabitants was Israelite. The concept of *Anat-Yahu* should thus 'be regarded as an Aramaean creation, elicited by the identification of Yahu with Bethel',<sup>660</sup> with the result that *Anat* – the consort of Bethel<sup>661</sup> – was accepted as the appropriate consort of *Yahu*.<sup>662</sup>

Rose<sup>663</sup> denotes that the three-consonant divine name *Yhw* in the Elephantine texts probably represents a form older than the biblical *Yhwh*. Combinations of this name, such as "*Anath-Yahwê*" [*Yahu*], cannot be reconciled with the norm of the faith in *Yahweh* as proclaimed in the biblical texts. Day,<sup>664</sup> however, is of the opinion that it is conceivable that in certain religious circles the concept of a consort for *Yahweh* – such as *Asherah* or *Anat* – was credible. *Asherah* was originally the consort of *El*, as *Anat* was that of *Ba'al*. In ancient Israel *Yahweh* was equated with *El* and *Ba'al*, and therefore both *Asherah* and *Anat* would have been acceptable as a consort for *Yahweh*. Van der Toorn<sup>665</sup> mentions that 'the concept of *Anat-Yahu* is an illustration of the cultural symbiosis which has marked the Israelites and the Aramaeans living in Egypt'. This goddess should be regarded as an Aramaean creation, her theological paternity, therefore, being ultimately Aramaean. Sperling<sup>666</sup> suggests that *Anat-Yahu* was 'an apparent androgynous<sup>667</sup> blend of *Yahweh* with the ancient Canaanite goddess *Anat*'. Although some scholars find the idea of a consort for *Yahweh* offensive and attempt to explain it away, Kenyon<sup>668</sup> indicates that, as more evidence appears, arguments in favour thereof tend to be corroborated.

#### 4.3.14 Résumé, evaluation and conclusion

In accordance with the Kenite hypothesis – see paragraph 5.3 – I theorise that *Yahweh* was venerated by the Kenites and Midianites before the time of Moses. I furthermore postulate that marginal groups – mainly nomad metalworkers – who migrated from the South to

---

<sup>660</sup> Van der Toorn 1992:97

<sup>661</sup> Röllig 1999:174.

<sup>662</sup> Van der Toorn 1992:88, 93-95, 97-98.

<sup>663</sup> Rose 1992:1003.

<sup>664</sup> Day 1986:392-393.

<sup>665</sup> Van der Toorn 1992:97.

<sup>666</sup> Sperling 1987:5.

<sup>667</sup> See "androgynous" incorporated in a footnote in § 3.2.1.

<sup>668</sup> Kenyon 1987:124.

different regions in the Ancient Near East, and had the opportunity to convey their beliefs, could have been instrumental in spreading knowledge about a god *Ya*, or the God *Yahweh*.

An analysis of the appearance of Ancient Near Eastern divinities indicates that analogous deities were active in widely-spread pantheons and accepted by various nations.<sup>669</sup> Although they had different but similar names, they were actually the same deities. Epigraphic finds, which include references to *Ya*-related names, have been recovered over a large area of the Ancient Near East. The *Ya*-names could thus be evaluated on the premise that, in agreement to the phenomenon of analogous deities appearing in different pantheons, a deity *Ya* could similarly have emanated from various regions in the Ancient Near East. Therefore, this deity could – or, maybe could not – be related in some way to the Israelite God *Yahweh*. In the previous paragraphs a number of epigraphic finds containing the name *Yahweh*, or a form thereof, are briefly discussed and hereafter summarised.

The discovery of thousands of texts from the royal archives of third millennium BC Ebla has significant advantages for both biblical and Ancient Near Eastern studies. Some of these texts have references to *Il* and *Ya*. The term *Il* is applied either as generic term for "god" or for a divinity *Il/El*, known particularly from the Ugaritic texts. The term *Ya* could be a shorter form of a proper name containing the name of a deity. These texts contain, inter alia, personal names such as *Mi-kà-Il/Mi-ka-Yà*, *En-na-Il/En-na-Yà*, *Iš-ra-Il/Iš-ra-Yà*, which, according to Pettinato,<sup>670</sup> demonstrate that *Ya* had the same value as *Il*, thus referring to a specific divinity. Pettinato builds his argument on the occurrence that before the reign of Ebrum – seemingly dated the same time as Sargon of Akkad, who is dated 2334-2279 BC – personal names incorporated the theophoric element *-Il* while, from the time of Ebrum onwards, *-Il* was replaced by *-Ya*. He deduces that *Ya* could be a shortened form of *Yaw*. Scholars generally dismiss Pettinato's claim. Archi,<sup>671</sup> for instance, indicates that *-ya* is a common hypocoristic ending, which usually denotes forms of endearment, while Van der Toorn<sup>672</sup> states that a god *Ya* is not mentioned in any of the god lists. He is therefore of the opinion that Pettinato's assertion is unsubstantiated. Dahood,<sup>673</sup> however, points out that, seemingly, a god *Yo* was venerated by the early Arabs, Edomites and Canaanites. It is therefore not improbable that a god *Ya* was worshipped by the Eblaites, 'since the long *a* in Eblaitic becomes long *o* in southern

---

<sup>669</sup> See discussions in Chapter 3, particularly § 3.2, § 3.3, § 3.5 and § 3.6.

<sup>670</sup> Pettinato 1976:48.

<sup>671</sup> Archi 1979:556-560.

<sup>672</sup> Van der Toorn 1999e:911.

<sup>673</sup> Dahood 1981:607-608.

dialects, the equation  $y\bar{a}$  equals  $y\bar{o}$  can readily be granted'. Although Pettinato<sup>674</sup> denies that he identified Eblaite *Ya* or *Yaw* with biblical *Yahweh*, Freedman<sup>675</sup> nonetheless mentions that the Ebla tablets do not hold the origins of Israel.

As at Tell Mardikh-Ebla, Tell Hariri – the ancient Syrian city Mari – yielded thousands of cuneiform tablets from the royal archives. Descriptions in some of these texts are important for the understanding of the Patriarchal Period. The tribe of the Benjaminites, as well as the *ḥabiru* is also mentioned; the latter apparently being an ethnic group operating as propertyless and rootless semi-nomads, disrupting and destabilising social order, particularly in Canaanite regions. Some scholars identify the Hebrews as a branch of the *ḥabiru*. The name *El Shadday*, God Almighty, which appears in the Hebrew Bible in connection with the patriarchs, may be found amongst proper names at Mari – such as *Ša-du-um-la-bi*. The Tetragrammaton was probably unknown at Mari, unless it could be identified with names such as *Ia-wi-el*, or *Ya-ḥwu-malik*. Some names of rulers or officials incorporate the element *-ya*. MacLaurin<sup>676</sup> is of the opinion that a name *Yau* was known at Mari. Despite these names incorporating theophoric elements, there is no direct indication that they are related to *Yahweh*.

A thirteenth century BC Egyptian text, as well as Amenhotep III's Topographical List,<sup>677</sup> mentions 'Yhw [*Yahu*] in the land of the shasu'.<sup>678</sup> Additional thirteenth and twelfth centuries BC Egyptian data<sup>679</sup> identify the nomadic *Shasu* with the tribes of Edom and with the land of Seir. Although the Egyptian evidence nowhere connects Edom and Seir directly, it does mention that both regions were peopled by *Shasu*. The Hebrew Bible, however, frequently links the two regions. As the *ḥabiru*, the *Shasu* were unruly, troublesome people unsettling the peaceful mountain regions of Canaan. They were widespread, but particularly identified as coming forth from Edom in southern Transjordan. Some scholars associate the Proto-Israelites with the *Shasu* and *ḥabiru*. The later Israelite community, therefore, probably included some of these Bedouins. A number of scholars disagree that "Seir" in the Egyptian texts refers to the territory in Edom, indicating that "Seir" in the relevant texts was written with a duplicated *-r*, while it is written with one *-r* in other Egyptian texts. These scholars point out that identifiable place names, which appear with the Seir in question, all belong to

---

<sup>674</sup> Pettinato 1980:204.

<sup>675</sup> Freedman 1980:202.

<sup>676</sup> MacLaurin 1962:444.

<sup>677</sup> See footnote in § 4.3.4.

<sup>678</sup> Nakai 2003:141.

<sup>679</sup> See footnote in § 2.6 regarding the Egyptian Papyrus Anastasi VI, as well as a footnote in the same paragraph referring to "letters" by Ramesses II and Ramesses III.

central Syria. However, the raid on Seir, referred to by Ramesses III, could be linked to Egyptian mining interests at Timnah, which is near Elath, and was thus in close proximity to Edom.

Another Egyptian reference that could also be linked to the *Shasu*, appears in one of the Amarna Letters.<sup>680</sup> The Egyptian king warns the mayor of Tyre against the *Ia-we*. It is unlikely that the pharaoh would be bothered about an unimportant individual. This *Ia-we* could thus be either a generic name – like the *Shasu-Yhw* of the Egyptian texts – or the name of a leader of a group of formidable enemies. As indicated earlier in this paragraph, it seems that the *Shasu* and *habiru* were connected in some way; the latter were employed as mercenaries. De Moor<sup>681</sup> is tempted to connect this *ia-we* with the warriors of *Yahweh*.

Archaic poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible preserve the memory of a topographical link between *Yahweh* and the southern regions – mentioning in particular Sinai, Seir, Mount Paran, Edom and Teman.<sup>682</sup> Biblical evidence on the topographical background of *Yahweh* therefore supports the Egyptian reference to "the land of the *Shasu*-Bedouins". It thus seems that the origin of *Yahweh* worship should be searched for – as early as the fourteenth century BC – among the *Shasu* of Edom in the regions of Mount Seir.

De Moor<sup>683</sup> identifies a certain Beya as the "real ruler" of Egypt in the latter part of the Nineteenth Dynasty. He suggests that Beya was a Semitic name – possibly Yahwistic – and identifies this "ruler" with Moses. Hess,<sup>684</sup> however, indicates that the name resembles the Egyptian name Peya, which has a hypocoristic ending *piyy*. Beya could therefore be a West Semitic hypocoristicon.

A cuneiform alphabetical script was revealed on tablets excavated at Ras Shamra, where the remains were uncovered of the ancient city Ugarit in northern Syria. These texts – mainly of mythological character – furnish new information on the religion of Syria and Canaan in the second millennium BC. The single occurrence of the name *Yw* – as *yw'elt* – appears in a damaged mythological text. Scholars have suggested a reading of, "the name of my son is *yw'Elat*, or, *Yw*, the son of *'Elat*, wife of *Il*". The rest of the text refers to *Ym* (*Yam*), deity of the

---

<sup>680</sup> See § 2.5.

<sup>681</sup> De Moor 1997:126.

<sup>682</sup> See footnote in § 4.3.4 for the particular texts in the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>683</sup> De Moor 1997:214-227.

<sup>684</sup> Hess 1991:182.

sea. According to De Moor,<sup>685</sup> the mythological texts indicate that *Ilu*, *Yw/Yammu* and *Ba'lu* were all involved in a struggle for control over the kingship of the pantheon. Therefore, contrary to the proposal of scholars that *yw* could be a by-form of *ym*, De Moor<sup>686</sup> suggests that *yw* might represent *yawê/yahwê* and that the possibility cannot be rejected 'that the Ugaritic god *Yw* is identical to *YHWH*', but agrees that it cannot be interpreted without doubt as an abbreviation for *Yahweh*. Other scholars, however, indicate that there is no evidence that the name *Yw* – which occurs only once in the Ugaritic texts – refers to the Israelite God. The fragmentary nature of this text does not contribute to the identification thereof. Yet, in both Hebrew and Ugaritic, theophoric names seem to indicate that *YH/YW* was an independent divine name. *YHW*, possibly being an earlier form of the Tetragrammaton, could thus be another way of writing the form *YW*.

Names found in the Israelite area containing the divine element *yw/yh/hw* are automatically assessed as being "Yahwist". The question arises whether such names from a non-Israelite context, should be evaluated as Yahwist. An Akkadian text discovered at Ugarit refers to a woman called *eli-ia-wa*. A similar example of a Hittite name was found. Considering these examples, Binger<sup>687</sup> suggests that the argument for 'a divinity bearing the name of *Yahweh* or *Yaw*' in Bronze Age Syria-Palestine is justified. This would, however, result therein that the name *Yahweh* loses its significance as an exclusive Israelite name, becoming just another god of Syria-Palestine.

The ancient site of Alalakh in northern Syria rendered texts with parallel passages in the Hebrew Bible. There are also texts referring to the *habiru*. In one of the census lists from the period 1550-1473 BC a personal name *ia-we-e* appears, which Hess<sup>688</sup> initially considered to be possibly identified with *Yahweh*. These lists furthermore provide useful information regarding social classes and subgroups, as well as Hurrian names and loan words contributing to the knowledge of the Hurrian language. The name *ia-we-e* is unusual for Late Bronze Age names known from Alalakh and elsewhere. However, similar Middle Bronze Age names – which form part of the Amorite language stratum – do occur in places such as Mari. The latter names have been grouped together as *ia-PI* type names, appearing as a verb – as a form of the *hwy* root – and first element in a sentence name, followed by the name of a deity or a hypocoristic suffix. The *PI*-sign has different values of which the reading *wi* could be useful if

<sup>685</sup> De Moor 1997:108, 165-166.

<sup>686</sup> De Moor 1997:165-166.

<sup>687</sup> Binger 1997:35.

<sup>688</sup> Hess 1991:186.

*ia-wi* is connected with the *hwy* root. Thus, a name *ia-wi* may be related to the later *ia-we-e* from Alalakh, with a vowel shift in the Amorite from  $\bar{i}$  to  $\bar{e}$ . The name could also possibly extend into the break on the tablet, reading *ia-we-e* or *ia-we-e-a*, as the result of the linking of an initial *-e* of a divine name, or a hypocoristic suffix *e-a*. According to Hess,<sup>689</sup> both *ia-wi* and *ia-we-e* should be identified as early Amorite verbal forms, and not as divine names. He furthermore indicates that, although one is tempted to do so, these names should not be associated with *Yahweh*.

One of the most well-known Ancient Near Eastern inscriptions is on the Mesha Stele, also known as the Moabite Stone. This inscription, dated ca 840-820 BC, is written in the name of Mesha, king of the Moabites. It describes the successful campaign of the Moabites against the Israelites and has a direct bearing on the contents of 2 Kings 3:14-27 in the Hebrew Bible, although the outcome of the battle differs in the two reports. There are, however, enough similarities to assume that both texts refer to the same historical event. The significance of the inscription on the Mesha Stele lies therein that it explicitly mentions Israel's God *Yahweh*,<sup>690</sup> which is the earliest known West Semitic text mentioning *Yahweh*. In this account, to all appearances, *Yahweh* is presented as the official God of the Israelites. On account of the close relationship between the Moabite and Hebrew languages, the meaning of certain items of vocabulary is confirmed mutually in the two languages. Since certain points in this external information contradict the biblical account, an earlier arrangement in the biblical text – before the redaction process – could possibly be recovered. This external material, furthermore, describes Israel's religious profile to some degree. The inscription testifies that *Yahweh* was an Israelite deity, worshipped at a sanctuary at Nebo in the Transjordanian territory.

A much-debated inscription – *bytdwd* – has been found on fragments excavated at Tel Dan. A similar text has been identified on the Mesha Stele. Lemaire<sup>691</sup> proposes that the Mesha text should be read 'Beth-[Da]vid', designating the kingdom of Judah, thereby supporting the same reading of the Tel Dan inscription.

Inscriptions and drawings discovered at Kuntillet 'Ajrud – a site in the north-eastern region of Sinai – have resulted in many debates concerning the possibility that the Israelites regarded

---

<sup>689</sup> Hess 1991:188.

<sup>690</sup> '... Go, take Nebo from Israel!

... And from there, I took th[e ves](18)sels of YHWH, and I hauled them before the face of Chemosh' (Smelik 1992:63-65).

<sup>691</sup> Lemaire 2004:367-369.

*Asherah* as the consort of *Yahweh*. This site, close to important crossroads, probably served as a caravanserai, and maybe also as a wayside shrine for travellers. Meshel<sup>692</sup> suggests that it was inhabited by a small group of priests, and could also have been frequented by local tribes. Two pithoi, each with inscriptions, were excavated at the site; the one reading:

'may you be blessed by Yahweh  
of Shomron [Samaria] and his Asherah'

and the other,

'... and be blessed by Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah. ...'.

Many scholars agree that these epigraphic finds, supported by evidence from the Taanach cult stands,<sup>693</sup> endorse the theory that, both in Israel and Judah, *Asherah* was venerated as consort of *Yahweh*. These finds furthermore link *Yahweh* topographically to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, as well as to the South. Perspectives on the religion of the Israelites have been influenced significantly by these inscriptions. The wording of the benedictions and the surroundings where they were discovered, point to folk religion. Apart from the inscriptions various drawings were found depicting, inter alia, a cow and suckling calf, *Bes*-like figures, a lyre player, figures seemingly in gestures of prayer, and two ibexes nibbling at a tree. Scholars differ in their interpretation of these drawings, particularly in that of the two *Bes*-like figures. The Egyptian dwarf-god *Bes* was often depicted in an erotic context. Some scholars suggest that these two figures represent a male bovine deity and his smaller consort in a traditional man-and-wife manner, thus portraying the divine couple "*Yahweh* and his *Asherah*". The smaller figure signifies the idea of "walking behind" as part of the marital metaphor. Some scholars, however, are of the opinion that the "*Asherah*" in these inscriptions denotes a cult object symbolising the goddess, who, alongside *Yahweh*, was invoked as a source of blessing. Nonetheless, it seems that a substantial number of Israelites believed that *Yahweh* had a partner or spouse. The popularity of syncretistic Yahwism possibly influenced the eighth century BC prophet Hosea to appropriate a theology wherein *Yahweh* had a "wife" named Israel.

An inscription, dated ca 725 BC, was discovered on a pillar of a burial cave close to Khirbet 'el-Qom.<sup>694</sup> On the engraving are a carved outstretched human hand and a blessing formula,

<sup>692</sup> Meshel 1992:108-109.

<sup>693</sup> See § 2.13 under the subtitle "Taanach".

<sup>694</sup> Identified with biblical Makkedah, approximately ten kilometres south-east of Lachish.

which reads

' . . . . Blessed is Uriyahu by Yahweh.

... he has been saved

By his a/Asherah. . . . !

The nature of the blessing suggests that an appeal invoked in the name of *Asherah* could influence *Yahweh*. It therefore appears that the Israelites knew *Yahweh* whom they called by name, as well as other deities, such as *Asherah*, who they seemingly knew as the consort of *Yahweh*.

Archaeological finds, such as the inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom, seem to justify the theory that the Israelites regarded *Asherah* as the consort of *Yahweh*.

Akkadian and Sumerian texts refer to Bedouin invaders from the north-western Syrian plains as Amorites. Parallels in personal Amorite names provide an important chronological framework for the name traditions underlying early biblical traditions. As no writing system is known for Amorite, personal names are the only direct evidence available for this language. Most of their names are "sentence names" which include verbs as well as other parts of speech. Van der Toorn<sup>695</sup> indicates that Amorite theophoric names which incorporate the element *Yahwi/yawi* could be linked to the name *Yahweh*. He furthermore denotes that names, such as *Ya(h)wi-la*, do not attest to a cult of *Yahweh* but 'merely elucidate the etymology of his name'. Amorite personal names from Mari – *Yahwi-ki-Addu* and *Yahwi-ki-An* – may be read as having a Yahwistic theophoric element. The annals of Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria refer to a North-Syrian prince Azri-yau of Jaudi, while Egyptian records mention the toponym *Ya-h-wa* in a Bedouin area in Syria.

The Assyrian tablet referring to the defection of the inhabitants of Hamath to the North-Syrian Azri-Yau, was broken and restored to read 'Izri-Yau the Judean'. Although scholars suggest that Izri-Yau could be a phonetic variant of Azri-Yau, whom they identify with biblical Azariah also known as king Uzziah of Judah, Dalley<sup>696</sup> argues that Uzziah could not be the Azri-Yau mentioned in the Assyrian campaign. She concludes that Azri-Yau – who had a *Yahweh*-bearing name – was a North Syrian ruler, probably of a small state Hattarika, between Aleppo and Hamath. Other examples that reinforce Dalley's<sup>697</sup> suggestion that *Yahweh*

---

<sup>695</sup> Van der Toorn 1995:244.

<sup>696</sup> Dalley 1990:23-27.

<sup>697</sup> Dalley 1990:26-29.

was worshipped in North Syria during the mid to late eighth century BC, are an anti-Assyrian coalition during 720/719 BC led by Yau-bi'di, king of Hamath, as well as an incident recorded in the Hebrew Bible. In the latter instance, king Tou – or Toi – of Hamath sent his son Hadoram – or Joram – to praise king David for his victory over the army of Hadadezer. Azri-Yau and Yau-bi'di would thus have been rulers of two North Syrian states, where – according to Dalley<sup>698</sup> – 'Yahweh was worshipped as a major God'; *Yahweh* could have been introduced in Hamath by Hebrews moving northwards from Sinai.

Papyri texts and documents discovered on the island of Elephantine, situated in the Nile river, describe the lives of a group of Jewish mercenaries and their families who lived there during the sixth and fifth centuries BC. Excavations revealed a Jewish temple on the island where sacrifices were offered to *YHW*. Egyptian priests of the god *Khnum* destroyed this temple in 410 BC. Despite a petition to the Judean governor, there was no support from Jerusalem for the restoration of this temple. These mercenaries probably originated from the former kingdom of Northern Israel, where the inhabitants consisted mainly of Israelites and Aramaeans. They worshipped a multitude of deities and presumably carried this religious pluralism over to Elephantine. Several of the discovered papyri letters and legal documents have references to, inter alia, '*YHW* the God', 'the Temple of *YHW*' or 'the priests of *YHW*'. Among these documents an oath in the name of *Anat-Yahu* has been recorded. This discovery, together with that of the inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet 'el-Qom referring to "*Yahweh* and his *Asherah*", have influenced scholars' views on the Israelite religion significantly. Despite attempts by some scholars to interpret *Anat* in this "oath text" as a noun instead of a proper name, it appears that the Jews of Elephantine knew a goddess *Anat* that they seemingly linked to *Yahu* as consort.

Although *Anat* was known as goddess in Egypt, there is no evidence that she was worshipped in Israel. The Ugaritic mythological texts portray her as a volatile war goddess. It seems that she was from North-West Semitic origin, probably introduced into Egypt during the mid-second millennium BC by the Hyksos, where she was honoured as the consort of a deity *Sutekh* – also known as the Egyptian *Seth*. During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties *Anat* appeared in the Egyptian mythology as a significant war goddess. An Egyptian inscription indicates a fusion of the goddesses *qudšu*, *ashtoreth* and *anat*.

---

<sup>698</sup> Dalley 1990:29.

*Anat-Yahu* is not mentioned otherwise than in the Elephantine papyri and, therefore, it is unlikely that the combination *Anat* and *Yahweh* (*Yahu*) had its roots among the Israelites. It is also improbable that a small number of Jews living in Egypt would invent a new deity. *Anat-Yahu* has, however, a parallel in *Anat-Bethel* which is mentioned twice in Neo-Assyrian treaties that precede the Elephantine documents. Aramaic personal names indicate that *Bethel* was venerated by Aramaeans who had contact with the Jews at Elephantine, the latter who also worshipped *Ešem-Bethel* and *Anat-Bethel* besides *Yahweh*. *Bethel* was probably introduced into seventh century BC Northern Israel by Aramaean deportees who adopted *Yahweh* (*Yahu*) into their cult. Together with *Anat* – who was of North-West Semitic origin – these deportees thus created *Anat-Yahu* on the model of *Anat-Bethel*. Therefore it is likely that, although *Anat* was long known in Egypt, the association of *Anat* with *Yahu* (*Yahweh*) was an Aramaean creation brought to Elephantine.

As Binger<sup>699</sup> has been quoted earlier in paragraph 4.3.1, 'extra-biblical material has a number of common potential errors and problems'. Although it is generally expected that such material has not undergone various redactions, it cannot be assumed, for instance, that all scribes spelled words the same way. Scribal errors and other inconsistencies, therefore, could lead to misinterpretation or the incorrect reading of a word or text. The fragmentary state of many of the excavated tablets and other finds also impede the correct reading of texts, with the result that names, which have been incorrectly identified, are being analysed.

All the finds briefly discussed and summarised in the foregoing paragraphs, incorporate either the name *Yahweh* or *Ya*-related names. The map enclosed at the end of this chapter indicates where these different finds have been located. Although only a number of relevant finds that have been discovered are pointed out, it is evident that *Ya*-names appear over a wide region of the Ancient Near East. From Egypt in the West to Mari in the East, Kuntillet 'Ajrud in the South and Alalakh in the North, some form of *Ya*-names have been revealed. The widespread appearance of these names confirms the phenomenon that beliefs, customs and names have been transmitted from one area to another by migrating groups. In accordance with the Kenite hypothesis, which maintains that *Yahweh*-worship originated in the South amongst marginalised nomadic groups, it is thus plausible that these groups spread their beliefs over a large area of the Ancient Near East. Therefore it is not unfounded to postulate that some of the *Ya*-names that have been discovered signify some form of *Ya*-religion, thus implying that

---

<sup>699</sup> Binger 1997:26.

a god *Ya* was venerated elsewhere than only in the South by the Kenites and Midianites. This theory is furthermore supported by the phenomenon of Ancient Near Eastern deities with similar names and the same attributes appearing over a widespread area in different pantheons.

Although I theorise that a god *Ya* – or gods with cognate names – could have been venerated in different regions of the Ancient Near East (see Map 3 at the end of this chapter) before the Israelites worshipped *Yahweh*, it does not necessarily mean that all the *Ya*-related names signify a god *Ya*. It is, however, significant that this name appears as early as the mid to late third millennium BC in Ebla and until the fifth century BC in Egypt. I am, however, not suggesting that – apart from the Kenites – there were groups who, without doubt, worshipped *Yahweh* before and after the emergence of Israel. I am merely – to my mind – posing a legitimate question on this matter. Surely, *Yahweh* does not need to have been confined to only one population segment in the Ancient Near East.

#### 4.4 Phenomenon of theophoric names

##### 4.4.1 Introduction

A theophoric name – which could be a personal name or a toponym – has, as one of its elements, a divine name or epithet. Many Semitic names have a combination of two or three elements to form verbal or nominal sentences. 'Theophoric names thus represent declarations about or expressions of petition to the deity mentioned in the name.'<sup>700</sup> Names in the Ancient Near East were often selected for their meaning.<sup>701</sup> The importance of the meaning of names is demonstrated in the manner which biblical characters and narrators comment on their meaning.<sup>702</sup> Personal names from the biblical period are therefore a valuable source of information. These names indicate, inter alia, the attributes associated with a specific deity. Theophoric names furthermore denote the importance of particular deities. Theophoric toponyms were less common than personal names, and were usually cultic or commemorative in nature.<sup>703</sup> Each personal name represented a culturally-sanctioned choice made by a parent.<sup>704</sup> The extent of theophoric names in ancient Semitic societies demonstrates the importance of the divine in the lives of these people.<sup>705</sup>

---

<sup>700</sup> Pike 1992:1018.

<sup>701</sup> Pike 1992:1019.

<sup>702</sup> Tigay 1987:159. See, for example, 1 Samuel 25:25; Ruth 1:20-21.

<sup>703</sup> Pike 1992:1019.

<sup>704</sup> Zevit 2001:604.

<sup>705</sup> Pike 1992:1019.

Many Israelite theophoric personal names – which appear in both the biblical text and extra-biblical epigraphic sources – are Yahwistic names. However, 'the popularity of Yahwistic names has no implication for the religious practices of their bearers',<sup>706</sup> and is probably only a remnant of earlier onomastic<sup>707</sup> customs. A minority of Israelites linked the names of their children with those of other deities, indicating general knowledge of such deities, their mythologies and communicating rituals.<sup>708</sup> However, personal names – even those applied in polytheistic groups – seldom invoked more than one deity in a name. Therefore, to establish the number of deities venerated in a particular group, the total onomastic picture of the group, and not only the names of a few individuals, should be studied.<sup>709</sup> Obviously, these non-Yahwistic theophoric elements would have offended a zealous Deuteronomist. Israelite Iron Age I sites favoured *Ba'al* theophoric names, suggesting that large extended families, and even clans as a whole, worshipped *Ba'al*, as well as other deities whose names were also evoked. According to biblical data, a clustering of *Ba'al* names – in both toponyms and some anthroponyms – appear in the South. Available information furthermore indicates that new Israelite settlements and villages founded were named after different deities revered in these tribal territories before the end of the United Monarchy.<sup>710</sup>

A number of methodological issues are at stake when dealing with onomastics as historical or religious source material. Theophoric names are not the only relevant matter. When dealing with the implications hidden in the name-material, the complete material should be assessed and not only the easily recognisable divine names. It is also important to keep in mind that while a theophoric name could have been meaningful at the beginning, the relevance thereof may be forgotten in the course of time. At the same time a name may have been given simply out of tradition, or because the giver fancied the name. Notably, deities in different cultures may share the same name but have different attributes, or share the same attributes and have different names. Onomastic source material, such as seals and inscriptions, was not made for the general public who were unable to read or write, but for the wealthier who could afford it. Therefore graffiti may, to some extent, provide a more representative picture.<sup>711</sup>

Hebrew seal inscriptions mainly consist of personal names. Apart from the name of its owner, the seal may also include the owner's title and name of his superior. These data are

---

<sup>706</sup> Zevit 2001:606-607.

<sup>707</sup> See footnote in § 3.5.

<sup>708</sup> Zevit 2001:608.

<sup>709</sup> Tigay 1987:159-160.

<sup>710</sup> Zevit 2001:587, 603-608, 648-649.

<sup>711</sup> Binger 1997:28-29.

significant for the study of the onomastics as well as the religious and social matters of the particular group. Hebrew personal names are often sentence names combined with the name of *Yahweh* or *El*, expressing religious feelings. The onomastics of the seals consists of various kinds of names. Theophoric Yahwistic names on the seals are predominantly compounded with *-yhw*, *-yw* and *-yh*, and the onomastics comprises more or less names current in the Hebrew Bible. Theophoric names frequently have their roots in Scripture passages. Seal inscriptions are the only Hebrew epigraphic source material that mentions contemporary people known from the Hebrew Bible. Seals that belonged to women cast light on the social status and legal rights of Israelite women.<sup>712</sup> The fact that they owned their own seals – although being subordinate to their husbands – indicates that they had the right to sign legal documents.<sup>713</sup>

More than twelve hundred names of pre-exilic Israelites are known from Hebrew and foreign inscriptions referring to Israel.<sup>714</sup> The vast majority of these names are from the South, dating mainly from the eighth century BC to the Exile. It seems that these individuals were predominantly from the upper class of Israelite and Judahite society. They were probably to a great extent court officials, tax collectors, owners of estates, royal officials, scribes and the like. Despite the prevalence of polytheism in Israel, at least half of the personal names in the epigraphic corpus carry a Yahwistic theophoric element. Only *b'l* appears in some names as a potential pagan component, although it could be interpreted in a way that does not imply polytheism; it may have been an epithet of *Yahweh*, synonymous with "Lord". Statistics procured from the corpus of inscriptional names – particularly for the period from the divided monarchy to the late Judah – correspond more or less to those acquired from the Hebrew Bible. These statistics do not match up to the expectation to find – in the light of biblical accusations of polytheism – a significant number of pagan theophoric names in Israel. There is no unequivocal explanation for this discrepancy. The possibility does, however, exist that personal names reflect only a singular facet of the religious life of a society, while the role of the dominant deity – or deities – is concealed in this particular aspect.<sup>715</sup> Tigay<sup>716</sup> concludes that 'in every respect the inscriptions suggest an overwhelmingly Yahwistic society in the heartland of Israelite settlement, especially in Judah. If we had only the inscriptional evidence,

---

<sup>712</sup> Thirteen seals belonging to women have been discovered. They are designated according to the father or the husband of the woman in each case. Some of these female names appear in the Hebrew Bible, and some are Yahwistic names which are rare in feminine onomastics. One of these seals carries the name of Meshullemeth, which is the name of the mother of king Amon of Judah (2 Ki 21:19) (Avigad 1987:206).

<sup>713</sup> Avigad 1987:195-196, 202, 205-206.

<sup>714</sup> Tigay 1986:9.

<sup>715</sup> Tigay 1987:161-163, 170-171.

<sup>716</sup> Tigay 1987:177-178.

I doubt that we would ever imagine that there existed a significant amount of polytheistic practice in Israel during the period in question.'

*Yahweh* and *Asherah* names are generally absent in Israelite toponymy. This phenomenon may be by virtue of a common and widespread convention to avoid these names for geographic designations. It may also be that these sites were established prior to the spread of Yahwism in Israel, or even that Yahwism was never particularly widespread in Israel.<sup>717</sup> Theophoric personal Israelite names do not bear the name of either *Asherah* or any other goddess.<sup>718</sup>

#### 4.4.2 Theophoric *Ya*-names

In the previous paragraphs, 4.3.2 - 4.3.13, a number of extra-biblical sources are discussed, concerning the name *Yahweh* or related forms, some of which appear as theophoric *Ya*-names.

The designation *ywh* never occurs in a name as such; it does, however, appear in different standardised forms: *yěhō-*, *yô-*, *-yāhū*, *-yô*, *-yâ*, whereas *-yěhō-* and *-yô-* are seldom found. The generic 'ēl, "god", appears to a lesser extent.<sup>719</sup> A comparison drawn by scholars between ancient Hebrew theophoric personal names and those in other ancient Semitic languages signifies a noticeable difference between the two groups.<sup>720</sup> This assessment – particularly regarding *ya*-names – does not necessarily imply that Yahwism was the predominant religion of ancient Israel. Archaeology provides sufficient proof of syncretism among the Israelites. These people probably could not afford to admit openly their sympathy for polytheism and, wisely, rather gave their children Yahwistic names, particularly when powerful people with pronounced polytheistic sympathies – such as Ahab and Jezebel<sup>721</sup> – set the example to give their children Yahwistic names.<sup>722</sup> Avigad,<sup>723</sup> however, is of the opinion that the 'overwhelming popularity of the *Yahweh* names attests to the worship of one god – *Yahweh*. The worship of foreign gods, of which the Israelite people were so often accused by the prophets, was apparently not so deeply rooted and widespread as to affect their personal

<sup>717</sup> Zevit 2001:595, 651.

<sup>718</sup> Korpel 2001:147.

<sup>719</sup> Pike 1992:1018.

<sup>720</sup> Differences are, inter alia, that female theophoric elements, such as "mother", "sister", as well as polytheistic concepts, normally do not appear in Hebrew personal names 'whereas they are quite common in the surrounding cultures' (De Moor 1997:11).

<sup>721</sup> 1 Kings 16:30-33.

<sup>722</sup> De Moor 1997:10-12. After his death, Ahab's son Ahaziah reigned in his place (1 Ki 22:40,51). Ahaziah – יהואחז – means: *Yahu* has grasped (MacLean 1962a:66).

<sup>723</sup> Avigad 1987:196-197.

names'. Tigay,<sup>724</sup> on the other hand, mentions that a high percentage of Yahwistic names does not necessarily imply that there was the same percentage of monotheists or monolatrists. If *Yahweh* was one of the gods polytheists venerated, they could very well have given their children theophoric *Ya*-names. He furthermore indicates that personal names expressed different aspects of their beliefs, such as hope for the god's blessing and protection. These names were not theoretical theological statements. Therefore, should personal names in a society reflect the predominance of a single deity – with the exclusion of others – this could merely signify the expectation of particular beneficial actions from this deity, and not purport that they did not worship other gods.

De Moor<sup>725</sup> mentions that biblical traditions regarding theophoric personal names in the pre-monarchical period should not all be regarded as reliable. However, although a number of names may have been invented for social, religious or political reasons, at least some historical value should be attributed to these early names. He grouped the Israelite theophoric names according to tribes, to ascertain whether there existed any differences between the various tribes in the use of Yahwistic, Elohist and other theophoric names. Theophoric personal names appear predominantly among the tribes of Judah (Davidic dynasty), Levi (priests) and Benjamin (warriors). Particularly by specific name-giving, these families obviously later would have demanded their rightful place in the history of Israel. Many of these names are found only in post-exilic Chronicles; understandably, the Chronicler would also have tried to eliminate a number of polytheistic names. Yet, although there is a significant increase in Chronic Yahwistic personal names up to the time of David, this may simply be a reflection of prevailing onomastics at the time of the Chronicler. Elohist names appear to have been more popular for the same period, and are attested for all tribes. Yahwistic names are lacking in many tribes, and are also low in number for others. De Moor<sup>726</sup> concludes that, on account of the phenomenon of early Yahwistic and Elohist names, Yahwism probably started as a popular religion long before the time of David. The data furthermore suggest that both the names *Yahweh* and *El* were from early times designations for the same God.

After doing a similar exercise on toponyms, De Moor<sup>727</sup> deduced that, up to the time of David and later throughout Israel's history 'toponyms with *yhwh* are virtually unattested'.

---

<sup>724</sup> Tigay 1986:6-7, 17.

<sup>725</sup> De Moor 1997:13-14, 29-33.

<sup>726</sup> De Moor 1997:33.

<sup>727</sup> De Moor 1997:38-39.

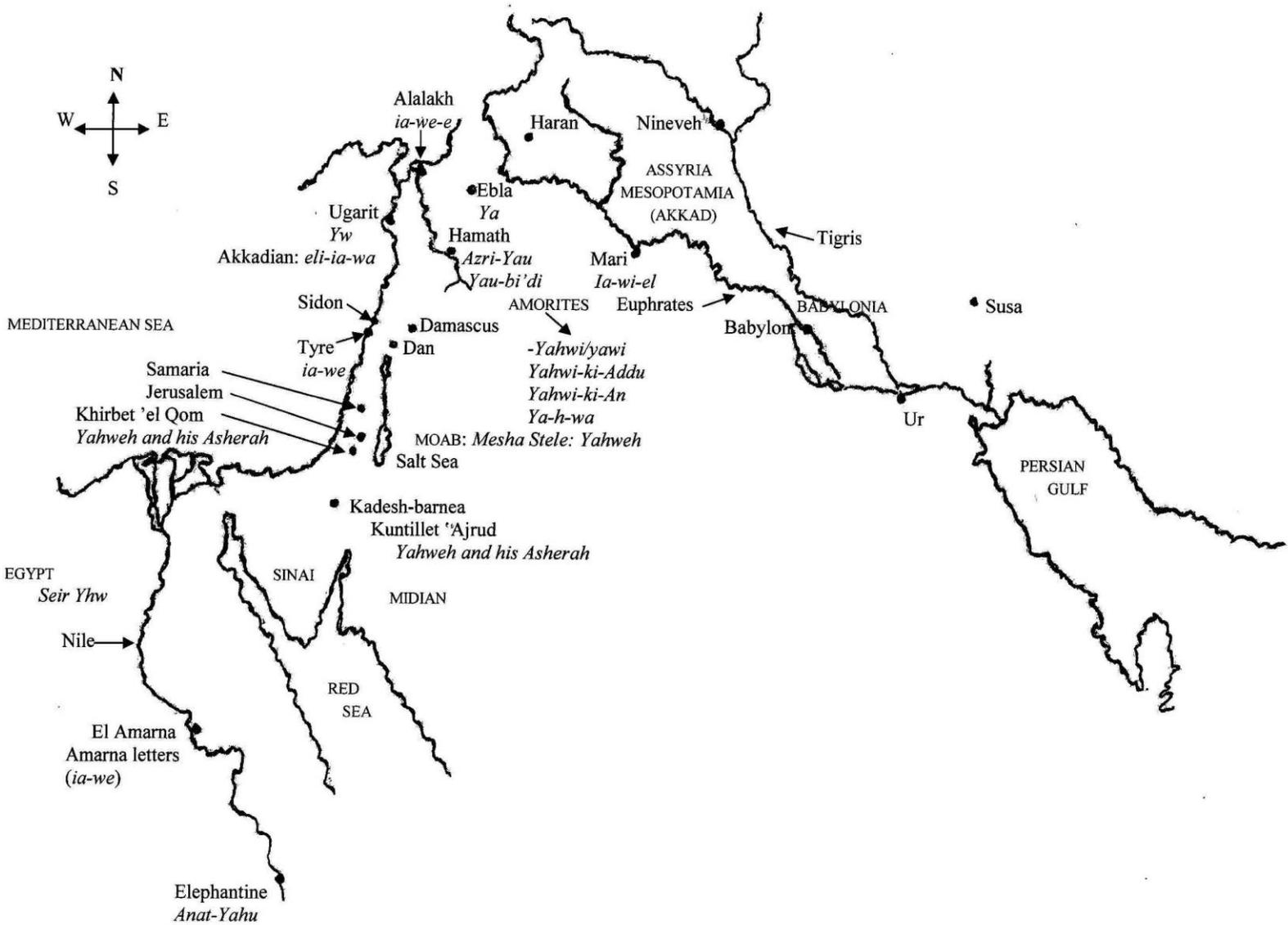
Most tribal territories contain Elohist or Baalistic names, as well as those of other deities known from Canaanite literature. Some Levitical cities which were previous pagan centres have names derived from pagan deities. Notably, Levitical names in the lists of temple personnel during the United Monarchy, exhibit a high frequency of Elohist and Yahwistic names. Onomastic evidence regarding theophoric toponyms thus points to 'a gradual, non-violent integration of the Israelites into the Canaanite world'.<sup>728</sup>

The origin of the name YHWH, as well as extra-biblical sources pertaining to this name – or related forms – has been deliberated in the foregoing paragraphs. It is thus logical that theories regarding the origin of Yahwism be discussed hereafter – as in the following chapter.

On the following page is a map indicating places where references to the name *Yahweh*, or related forms, have been discovered.

---

<sup>728</sup> De Moor 1997:39.



Map 3. Extra-biblical sources: the name *Yahweh* or related forms<sup>729</sup>

<sup>729</sup> The map indicates the places where references to the name *Yahweh*, or related forms, have been discovered regarding particular extra-biblical finds, as discussed in the previous paragraphs (§ 4.3.2 - § 4.3.13). Names in italics denote the extra-biblical references.