Divine Origins:

An Analysis of the Origins of YHWH and El in Ancient Israelite Worship

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the origins of the Ancient Near Eastern deities, YHWH and El, in connection with ancient Israel, tracing their roots through Canaanite cultures. This work largely explores the secondary literature surrounding Ancient Near Eastern religion, especially regarding YHWH and El and influences from ancient Israel's neighbours. Additionally, this work examines primary sources from the Hebrew Bible regarding Israel’s worship of YHWH and El, paying particular attention to defining features, characteristics, and revelation of names. From these sources it is argued that Israel’s adoption and merging of YHWH’s and El’s worship played a central role in moving their worship and religion from monolatry to monotheism. Further, this worship and conception of YHWH and El as God is intimately tied to Israel’s understanding of themselves as a chosen people and nation.

No individual sat down millennia ago to create a list of characteristics or features that a deity must have. Rather, the earliest religions formed over millennia, evolving and adapting as an expression of a people’s beliefs, values, and history.[[1]](#footnote-0) Religion is shaped by a number of complex factors - social, cultural, political, and economic - that affect the beliefs and practices of a people. Further, there is an interplay of official and unofficial belief - what is stated by a representative body of the faith, and what the people actually practise - that must be explored and noted. While this dichotomy is problematic, a consideration of this perspective is still worthwhile. Peter Brown argues that the dichotomy of official vs unofficial religion, elite vs popular belief is false. Brown explores this issue tracing it back to David Hume’s “the vulgar” and Protestant and Catholic medieval historians. His point is that ideas like “the cult of the saints” may begin with the “vulgar,” but also influence the “elite.” [[2]](#footnote-1) Kings and priests may proclaim a divine decree, but the people may not always follow, especially if regimes tolerate certain popular practices. Yet this mingling of official and unofficial belief, and all in between, shapes cultic expression. The Israelites were no exception to this process. Israel’s religious practices and beliefs were shaped by the region they were in their neighbours, and the exchange of ideas that occurred. Worship of their deity, YHWH, did not arise in a vacuum and seems to share roots with its Canaanite neighbours - a conglomeration of El, and other Canaanite deities combining to form a supreme deity, worthy of all worship.[[3]](#footnote-2) Yet how did Israel come to worship YHWH? How did their conception of YHWH and subsequent worship change over time? Did the norms of who YHWH was shift in Israel’s eyes? What are the constructs of YHWH’s identity with Israel? Israel’s worship of YHWH evolved out of the mosaic of West Semitic religions, although the exact mechanisms themselves are yet unknown. Critically, though, Israel’s conception of YHWH was formed by officially proclaimed beliefs that countered and interplayed with popular beliefs in a manner that helped shape a distinct and new concept of deity. While YHWH’s identity was revealed and shaped by Israel, Israel’s identity was also shaped as a result of its ideas about YHWH.

Israel was not always monotheistic.[[4]](#footnote-3) Prior to the exile, Israel was monolatrous, as evident in Exodus 15:11: “Who is like you among the gods, O Yahweh?”[[5]](#footnote-4) For the author, YHWH stands above the other gods, but the existence of other beings worshipped as gods are acknowledged. While this may not necessarily be a wholesale reflection of the author’s personal beliefs in other gods, it is an admission that, at the least, others Israelites believed in the existence of different gods. Biblical scholar and anthropologist Mark S. Smith has argued that the move from monolatry to monotheism was a process that involved Israel severing itself from its Canaanite neighbours, and possibly heritage, although the specifics of how this metamorphoses worked is unclear.[[6]](#footnote-5) Biblical archaeologist Nissim Amzallag countered that there is “no substantial evidence . . . to confirm the gradualist sequence from local clan-deity to universal monotheism,” but that there was a “latent monotheism or monolatry” within Canaanite culture.[[7]](#footnote-6) Amzallag goes so far as to suggest that the march toward monotheism was not a gradual move from monolatry and henotheism but part of an “ancient tradition, that of the Canaanite smelters.”[[8]](#footnote-7) Despite his argument, Amzallag points out that there are “many obscure points in the emergence of monotheism in Israel,” admitting that the emergence of monotheism was not always obvious. Most scholars agree with Smith and argue that monotheism arose after the Babylonian exile and during Second Temple Judaism, and was not present in the early stages of Israelite religion.[[9]](#footnote-8) Christopher Rollston, an Ancient Near Eastern scholar, points out, “monotheism developed gradually,” and formed after a “long process of development and revelation.”[[10]](#footnote-9) Manfred Krebernik has written extensively on the Ancient Near East has also suggested that monotheism was a later development with his compared the Hebrew, Babylonian and Mesopotamian myths.[[11]](#footnote-10) Jason Bembry, a scholar on the Hebrew Bible, agrees: Israelite monotheism, expressed in Deuteronomy and Isaiah, developed later and was not part of Israel’s original belief system or a borrowing from Canaanite culture.[[12]](#footnote-11) Even if one were to admit that monotheism was somehow latent in the background cultural milieu, it is clear that Israel was not always monotheistic in its worship.

All peoples have an origin story, and, Israel’s is heavily intertwined with its Canaanite neighbours and possibly pastoral nomads from as far away as Egypt.[[13]](#footnote-12) In 1929, Ugaritic tablets dating to the early 2nd millennium BCE were found at Ras Shamra, the ruins of Ugarit.[[14]](#footnote-13) Startlingly, they dealt with stories about the Canaanite pantheon of gods, including the patriarch, El, also worshipped by the Israelites. While there is disagreement over how much syncretism occurred, and if that is even the correct term to use, there is material evidence of “numerous common points between the Israelites and ‘Canaanites’ in the Iron I period.”[[15]](#footnote-14) Biblical scholar J.J. Bimson, exploring multiple theories on Israel’s origins, points out that there is evidence for Israel’s semi-nomadic origins, possibly a displaced population from the coast.[[16]](#footnote-15) If accurate, then it is not too much of a stretch to suggest that Israel would have picked up ideas and traditions with the cultures and peoples it met. Historian Brendon C. Benz makes this connection clear: there are “points of continuity between the so-called Canaanite religion and Israelite religion, concluding that these traditions emerged out of the same ‘cosmic pool.’”[[17]](#footnote-16) The Hebrew Bible was written by authors who clearly had an intimate understanding of the temporal, ideological, and geographical knowledge of the Canaanite region. Theologian Herbert Nierh takes it even further, suggesting that Biblical Canaan represents an “‘anti-people’ in comparison to Israel.’” Canaan acts as a contrast, a foil for Israel to learn its lessons from, to help develop its own worship and identity. From this perspective, Israelite religion should be seen as a “sub-set of Canaanite religion.”[[18]](#footnote-17) Familiar with the northwest Semitic religions, it is a variant, one with similarities in the background, and thus there was a need and desire for it to stand out amongst the other local variants. Biblical scholar John Oswalt affirms that “Israelite religion is simply one more of the complex of West Semitic religions,” and that an evolutionary process occurred to sharpen, and distinguish its key features.[[19]](#footnote-18) Furthermore, in Jed Robinson’s article, “The God Of The Patriarchs And The Ugaritic Texts: A Shared Religious And Cultural Identity,” he suggests that defining “Canaanite” itself can be a challenge. The term is “very vague” and can refer to various people groups who once lived in Canaan. Hence Smith’s preferred term, “West Semitic,” which is inclusive of Israelite, Canaanite, Amorite, and Ugaritic cultures .[[20]](#footnote-19) Smith’s use of West Semitic is appropriate as the term covers a broader swathe of religious ideas and traditions shared by the aforementioned peoples. Even Amzallag, who earlier noted monotheism’s latency in Israel’s history, proposed that the cult of YHWH may have been a Canaanite endemic tribal cult that spread: “political expansion of the tribes worshipping him, and monotheism would emerge as a consequence of a gradual subordination of all Canaanite gods to Yahweh prior to their progressive ‘collapse.’”[[21]](#footnote-20)

Smith summarised the scholarly consensus when he wrote, “Israelite culture was largely ‘Canaanite’ in nature.”[[22]](#footnote-21)

Canaan’s influence on Israel is noticeable in their shared worship of El, which in turn would affect Israel’s understanding of YHWH. Israel’s pre-exilic religion “apparently included worship of Yahweh, El, Asherah, and Baal.”[[23]](#footnote-22) El was worshipped early on in Israelite religious history, and it is clear that he was distinct from YHWH. John Currid, a biblical scholar and archaeologist, believes that a strong case can be made that “several of the El epithets referred to in Genesis in connection with patriarchal religion do indeed derive from the worship of the Canaanite god El.”[[24]](#footnote-23) Smith concurs in saying that El was Israel’s original god, not YHWH.[[25]](#footnote-24) Not only was El Israel’s first god, but El was also the head of the Canaanite and Ugaritic pantheon as the patriarchal figure.[[26]](#footnote-25) In the Ugaritic tradition, El is “‘Father of Years,’” wholly benevolent, and noted for his wisdom.[[27]](#footnote-26) He is the Creator and Judge.[[28]](#footnote-27) El is often referred to as *El Shaddai*, often translated as “God Almighty.” However, Currid notes that this epithet can also be translated as “El, the mountain one.”[[29]](#footnote-28) This latter translation would place El in the Ugaritic tradition by living on a mountain - as well as other Ancient Near Eastern deities like the Amorite Amurru - where El meets with his divine council.[[30]](#footnote-29) In the Baal myths of the Canaanite religion, El resides in a pavilion, or tent, possibly correlational to the Biblical Shiloh or early nomadic tradition of the Israelites.[[31]](#footnote-30) Clearly there is a connection between El of the Ugaritic tradition and El of the Israelite tradition. Exodus 6:2-3 sheds light on the different names of Israel’s God: YHWH, and El.

God also said to Moses, ‘I am the LORD [YHWH]. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty [*El Shaddai*], but by my name the LORD [YHWH] I did not make myself fully known to them.

Evidently, at this point in time, YHWH makes clear that the Israelites previously only knew YHWH as *El Shaddai* but would now know him as YHWH. The very name, “Israel,” is telling: it is “Isra-El,” after El, and not “Isra-Yah,” after YHWH.[[32]](#footnote-31) In the Pentateuch, *El Shaddai* is also referred to as *El-Bethel*, “God of the House of El” (Genesis 31:13); *El Elyon*, “God Most High” (Genesis 14:18-24; Deuteronomy 32:8-9); *El Elohay-Israel*, “The Mighty One of Israel” (Genesis 33:20); and *El Roi*, “The God Who Sees Me” (Genesis 16:13).[[33]](#footnote-32) Over time, El would simply come to mean the generic term for God, and lose much of his “distinct character.”[[34]](#footnote-33) While for the most part El is a general name for God and does not reflect any Canaanite influence, there are a few times when, as mentioned earlier, it does, and in connection with YHWH.[[35]](#footnote-34)

One of the most fascinating links between El and YHWH is found in bull imagery. Both Baal and El were associated with the bull, a symbol of strength and fertility.[[36]](#footnote-35) Canaanite El is possibly “Bull El” in Ugaritic, and golden calves, identified in the Hebrew Bible as idols,are found at two sites, including Bethel, already identified as “The House of El.”[[37]](#footnote-36) 2 Kings 10:29 also notes that these calves were not removed in King Jehu’s purge. One reason for the golden calves not being purged in 1 Kings 12:25-33 and being built in the first place in Exodus 32:1-20, could be the people’s perceived connection between the bull and the cult of El, and eventually YHWH. If this connection was present, then it may partly explain the Israelite reluctance to take down the golden calves.[[38]](#footnote-37)

YHWH’s origins are more obscure, but there is evidence to suggest foreign origin like El.[[39]](#footnote-38) YHWH was associated with the storm, with a similar theophany to Baal.[[40]](#footnote-39) This association may even be reflected in YHWH’s very name. Karel van der Toorn, a scholar of ancient religion, points out that YHWH’s etymology may come from the root, *hwh*, “to fall,” similar to the Arabic root, “to fall (rain)” or “to blow (wind),” further connecting him to the storm.[[41]](#footnote-40) Storm imagery is further indicated in Genesis 9:13, Habakkuk 3:9, Psalm 18, and Psalm 29.[[42]](#footnote-41) Psalm 29 is perhaps the most striking and clear reference of YHWH to the storm, and intriguingly connects to Baal. Bembry notes how as the Israelite prophet Hosea appropriates Canaanite ideas to oppose idolatry as does Psalm 29 by using Canaanite themes to negate Baal and proclaim YHWH’s primacy.[[43]](#footnote-42) Plainly, YHWH and Baal were both associated with the storm, and Biblical writers appropriated the storm imagery to demonstrate YHWH’s predominance over both Baal and the storm.

Besides storm imagery, YHWH’s imagery as divine warrior also has connections to the Ugaritic pantheon. Both YHWH and Baal similarly defeat the Leviathan.[[44]](#footnote-43) Bernard Batto, professor of religious studies, even characterises the exodus as YHWH’s combat against the Sea, part of a Semitic combat trope.[[45]](#footnote-44) Habakkuk 3, Psalm 74, and Psalm 77 also show YHWH’s power as creator and master of the storm and sea, with everything belonging to his dominion.[[46]](#footnote-45) The Israelites believed that YHWH would assist them in battle.[[47]](#footnote-46) Smith draws attention to the evidence that YHWH and Baal were both “warrior-gods.”[[48]](#footnote-47) Besides Baal, other Ancient Near Eastern deities, like Hadad (Adad), were also warrior storm gods, further reinforcing the possible foreign influence on YHWH.[[49]](#footnote-48)

Besides the storm and divine warrior imagery, YHWH likely took on El’s agelessness. Initially, YHWH is depicted as a youthful warrior god but takes on El’s “Father of Years” imagery as a divine being as an “aged God,” or the “Ancient of Days” as described in Daniel 7.[[50]](#footnote-49) Historians are “quite certain” that El was deemed old, often being portrayed with “gray hair and gray beard.”[[51]](#footnote-50) The beard is of note since it was uncommon for Levant deities to be shown with a beard. Furthermore, in the story of Baal, El’s wisdom is noted three times, and associated with his old age. YHWH, as “Ancient of Days,” takes on El’s features as Creator, and age, although YHWH is “eternal, not elderly.”[[52]](#footnote-51) He becomes the “Ageless One.” Even YHWH’s descriptions as a father are not of a “progenitor but, rather, as a merciful and kind caregiver.”[[53]](#footnote-52) Psalm 90:2 acknowledges that YHWH has no beginning nor end, and always was. There is some evidence that this portrayal, especially of “Ancient of Days,” also has some provenance in Canaanite mythology. Yet it must be clarified that the Ugaritic mythos would have been far removed from Daniel at this point, and the exact mechanism of influence is unclear.[[54]](#footnote-53) Nonetheless, it is apparent that YHWH’s father and cosmic imagery led to YHWH’s revelation as “Ancient of Days.”

Deuteronomy 33:26-27, Psalm 18, and Genesis 49:25-26 all display “imagery regularly applied to El and Baal in Northwest Semitic literature” and “combine or conflate the imagery of more than one Canaanite deity.”[[55]](#footnote-54) In noting these passages, Smith suggests that YHWH may have absorbed qualities of El, Baal, and even Asherah. Baal himself was known as an Ugaritic and Phoenician storm god.[[56]](#footnote-55) Baal’s influence in Israel was already well-established, with Biblical writers becoming more polemical during the monarchy, but Israelites were even incorporating the foreign god’s name into their children’s with names like Jerubaal, Eshbaal, and Meribbaal.[[57]](#footnote-56) Smith even argues that prior to the ninth and eighth centuries, there was little criticism of Baal and its cult; he writes that there is “no evidence that prior to the ninth century, Baal was considered a major threat to the cult of Yahweh.”[[58]](#footnote-57) Even when criticism of Baal began and continued with the Biblical prophetic pronouncements against Baal, many Hebrew kings continued to worship Baal until the end of the monarchy.[[59]](#footnote-58) That the cult of Baal persisted despite prophetic opposition suggests its staying power on a popular level. That kings continued to worship Baal, and allowed its cult to remain suggests its influence on an elite and official level. That prophetic attacks were necessary shows the sway Baal’s followers and beliefs had amongst the Israelites.

Amzallag makes an intriguing argument that traces YHWH’s origins back to Edom. While others have noted the Edomite connection, Amzallag expands his point by stating that the Edomite divine name, Qos, is plausibly YHWH.[[60]](#footnote-59) Justin Kelley also suggests this connection and believes that YHWH and Qos could be the same divine being.[[61]](#footnote-60) Constructing his case, Amzallag notes how the Hebrew Bible often looks favourably upon Edom as a “land of wisdom” (Jeremiah 49:7; Obadiah 8). He points out that Isaiah 21:11 explicitly mentions the worship of YHWH in Edom, and suggests that the Book of Job had Edomite roots.[[62]](#footnote-61) Kelley also cites Deuteronomy 33:2 and Judges 5:4 in keeping a potential ancient link between YHWH and Edom.[[63]](#footnote-62) Further building the connection, YHWH is also known as “YHWH of Teman,” an eponym for Edom.[[64]](#footnote-63) J. David Schloen, archaeologist and Levant historian, also supports this argument for a Midianite origin. For the crux of his argument, Amzallag notes a connection between YHWH and Canaanite copper metallurgists, tracing their lineage back to Cain himself. These Kenites were believed to have “divine power” and were marked by a sign (*taw*) on their foreheads signalling the protection of YHWH.[[65]](#footnote-64) For Amzallag, this sign bears a striking similarity to a “symbol of devotion to Yahweh” found in Ezekiel 9:4-6.[[66]](#footnote-65) He also suggests “an essential link between Yahweh and copper” in Zechariah 6:1-6 where YHWH’s abode is symbolised by two copper mountains.[[67]](#footnote-66) Exodus 27, Ezekiel 22:20 and 40:3 and Isaiah 54:16 also mention a direct tie-in between YHWH and copper. Additionally, metallurgy itself was often seen as a symbol of the power and act of creation, something fit for the divine. In short, Amzallag suggests that YHWH was the Canaanite god of metallurgy, and appeals to Amos 9:11-12: “On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David . . . that they may possess the remnant of Edom. . .” Plainly, Edom had a special place in YHWH’s heart. Kelley again lists three hypotheses to explain the connection between YHWH and Qos. YHWH and Qos were the same Syrian storm warrior god bringing fertility; Edomite clans worshipped El who morphed into YHWH in Israel and Qos in Edom; or Kelly’s preferred hypothesis , that YHWH was the Edomite, Midianite, and Kenite god of metallurgy and became Israel’s God, and Qos was an Edomite epithet.[[68]](#footnote-67) Each of these hypotheses suggest a strong link between YHWH and Edom.

While there certainly are connections between YHWH and other Ancient Near Eastern deities, the most critical one being El, YHWH’s Biblical composition would eventually develop a uniqueness that reflects Israel’s desire to set him apart from his contemporaries. As already mentioned, El went from being the head of the Ugaritic pantheon to the generic name for God in the Hebrew Bible. Then YHWH likely arose geographically around Edom to become the receiver of Israel’s prescribed monotheistic worship. Israel worshipped YHWH as a nonsexual being - holy, timeless and eternal.[[69]](#footnote-68) Gary Rendsburg, professor of biblical studies, observes that when first revealing himself to Moses in the burning bush, Israel’s God does not use the names YHWH, *Elohim*, or *Shaddai*. Rather, א ְהֶיה ֲא ֶׁשר ֶאֽ ְהֶיה, “‘I am that I am’ (v. 14), a name used nowhere else in the Bible, shortened later in the verse to the simple הֶהֽ ְאֶ . . . ‘I am’.”[[70]](#footnote-69) As Biblical scholar Thomas Römer notes,by revealing this special name to Moses and Israel this reflects that “Israel’s singular privilege is the knowledge of the divine name and through this privilege, Israel becomes the only nation capable of worshipping God.”[[71]](#footnote-70) Again, there is a parallel to another Near Eastern culture, Egyptian, in that there is an unknown divine Name.[[72]](#footnote-71) However, the Israelite story has a stark and integral difference: “God is not fearful of disclosing his name.”[[73]](#footnote-72) In the Egyptian account, the sun god Ra is afraid of falling under the magical powers of anyone who may learn his name and is thus careful to keep it concealed. In the Hebrew account, YHWH has no fear and reveals his name to Moses without concern of any magical misuse or maleficence.[[74]](#footnote-73) This differing approach between Ra and YHWH demonstrates a difference in power and Israel’s belief in YHWH’s omnipotence. The Israelite story takes this Egyptian trope, amongst others, and “turns them on their head.”[[75]](#footnote-74) This is something that Israelite narratives do over and over, be it with Egyptian, Ugaritic, or other Mesopotamian cultures: subvert tropes and ideas about who and what their gods are like, to signify YHWH’s predominance over all other gods. In doing so, they reveal and express “Israel’s national heritage in exquisite literary fashion,” affirming the uniqueness of YHWH, and by extension, themselves.[[76]](#footnote-75)

If indeed Israel had deep Canaanite connections, this would also explain the necessity for Israel to distinguish itself from its neighbours. Archaeologist William Dever argues that Israel was partly born out of conflict with its Canaanite neighbours, and while they have a similar lineage to the Canaanites, they became ethnically and materially distinct from the Philistines, Phoenicians, Arameans, Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites.[[77]](#footnote-76) Thus it was critical for Israel to differentiate themselves and their God from the surrounding pantheon, which manifested itself not only in its religious worship but throughout its culture. As YHWH became their only God, it made sense why post-exodus Israelites would name their children Hezekiah or Joshua, showing their connections to YHWH.[[78]](#footnote-77) Israelite culture would thus become more distinct as YHWH became more distinct. Theologians [Jürgen](https://books.google.ca/books?id=8LtGDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false) Van Oorschot and Markus Witte make this connection explicit: “early historical revelation of YHWH grant[ed] Israel its *status* as the people of God” (emphasis original).[[79]](#footnote-78) Clearly, YHWH’s worship as the supreme deity was deeply tied to Israel’s essence, expressing who they were as a people.

Bibliography

[Amzallag, Nissim. “Yahweh, the Canaanite God of Metallurgy?” *Journal for the*](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0309089209105686?casa_token=VsflClSbRKYAAAAA:aEAcsrDiGd0LGgv4ygwE8DfSXOSHxiNKPZdX0nkhveWcXwXOvHSXg2WLOf_m-h1xk7TCA6PvdYUVz1g#articleCitationDownloadContainer)

[*Study of the Old Testament* 33, no. 4 (June 2009): 387–404.](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0309089209105686?casa_token=VsflClSbRKYAAAAA:aEAcsrDiGd0LGgv4ygwE8DfSXOSHxiNKPZdX0nkhveWcXwXOvHSXg2WLOf_m-h1xk7TCA6PvdYUVz1g#articleCitationDownloadContainer)

Batto, Bernard F. “Mythic Dimensions of the Exodus Tradition.” [In *Israel's Exodus In*](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about)

[*Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, And Geoscience*, edited by Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider and William H.C. Propp, 187-195. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about), 2015.

Bembry, J. *Yahweh's coming of age*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2011.

Benz, Brendon C. “In Search of Israel’s Insider Status: A Reevaluation of Israel’s

Origins.” [In *Israel's Exodus In Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, And Geoscience*, edited by Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider and William H.C. Propp, 457-466. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015.](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about)

Berlejung, Angelika. “The Origins and Beginnings of the Worship of YHWH: The

Iconographic Evidence.” In [*The Origins Of Yahwism*, edited by Jürgen Van Oorschot and Markus Witte, 67-92. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017.](https://books.google.ca/books?id=8LtGDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Coogan, Michael D., editor. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised*

*Standard Version*, 5th edition. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Bimson, J.J. “The Origins of Israel in Canaan: An Examination of Recent Theories.”

*Themelios* 15 (1): (1989): 4-15.

Currid, John D. *Against The Gods*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013.

Day, John. *Yahweh And The Gods And Goddesses Of Canaan*. London: Sheffield

Academic Press: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 2000.

Dever, William G. “The Exodus and the Bible: What Was Known; What Was

Remembered; What was Forgotten?” [In *Israel's Exodus In Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, And Geoscience*, edited by Thomas E. Leby, Thomas Schneider and William H.C. Propp, 309-408. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about), 2015.

Edelman, Diana Vikander. *The Triumph Of Elohim*. Kampen: Pharos, 1995.

Faust, Avraham. “The Emergence of Iron Age Israel: On Origins and Habitus.” [In](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about)

[*Israel's Exodus In Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, And Geoscience*, edited by Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider and William H.C. Propp, 467-482. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about), 2015.

[Kelley, Justin. "Toward A New Synthesis Of The God Of Edom And Yahweh." *Antiguo*](https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/bitstream/123456789/7231/1/toward-new-synthesis-god-edom.pdf)

[*Oriente: Cuader-nos Del Centro De Estudios De Historia Del Antiguo Oriente* 7 (2009): 255-280.](https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/bitstream/123456789/7231/1/toward-new-synthesis-god-edom.pdf)

Krebernik, Manfred. “The Beginnings of Yahwism from an Assyriological

Perspective.” In [*The Origins Of Yahwism*, edited by Jürgen Van Oorschot and Markus Witte, 45-66. Berlin: de Gruyter](https://books.google.ca/books?id=8LtGDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false), 2017.

Lang, Bernhard. *The Hebrew God*. New Haven, CI]: Yale University Press, 2002.

MacLaurin, E. C. B. "YHWH, the Origin of the Tetragrammaton." *Vetus Testamentum*

12, no. 4 (1962): 439-63.

Mullins, Robert A. “The Emergence of Israel in Retrospect.”[**I**n *Israel's Exodus In*](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about)

[*Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, And Geoscience*, edited by Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider and William H.C. Propp, 517-525. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015.](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about)

Niehr, Herbert. “The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israelite Religion:

Methodological and Religio-Historical Aspects” In [*The Triumph Of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms*, edited by Diana Vikander Edelman. Kampen: Pharos, 1995.](https://books.google.ca/books/about/The_Triumph_of_Elohim.html?id=bua2dMa9fJ4C&redir_esc=y)

Oswalt, John N. *The Bible Among Other Myths*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan,

2009.

Rendsburg, Gary A. “Moses the Magician.” [In *Israel's Exodus In Transdisciplinary*](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about)

[*Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, And Geoscience*, edited by Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider and William H.C. Propp, 243-258. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015.](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about)

Robinson, Jed. "The God Of The Patriarchs And The Ugaritic Texts: A Shared

Religious And Cultural Identity." *Studia Antiqua* 8 (1): (2010): 25-33.

Rollston, C. A. “The Rise of Monotheism in Ancient Israel: Biblical and Epigraphic

Evidence.” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 6 (1): (2003: 95-115).

[Römer, Thomas. "The Revelation Of The Divine Name To Moses And The](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about)

[Construction Of A Memory About The Origins Of The Encounter Between Yhwh And Israel." In *Israel's Exodus In Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, And Geoscience*, edited by Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider and William H.C. Propp, 305-315. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015.](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about)

Schmidt, Brian B. “The Aniconic Tradition: On Reading Images and Viewing Texts.”

In [*The Triumph Of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms*, edited by, Diana Vikander Edelman. Kampen: Pharos, 1995.](https://books.google.ca/books/about/The_Triumph_of_Elohim.html?id=bua2dMa9fJ4C&redir_esc=y)

[Smith, Mark S. *The Early History Of God*. Dearborn, MI.: Dove Booksellers](https://books.google.ca/books?id=1yM3AuBh4AsC&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false), 2002.

Smith, Mark S. *The Origins Of Biblical Monotheism*. Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 2004.

Smith, Mark S. “YHWH’s Original Character: Questions about an Unknown God.” In

[*The Origins Of Yahwism*, edited by Jürgen Van Oorschot and Markus Witte, 23-44. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017.](https://books.google.ca/books?id=8LtGDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Tropper, Josef. “The Divine Name \*Yahwa.” In [Van Oorschot, Jürgen, and Markus](https://books.google.ca/books?id=8LtGDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false)

[Witte. *In The Origins Of Yahwism*](https://books.google.ca/books?id=8LtGDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false), [edited by Jürgen Van Oorschot and Markus Witte, 23-44. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017.](https://books.google.ca/books?id=8LtGDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false)

[Van Oorschot, Jürgen, and Markus Witte. *The Origins Of Yahwism*. Berlin: de](https://books.google.ca/books?id=8LtGDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false)

[Gruyter, 2017.](https://books.google.ca/books?id=8LtGDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Walton, J. H. *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.

Walton, John H. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought And The Old Testament*. Grand

Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018.

1. This is not to say that there is no room for inspiration or revelation in religion. I am simply making a claim that the outward expression of belief changes and adapts to various factors that will be further addressed in this paper, including social, cultural, political, and economic. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. See Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: its rise and function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). For another perspective, Robert Scribner suggests that historians can use official vs unofficial, but as a spectrum and process more than a dichotomy. This is the perspective I will use for this paper. See Robert Scribner, “Elements of Popular Belief,” *Handbook of European History 1400-1600* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Out of respect for anyone who this matters to, and for consistency's sake, I will use the tetragrammaton spelling, YHWH, throughout this paper unless making a direct quotation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God* (Dearborn, Michigan: Dove Booksellers, 2002), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. All Biblical references will be made using the following formatting: Book Chapter:Verse, unless making a direct quotation using another format. While I will endeavour to keep the translations consistent, many of the sources use different translations and are not always noted. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Smith, *The Early History of God,* 7*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Nissim [Amzallag, “Yahweh, the Canaanite God of Metallurgy?” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33, no. 4 (June 2009):](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0309089209105686?casa_token=VsflClSbRKYAAAAA:aEAcsrDiGd0LGgv4ygwE8DfSXOSHxiNKPZdX0nkhveWcXwXOvHSXg2WLOf_m-h1xk7TCA6PvdYUVz1g#articleCitationDownloadContainer) 388. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. [Amzallag, “Yahweh, the Canaanite God of Metallurgy?,”](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0309089209105686?casa_token=VsflClSbRKYAAAAA:aEAcsrDiGd0LGgv4ygwE8DfSXOSHxiNKPZdX0nkhveWcXwXOvHSXg2WLOf_m-h1xk7TCA6PvdYUVz1g#articleCitationDownloadContainer) 403. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. C. A. [Rollston, “The Rise of Monotheism in Ancient Israel: Biblical and Epigraphic Evidence.” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 6, no. 1 (2003): 9](https://www.scribd.com/document/339928895/C-Rollston-The-Rise-of-Monotheism-in-Ancient-Israel-Biblical-and-Epigraphic-Evidence-2up-pdf)6. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Rollston, “The Rise of Monotheism in Ancient Israel,” 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Manfred Krebernik, “The Beginnings of Yahwism from an Assyriological Perspective,” in *The Origins of Yahwism*, eds. [Jürgen](https://books.google.ca/books?id=8LtGDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false) Van Oorschot, and Markus Witte (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Jason Bembry, *Yahweh’s Coming of Age*,(Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Avraham Faust, “The Emergence of Iron Age Israel: On Origins and Habitus,” in [*Israel's Exodus In Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, And Geoscience*, (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about) 2015), 468, 472. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. Smith, *The Early History of God*, 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. Smith defines syncretism as follows: “the union of religious phenomenon from two historically separate systems or cultures.” Smith, *The Early History of God*, 4, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. J.J. Bimson, “The Origins of Israel in Canaan: An Examination of Recent Theories.” *Thermelios* 15, no. 1 (1989): 10-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. Brendon C. Benz, “In Search of Israel’s Insider Status: a Reevaluation of Israel’s Origins,” in *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 458. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. Herbert Niehr, “The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israelite Religion: Methodological and Religio-Historical Aspects,” in [*The Triumph Of Elohim*, ed.](https://books.google.ca/books/about/The_Triumph_of_Elohim.html?id=bua2dMa9fJ4C&redir_esc=y) Dian[a Vikander (Kampen: Pharos, 1995)](https://books.google.ca/books/about/The_Triumph_of_Elohim.html?id=bua2dMa9fJ4C&redir_esc=y), 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. John N. [Oswalt, *The Bible Among Other Myths*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan](https://books.google.ca/books?id=9zgRdJy1X80C&pg=PT4&lpg=PT4&dq=Oswalt,+J.+N.+2009.+The+Bible+among+the+Myths:+Unique+Revelation+or+Just+Ancient+Literature?+Grand+Rapids,+Michigan:+Zondervan.&source=bl&ots=yAJhZSamjj&sig=ACfU3U347aGzoHLJRU_th_KTvF_JWBz7ug&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjEioHK6NznAhVlCTQIHRtPCOIQ6AEwBHoECAcQAQ#v=onepage&q=Oswalt%2C%20J.%20N.%202009.%20The%20Bible%20among%20the%20Myths%3A%20Unique%20Revelation%20or%20Just%20Ancient%20Literature%3F%20Grand%20Rapids%2C%20Michigan%3A%20Zondervan.&f=false), 2009), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. Jed Robinson, “"The God Of The Patriarchs And The Ugaritic Texts: A Shared Religious And Cultural Identity," *Studia Antiqua* 8, no. 1 (2010): , 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. Amzallag, “Yahweh, the Canaanite God of Metallurgy?” 388. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. Smith, *The Early History of God*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. Ibid, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. John [Day, *Yahweh And The Gods And Goddesses Of Canaan*,](https://books.google.ca/books?id=2xadCgAAQBAJ) (Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. Mark S. Smith, “YHWH’s Original Character: Questions about an Unknown God,” in *The Origins of Yahwism*, edited by J[ü](https://books.google.ca/books?id=8LtGDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false)rgen Van Oorschot and Markus Witte. (Berlin: de Gruyter), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. Bembry, *Yahweh’s Coming of Age*, 62. Robinson, "The God Of The Patriarchs And The Ugaritic Texts,” 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. Day, [*Yahweh And The Gods And Goddesses Of Canaan*](https://books.google.ca/books?id=2xadCgAAQBAJ), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
28. Bembry, *Yahweh’s Coming of Age*, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
29. Day, [*Yahweh And The Gods And Goddesses Of Canaan*](https://books.google.ca/books?id=2xadCgAAQBAJ), 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
30. Robinson, "The God Of The Patriarchs And The Ugaritic Texts,” 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
31. Ibid, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. Robinson, "The God Of The Patriarchs And The Ugaritic Texts,” 29;Thomas R[ö](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about)mer, “The Revelation of the Divine Name to Moses and the Construction of a Memory About the Origins of the Encounter Between Yhwh and Israel,” in *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, edited by [Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider, and William H.C. Propp](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about) (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. Robinson, "The God Of The Patriarchs And The Ugaritic Texts,” 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. Smith, *The Early History of God*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
35. Day, [*Yahweh And The Gods And Goddesses Of Canaan*](https://books.google.ca/books?id=2xadCgAAQBAJ), 24-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
36. Krebernik, “The Beginnings of Yahwism from an Assyriological Perspective,” 49.;Bembry, *Yahweh’s Coming of Age*, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
37. Dan is the other site. Day, [*Yahweh And The Gods And Goddesses Of Canaan*](https://books.google.ca/books?id=2xadCgAAQBAJ), 36-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
38. Krebernik,“The Beginnings of Yahwism from an Assyriological Perspective,” 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
39. It is important to remember that while I use the term “foreign” here, we are speaking of Israelite religion against the backdrop of other West Semitic cultures with a shared heritage. With that being said, “foreign” still seems appropriate in that strictly speaking, these other influencing cultures were not Israelite. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
40. Smith, *The Early History of God*, 56.;Day, [*Yahweh And The Gods And Goddesses Of Canaan*](https://books.google.ca/books?id=2xadCgAAQBAJ), 35-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
41. [Justin Kelley, "Toward A New Synthesis Of The God Of Edom And Yahweh"](https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/bitstream/123456789/7231/1/toward-new-synthesis-god-edom.pdf), in *Antiguo Oriente: Cuadernos Del Centro De Estudios De Historia Del Antiguo Oriente* 7 (2009): 255-280, 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
42. [Kelley, "Toward A New Synthesis Of The God Of Edom And Yahweh"](https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/bitstream/123456789/7231/1/toward-new-synthesis-god-edom.pdf), 266.; Krebernik,“The Beginnings of Yahwism from an Assyriological Perspective,” 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
43. A side by side comparison shows deep connections between Psalm 29 and a similar Baal hymn. Bembry, *Yahweh’s Coming of Age*, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
44. Smith, *The Early History of God*, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
45. Bernard F. Batto, “Mythic Dimensions of the Exodus Tradition,” in *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, edited by  [Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider, and William H.C. Propp](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about) (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
46. Batto, “Mythic Dimensions of the Exodus Tradition,” 191-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
47. [Bernhard Lang, *The Hebrew God*, (New Haven: Yale University Press](https://books.google.ca/books/about/The_Hebrew_God.html?id=uf2RVOzQlM8C&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false), 2002), 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
48. Smith, *The Early History of God*, 33. Smith, “YHWH’s Original Character: Questions about an Unknown God,” 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
49. [Kelley, "Toward A New Synthesis Of The God Of Edom And Yahweh"](https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/bitstream/123456789/7231/1/toward-new-synthesis-god-edom.pdf), 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
50. Day, [*Yahweh And The Gods And Goddesses Of Canaan*](https://books.google.ca/books?id=2xadCgAAQBAJ), 18-9. Bembry, *Yahweh’s Coming of Age*, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
51. Bembry, *Yahweh’s Coming of Age*, 62-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
52. Ibid, 91, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
53. Ibid, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
54. Ibid, 113-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
55. Smith, *The Early History of God*, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
56. Ibid, , 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
57. Ibid, 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
58. Smith, *The Early History of God*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
59. For examples of this contrast between YHWH and Baal in the Bible, see the following passages for some examples which make a clear demarcation between the Israelites choosing between YHWH and Baal: Judges 2:13; Judges 6:25-32; 1 Kings 18:19-40; 1 Kings 19:18; 1 Kings 22:53; 2 Kings 3:2; 2 Kings 10:23; Jeremiah 2:8; Jeremiah 7:9; Jeremiah 11:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
60. Amzallag, “Yahweh, the Canaanite God of Metallurgy?” 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
61. [Kelley, "Toward A New Synthesis Of The God Of Edom And Yahweh"](https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/bitstream/123456789/7231/1/toward-new-synthesis-god-edom.pdf), 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
62. Amzallag, “Yahweh, the Canaanite God of Metallurgy?” 391. For more information on YHWH and Edom, see Thomas [Römer](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about), “The Revelation of the Divine Name to Moses and the Construction of a Memory About the Origins of the Encounter Between Yhwh and Israel,” in *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
63. [Kelley, "Toward A New Synthesis Of The God Of Edom And Yahweh,"](https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/bitstream/123456789/7231/1/toward-new-synthesis-god-edom.pdf) 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
64. [Kelley, "Toward A New Synthesis Of The God Of Edom And Yahweh,"](https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/bitstream/123456789/7231/1/toward-new-synthesis-god-edom.pdf) 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
65. Amzallag, “Yahweh, the Canaanite God of Metallurgy?” 392. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
66. Ibid, 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
67. Ibid, 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
68. Ibid, 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
69. The Hebrew Bible uses gendered language when referring to YHWH. However, Smith writes that the Bible uses “gendered metaphors yet transcending such particular renderings,” to explain how YHWH is still not a gendered being; Mark S. Smith, *The* *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 91, 95, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
70. Gary A. Rendsburg, “Moses the Magician,” i[n Thomas Römer, *Israel's Exodus In Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, And Geoscience*, (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015)](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about), 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
71. [Römer](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about), “The Revelation of the Divine Name to Moses and the Construction of a Memory About the Origins of the Encounter Between Yhwh and Israel,” 311-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
72. Isis seeks out the unknown name of Ra, and Ra is quite concerned over giving up his name lest anyone hold magical influence over him. For more information, see Gary A. Rendsburg, “Moses the Magician,” i[n Thomas Römer, *Israel's Exodus In Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, And Geoscience*, (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015)](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04768-3#about), 244.For information on the “cultural memory of the Hebrew Bible” and “Egyptian connections,” see William G. Dever, “The Exodus and the Bible: What Was Known; What Was Remembered; What was Forgotten?” in *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
73. Rendsburg, “Moses the Magician,” 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
74. Ibid, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
75. Ibid, 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
76. Rendsburg, “Moses the Magician,” 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
77. Dever, “The Exodus and the Bible,” 401. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
78. Robinson, "The God Of The Patriarchs And The Ugaritic Texts,” 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
79. [Jürgen Van Oorschot, and Markus Witte, *The Origins Of Yahwism*, (Berlin: de Gruyter](https://books.google.ca/books?id=8LtGDwAAQBAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false), 2017), VII. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)