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Three Theses on the Early History of Israel

In the biblical memories of the early history of Israel and of the origins of its relationship to its deity, there are a number of blind spots that can only be filled now by way of reconstruction. Whether background knowledge was expected of readers in antiquity or whether the biblical authors simply had no interest in clarifying the questions that were raised can no longer be determined.

1

“YHWH (is) the God of Israel” is one of the earliest—if not the earliest—expressions of Israel’s relationship to its deity in the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, it is striking that the two elements of this statement are incongruent with each other insofar as “Israel” contains a divine name other than that of YHWH, namely, El.¹ This incongruence is all the more noteworthy in view of the fact that at least one biblical text attests the congruent expression “El (is) the God of Isra–El” (Gen 33:20).²

1.1 Consequently, it seems possible that the congruent statement “El (is) the God of Israel” could mark an earlier stage in Israel’s relationship to its deity that preceded the statement “YHWH (is) the God of Israel.” This stage may possibly apply to the “Israel” that is named in the well-known victory stele of Pharaoh Merenptah at the end of the 13th c. B.C.E.³ and of whose size, area of settlement, and nature we know nothing further.

1.2 This possibility finds support in the observation that in Syria–Palestine there are no attested place names with the theophoric element YHWH (or a short form such as YH),⁴ while there are a number of place names with the theophoric element El. It appears that the worship of YHWH did not originate in Syria–Palestine but came to Palestine through the migration of new groups to the area.

1 Cf. the tribal names of the Ishmaelites, Othnielites, Jerahmeelites, etc.

2 Cf. R. Smend, *Die Bundesformel* (ThSt 68; Zürich 1963), 14 f.; reproduced in id., *Die Mitte des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen 2002), 11 f.

3 Cf., for example, M. Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch zum Alten Testament* (GAT 10; Göttingen 2010), 168–171.

4 This is noted, for example, in C. Levin, “Integrativer Monotheismus im Alten Testament,” *ZThK* 109 (2012), 153–175; here 155.

1.3 This assumption is supported by the three well-known theophany texts (Judg 5:4 f.; Deut 33:2; Hab 3:3) that announce YHWH's help for his people by describing his arrival from southern regions. This issue will be taken up in more detail below.

1.4 The aforementioned indications that YHWH was not originally a deity of the land of Palestine correspond to biblical reports that Moses first learned of the divine name YHWH in the desert to the east of the Nile Delta, specifically in the settlement area of the Midianites, to whom he had fled under personal distress. There, Moses married a Midianite woman (Exod 2:15 ff.; 4:18 f.; 18:1 ff.; Num 10:29; in Judg 1:16; 4:11 she is described as a Kenite and in Num 12:1 as a Cushite). This information should be regarded as a particularly reliable core element of the tradition, since later tradition found it quite problematic. The late text of Num 25:6 ff. states in Moses' name that relations between an Israelite and a Midianite constitute an offense punishable by death, and Num 31:1 ff. depicts Moses as leading a brutal war of divine retribution against the Midianites. Wars between Israel and the Midianites are already attested in the period of the Judges; the Midianites were capable of rapid, predatory attacks through the use of camels (Judg 6 ff.)

1.5 Moses' marriage to a Midianite (or Kenite) and the location of his learning of the divine name YHWH in Midianite territory have long led many exegetes to assume the so-called "Midianite (or Kenite) Hypothesis," that is, the notion that Israelite groups adopted the worship of YHWH (in whatever form) from the Midianites or Kenites.⁵ Among the exceptional notices that have led to this thesis are the following: the Israelite elders' ritual celebration with the Midianites at the mountain of God "in the wilderness," in which Moses' father-in-law served as priest (Exod 18:12), the sparing of the Kenites in Israel's war against the hated Amalekites (1 Sam 15:6), and the heroic deed of Jael the Kenite in the battle against Sisera (Judg 4:11, 17; 5:24 ff.).⁶ Gen 4:26 could indicate that the Kenites were the first to invoke the name of YHWH, although according to Gen 4:16 they lived "away from the presence of YHWH." Even though these scattered reports do not provide a clear and coherent picture and the juxtaposition of the Kenites and Midianites in particular is now opaque to us, they are unusual enough to gather more from them than simply friendly contacts between (pre-)Israelite groups with Kenites and Midianites.

⁵ A detailed list of references is found in W.H. Schmidt, *Alttestamentlicher Glaube* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1981), 83–90; cf. also A. Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism* (Washington 2007), 25–27.

⁶ Cf. also 1 Sam 27:10 and 30:29, where the Kenites are counted among the Judahites.

1.6 The attestation of two different divine names in Israel's earliest religious history corresponds on a sociological level to the attestation of two different female ancestors from whom the later Israelite tribes would descend (if, for the sake of simplicity, one sets aside the fact that according to Gen 30 some of the tribes are also descended from Jacob's other wives). Unlike the two female ancestors of the Edomites in Gen 36:10–14, these two female ancestors are not placed on equal footing; rather, they are differentiated as the older and less beloved (Leah) and the younger and much sought-after (Rachel). From the beginning, Jacob's true longing was for the younger sister, Rachel: "He loved Rachel more than Leah" (Gen 29:30). This raises the possibility that the differentiation between an older and a younger female ancestor of the Israelite tribes, one less beloved and one more, is connected to an older worship of El by the older (Leah) tribes and the more recent worship of YHWH by the younger (Rachel) tribes, whereby the contrast between the two female ancestors in the manner described here is only conceivable from the perspective of the Rachel tribes. Thus, the older Leah tribes would have worshiped El as their deity, while the Rachel tribes (or, rather, at first only some of them) would have worshiped YHWH.

1.7 Our conjecture finds support in the observation that by far the most reports in the Hebrew Bible that relate to Israel's existence in the land prior to the monarchy come from the area of the two "younger" Rachel tribes of Joseph and Benjamin. This is true in several respects:

1.7.1 The conquest report in the book of Joshua that has all Israel settle the land at the same time selects a route through Benjamin with stops in Jericho, Gilgal, and Ai as a means of giving narrative shape to the confession that YHWH has given the land to Israel.

1.7.2 In contrast, the narratives in the book of Judges are characterized largely by the experiences of the house of Joseph. The great deeds of the charismatic heroes of the early period in Judg 3–12 take place exclusively in central Palestine: the first hero, Ehud, is a Benjaminite (ch. 3); the most prominent female figure of the period, Deborah, performs her function in Ephraim (chs. 4–5); the most significant of the so-called "great judges," Gideon, was an Ephraimite (chs. 6–8); and Jephthah, who is controversial on account of his lineage, is associated with Gilead in Transjordan, which is counted as a settlement area of the tribe of Manasseh (chs. 10–12). Only Samson, who stands apart from the other judges in every respect on account of his peculiar behavior (chs. 13–16), is a Danite.

1.7.3 A comparable picture is provided by the prosaic lists of the so-called "minor judges," for whom we only know names, places of activity, and places of burial (Judg 10:1–5; 12:7–15). Regardless of the size of their area of administration, they are said—in stereotypical fashion—to have "judged Israel." Two

such judges performed their function in Ephraim (one, Tola, descended from Issachar but was active in Ephraim), two were active in Gilead in Transjordan (associated with Manasseh), and only one “minor judge” is associated with the south (Bethlehem) and the north (Zebulon) respectively.

1.74 Finally, the shrines that are associated with the early period in biblical texts reflect a clear preference for the Rachel tribes. While only two shrines located at some distance from each other are attested for both the north and the south of Palestine—in the north, Tabor as the border shrine for Issachar, Zebulon, and Naphtali, and the shrine of the northernmost tribe, Dan; in the south, the two shrines of the ancestors Abraham and Isaac, Mamre near Hebron and Beersheba—, in south-central Palestine a number of shrines are attested within a very small area: Shechem, Shiloh, Ophrah, Bethel, Mizpah, Gilgal, and Gibeon, to name only the most important.

1.75 The jealousy of Joseph’s brothers regarding his dreams also has a background in the historical relations between the tribes, and it is no coincidence that it is the other Rachel tribe, Benjamin, who is set apart in this respect.

1.76 Archaeology has provided an impressive confirmation of the Hebrew Bible’s focus on the Rachel tribes and particularly on the house of Joseph. The archaeological surveys of the 1970s and 1980s revealed, in general terms, a surprising tripartite division of the land during the transition from the Late Bronze age to Iron I. While cities maintained a high degree of cultural continuity despite a reduction in population size,⁷ in the hill country both in the south (i.e., south of Jerusalem but also in the area of Benjamin) as well as in the north (i.e., north of the Jezreel Valley) there was modest population growth of up to 20% in existing settlements. In contrast, in central Palestine this growth was explosive, both to the east (biblical “Gilead”) and to the west of the Jordan. Based on the new technological ability to seal cisterns and to construct terraces, the number of settlements in this region grew up to four or five times in relation to the previous period.⁸ For comparison: in Judah, 10 Iron I settlements are known, in Benjamin 12, in Ephraim 120, and in Manasseh around 140 west and 70 east of the Jordan.⁹

7 Judg 1:27 also knows of such continuity for the Jezreel Valley.

8 See esp. I. Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem 1988).

9 Finkelstein, *ibid.*, 353; V. Fritz, *Die Entstehung Israels im 12. und 11. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (BE 2; Stuttgart 1996), 75–79; E. Gaß, “Das Gebirge Manasse zwischen Bronze- und Eisenzeit,” *ThQ* 186 (2006), 96–117; 103f. On the basis of the surveys, Finkelstein estimates that during the Iron I more than two-thirds of the Israelite population lived in central Palestine, that is, in the area of the house of Joseph (332f.).

1.8 Even if the thesis in no. 6 above must remain unproven, one thing is certain: the “younger” central Palestinian Rachel tribes, and the greater house of Joseph in particular, constituted the most historically significant Israelite groups during the premonarchic period (archaeologically speaking, the Iron I). Thus, it should hardly be considered a coincidence that a number of elements within the Moses- and Joshua traditions show a close connection to the house of Joseph and probably originated there. No other tribe is as closely connected to Egypt as (the house of) Joseph, and Joshua, Moses’ successor who already bears a Yahwistic name, is described as an Ephraimite (Josh 24:30). The same is also true of the Jacob tradition, which, in addition to the aforementioned connection to the female ancestor Rachel, is also indicated in the geographical setting of the narratives (Penuel, Mahanaim, Bethel, and Shechem).¹⁰ This tradition will be discussed under thesis 2.

2

A second significant gap in Israel’s memories of its early history is found in the statement—attested more than once—that the Edomites are a “brother” nation to the Israelites. This notion is found both in prophetic texts (Amos 1:11; Obad 10, 12; Mal 1:2) as well as in predominately late texts within the Pentateuch (Num 20:14; Deut 2:4–5; 23:8) but above all in the narratives of the Jacob–Esau cycle (Gen 25; 27; 32–33), which are among the oldest narratives relating to Israel’s ancestors. In these texts, Esau is even awarded the position of the (older) twin brother, that is, the closest conceivable relationship to the ancestor Jacob within the genealogical system of relations used in the ancestral narratives¹¹ and at the same time a privileged position over him.

2.1 This description of such a close relationship between Israel and Edom is completely incomprehensible from the perspective of the history of Israel as it is described in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, the Bible presents a picture of a permanent and growing enmity between the two peoples. This enmity begins with David’s subjugation of the Edomites following his victory in battle in the “Valley of Salt” (2 Sam 8:13–14), which probably persisted up to the reign of Jehoram (2 Kgs 8:20); it reaches its peak after decades of coexistence largely without contact

¹⁰ Further important grounds for this connection are discussed in E. Blum, “The Jacob Tradition,” in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (ed. C.A. Evans et al.; Leiden 2012), 181–211; here 208–210.

¹¹ On this system cf. E. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1984), 481 ff.

under Assyrian rule, during which time the Edomites established state structures,¹² in the so-called “hatred of the Edomites,” which is attested in a number of prophetic books (Isa 34; 63:1–6; Jer 49:7ff.; Ezek 25:12f.; 35:1–15; Joel 4:19; Obad 8ff.; Mal 1:2; cf. Ps 137:7). Whatever role the Edomites played in the siege and conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (described in Obad 10–14 in highly charged language), it cannot be denied that the Edomites profited significantly from the destruction of Jerusalem inasmuch as they came to possess the southern territory of the former Judahite state during the exilic and post-exilic period and thereby became Judah’s archenemies. As far as we are able to see, from the time of David onwards the origin of the tradition of a fraternal relationship between Israel and Edom becomes inexplicable.¹³

2.2 On the other hand, the notion sometimes proposed by earlier exegetes that “Esau” in the Jacob narratives was not originally a cipher for Edom¹⁴ (in which case the secondary connection to Edom in the biblical attestations would also need to be explained) can be ruled out. Even though the geographical terms “Seir” and “Edom” are attested for the area to the east of the *wādi el-‘arabah* prior to the name “Esau,” the word play with the names “Seir” and “Edom” in the narratives about the beginning of the conflict between the twin brothers Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:25; 27:11, 16, 21–23) as well as the resolution of the conflict using the same terms, only now as geographical concepts (Gen 32:4; 33:16), leave no doubt that Esau was regarded as the ancestor of the Edomites from the outset.¹⁵ Numerous passages in the Hebrew Bible use the name “Esau” in a geographical sense to designate Edom (e.g. Jer 49:8, 10; Obad 6 ; cf. esp. the phrase “the hill country of Esau” in Obad 9). In addition to this is the fact that Deut 2:4 locates the area of settlement for the “children of Esau” in Seir. L. Perlitt has shown that here the name “Esau” is used in order to avoid referring to “Edom” explicitly.¹⁶

2.3 Thus, the concept of Israel’s close relationship to Edom in terms of lineage stands in tension with the feeling of bitter enmity that was the reality. In light of our knowledge of history, the latter is easily explainable, while the former is not. And yet this notion proves to be deeply rooted in the texts, making it dif-

¹² For a more detailed discussion see M. Weippert, “Edom und Israel,” *TRE* IX, 291–299; here 295 and esp. J. R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites* (JSOT.S 77; Sheffield 1989), 145 ff.

¹³ For older theories trying in vain to explain Israel’s brotherhood to Edom from the time of David or even later see J.R. Bartlett, “The brotherhood of Edom,” *JSOT* 4 (1977), 2–27.

¹⁴ This notion is still held by B. Dicoü, *Edom, Israel’s Brother and Antagonist* (JSOT.S 169; Sheffield 1994), 137 ff.

¹⁵ Cf. esp. Blum, *Komposition* (see n. 11), 86 ff.

¹⁶ L. Perlitt, *Deuteronomium* (BK V/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1991), 153 f.

ficult to understand as a later construct – on whatever grounds. Not only do the texts repeatedly express Israelites' incomprehension that the brother nation of the Edomites could be capable of such bitter hostility (Amos 1:11; Obad 10, 12; Mal 1:2f.), but the Israelites' own early history under Moses in the Pentateuch was later reworked in order to cast the Edomites in the most positive light possible (cf. Num 20:14–21 with Deut 2:4 f.).¹⁷ The “hatred of the Edomites” found in other texts runs completely counter to this trend and cannot be explained by it.

2.4 Even after the foregoing observations, the most significant influence of the concept of Israel's fraternal relationship with Edom remains to be discussed. The so-called “law of the congregation” in Deut 23:2–9 evaluates the Edomites fundamentally differently from Israel's other Transjordanian neighbors, the Moabites and the Ammonites. In a context that deals with the purity of the congregation, the Moabites and Ammonites are excluded (along with emasculated and castrated men) from the possibility of becoming members of the community, perhaps originally with reference to the act of incest from which they descended (Gen 19:30–38). The Edomites are treated in a different manner: If they wish to become members of the congregation, they should not be turned away – at least up to the third generation, as the addition in v. 9 decrees—, and this only on account of Edom's fraternal relationship with Israel. Regardless of when the “law of the congregation” was created – and here opinions vary widely¹⁸—it must have been in effect during the decades or centuries characterized by the “hatred of the Edomites.” In an addition to the so-called Nehemiah Memoir, the ordinances of the law of the congregation are explicitly stated to be binding (Neh 13:1–3), although this text is not interested in the exceptional position of the Edomites.

2.5 It can also hardly be coincidental that such a complex genealogical list about the Edomites has been handed down in Gen 36, which is without analogue for any of Israel's other neighbors. Within this text, the list of “kings who ruled in the land of Edom” (vv. 31–39) stands out and was probably originally a list of

¹⁷ The fact that Deut 2:4f. intentionally corrects Num 20:14–21 has been shown particularly by S. Mittmann, *Deuteronomium 1,1–6,3 literarkritisch und traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht* (BZAW 139; Berlin 1975), 72–79, who is followed by L. Perliitt, *Deuteronomium* (see n. 16), 147 ff.

¹⁸ Following K. Gallig, “Das Gemeindegesetz in Deuteronomium 23,” in *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet* (ed. W. Baumgartner et al.; Tübingen 1950), 176–191, some exegetes regard Dtn 23,2–9* as very old, while others regard it as relatively late. Representative of the difficulty in dating the text is E. Otto; while in 1999 he followed U. Kellermann in dating the core of the text as pre-exilic (*Das Deuteronomium*; BZAW 284, Berlin 231 f.), a year later he followed H.-D. Preuss and O. Kaiser in dating it to the post-exilic period (*Das Deuteronomium im Pentateuch und Hexateuch*; FAT 30; Tübingen 2000, 203 f.).

local rulers who were secondarily arranged into a schema of succession.¹⁹ Yet the division of the “children of Esau” into two tribes and their descent from two female ancestors (vv. 10 – 14, 20 – 28) probably also draws on old material.²⁰ However, it is less the age of the core of the lists that is noteworthy but rather the intensive engagement with the material, which is shown through numerous additions and particularly in the construction of the Priestly Writing. Just as striking is how such a prominent place – more than any other non-Israelite nation – is ascribed to the “children of Esau” in the presentation of the Israelites’ family tree in 1 Chr 1 through a long quotation of Gen 36. “The reasons for this lie more in the evaluation of Edom by the biblical tradition than in the events of the Chronicler’s own time.”²¹

2.6 This biblical tradition becomes even more understandable considering that there were clans that are introduced as Edomite in Gen 36 but that are counted as Judahite or Simeonite elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.²²

2.7 Thus, the following conclusion drawn by M. Weippert remains valid: “The historical anchor for this strongly contradictory attitude in the history of both nations since the time of David ... could perhaps best be sought in a shared prehistory of population groups that merged into Edom and Israel (Judah?), respectively.”²³ Israel’s “brotherhood” with Edom thus underlies the history known to us to the same extent as Israel’s (and YHWH’s) “age-old” enmity with the Amalekites (Exod 17:16). Here it should be taken into account that Israel knew very well that the Amalekites, for their part, were “related” to the Edomites (Gen 36:12).

2.8 Thus, the sequence of events that forms the basis of the Jacob-and-Esau cycle (too) must have a historical basis, namely, that Esau was the firstborn of the twin brothers. Genesis 36:31 in particular indicates that the Edomites were of greater historical significance in the pre-monarchic period, noting that “kings” ruled in Edom earlier than in Israel. However the area of control of these “kings” is to be understood, who, like the aforementioned so-called

19 Cf., for example, Weippert, Edom (see n. 12), 293; J.R. Bartlett, “Edom,” *ABD* 2, 288.

20 So at least Weippert, *ibid.*, 293; differently Bartlett, *ibid.*, 289.

21 T. Willi, *Chronik, I. Teilband* (BK XXIV/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn 2009), 26: “Die Gründe dafür liegen mehr in der Wertung Edoms durch die biblische Tradition als in der Zeitgeschichte des Chronisten.”

22 This is true for the clan of Kenaz (cf. Gen 36:11, 15, 42 with Josh 14:6, 14; 15:17) and the clan of Zerah (cf. Gen 36:13, 33 with Num 26:13); cf. H. Gese, *Alttestamentliche Studien* (Tübingen 1991), 50.

23 Weippert, Edom (see n. 12), 297: “Der historische Ansatzpunkt dieser der Geschichte beider Völker seit David aufs schärfste widersprechenden Haltung [...] dürfte am ehesten in einer gemeinsamen Vorgeschichte von Bevölkerungsgruppen zu suchen sein, die in Edom bzw. Israel (Juda?) aufgegangen sind.”

“minor judges” (Judg 10:1–5; 12:7–15), ruled without dynastic succession and whose duration of rule is not mentioned – they were probably “local petty lords” (Weippert) – , what is important to the biblical text is the fact that in “Israel” during the same period there was nothing comparable. It is possible that the Jacob–and–Esau narrative preserves a reflex of Edom’s earlier predominance in its description of Jacob’s reconciliation with Esau: not only did all of Jacob’s wives and children bow down before Esau, but Jacob himself bowed before his twin brother “seven times” (Gen 33:3).

3

Should the two theses discussed thus far be joined, indicating that Israel – more precisely, some of the groups belonging to the Rachel–tribes – adopted the worship of YHWH from its “brother nation,” the Edomites?

3.1 Such a conclusion is suggested upon an initial reading of the three well-known theophany texts that describe YHWH as coming to the aid of his people from his southern abode (Judg 5:4f.; Deut 33:2; Hab 3:3). All three texts refer to areas in Edom as the place from which the divine presence appeared or will appear: in Judg 5:4 and Deut 33:2 it is “Seir” (with an additional reference to the “plains of Edom” in Judg 5:4), while in Hab 3:3 it is “Teman.” Within the Hebrew Bible, “Seir” is almost always used with reference to “Edom,” while “Teman” is a term that can indicate the “south” generally but is also used for a specific part of Edom (Ezek 25:13) and more frequently *pars pro toto* for Edom as a whole (e. g., Jer 49:20; Amos 1:12; Obad 9).

3.2 On the other hand, there are no indications in the biblical text that Israel was connected to Edom through a common faith.²⁴ Edom’s national deity was called Qaus (or later Qōs), and this name is widely attested in the Iron II and Iron III, particularly in personal names. The Israelites and Edomites were only related in terms of religion insofar as the Edomites, like the Moabites and Ammonites, did not have a pantheon but rather worshiped their national deity in a monolatrous fashion.

3.3 At the same time, it is noteworthy that the three aforementioned theophany texts that describe YHWH arriving from the distant south not only mention geographical regions within Edom (and which represent Edom) but also those

²⁴ The assumption of a common worship of YHWH by early Edomite and Israelite groups (J. Gray, *VT* 4, 1954, 148–154; M. Rose, *JSOT* 4, 1977, 28–34; R. J. Barlett, *JSOT* 5, 1978, 29–38) is pure speculation.

that go beyond Edom's borders.²⁵ Thus, the reference to "Sinai" alone in Deut 33:2 is apparently not meant as a mountain or mountainous region (such as the "hill country of Paran," see below) but rather as a region or desert south of Edom, as L. Perlitt already showed several decades ago.²⁶ Likewise, the region called the "hill country of Paran" in Deut 33:2 and Hab 3:3, which is only attested in these two passages, is otherwise referred to as the "wilderness of Paran" (six times, preferred in the Priestly Writing) or as "Paran" alone (Deut 1:1; 1 Kgs 18:11). The "wilderness of Paran" is described as the territory of the Ishmaelites (Gen 21:21). On account of the name, several scholars have attempted to locate Paran near *wādi fērān* in the south of the Sinai Peninsula,²⁷ but this area with its lush oasis lies too far south for the biblical texts. In the Priestly Writing, the "wilderness of Paran" is the point of departure for the spies, who reach the hill country of Judah by travelling north from there through the Negev (Num 13:3, 17, 26). The older report placed this point of departure in Kadesh, ca. 75 km south of Beersheba, and both places are identified with each other in Num 13:26. Thus, the region in view here is the extreme south of Palestine, connecting to the Negev.²⁸

3.4 It is striking that while YHWH's arrival "from the hill country of Paran" in Hab 3:3 unsurprisingly causes a reaction of terror from both nature and humans, here the Cushites and Midianites are mentioned as those who are affected first by this terror (v. 7), apparently because they live closest to the place from which YHWH comes. We learn nothing further of the Cushites (who here are clearly not Ethiopians, as is meant in many other passages) apart from the fact that Moses' wife, who is normally described as a Midianite, is called a Cushite in Num 12:1. The territory of the Midianites is connected directly to the south of Edom, southeast of the Gulf of Aqaba. This can be deduced particularly from 1 Kgs 11:18, which reports that the Edomite prince Hadad fled to Egypt: "They

²⁵ This has been noted by E.A. Knauf, *Midian: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Palästinas und Nordarabiens am Ende des 2. Jahrtausends* (ADPV; Wiesbaden 1988), 51 ff.

²⁶ L. Perlitt, "Sinai und Horeb," in *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie, Festschrift W. Zimmerli* (ed. H. Donner et al.; Göttingen 1977), 302–322; here 303 f.; reproduced in id., *Deuteronomium-Studien* (FAT 8; Tübingen 1994), 32–49; here 33 f. One should also recall the old divine name *יהוה סיני* "the one from Sinai" in Judg 5:5 and Ps 68:9, which, however, is regarded by some authors as a gloss.

²⁷ For example, M. Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose. Numeri* (ATD 7; Göttingen 1966), 69 and in more detail S. Timm, "Gott kommt von Teman, der Heilige vom Berg Paran" (Habakuk 3:3) – und archäologisch Neues aus dem äußersten Süden (Tell el-Meharret)," *OTE N.S.* 9,2 (1996), 308–333; here 316 ff.

²⁸ Cf. J.M. Hamilton, "Paran," *ABD* 5,162.

set out from Midian and came to Paran,” which is named as the only stopover. Thus, the prince first fled southward and then westward.

3.5 The inscriptions on the large pithoi from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud dating to the 9th/8th c. B.C.E. have played a major role recently in evaluating the problems discussed thus far. When “YHWH of Teman” is invoked alongside the national deity “YHWH of Samaria” in the blessing formulae,²⁹ presumably this means “YHWH from the south” or “YHWH the southerner,” since *tmn* is used in this context both with and without the article, which would be unusual for the name of a region. Kuntillet ‘Ajrud lies deep in the south of the Negev, some 50 km south of Kadesh-Barnea; the name “YHWH from the south” presumably refers to some area still further to the south. At least into the 9th/8th c., YHWH remained connected to the region in which former groups of Israel encountered him for the first time.

3.6 Thus, in using the Edomite regional names “Seir” and “Teman,” the three aforementioned theophany texts do not seek to specify the precise place from which YHWH came or will come to the aid of his people but rather the direction from which he comes. His point of departure lay further south than Edom.

3.7 For the early history of Israel that can be traced and reconstructed behind the texts, it is apparently necessary to differentiate between the history of groups (belonging to the Rachel tribes) which was shared with the “twin brother” groups of the later Edomites and decisive religious impulses (to which the theophany texts indirectly attest) that spread from the Midianites (and related groups) to other members of these groups; their leader, Moses, was related to the Midianites through marriage.³⁰ It is also probable that the divine name YHWH is of northwest Arabian origin.³¹

In any event, it is remarkable that in the biblical texts that describe the “historical,” post-Mosaic period, both the Midianites and the Edomites appear as Israel’s enemies, the Midianites even in premonarchic time.³²

29 Cf. J.A. Emerton, “New Light on Israelite Religion: The Implications from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud,” *ZAW* 94 (1982), 2–20; here 9f. On newer readings of the divine names cf. O. Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus* (Göttingen 2007), 201.

30 Recently E. Blum, “Der historische Mose und die Frühgeschichte Israels,” *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 1 (2012), 37–63; 58f. has demonstrated convincingly that the oldest Moses-stories as well as the early Jacob-stories as well as the oldest theophany traditions and also the inscriptions of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud stem from traditions of the realm of the Rachel-tribes. Cf. id., “The Jacob tradition,” (see no.10).

31 Cf. E.A. Knauf, “Yahwe,” *VT* 34 (1984), 467–472.

32 Cf. especially K.L. Sparks, “Israel and the Nomads of Ancient Palestine,” in *Community Identity in Judean Historiography* (ed. G.N. Knoppers and K.A. Ristau; Winona Lake 2009), 9–26; here 12–17.

3.8 Almost nothing can be said with certainty about the nature of YHWH during this early period. On the other hand, if the hypotheses presented above are correct, then the various traces of polytheism contained in the Hebrew Bible (such as in Deut 32:8 f.; Ps 29; 82) should be traced back to the worship of El by the older Leah tribes.

Additional note

H. Pfeiffer's conclusion that the three theophany texts are postexilic constructs relies on two assumptions: 1. Pfeiffer completely avoids the texts treated above that describe Israel's special relationship to Edom. 2. He derives Judg 5:4 f. as the oldest theophany text from Isa 63:1–6, since this late text is "the only parallel for an arrival of YHWH from the south apart from Hab 3 and Deut 33:2;" for Pfeiffer in Isa 63 Edom is "a sort of model enemy."³³ If Pfeiffer were correct, then the differentiated geographical information found in the three theophany texts would need to allow for reconstructions that simply had "Edom" as their *Vorlage*—a rather far-fetched notion. Additionally, YHWH in Isa 63 comes from Edom because he had to punish it, while in Judg 5:4 f.; Deut 33:2, and Hab 3 the region of Edom and south of it is noted as the realm of his dominion. O. Keel and especially M. Leuenberger have offered detailed critiques of Pfeiffer's theses, both of whom rightly emphasize the early traditio-historical date of the three theophany texts.³⁴ Pfeiffer argues from a purely literary-critical perspective and does not account for the possibility that literarily later texts such as Hab 3 could intentionally employ archaizing motifs that readers would recognize as ancient conceptions.³⁵

Since both Keel and Leuenberger discuss in detail the extrabiblical material that supports the notion of YHWH's origins in the south—the Egyptian lists from the temple of Amen-Hotep III in Soleb and from the Temple of Ramesses II in Amara-West referring to "Yhw(h) nomads" (šššw yhw3[-w]) and the Egyptian papyri and temple inscriptions that refer to nomads (šššw) from Edom and Seir—, I have foregone a discussion of these texts here.

³³ H. Pfeiffer, *Jahwes Kommen von Süden* (FRLANT 211; Göttingen 2005), 82, 86.

³⁴ Keel, *Geschichte Jerusalems* (see n. 29), 200–202; M. Leuenberger, *Gott in Bewegung* (FAT 76; Tübingen 2011), 10–33. Cf. also the important new Judges commentary by W. Groß: *Richter* (HThKAT; Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2009), 305–311.

³⁵ So, for example, L.A. Axelsson, *The Lord Rose up from Seir* (CB.OTS 25; Lund 1987), 53.