

THE SOUTHERN HOME OF YHWH AND
PRE-PRIESTLY PATRIARCHAL/EXODUS TRADITIONS FROM
A SOUTHERN PERSPECTIVE

I. INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen an enormous change of paradigm concerning the dating and historical background of the pre-Priestly Patriarchal and Exodus material. New models of the origin of these narratives have been proposed, in which these two formerly different origin traditions were linked by a Priestly redactor in exilic or post-exilic times ¹. In the new paradigm, the pre-Priestly development of these traditions is intensely associated with the history of the monarchies of Israel and Judah. The Patriarchal narratives — or at least those related to Jacob — and Exodus/Wilderness traditions are considered as two different, if not competing, foundation stories of the Israelite monarchy, later inherited by Judah after the destruction of the northern kingdom. The Exodus tradition was dominant in Israel, where it was promoted as a “chart myth” for unifying Israel under the reforms of Jeroboam II ².

Concerning the Patriarchal narratives, those clinging to a pre-exilic origin adhere to the view that Jacob was an ancestor originally associated with the kingdom of Israel who was later appropriated by Judah ³. In the same vein, the earliest narratives relating to Abraham were primarily connected to the population of the southern highlands of Judah in the late

¹ K. SCHMID, *Genesis and the Moses Story. Israel’s Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (Siphrut 3; Winona Lake, IN 2010); IDEM, “Genesis and Exodus as Two Formerly Independent Traditions of Origins for Ancient Israel”, *Bib* 93 (2012) 187-208; TH.B. DOZEMAN – K. SCHMID, eds., *Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (SBL Symposium Series 34; Atlanta, GA 2006); E. BLUM, “The Literary Connection Between the Books of Genesis and Exodus and the End of the Book of Joshua”, *Farewell to the Yahwist?*, 89-106.

² K. VAN DER TOORN, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel. Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden 1996) 287-315. See now *HBAI* 6 (2017), dedicated to Jeroboam’s Israel.

³ A. DE PURY, “The Jacob Story and the Beginning of the Formation of the Pentateuch”, *Farewell to the Yahwist?*, 51-72; E. BLUM, “The Jacob Tradition”, *The Book of Genesis. Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (eds. C.A. EVANS – J.N. LOHR – D.L. PETERSEN) (VTSup 152; Leiden 2012) 181-211; I. FINKELSTEIN – TH. RÖMER, “Comments on the Historical Background of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis”, *ZAW* 126 (2014) 317-338.

Iron Age, probably related to memories kept in the shrine of Mamre⁴. However, the pre-exilic dating of the pre-Priestly material of Jacob and Abraham is not universally accepted, and other scholars have proposed exilic (Babylonian period) dates, viewing these narratives as a kind of “literature of crisis” with no value for reconstructing historically the monarchical period⁵.

The conclusions arrived at by these new models are grounded on more solid extra-biblical and archaeological foundations than the traditional historical-critical views from the first half of the last century. Yet, in placing too much emphasis on the role played by the Iron II monarchies in the propagation of the Patriarchal and the Exodus stories, there is danger in portraying the diffusion of these traditions as totally politically motivated by the royal and priestly elites. Most particularly, these monarchical-centric approximations overlook the role played by (geographically and socially) “peripheral” areas in the origin and diffusion of this folklore.

One of the areas that were central for the ancient traditions of Israel and Judah were the arid regions to the south, especially the northern Negev. The development of the traditions of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Esau is inextricably linked with the history of settlement, contacts and trade of the Late Bronze/Iron Age Negev, Sinai and Edom. In addition, the traditional approximations detach the history of the Iron II Patriarchal narratives from the origins and transmission of the cult of YHWH during the Late Bronze and early Iron II Ages. Therefore it is time for a reassessment of the evidence from a southern perspective.

Recent archaeological excavations in the arid southern regions and new interpretations of old epigraphic and iconographic evidence are rapidly changing the biblical-based paradigm of the interactions between the desert cults and the Levantine religions. This article will investigate the configuration of the varied desert cultic practices of the Negev, Edom and the Sinai during the Late Bronze/Iron Ages which may have contributed to the emergence of the Yahwistic cult and to the development of the Patriarchal and Exodus narratives. The study adopts an interdisciplinary methodology that draws from the biblical and extra-biblical data.

⁴ I. FINKELSTEIN – TH. RÖMER, “Comments on the Historical Background of the Abraham Narrative. Between ‘Realia’ and ‘Exegetica’”, *HBAI* 3 (2014) 3-23; O. LIPSCHITS – TH. RÖMER – H. GONZALEZ, “The Pre-Priestly Abraham Narratives from Monarchic to Persian Times”, *Sem* 59 (2017) 261-296.

⁵ J. VAN SETERS, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, CT – London 1975); R.G. KRATZ, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* (trans. J. BOWDEN) (London – New York 2000); N. NA’AMAN, “The Jacob Story and the Formation of Biblical Israel”, *TA* 41 (2014) 95-125; IDEM, “The Pre-Priestly Abraham Story as a Unified Exilic Work”, *SJOT* 29 (2015) 157-181.

This investigation has the aim of analyzing important historical questions concerning the historical memory of Israel and Judah. Of central concern will be the question: How were the religious experiences shaped by the interactions between the desert cultic traditions and the Israelite/Judaeans sanctuary cults that penetrated from the agricultural lands? This question, of course, is part of the much wider debate regarding the role played by trade and cultural interconnections in the diffusion of religious ideas.

The history of the interactions between the Israelites/Judaeans and the southern cults and traditions spans a long period of time, extending from the end of the Late Bronze to the end of the Iron Age (*ca.* 1400-550), a period of some eight hundred years in which considerable changes are discernible in the local material culture.

Based only on the local archaeological and epigraphic evidence, the history of these interactions can be divided chronologically into three main phases: Formative (14th to 11th centuries), Early Contact (10th to mid 8th centuries) and Late Contact (late 8th to early 6th centuries) periods.

II. FORMATIVE PERIOD (14th TO 11th CENTURIES BCE)

The religion of the southern arid margins of the Levant in the Late Bronze and early Iron Ages was highly hybridized, the result of the amalgam of the Egyptian and local cultic practices in the mining sites of Serabit el-Khadem in Sinai and Timna in the southern Arabah. Despite the usual pharaonic rhetoric, relations between Egyptians and locals seem to have been peaceful enough, allowing the establishment of small open-air shrines in the Timna Valley where the veneration of Egyptian deities (e.g., the goddess Hathor who was worshipped as protector of the miners and called “Lady of the Turquoise”) coexisted with architecture, material culture and cultic practices that drew heavily from the local cultural heritage ⁶. The local cultic architecture relied greatly on the area’s arid environment and resources; widely common were the open air-shrines constructed of local stones and displaying mostly rock paraphernalia — especially standing stones, such as those found in Timna’s Sites 200 (Hathor shrine) and 2, Har Shani in the Uvda Valley, and Faynan in southern Transjordan ⁷.

⁶ U. AVNER, “Egyptian Timna – Reconsidered”, *Unearthing the Wilderness*. Studies on the History and Archaeology of the Negev and Edom in the Iron Age (ed. J.M. TEBES) (ANESSup 45; Leuven 2014) 103-162.

⁷ J.M. TEBES, “Late Bronze/Iron Age Extramural Shrines of the Arid Southern Levant and the Syro-Arabian Desert Cultic Architecture”, *The Archaeology of the Arabian Peninsula* 2. Connecting the Evidence. Proceedings of the International Workshop held in Vienna

No iconographic depictions of local deities exist from this period, and the intentional defacing of Hathor images after the Egyptian withdrawal from Timna may point to the practice of aniconism linked to a new cult ⁸, to anti-Egyptian sentiment, or both. There exist, however, depictions of human-like figures in the rock-art of Timna and in the decorated Qurayyah pottery imported from the northern Hejaz, but the parallels within the wider Arabian rock-art context suggest they are depictions of local chiefs or sorcerers, some of them practicing sacred hunting ⁹.

1. *The Southern Desert Cults and the Origins of YHWH*

After more than a century of research, no convincing evidence has surfaced concerning the origins of the cult of YHWH in Palestine ¹⁰. The most likely scenario is that this deity originated outside this area and was later imported into the central hill country. Several pieces of evidence, both biblical and epigraphic, point to the southern arid fringes of the Levant as the area where the worship of YHWH started.

The earliest attestations of the name YHWH comes from New Kingdom temple toponym lists from the reigns of Amenophis III (*ca.* 1380) and Ramses II (*ca.* 1270/1250). Although Ramses II's list from Amara West is probably a revised copy of Amenophis III's from Soleb, they both register several Shasu-lands (i.e., lands inhabited by local semi-pastoral groups), among which was *ʔ šsw yhw*, most likely Yahu, an archaic form of the Tetragrammaton. The Amara West text also lists a *ʔ šsw s'rr*, most probably Seir, a site-name likely referring to the Negev and closely related by several biblical texts to the land of Edom ¹¹. These and other Egyptian

on April 25, 2016 (ed. M. LUCIANI) (Oriental and European Archaeology; Vienna, forthcoming).

⁸ N. AMZALLAG has recently argued that this cult was no other than YHWH's; see "Who was the Deity Worshipped at the Tent-Sanctuary of Timna?", *Mining for Ancient Copper. Essays in Memory of Beno Rothenberg* (ed. E. BEN-YOSEF) (Monograph Series 37; Tel Aviv 2017) 127-136.

⁹ J.M. TEBES, "The Symbolic and Social World of the Qurayyah Pottery Iconography", *Unearthing the Wilderness*, 163-202; IDEM, "Iconographies of the Sacred and Power of the Desert Nomads: A Reappraisal of the Desert Rock Art of the Late Bronze / Iron Age Southern Levant and Northwestern Arabia", *WDO* 47 (2017) 4-24.

¹⁰ K. VAN DER TOORN, "Yahweh", *DDD*, 910-911; TH. RÖMER, *The Invention of God* (transl. R. GEUSS) (Cambridge, MA 2015) 35-50. That is, geographical Palestine, including the territories of the modern state of Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

¹¹ R. GIVEON, *Les Bédouins Shosou des Documents Égyptiens* (Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui 18; Leiden 1971) 27, 76. See recent discussion with older literature in F. ADROM – M. MÜLLER, "The Tetragrammaton in Egyptian Sources – Facts and Fiction", *The Origins of Yahwism* (eds. J. VAN OORSCHOT – M. WITTE) (BSAW 484; Berlin – Boston, MA 2017) 96-103.

texts locate the Shasu in that indeterminate portion of land comprising the Sinai, Negev and Edom¹², but it is very difficult to determine a precise location. However, it is clear that by the 14th century the name Yahu, either a geographical, tribal or deity name, was known in the southern arid margins of the Levant.

If the several Egyptian site-names *qś* that appear in lists of the reigns of Ramses II and III refer to the Edomite teophoric name Qos¹³, then we have a picture of the Negev and Edom being inhabited by semi-pastoral groups worshipping tribal deities who would later find their way into the pantheon of the Iron II southern Levantine monarchies¹⁴.

The Egyptian references are usually coupled with a group of poetic biblical texts, some probably archaic, that associate YHWH with locations south or southeast of Palestine. The Song of Deborah sees YHWH coming from Seir and advancing from the fields of Edom (Judg 5,4). The Blessing of Moses in Deut 33,2 declares that YHWH comes from Sinai, rose in Seir, shined forth in Mount Paran, and came out to the fields of Kadesh. Some prophetic texts present similar imagery, with references in Isaiah to YHWH coming from Edom and Bozrah (63,1) and in Habakkuk to God coming from Teman (3,3). In Psalm 68,8.18, God is the lord of the Sinai.

Traditional scholarship has considered some of these texts as archaic. Based on linguistic reasons, the Song of Deborah has long been regarded as one of the earliest pieces of Hebrew literature¹⁵. Judges 5 constitutes the basic text, variously dated between the 13th/12th and the 10th/9th centuries,

¹² Such as the document of an Egyptian official in the Sinai frontier reporting the migration of Shasu tribes from Edom into the Delta during a period of drought; *ANET*, 259.

¹³ B. ODED, "Egyptian References to the Edomite Deity Qaus", *AUSS* 9 (1971) 47-50; E.A. KNAUF, "Qōs", *DDD*, 675.

¹⁴ I. KNOHL ("Jacob-el in the Land of Edom and the Roots of Biblical Religion", *VT* 67 [2017] 481-484) has recently suggested that the name Ya'qub'ilu in Asian toponym lists of Ramses II and III corresponds to a southern clan with an eponym Jacob, but this suggestion should be viewed with caution, given that Jacob was a common Northwest Semitic name since the early 2nd millennium (see M. DIJKSTRA, "Jacob", *DDD*, 459-461) and that the biblical tradition firmly associates this patriarch with northern Israel, not the south.

¹⁵ W.F. ALBRIGHT, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*. A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths (1st ed. 1968; Winona Lake, IN 1994) 13-16; D.N. FREDMAN, "Archaic Forms in Early Hebrew Poetry", *ZAW* 72 (1960) 101-107; F.M. CROSS, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*. Studies in the History of the Religion of Israel (Cambridge, MA 1973) 100-103. See also L.E. AXELSSON, *The Lord Rose up from Seir*. Studies in the History and Traditions of the Negev and Southern Jordan (*ConBOT* 25; Stockholm 1987) 48-65; J. BLENKINSOPP, "The Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis Revisited and the Origins of Judah", *JSOT* 33 (2008) 131-153; KNAUF, "Deborah's Language. Judges Ch. 5 in its Hebrew and Semitic Context", *Studia Semitica et Semito-hamitica* (eds. B. BURTEA – J. TROPPER – H. YOUNANSARDAROU) (*AOAT* 317; Münster 2015) 167-182; M. LEUENBERGER, "YHWH'S Provenance from the South. A New Evaluation of the Arguments pro and contra", *The*

on which the others depend. This opinion, however, is not without critics, with Pfeiffer being a strong advocate of the post-exilic origin of these texts¹⁶. However, it is clear that although these texts are disparate in date they share the basic belief that YHWH is residing and/or is coming from areas south of Palestine. It is also striking that the earliest extra-biblical references for the names Seir, Edom, and Teman are of pre-exilic date. As stated above, Seir and Edom were already known in New Kingdom Egyptian times. Key are the references to “YHWH of Teman” in the inscriptions of the late-ninth/early-eighth-century northeast Sinai site of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, which would provide the earliest extra-biblical evidence for the transference of Yahwism to the central hill country (see below).

2. *Southern Traders as Transmitters of Yahwism in the Early Iron Age?*

A number of biblical scholars have undertaken to explain the transmission of the veneration of god YHWH to the Israelites by highlighting the role of southern traders in the early Iron Age. This approach is expressly literal, focusing on the role of the Midianite Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, in the adoption of Yahwism by Moses and his followers (Exod 2,16-22; 3,1; 18). Since Jethro is elsewhere identified as a Kenite (Judg 1,16; 4,11 with the name Jobab), one of the several groups that settled in the northern Negev¹⁷, attention is focused on the role of early traders coming from the south, such as Midianites, Kenites and Amalekites, in the diffusion of Yahwism to the ancient Israelites settling in central Canaan¹⁸.

Aside from the fact that the traditions surrounding Moses, Jethro and the Mountain of God involve Priestly or post-Priestly materials¹⁹, the “Kenite connection” also lacks archaeological evidence. There is no

Origins of Yahwism, 169-171; M.S. SMITH, “YHWH’s Original Character: Questions about an Unknown God”, *The Origins of Yahwism*, 23-43.

¹⁶ H. PFEIFFER, “The Origin of YHWH and its Attestation”, in *The Origins of Yahwism*, 115-156.

¹⁷ BLENKINSOPP, “The Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis”, 133-136.

¹⁸ F.M. CROSS, “The Epic Traditions of Early Israel: Epic Narrative and the Reconstruction of Early Israelite Institutions”, *The Poet and the Historian. Essays in Literary and Historical Biblical Criticism* (ed. R.E. FRIEDMAN) (Chico, CA 1983) 13-39; J.D. SCHLOEN, “Caravans, Kenites, and *Casus belli*: Enmity and Alliance in the Song of Deborah”, *CBQ* 55 (1993) 18-38; M.S. SMITH, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism. Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford 2001) 145; N. NA’AMAN, “The ‘Kenite Hypothesis’ in the Light of the Excavations at Ḥorvat ‘Uza”, *Not Only History. Proceedings of the Conference in Honor of Mario Liverani Held in Sapienza–Università di Roma, Dipartimento di Scienze dell’Antichità*, 20-21 April 2009 (eds. G. BARTOLONI – M.G. BIGA) (Winona Lake, IN 2016) 171-182.

¹⁹ PFEIFFER, “The Origin of YHWH”, 132-136; CH. BRENNER, “‘I am YHWH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt (Exod 20:2). Reflections on the Status of

material data to uphold the notion that the central hill country was linked by trade with the Negev and Edom during the Iron I. The best indicator is the distribution of the locally hand-made Negevite pottery and the northern Arabian Qurayyah pottery which maps the geographical extension of the southern nomadic groups' movements. During the Iron I the Negevite pottery was concentrated in the Timna Valley and probably did not extend further north than the Beersheba Valley. Similarly, Qurayyah ware was common in Ramesside Timna and less so in Faynan, while very few outliers were discovered as north as Amman in Transjordan, Tell Jedur in the Judean highlands and Lachish in the Shephelah ²⁰. The contacts between the Negev and the central highlands were, at best, tenuous.

Unfortunately, another good indicator, the finds of copper/bronze artifacts in the southern Levant, are very difficult to date. Those originating from sources in the Wadi Arabah (Tell Deir 'Alla, Pella, Tell en-Nasbeh, Tel Jatt, Neve Yam) are concentrated in the Jezreel and Jordan Valleys ²¹: if anything, they indicate contacts between the south and the Iron I Canaanite towns and not with the newly established Israelite settlements in central Canaan.

In sum, Yahwism originated in the south and was transmitted to the central hill country, not by Kenite/Midianite traders as early as the Iron I, but probably later in a more long-term process. As Smith has pointed out, the later tradition “‘narrativized’ the ancient tradition of YHWH’s origin in the south” by constructing a link through Moses’ father-in-law and the Kenites ²².

II. EARLY CONTACT PERIOD (10th TO MID 8th CENTURIES BCE)

The end of the Egyptian hegemony in the late 12th century left a political vacuum that was soon filled by small local polities localized in the Beersheba Valley and Faynan. In early treatments, scholars postulated

the Exodus Creed in the History of Israel and the Literary History of the Hebrew Bible”, *The Origins of Yahwism*, 192-196.

²⁰ J.M. TEBES, *Nómadas en la encrucijada*. Sociedad, ideología y poder en los márgenes áridos del Levante meridional del primer milenio a.C. (BAR International Series 2574; Oxford 2013) 75 fig. 16, 113 fig. 20.

²¹ TEBES, *Nómadas*, 54-55 fig. 5; N. YAHALOM-MACK – E. GALILI – I. SEGA – A. ELIYAHU-BEHAR – E. BOARETTO – S. SHILSTEIN – I. FINKELSTEIN, “New Insights into Levantine Copper Trade: Analysis of Ingots from the Bronze and Iron Ages in Israel”, *Journal of Archaeological Science* 45 (2014) 159-177.

²² SMITH, “YHWH’s Original Character”, 27.

that the early wave of settlement in the late 11th and 10th centuries and comprising new sites such as Tel Masos, Tel Beersheba and Tel 'Arad was initiated by Israelite population migrating from the northern central highlands²³. However, later interpretations of the archaeological evidence have highlighted the role of the local populations in the settlement and sociopolitical development of this area. Thus Iron I-early Iron II sites such as Tel Masos III-II and Tel Beersheba IX-IV are now seen as local fortified posts or even chiefdoms that would soon have to contend with, and ultimately be replaced by, the ascending powers of Israel and Judah²⁴.

1. *Diffusion of Yahwism to the North*

The little that has been found of the cultic material culture from this time attests to the coexistence of both northern and southern cultural elements. At a Tel Masos II (10th century) building, ritual practices were associated with copper metallurgy²⁵. Farther to the south in the central Negev Highlands, the local population continued the tradition of erecting cairns, piles of stones raised as memorials or cultic places, such as in Wadi el 'Asli and Wadi el Huar²⁶. Later in date are the small tripartite temples of the Tel 'Arad X-IX fortress (mid 8th century) and a possible temple at Tel Beersheba III, if the decommissioned four-horned altar belonged to a local temple that was never found²⁷. From the (admittedly later) military correspondence invoking YHWH found at 'Arad, it can be inferred that the cult in the local temple was devoted to YHWH. Central for the worship was one or more standing stones (*mazzeboth*) erected in the temple niche that served as an aniconic symbol of YHWH's presence in the site²⁸.

²³ For a good summary of this view, see Z. HERZOG, "The Beer-sheba Valley: From Nomadism to Monarchy", *From Nomadism to Monarchy*. Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel (eds. I. FINKELSTEIN – N. NA'AMAN) (Jerusalem 1994) 122-149.

²⁴ I. FINKELSTEIN, "Arabian Trade and Socio-Political Conditions in the Negev in the Twelfth-Eleventh Centuries B.C.E.", *JNES* 47 (1988) 241-252; Z. HERZOG, "Social, Historical and Cultural Ramifications", *Beersheba III*. The Early Iron IIA Enclosed Settlement and the Late Iron IIA-Iron IIB Cities (eds. Z. HERZOG – L. SINGER-AVITZ) (Winona Lake, IN 2016) 3: 1464.

²⁵ V. FRITZ – A. KEMPINSKI, *Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen auf der H̱irbet el-Mšāš (Tēl Māšōš) 1972–1975*. Vol. 1, *Textband* (Wiesbaden 1983) 40-41.

²⁶ M. HAIMAN, "Cairn Burials and Cairn Fields in the Negev", *BASOR* 287 (1992) 27, 42, fig. 22:5,6.

²⁷ Z. HERZOG, "The Fortress Mound at Tel Arad: An Interim Report", *TA* 29 (2002) 49-72; Y. AHARONI, "The Horned Altar of Beer-Sheba", *BA* 37 (1974) 2-23; HERZOG – SINGER-AVITZ, *Beersheba III*, 3: 1476-1477. Several altars have been found in Beersheba: I. ZIFFER, "Altars and Art Objects", *Beersheba III*, 3: 1229-1257.

²⁸ E. BLOCH-SMITH, "Massebot Standing for Yhweh: The Fall of a Yahwistic Cult Symbol", *Worship, Women, and War*. Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch (eds. J.J. COLLINS – T.M. LEMOS – S.M. OLYAN) (BJS 357; Providence, RI 2015) 99-115.

It is thus in the 10th century when, for the first time, the population of the central hill country had full contact with the cultic traditions and folklore of the arid south. It is within this historical period, and not before, that the cult of YHWH was likely transmitted from the southern tribal groups to the newly-arrived northern highlanders. The process by which YHWH soon ascended into the pantheon of gods of Israel is difficult to ascertain, but soon he began to be identified with the Canaanite deity El, the original god of Israel, gradually taking on the attributes of El and competing with the cult of Baal. Without doubt the support of the nascent monarchy constituted a major stimulus for the cult of the southern deity ²⁹. An interesting possibility suggested by van der Toorn is that the rise of YHWH should be seen against the decision of Saul, a man coming from a family of southern Gibeonite/Edomite stock, to adopt YHWH as his patron deity ³⁰.

Worship of YHWH is mentioned by the Mesha Stela (*ca.* 850) in the context of the conquest of Nebo from the Israelites (l. 17-18, Mesha “took from there th[e ves]sels of Yahweh [’[t k]ly yhw]”), but this is hardly evidence of the Moabite recognition of YHWH as “the official god of the Israelites”, as some have argued ³¹; rather it indicates only his already high status in the Israelite religion. In the north, royal support for YHWH existed — as confirmed by the royal names ’Ahazyahu and Yehoram — but did not seem to have been strong until the reign of Jehu (*ca.* 841), who fought against the faction of Baal supporters (2 Kgs 10,18-28).

The cultural influence of the south not only entailed the adoption of the cult of YHWH, but also of defined cultic practices. There is no place here to detail the materiality of those practices, but elsewhere I have suggested four elements that can be safely attributed to the southern traditions ³²: aniconism; YHWH as a hunting/war god; pilgrimage; and YHWH’s metallurgical attributes.

2. *Israelite Hegemony in the South and Transmission of the Patriarchal Traditions*

During most of the 8th century, the northern kingdom of Israel enjoyed an unprecedented phase of political hegemony in the southern Levant under the umbrella of Assyria, while the southern Judaeen monarchy

²⁹ M.S. SMITH, *The Early History of God. Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI 2002) 32-47, 153-155.

³⁰ VAN DER TOORN, *Family Religion*, 281-286.

³¹ VAN DER TOORN, “Yahweh”, *DDD*, 1713.

³² J.M. TEBES, “The Archaeology of Cult of Ancient Israel’s Southern Neighbors and the Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis”, *Jews and Judaism in Northern Arabia* (ed. H. MAZUZ) (BRLA; Leiden forthcoming).

acted as its satellite kingdom probably as early as the reign of the Israelite king Joash (2 Kgs 14,8-14). The Israelite trade interests extended into the arid south, where the site of Kuntillet 'Ajrud (KA) was established in the northeast Sinai from the late 9th to the mid 8th centuries³³. The founding of a site — variously identified as a cultic centre, fortress or caravan-serai — in such a remote southern location must have needed Judaeen collaboration, which is confirmed by the mixture of Israelite and Judaeen cultural traits (pottery, script) at the site.

Being at the crossroads of the Dharb el-Ghazza road, cultic practices at KA were highly hybridized, with worship of YHWH existing along that of other deities (El, Baal and Asherah). The well-known pithoi inscriptions mentioning “YHWH of Samaria and his Asherah” and “YHWH of Teman and his Asherah”³⁴ indicate that these deities were worshipped here through their local manifestations, which drawings in Pithos A associate with Egyptian deities Bes and Beset³⁵. The ritual paraphernalia recovered at KA draw strongly from the cultic heritage of the desert populations. Schmidt has recently made a good case that the decorated pithoi A and B served as subjects of libation rituals, votive and dedicatory gifts, incense burning and ritual meals, akin to 'Arad's standing stones. Empty-space aniconism would be present at pithos B in the spatial arrangement of the representation of worshippers and the inscription making reference to “YHWH of Teman and his Asherah” (3.9) immediately above³⁶.

Veneration of YHWH of Samaria is reasonable given that it was the patron deity of the northern Israelite monarchy; worship of YHWH of Teman is less obvious. Although Teman is a name related by the biblical texts to Edom or some location to the south of Palestine (Gen 36,11.15.34.42; 1 Chr 1,36.45.53; Jer 49,7.20; Bar 3,22.23; Ezek 25,13; Obadiah 9; Job 2,11; 4,1; 15,1; 22,1; 42,7.9), there is no compelling reason for seeing a direct link between KA and Edom. No material culture, either pottery or cultic vessels, has been found at KA to connect it with southern Transjordan,

³³ Z. MESHEL, *Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Ḥorvat Teman)*. An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border (Jerusalem 2012).

³⁴ S. AHITUV et al., “The Inscriptions”, *Kuntillet 'Ajrud*, Inscriptions 3.1, 87-91; 3.6, 95-97; 3.9, 98-101.

³⁵ See most recently B.B. SCHMIDT, *The Materiality of Power*. Explorations in the Social History of Early Israelite Magic (FAT 105; Tübingen 2016) 15-122. For a similar view, see R. THOMAS, “The Identity of the Standing Figures on Pithos A from Kuntillet 'Ajrud: A Reassessment”, *JANER* 16 (2016) 121-191.

³⁶ SCHMIDT, *Materiality*, 22-23, 45, 81, 89-90. The representation of the worshippers in pithos B shows close resemblance to the iconography present in the Arabian rock-art and pottery, confirming the hybrid nature of the cultic ritual; P. BECK, “The Drawings and Decorative Designs”, *Kuntillet 'Ajrud*, 176-177; TEBES, “Qurayyah Pottery Iconography”, 175-176.

and the most plausible explanation is that Teman is here referring to Edomites or Edomite-related groups settling in the Negev. Contacts between the Negev and southern Transjordan can be dated as early as the 9th century according to similarities between the pottery of Khirbet en-Nahas in the lowlands of Edom and Cisjordanian decorated pottery (Ashdod IX-VIII, Tel Beersheba VI, 'Ain el-Qudeirat IV-II)³⁷, and especially since the late 8th century with the presence of the so-called "Edomite ware" (see below). It is also possible that YHWH of Teman refers to a temple of YHWH in the Negev used by Edomites living in the area. In this regard Na'aman has recently suggested that this temple was located in Beersheba, following Amos' allusions to a cultic place there alongside references to other Israelite sanctuaries (see below)³⁸. This being the case, visitors to the site would have inscribed personal graffiti on the pithoi to commemorate their visit and secure the protection of their preferred deities, and it would be no surprise that YHWH of Teman, the local god, was among their favourites.

Not only were the Israelites in close contact with the southern traditions through sites like KA, but also the northern folklore, in particularly the Jacob narratives, could now be placed in southern locations. After all, these areas could for a while be considered "Israelite" territory.

It has long been recognized that Jacob and Esau belong to two different traditions that were later joined, with the earliest Jacob belonging to a northern Israelite or Transjordanian setting and the earliest Esau coming to meet him from Edom to Manahaim and Penuel "only to return there again just as quickly"³⁹. As Bartlett has pointed out, a strong tradition connects Esau with Seir, as made clear by the pun stories of Gen 25,25 and 27,11, while the relationship with Edom is secondary: "therefore his name was called Edom" (Gen 25,30); "that is, Edom", "Esau is Edom", "the father of the Edomites" (Gen 36,1.8.9.21)⁴⁰. It remains, then, to reconstruct the process by which Esau, a southern ancestor connected with Seir (Negev), was connected with the northern Jacob and later with the southern Transjordanian Edom.

³⁷ TEBES, *Nómadas*, 100-102.

³⁸ N. NA'AMAN, "In Search of the Temples of YHWH of Samaria and YHWH of Teman", *JANER* 12 (2017) 76-95.

³⁹ M. NOTH, *A History of the Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. B.W. ANDERSON; 1st ed. 1948) (Chico, CA 1981) 88-98, 192-193; see also H. GUNKEL, *Genesis* (Göttingen 1911) 296-297; G. VON RAD, *Genesis: A Commentary* (OTL; London 1972) 275-276; V. MAAG, "Jakob-Esau-Edom", *TZ* 13 (1957) 418-429; V.G. WALLIS, "Die Tradition von den drei Ahnvätern", *ZAW* 81 (1969) 20-22.

⁴⁰ J.R. BARTLETT, "The Brotherhood of Edom", *JSOT* 4 (1977) 17-18; IDEM, *Edom and the Edomites* (JSOTSup 44; Sheffield 1989) 178-179, followed by B. DICOU, *Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist. The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story* (JSOTSup 169; Sheffield 1994) 137-154.

In an earlier study, Bartlett made the case for the existence of two brotherhood traditions, an Israelite one based on the political alliance between Israel and Edom, and a later Judaeen one when Edomites began immigrating to the Negev during the last decades of Judah's life⁴¹. Although he later attributed all the Jacob/Esau material to Judaeen hands⁴², the archaeological evidence of the Israelite presence in the Negev in the early 8th century provides an adequate historical framework for the development of this story within the Israelite tradition.

The earliest attestation is Hosea 12,3b, a text traditionally dated to the 8th century⁴³, where the struggle with an unnamed brother of Jacob is mentioned. Difficult to locate historically are the almost contemporary diatribes of Amos that mention the "transgressions" of Edom, including pursuing his brother with the sword (1,11-12; also 9,12a). The identity of the brother that Amos refers to is not disclosed. The content of the book and the reference in Hosea 12 suggest that Israel is meant, even though no evidence of political alliance exists between the kingdom of Israel and Edom in this period⁴⁴.

⁴¹ J.R. BARTLETT, "The Land of Seir and the Brotherhood of Edom", *JTS* n.s. 20 (1969) 1-20. For the Jacob/Esau tradition as a totally Israelite narrative, see now D. FLEMING, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible*. History, Politics and the Reinscribing of Tradition (Cambridge 2012) 75-85.

⁴² BARTLETT, "Brotherhood", 17-18; IDEM, *Edom*, 178-179.

⁴³ There are scholars who date part or the entirety of the book of Hosea to the post-exilic period; see most recently E. BEN ZVI, *Hosea* (FOTL XXIA/1; Grand Rapids, MI 2005); J.M. BOS, *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea*. The Case for Persian-Period Yehud (LHBOTS 580; New York 2013). But the traditional eighth-century date is effectively defended, among others, by K. SPARKS' review of the first book in *JNES* 69 (2010) 255-258 and by N. NA'AMAN, "The Book of Hosea as a Source for the Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel", *BN* 59 (2015) 232-256.

⁴⁴ The similarity in content and phraseology with later prophesies accusing Edom of misconduct within the context of the fall of Judah in 586 has led some scholars to date this prophecy to the exilic period: e.g., BARTLETT, "Brotherhood"; IDEM, *Edom and the Edomites*, 180; J.B. GEYER, "Mythology and Culture in the Oracles Against the Nations", *VT* 36 (1986) 129-145. However, since almost nothing is known about the context of Amos' accusations against Edom, it is preferable not to disentangle this prophecy from the rest of the book. Moreover, other passing references seem to imply that Edom was acting in concert with Gaza and Tyre, and against Moab (1,6b.9b; 2,1b). Scholars supporting an eighth-century date for Amos' Edom prophecy suggest its historical background is either Edom's independence under king Jehoram (2 Kgs 8,20-22) (eighty year before Amos!) or Amaziah's victory over Edom at the Valley of Salt (2 Kgs 14,17); see J. PRIEST, "The Covenant of Brothers", *JBL* 84 (1965) 400-406; M. HARAN, "Observations on the Historical Background of Amos 1:2 - 2:6", *IEJ* 18 (1968) 201-212; B. GLAZIER-McDONALD, "Edom in the Prophetic Corpus", *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite for He is Your Brother*. Edom and Seir in History and Tradition (ed. D.V. EDELMAN) (Atlanta, GA 1995) 25. But there is nothing in the text of 2 Kings to relate these narratives with Amos' vituperation of Edom, nor is it related to Israel but rather to Judah. The presence in Amos of covenant terminology does not necessarily lend itself to an exilic or post-exilic dating, since the use of diplomatic

In fact, it is not necessary to resort to hypothetical alliances between Israel and Edom to explain the origins of the Jacob/Esau narrative, since commercial links assured connections with the Edomites in the Negev, either traders moving in the area or people beginning to settle in the northern Negev, but all of them allowed to visit KA and worship “YHWH of Teman” there (and note Amos’ allusion to Teman: 1,12). For Blum, “[t]hese northern traders [at KA] apparently acknowledged a special connection of their ‘state’ god with the region of Teman”; similarly, Finkelstein and Römer understand this as “an acknowledgement of common veneration of Yhwh (in different manifestations)” in Israel and Edom⁴⁵.

3. *Beersheba: The Missing Link?*

The Israelite connections with the Negev are confirmed by Amos’ reprimand about not going to Beersheba (5,5; 8,14). That these allusions mention Beersheba alongside recognized Israelite centers of worship such as Samaria, Dan, Bethel and Gilgal implies the existence of an Israelite center of worship at Beersheba, or at least Israelite visitors traveling there. The acrimony of Amos may have been directed against the attempts of Jeroboam II to integrate the worship in boundary shrines such as Beersheba under the eponymous ancestor Jacob. Beersheba is tangentially mentioned in the Elijah story (I Kgs 19,3), a cycle probably originating in Israel in the early 8th century⁴⁶, although the allusion was later probably expanded to באר שבע אשר ליהודה by a Judean editor.

There is debate over whether biblical Beersheba was located in modern Tel Beersheba or in Bir es-Seba’⁴⁷. Occupation at Tel Beersheba started early in the Iron I and grew rapidly in the Iron II (str. IX-IV); the city developed as a royal administrative center of Judah until it was destroyed by Sennacherib in 701 (str. V-II). After a meager occupation in the 7th century (str. I), the city remained unoccupied for *ca.* three hundred years until the Persian and Hellenistic periods (str. H3-2)⁴⁸. The scant remains unearthed at Bir es-Seba’ — buried under the modern city of Beersheba — and its

language was also very frequent in the ancient Near East in the Bronze and Iron Ages: J.M. TEBES, “La terminología diplomática en los oráculos de Amós contra Tiro y Edom (Am 1,9-12)”, *AuOrs* 24 (2006) 243-253.

⁴⁵ BLUM, “The Jacob Tradition”, 209; FINKELSTEIN – RÖMER, “Comments”, 331-332.

⁴⁶ B. HALPERN – A. LEMAIRE, “The Composition of Kings”, *The Book of Kings. Sources, Composition and Reception* (eds. A. LEMAIRE – B. HALPERN) (VTSup 129; Leiden 2010) 137-138.

⁴⁷ HERZOG, “Social, Historical and Cultural Ramifications”, *Beersheba III*, 3: 1480-1481.

⁴⁸ HERZOG – SINGER-AVITZ, *Beersheba III*.

environs do not provide a good picture of the Iron Age settlement, although most of the pottery found is similar to that found at Tel Beersheba III-II, that is, pre-701⁴⁹. The size and function of Tel Beersheba (it was probably the administrative capital of the northern Negev during the Iron II) suggest that this is the Beersheba mentioned by the Patriarchal narratives, although its small size in the 7th century runs contrary to its mention in the town lists of the tribes of Judah and Simeon (Josh 15,28; 19,2) and in the narrative of the cultic reform of Josiah (2 Kgs 23,8). This conflicting evidence has led to two differing alternatives: either the settlement shifted from the tel to Bir es-Seba' in the 7th century⁵⁰, or Bir es-Seba' had been the location of the biblical Beersheba throughout the entire Iron Age⁵¹.

Be this as it may, the most important occupation at both sites corresponds to the 8th century, before the destruction of the Israelite monarchy and contemporary to Amos' allusions to Beersheba. We have already mentioned Na'aman's insightful proposal that the temple of "YHWH of Teman" mentioned in the KA inscriptions was located at Beersheba. He understands the enigmatic reference to *דרך באר שבט* (Amos 8,14) as an emendation, "your beloved", over other interpretations such as "way, pilgrimage" or "your divine council/assembly"⁵². If this proposal is correct, then we would have to seriously reconsider not only the political status of Beersheba and its environs in the early 9th to mid 8th centuries, but also the possibility that the tradition of the southern origins of YHWH was transferred to Israel at the time of its hegemony in the area. Aside from the references in the Patriarchal narratives, Beersheba is briefly mentioned in a note concerning the appointment of Samuel's sons as judges (1 Sam 8,2), while it is especially connected to Judah through the town lists of the tribes of Judah and Simeon (Josh 15,28; 19,2) and the story of the cultic reform of Josiah (2 Kgs 23,8). Because the last two texts are late compositions (the town lists likely date to the 7th century, the Josiah narratives are probably post-exilic) and are imbued with the ideology of a "Great Judah" since the times of Joshua, they are likely extrapolating the realities of the Negev in the late pre-exilic and exilic periods to the early Iron II Beersheba.

⁴⁹ R. GOPHNA – Y. YSRAELI, "Soundings at Beer Sheva (Bir es-Seba')", *Beer Sheva I. Excavations at Tel Beer-Sheba. 1969-1971 Seasons* (ed. Y. AHARONI) (Tel Aviv 1973) 115-118; N. PANITZ-COHEN, "A Salvage Excavation in the New Market in Beer-Sheba: New Light on Iron Age IIB Occupation at Beer-Sheba", *IEJ* 55 (2005) 143-155; Y. YISRAEL – O. FEDER, "An Iron Age and Hellenistic-Period Site near Be'er Sheva", *'Atiqot* 67 (2011) 61-80, 88*.

⁵⁰ AHARONI, "The History of the City and its Significance", *Beer Sheva I*, 110-111.

⁵¹ N. NA'AMAN, "The Inheritance of the Sons of Simeon", *ZDPV* 96 (1980) 150-151.

⁵² NA'AMAN, "In Search of the Temples".

With this in view, I suggest that the Beersheba Valley was, from the late 9th to the mid 8th century, under the hegemony of Israel. Given the subservient status of Judah towards Israel, we must consider the possibility that this hegemony involved trade concessions such as those attested at KA and cult privileges like the temple of YHWH of Teman in Beersheba. That Teman is a site/region intrinsically connected with the Edomites (cf. Amos 1,12) suggests that key for the Israelite interests in the south were trade and cultic relationships with the Edomites, not necessarily with southern Transjordan but probably Edomite traders in the Negev visiting KA and Beersheba.

It is within this historical background that the stories surrounding Isaac in the vicinity of Beersheba found their way into Israel. Amos already knows the “high places of Isaac” and the “house of Isaac” (7,9.16b) and — as we observed — the Israelite connection with Beersheba, but there is no explicit association between Isaac and Beersheba. However, a closer reading of the text reveals that Amos’ references to Isaac run parallel to the mention of “Israel” and the “sanctuaries of Israel”, seeming to represent allusions to the south in opposition to the north⁵³. Since in Amos Israel is otherwise called “the house of Jacob” (3,13; 9,8b) or the “house of Joseph” (5,6) and symbolized by the “altars of Bethel” (3,14), while Judah is not represented by another name (2,4-5) or is not mentioned at all (except probably 9,11a), then Isaac should represent the south and most particularly the northern Negev. Was the tradition of Isaac as Esau’s father an original southern folklore, or were both ancestors only related by the Israelite tradition? That both Hosea 12,4b and Amos 1,11a know the tradition of brotherhood but make no mention of Isaac would point to the first option. Then at some point the southern Isaac-Esau folklore and the northern Jacob-Laban traditions were combined, and the Jacob story was joined to that of Esau’s birth and blessing⁵⁴.

The existence of a temple of YHWH in Beersheba connected to Isaac is reflected in the etiological story present in Gen 26,23-33, later transferred to the Abraham and Abimelech narrative (Gen 21,31-33) when the Isaac and Jacob stories were absorbed by the Abraham tradition⁵⁵. Passing allusions to Jacob departing from or arriving to Beersheba (Gen 28,10; 46,1.5) are secondary and depend on the tradition linking the site with Isaac, as is shown by the offering of sacrifices to “the god of his father Isaac” (Gen 46,1).

⁵³ An important point raised by FINKELSTEIN – RÖMER, “Abraham Narrative”, 14.

⁵⁴ KRATZ, *Composition*, 267-268.

⁵⁵ NOTH, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 110; LIPSCHITS et al., “The Pre-Priestly Abraham Narratives”, 267.

The story of the relationship between Isaac and Abimelech, king of Gerar (Genesis 26), which was later incorporated into the tradition of the southern Abraham (Genesis 20; 21,22-34), is an integral part of the Isaac-Beersheba tradition, thus dating as early as the 8th century. It is Abimelech of Gerar with whom both patriarchs made a covenant, and from this the name Beersheba is given (Gen 21,31; 26,33b). A later dating in the last part of the Iron Age is possible⁵⁶, but this would contradict the small size of Beersheba in the 7th century. Gerar is traditionally identified with Tel Haror, ca. 20 km from Bir es-Seba' and 30 km from Tel Beersheba, a site that was very prominent in the late Iron Age⁵⁷. Clashes in the 8th century between Israel and the kings of Gerar over the use of wells could have provided the historical background for the origin of such traditions.

A similar transfer of geographical settings occurred with the story of Ishmael and Hagar. Although the location of Beer Lahai Roi and Berid are unknown⁵⁸, Kadesh (Gen 16,14) is most likely the Iron Age administrative and military center of 'Ain el-Qudeirat in the Negev-Sinai frontier⁵⁹. However, the connection between Ishmael and this area is secondary, since the Beer Lahai Roi story is meant to explain the origin of the name of this desert well by reference to Hagar's attribution to YHWH of the name "Atta El Roi" ("You are El Roi"). Thus the traditions surrounding this area of the west-central Negev probably originated with Isaac (24,62a; 25,11b)⁶⁰ and were attributed to the Ishmael story by Judaeen redactors during the 7th century (see below).

III. LATE CONTACT PERIOD (LATE 8th TO EARLY 6th CENTURIES BCE)

The last phase of the Iron Age in the Negev, from the late 8th to the early 6th centuries, represented the highest peak of settlement so far, triggered by the prosperity brought by the Arabian trade. The northern valleys were administered by Judah through a chain of forts and fortified settlements such as Tel 'Arad, Tel 'Aroer, Tel 'Ira, Tel Malhata, Tel Masos and Horvat 'Uza and probably a much reduced site in Tel Beersheba. The central

⁵⁶ E.g., FINKELSTEIN – RÖMER ("Abraham Narrative", 13), who situate the Gerar stories within the context of the conflicts between Judah and the Philistines in the 7th century.

⁵⁷ E.D. OREN, "Tel Haror", *NEAEHL* 2, 580-584.

⁵⁸ KNAUF, *Ismael*. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Palästinas und Nordarabiens im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr. (ADPV; Wiesbaden 2¹⁹⁸⁹) 45-49. NOTH (*History*, 108) speculated El-Roi was the name of a local god, but there is absolutely no evidence for this deity; DE PURY, "Lahai Roi", *DDD*, 500-502.

⁵⁹ R. COHEN – H. BERNICK-GREENBERG, eds., *Excavations at Kadesh Barnea (Tell el-Qudeirat) 1976-1982* (IAA Reports 34; Jerusalem 2007).

⁶⁰ AXELSSON, *The Lord Rose up from Seir*, 91-93.

and southern Negev were, however, a no man's land with several polities — Judah (through the fortress at 'Ain el-Qudeirat), Philistines, Arabian tribes and particularly Edom — struggling to profit from the emerging trade routes and the security imposed by the *Pax Assyriaca*.

Although evidence of cultic activities in the Judaeen sites is scantier than in the previous period (including small altars at 'Ain el-Qudeirat and Horvat 'Uza ⁶¹), two open-air shrines at Horvat Qitmit and 'En Hazeva attest the proliferation of cultic places along the desert roads.

1. *Judaeen Hegemony in the Negev and Integration of the Patriarchal Narratives*

As I have read the development of the Jacob tradition, the Israelite presence in the Negev played a significant role in the placement of the Jacob family story in the south. However, the final redaction of these narratives was done from an entirely Judaeen perspective. There is consensus in affirming that after the fall of Samaria in 720 most of the Israelite historical traditions were taken over by Judah and re-elaborated to fit into the Judaeen vision of history. The Isaac-Jacob stories were now integrated into the narrative of the Judaeen ancestor Abraham, with Isaac taking the role of Abraham's son and transferring to Abraham much of the older traditions, such as the Abimelech/Gerar and Beersheba covenant stories (Genesis 20; 21,22-34).

Concerning the tradition of the Isaac-Ishmael brotherhood, no pre-exilic prophetic text, nor anything in the Books of Kings, refers explicitly to Ishmael, while the allusions to the Ishmaelites in Genesis as merchants related to the Midianites (Gen 37,25.27; 39,1: also Judg 8,24) and the list of descendants of Ishmael (Gen 25,13-14) are late in date ⁶². The incorporation of the Ishmael story narrated in Genesis 16 should be dated to the 7th century, if the identification between Ishmael and the Arabian tribal confederation of Shumu'il attested in Assyrian sources dating to Sennacherib and Assurbanipal is correct ⁶³. However, the setting of the Ishmael-Hagar

⁶¹ A. GERA, "The Small Finds", *Kadesh Barnea*, 211-235; I. BEIT-ARIEH, *Horvat 'Uza and Horvat Radum. Two Fortresses in the Biblical Negev* (Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University 25; Tel Aviv 2007) 31-33.

⁶² See I. EPH'AL, *The Ancient Arabs. Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent 9th-5th centuries B.C.* (Jerusalem – Leiden 1982) 233-240; J. RETSÖ, *The Arabs in Antiquity. Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (London – New York 2003) 220-228.

⁶³ KNAUF, *Ismael*, 1-55; DIJKSTRA, "Ishmael", *DDD*, 451; FINKELSTEIN – RÖMER, "Abraham Narrative", 13-14; LIPSCHITS et al., "Abraham Narratives", 293-294. The identification Ishmael/Shumu'il is by no means accepted by all scholars; see, e.g., EPH'AL, *The Ancient Arabs*, 166-168; R. ZADOK, "On Early Arabians in the Fertile Crescent", *TA* 17 (1990) 223; NA'AMAN, "Abraham", 162-163.

story, situated in the west-central Negev environs close to Kadesh Barnea (Gen 1,14) does not match the geographical location of the Shumu'il tribes in the Syro-Arabian desert ⁶⁴. As we have seen, the Kadesh setting is not original ⁶⁵ and was probably extrapolated from the earlier Isaac traditions. Thus the story of Ishmael, instead of reflecting the southern expansion of Judah in the 7th century ⁶⁶, would reflect the attempts of the Judaeans to integrate the neighboring Arabian tribes moving in the southern Negev into the genealogy of Abraham. The name Ishmael should be seen as a generic term chosen to denote those Arabian groups, without any ethnic meaning or connection with the "real" Syro-Arabian Shumu'il.

The northern Jacob now formed part of the Judaeans historical heritage, their stories being readapted to the realities of the late Iron Age, particularly the narratives of Jacob/Esau. As indicated above, since the late 9th century there is evidence of strong contacts between the Negev and southern Transjordan, and relationships grossly intensified since the late 8th century following the nomadic movements across the Wadi Arabah, the intensification of trade with Edom and the settlement of Edomites in the Judaeans towns. Common in the ceramic assemblages of the late Iron northern Negev sites is the finding of Southern Transjordan-Negev Pottery (STNP, also "Edomite ware"), a group of locally-made and imported vessels with parallels in the Edomite sites of southern Transjordan, particularly Buseirah ⁶⁷. Epigraphic texts attest the worship of Edomite god Qos in the Negev ⁶⁸, particularly in the small open-air shrine of Horvat Qitmit ⁶⁹. Many have embraced the position that this material culture is evidence of the conquest of the Negev by the Edomites ⁷⁰; however, the eclectic style of the pottery and cultic vessels from Horvat Qitmit and the even smaller cultic shrine at 'En Hazeva suggests the Negev at this time was inhabited by people of diverse ethnicity ⁷¹.

⁶⁴ RETSÖ, *Arabs*, 220-228.

⁶⁵ See the arguments in TH.B. DOZEMAN, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story", *JBL* 117 (1998) 36-38.

⁶⁶ As per FINKELSTEIN – RÖMER, "Abraham Narrative", 14.

⁶⁷ J.M. TEBES, "The Potter's Will: Spheres of Production, Distribution and Consumption of the Late Iron Age Southern Transjordan-Negev Pottery", *Strata* 29 (2011) 61-101; SINGER-AVITZ, "Edomite Pottery in Judah in the 8th Century BCE", *Unearthing the Wilderness*, 267-281.

⁶⁸ KNAUF, "Qōs".

⁶⁹ I. BEIT-ARIEH, ed., *Horvat Qitmit. An Edomite Shrine in the Biblical Negev* (Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology 11; Tel Aviv 1995).

⁷⁰ E.g. BEIT-ARIEH, "The Edomites in Cisjordan", *You Shall Not Abhor*, 33-40.

⁷¹ I. FINKELSTEIN, *Living on the Fringe. The Archaeology and History of the Negev, Sinai and Neighbouring Regions in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (Monographs in Mediterranean Archaeology 6; Sheffield 1995) 149-152.

The “Edomite threat” model is based on the application of the scape-goat notions present in the post-exilic prophetic literature to the realities of the late Iron Age. The Hebrew ostraca found at ‘Arad referring to the “evil” done by Edom (l. 40) and to the dispatch of reinforcements “lest Edom should come there” (l. 24) can be interpreted as conflicts over sheep-stealing and grazing rights rather than military operations⁷². Other ostraca from Horvat ‘Uza, Tel Malhata and Tel ‘Aroer attest the presence of people of diverse origins (Judaeans, Edomites, Phoenicians, Arabians) in the northern Negev, some of them merchants operating in the routes connecting the Negev with Edom⁷³.

Returning to the narratives linking the brothers Jacob and Esau, this originally Israelite folklore harking back to the Israelite presence in the Negev flourished during the late Iron Age when a multicultural milieu emerged connecting Judaeans and Edomites. Close social and economic contacts were formed through neighbourhood, intermarriage, and trade ventures, and although not all of them seem to have been fruitful as the ‘Arad letters attest, local folklore expressed these relationships through the language of kinship and retroactively located them in the time of the patriarchs. The original tradition, of which we know only few elements such as the story of the supplantation in the birth of Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Seir) (Hos 12,4a; cf. Gen 25,24-28), was expanded by Judaeans to incorporate the association between Esau and Edom (Gen 25,30; 36,1.8.9.21), which is clearly secondary. The “prophetic” texts concerning the future primacy of Jacob over Esau (Gen 25,23; 27,40b) should be read against the troubled Judaeans-Edomite history, and as such legitimizing the possession of the Negev by Judah⁷⁴.

2. *Desert Trade and the Wilderness Narratives*

The northern Exodus and Wilderness wandering traditions also found their way into Judah’s cultural heritage. The eighth-century prophets, Hosea, Amos and Micah, knew YHWH’s deliverance of the people of

⁷² As convincingly argued by PH. GUILLAUME, “The Myth of the Edomite Threat. Arad letters 24 and 40”, *KUSATU* 15 (2013) 97-108; see also J.M. TEBES, “Memories of Humiliation, Cultures of Resentment towards Edom and the Formation of Ancient Jewish National Identity”, *Nations and Nationalism*, forthcoming.

⁷³ N. NA’AMAN, “Literacy in the Negev in the Late Monarchical Period”, *Contextualizing Israel’s Sacred Writings. Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production* (ed. B.B. SCHMIDT) (SBLAIL 22; Atlanta, GA 2015) 47-70.

⁷⁴ BARTLETT, “The Brotherhood of Edom”; J.M. TEBES, “‘You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite, for He is Your Brother’: The Tradition of Esau and the Edomite Genealogies from an Anthropological Perspective”, *JHS* 6 (2006) 1-30.

Israel from Egypt and the wanderings in the desert. However, whether they were drawing from an earlier source or not ⁷⁵, these texts do not provide precise geographical references of the wilderness itineraries, only mentioning the Transjordanian part of the route to Canaan (“the land of the Amorites”: Amos 2,10; “from Shittim until Gilgal”: Mic 6,5).

Thus the detailed description of the Sinai-Negev part of the itinerary present in Num 33,5-49 has been traditionally attributed to the Priestly source ⁷⁶. Scholars have long debated if the wilderness itineraries represent historical information from pre-exilic times. While some defend the authenticity of the toponyms mentioned in these itineraries for the late 2nd millennium ⁷⁷, others suggest they reproduce real itineraries — even pilgrimage routes — dating to the Iron Age ⁷⁸. Those who adopt more pessimistic approximations view little historical information in such references, which are interpreted as late by-products of the Exodus and Numbers narratives ⁷⁹.

A close analysis of the Wilderness wandering material, contrasting the toponyms that can be securely identified with the archaeology of the area, reveals that those itineraries fit perfectly into a late Iron Age date. These places were intensely occupied during the 7th and early 6th centuries and located in strategic points along the desert trade routes: Ezion Geber (Tell

⁷⁵ For different interpretations, see Y. HOFFMAN, “North Israelite Typological Myth and a Judaeon Historical Tradition: The Exodus in Hosea and Amos”, *VT* 39 (1989) 169-182; Th.B. DOZEMAN, “Hosea and the Wilderness Wandering Tradition”, *Rethinking the Foundations. Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible – Essays in Honour of John Van Seters* (eds. S.L. MCKENZIE – Th. RÖMER) (BZAW 294; Berlin 2000) 55-70; J. HWANG, “‘I Am Yahweh Your God from the Land of Egypt’: Hosea’s Use of the Exodus Traditions”, *“Did I Not Bring Israel Out of Egypt? Biblical, Archaeological, and Egyptological Perspectives on the Exodus Narratives* (eds. J.K. HOFFMEIER – A.R. MILLARD – G.A. RENDBURG) (BBRSup 13; Winona Lake, IN 2016), 243-253; J.A. DEARMAN, “Some Observations on the Exodus and Wilderness Wandering Traditions in the Books of Amos and Micah”, *Did I Not Bring Israel Out of Egypt?*, 255-267.

⁷⁶ G.I. DAVIES, “The Wilderness Itineraries and the Composition of the Pentateuch”, *VT* 33 (1983) 1-13; IDEM, *Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus* (JSOTSup 239; Sheffield 1997).

⁷⁷ K.S. KITCHEN, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI 2003) 265-312; J.K. HOFFMEIER, *Israel in Egypt. The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford 1997) 176-198; IDEM, *Ancient Israel in Sinai. The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (Oxford 2005) 159-171.

⁷⁸ For an eighth-century date, see M. NOTH, *Numbers* (OTL; London 1968) 243, 246; G.I. DAVIES, *The Way of the Wilderness. A Geographical Study of the Wilderness Itineraries in the Old Testament* (SOTSMS 5; Cambridge 1979) 78-81. For a seventh-century date, see D.N. REDFORD, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ 1992) 408-422; I. FINKELSTEIN, “The Wilderness Narrative and Itineraries and the Evolution of the Exodus Tradition”, *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective. Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience* (ed. Th.E. LEVY) (Heidelberg 2015) 39-53.

⁷⁹ J. VAN SETERS, *The Life of Moses. The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville, KY 1994) 153-164; A.R. ROSKOP, *The Wilderness Itineraries. Genre, Geography, and the Growth of Torah* (HACL 3; Winona Lake, IN 2011).

el-Kheleifeh) in the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba connecting with the northern Hejaz, Kadesh Barnea ('Ain el-Qudeirat) in the Dharb el-Ghazza road linking with the Mediterranean, Tamar ('En Hazeva) guarding the Wadi Arabah access to the northern Negev, and Punon (Khirbet Faynan) connecting with central Transjordan⁸⁰. The Wilderness itineraries reflect these late Iron Age routes.

I have recently investigated two toponyms located in the vicinity of Kadesh and mentioned in Numbers, one in the wilderness itinerary (Haradah, Num 33,24) and another in the "boundaries of the lands" list (Hazar Haddar, Num 34,4)⁸¹. The etymology of both site-names finds their closest parallels in the Aramaic/North Arabian-speaking world of the arid margins of the Levant of the 1st millennium. Most particularly, these toponyms bear resemblance to Edomite toponyms mentioned in Assurbanipal's records of the wars against the Arabs (*ca.* 652-648). I proposed that the author of the Number's lists was drawing from records originating from Judaeen state scribes in the seventh-century northern Negev, whose presence is amply demonstrated in these sites through dozens of written ostraca⁸², thus confirming the reliability of the late Iron date of these itineraries.

The wilderness wandering narrative in Deuteronomy 1–3 seems to have influenced the Negev geographical references in the account of the campaigns of the four great kings (Gen 14,1-16)⁸³. Genesis 14 is generally dated to post-exilic times, most likely the Persian period⁸⁴; although the names of the four kings reflect to a great extent a Mesopotamian context, the war is said to have taken place also in the Negev, with references to Seir, El-Paran, Ein Mishpat/Kadesh ('Ain el-Qudeirat), and Hazazon Tamar ('En Hazeva?). The sites of 'Ain el-Qudeirat and 'En Hazeva were occupied in the Iron Age, and only the earlier extended into the Babylonian and Persian periods⁸⁵.

⁸⁰ FINKELSTEIN, "The Wilderness Narrative and Itineraries".

⁸¹ J.M. TEBES, "Quelques suggestions sur les toponymes 'édomites' du Cylindre Rassam (Prisme A) d'Assurbanipal", *NABU* 2016/3 (2016) 127-130 ; IDEM, "Desert Place-Names in Numbers 33:34, Assurbanipal's Arabian Wars and the Historical Geography of the Biblical Wilderness Toponymy", *JNSL* 43 (2017) 65-96.

⁸² NA'AMAN, "Literacy in the Negev".

⁸³ G. GRANERØD, *Abraham and Melchizedek*. Scribal Activity of Second Temple Times in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 (Berlin – New York 2010) 106-108; FINKELSTEIN – RÖMER, "Abraham Narrative", 14.

⁸⁴ V. GLISSMAN, "Genesis 14: A Diaspora Novella?", *JSOT* 34 (2009) 33-45; GRANERØD, *Abraham and Melchizedek*, 99-128; N. NA'AMAN, "Abraham's Victory over the Kings of the Four Quadrants in Light of Darius I's Bisitun Inscription", *TA* 42 (2015) 72-88.

⁸⁵ COHEN – BERNICK-GREENBERG, *Kadesh Barnea*; R. COHEN – Y. YISRAEL, *On the Road to Edom*. Discoveries from 'En Hazeva (Jerusalem 1995). The list was evidently reworked later, because in the Persian period Hazazon Tamar was identified with 'En Gedi (2 Chr 20,2).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

For some eight hundred years the arid south and the southern Levant engaged in a reciprocal exchange of cults, religious architecture and local narratives that helped to redefine each other's cultic traditions. Granting the limitations of the archaeological evidence, the material record of Late Bronze/Iron Age Negev, Sinai and Edom is a great source of information for dating the origin and development of these traditions as they appear reflected in the pre-Priestly material that was later combined and edited after the fall of Judah.

Although the earliest attestations of YHWH in the New Kingdom sources go as far back as the 14th-13th centuries, nothing is known about the longevity and features of this cult. However, it has been possible to date the earliest transmission of the Yahwistic cult to the southern Levant in the 10th century, when the northern communities had for the first time contact with the cultic traditions of the south. But it was during the period of Israel's influence in the Negev during the late 9th to mid 8th centuries that the traditions about Isaac and Esau found their way into the historic patrimony of the northern monarchy and were then incorporated into the narratives of the northern Jacob. In my review of the biblical references in Hosea and Amos, I have hypothesized that the city of Beersheba and its temple, possibly under Israelite hegemony, played a decisive role in the transmission of this folklore.

It was not until the destruction of Israel that many of these traditions found their way into the heritage of Judah, a political entity that by the 7th century controlled an increasingly multicultural northern Negev. The growing presence of Edomites and Arabians in the Negev was ideologically accommodated through the generation of family narratives and genealogical links with Israel, such as the stories of Esau/Edom and Hagar. The late Iron Age was also the period when for the first time the Wilderness narratives were located in a precise geographical setting; much of this material drew from knowledge of the local trade routes.

In closing, the Priestly redactor had at his disposition long-standing traditions and stories emanating from the arid regions of the south that were merged and adapted to Israel's and Judah's historical heritage, just as further editions would reflect the anxieties of the exilic and post-exilic periods.

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SUMMARY

The southern arid regions of the Levant were central for the development of the ancient traditions of Israel and Judah. Their history is inextricably linked with the history of settlement, contacts and trade of the Negev, Sinai and Edom during the Late Bronze/Iron Ages. This article will investigate the configuration of the varied desert cultic practices during this period that may have contributed to the emergence of the Yahwistic cult and to the development of the Patriarchal and Exodus narratives. It adopts an interdisciplinary methodology that draws from the biblical and extra-biblical data. This investigation has the aim of analyzing large historical questions concerning the historical memory of Israel and Judah, particularly how religious experiences were shaped by the interactions between the desert cultic traditions and the Israelite/Judaeans sanctuary cults that penetrated from the agricultural lands. The study will also contribute to the much wider debate of the role played by trade and cultural interconnections in the diffusion of religious ideas.