

# The Many and the One

## Integrative Monotheism in Ancient Israel\*

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Polytheism and monotheism are no strict alternatives. The conflicting experiences of existence which religion sets out to solve do not call in question the unity of the world, while conversely, the unity of the world cannot do away with the contradictions in our existence. A polytheistically shaped religion will not be able to avoid seeing the multiplicity of the divine as being nevertheless in some form a unity, and a monotheistically molded religion will not be able to avoid recognizing the many facets of experience of the world as reflecting in some way the ambiguity of the experience of the one God, thus to a certain degree calling his unity in question.<sup>1</sup> Religion does not necessarily follow the rules of a binary logic while trying to understand the foundations of being. In its relation to the situation it is rather aspectual and existential. This is true not only for the pre-modern world, but also today.

If polytheism and monotheism do not in this way constitute absolute alternatives, we should be hesitant about offering explanations of their relationship in the sense of a historical development, and about judgments along the lines of a lower or higher stage of religion. This is not to deny that in the history of religion a path did run from polytheism to monotheism. And on this path it has undoubtedly been shown that the monotheistic idea of God offers the greater challenge to thought, and that it also has the greater power soteriologically, as well as in regard to ethics.

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<sup>1</sup> For a survey on the debate about the religion of Egypt, Greek, Assyria, and Israel/Judah, see Barbara N. Porter, ed., *One God or Many? Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World*, TCBAI 1 (Casco Bay, ME: Assyriological Institute, 2000), and Manfred Krebernik and Jürgen van Oorschot, eds., *Polytheismus und Monotheismus in den Religionen des Vorderen Orients*, AOAT 298 (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2002).

## 1. Exclusive Monotheism as a Feature of Second Temple Judaism

Where Israel's religion is concerned, an explanation along the lines of a historical development seems at first sight to be inescapable, and this all the more since the study of the literary history has proved the unhistorical character of the biblical picture, according to which the demand for the exclusive worship of YHWH stood at the beginning of Israel's religious history – that the history linking Israel with its god began with the revelation on Sinai, when the god YHWH chose the Israelites to be his people, and committed them to worship him and him alone; but this picture has no foundation in historical reality. We know today that from the aspect of the history of religion this revelation-theology explanation, so to speak, is an anachronism, with which the Judaism of the Second Temple *ex post* created for itself a story about its origins.

Underlying this biblical picture, the scholarship of the last two centuries unearthed the actual history of the religion of Israel and Judah as it probably proceeded until the destruction of the First Temple. The reconstruction was initially made with the methods of source criticism, by way of a re-dating of the Pentateuch sources, later through a comparison with written witnesses from neighbouring civilizations, as these increasingly became known; and during recent decades more and more based on archaeology, epigraphy, and iconography. We know today that, religiously speaking, ancient Israel did not differ essentially from its ancient Near Eastern environment. As far as our present subject is concerned: as long as the First Temple was in existence, no explicit demarcation line was drawn against polytheism.

What is also of great importance is that in the period of the Second Temple, the religious norm was not monotheistic in the narrower sense. The commandment to worship the god YHWH exclusively – “I am YHWH your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; you shall have no other gods besides me” (Exod 20:2–3 par. Deut 5:6–7) – is expressly occasioned by the existence of other gods. The “other gods” are not considered to be imaginary, as if idolatry would be related to entities existing only in the imagination of their erring worshippers. Instead the prohibition is directed against the worship of gods who really exist. The sin is concrete; whether it has to do with the worship of the Baalim, or whether the Israelites are reproached with having worshipped either the gods of the previous inhabitants of their country, or the gods of the neighboring peoples. In so far the Bible does not maintain a monotheism, but for the Judaism of the Second Temple propagates an exclusive monolatry. The polemical zeal with which the exclusive worship of YHWH is demanded is not directed to the outside world but serves the unity and cohesion of the people's own group.

It is only on the margin of the Hebrew Bible that the actual existence of other gods is disputed as well. The relevant assertions are confined to a few passages in the second part of the book of Isaiah (Isa 44:6; 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21, 22; 46:9),<sup>2</sup> and – dependent on them – a few sentences in the late framework of the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 4:35, 39; 32:39).<sup>3</sup> Even in these cases, it is a matter of dispute whether the pronouncement “I am YHWH, and there is no god besides me” should be interpreted in an absolute sense, as meaning “there is no god at all except me” or whether it has to do with the relation of God’s people to their God, i.e.: “For Israel there is no god except me.”

## 2. Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah

The program of exclusive monolatry which determined the period of the Second Temple and forms the focus of the biblical writings stands in remarkable contrast to the religious diversity which we can observe for the period of the Israelite and Judean monarchy.

An indication of this are the names. They show that in Israel the cult of the god YHWH was a relatively late phenomenon. The name Israel, which we first come across on the victory stele of the Pharaoh Merneptah which dates from about 1209 BCE, is related to the god El.<sup>4</sup> There are no toponyms at all with YHWH as theophoric element. Instead we find place-names with El, such as Bethel and Jezreel, with Anat, such as Beth-anath (Josh 19:38; Judg 1:33) and Anathoth (1 Kgs 2:26; Jer 32:7), with the sun god, such as Bet-shemesh, and above all with the Baal, such as Baalah (Josh 15:9; 2 Sam 6:2), Baalath (Josh 15:29; 1 Kgs 9:18)<sup>5</sup> and many others.

Among personal names, too, numerous references to the Baal can be found in the earlier period. Even two of King Saul’s sons had Baal names, Ishbaal (2 Sam 2:8; 1 Chr 8:33; 9:39) and Merib-baal (2 Sam 21:8), as well as one of his grandsons, Merib-baal Jonathan’s son (2 Sam 4:4; 1 Chr 8:34; 9:40). Names

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<sup>2</sup> Reinhard G. Kratz, *Kyros im Deuterocesaja-Buch: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Entstehung und Theologie von Jes 40–55*, FAT 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), destroyed the basis for the usual dating of Deutero-Isaiah in the time of the Babylonian exile by proving that the Persian great king was not yet mentioned in the oldest literary stratum of the book. The book has hardly been written before the middle of the fifth century, and, to be more precise, probably in Jerusalem, because it is closely familiar with the liturgy of the temple.

<sup>3</sup> See Matthias Albani, *Der eine Gott und die himmlischen Heerscharen: Zur Begründung des Monotheismus bei Deuterocesaja im Horizont der Astralisierung des Gottesverständnisses im Alten Orient*, ABIG 1 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature (AEL)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 2:73–78; *COS* 2.6:40–41 (James K. Hoffmeier).

<sup>5</sup> See Nadav Na’aman, “Baal Toponyms,” in *DDD*: 140–41.

of this kind can also be frequently found epigraphically. In the ninth century even a reigning king of Israel, Baasha, bore a Baal name (1 Kgs 15:33). Over against this, we have Abijam, the son of Rehoboam, a king of Judah, who had a name related to Yam, the sea god (1 Kgs 15:1).<sup>6</sup> This finding permits the deduction that the Canaanite pantheon (which we know best from the texts from Ugarit, which date from the fourteenth century BCE) were familiar in Israel and Judah too and played a part in cultic worship.

In fact nothing else is to be expected. For under Palestinian climatic presuppositions, a monotheistic idea of God would have contradicted experience more emphatically than would have been the case elsewhere. The abrupt change from the winter rains to the summer drought taught people that the divine forces which determine life were not continuously in power. The Ugaritic myths tell of the annual conflict between the weather god Baal and the sea god Yam, who embodies the chaos which is hostile to life.<sup>7</sup> When Baal wins this struggle at the beginning of autumn, the vegetation period begins with thunderstorms. In this struggle he is supported by his sister and wife Anat.<sup>8</sup> Toward the end of the vegetation period Baal is defeated by the god of death Mot,<sup>9</sup> and is forced to descend to the underworld until in autumn he appears on the stage once more, as a contending god.

Because the unity of being remains constant in spite of the seasonal alternation of the god's death and resurrection, the Ugaritic pantheon also includes the father of the gods, El, and his wife Athiratu. El represents what has been aptly called the "the sacred world in the background."<sup>10</sup> It is not by chance that the name El is the Semitic term for god *per se*.<sup>11</sup> El presides over the assembly of the gods, which is also depicted in the image of a royal family. He endorses the monarchy of the younger gods in their various victories, but does not intervene himself in the struggles between the rivals, so his sovereignty on earth is not efficacious in the direct sense.

A change begins in the middle of the ninth century with the Omri dynasty. The Canaanite pantheon shrinks in favor of the weather god. It is from that time only that the personal names formed with the name of YHWH begin among the kings of Israel and Judah, becoming the rule until the end of the

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<sup>6</sup> See Fritz Stolz, "Sea," in *DDD*: 737–42.

<sup>7</sup> See *COS* 1:241–74 (Dennis Pardee); *ANET*, 129–42 (Harold L. Ginsberg).

<sup>8</sup> See Peggy L. Day, "Anat," in *DDD*: 36–43.

<sup>9</sup> See John F. Healey, "Mot," in *DDD*: 598–603.

<sup>10</sup> Victor Maag, "Syrien – Palästina," in *Kulturgeschichte des Alten Orient*, ed. Hartmut Schmökel, KTA 298 (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1961), 574, following Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*, trans. John E. Turner, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 164–66 (§ 18, 3).

<sup>11</sup> See Wolfgang Herrmann, "El," in *DDD*: 274–80.

Israelite and Judean monarchies.<sup>12</sup> In seventh-century Judah, the YHWH names are far and away the most prevalent, epigraphically too.<sup>13</sup>

The concentration on the warlike weather god YHWH can best be explained by the growing strength of the Iron Age monarchy which in Israel begins with the Omride dynasty. With the powerful position of the warlike monarchs, the world of the gods changes too from an aristocracy to a monarchy. The weather god as the life-determining principle is given the key position. We can see this development also among Israel's neighbors, with the Ammonite god Milcom, the Moabite god Chemosh, and the Edomite god Qôs.<sup>14</sup>

However, the existence of what was virtually a monolatry at the king's court and in the royal cult does not mean that the rest of the pantheon disappeared. The myths about the periodic struggle of the gods – the conflict between the weather god and the chaos embodied by the sea – remained vital. The earliest psalms show with clarity that the resurrection and accession of the weather god continued to be celebrated in cultic drama at the autumn New Year festival until the end of Judah.<sup>15</sup> Myths of this kind even underwent a vigorous revival in the late eschatology.<sup>16</sup> There are also signs that the weather god continues to keep his sister-wife, even though no traces of this have been preserved in the Bible. As late as at the end of the fifth century, in the Jewish military colony in Egyptian Elephantine a goddess Anat-Yahu or Anat-Bethel was still worshipped as well as the god YHWH.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The change which is expressed therein has already been seen by Julius Wellhausen, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*, 7th ed. (Berlin: Reimer, 1914), 100–101 with n. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Compare the list presented by Johannes Renz, *Die althebräischen Inschriften, Teil 2: Zusammenfassende Erörterungen, Paläographie und Glossar*, HAE II/1 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 53–87; also Frederick W. Dobbs-Allsopp et. al., eds., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 583–622; and Jeffrey H. Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions*, HSS 31 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 47–63.

<sup>14</sup> See Emile Puech, “Milcom,” in *DDD: 575–76*; Hans-Peter Müller, “Chemosh,” in *DDD: 186–89*; Ernst-Axel Knauf, “Qôs,” in *DDD: 674–77*.

<sup>15</sup> See Reinhard Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott: Studien zur althebräischen Kultlyrik anhand ausgewählter Psalmen*, BZAW 387 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008); Friedhelm Hartenstein, “Wettergott – Schöpfergott – Einziger: Kosmologie und Monotheismus in den Psalmen,” in *JHWH und die Götter der Völker: Symposium zum 80. Geburtstag von Klaus Koch*, ed. Friedhelm Hartenstein and Martin Rösel (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009), 84–91.

<sup>16</sup> See the famous presentation by Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalmstudien II: Das Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwäs und der Ursprung der Eschatologie*, SVSK.HF 1921/6 (Kristiania: Dybwad, 1922); also Gunther Wanke, *Die Zionstheologie der Korachiten*, BZAW 97 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1966), esp. 106–9.

<sup>17</sup> Anat-Yahu: Arthur Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), No. 44:3 = Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents*

In the early period even the god YHWH himself was not a single entity. This is actually shown by the renowned **שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל**: “Hear, O Israel, YHWH is our God, YHWH is a single one” (Deut 6:4). This programmatic assertion is neither a monotheistic acknowledgment in the sense of “Only YHWH is God,” nor is it a demand for the sole worship of the god YHWH, in the sense of “Only YHWH is *our* God.” The Hebrew text, rather, has the numeral **אֶחָד**, “one.” The antithetical relation to this is not “another god” but “several YHWHs.”<sup>18</sup> We know today from inscriptions that YHWH was worshipped under various forms in various places. Just as there was the Baal of Tyre and the Baal of Ekron (2 Kgs 1:2), and many other Baalim, too,<sup>19</sup> there was also the “YHWH of Samaria” and the “YHWH of Teman.”<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, an incompatibility within the very personality of the god YHWH could arise. For the god YHWH could be worshipped simultaneously in two neighboring kingdoms which were from time to time locked in warlike conflict. From a religious viewpoint this meant that the god YHWH was divided, and thus YHWH, the god of Israel, went to war against YHWH, the god of Judah.<sup>21</sup> This constellation is the background to the message which the book of Hosea directed against Israel – probably from a Judean perspective. In the introductory sign-act of the prophet’s marriage, YHWH proclaims: “You are not my people, and I am not your God” (Hos 1:9 txt. em.). This utterance probably still goes back to the eighth century, that is to say, when Israel and Judah existed side by side.

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from *Ancient Egypt (TAD)* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1986–1999), B7.3:3; Anat-Bethel: Cowley No. 22:125 = *TAD* C3.15:128.

<sup>18</sup> See Erik Aurelius, “Der Ursprung des Ersten Gebots,” *ZTK* 100 (2003): 7. Already Manfred Weippert, “Synkretismus und Monotheismus: Religionsinterne Konfliktbewältigung im alten Israel,” in *Jahwe und die anderen Götter: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des antiken Israel in ihrem syrisch-palästinischen Kontext*, FAT 18 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 1, assumes, that “the *Šma’ Yiśrā’el* [...] originally should rather fend off notions of different local forms of the god of Israel.”

<sup>19</sup> See Wolfgang Herrmann, “Baal,” in *DDD*: 132–39; cf. Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2001), 143–44.

<sup>20</sup> Documented in the inscriptions found in 1975/76 on pithos 1 and 2 from Kuntillet ‘Ağrūd which date from the ninth century BCE. See Graham I. Davies, ed., *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions: Corpus and Concordance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 78–82; Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, 277–98, esp. 277–97; and Erhard Blum, “Die Wandinschriften 4.2 und 4.6 sowie die Pithos-Inschrift 3.9 aus Kuntillet ‘Ağrūd,” *ZDPV* 129 (2013): 21–54.

<sup>21</sup> See Herbert Donner, “Hier sind deine Götter, Israel!” (1973), in *Aufsätze zum Alten Testament aus vier Jahrzehnten*, BZAW 224 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), 72: “Since ancient times the cult for YHWH was fragmented locally in the country.”

### 3. Integrative Monotheism in Ancient Israel and Judah

There are, basically speaking, two possible ways of replacing the religious diversity by the program of the exclusive worship of YHWH. The one is the polemical rejection of all deviating forms of divine worship; we find this formulated in the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods besides me” (Exod 20:3 par. Deut 5:7). On the surface, this is the dominant way in the Bible. But the other possibility is for the god YHWH to take over the functions of other gods in addition to his own.

The two methods are not mutually exclusive. The *integrative monotheism* which comes into being through the adoption of further divine functions is even in a certain way the presupposition of exclusive monolatry, if that is not to become sterile and lose its relation to life. In fact the integration process preceded historically the exclusive monolatry which determined the religion of the Second Temple, and it belongs at least as much to the particular character of the Hebrew Bible as the latter.

The obvious example is the **שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל** which has been already mentioned. This maintains nothing less than that the different forms of the god YHWH which existed in Israel and Judah and their individual regions are all forms of a single god, because YHWH is a single god, **אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה**.<sup>22</sup> This *programmatically mono-yahwism* set a standard. It is not without good reason that the formula was later also understood in the sense of an acknowledgment of the uniqueness of God *per se*.

At the beginning it did not mean this. Most scholars today date this programmatic creed as belonging to the seventh century, and associate it with the policy of the Judean king Josiah (639–609 BCE), who after the collapse of the Assyrian empire probably set out to incorporate parts of the former province of Samerina into his own territory and, for this, caused a kind of Judean “all-Israel ideology” to be developed which eventually became the presupposition for the idea that the Judeans were God’s people, “Israel.”

A second example is what recent research discusses under the term the “solarization of YHWH.”<sup>23</sup> Several Psalms connect with YHWH statements and metaphors which otherwise used to be attributed to the sun god.<sup>24</sup> Another example is the relation between YHWH and El. It is one of the special features of ancient Near Eastern religion that the contours of a deity are not sharply

<sup>22</sup> See Aurelius, “Der Ursprung des Ersten Gebots,” 11.

<sup>23</sup> See Hans-Peter Stähli, *Solare Elemente im Jahweglauben des Alten Testaments*, OBO 66 (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitäts-Verlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985); Bernd Janowski, “JHWH und der Sonnengott: Aspekte der Solarisierung JHWHs in vorexilischer Zeit,” in *Die rettende Gerechtigkeit: Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments 2* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 192–219.

<sup>24</sup> See Deut 33:2; Pss 19; 72; 84:12; Isa 60:1–3; Hos 6:3, 5; Zeph 3:5; Mal 3:20.

drawn. This is also true of the concept of YHWH in Israel and Judah. In the Bible, the names YHWH and El/Elohim are used indiscriminately for one and the same god, although his individuality is emphatically maintained. We meet this in the texts with certainty from the seventh century onwards, and the variety of divine names persisted even in the era of the Second Temple, when the worship of several gods was subject to a strict prohibition.

In our ears the identification of YHWH and Elohim may not be surprising because *Elohim* is also the Hebrew term for god *per se*, and in the framework of monotheism the god YHWH has *per se* become the god whose individual name was increasingly avoided or paraphrased. Yet the role of the Canaanite god El was also retained, so that one can say that “the sacred background” and the weather god who dies and rises again coincide, just as in the Christian concept the annual cultic drama about the birth, death, and resurrection of the Son of God does not exclude the personal unity of the Son with God the Father. It is speculative, but not perhaps without meaning, that אֱלֹהִים, the Hebrew term for *god*, is a plural, which nevertheless as a rule is seen grammatically as a singular, and has mutated from being a *term* for god into being the *title* or *name* of what is from now on the only God<sup>25</sup> – besides the name יְהוָה, which is none the less still retained. Named by the plural אֱלֹהִים, the concept of the single god is integrative *per se*, so to speak.

In view of this multiple nomenclature, the weight given to the name of God is remarkable. The name is an expression of individuality. Perhaps God’s individuality is so much stressed because it was not in fact sharply delineated. In the Second Temple period, God was still talked about alternately as YHWH and Elohim; indeed even in late times a number of other names were added which, although they were rooted in earlier tradition, only now became more widespread in religious literature – for example, the name שַׁדַּי in the book of Job, or the title אֱלֹהֵינוּ in the story about Abraham’s war with the kings (Gen 14:18, 19, 20, 22), which is one of the latest texts in the Torah in general.

#### 4. The Yahwist’s History

A special representative of integrative monotheism is the *Yahwist’s History*, the basic document of the narrative in the Pentateuch. From its text it is possible

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<sup>25</sup> See Erhard Blum, “Der vermeintliche Gottesname ‘Elohim,’” in *Gott Nennen: Gottes Namen und Gott als Name*, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth and Philipp Stoellger, RPT 35 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 97–119, against Albert de Pury, “Wie und wann wurde ‘der Gott’ zu ‘Gott?’” (*ibid.*, 121–42), as well as against Konrad Schmid, “Differenzierungen und Konzeptualisierungen der Einheit Gottes in der Religions- und Literaturgeschichte Israels,” in *Der eine Gott und die Götter: Polytheismus und Monotheismus im antiken Israel*, ed. Konrad Schmid and Manfred Oeming, ATANT 82 (Zürich: TVZ, 2003), 11–39.

to deduce exegetically in a number of instances how the god YHWH assumes in himself other forms of the divine. This goes in line with the distinction between pre-editorial written sources and the editorial additions and comments of the Yahwist's redaction. According to what we know today, this took place as a reaction to the experience of the Jews in the diaspora,<sup>26</sup> but before the exclusive worship of YHWH became a doctrine, and it took place astonishingly as a matter of course, in no way mentioning the act of religious integration as such.

I shall begin with the visit of the three men to Abraham (Gen 18:1–16). To this story the Christian doctrine of the Trinity has been traditionally closely related. Andrei Rublev painted c. 1441 the icon of the Trinity on the basis of Gen 18.<sup>27</sup> The Moscow Synod of 1551 officially declared it the model for the orthodox Trinity icon. It shows the three angels sitting at a table under a tree. Abraham and Sarah are missing but the biblical origin is still recognizable.

Of course the story about Abraham's hospitality, if it is read in the context of its own premises, has nothing whatsoever to do with the Christian doctrine. And yet this kind of reception is not without foundation in the text itself.<sup>28</sup>

1 *And YHWH appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre,*<sup>29</sup> as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, 3 and said, <My lords>, *if I have found favor in your (sg.) sight, do not pass by your (sg.) servant.* 4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your (pl.) feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, 5 while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you (pl.) may refresh yourselves, and after that you (pl.) may pass on – *since you (pl.) have come to your (pl.) servant. So they said, Do as you have said.* 6 *And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal [...], knead it, and make cakes. [...]* 8 Then he took curds and milk [...], and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. 9 *They said to him, Where is Sarah your wife? And he said, She is in the tent.* 10 *He said, I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.*

Abraham offers food and drink to three beings who, as the story goes on, show themselves to be more than human. They are in a position to prophesy that as a reward for his hospitality a son will be born to him, and this also comes about, contrary to anything that is humanly possible. They also save his nephew Lot

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<sup>26</sup> See Christoph Levin, "The Yahwist: The Earliest Editor in the Pentateuch," *JBL* 126 (2007): 209–30; repr. in *Re-Reading the Scriptures: Essays on the Literary History of the Old Testament*, FAT 87 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 1–23.

<sup>27</sup> Now in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia, Cat. No. 13012.

<sup>28</sup> See Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, "Einheit und Einzigkeit Gottes im frühen Jahwismus," in *Im Gespräch mit dem dreieinen Gott: Elemente einer trinitarischen Theologie: Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Wilhelm Breuning*, ed. Michael Böhne and Hanspeter Heinz (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1985), 63–66.

<sup>29</sup> The part of the text that was added by the Yahwist (or: editor J) is marked by italics.

by supernatural means from the wicked inhabitants of the city of Sodom, whom they punish in the form of a rain of fire from heaven (Gen 19).<sup>30</sup>

Abraham meanwhile addresses the guest as if he sees only one of them. After the meal, the three men begin to speak to him, but it is then only a single person who promises Abraham that in a year he will have a son. This single person is the god YHWH. The whole scene falls under the heading of an epiphany of YHWH.

The contradiction remains unresolved. One can show that it goes back to a reinterpretation by a redactor – or, to be more exact, by the author of the Pentateuch source which we call the “Yahwist,” – of an already existing, written tradition about the visit of three divine beings to Abraham and Lot, which now becomes an epiphany of the god YHWH.<sup>31</sup> In his reinterpretation, the redactor has kept the earlier tradition and inserted into it his own concept of God. The juxtaposition of, let us say, “polytheistic” tradition and Yahwistic interpretation shows that, for the editor, the three divine beings counted as compatible with the one YHWH. The parallelism did not present any logical problems to him. It was the Samaritan Pentateuch which for the first time felt the disruption to be one, and tried to correct the numerical shift.<sup>32</sup> But this attempt could not succeed.<sup>33</sup> The three men are the one YHWH, and the one YHWH is the three men. And this without the identification in the text being named at all.

This integration of the divine is not a single case in the framework of the Yahwist’s Pentateuchal source; it is almost the rule. A second example is Jacob’s struggle at the brook Jabbok (Gen 32:23–33). While Jacob is attempting to ford the brook, he is attacked by a being whom the Hebrew text only calls שׂוֹנֵי, “any one, someone.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> In Gen 19 the problem of the number occurs again. In v. 1 it is solved by adding שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים, “the two angels,” in order to make a distinction between YHWH and two other figures who accompany him, see also v. 15aβ. Elsewhere in the story אֲנָשִׁים “the men” (vv. 5, 8, 10, 12, 16) are on stage.

<sup>31</sup> For the redaction history of Gen 18, see Rudolf Kilian, *Die vorpriesterlichen Abrahamsüberlieferungen literarkritisch und traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht*, BBB 24 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1966), 96–111; and Christoph Levin, *Der Jahwist*, FRLANT 157 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 153–58.

<sup>32</sup> See *BHS* and the commentaries *sub loco*. The Greek translation goes in line with the Masoretic text.

<sup>33</sup> Between vv. 9 and 10 the break still remains. This time the Greek translation tried to harmonize it by changing it into the singular already in v. 9. However, the Samaritan Pentateuch goes in line with the Masoretic text.

<sup>34</sup> Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar: As Edited and Enlarged by the Late E. Kautzsch*, rev. in accordance with the 28th German edition (1909) by Arthur E. Cowley, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), § 139d; cf. Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, SubBi 14/2, 3rd ed. (Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2011), § 147b.

23 The same night he arose [...] and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. [...] 24 [...] *He took across the stream everything that he had.* [...] 25 [...] And someone wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. 26 When the man saw that he did not prevail against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh [...] 27 and said, Let me go, for the day is breaking. But he said, I will not let you go, unless you bless me. 28 *And he said to him, What is your name? And he said, Jacob.* 29 *Then he said, Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.* 30 *Then Jacob asked him, Tell me, I pray, your name. But he said, Why is it that you ask my name?* And there he blessed him.<sup>35</sup>

Jacob is strong enough to defeat this “someone” and to hold him fast. The “someone” only possesses power during the darkness. With the coming of dawn, he sees himself as threatened. Jacob uses the situation and compels the “someone” to bless him. The “someone” then blesses him, that is to say he shares his strength with him, strength which is evidently more than human. The scene is reminiscent of a fairy tale in which the hero is victorious over a demon. In this case it would be the demon of the brook Jabbok who denies the wanderer a passage over the ford.

In the form in which we have it today, the scene has been expanded by a dialogue. The “someone” asks Jacob his name. When Jacob tells him, his interlocutor answers: “Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel.” The patriarch is given the name of God’s people. He becomes their representative. In the context it becomes indubitably clear that only the god YHWH could have made such a change in the name. That means that the blessing which Jacob extorts from the demon becomes the god YHWH’s blessing. YHWH absorbs this demon’s function, the demon being obviously superhuman, even if not in the full sense divine.

Understandably enough, later theologians had difficulty with this interpretation. That touches especially on the statement that Jacob has defeated the demon, which is now to say: the god YHWH himself. Consequently the text was expanded so that, although Jacob is the victor, he leaves the arena with a wound, and is astonished that he is still alive, although he “has seen God face to face” (vv. 26b, 31).

A third example of this kind, also in the Yahwist source, is the story of how Balak, the king of Moab, hires the seer Balaam to curse the Israelites, but YHWH turns his words upside down: Balaam has to bless Israel (Num 22–24). Balaam’s original oracle reads as such:

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<sup>35</sup> For the redaction history of Gen 32:23–33, see Levin, *Der Jahwist*, 250–54. The part of the text that was added by the Yahwist (or: editor J) is marked by italics.

The oracle of Balaam son of Beor,  
 the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, [...]
 who sees the vision of וַיִּשֶׂה,  
 falling down, but having his eyes uncovered:  
 how fair are your tents, O Jacob,  
 your encampments, O Israel!  
 Like valleys that stretch afar,  
 like gardens beside a river. (Num 24:3b, 4b–6a)<sup>36</sup>

For this blessing the seer Balaam refers to a vision of Shaddai. This reference coincides strikingly with the Aramaic Balaam inscription found in 1967 at *Tell Deir ‘Alla* in the Jordan Valley, which goes back to the seventh century BCE.<sup>37</sup> In this inscription Balaam describes how in a vision he witnesses the celestial council of the Shaddai gods – they are in the plural – with the sun goddess.<sup>38</sup> Listening to their debate, he learns of the nefarious plans of the sun goddess. In the original biblical version too, the seer Balaam refers to the Shaddai gods, as he does in the non-biblical version. But in today’s text his oracle has been expanded, and it now refers to YHWH:

like <tents> that YHWH has <pitched>,<sup>39</sup>  
 like cedar trees beside the waters. [...]

*Blessed be everyone who blesses you,*  
*and cursed be everyone who curses you.* (Num 24:6b, 9)

Again we can see that YHWH has absorbed into himself another religious appearance, in this case even a whole group of lower gods.

The integration of Elohim is less spectacular but none the less remarkable. In the well-known vision, which is linked in the tradition with the establishment of the sanctuary at Bethel, the dreaming Jacob sees a *ziggurat*, at which the angels of God (Hebr. מַלְאָכֵי יְהוָה) ascend to heaven and descend to earth (Gen 28:11–19). From this he recognizes the holiness of the place.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> For the redaction history of Num 22–24, see Levin, *Der Jahwist*, 383–87.

<sup>37</sup> First published by Jacob Hoftijzer and Gerrit van der Kooij, *Aramaic texts from Deir ‘Alla*, DMOA 19 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 1976). English translation *COS 2:27* (Baruch A. Levine).

<sup>38</sup> For the reading, see Manfred Weippert, “Der ‘Bileam’-Text von Tell Dēr ‘Allā und das Alte Testament,” in *Jahwe und die anderen Götter* (see n. 18), 163–88; Erhard Blum, “Die Kombination I der Wandinschrift vom Tell Deir ‘Alla. Vorschläge zur Rekonstruktion mit historisch-kritischen Anmerkungen,” in *Berührungspunkte: Studien zur Sozial- und Religionsgeschichte Israels und seiner Umwelt: Festschrift für Rainer Albertz zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ingo Kottsieper et al., AOAT 350 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2008), 573–601.

<sup>39</sup> The reading follows the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Greek translation.

<sup>40</sup> For the redaction history of Gen 28:11–22, see Levin, *Der Jahwist*, 216–20. The part of the text that was added by the Yahwist (or: editor J) is marked by italics.

11 And he came to a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. [...] 12 And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 *And behold, YHWH stood above it and said, I am YHWH, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.* [...] 15 *Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land.* [...] 16 *Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely YHWH is in this place; and I did not know it.* 17 And he was afraid, and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. [...] 19 And he called the name of that place Bet-El (“House of God”).

The Yahwistic editor has expanded this tradition through a divine speech which the god standing at the top of the *ziggurat* proclaims. He begins with the formal self-introductory formula “I am YHWH, the god of your father Abraham and the god of Isaac.” With these words Elohim is explicitly identified with the god YHWH. Earlier exegesis put the change in the divine name down to the sources, not the edition, i.e., traced it back to the differing linguistic usage of the different sources of the Pentateuch. But in doing so it missed the point, from the aspect of religious history: the two names for God do not stand parallel to each other; they are integrated.

The same thing is true in the revelation to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:1–5). It is also non-homogeneous, from a literary point of view.<sup>41</sup>

1 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, *the priest of Midian*; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came [...] into the desert. 2 *And the angel of YHWH appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush*; and he looked, and lo, a bush was burning, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 *And Moses said, I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burning.* 4 *When YHWH saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, Moses, Moses! And he said, Here am I.* 5 Then he said, Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. [...] 7 *Then YHWH said, I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry [...]* 8 *and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land.*

When Moses approaches, Elohim speaks to him out of the burning bush, and points him to the holiness of the place: “He looked, and lo, a bush was burning, yet the bush was not consumed. [...] And God called to him out of the bush, Moses, Moses!” Today the scene is introduced as an appearance of the angel of YHWH, and Elohim’s speech is interpreted as YHWH’s: “When YHWH saw that he turned aside to see, Elohim called to him out of the bush.”

A similar encounter between Moses and God is told as the revelation on the mountain of God (הַר הָאֱלֹהִים) in the desert of Sinai (Exod 19:2–34:28\*).<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> For the redaction history of Exod 3, see Levin, *Der Jahwist*, 326–33. The part of the text that was added by the Yahwist (or: editor J) is marked by italics.

<sup>42</sup> For the redaction history of Exod 19–34, see Levin, *Der Jahwist*, 362–69. The part of the text that was added by the Yahwist (or: editor J) is marked by italics.

19:2 And when (the Israelites) set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mountain. 3 And Moses went up to God. [...] 24:18 [...] And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights. [...] 34:5 *And YHWH descended in the cloud and stood with him there. And he proclaimed the name of YHWH, [...] 9 and he said, If now I have found favor in your sight, my lord, I pray you, may go my lord in the midst of us. [...] 28 And he was there with YHWH forty days and forty nights.* He neither ate bread nor drank water.

Traditionally, the mountain is the dwelling place of Elohim. However, when Moses climbs up, the God on his part descends from heaven, and it is not Elohim, but rather YHWH, who is going to meet Moses and to assure him of his assistance.

It is with this presupposition that the double term יהוה אֱלֹהִים in the second creation account (Gen 2:5–3:24) may be explained.<sup>43</sup>

5 When no plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up – *for YHWH God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground* – [...] 7 then YHWH God formed man [...] *from the ground*, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. [...] 8 And YHWH God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ...

The term YHWH-Elohim is unquestionably not original, but it can hardly go back to the redaction which put together the two Pentateuchal sources, as used generally to be thought. Instead I assume that the original account had Elohim as subject, and the Yahwistic editor equated Elohim with YHWH. Again this took place without any particular pointer, as being a matter of course, religiously speaking.

The story about the wooing of a wife for Isaac (Gen 24) gives a clue to the further framework of this redaction, in the context of the history of religion. When the aged Abraham charges his servant to woo a wife for his son Isaac among the relatives living in northern Syria, he makes him swear an oath “by YHWH, the god of heaven and of the earth” (Gen 24:3, 7). This title is otherwise found only in texts dating from the Persian period,<sup>44</sup> and outside the Hebrew Bible in the Elephantine papyri.<sup>45</sup> Using this title, it seems obvious that

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<sup>43</sup> For the redaction history of Gen 2–3, see Levin, *Der Jahwist*, 82–92, and idem, “Genesis 2–3: A Case of Innerbiblical Interpretation,” in *Genesis and Christian Theology*, ed. Nathan MacDonald et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 85–100; repr. in *Re-Reading the Scriptures: Essays on the Literary History of the Old Testament*, FAT 87 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 51–64. The part of the text that was added by the Yahwist (or: editor J) is marked by italics.

<sup>44</sup> Hebrew: Jonah 1:9; Ps 136:26; Ezra 1:2 (par. 2 Chr 36:23); Neh 1:4, 5; 2:4, 20; see also Deut 3:24; Josh 2:11; Mic 6:6; Ps 92:9; Lam 3:41; Dan 4:34; 5:23; Aramaic: Ezra 5:11, 12; 6:9, 10; 7:12, 21, 23; Dan 2:18, 19, 37, 44; Greek: Jdt 5:8; 6:19; 11:17; Tob 7:13; 8:5.

<sup>45</sup> Cowley No. 30:2, 27–28; 31:2 (txt. em.); 32:3–4; 38:2 (txt. em.), 3, 5; 40:1; cf. 30:15; = TAD A4.7:2, 27–28; A4.8:2 (txt. em.); A4.9:3–4; A4.3:2 (txt. em.), 3, 5; A3.6:1; cf. A4.7:15.

YHWH is about to imitate the role of the supreme Persian god Ahura Mazda, even if it is true that we have no word for word examples that this god was called the “god of heaven.” A similar phenomenon, still more obvious, is the Babylonian god Marduk, as we shall see soon. His cult survived the Persian conquest of Babylon. In the last decades of the Neo-Babylonian empire it was neglected by King Nabonidus, but the Persian king Cyrus re-established it and strengthened it.

The editor of the Yahwist’s History lets YHWH, the god of the kings of Israel and Judah, assume the role of the One God of the world. Moreover the religious tradition he incorporates into his history-work is completely and without further ado associated with the god YHWH: creation, which according to most ancient Near Eastern myths proceeds from a struggle between gods; the Flood, which is usually initiated through a council of the gods; the encounters with god of the patriarchs; and the exodus under Moses. Other gods are as if non-existent, so there is no need to warn people against them. YHWH has absorbed them all into himself.

## 5. Monotheistic Tendencies in Egypt and Mesopotamia

In its ancient Near Eastern environment, the integrative monotheism of the Yahwist’s History was by no means unique. In Egypt as well as in Mesopotamia we come across comparable religious phenomena. This is not surprising if we take into account the reciprocity of polytheism and monotheism I mentioned initially. At the same time, around the end of the sixth and the beginning of the fifth centuries, when the literary basis of the Hebrew Bible eventually came into being, the pre-socratic philosopher Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 570 – c. 475 BCE) claimed that the divine is a single one: εἷς θεός, ἔν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστος, οὔτε δέμας θνητοῖσιν ὁμοίος οὔτε νόημα, “One god is greatest among gods and men, not at all like mortals in body or in thought.”<sup>46</sup>

Concerning Egypt, Erik Hornung in particular has pointed to the fact that the multiplicity of the Egyptian world of the gods nevertheless relates to the idea of the unity of the divine.<sup>47</sup> This idea begins to emerge with the end of the Ancient Empire. In earlier time the traditional multiplicity of gods was predominant, which arose from the manifold local origins and was related to the different living conditions. This multiplicity could easily be tolerated because

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<sup>46</sup> Transmitted by Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* v 109. Edition: James H. Leshner, *Xenophanes of Colophon: Fragments* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 30–31 (fragment 23).

<sup>47</sup> See Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

it was the king who occupied the powerful central position in the kingdom. While the gods were acting rather in the background, the king assured the unity of the world.

However, when the monarchy broke down at the end of the Ancient Empire, religion became more important. During the first Intermediate Period, the unity and order of the world had to be sought for in the world of the gods. As a consequence, the multiplicity of the gods became unsubstantial. People turned to the One, who in the end is responsible for everything, “from whose eyes humankind were formed, from whose sweat the gods were formed.”<sup>48</sup> The following Middle Kingdom paid tribute to the increasing importance of the gods. The multiplicity of the divine persisted and was vitalized, though bundled by the idea of a king of gods. The god Amun of Thebes took over the role of the main god of the Egyptian empire. By incorporating the sun god Re he became Amun-Re. Together with the god Ptah of Memphis, Amun and Re formed a trinity which represented the unity of the empire. Religious integration, however, remained incomplete. The prestige of Osiris, Sobek, Hathor, and other gods of the other important sanctuaries stayed undisputed. With the Pharaohs of the New Kingdom, the trend of religious integration continued, always for reasons of power politics as well. At the time of Amenophis II (1427–1401 BCE), a hymn is praising the god Amun:<sup>49</sup>

You are the Sole One,  
 who made [all] that exists,  
 One, alone, who made that which is,  
 From whose two eyes mankind came forth,  
 On whose mouth the gods came into being.

This means that the god Amun-Re has produced all beings including the other gods by an act of procreation with himself. This religious concept allowed to perceive the mutual relationship of the gods as emanating from one God. On that basis, Amenophis IV (1353–1335 BCE) in an unprecedented act of power politics was able to deny the existence of all gods except the sun disc Aten and present himself as the only voice of this sole god. This kind of monotheism could only have been an episode, but was not without consequences. After Akhenaton’s death, the center of the empire moved to Memphis where the god Ptah in his person became the embodiment of the re-established divine triad of Amun, Re, and Ptah.

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<sup>48</sup> Coffin Text 1330, see *ANET*, 8 (John A. Wilson); *AEL* 1:132.

<sup>49</sup> P. Cairo 58038 (P. Bulak 17), see *COS* 1:37–40, esp. 39 (Robert K. Ritner); *ANET*, 365–67, esp. 366 (John A. Wilson).

In Mesopotamia too, one can observe the attempt to conceive the multiplicity of the divine as a unity.<sup>50</sup> Friedrich Delitzsch and Alfred Jeremias<sup>51</sup> were the first to emphasize this; more recently in particular Simo Parpola,<sup>52</sup> and lastly Stefan Maul.

At first glance, it is evident that polytheism determines the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian culture.

There is an immense number of deities in the Sumerian-Akkadian pantheon; but one should better say: of names of gods, because one has to find out from case to case [...] whether a name corresponds to a particular individual deity or whether it is an epithet, possibly also a local appearance of a deity who is worshipped elsewhere under another name.<sup>53</sup>

One of the reasons is that the empires in Mesopotamia were established by conquering and integrating many political entities, which originally had been independent, beginning with the Sumerian city states. Although the many local deities have been similar in form and function, every one of these previous entities had their own religious identity. In the wider empires, this religious identity was not effaced but grew into the larger entity. Already in early times there have been comparing lists of the gods which on the one hand record the existing multiplicity and diversity, and on the other hand try to integrate the world of the gods. The political purpose of integrating the former diversity and the genuine religious interest to get the plurality of the divine into order go together. That is to say, the greater the multiplicity of the divine, the greater the need to get someone who unites the diversity.

The clearest example of this integrative tendency may be perceived in the Babylonian god Marduk who was the high god of the Old Babylonian empire in the first third of the second millennium and also of the Neo-Babylonian empire in the seventh and sixth centuries. The Babylonian theologians could easily transfer the attributes and functions of other gods to Marduk or even

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<sup>50</sup> See Manfred Krebernik, "Vielzahl und Einheit im altmesopotamischen Pantheon," in Krebernik and van Oorschot, eds., *Polytheismus und Monotheismus*, 42.

<sup>51</sup> See Alfred Jeremias, *Monotheistische Strömungen innerhalb der babylonischen Religion* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1904). The debate was initiated by Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel und Bibel: Ein Vortrag* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1902), 49.

<sup>52</sup> Simo Parpola, "Monotheism in Ancient Assyria," in Porter, ed., *One God or Many?*, 165–209. However, note, in the same volume, the contradiction by Barbara N. Porter, "The Anxiety of Multiplicity: Concepts of Divinity as One and Many in Ancient Assyria," 211–71. Also Benedikt Hartmann, "Monotheismus in Mesopotamien?," in *Monotheismus im Alten Israel und seiner Umwelt*, ed. Othmar Keel, BiBe 14 (Freiburg, Schweiz: Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1980), 70, comments skeptically: "The Mesopotamian religion has been polytheistic ever since, and remained as such."

<sup>53</sup> Dietz Otto Edzard, *Geschichte Mesopotamiens: Von den Sumerern bis zu Alexander dem Großen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2004), 135–36.

define the other gods themselves as functions of Marduk. A god-list<sup>54</sup> from Neo-Babylonian times<sup>55</sup> is as follows:<sup>56</sup>

Uraš (is) Marduk of planting.  
 Lugalidda [an epithet of Enki/Ea] (is) Marduk of the *apsû*.  
 Ninurta (is) Marduk of the pickaxe.  
 Nergal (is) Marduk of battle.  
 Zababa (is) Marduk of warfare.  
 Enlil (is) Marduk of lordship and consultations.  
 Nabû (is) Marduk of accounting.  
 Šîn (is) Marduk who lights up the night.  
 Šamaš (is) Marduk of justice.  
 Adad (is) Marduk of rain.  
 Tišpak (is) Marduk of troops.

One may call this integration “monarchic polytheism,” and indeed the integration of diversity into the unity of a single God should have a political, not to say an “imperial,” reason. Wilfred Lambert even came to the conclusion: “it must be stated that this (text) has indeed every claim to present Marduk as a monotheistic god.”<sup>57</sup>

This is especially true since this integrative concept is in line with the view of practical, individual religion as well. Namely, it is a natural view that the causes of help and harm are identical. The god who heals is the same as the god who sends disease; for it is he who has the power over disease. In this way, even the conflicting experiences of existence can lead to the idea of the unity of the divine. We know such statements from the Bible:

YHWH kills and brings to life;  
 he brings down to Sheol and raises up.  
 YHWH makes poor and makes rich;  
 he brings low, he also exalts. (1 Sam 2:6–7)

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<sup>54</sup> God-list CT 24, 50, BM 47406, first published in 1896 by Th. G. Pinches and quoted since then again and again. For a critical edition of the list, see Simo Parpola, “The Assyrian Cabinet,” in *Vom Alten Orient zum Alten Testament: Festschrift für Wolfram Freiherr von Soden zum 85. Geburtstag*, ed. Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, AOAT 240 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995), 398–401 (Appendix).

<sup>55</sup> Possibly the list goes back to early Babylonian eras. Simo Parpola presented some reasons for the early dating.

<sup>56</sup> Translation by Wilfred G. Lambert, “The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon: A Study in Sophisticated Polytheism,” in *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Hans Goedicke and Jimmy J. M. Roberts (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 197–98.

<sup>57</sup> Lambert, “The Historical Development,” 198.

See now that I, even I, am he,  
and there is no god beside me;  
I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal;  
and there is none that can deliver out of my hand. (Deut 32:39)

It should not surprise us that quite similar statements about Marduk have been passed down:

Marduk: who struck me and had pity on me,  
brought me to ruin and bandaged me,  
shattered me and brought me out,  
who made me weak and fit me together,  
who stretched me out and gathered me together,  
who made me fall and helped me up.  
From the throat of death he tore me out,  
from the underworld he made me rise.<sup>58</sup>

We may recognize in the cosmogonic myth that the unity of the divine, which is expressed in such statements, was subject even to theological reflection. As Stefan Maul has recently highlighted, the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish*, in which various mythological traditions are linked in a rather contradictory way, demonstrates the view that all deities despite their multiple forms stem from a single god.<sup>59</sup> In the assembly the gods proclaim:

[Marduk] shall appoint the black-headed folk to serve him.  
Let the subject peoples be mindful that their gods should be invoked. [...]  
Let the black-headed folk be divided as to gods,  
but by whatever name we call him, let him be our god.  
Let us then proclaim his fifty names.<sup>60</sup>

Interpreted in such a way, the exuberant Babylonian polytheism is based on nothing other than a latent monotheism. In a special constellation, Marduk even enters into a son relationship with the three major gods of the Sumerian pantheon equally, namely the sky god Anu, the earth god Enlil, and the water god Ea. Through his elevation, he takes on in one and the same single person – the role of the highest divine triad.

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<sup>58</sup> The translation follows Thomas R. Kämmerer, *šima milka: Induktion und Reception der mittelbabylonischen Dichtung von Ugarit, Emār und Tell el-'Amārna*, AOAT 251 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 163. A similar ambivalence is also subscribed to the gods Ishtar, Ea, Gula, and others.

<sup>59</sup> See Stefan Maul, “Die Religion Babyloniens,” in *Babylon – Mythos und Wahrheit*, vol. 2, ed. Joachim Marzahn and Günther Schauerte (Munich: Hirmer, 2008), 172–73.

<sup>60</sup> VI 113–14, 119–21. *COS* 1:111 (Benjamin R. Foster); compare *ANET*, 69 (Ephraim A. Speiser).

## 6. The Priestly Writing

It is not surprising that the Yahwist's History, which in my opinion was composed in Neo-Babylonian times among the exiles in Babylon, advocates a similar integrative monotheism for the god YHWH. It has certainly, as we have seen, not yet progressed to the level of theological reflection.

This had to change later. In particular, the contradiction to the claim of exclusive monolatry must be solved in some way. In the so-called Deuteronomistic theology which developed toward the end of the sixth century in Jerusalem, the other gods were not included in the concept of the divine but rather strongly repelled and their veneration was subject to penalty (Exod 20:3 par. Deut 5:7; Deut 13:2–16; 17:2–5).

Now the Priestly Writing, the more recent historical outline within the Pentateuch which we date somewhere in the middle of the fifth century, responded to it. The theology of this history work is based on the book of Ezekiel,<sup>61</sup> which in turn presupposed the covenant theology of the book of Jeremiah and the book of Deuteronomy. On this basis, the authors now seek to connect exclusive monolatry with integrative monotheism. The concrete cause lies in the claim of the Jerusalem temple to be the central sanctuary for the Jewish diaspora scattered worldwide. This claim has made the diversity of deities as a form of revelation of the one God unthinkable.

The connection of inclusion and exclusion succeeds with the help of the history of a threefold revelation, which unfolds itself between the creation of the world and the establishment of the sanctuary at Mt. Sinai. The tent of meeting is nothing other than the Jerusalem temple, which in a surprising fiction was transferred from Jerusalem to the middle of the Jewish diaspora staying outside the land. As has often been observed, the creation of the world and the foundation of the cult are in correspondence with each other. The temple embodies the order of the world, which is based on creation, and the performance of the cult serves to protect it.

In the span between creation (Gen 1) on the one hand and temple building (Exod 25–29) on the other, the one God reveals himself under changing names. One may understand this revelation history as a series of concentric circles.<sup>62</sup> These circles interlock; they do not succeed one another in a juxtaposition. With a powerful gesture this theology gradually integrates all deities into the single God. In the outer circle, which is filled by the primeval history, God acts under the name Elohim (Gen 1:1–9:17). His actions under this name apply to

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<sup>61</sup> See esp. Thomas Pola, *Die ursprüngliche Priesterschrift: Beobachtungen zur Literarkritik und Traditions-geschichte von P<sup>s</sup>*, WMANT 70 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995), 264–98.

<sup>62</sup> See Gerhard von Rad, *Die Priesterschrift im Hexateuch: Literarisch untersucht und theologisch gewertet*, BWANT 65 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1934), 167 and 186.

humanity as a whole. In the next inner circle the history of election begins. YHWH reveals himself to the patriarchs, who represent God's people, as El Shaddai. YHWH explicitly identifies himself with this deity: "YHWH appeared to Abram and said to him: I am אֱלֹהֵי שְׂרַי" (Gen 17:1). In the innermost circle, YHWH finally makes himself known to Moses with his name YHWH, which he henceforth wants to be called (Exod 6:2–3, 5–7), and combines this with the desire that a sanctuary be built for him so that he may dwell among his people (Exod 25:1–2a, 8; 29:43, 45–46). The Priestly Writing thus takes up exactly the three names of God used by the Yahwist<sup>63</sup> and brings them together in a relationship. Integrative monotheism, as it is represented by the Priestly Writing, reflects the concentration on the single cult place, which in this way is awarded worldwide significance. Now the multiple possibilities to worship a single god are thus no longer applied, as the Marduk theology still allowed.

The god YHWH unites all deities in himself. The origin of the world is traced back without much ado and without reservation to a single cause. There is no battle of the gods anymore, as it has been in *Enuma Elish*. The *one* God moved completely into transcendence. The *creator* is simply divorced from the *creature*. He reveals himself only in the way that he hides himself in his terrifying glory, the קְבוֹד. Only the legitimate cult, which is performed and intellectually conceived by the theological elite, is capable of mediating revelation. The step toward monotheism is thereby complete. Instead of the multiplicity of gods, only humanity exists next to the one God. Humankind becomes a being in the likeness of the one God and exercises as God's vassal dominion over the world (Gen 1:26–28). The universal human dignity should be understood as a direct reflex to monotheism.

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<sup>63</sup> For Elohim in the pre-editorial sources of J, see Gen 2:7, 8, 19, 21, 22; 3:21; 4:25; 21:6; 27:28; 28:12, 17; 32:2, 3; Exod 3:4; 19:3; Num 22:12, 22. Shaddai occurs in Num 24:4. The divine name YHWH is used by the editor throughout. In the pre-editorial sources it occurs in Exod 14:14, 21, 24, 25, 27; 15:21, see Christoph Levin, "Source Criticism: The Miracle at the Sea," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards, RBS 56 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 57.