Hywel Clifford / Joachim Schaper (eds)

Reconceptualising Monotheism

Concepts and Contexts of the One God in Antiquity

V&R

Reconceptualising Monotheism

Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments

Edited by

Ismo Dunderberg, Jan Christian Gertz, Jennifer Knust,
Hermut Löhr, Susanne Luther, Joachim Schaper

VOLUME 294

Reconceptualising Monotheism

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VANDENHOECK & RUPRECHT

ISSN 2198-1183
ISSN 2197-0939 (DIGITAL)
ISBN 978-3-525-50299-0
ISBN 978-3-647-50299-1 (PDF)
ISBN 978-3-666-50299-6 (ELIBRARY)
DOI https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666502996

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at https://dnb.dnb.de.

© 2027 Brill Deutschland GmbH, Robert-Bosch-Breite 10, 37079 Göttingen, Germany

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www.degruyterbrill.com

Questions about General Product Safety Regulation: productsafety@degruyterbrill.com

Printing: CPI books GmbH, Leck

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Preface

This volume of essays about monotheism grew out of a remarkably well-attended online day-long conference on 4th November 2021, hosted by the Centre for the Study of the Bible at Oriel College, Oxford and the Chair of Hebrew and Semitic Languages at the University of Aberdeen. Monotheism is at the heart of the nexus of biblical disciplines: it is arguably the distinctive theological hallmark of the biblical cultures situated within the complex tapestries of antiquity. It has certainly generated a major legacy in the history of religious beliefs and practices since then. This volume thus speaks to scholarly and also to wider audiences. In reconceptualising monotheism, the contributors to this collection trace, explore, and analyse afresh what is now a global idea whose roots lie deep in the past.

The conference's success was a result of joint effort across different institutions. It had two main stimuli. The first stimulus for the workshop – planned and overseen by Professor Hindy Najman (University of Oxford), Professor Joachim Schaper (University of Aberdeen) and Dr Hywel Clifford (Ripon College Cuddesdon and the University of Oxford) – was the collaborative research interests of Hindy Najman who founded and directs the Centre. The second stimulus was the then-recent publication of Joachim Schaper's monograph: *Media and Monotheism: Presence, Representation, and Abstraction in Ancient Judah* (ORA 33; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019). Various essays in this volume interact with that publication.

The workshop was originally entitled "Reconceptualising Monotheism: Concepts and Cultures in Ancient Israel". That title gave the attendees the opportunity to hear from scholars who conduct research in this area, broadly conceived. The reference to a reconceptualisation of the topic signals an invitation to revisit it with fresh ideas, from new perspectives, and in imaginatively inter-disciplinary ways. The workshop's subtitle was changed for this volume of proceedings; we have opted for "Concepts and Contexts of the One God in Antiquity". The modification reflects the volume's focus on certain texts and periods while still highlighting its core theological interest. It also accommodates a number of the essays whose scope, both geographical and chronological, moves beyond that of ancient Israel.

The sequence of the eight essays in this volume broadly follows that of the books of the biblical canon. This shape to the contents does not assume any particular or shared view among the contributors regarding the historical reality or otherwise that lies behind the biblical writings. The essay sequence begins with texts and traditions in the Pentateuch (Schmid, MacDonald,

Schaper) before moving on to the largely exilic era (Otto, Clifford) and then the period of Second Temple Judaism (Bellantuono, Fletcher-Louis). The final essay (Moberly) analyses prevailing scholarly paradigms.

Schaper's *Media and Monotheism* traces three kinds of ancient media and what they tell us about human thought: images – or, rather, their prohibition in aniconic worship; writing – notably alphabetic; and money. These all indicate abstractions, the constellation of which enabled a transition from monolatry to monotheism in Judean religion in its wider religious and philosophical setting. Schaper's work thus integrates afresh the study of ideas and of material culture. A number of the essays in the present volume engage with his study, reflecting the exchanges that took place at the conference.

The contributors bring a range of skills and insights about monotheism to the scholarly table. They present these in the light of recent developments in Pentateuchal Criticism, Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Archaeology, the History of Religion, the History of Ideas, Gender Studies, Anthropology, and Reception History. This rich range of approaches and methods inevitably has diverse bearings on understandings of monotheism in antiquity and beyond. This observation also makes the point that, while academic approaches and methods arise and develop, central topics such as monotheism persist in scholarly, wider public, and indeed global conversations.

This volume's essays "reconceptualise monotheism" by analysing the intellectual forms and patterns affecting it and the cultural contexts in which it was embedded in antiquity. Schmid distinguishes the illegibility of God and the legibility of the world, created by the divine word, in Genesis 1. MacDonald holds together the inclusive universalism of that same text with the cultic particularism of Exodus 40 about the tabernacle – both Priestly texts about the one God – in the context of imperial Persian patronage. Schaper considers how the *imago Dei* mediates an aniconic transcendental monotheism and the human desire for divine presence in the world; indeed, as a vessel for the divine presence, every human being has a remarkable authority and a much higher significance than ever before.

For Otto, monotheism was triggered by theodicy in Pentateuchal law, consciously theologised and integrated as part of the rationalisation and abstraction of ancient Near Eastern thought, concurrent with Greek philosophical Axial Age processes. Questioning the latitude with which both ancient apologetic and modern Axial Age narrators have proposed early Greek philosophical parallels for monotheistic Israelite Yahwism, Clifford locates in Philo of Alexandria's uses of "one" for God the first full articulation of monotheism. Bellantuono explores how selected Septuagint passages indicate that the Ptol-

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emaic-era pagan cults of Isis and Serapis influenced the expression and boundary formation of monotheistic Jewish identity.

For Fletcher-Louis, the high priest in Israel's monotheistic cult actually shows a programmatic iconism: the *imago Dei* of Genesis 1 is about humanity in the cosmos whereas – for the Pentateuch's framers and Ben Sira 50 – the high priest's office was about the perfect, holy, ideal and representative human conceived as a divine cult statue in the tabernacle (and temple) in microcosm. After evaluating socially-shared paradigms in modern discourse about monotheism, Moberly interprets two prime biblical texts (Deut 6:4–5 and Isa 44:6–8) canonically to propose that human self-understanding and modes of living cannot be separated from affirmations about God: the metaphysical and the existential are inseparable. Monotheism matters.

Our particular thanks go to Hindy Najman for her invitation to co-host the conference. We express our gratitude to those who presented and to those who contributed to this volume. We acknowledge scholars then at the Centre, as well as graduate students, who helped to make the conference run smoothly. It had to take place online because of the Covid-19 pandemic. But it thereby attracted an unusually high number of participants: more than 300 registrations from across the world, and well over 100 in online attendance for most of the proceedings. This is a strong indicator that monotheism continues to stimulate ongoing fascination and exploration.

Hywel Clifford
Joachim Schaper
December 2025

Contributors

Antonella Bellantuono
is the Associate Professor in Ancient Languages and Biblical Anthropology at the Université Catholique de Lille. Antonella Bellantuono studied Classics at the University of Bari (2012) and Biblical Philology (2014) at the Catholic University of Milan. In November 2019 she obtained a PhD in the History of Religions at the University of Strasbourg with a thesis on divine epithets in the Greek Bible. She is on the advisory board of HTLS (*Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint*) and part of the Pluritext project for the critical edition of the Hebrew Manuscripts of Ben Sira. Her research fields are Jewish-Hellenistic literature, religious coexistence in Second Temple Judaism and Biblical papyrology.

Hywel Clifford
was educated at the universities of Edinburgh and Oxford. The Tutor in Old Testament at Ripon College Cuddesdon since 2005, and an Associate Member of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Oxford, Hywel has extensive experience teaching the Old Testament in university, college, and church settings. Hywel has published about Biblical and Second Temple Jewish texts and topics, and the interpretation of Biblical texts in the eras of the European Reformation and Modernity. Hywel is the editor of and contributor to *Companion to the Old Testament: Introduction, Interpretation, Application* (London: SCM, 2016) and the co-editor and contributor to *The Exegetical and the Ethical: The Bible and the Academy in the Public Square: Essays for the Occasion of Professor John Barton's 70th birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

Crispin Fletcher-Louis
is a Postgraduate Tutor and Researcher at the University of Gloucestershire. Dr Fletcher-Louis read Theology at Oxford University, where he also wrote a doctorate on Angels, Christology and Soteriology in Luke-Acts. He taught at the Universities of King's College London, Durham and Nottingham, before working as a resident theologian at a church in central London, from where he launched a new venture in theological education that became Westminster Theological Centre. His current primary research project is a four-volume work that aims to explain the historical origins and incarnational shape of the earliest beliefs about Jesus' divine identity (*Jesus Monotheism,* 2015–).

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Nathan MacDonald
was educated at Cambridge and Durham and has held posts at the University of St Andrews and Georg-August-Universität Göttingen before taking up his position at Cambridge in 2013 as the Professor of the Interpretation of the Old Testament, University of Cambridge and Fellow of St John's College. He has authored and edited more than a dozen books, including *Priestly Rule: Polemic and Biblical Interpretation in Ezekiel 44* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), *The Mobilization of Biblical Scholarship in the First World War* (edited with Andrew Mein and Matthew A. Collins; London: Bloomsbury, 2019) and *The Making of the Tabernacle and the Construction of Priestly Hegemony* (Oxford: OUP, 2023).

R.W.L. (*Walter*) *Moberly*
is the Professor of Theology and Biblical Interpretation *emeritus* at Durham University. Until retirement in 2022 Walter Moberly taught at Durham University for 37 years. His work has consistently sought ways to take seriously the biblical texts both as documents of pre-Judaistic and pre-Christian antiquity and as documents of enduring significance and authority within Jewish and Christian faiths. His books include *Prophecy and Discernment* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Baker Academic: 2013), and *The God of the Old Testament: Encountering the Divine in Christian Scripture* (Baker Academic: 2020).

Eckart Otto
is the Professor of Theology of the Old Testament *emeritus* at the Ludwig Maximilians-Universität in Munich and Honorary Professor of the University of Pretoria. He also held chairs in Old Testament and Biblical Archaeology at the universities of Hamburg, Osnabrück and Mainz, and lectured at the Hochschule für Philosophie in Munich. In 1994 he founded the *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte/Journal for Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Law* (ZABR) and in 2000 the series *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* (BZABR). In 2005 he published an edition and commentary on Max Weber's *Antikes Judentum* as part of his *Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen* in the *Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe* (MWG). In 2012–2017 he published a four-volume commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy in the series *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament* (HThKAT).

Joachim Schaper
studied Theology, Philosophy and Assyriology at Tübingen and Theology at Cambridge. He earned his doctorate with a thesis on eschatology in the

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Greek Psalter and proceeded to a *Habilitation* at Tübingen, devoting his *Habilitationsschrift* to the history of the priesthood in ancient Israel. He was a Research Fellow at Clare College, University of Cambridge, taught as a *Privatdozent* in Old Testament at the University of Tübingen from 1999 to 2005 and was, in 2002, awarded a Heisenberg Fellowship by the DFG. In February 2000, he was ordained to the ministry in the Lutheran Church. In 2005 he joined the University of Aberdeen as a Reader in Old Testament, was appointed to a Personal Chair in 2006, and translated to the Chair of Hebrew and Semitic Languages (established in 1673) in 2012. Professor Schaper was the President of the IOSOT in the years 2016–2019 and the President of its 23rd congress, held at the University of Aberdeen in August 2019. He has served, in various capacities, at the University of Heidelberg, the Freie Universität Berlin, and other institutions. Professor Schaper is a co-editor, with Dr James Carleton Paget, of the *New Cambridge History of the Bible, vol. I: From the Beginnings to 600* (one of the CHOICE Outstanding Academic Titles of 2013) and a co-editor of Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, founded by Hermann Gunkel and published by V&R.

Konrad Schmid

is the Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Judaism at the University of Zurich. Before coming to Zurich, he served as professor of Hebrew Bible at the University of Heidelberg (1999–2002). In 2006–2007 he was a Member in Residence at the Center for Theological Inquiry (CTI), Princeton. He co-directed a research group on the formation of the Pentateuch at the Israel Institute of Advanced Study (2012–2013). In 2017, he was a member of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. From 2019–2022, he served as the 24th president of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT). He was awarded an ERC Advanced Grant (2020–2024), spending the autumn term of 2022 as Lady Davis Visiting Professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His main publications include *Erzväter und Exodus: Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels in den Geschichtsbüchern des Alten Testaments* (1999; English translation: *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 2010); *Literaturgeschichte des Alten Testaments: Eine Einführung* (2008; 3rd edn 2021; translated into English, Spanish, Portuguese, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese); *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (2019; translated into English, Italian, Chinese, and Japanese); and, together with Jens Schröter, *Die Entstehung der Bibel* (2019; 4th edn 2021; translated into English, French, Portuguese, Italian, and Spanish).

Abbreviations

AABNER	*Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research*
AB	Anchor Bible
ACM	Amsterdam Classical Monographs
AD	Anno Domini = CE Common Era
Aegyptiaca	*Aegyptiaca: Journal of the History of Reception of Ancient Egypt*
Aegyptus	*Aegyptus: Rivista italiana di Egittologia e di Papirologia*
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
ALUB	Annales Littéraires de l'Université de Besançon
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANE	Ancient Near East/Eastern
ANET	J.B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, ^{3}1969)
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
APAW	Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
ArBib	The Aramaic Bible
ARET	Archivi Reali di Ebla Testi
ASR	*Annali di Scienze Religiose*
ASSR	*Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*
ASV	American Standard Version
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AThANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AzTh	Arbeiten zur Theologie
BBRS	Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement
BCAW	Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World
BCE	Before the Common Era (= BC Before Christ)
BdA	La Bible d'Alexandrie
BDB	F. Brown/S.R. Driver/C.A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament: With an Appendix, containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906)
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHAW	Blackwell History of the Ancient World
Bib	*Biblica*
BICSS	Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies Supplement
BJHP	*British Journal for the History of Philosophy*
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BJudS	Biblical and Judaic Studies
BK	Biblischer Kommentar

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BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BNP	H. Cancik/H. Schneider (ed.), English edn C.F. Salazar (ed.), *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World* (20 vol.; Leiden: Brill, 2002–2011 [German original 1996–2003])
BRS	Biblical Resource Series
BTAT	Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments
BThZ	*Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift*
Budé	Collection Budé/Collection des universités de France
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAT	Companions to Ancient Thought
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CCS	Cambridge Classical Studies
CE	Common Era = AD Anno Domini
CEB	Common English Bible
CEM	Collection d'Études Mythologiques
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
Ch(s)	Chapter(s)
CK	Common Knowledge
ClOr	Classica et Orientalia
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
COS	W.H. Hallo *et al.* (ed.), *The Context of Scripture* (4 vol.; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1997–2016)
CPI	A.K. Bowman *et al.* (ed.), *Corpus of Ptolemaic Inscriptions* (OSAD; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021–)
CQ	*The Classical Quarterly*
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CSCP	Cornell Studies in Classical Philology
DDD	K. van der Toorn/B. Becking/P.W. van der Horst (ed.), *Dictionary of Deities in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998)
DK	H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, revised 6th edn by W. Kranz (3 vol.; Berlin: Weidmann, 1952)
EAC	Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique
EBib	Études bibliques

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EBR	B. Breed *et al.* (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (24 vol.; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009–)
EeC	Études et Commentaires
EI	Evangelische Impulse
EJS	*European Journal of Sociology*
ELS	Edinburgh Leventis Studies
EPRO	Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain
ES	Edition Suhrkamp
EVSS	Eric Voegelin Studies Supplements
EvTh	*Evangelische Theologie*
Faith Philos.	*Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FGH	F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker, I–III* (Leiden: Brill, 1923–59)
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FS	Festschrift
GCRW	Greek Culture in the Roman World
GRBS	*Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
HB	Hebrew Bible
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HBS	Herders Biblische Studien
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTLS	E. Bons (ed.), *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020–)
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUTh	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
IAA	Institut d'Art et Archéologie
I.Aeg.Thrace	L.D. Loukopoulou *et al.* (ed.), *Epigraphes tēs Thrakēs tou Aigaiou: metaxy tōn potamōn Nestou kai Hevrou* (*nomoi Xanthēs, Rhodopēs kai Hevrou*) (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2005)
IAHI	International Archives of the History of Ideas/Archives internationales d'histoire des idées
IAP	Issues in Ancient Philosophy
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
I.Délos	F. Dürrbach *et al.* (ed.) *Inscriptions de Délos* (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 1926–)

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I.Égypte métriques	E. Bernand, *Inscriptions métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine: Recherches sur la poésie épigrammatique des grecs en Égypte* (ALUB 98; paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1969)
IG	Inscriptiones Graecae (Berlin: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1873–)
IGSK	Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien
I.Kaunos	C. Marek, *Die Inschriften von Kaunos* (Vestigia 55; München: C.H. Beck, 2006)
I.Knidos	W. Blümel, *Die Inschriften von Knidos* (2 vol.; IGSK 41–42; Bonn: Habelt, 1992–2019)
I.Kyme	H. Engelmann, *Die Inschriften von Kyme* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Kommission für die Archäologische Erforschung Kleinasiens; Bonn: Habelt, 1976)
Int	*Interpretation*
IOSOT	International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament
ISACR	Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion
JAJ	*Journal of Ancient Judaism*
JBTh	*Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie*
JHS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism*
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSRC	Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture
JTECL	Jewish Traditions in Early Christian Literature
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KAI	H. Donner/W. Röllig (ed.), *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, 2nd edn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1969–1969)
KAR	E. Ebeling (ed.), *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts* (Leipzig: Hinrichs Verlag, 1919–23)
KJV	King James Version
Klio	*Klio: Beiträge zur alten Geschichte*
KTAH	Key Themes in Ancient History
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Series
LXX	Septuagint

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MAIBL	Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres
MEW	Marx-Engels-Werke
MNS	Mnemosyne Supplements
ms(s)	manuscript(s)
MVÄG	Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-Ägyptischen Gesellschaft
MWG	Max Weber Gesamtausgabe
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	New Jerusalem Publication Society
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NT	New Testament
NThG	Neue Theologische Grundrisse
Oasis d'Égypte	G. Wagner (ed.), *Les oasis d'Égypte à l'époque grecque, romaine et byzantine d'après les documents grecs: recherches de papyrologie et d'épigraphie grecques* (Bibliothèque d'étude 100; Paris: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1987)
OBC	Orientalia Biblica et Christiana
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
ÖBS	Österreichische Biblische Studien
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
OG	Old Greek
OGIS	C.F.W. Dittenberger (ed.), *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae* (2 vol.; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1903–5)
ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
OSAD	Oxford Studies in Ancient Documents
OT	Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library
PA	Philosophia Antiqua
PACS	Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series
PGM	K. Preisendanz *et al.* (ed.), *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri* (2 vol.; Stuttgart: Teubner, ^{2}1973–74)
PhB	Philosophische Bibliothek
P.Hib.	B.P. Grenfell/A.S. Hunt *et al.* (ed.), *The Hibeh Papyri* (2 vol.; London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1906–55)
PM	Poche Marabout
P.Oxy.	B.P. Grenfell/A.S. Hunt *et al.* (ed.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1898–)
PSV	Phoenix Supplementary Volume

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QD	Quaestiones Disputatae
QMHSS	Quantitative Methods in the Humanities and Social Sciences
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
RD	Routledge Dictionaries
REG	*Revue des Études Grecques*
RGRW	Religions in the Greco-Roman World
RGVV	Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten
RHP	Routledge History of Philosophy
RICIS	L. Bricault (ed.), *Recueil des Inscriptions Concernant les Cultes Isiaques* (3 vol.; MAIBL 31; Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 2005)
RJ	*Rechtshistorisches Journal*
RPP	H.-D. Betz (ed.), *Religion Past and Present* (14 vol.; Boston: Brill, ^{4}2005–13 [German original 1998–2007])
RPT	Religion in Philosophy and Theology
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RW	Routledge Worlds
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SBAB	Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände
SBLSPS	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers Series
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SESJ	Schriften der Finnischen Exegetischen Gesellschaft
SHANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SIG	C.F.W. Dittenberger (ed.), *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* (2 vol.; Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1883)
SIRIS	L. Vidman (ed.), *Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae* (RGVV 28; De Gruyter: Berlin, 1969)
SIJD	Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum
SJS	Studia Judaeoslavica
SJSJ	Supplements to Journal for the Study of Judaism
SLB	Studia ad tabulas cuneiformes collectas a F.M. Th. de Liagre Böhl pertinentia
SLTHS	Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Studia Praesocratica
SPhA	Studies in Philo of Alexandria
SPhiloA	*The Studia Philonica Annual*
SPhiloM	Studia Philonica Monographs
SSEJC	Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity
ST	Studi e Testi

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STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StudBib	Studia Biblica
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
SWBA	Social World of Biblical Antiquity
TB	Theologische Bücherei
TDNT	G. Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, translated and edited by G.W. Bromiley (10 vol.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76 [German original 1933–79])
ThLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
ThLZF	Forum Theologische Literaturzeitung
ThWAT	G. Johannes Botterweck/H. Ringgren (ed.), *Theologische Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (10 vol.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973–2000)
Transeu	*Transeuphratène*
TT	Themen der Theologie
TW	Theologische Wissenschaft
UCOP	University of Cambridge Oriental Publications
UPZ	U. Wilcken (ed.), *Urkunden der Ptolemäerzeit.* I*: Papyri aus Unterägypten;* II*: Papyri aus Oberägypten* (Berlin/Leipzig: De Gruyter 1922, 1935–57)
UTB	Uni-Taschenbücher
UTR	Utrechtse Theologische Reeks
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
VWGTh	Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie
WAWSup	Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZABR	*Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*
ZThK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

CHAPTER 1

The Readability of the World

Konrad Schmid

1 Monotheism and Creation Through the Word in Genesis 1

The development of the Judean religion towards monotheism is one of the most significant and influential events in the history of human religions and ideas. It has often been interpreted on a temporal axis.[1] In this process Judaism emerges as a "secondary religion".[2] "Secondary religions" do not construe nature and history via a particular religious linearity, rather certain informational content – typically given in the form of "revelations" – comes to the fore. Even if "primary" religions naturally know texts and use them in their cult, texts play a far more significant role in "secondary" religions.[3]

With that, a concept of divine transcendence emerges that categorically exceeds the conception of the gods of "primary" religions. The numinous is no longer present in the world via cultic symbols, rather the sphere of the divine is now conceived and imagined far more abstractly.[4] It is clear that this transformation is connected to a change in the mediality of religious discourse – be that as the cause or the effect of that transformation.[5]

The transfer of mediality can be observed not only on the level of concrete religious acts – the cult no longer functions exclusively or primarily via the

1 See, e.g., the history of research in J. Assmann, *Achsenzeit. Eine Archäologie der Moderne* (München: Beck, 2018). This article is a revised English translation of K. Schmid, "Die Lesbarkeit der Welt: Monotheismus und Schöpfung durch das Wort in Genesis 1", *ZABR* 27 (2021), 187–202. The title is a playful reference to H. Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979 [reprint 2003]). My thanks go to Hans Decker for improving the English of this essay.

2 See, e.g., T. Sundermeier, *Was ist Religion? Religionswissenschaft im theologischen Kontext* (TB 96, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999); A. Wagner (ed.), *Primäre und sekundäre Religion als Kategorie der Religionsgeschichte des Alten Testaments* (BZAW 364; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2006).

3 Cf. the examples in K. Schmid, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (NThG; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 330–4.

4 See, e.g., the archaeological finds of the Persian period in C. Frevel, "Der Eine oder die Vielen? Monotheismus und materielle Kultur in der Perserzeit" in C. Schwöbel (ed.), *Gott–Götter–Götzen* (VWGTh 38; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), 238–65.

5 See, e.g., J. Schaper, *Media and Monotheism: Presence, Representation, and Abstraction in Ancient Judah* (ORA 33; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019).

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performance of certain rites before statues of the gods,[6] rather it is relocated to the study of texts –, but also presents itself in the content-related conceptualisation[7] and character of religious texts themselves. The transition from a ritual to a textual coherence of a specific religious tradition is also reflected in the means by which the essence and actions of God are presented in its textual foundations. Of course, in the case of ancient Judaism the tradition preserves the memory of ancient ideas (even if revitalised or imitated),[8] still the texts from the most important formative periods of the Hebrew Bible – the Babylonian and Persian periods – convey a different picture. This will be demonstrated in what follows via the example of the creation account in Genesis 1, in which a transcendent, unlocatable, imageless and primarily speaking deity is presented, whose actions occur only after he has spoken.[9] Genesis 1 must also be considered in its original context, i.e. as the beginning of the so-called Priestly Document.[10] Thanks to the specific linguistic and theological profile of the Priestly texts in the Pentateuch they are comparatively uniformly dated and defined,[11] even if differences remain regarding the Priestly Document's

6 See F. Hartenstein/M. Moxter, *Hermeneutik des Bilderverbots. Exegetische und systematisch-theologische Annäherungen* (ThLZF 26, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 24–71.

7 Cf. J. Assmann, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis. Zehn Studien* (München: Beck, 2000), 148–66.

8 See, e.g., K. Schmid, "Gibt es 'Reste hebräischen Heidentums' im Alten Testament? Methodische Überlegungen anhand von Dtn 32,8f und Ps 82", in Wagner, *Primäre und sekundäre Religion* (see n. 2), 105–20.

9 See still the quintessential O.H. Steck, *Der Schöpfungsbericht der Priesterschrift. Studien zur literarkritischen und überlieferungsgeschichtlichen Problematik von Genesis 1,1–2,4a* (FRLANT 115; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, ^{2}1981). See also J.C. Gertz, *Das erste Buch Mose* (*Genesis*). *Die Urgeschichte Gen 1–11* (ATD 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 26–79; D.M. Carr, *The Formation of Genesis 1–11. Biblical and Other Precursors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 7–29. For an overview see K. Schmid (ed.), *Schöpfung* (TT 4; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 77–92.

10 For an overview of the recent debate see S. Shectman/J.S. Baden (ed.), *The Strata of the Priestly Writings. Contemporary Debate and Future Directions* (AThANT 95; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag *Zürich*, 2009); F. Hartenstein/K. Schmid (ed.), *Abschied von der Priesterschrift? Zum Stand der Pentateuchdebatte* (VWGTh 40; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015); J. Jeon, "The Promise of the Land and the Extent of P", *ZAW* 130 (2018), 513–28.

11 See, e.g., A. de Pury, "P^{g} as the Absolute Beginning", in T. Römer/K. Schmid (es.), *Les dernières rédactions du Pentateuque, de l'Hexateuque et de l'Ennéateuque* (BETL 203; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 99–128 = A. de Pury, *Die Patriarchen und die Priesterschrift, Gesammelte Studien zu seinem 70. Geburtstag = Les patriarches et le document sacerdotal. Recueil d'articles, à l'occasion de son 70e anniversaire* (AThANT 99, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag *Zürich*, 2010), 13–42, on pp. 37–42; R.G. Kratz, *Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments* (UTB 2157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 248;

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literary characteristics[12] and conclusion.[13] The clear inclusio between the creation narrative and the revelation atop Sinai,[14] as well as its unique theological profile, point toward the Priestly texts originally belonging to a standalone source; these basic assumptions will be present in the following discussion, even if they are not decisive for the specific question posed here.[15]

2 The Word as the Medium of Creation of the Monotheistic God of Genesis 1

In Gen 1 the creator God operates as a singular deity and as such can be referred to via the proper noun without the article, using the categorical designation אלהים.[16] Ignoring for the moment the historical scholarly reservations

R.G. Kratz, *Historisches und biblisches Israel: Drei Überblicke zum Alten Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 162 n. 107.

12 For arguments against P as a source: C. Berner, *Die Exoduserzählung: Das literarische Werden einer Ursprungslegende Israels* (FAT 73, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010) (*contra* K. Schmid, Review in *ZAW* 123 (2011), 292–94); cf. also R. Albertz, *Exodus 1–18* (ZBK 2.1; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag *Zürich*, 2012), 10–26 and for Genesis 12–50, J. Wöhrle, *Fremdlinge im eigenen Land: Zur Entstehung und Intention der priesterlichen Passagen der Vätergeschichte* (FRLANT 246; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

13 Since T. Pola, *Die ursprüngliche Priesterschrift: Beobachtungen zur Literarkritik und Traditionsgeschichte von P^g* (WMANT 70; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1995), there has been a trend to see the end of Pg in the area of the Sinai pericope, cf. the more recent discussion in C. Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus* (FAT 2.25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 20–68, 379; J.-L. Ska, "Le récit sacerdotal: Une 'histoire sans fin'?" in T. Römer (ed.), *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers* (BETL 215; Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 631–53; cf. also E. Noort, "Num 27, 12–23 und das Ende der Priesterschrift", in T. Römer (ed.), *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers* (BETL 215; Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 99–119; Jeon, *Promise* (see n. 10). C. Frevel, *Mit Blick auf das Land die Schöpfung erinnern* (HBS 23; Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2000) defends the traditional ending in Deut 34.

14 See, e.g., B. Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen. Studien zur Sühnetheologie der Priesterschrift und zur Wurzel KPR im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (WMANT 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982), 309–12; A. Grund-Wittenberg, "Geschichte und Kult: Die Einsetzung des Heiligtums in der priesterlichen Geschichtserzählung", in M. Meyer-Blanck (ed.), *Geschichte und Gott* (VWGTh 44; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 302–21, 318–9; Hartenstein/Moxter, *Hermeneutik* (see n. 6), 178–79.

15 See, e.g, K. Schmid, *Literaturgeschichte des Alten Testaments. Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, ^{3}2021), 191–96.

16 See, e.g, A. de Pury, "Gottesname, Gottesbezeichnung und Gottesbegriff. Elohim als Indiz zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Pentateuch", in J.C. Gertz *et al.* (ed.), *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (BZAW 315, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2002), 25–47; A. de Pury, "Wie und wann wurde "der Gott" zu

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over the category,[17] Genesis 1 is a "monotheistic" text.[18] God does not create the world from nothing[19] – as the dogmatic tradition connected with 2 Macc 7:28 would like to suggest[20] –, He rather transforms the completely chaotic condition of the world prior to creation (as encapsulated by the phrase תהו ובהו in Gen 1:2) into a structured and ordered living world.[21]

This process is primarily unfolded through God's speech.[22] The phrase ויאמר אלהים "and God said" appears nine times in Gen 1:1–2:4 (Gen 1:3, 6, 9,

"Gott"?, in A. de Pury, *Die Patriarchen und die Priesterschrift* (see n. 11), 195–216; critically E. Blum, "Der vermeintliche Gottesname 'Elohim'", in I.U. Dalferth/P. Stoellger (ed.), *Gott nennen. Gottes Namen und Gott als Name* (RPT 35; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 97–119.

17 Cf. K. Schmid, "Differenzierungen und Konzeptualisierungen der Einheit Gottes in der Religions- und Literaturgeschichte Israels: Methodische, religionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Aspekte zur neueren Diskussion um den sogenannten "Monotheismus" im antiken Israel", in M. Oeming/ K. Schmid (ed.), *Der eine Gott und die Götter: Polytheismus und Monotheismus im antiken Israel* (AThANT 82; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag *Zürich*, 2003), 11–38. For the question of the genesis of monotheism, see E. Zenger, "Der Monotheismus Israels: Entstehung–Profil–Relevanz", in T. Söding (ed.), *Ist der Glaube Feind der Freiheit? Die neue Debatte um den Monotheismus* (QD 196; Freiburg in Breisgau: Herder, 2003), 9–52; J. van Oorschot (ed.), *Anfänge und Ursprünge der Jahwe-Verehrung* (BThZ 30.1; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013); J. van Oorschot/M. Witte (ed.), *The Origins of Yahwism* (BZAW 484; Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017); T. Römer, *Die Erfindung Gottes: Eine Reise zu den Quellen des Monotheismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2018). Cf. also F. Hartenstein, "Exklusiver und inklusiver Monotheismus: Zum "Wesen" der Götter in Deuterojesaja und in den späten Psalmen", in A. Grund *et al.* (ed.), *Ich will dir danken unter den Völkern: Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Gebetsliteratur. FS Bernd Janowski zum 70. Geburtstag* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2013), 194–219.

18 See, e.g., K. Schmid, "The Quest for "God": Monotheistic Arguments in the Priestly Texts of the Hebrew Bible", in B. Pongratz-Leisten (ed.), *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 271–89.

19 See, e.g., M. Bauks, *Die Welt am Anfang: Zum Verhältnis von Vorwelt und Weltentstehung in Gen 1 und in der altorientalischen Literatur* (WMANT 74; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997).

20 See, e.g., G. Anderson/M. Bockmuehl (ed.), *Creation ex nihilo: Origins, Development, Contemporary Challenges* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2018).

21 See, e.g., K. Schmid, "Von der Gegenwelt zur Lebenswelt: Evolutionäre Kosmologie und Theologie im Buch Genesis", in T. Fuhrer/M. Erler *et al.* (ed.), *Cosmologies et Cosmogonies dans la Littérature Antique. Huit Exposés Suivis de Discussions et d'un Épilogue, Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique LXI* (Genève: Droz, 2015), 51–104.

22 This also allows the much discussed passage in Gen 1:2 (ורוח אלהים מרחפת על־פני המים) to be understood: the "trembling" of the spirit of God demonstrates God's readiness to speak. See, e.g., Steck, *Schöpfungsbericht* (see n. 9), 236–7; Schaper, *Media* (see n. 5), 109–10: "In Genesis 1, divine speech plays a special role. It is central to the act of creation; indeed it is *instrumental* to it." (p. 109, italics original).

11, 14, 20, 24, 28, 29), once with a slight variation ויאמר להם אלהים "and God said to them" (Gen 1:28), which appears with the first humans as the object of the speech.[23] Further verbs appearing in Gen 1:1–2:4 with God as the subject are "created" (ברא, Gen 1:1, 21, 27; 2:3), "made" (עשׂה, Gen 1:7, 16, 25), "saw" (ראה, Gen 1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25, 31), "separated" (בדל, Gen 1:4, 7), "named" (קרא, Gen 1:5, 8, 10), "gave" (נתן, Gen 1:17), "blessed" (ברך, Gen 1:22, 28; 2:3), "completed" (כלה, Gen 2:2), "rested" (שׁבת, Gen 2:2, 3) and "sanctified" (קדשׁ, Gen 2:3). From among these, קרא "named" and ברך "blessed" can be seen as acts of speech.

The "creative word", that is creation through God's speech, is most pronounced in God's first deed, the creation of light:

ויאמר אלהים יהי אור ויהי־אור

> And God spoke, Be light! And there was light. (Gen 1:3)

Divine order and actual creation correspond completely, light arises singly and purely from the spoken command of God.[24]

This specific command of God to his first work can be explained via the meaning of light, which is distinguished through a special proximity to God: in the biblical tradition God can reveal himself as light and be perceived as light.[25]

Already the second work, however, the making of the רקיע between the water above and the water below[26] is characterised through the correlation of God's word and deed. The creation is preceded by God's command:

ויאמר אלהים יהי רקיע בתוך המים ויהי מבדיל בין מים למים

> And God spoke, Let there be a firmament between the waters that will separate water from water. (Gen 1:6)

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23 From the perspective of systematic theology, cf. O. Bayer, *Schöpfung als Anrede: Zu einer Hermeneutik der Schöpfung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, ²1990).

24 See, e.g., C. Westermann, *Genesis 1: Teilband Genesis 1–11* (BK 1.1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), 153: "[D]as Sprechen Gottes in Gen 1,3 ist als schaffender Befehl, also eine Tat, zu verstehen."

25 See, e.g., B. Langer, *Gott als "Licht" in Israel und Mesopotamien: Eine Studie zu Jes 60,1–3.19f* (ÖBS 7; Klosterneuburg: Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989); T. Podella, *Das Lichtkleid JHWHs: Untersuchungen zur Gestalthaftigkeit Gottes im Alten Testament und seiner altorientalischen Umwelt* (FAT 15; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996).

26 See, e.g, M. Görg, "רקיע", *ThWAT* (1993), 668–75, esp. 670–1.