



When and from Where did YHWH Emerge?

Some Reflections on Early Yahwism in Israel and Judah

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ABSTRACT The paper addresses two crucial questions of the history of Israelite religion. Did YHWH emerge in the southern steppe and when did YHWH become the God of Judah? After discussing the available evidence for YHWH's origin in the South, the paper tests the extra-biblical evidence for the worship of YHWH in Israel and Judah and questions his widespread importance in the tenth and early ninth centuries BCE in the mentioned territories. By presenting the theophoric personal names, the hypothesis is corroborated that YHWH was significantly introduced at the earliest by the Omrides. Moving then to the epigraphic evidence, the additional evince for YHWH's origin in the South is reviewed negatively. YHWH of Teman from *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* cannot prove the origin of this deity in the South. It is rather a piece of evidence that the worship of this deity in the South was not natural even in the mid-eighth century BCE. That YHWH's true origin is in Midian, Paran, Seir, etc. remains a speculative hypothesis that is built on the tradition-history of some biblical passages and the biblical Sinai tradition. This particular feature is indeed related to the South and its struggle to claim independence for the Southern YHWH from the North. YHWH was only introduced to Judah as a patron deity of the dynasty, and that is the state of the Omrides ruling in Jerusalem.

KEYWORDS YHWH, Israelite Religion, early Yahwism, Iconography, Judahite religion, history of Ancient Israel, Hebrew Bible, Sinai

Introduction

The entry “Yahweh” by Karel van der Toorn in the highly regarded *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* asks an intriguing question: “If YHWH was at home in the south, then, how did he make his way to the north?” (1999, 912). The “South” in this quote refers to the fringes of the desert in the Negev, the southern Arabah, and the Sinai Peninsula, that is, the traditional area of YHWH's origin, and the “North” is the land of Israel/Palestine, the traditional area of the emergence of Yahwism. Against the background of the more recent discussion on the early statehood of Israel and Judah, I have become convinced that this is

the wrong question and that it should rather be inverted: How did YHWH become the God *in* Judah and *of* Judah? If the answer is not to be found in the biblical narrative (which introduces YHWH to the land via the exodus and the Israelite conquest) but rather in the political and historical development in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, then the question should instead be: Why was YHWH's emergence biblically conceptualized as coming from "the South"? This conundrum will be addressed in the following paper after suggesting a new understanding of YHWH's emergence in Judah. But first some remarks on the reconstruction of Israelite religion in general are necessary.

Beyond the Biblical Paradigm: Some General Remarks on the Conceptualization of Early Israelite Religion

Mark S. Smith characterized the state of the study of Israelite religion with some reservation [2] in the second edition of the 1990 ground-breaking book, *The Early History of God*:

History of religion work for ancient Israel remains largely in the stage of assembling and examining pertinent data, with steps having been taken toward satisfactory theoretical frameworks for specific topics within the larger enterprise. (Smith 2002, XXIX) [3]

It does not seem immoderate to state that thirty years later not very much has changed, particularly with regard to the data on the early history of Israelite religion. In terms of methodology, we are still assembling and examining data and steps towards a satisfactory theoretical framework (Uehlinger 2015). There are nevertheless several important monographs on the topic, such as Bernhard Lang's *The Hebrew God: Portrait of an Ancient Deity* (2002) and Thomas Römer's *The Invention of God* (2015). Preceding the completion of the present paper, several more monographs have been published on the topic, including Theodore J. Lewis' *The Origin and Character of God* (2020), Shawn W. Flynn's *A Story of YHWH* (2020), and Daniel E. Fleming's *Yahweh Before Israel* (2021). Thus, it seems that the topic has recently become 'hot.' Most influential in the meantime was the overview of Ziony Zevit, which brought the idea of a singular Israelite *religion* into a more appropriate plural (2001), and the volume of Francesca Stavrakopoulou and John Barton that addressed the *diversities* among these plural religions (2010). Another milestone is the anthology *The Origins of Yahwism* (van Oorschot and Witte 2017), which addressed most of the issues to be discussed in this paper. In mentioning this tip of the iceberg, it becomes clear that there has been progress in many respects. The study of early Israelite religion and the emergence of Yahwism as "*religion(s)*" has indeed taken part in the *material turn* in several ways (Mandell and Smoak 2019, 3). Particularly iconographic studies have become a natural part within studies on ancient Israelite religion (Keel 2007; Uehlinger 2019; Bonfiglio 2016, 227–310, 2020). Finally it cannot be denied that archaeology has contributed tremendously to the study of Yahwism in the past three decades (Faust 2020), for instance the excavations of *Tel Moza*, *Tel Rehov*, *Lachish*, *Ḥirbet 'Atarūz*, etc. [4]

Notwithstanding all progress and the admission to religious plurality particularly in the time of the divided monarchy, the underlying paradigm of *early* Yahwism is still framed by two main assumptions: (1) YHWH was the God of a group of people named "Israel" from the earliest traceable records of this group in Israel/Palestine, and (2) YHWH was already the national deity in the tenth century BCE. Thus, the conceded religious diversity was framed [5]

by national unity. Only with the division of the kingdom traditionally dated to 926 BCE did “Israelite” religion depart from this former unity into local Yahwisms of the two states, Israel and Judah. To be clear, the biblical account still provides the powerful conceptual matrix behind this reconstruction. Yet both presuppositions have to be challenged, as will be demonstrated below. It is already the conception of what is conventionally called “ancient Israel” that brings plurality into the emergence of what is conventionally called “Israelite religion” (Uehlinger 2015, 4). The biblical image forms a hypothetical orthodoxy to which a certain deviance is added. The deviance, such as the worship of a goddess, is then often called syncretistic, heterodox, or private, etc. The “prescriptive Torah as a template of actual ‘Israelite religion’” (Uehlinger 2019, 115) continues to be the hidden matrix of Israelite religion. Thus, Israelite religion is a biblical religion and *vice versa*; both are coextensive and more or less identical in origin, emergence, and development. In the traditional model there was not very much regional variance and change, and the impact of local sanctuaries and local traditions was minimal. What is striking, though, is that the reconstruction of early Israelite religion has been largely immune to the progress that has taken place in the historiography of Israel over the past decades (Knauf and Guillaume 2016; Berlejung 2019; Frevel 2018a). It assumes a unified Israel with a common origin. But *all* these basic assumptions have since been shaken. To demonstrate this, let me first list the seven pillars of the *traditional* reconstruction of Israelite religion before we deepen some aspects of the discussion. The seven pillars are:

1. YHWH was not an indigenous deity of the region, into which YHWH worshippers spread by settlement, but was rather originally connected to the southern regions “Sinai” and “Midian.” [6]
2. Israel originated from a tribal and nomadic existence. [7]
3. YHWH worshippers were united by common ancestry and kinship. [8]
4. In one way or another there was an impact of “the desert” that marked a pronounced contrast to the Canaanite polytheistic religion. [9]
5. There was a pre-state existence of “Israel” after the conquest of the land in which YHWH was worshipped by the tribes of Israel in various sanctuaries all over the land, but there was no regional diversity in early Yahwism. [10]
6. YHWH was introduced to Jerusalem by David at the latest and promoted to the national God by Solomon. Within the united monarchy under the kings David and Solomon, YHWH worship was not only introduced to Jerusalem but he was made the national deity of “Israel” from *Dan to Beersheba*. [11]
7. Only after the division of the kingdom in 926 BCE did Yahwism separate into a northern “Samaritan” and a southern “Judaeen” branch, a development that intensified after the conquest of Samaria in 722 BCE, which marked the end of the existence of the Northern Kingdom as a nation state. [12]

We cannot go into detail here, but *all* of these assumptions have been either questioned or already abandoned in more recent research on the history of Israel (Frevel 2018a, 2018b, 2019). If this is taken seriously, the image of what “Israel” is in the construct of Israelite religion changes dramatically. Within this trajectory it goes without saying that YHWH was [13]

not the first or original chief God of Isra-El (Sanders 2015, 92). This has been noted by many, but the consequences are more far-reaching. If there was no single origin, and neither the people nor the territory of “Israel” in the pre-monarchic and early monarchic period (twelfth to ninth centuries BCE) were uniformly homogeneous but rather composed of very different regions and diverse clans, why should we then speak of a uniform Israelite religion? One gets the impression that in the last decade the tremendous change in the historiography of Israel has not yet had the impact on the reconstruction of early Yahwism that it deserves. In the following paper I will touch upon the first, fifth, sixth, and seventh pillars in addressing the issue of YHWH’s origin in the southern desert fringe, after which a new understanding of YHWH’s emergence in Judah will be suggested. The pragmatics of the emergence of YHWH in the South in the biblical account are addressed in a final, more speculative paragraph.

The Lord Rose Up from Seir: So What? Questioning the Origin from the South

Within the traditional paradigm, it was unquestioned that Moses came to know YHWH in Midian. Even if the story of his flight was not understood to be a historical account, it was meaningful to the reconstruction of early Yahwism insofar as the connection between YHWH and the Midianites was considered to be historical. In addition to this, it was unquestioned that this tiny piece of “evidence” was also reflected in the poetic texts of theophany, which were reckoned to contain the bedrock of tradition. This view is even visible in the antiquated translation of Deut 33:2 in the NRSV “The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran. With him were myriads of holy ones; at his right, a host of his own.” Together with Judg 5:4–5; Ps 68:8–9; Hab 3:3 this text was understood to contain the most original information regarding the homeland of YHWH in the southern desert circumscribed as Paran, Seir, Teman, and Sinai. The more the patriarchal traditions became un-historical the more the southern origin of Yahwism became a dogma. [14]

The mentioned southern landscapes are all located outside the later Israelite settlement area. Since it is hardly conceivable that Israel subsequently moved the seat of its main deity abroad, it can be concluded with sufficient certainty from the texts that the directions given are correct and that Yahweh will have been the name of a *numen of one or more desert mountains east and/or west of the Arabah* at the beginning of the Iron Age or shortly before. (Koch 2007, 174)¹ [15]

This situation has changed dramatically. It nevertheless remains true that we do not have any evidence for YHWH as an indigenous deity in the second millennium in Palestine or Syria. All previous attempts to locate YHWH in Egypt besides the Shasu (see below), in the traditions of Ebla (*Ya*), in the texts from Ugarit (*yw*), or elsewhere, have failed (Weippert 1997, 35–44; Lewis 2020, 227–34; van der Toorn 1999) and remain “wishful thinking” (Krebernik 2017, 61, 2013). Such evidence, rather, has contributed to the understanding of the predecessors [16]

1 Translation by the author. The German original reads: “Die genannten südlichen Landschaften liegen alle außerhalb des späteren israelitischen Siedlungsgebietes. Da es schwerlich denkbar ist, daß Israel den Sitz seines Hauptgottes nachträglich in das Ausland verlagert hat, läßt sich aus den Texten mit hinlänglicher Sicherheit schließen, daß die Richtungsangaben zutreffen und Jahwä zu Beginn der Eisenzeit oder kurz vorher der Name des *Numens eines oder mehrerer Wüstenberge östlich oder/und westlich der Araba* gewesen sein wird.”

of Israelite religion. Thus, the only trace leads into the Midianite-Kenite hypothesis (for this hypothesis see Blenkinsopp 2008; Blum 2012a, 49–53; Na’aman 2016). But in the same way it also holds true that we do not have extra-biblical evidence of YHWH originally being a Midianite (or Edomite, see below) deity. Moses’ encounter with the Midianites in the Exodus story is discussed in its function to reflect historical beginnings, particularly the information that Jethro, as a priest of Midian, was related to YHWH worship (Albertz 2012, 53–99). However, the older view was that, following Gen 4:16, the Kenites were reckoned as part of the Midianites and were the original YHWH worshippers: “Everything indicates that they did not adopt the worship of Yahweh from others, but were conscious of being the proper, the genuine, the original worshippers of Yahweh” (Budde 1899, 21). This originality cannot hold water. Only the biblical evidence (and nothing beyond that) attests to the Kenites as a tribe in the Southern Negev and perhaps the Arabah (Mondriaan 2011; Gaß 2012) (see also the paper of Juan Manuel Tebes in this volume). Building on the biblical information on the Kenites (Num 24:21; Judg 1:16; 4:11; 1 Sam 27:10, Zech 6:1; etc.) as well as archaeological and metallurgical evidence of copper production in the Arabah, Nissim Amzallag has put forward a renewal of the Midianite-Kenite hypothesis in a very creative and combinatory argument (2014, 2018, 2019). He concludes “that YHWH was once essentially related to the production and processing of copper in Canaan” (2016, 226). The ancient metal workers had a special affinity to this God and even the metallurgical knowledge was related especially to him. His argument of YHWH worship and his conclusion that YHWH was this God is speculative at best and cannot be discussed here in detail. What we nevertheless may state is that we do not know much at all about the religion of the Kenites and the Midianites in the second millennium BCE. As regards the Midianites, neither in Exod 2:16 nor in Exod 18:1 nor even in Num 10:29–32 is Moses’ father-in-law explicitly related to any YHWH worship that is *not* mediated by Moses and the Israelites; whether Zipporah, his daughter, first learned about YHWH from her family or only after her marriage with Moses remains open in the biblical text. If we follow Julius Wellhausen in deriving the name YHWH from Arab *hwh* “he blows, he falls” (1981, 25 note 1; see also Knauf 1984, 1988, 43–50), the only remaining clue for attributing the God of Israel to the region discussed is the name itself. And although this is widely accepted and a corresponding alternative is lacking, the argument is circular: If YHWH is related to the southern scenery—which is attested in the unknown location of the Sinai desert and mountain, in his relation to Midian, and in some texts of YHWH’s theophany from the South (Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4–5; Ps 68:8–9; Hab 3:3)—and if the etymology confirms the original character of YHWH as a weather God—only then is it logical to suppose that the name is derived from a hypothetical Old-Arab root. Finally, one has to admit that the root *hwh* and its meaning “he blows” have left no traces in the biblical record (Lewis 2020, 223) aside from the attributive relation of YHWH to wind, storm, lightning, and thunder, which are rather standardized theophanic motifs (Albertz 1994, 50–56). If this is not accepted, the derivation from the root **HWH/hyh* as indicated in the biblical account (Exod 3:14) also has something to offer (Kitz 2019; Lewis 2020, 210–27). In addition, without presenting an alternative etymology, Josef Tropper has questioned the standard derivation from a verbal root with considerable linguistic arguments (2001, 2017). Thus, the name of the Israelite God remains a conundrum.

In this situation of undecidable hypotheses and ignorance, scholars sought refuge in what is perhaps the oldest reference from Egypt. In inscriptions of Soleb and Amarah-West from the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BCE, a “land of the Shasu-Yhw” (*š ššw y-h-w-š*) is mentioned, and the Shasu-Yhw are then associated with other groups of Shasu pastoral semi-

nomads from other places. Since groups of mobile people called Shasu in Egyptian texts are attested throughout the Southern Levant (and the phenomenon is heterogenous and widespread, see Giveon 1971; Warburton 2013; Grabbe 2017, 26–27), there is much discussion on the question whether the other toponyms mentioned alongside *yhw* locate the Shasu groups in Lebanon and Syria or whether these inscriptions locate the Shasu-Yhw alongside other groups from Northern Arabia, the Sinai Peninsula, and both sides of the Southern Arabah Rift Valley, that is, in the presumed area of YHWH's origins according to the biblical texts. Martin Leuenberger, for instance, continues to locate these $\text{ššw } yhw$ in the South (Leuenberger 2011, 2016, 2017), while Adrom and Müller situate the toponyms in Northern Palestine and the Lebanon (2017). However, even if some of the groups mentioned alongside the $\text{ššw } yhw$ can in fact be located in the area of Edom, Seir, and the Arabah, it is by no means clear that the list is homogenous in geographical respect, since the names are compiled from various sources. In other words, if the lists comprise a composite of names with various origins, one cannot simply locate an unknown toponym by relating it to juxtaposed other toponyms that are putatively located more safely. This methodological challenge applies to both variants of locating the $\text{ššw } yhw$, which are accordingly neither *clearly* of southern origin nor of an original relation to Syria and the Lebanon unless we relate them to other toponyms in the list. Yet, the reading of Nr. 92 šš-r-ï-r ($T\text{ššw } šrr$) as Seir in the list of Amarah-West remains problematic (due to the double /r/), and thus also the location of the whole list in Southern Palestine. The corresponding entry in the Soleb list is different anyway in this regard. Finally, if one agrees to acknowledge a reference to Seir in $šrr$, this does not have great impact on the $\text{ššw } yhw$ unless one accepts the structuring function of exactly this toponym in the list, as is argued by Leuenberger (2016, 283). Particularly this argument has nevertheless been challenged convincingly by Henrik Pfeiffer (2013, 39). It is not compelling to admit orthographic mistakes made (continuously) by the copyists, on the one hand, and at the same time to argue that they have implemented a sophisticated ordering principle, on the other. Even ignoring these difficulties, it is by no means clear that the geographical region named *yhw* is the homeland of the deity. Although it remains possible that the mountainous region called *yhw* is related to the deity with the name YHWH, it is less clear than often claimed. Thus, Adrom and Müller correctly conclude that neither religio-historically nor geographically can *reliable* indications be collected from the lists (2013, 2017). Therefore, they consider the lists *de facto* useless in the discussion about the origin of YHWH. Recently Daniel E. Fleming has pointed out that when Giveon originally located the toponyms from the Soleb list, he was already guided by the Bible (2021, 62). It holds true that a certain circularity characterizes the use of the Shasu-Yhw when tracing the origin of the God YHWH. Only if this *deity* lurks behind the Shasu-*land*, and only if this group can originally be located in the Arabah, and only if they worshipped the God YHWH, and only if there is a link between the Exodus group and these Shasu, can they contribute to the origin of YHWH. As long as the geographical identification of the Shasu is so shaky, the Egyptian evidence is not of very much help, be it in the southern or the northern location of YHWH's homeland. This insight also applies when one considers the personal name $j\text{-}t\text{-}w\text{-}j_2\text{-}r^c\text{-}y\text{-}h$, which was presented by Thomas Schneider as the earliest occurrence of the name YHWH in Egyptian documents taken from a papyrus of the Book of the Dead from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth dynasty (Pharaonic Roll 5) (2007). Even if the owner of the papyrus is named this way, and the name can be understood as *'adonî rō'ē-yāh* "My Lord is the Shepherd of Yah," the shepherd is not simply identical with YHWH, and *-yh* should not too easily be accepted as the much later hypocoristic form

of YHWH (Adrom and Müller 2017, 108–9). The *-yh* ending rather remains a toponym whose shepherd is N.N., and it is mere speculation to connect this with Ps 80:2; Hos 4:16; etc.

As regards the biblical evidence for YHWH's origin from the South, the use of the four poetic texts mentioned above describing the theophany of YHWH related to regions in the South (Paran, Teman, Seir, Sinai) in Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4–5; Ps 68:8–9; Hab 3:3 (Axelsson 1987, 178) has undergone harsh critique (Pfeiffer 2005, 2017). In more recent exegetical discussions, these poetic texts have been dated radically later so that they cannot prove an old tradition of the origin of YHWH in the South. It remains possible that an old tradition has been dressed in very young texts, but if so the proof of the tradition must come from elsewhere and not from the texts themselves. Only Judg 5:4–5 can maintain its likely early dating, but even this text was written—at the earliest—in the Monarchic Period (Groß 2009, 289–349) and more likely in the ninth or eighth rather than in the tenth century BCE.

Instead of providing a reliable resource on YHWH's origin, the epiphanic genre rather serves a rhetorical function to emphatically underscore YHWH's martial character. Building on this, Pfitzmann has recently argued that the biblical traditions reflect various memories of YHWH's origin, which are related to poly-Yahwistic varieties of Yahwism that can no longer be traced historically (2020, 457–58). Within the many local traditions of YHWH, several narratives of YHWH's emergence existed as “inventions of traditions” rather than historical records of YHWH's true origin. As a result of the Exodus tradition becoming crucial for the construction of Yahwistic identity, these traditions were mingled into the present inhomogeneous picture of YHWH coming from the South. The traditions of YHWH's relation to Midian were kept to include a memory of the permanent YHWH cult in the southern regions. The bulk of evidence is interpreted by Pfitzmann as indicating YHWH's worship in the South rather than his origin.

The traditional conception of the character of YHWH can be summarized in one simple sentence: Compared to the deities of Canaan, YHWH was *different* by origin. He was neither integrated in a pantheon nor originally characterized by polytheistic hierarchy relations. He was simply the only, solitary, and celibate deity, optionally aniconic or even monotheistic, related to the desert rather than to the cultivated land. Only by contact and competition did he become “Baalish” or was assimilated with the prime god of the Canaanite religion, El, by comparison. That YHWH was connected to the desert was drawn from *'ahar hammidbār* (“beyond the desert”) in Exod 3:1, the sacrifice in the desert Exod 3:18; 5:1; 7:16, etc., or from cultic lyrics such as Ps 29:8 “The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.” The biblical narrative that Israel journeyed forty years in the wilderness was seen as evidence that YHWH's home is the desert (Sweeney 2013, 154–55). Even the inscriptional evidence of *tmn* “south” combined with YHWH from the eighth-century BCE *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* was considered to corroborate YHWH's desert origin (Rendsburg 1980, 9) (see below). Finally, Horeb means “the dry place” and Sinai is a desert as well. However, it is often emphasized that the desert-sown diametrical construct of biblical origins is rather an over-simplification of nature than historical truth (Hiebert 1996, 20). Again, we can observe tremendous progress in biblical and religious studies questioning each and every piece of this traditional view. Yet, a new picture of early Yahwism did not emerge from the deconstruction of the traditional view. Why was that?

It is true that one of the main areas of locating the ‘home’ of YHWH is beyond the cultivated land, but its function in the biblical tradition is not clear; and neither is it clear when this location ‘outside’ was developed. That this feature has to be related with the oldest beginnings of tradition is questioned in recent approaches. Beyond the historical appropriateness of the

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tradition, the rhetorical function comes into play that may be a camouflage of the historical setting: The foreignness of YHWH might just have been emphasized to conceal that he did not arise naturally from a broader basis of religious belief but was rather imposed by small circles. But this suggestion still remains open for discussion and further development. What corroborates heading in this direction is the commonly accepted view that since traditions are recursive constructs, the roots and the very beginnings of traditions are often, if not always, concealed and withdrawn from historical access (Shils 1981). The “chain of tradition” has no beginning, it is rather built on reception. The only way to hold on to claiming the Sinai tradition as an index for YHWH’s origin is to see it as a sign of continuity, so that the age of the literary tradition is not decisive (Schmid 2019, 248). And as far as the absolute distinctiveness from the Canaanite religion is concerned, the discussion has changed tremendously, too. For almost fifty years, the Israelite religion has been discussed as a sub-set of the Canaanite religion (Coogan 1987), which is not distinctive in principle, but evolved out of its Canaanite origins (Smith 1990). This view is corroborated by the relation of YHWH and Asherah, which seems to have been not only a temporal love affair, but a constant relationship forming a divine couple. Aspects which bring YHWH’s character close to Baal and El are not ephemeral but rather essential (Müller 2008; Adrom and Müller 2017), and YHWH becomes all the more comparable to his contemporaneous divine companions (Cornell 2020). If there is no pronounced contrast to Canaanite polytheistic religions in essence, there is no need to develop the character of YHWH from the desert origins.

YHWH as National Deity Disseminated from Jerusalem Throughout the Land?

The traditional view attributed a crucial role to David and Solomon. David conquered Jerusalem and brought YHWH to the city (2 Sam 5–6) and made him the national deity. Since YHWH was already worshiped throughout the land by the tribes of Israel, he had an easy game with the promotion of Yahwism. Solomon built the temple (1 Kgs 6:1) and thus laid the foundation for later centralization. The more recent debate has limited the impact of these figures enormously. It is more likely that the temple in Jerusalem was inherited from the former Canaanite city god, probably a solar deity (Keel 2007). Nothing beyond the biblical account indicates that Yahwism was the national religion of the whole land from upper Galilee to the Negev. All the archaeological evidence we have at hand points at diversity, a limited Canaanite polytheism with Aramaean and Syrian influence in the North, and North Arabian/Edomite and Egyptian influence in the South. [22]

Furthermore, if there was no united monarchy centered in Jerusalem, there was also no division of the kingdom in 926 BCE, as the biblical narrative portrays the development at the end of the tenth century BCE. It was not Jeroboam I who distracted the northern tribes from going up to Jerusalem, because there was no prior centrality of worship. It is a near consensus that he did *not* make the Northerners deviant by associating YHWH with a bull in Bethel and Dan (1 Kgs 12:28). It was rather Jeroboam II who built those sanctuaries and who fostered the local Yahwistic cult in the Northern Kingdom (Berlejung 2009; Frevel 2018a, 184–85). The biblical pattern of the deviant North following the sin of Jeroboam and the pious South following the footsteps of David rather reveals a Judean perspective aimed at a legitimation of Judean independence from the North (Frevel 2018c). What seems to be true of the exaggeration is that Yahwism in the North became *increasingly* different from that in the [23]

South. The Samaritan religion did not appear out of nowhere (or only all of the sudden after a schism in the Hasmonean Period) but emerged after the close cooperation between Judah and Israel had ended, after the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE at the latest. But as correct as it is to assume regional manifestations of the Yahwist religion (Uehlinger 2019, 106–7; Hutton 2010; Allen 2015), it is (as the mentioned studies also underline) mistaken to understand this as “divergence” or a “parting of [two] ways” in the division of the kingdom. It rather reflects the plurality of Yahwisms from the start, which were unified by the biblical account from a Judaeian perspective. It is the regional sanctuaries or temples at Shiloh, Shechem, Gibeon, Bethel, Hazor, Megiddo, Dan, Samaria, Beth-Saida, and other places which formed the plurality of local Yahwisms in the North.

YHWH as the God *in* Judah and *of* Judah: Some General Remarks

Just as little as the Northern poly-Yahwism originated with Jeroboam I did the Southern variety of Yahwism(s) in Jerusalem, Moza, Hebron, Beersheba, Aseka, Lachish, etc., develop from Rehoboam. Although not everybody will follow my reconstruction of the early history of Judaeian kingdom, in which Rehoboam—as part of a retrospective construction of a beginning out of conflict (Frevel 2018a, 177–80) (for different view see Krause 2020, 111–12)—is a fictitious figure, it is crucial to look at the evidence for a Southern Yahwism beyond the biblical account. As already noted above, it cannot be taken for granted that YHWH was worshiped in Jerusalem as early as the tenth century BCE. We simply have no extra-biblical evidence for the worship of YHWH at any sanctuary in the South before the ninth century, not even in Jerusalem, Arad, Lachish, or other places. This brings us back to the question of when and how YHWH became the God *in* Judah and *of* Judah. The emergence of a discernible Yahwism in Judah is related to the emergence of statehood. As already indicated above, the paradigm of state formation has undergone a radical change in the last decade, while the reconstruction of ‘state’ or ‘national’ religion has not. Thus, it is necessary to also take the development of the Northern state of Israel into account.

Before presenting a case study on the question of how Yahwism emerged in Judah, let me emphasize, in (admittedly too) broad strokes, some background elements that are important for the following argument. As a starting point, one has to realize the role that the network of ruling elites, or the chiefs or kings, play in the reconstruction of a collective level of religious practice within the boundaries of power. Most often the origins of a “national” deity can be traced back to the protective function of the ruling family or dynasty. As a rule, states originate from chiefdoms, which in turn emerge from patron-client networks in which families and clans engaged with one another economically and politically (Frevel 2018a, 98). On top of this, three decisive points with regard to the reconstruction below are as follows: First, any explicit extra-biblical evidence of YHWH worship in Israel, Judah, or Transjordan before the ninth century BCE is lacking. Although one must always be cognizant that the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence, this observation is striking and calls for an explanation. If YHWH had been the sole or decisive divine player, one would expect that at least traces would have been found in the archaeological or epigraphic record; but they have not (Keel and Uehlinger 1998; Renz 2009; Berlejung 2019)! Second, in reconstructing the history of Yahwism, one has to take regional characteristics into consideration. Even if political and religious geography do not necessarily need to coincide, they are not independent of each other, especially when (allowing for a heuristic purpose of this anachronistic concept) ‘national deities’ are involved.

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Neither the territory of Israel nor that of Judah is clearly defined but is subject to great changes during the existence of these states. It is crucial, therefore, to look at the contested areas of the developing zones, such as the Shephelah, the Negev, the region of Benjamin, Gilead, or the Galilee, etc. This brings us to the third point: On the one hand, the territorial inconsistency alone speaks for regional differentiations and poly-Yahwistic tendencies. On the other hand, one has to consider the main factors of the spreading of a 'religion' in these contexts. Although not the only factor, monarchy is the decisive one in my understanding.

In the following I will presuppose the understanding of the history of Israel and Judah which I have argued in a larger textbook (Frevel 2018a). Within this new reconstruction, which leaves behind the assumption of an encompassing Davidic-Solomonic empire as well as the idea of the so-called division of the kingdom, Judah and Israel are considered to be deeply intertwined in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, particularly in the early phases of their emergence. A stable monarchy first existed with the Omrides in the North and only more than a generation later in Jerusalem. However, this reign in the South was not originally independent from the North. Some define the relation solely as an economic and military co-operation, some rather as a (veiled) vassalage of the Southern kingdom. Based on biblical information and the striking similarity of the kings' names, I have in contrast suggested that the early monarchy in ninth-century Jerusalem was a secondary kingdom and at least temporarily a *secundogeniture* of the Omride dynasty (Frevel 2018a, 190–91, 234–38). This means that members of the ruling family from Samaria ruled Jerusalem and Judah. Only in the eighth century BCE, when Israel came under heavy Aramaic pressure from the Aramaean king Hazael, could Judah develop, under Aramaic patronage, a new form of dependency which enabled the southwestern expansion of the territory into the southern Shephelah and the Negev. Finally, after the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE, Judah remained and further developed until the late seventh/early sixth century BCE without significant political influence from Israel/Samaria. Strikingly, the influence became important again in the Persian period. Whether one takes the weaker variant of entanglement (influence, dependence) or the stronger one (vassalry, secundogeniture) of intertwined dominion is ultimately not decisive. The key point is that religious affiliation and governance belong together, and thus the impact of the Northern Kingdom on the religion of the South cannot be underestimated. If it is accepted that monarchy is the decisive factor for the nationwide dissemination of a deity within the national cult, the role of the Omrides becomes crucially important. This is because it is consensually accepted that YHWH was the tutelary deity of the Omride dynasty. This can be seen in the naming tradition of Ahab's children. All of them bear theophoric Yahwistic names *for the first time* in the history of Israel: Ahaziah, Joram, Athaliah. This corroborates that YHWH was the patron God of the Omrides. This is not only a new phenomenon in the biblical reflection of the Northern dynasty (Sanders 2015, 79). The father of Baasha, Ahijah (1 Kgs 15:27), and Abijah, the son of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 14:1), are special cases which cannot be discussed in this paper. In Judah Jehoshaphat is the first king to carry a Yahwistic name (1 Kgs 15:24; 22:41). Strikingly, military and economic joint ventures also begin at that time (1 Kgs 22:45–51). Judging from extra-biblical evidence, however, YHWH seems to have been unknown in the South before the establishment of the monarchy. If this is true, he was probably introduced into Jerusalem and the territory of Judah *by the Omrides* and thus became an important religious factor in the South. It cannot be excluded in principle that YHWH played a minor role in some local places in Judah before the ninth century BCE (although this does not seem likely at present), but the breakthrough as the God of the Shephelah and the hill-country is most probably only a con-

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sequence of the expansion of Judah. Perhaps the inscription of *Khirbet Beit Lei* gives evidence to the process. This inscription scratched into the soft limestone of a burial chamber in the southern Shephelah close to Lachish mentions YHWH as “the god of the whole country, the mountains of Judah and the god of Jerusalem” (Ahituv 2008, 233–34; Leuenberger 2014). There are difficulties in reading and dating the inscription paleographically, but it is most often dated to the late eighth or early seventh century BCE (Renz 1995, 1:243). In addressing YHWH as the god of the Judaeian hill-country and *the whole land* (and not the whole earth, as כּל הארץ is often translated), the inscription is perhaps indicative for the expansion of YHWH’s dominion in the time not long before. Perhaps it is exactly this emphasis which gives a clue that YHWH’s responsibility for this geographical area had not been self-evident (or at least not for long) and still needed to be emphasized. The whole Shephelah became Judaeian only after Hazael’s campaign to the South at the end of the ninth century BCE.

I am fully aware that this thesis provokes considerable resistance, especially as it turns the traditional image upside down. But as long as the counterarguments are based solely on the information given in the Bible, I am convinced that this thesis represents a strong alternative to the traditional picture, because it much more clearly takes the recent changes in the reconstruction of Israel’s history into account. [27]

YHWH in the South, *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud*, or the Emergence of Judaeian Religion

The discovery of the *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud* inscriptions and drawings in the Sinai desert south of Kadesh Barnea are an outstanding example of how complex the questions on the development of Yahwism have become. Biblical history has lost its guidance function to act as the sole indicator in reconstructing religious history. In contrast, what is nowadays required to answer the questions raised by the evidence from *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud* is a complex interaction of competencies in history, archaeology, epigraphy, iconography, etc. The findings of the way station in the desert can rightly be described as the most important findings in the history of Israelite religion of the last century, precisely because they do *not* mirror the biblical depiction. Their importance can hardly be overestimated, which can already be seen from the innumerable publications that cannot be mentioned here. Particularly the formulaic benedictions, which mention the goddess Asherah in association with YHWH, have kindled a fiery discussion. Today there is hardly any doubt that for a long time YHWH was worshipped with a partner, even in an official context. Notwithstanding the importance of the findings from *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud* as a valuable insight, they hardly reflect the whole picture. Thus, one should be cautious not to make them the normative instance for the reconstruction of Israelite and Judahite Yahwism. That being said, the evidence remains striking and particularly important for the issue discussed in this essay, that is, how YHWH entered Judah and became the first tutelary God of the Davidic dynasty and finally the national God of Judah. [28]

General Introductory Remarks on the Religious Importance and Interpretation of *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud*

When the first findings of the excavations of *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud* in 1975–1977 were published—more than a biblical generation ago—, what I call the ‘traditional paradigm’ of early Yahwism (see above) was nearly unquestioned. Within this traditional portrayal of Yahwism, *Kuntillet* [29]

'Ajrud had special importance: Although the particular economic and political role and function of the complex remained unclear, it quickly became obvious that there was a dominant influence from the North: Nine "Northern" Israelite personal names in the inscriptions featured the theophoric element /yw/, the mention of YHWH of Samaria, Phoenician influence in the iconography, the king's or governor's figurine painted on the wall, and finally a certain amount of Samarian ware supported the thesis that the complex (be it a sanctuary, a trading post, a way station, a school, or a caravanserai) had been built *with state support* from the North, i.e., Israel or Samaria. It is clear that the way station was not run without the Northerners' significant influence and control. It was part of the southern trade network (Finkelstein 1992; Zwicker 2000; Frevel 2018a, 218–19), particularly integrating the maritime trade in linking the Gulf of Aqaba with the trade hub in Gaza by the route named *Darb el-Gazze* ("the way to Gaza"). If Israel intended to take part in the long-distance trade importing spices, incense, copper, and other rare raw materials, it was necessary to have access to this network, especially because Israel did not have a sea harbor in its own territory (for the discussion when the harbor of Dor was integrated into the Omride rule, see Frevel 2018a, 227–28). At the entrance wall of the building a seated official with a lotus flower was painted on the plastered wall, either depicting the king or the governor of the enclosure. As with other wall paintings in *Kuntillet 'Ajrud*, the poorly preserved, colored painting resembles a Phoenician-Syrian iconographic style and can be added to the clues for the Northern control of the trading post on the important trade route from the South. While the evidence for a Northern presence or even control in *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* is obvious, there is also indication of a Judaeon participation. Particularly the provenance of some pottery from the Shephelah and the Jerusalem area (Meshel 2012, 244.280) suggest that *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* was a joint venture rather than an exclusively northern enterprise.

However, the overall polytheistic impression of the plaster inscriptions, which mention Baal, El, YHWH, and Asherah (Meshel 2012, 105.117), and the *pithoi* inscriptions mentioning YHWH and Asherah, puzzled scholars. There were many discussions on the religion of *Kuntillet 'Ajrud*, not to mention the fiery debate on the understanding of *'ašeratah* being a deity (uppercase 'A') or an object (lower case 'a'), or the interpretation of the two Bes figurines (see the overview in Thomas 2016, 2017). While some subsumed the general line into the dominant biblical narrative of a deviant and "heterodox" North, others faced the fact that the dominant picture of a single, unified, and 'orthodox' Yahwism even for the South had crumbled. In any case, *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* developed into the most important piece of evidence within the discussion on the character of Yahwism in the Monarchic Period with regard to four points: a) *monolatry*: following the mention of other deities alongside YHWH in an allegedly official context; b) *marital status*: was YHWH wifeless or in a constant relationship with the goddess Asherah? c) *aniconism*: was YHWH represented by the left of the two Bes-like figurines on Pithos A? and d) *origin*: does the phrase *yhwh (h)tmn* give a clue for YHWH's origin in the South, and/or for a certain regionalization of Yahwism in the eighth century BCE? For our purposes, the last point is most crucial and will be developed in more detail below.

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The Extra-Biblical Evidence for YHWH in the Ninth Century BCE

As was outlined above, the traditional paradigm is no longer tenable in almost all respects. Let us briefly summarize the extra-biblical evidence for YHWH worship in Israel and Judah. As already said, we are lacking almost any evidence for the worship of YHWH in Judah between the twelfth and ninth centuries BCE. To be clear, although the Egyptian lists mention a group

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of Shasu related to *yhw* (whatever is meant by this, a region, a clan, or a deity), there is no reliable extra-biblical link between this evidence and the YHWH in the evidence of Judah and Israel. The first mention of the deity YHWH is the Mesha stela (KAI 181:18), dated to the middle of the ninth century BCE and already known by 1886. It mentions [כ]לֵי יְהוָה, [ves]sels of YHWH, which were removed by king Mesha from (a sanctuary in?) Nebo at the time of Omri's son (most probably Ahab) with the help of the deity Ashtar-Kemosh. Among other things, the passage is a clear indication that at the time of Omri's expansion to the Moabite plateau YHWH was understood as a kind of 'national' God who was closely associated with the king's policy and by that with Israel. He came to Transjordan most probably not by the Israelite tribes, as it is reflected in Numbers 32, or by the people of Gad, who, according to the Mesha inscription, lived in the land of Ataroth for a long time (KAI 181:10), but rather through the policy of the Omrides. All the territory including Nebo, Madeba, Ataroth, and Jazer was assigned to the dominion of the Omrides by the worship of YHWH.

The Tel Dan stela (KAI⁵ 310), which is dated a bit later and which was found in 1993 [32] (with additional fragments found in 1995), gives evidence to the first Yahwistic names of the Omrides, allegedly Jehoram and Ahaziah. These two names are the most probable reconstruction of the stubs in lines 7 and 8 which mention "[...]ram, son [of Ahab], king of Israel" and "[...]jahu, son of [...], kin]g of the house of David" (Robker 2012, 246–64). According to 2 Kgs 8:24, the father of Ahaziah in Judah was "son" of the formerly ruling Joram, but this genealogical sonship is perhaps due to the construction of a dynastical succession (e.g., in the case of Hazael in the same inscription, who mentions [Be]n[ha]dad as his father but—as a usurper—was rather a "son of nobody"). Thus, Ahaziah of Judah could also have been the brother of the Omride Jehoram, as was argued elsewhere (Frevel 2018a). If the house of David, like *bīt humrī* on the black obelisk, is only the designation of a political entity naming the eponymic founder, then a genealogical connection between king Ahaziah and David is not compulsory, perhaps not even likely. It is important to note that the inscription neither mentions when the eponymic founder David lived nor which political entity (the united monarchy, the land of Judah, the city-state Jerusalem, etc.) he founded. Be that as it may, the joint military venture between the Israelite king and the king from the "house of David" is obvious even from the Aramaean perspective of Hazael in Tel Dan, and thus all our oldest evidence for YHWH comes from the North or is related to the Omrides in Samaria. Both names carry the theophoric element indicating that YHWH was the patron God of the dynasty. Interestingly enough, this is a special feature of Israelite religion compared to its neighbors: "Only in Hebrew is the dynastic god identical with the most popular kin-god. This unique feature, which can be traced to at least 800 B.C.E., represents the first verifiable point at which a three-way connection was built between Yahweh and Israelite and Judahite groups, a connection later misrecognized as 'monotheism'" (Sanders 2015, 86, cf. 99). However, this phenomenon appears with a time delay, first in Israel and only later in Judah. It is this shift which makes the issue of Omrides in Jerusalem so important in the discussion. The close bond between YHWH, the monarch, and thus the respective political state in Israel in the North, is paramount since we lack dated *extra-biblical* evidence for the worship of YHWH by the way of personal names before. Thus, the suggestion of Seth Sanders (Sanders 2015, 100) that YHWH was chosen by the Omrides in a royal strategy *because* he was already widespread and accepted in family names in Israel and Judah fails. He may have been the deity of Omri's clan, but not yet of the people that formed the later states of Israel and Judah.

In fact, we do not have *controlled* extra-biblical evidence for Yahwistic theophoric names [33]

before the mid–ninth century (see inter alia the overview in Albertz and Schmitt 2012, 505–7; Sanders 2015, 96–99; Golub 2014, 2017) (see also the 2019 database of Mitka Golub, accessed February 23, 2021, <http://www.onomasticon.net>). Some exceptions are frequently mentioned in the discussion, but they are all either doubtful in terms of provenance or date back later than to the early ninth century BCE. Since Yahwistic names from controlled excavations are rare, we will briefly discuss the most important artifacts: c) the early Arad ostraca, d) the stamped jar handles from Dothan and Dan, e) a most recently discovered inscription on a jar shoulder from Abel Beth Maacah, f) a limestone basin from *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* and the evidence from the pithoi shoulders. To begin with, we will briefly present the presumably most ancient specimens with regard to Yahwistic names which are not from controlled archaeological contexts: a) the arrowheads from Bethlehem, and b) the so-called Gezer calendar.

a) The name *ywhnn* on a bronze arrowhead from a private collection

Supposedly, the most ancient evidence of a theophoric personal name with the element *-yh* [34] or *-yhw* is inscribed on a bronze arrowhead. This artifact belongs to a group of items which are reckoned as the earliest inscriptional evidence for the Proto-Canaanite, Hebrew, and/or Phoenician alphabet script (for an overview see Deutsch and Heltzer 1995, 11–38; Mitchell 1985; Sass 2010). Until today some 48 inscribed items of this type are known. Only few of them are from excavations (in Lebanon, unstratified finds!), but almost all of them are lacking context and appeared on the antiquities market (Sass 2010, 61; Finkelstein, Robin, and Römer 2016, 163 fn. 58). The most famous group are the 30 arrowheads from el-Kadr, five kilometers west of Bethlehem, of which some bear an inscription of *'bdb't*.

The inscribed ones frequently bear personal names, such as the particular one from a private [35] collection, which is presented by the famous epigrapher Frank M. Cross (Cross 1992, 21, 1996, 12 Nr. 17 with Fig. 5). He reads the two line-inscription *ḥṣ ywhnn|š'zbl* “arrow of Yawḥanan, retainer of 'Uzzib'al,” and dates the artifact to the mid-eleventh century BCE. Pierre Bordreuil offers a completely different reading (Bordreuil 1992, 208). He reads the inscription without any theophoric elements, as *ḥṣ pqh[ly] |š'zr'y* “arrow of Peqaḥy, man of Zar'ay.” Cross himself noticed several times that the authenticity of the object is by no means guaranteed and needs further study, which is impeded by the lack of good documentation (only one photo is published in the auction catalogue of the Frank Sternberg AG). In addition to this, the dating of the artifact has to be discussed in greater detail. While some of the arrowheads date from the Late Bronze Age, a greater proportion is frequently—based on paleographical and comparative arguments—dated to the Iron I. While Frank M. Cross, who dedicated many studies to this group of items, suggests a “traditional chronology” with a principal focus in the eleventh century BCE, Benjamin Sass advocates a more “floating” development of the alphabet with a wider range of dating also beyond the end of Iron I, at least in the Iron IIA between 900–850 BCE (Sass 2005, 14–16). Sass rather dates them mainly to the second half of the ninth century BCE (2005, 34, 44). In their most recent overview on the alphabet inscriptions, Sass and Finkelstein even suggest that none of the arrowheads originate from the Iron I (Finkelstein, Robin, and Römer 2016, 163). An appropriate chronology of these artifacts is further complicated by the fact that arrowheads do not change much between the LB and Iron I, not to mention that some of the inscriptions may be modern forgeries, but this is also quite disputed (Sass 2005, 34). In any case, leaving the Gezer calendar aside (see below), the *suggested* reading of the personal name *Yawḥanan* would be one of the earliest attestations of a theophoric

name before any seal reads such a theophoric element. The lack of proof of authenticity makes it difficult to decide whether we should take this evidence into account at all.

b) The evidence of the Gezer Calendar

Some of the most ancient Yahwistic names come from the Gezer Calendar (KAI 182), which, following W. F. Albright, is traditionally dated in the tenth century BCE. While this dating is questioned in more recent discussions, the question of unity is not addressed so vividly. The Gezer Calendar consists of seven lines on a 7×11 cm large limestone tablet. Whether the enigmatic list of agricultural activities is part of a student's exercise or a wisdom text remains open for discussion (van Leeuwen 2018). On the lower bottom left of the inscription the word 'by is written vertically. In addition to that, some letters are scratched on the backside, which are recorded by David Diringer (1934, 11) also as a personal name. [36]

The finding is unstratified and is commonly dated by its paleography because its script resembles the Phoenician Byblos inscription (e.g., Rollston 2006, 52, 2008). If it is accepted that the language of the Gezer Calendar is 'Hebrew' (which is by no means clear, the case for Phoenician is made by Pardee 2013), it represents the oldest known Hebrew inscription, dating from the tenth century BCE. This was not always the case; the excavator Macalister dated the inscription by the pottery from Trench 8 to the end of the sixth century BCE (1912, 25), and there was some comparison with the Samaritan ivories and the Mesha inscription by Birnbaum (1942, 106). However, paleographic dating has its own problems (circularity, range of variation), as Schniedewind has demonstrated (2005, 406). This concerns the Gezer Calendar in particular, even if its script is close to the *Tel Zayit* abecedary, which is dated stratigraphically to the tenth century BCE (Tappy et al. 2006). Even the comparison with the tenth or early ninth century *Tel Rehov* inscriptions (Ahituv and Mazar 2014, 42) do not bring us to firm ground (Schniedewind 2005, 408). Thus, the date of the calendar itself is not clear. It is furthermore doubtful how the vertically written name relates to the inscription because the small tablet was used as a palimpsest (Macalister 1912, 27; Schniedewind 2019). The word most probably reads an *aleph*, followed by a *beth*, and a third letter, which was first deciphered by Lidzbarski (Macalister 1912, 25), is usually read as a *yod* and understood as a consonantal /y/. [37]

However, it may be read also as a *gimel* /g/, and then the vertical letters are the beginning of an abecedary, as Buchman 1934 suggested (see Moscati 1951, 18). But even if one reads /y/, a Yahwistic name 'Abiyāhû can only be read if an additional [h] is complemented. Already Sabatino Moscati points out the lively discussion of other interpretations than the hypothetical suggestion of a Yahwistic personal name (Moscati 1951, 18–19). In sum, both dating and reading exclude the Gezer calendar as a witness to early YHWH worship. Finally, since only one photo of the backside exists, the matter is difficult to decide, but the few scratches, which are read as letters of completely different size and emended to *P^enīyāhû*, are too shaky to build on. [38]

c) Arad Ostraca as evidence for YHWH in Judah

While the bulk of the ostraca found in the fortress of Arad are from the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, when YHWH was undoubtedly the head of the pantheon in all of Judah, some of them are dated very early by the excavator Yohanan Aharoni and in the scholarly discussion. Yet, dating the earliest letters—with Dennis Pardee—to the tenth century BCE (COS III.81) [39]

is no longer tenable for stratigraphic and paleographic reasons. I follow the tentative dating of Johannes Renz and Wolfgang Röllig, but lower the dates according to the stratigraphical discussion of the site by Ze'ev Herzog (2002). In short, the Arad ostraca cannot substantiate YHWH worship in Judah in the ninth century BCE.

One of the oldest ostraca is Ostrakon 79 from the casemate fortress of Arad (Stratum XI), which did *not* yet have a temple (Herzog 2002, 51). The stratigraphical context is the ninth or even eighth century rather than the tenth century BCE, as assumed by Aharoni (Herzog 2002, 14). The personal name on the delivery note Ostrakon 79 is reconstructed by Aharoni and others [*Y^ehō*]'āh, but only the two letters **aleph** and **chet** are readable. Thus, even the reading of a Yahwistic name is not reliable. Other 'early' ostraca have been found in Stratum X in various loci. In Stratum X, the former casemate wall was replaced or better refurbished by a solid wall and the entrance was fortified by two large towers. The whole fortress was strengthened by an earthen glacis (Herzog 2002, 27–30). Stratum X is also the most important phase of the tripartite temple, which was finally dismantled and buried by the end of Stratum IX. The sanctuary consisted of a broad-room, a small cultic holy of holies, and a courtyard with a sacrificial altar (Herzog 2002, 52). Judging from the "house of YHWH" ostrakon from the sixth century BCE (no. 18) (Aharoni, Naveh, and Rainey 1981, 35–39), it is assumed that the temple in Arad was dedicated to YHWH from the beginning. Stratum X was dated by the excavator Yohanan Aharoni to the ninth century BCE. However, the more appropriate dating to the mid-eighth century BCE was adjusted by Ze'ev Herzog in a widely accepted discussion on the stratigraphy of Arad in an "interim report." The dating of the ostraca is determined by stratigraphy and paleography. The theophoric element is attested several times in these ostraca. [40]

Ostrakon 69 is a list of names, three of which give evidence for the use of the theophoric element *-yhw*. This administrative list most probably dates to the mid- or second half of the eighth century BCE. Renz noticed that the script is archaic, but the Yod is *even later* than the pithos-inscriptions from *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* (see below). Besides Ostrakon 69, a fragment of a letter (no. 71) reads the letter sequence *gdly*, which is reconstructed by Renz as the biblically attested name Gedaliah (Renz and Röllig 2016). He argues that the /l/ has been written on the top of the line between the /d/ and the /y/. However, the alternative reading *gḍy* Gadî is also plausible (see Num 13:11). [41]

Most recently, a list similar to Ostrakon no. 69 has been found in the excavations of Ariel University in Tel Hebron. The small ostrakon (56 × 37 × 7 mm) published by Daniel Vainstub and David Ben-Shlomo in 2016 (2016; 2017) was found in a locus dated to the end of the eighth century BCE. The fragmentary content of the faded ink was only made visible by modern techniques. It attests five lines which allegedly all end with the letters *ḥẉ*, which most likely points to a list of names with the Judaeian theophoric element *-yhw*. A paleographic dating is nearly impossible. Very close by, an eroded limestone seal was found in a similar stratigraphic context "in the fill and collapse between Iron Age IIB fortification Walls 2153 and 2517" (Vainstub 2017, 395). It shows a gazing quadruped, most likely a gazelle or stag, and reads *lšp̣tyḥẉ sṃḳ*. From the archaeological context as well as by the shape of letters this seal is dated to the end of the eighth or the early seventh century BCE. It parallels a newly found seal impression of *lšbṛỵḥẉ ỵẉḅ* from *Tel 'Eton* in the southeastern Shephelah (Faust and Eshel 2012), which is dated by the archaeological context in the late eighth century BCE (Mendel-Geberovich and Golub 2019, 55). Taking the evidence together, the early Arad ostraca cannot prove the worship of YHWH by personal names already in the ninth century BCE. In addition, [42]

it seems perhaps more convincing to start the corpus of ostraca in the Negev roughly with the late eighth or early seventh century BCE, as Na'aman has convincingly argued in a more recent essay (2015, 60–61).

d) Yahwistic names on jar handles from Dothan and Dan

A Yahwistic name is attested in a seal impression on a jar handle, which came to light from the first 40 cm unearthed in square 7, area L in the 1960 excavations in Tell Dothan (Barkay 2005, 171). The two-line inscription reads *lšm|ryw*. Shemaryau is a well-known name from the Samaria Ostraca and is also attested in an eighth-century seal allegedly originating from Samaria (CWSS 377). According to Barkay, the handle belongs to a jar of the Judaeen *lmlk*-type, and he suggests a local officer behind it. Barkay even suggests that the two seals from Samaria and Dothan belonged to the same person (2005, 171), because both lack a patronym. He identifies the owner with the high-ranking officer or royal functionary mentioned in the Samaria Ostraca no. 1, 13, 14, and 21. Considering the different locations and the different style of the seals, this remains doubtful in my mind (assuming CWSS 377 is not a forgery). The seal impression of Tel Dothan dates to the first half of the eighth century BCE. [43]

One of the oldest excavated examples of inscribed handles comes from Tel Dan. Room 9024 west of the shrine complex in area T revealed an amphora handle of special interest. The oval impression, which is attested at least three times in Dan, reads *l'mdyh*, which is interpreted by Avraham Biran as “*Immadi-Yô*” “[the god] Yah shall be with us” (1994, 199–200; Davies [1991 (Vol. 1). 2004 (Vol. 2)] 2004, 100.903, and CWSS 255, no. 692) and, following George Athas, is “a distinctly Hebrew name of Israelite origin” (2003, 256). Two other impressions of this name were found in Tel Dan, one in area B of the 1974 season, and the other in 1991 in area M (Brandl 2009, 139; Davis 2013, 78–79). The same name in the southern form *'mdyhw* is attested in the seventh-century BCE ostrakon from *Horvat 'Uza* in the Negev (Renz and Röllig 2016, 445). Although N. Avigad and B. Sass as well as G. Davies tend to agree with the excavator's early dating of the stamp-impression from Dan to the late ninth century BCE, it may be from a slightly later period (2013, 78). The discussion on the dating of strata in Dan is ongoing. Following E. Arie, Stratum III of Tel Dan must be dated to the first half of the eighth century BCE. While he assigns the building activities to King Joash (802–787 BCE) (2008, 11), some of his arguments are challenged by Y. Thareani (2016). However, the comparison with the *zkryw* impressions from *et-Tell/Bethsaida* and Dan clearly advocate for the earlier date (Brandl 2009, 139–40). The debate is not decided, but to assign the *'mdyh* impressions to the mid-ninth century seems rather unlikely, particularly because one of the other impressions was uncovered in Stratum II. [44]

e) The name *Benyaw* from Abel Beth Maacah

Located as far north as Dan, Abel Beth Maacah is an important site for the issue of the spread of Yahwism in the contested zone between Aramaeans and Israelites. In 2020, the discovery of a new inscription was announced, which is currently in the process of publication.² The inscription on a storage jar was found in area K in the southern, lower part of the city in an Iron IIA storage building which contained four other (probably wine) jars of the same type [45]

2 <https://www.apu.edu/media/news/release/27238/>, accessed October 21, 2020; see forthcoming Yahalom-Mack et al. 2020. I am grateful to the excavators for providing me with the pre-publication version of the paper.

and which are allegedly attributed to an administrative context in the ninth century BCE. Strikingly, the one-word ink inscription is not located on the shoulder of the jar but in the middle, several centimeters lower than the left end of the handle, which is marked by a deeply incised cross-shaped sign. A comparable jar containing a similar but incised inscription *lśrʿr* “to the governor of the city,” which is located on the body directly below the shoulder, stems from the assemblage of *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud*, dating in the end of the ninth or early eighth century BCE (Meshel 2012, 80, 221). The reading is not really convenient. Three of the five letters are decipherable, the first and last letter are almost faded. The initial *lamed* can be assumed by the genre-parallels of the inscription, but the vertical stroke is completely missing. What is on the left could also be an *ayin*. The following letter is open to the left but is probably a *beth* /b/. After that an /n/ in a rather angular shape follows, and despite its peculiarity there is not much room for a different letter. The following letter clearly resembles /y/, particularly if the lower horizontal stroke belongs to the script. The final letter lacks clear characteristics of a /w/ and remains indecipherable (a /d/ is also possible), so that the suggested reading *lbn̄yʿw* can be accepted only with reservation. The southern form *Benayahû*, with the ending *-yhw* or *-yh*, is a common feature of Judaeen personal names on later seals (CWSS 24.105-108.459-460) and (yet difficult to decipher) on the reverse of Ostrakon no. 38 from Arad (Ahituv 2008, 140–41). Assuming that the final letter is indeed a /y/, the archaeological context makes this personal name one of the earliest attestations for a theophoric YHWH name far in the North in the second half of the ninth century BCE. If dating and reading can withstand further discussion, the attestation of an Israelite name in an administrative context may contribute to the discussion on early Israelite presence in the North mentioned above.

f) Names from *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud* and the evidence from the Pithoi Shoulders

All together eight names of Northerners with the theophoric element *-yw* are attested in the inscriptions of *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud*. One is written on a pithos shoulder mentioning the sender of a letter in an exercise letter form (Inscription 3.6, see below), four appear in a list of names written on a pottery sherd, and three are incised on the rims of stone bowls (Meshel 2012, 75–78, 92–101). All three limestone bowls are dated only by the architectural context of the way station at *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud*. The heaviest of these stone bowls weighed at least 200 kg, and it must have required great effort to transport this basin into the desert station. The inscription of the largest bowl mentions the probable donor and the deity YHW for the blessing. Although the Israelite YHW and a certain Obadyahu are mentioned, Phoenician influence cannot be excluded. The craftsmanship of the drawings and wall paintings also indicate that the workers were trained in Phoenicia or even came from there. The stone bowls were imported during the time of usage. They were perhaps votive gifts, even if the installation was a way station, trade-post, or ‘caravanserai’ rather than a sanctuary. The building and thus the wall-plaster inscriptions, the pithoi, and the interior have to be dated to the eighth century BCE, in the time of Jeroboam II (787–747 BCE), more or less around 760 BCE or even a little bit later. The paleographic dating of the inscriptions remains difficult and is as controversial as the dating of the pottery in the Iron IIB. The earliest plausible date seems to be the beginning of the eighth century BCE, although earlier discussion saw particularly ancient features in the inscription of the stone bowls. For instance, when Frank M. Cross discussed the date of the large stone basin’s inscription first, he dated the *ʿbdyw* bowl very early. He read the inscription on the rim as *lʿbd[y]w bn ʿdnh brk hʿ lyhwh* and dated it paleographically to the tenth or ninth century BCE. By pointing out the shape of some letters and their relationship to

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older Phoenician forms, he made the inscription one of the oldest known Hebrew inscriptions. However, he admitted that “the long letters and fluid style anticipate the style of the ninth and eighth centuries” (Cross 2003, 340). This again demonstrates the open range of paleographic dating. According to the ¹⁴C data, the structure existed between approx. 795–730/720 BCE (Finkelstein and Piasezky 2008, 183–84; Finkelstein 2013, 15–16). However, the excavator Ze’ev Meshel dated the complex on the basis of the same ¹⁴C data earlier, but according to an earlier classification of the pottery (before Lachish Stratum III) (Meshel 2012, 61). Given that the use of Lachish III began in the middle of the eighth century BCE, the building still existed at the beginning of the second half of the eighth century BCE (Singer-Avitz 2009). If the pithoi are linked to the Phoenician (trained) craftsmen, who made sketches to practice their drawing skills and who wrote letter forms and abecedaries to train their writing capacities, then the date of the inscriptions may be associated with the interior decoration of the building in the earliest usage phase. Whether the stone bowls were older pieces, made for some other context, or were intended to remain in the way station can no longer be determined. However, it is more probable not to see them as heirlooms brought accidentally to *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud* but rather as items whose period of production and period of use do not differ widely.

In sum, the known theophoric names cannot prove the spread of Yahwism in Judah in the ninth century BCE already. The earliest evidence from this source points again to Israel in the time of the Omrides. Beyond the biblical evidence there seems to be no strong evidence that YHWH came from the South, nor that he was worshipped there from early on. In view of this, it is worth taking a closer look at the epigraphic findings of *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud*. Following the first catalog from an exhibition in the Israel Museum in 1978 (Meshel 1978) and the final publication in 2012, the inscriptions attest the word *Teman* four times in connection to YHWH (see the table in Allen 2015, 410). This was often considered extra-biblical proof of the origin of YHWH from the South (van der Toorn 1999, 912; Blum 2012a, 57; Cross 1973, 67; Mettinger 1988, 24–25). Therefore, we must now carefully examine this argument. In my understanding there are three reasons why this does not hold water: It is methodologically flawed, epigraphically doubtful, and even unlikely from the setting of the inscription, which is a form of a diplomatic letter. Let me demonstrate this in some remarks on the reading of the inscriptions.

[47]

The Evidence of YHWH from *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud* in Context

The character and limited space of this paper only allow for a superficial reference to the reading of the inscriptions. For this I will simply rely on the edition in the final publication and will not discuss alternative readings in this paper, which are indeed necessary. Some clues for the dating of *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud* were already given above. The historical context cannot be addressed here. Let us begin with Inscription 3.1 on Pithos A, which reads ...*brkt ’tkm lyhwh šmrn wl’šrth* “I* have blessed you by YHWH of Samaria and his Asherah.” The word *’šrth** in the blessing formulae is doubtless in one way or another related to Asherah; it most probably makes the goddess the partner of the main blessing instance, the male deity YHWH. *Shomron* can have multiple meanings. It can stand for the city of Samaria proper, the hill country immediately around the city, the larger region around the city, or the national state *Israel*, subsumed under the name of the city where the Omrides built their residency. Assyrian texts of the eighth century BCE speak of ^{KUR}*šamirīnāya* “land of Samaria” or take ^{URU}*šamara’in* “city of Samaria” to denote the kingdom of Israel. Thus, it is possible that even non-poetic, extra-biblical Hebrew texts take the city to denote the state. The semantic meaning of *šmrn*

[48]

remains difficult to define because geographical terms vary depending on their context. Even the comparison of the expression *yhwh šmrn* with other compounds, such as Baal Zaphon, Baal Carmel, *Ištar* of Arbela, or *Tešub* of *Ḫattuša*, cannot decide the issue, because it is not necessarily a particular place or city which specifies the locality of a deity. Within the wide spectrum of deity names combined with specifying terms, regions, political entities, or abstract areas are also used, such as *Ištar* of the countryside, the warrior god of *Ḫatti*, etc. (Allen 2015). Although the most probable point of relation is the city Shomron, it can also be the Northern state as shown above. An interesting solution was suggested by Ziony Zevit, arguing that the Aramaean king Hazael, at the end of the ninth century BCE, took control of the Jezreel valley and only a Northern rump state remained, so that “‘Shomron’ could only refer to the territories around Samaria and they were ‘northernmost’ in Israel” (2001, 650). This would be parallel with Teman denoting the southernmost area of YHWH’s worship in the inscriptions of *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud*. However, Shomron and Teman are not mentioned together, let alone mentioned in parallel. Thus, it is perhaps doubtful to assume a hendiadys comparable to “from Dan to Beersheba.” In any case, Zevit’s suggestion is tempting, as we will see below. What we can say at this stage of the argument is that the God called upon in the inscription is to be addressed as a regionally specified variant of the God YHWH, which is thus more closely connected with the place through the addition of Shomron, without necessarily differing in essence from other manifestations of YHWH.

The red ink Inscription 3.6 on Pithos B represents a West-Semitic form of a diplomatic letter. [49] It appears to be the exercise of a writer, who filled in the form by practicing the standardized introductory lines. In the translation of Shmuel Ahituv, Esther Eshel, and Ze’ev Meshel, the text reads: “Message of ‘Amaryāw: ‘Say to my lord, are you well? I have blessed you by YHWH of Tēman and His *asherah*. May He bless you and may He keep you, and may He be with my lord [forever(?)].’” I will not discuss the question of the lower case “a” in “*asherah*,” which is to my understanding wrong, if *Asherah* is mentioned in this inscription at all. But be that as it may, in the phrase *lyhwh.tmn*, the /t/ is just as supplemented as the word divider. If we do not presume that defective *tmn* stands in *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud* for the biblical orthography *tymn* and that it denotes a local variant of YHWH, it would be difficult to suggest it as a reading. This is even more striking in Inscription 4.1, written in Phoenician script, if (!) *hty[mn]* is written (see below). The next piece of evidence is Inscription 3.9 on the shoulder of Pithos B, where the editor’s reconstruction reads *lyhwh.htmn.wl’šrth*. Although this is quite difficult to decipher from the published photos, it is the commonly accepted reading. The difference to YHWH Shomron discussed above is the definite article, as Teman can have several meanings: a city named Teman, a region named Teman, or the South. It could denote the region where YHWH originated, his ‘mythical homeplace,’ so to speak, or the place where he was actually worshipped (Allen 2015, 275).

In the discussion of the inscriptions, Teman was usually understood as a geographical region, denoting the area of YHWH’s ‘origin’ either in Edom or even in North Arabia. In contrast, Ahituv, Eshel, and Meshel, in their edition of the inscriptions, write: “Teman was an important city in Edom” (2012, 96). By taking the clue from Eusebius’ *Onomasticon*, they locate the city “in the vicinity of Petra (however, the details are not precise).” In this line and according to the parallel in Amos 1:11–12 (בְּתֵמָן *b^etēmān*), Teman is often identified with Bozra (e.g. Blum 2012b, 209). The problem is that evidence for the existence of the city of Teman in Edom remains rather scarce. Ernst Axel Knauf, in his typically distinctive way, declares, without the slightest doubt: “There is nothing to suggest that there was a place called Teman” [50]

(2009, n.p.).³ In his understanding, Teman denotes, if at all, a region derived from a southern tribe. Only the biblical *htmny* refers to the inhabitants of the oasis of Tayma or the region of this place (Knauf 2009). In contrast to a place, the lexeme *tmn*, like the Negev, can mean just “South” (Gesenius, Meyer, and Donner 2013, 1436–7; Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995, 1212). *tymn* is derived from the root *ymn* and first and foremost means “south” as a direction or the landscape in the southern fringes, more southern than the Negev (Meshel 2012, 96). Juan Manuel Tebes most recently underscores that “there is no compelling reason for seeing a direct link between K[untillet ‘]A[ğrūd] and Edom” (2018, 175). He sees “Teman [...] referring to Edomites or Edomite-related groups settling in the Negev” rather than referring to a region in Transjordan (i.e., Midian, South Arabia) (2018, 176). However, if Teman denotes “south” in the first place, and if the *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud* inscriptions are written from a ‘northern perspective,’ then there is nothing forcing the connection between Teman and the Edomites. In contrast, YHWH of Teman may allude to the ‘Samaritan import’ to Jerusalem and Judah. The meaning of Teman would then be a reference to “the South,” i.e., the southern part of Judah. This understanding was also recently suggested by Nadav Na’aman:

Extrapolating from mid-eighth century North Israelite inscriptions to the biblical tradition of YHWH’s origin in the south in the late thirteenth century BCE is, in my opinion, methodologically and materially unlikely. All that can legitimately be stated is that the eighth century inhabitants of Israel considered ‘YHWH Shomron’ to be the god of the Samaria region, and that ‘YHWH Teman’ was the god of the southern Palestinian districts. (Na’aman 2011, 316) [51]

Let us now turn to the two-line Phoenician Plaster Inscription 4.1.1 in black ink, which offers two additional readings of Teman according to the editors. The inscription was written on the wall of the northern wing of the so-called bench-room in the entrance area. It is reconstructed in the edition as follows (Meshel 2012, 105): [52]

y]’rk.ymm.wyšb’w [...]ytnw.l[]hwh[.]tymn.wl’šrth [53]

.]hytb yhwh.hšy[...].y.hytb.ym[...]h}h[]yhm/n [...] [54]

1. *May] He lengthen their days and may they be sated [...] recount to [Y]HWH of Têmān and His asherah [...]* [55]

2. *... because (?)] YHWH of the Tê[mān], has shown [them(?)] favour, has bettered their da[ys].* [56]

The inscription is fragmentary and consists of several pieces (five large and ten small fragments, with many more tiny fragments that only contain parts of one letter). To what extent the fragments can be linked to each other is a completely open question and there is no certain connection between the possible three last letters of the *Tetragrammaton* and the letters /mn/ in the first line. In addition, the /t/ and the /y/ of Teman from the second line are almost *unreadable*, and the last two letters are completely missing. This is by no means a ‘safe’ reading, epigraphically speaking. It rather seems to be wishful thinking that YHWH of Teman is attested so frequently in *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud*. If it is not accepted that the plaster inscription on the wall reads *tmn* in a dedicatory inscription, nothing points to the suggestion that the enclosure [57]

3 “Dafür, dass es einen Ort Teman gegeben hat, spricht nichts” (translation mine).

was “a shrine dedicated to Yahweh-of-Teman“ (Allen 2015, 248). *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* was a way station with some religious activity (offerings, votives, and perhaps also votive inscriptions), but not a sanctuary proper. Thus, what was the home of YHWH of Teman? Was he associated to a local shrine, which represented the temple of the southern YHWH? Nadav Na'aman has recently suggested that the temple of YHWH of Teman stood in Beersheba: There were three “main Israelite regional sanctuaries dedicated to YHWH: Bethel to YHWH of Samaria, Dan to YHWH of Dan, and Beer-sheba to YHWH of Teman” (Na'aman 2017, 90). This possibility is drawn from Amos (Amos 5:5; 8:14) and from 1 Kgs 19:3. However, as Na'aman underlines, “we know nothing of the history of Beer-sheba's temple” (2017, 89). Thus, to locate *the* temple of YHWH of Teman in Beersheba remains pure speculation, which is only necessary if one accepts the presupposition that every onomastic sequence that associates a deity with a place-name or region implies that there was a local temple. However, if there was a sanctuary in Beersheba as in Arad, it is quite possible that the southern YHWH, called YHWH of Teman in the *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* inscriptions, was worshipped there.

To sum up the evaluation of the findings from *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* with regard to Teman and YHWH's allocation to the South in four points: [58]

1. Looking more closely, the testimony to the phrase *yhwh tmn* remains uncertain, and its spelling is striking (note the variance between *tmn*, *tymn*, *htmn*). Strictly speaking, only the determined form *yhwh htmn* in Inscription 3.9 remains as a *possible* reading, the others are more than doubtful attestations of Teman as a place. [59]
2. That Teman refers to the origin or home of YHWH and thus parallels the testimony of the biblical theophany texts can only be ‘proved’ under the condition that the result is already presumed. YHWH of Teman *can* be the local variant in the region of his origin but does not need to be! It could also be a local variant of YHWH ‘of the South,’ without (as it is with YHWH of Shomron) making any statement about origin. [60]
3. Even if Teman is read in other inscriptions of *Kuntillet 'Ajrud*, beyond Inscription 3.9, the epigraphic evidence does not make the building of *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* a shrine of YHWH of Teman. Nothing indicates that Teman is exactly the place or region of *Kuntillet 'Ajrud*, even if the site is named *Ḥorvat Teman* in Arabic. It is rather possible, and in my view more favorable, that “YHWH of the South” denotes YHWH of the South, that is—formulated from a Northern perspective—Judah. [61]
4. Finally, nothing indicates that *HaTeman* must be understood as a synonym to Edom or that *HaTeman* denotes a region connected to Sinai, Midian, or even Paran. It can just denote ‘the South,’ pointing either generally southwards or, more likely, to a region in the South. It can even denote the God of Judah. [62]

The inscriptions of *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* do *not* corroborate the Midianite-Kenite hypothesis or attest YHWH's origin in the South. They attest that from an Israelite perspective, a southern variant of YHWH existed, which was named YHWH of the South. Considering the use of YHWH of Samaria at the same time and assuming that this denoted the ‘*national God*’ of Israel, it is possible that the YHWH of the South designated the national deity in Judah. However, one has to admit that one would rather expect YHWH of Jerusalem. [63]

At this point it may be worthwhile to come back to the idea of Ziony Zevit mentioned above. Zevit associated the meaning of *šmrn* in the compound “YHWH of Samaria” with the [64]

reduced territory after the campaign of the Aramaean king Hazael. This campaign changed the geopolitical situation massively. The Aramaeans limited Israel's influence in the North and skimmed off its economic resources. Hence, Israel was forced to cooperate even more intensively with the increasingly autonomous Judah. In becoming the protective power of Judah, the Aramaeans enabled a more independent existence in political, but not necessarily in economic, respects. But Judah's influence and political power increased in the eighth century BCE, and this also had religious consequences. The southwestern expansion that extended the territory of Judah southward into the Shephelah and the Negev also required the campaign of Hazael (Lehmann 2019; Frevel 2018a; Kleiman and Sergi 2018). Only with this process did YHWH become the God of the whole land of Judah (Frevel 2018b, 28). The cooperation in long-distance trade between Israel and Judah, that can be seen in the operation of *Kuntillet 'Ajrud*, could go hand in hand with the strengthening of Judah in the South and the changed general political situation. Thus, it is possible that as YHWH of Samaria denotes the YHWH of the Northern territory and YHWH of Teman is just the synonymous or synecdoche designation of the YHWH of Judah.

How YHWH Came to the South: An Alternative View

If the interpretation of *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* and its background goes in the right direction, then YHWH of Teman does not relate to the region of origin but rather reflects an Israelite view that YHWH has not always—and particularly not always in parallel to Israel—been the national God of Judah. This may be corroborated by the fact that we do not have any extra-biblical evidence for the worship of YHWH before the mid-ninth century BCE, and that this evidence relates YHWH first and foremost to the North and the Omrides. First, one has to face the striking fact that the name of the Northern state is Isra-El, which is perhaps traditional and reflects a time in which the political entity in the North was not yet related to YHWH on a national level, but rather to the Canaanite deity El. If this is true, the lack of evidence in the North reflects exactly this situation. Second, if it is accepted that the early monarchy in ninth-century Jerusalem included a *secundogeniture* of the Omride dynasty, as I have suggested elsewhere (Frevel 2018a, 190–91, 234–38), the lack of evidence in the South comes as no surprise. YHWH was perhaps originally foreign to Judah, if not completely, then at least as an important patron god of the state. This may be reflected in the biblical tradition where YHWH is addressed as God of Israel frequently but *not once* as God of Judah. As long as the corresponding extra-biblical evidence is missing, it remains at least possible that he did not enjoy veneration in Judah. [65]

YHWH was foreign to Jerusalem until the Omrides brought him to the southern branch of their monarchy as the tutelary God of their dynasty. Thus, the monarchy played a crucial role in spreading Yahwism in the South, even more than in the North, where YHWH was perhaps rooted in the religion(s) of the tribes in Ephraim and Manasseh. [66]

To answer the question why YHWH became the patron deity of the Omride dynasty under Ahab, we must enter the field of speculation again. If the argument above is correct that the Yahwistic names given by Ahab to his children was not due to the general acceptance of YHWH in the people's religion, but rather a deliberate act to create a new religious substantiation of his expansive policy towards the northern territories and towards Judah, then it is most probable that the worship of YHWH was rooted in the family tradition of the Omride clan. Against the background of the evidence discussed above, I see three possibilities: (1) YHWH was a/the local God in the homeland of the Omrides, but we lack the sources for that. [67]

the striking fact (which hardly plays any role in the recent discussion) into consideration that the Exodus narrative speaks frequently of the “God of the Hebrews,” who is obviously not related to Midian or Sinai, but rather to Canaan (Loretz 1984), this piece of evidence deserves more attention in future discussion. (2) The Omrides took on YHWH, who may perhaps have originally been related to a group of *ššw*-nomads, who joined the settlers in Iron I, but this also remains quite hypothetical. To walk on this trodden path would rather contradict the methodological discussions presented in this paper. (3) The other point of origin may have been preserved in the charter myth of Israel, the Exodus narrative. If Ahab had already made the core of the Exodus tradition foundational, and if this charter myth was connected with YHWH, the Omrides proliferated the worship of this God exactly because of his connection to the exodus event. At the end of the day, this question has to be left open. The origin of YHWH, even seen through the lens of the Omride clan, remains obscure. But what about the South and the later proliferation of YHWH in Judah?

After being introduced by the Omrides in Jerusalem, YHWH only successively became the *God of Judah* by the eighth century BCE and was introduced into the southern Judaeen hill country and the southern parts of the Shephelah with Judah’s expansion in the early eighth century BCE. This speculation cannot be proved by extra-biblical evidence, but if it holds water, “YHWH of the South” in *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud* may relate to it. What does this say about the biblical construct in which YHWH originated in the South? Perhaps this reflects a Judaeen perspective designed to obscure the fact that the national God had his origin not in Judaeen but in Israelite traditions. This particular feature is indeed related to the South and its struggle to claim independence from the southern YHWH from the North after the fall of the Northern Kingdom. What is clear from the argument above is that the northern and southern variants of YHWH were neither equiprimordial nor synchronous in their development. Even in local respect there was much more variety in early Yahwism than the straightforward development reflected in the biblical account. This holds true not only for the early Yahwism but also for the time when the bulk of the texts emerged. As already stated above, Fabian Pfitzmann is completely right in his warning that not every statement in the Bible, which assumedly makes a statement on the origin of YHWH, is intended to indicate YHWH’s historical origin. It is often rather a statement on local plurality of YHWH worship.

[68]

The Emergence of Early Yahwism: Summary

The current paper questioned the general assumption of an unbroken continuity of the worship of YHWH between the second half of the second millennium and the middle of the first millennium BCE. While dissolving the notion of origin and originality from the biblical statements that YHWH comes *from* the south and by questioning the reliability of the Egyptian evidence for YHWH’s homeland, the argument unfolded a fresh take on YHWH’s emergence *in* the south, that is, Judah. To this end, an overview of the epigraphic evidence in inscriptions and theophoric personal names was presented with the result that YHWH is first documented in the North and a little later in the South, but none of these derived from the tenth century BCE. Building on the epigraphic evidence, it was suggested that YHWH was introduced in Judah by the Omrides, who ruled in Jerusalem only from the mid-ninth century. The position as national god in the late ninth or early eighth centuries BCE evolved from the function as dynastic god and patron deity of the monarchy. In this light, the local variant of a southern YHWH was interpreted in the inscriptions of *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud*. The only reliable evidence there

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reads Teman with an article (*htmn*), suggesting that it is not about YHWH's home, but about his presence in the South.

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