

# ***Yhwh, a God of the Wilderness? The question of the origin of the Exodus Tradition***



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# Introduction

- ❖ **Judaism: one God, who is at the same time the particular god of the people of Israel and also the God of the whole universe.**
- ❖ **Christianity and Islam: take over the same monotheistic idea.**
- ❖ **A closer look in the Hebrew Bible reveals a more complicated situation.**
- ❖ **Moses commission: what's God's name?**
- ❖ **Revelation in the wilderness.**



# The aim of this investigation

- ❖ Investigation about the origins of the god Yhwh and a possible origin of the Exodus tradition
- ❖ Biblical texts: no direct historical sources.
- ❖ Reflect the ideologies of their authors and redactors.
- ❖ Results of the analysis of the biblical texts must be compared with the archaeological, epigraphic, and iconographic facts.
- ❖ The break of a taboo.
- ❖ Since the 1970s: Many biblical texts are today dated in a “late” period.
- ❖ =>skepticism about the historical value of these texts:



# An example: Christoph Berner, *Die Exoduserzählung* (2009)

- ❖ Tendency to understand the biblical texts on a purely literary level, as “invention” of scribes from the so-called “post-exilic” period.
- ❖ Origin of the Exodus story: a very short narrative that originated after 722 BCE in the “Northern Diaspora” in Egypt.
- ❖ Many *Fortschreibungen*:
- ❖ Several priestly redactions starting around 500 BCE.
- ❖ The major part of the narrative stems from post-priestly redactors until the beginning of the Hellenistic period.
- ❖ Berner: the results of his investigation make useless any inquiry about earlier and oral traditions:



- ❖ **“Der Annahme, sie [=die Exoduserzählung] hätte ganz oder in Teilen zum Sagenschatz der Israeliten gehört und sei über lange Zeit mündlich überliefert worden, steht der literarische Befund diametral entgegen. Die Exoduserzählung ist das Produkt schriftgelehrter Eliten“ (p. 451).**
- ❖ **“The idea that the Exodus narrative has belonged in its entirety or partially to the legends of the Israelites and that it was first transmitted orally is contradicted by the literary evidence. The Exodus narrative is the product of scribal elites”.**
- ❖ **This approach ignores the fact that the narratives contained in the Pentateuch are not inventions proceeding simply from the minds of intellectuals seated in their comfortable chairs.**
- ❖ **Biblical literature is a literature of tradition.**
- ❖ **There were “scribal elites”, but they worked on traditions.**
- ❖ **The process of revision operated in a manner that rested on certain archaic kernels of fact that might perhaps have received their definitive formulation only at a relative late stage.**
- ❖ **But often: traces of memory’ of events of the distant past.**



# ***The encounter in the wilderness***

- ❖ **Hos 9:10: “Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season, I saw your fathers”.**
- ❖ **Jer 2:2: “Thus says Yhwh: I remember the affection of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in an uncultivated land”.**
- ❖ **=> the time in the desert was the time of a harmonious relation between Yhwh and Israel.**
- ❖ **Robert Carroll: “The honeymoon was wonderful but the marriage – a complete failure”.**
- ❖ **Hos 2:16: “Therefore, I will now seduce her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.”**
- ❖ **=> Restoration in the wilderness.**
- ❖ **Exodus 3: God appears to Moses at the edge of the desert, in the land of Midian, at “the mountain of God”.**



# The idea of the wilderness as privileged place for the encounter with the divine



- ❖ Ernest Renan: History of the people of Israel (1887): “the desert is monotheistic”.
- ❖ Karl Budde (1895): nomadic ideal of the OT; Yhwh, a desert god.
- ❖ J.W. Flight (“The Nomadic idea and ideal” JBL, 1923): the wilderness was the birthplace of the yahwistic religion; Christianity should return to the desert ideal.



# Critique

- ❖ *Überlieferungsgeschichte* (G. von Rad, M. Noth *et al.*):
- ❖ The wilderness traditions do not belong to the oldest traditions of the Hebrew Bible:
- ❖ Deut 26:5-9: My father was a wandering Aramean; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to Yhwh, the God of our ancestors; Yhwh heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. Yhwh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.
- ❖ => Exodus is followed immediately by the entrance into the Land.
- ❖ Nevertheless, the wilderness texts in the Bible are intriguing and need explanation.
- ❖ The relation between Yhwh and Israel is not an “original” one.



# *Israel and Yhwh*

- ❖ “Israel”:
- ❖ Theophoric element *’ēl*, which is the proper name of the highest Canaanite god as evidenced by the texts from Ugarit.
- ❖ Cf. Curtis, A. “Encounters with El.” In *He Unfurled his Brow and Laughed*, 2007.
- ❖ Genesis 32: Jacob’s struggle with a mysterious entity: folk-etymology, based on a root meaning “to struggle”, “to combat” (*ś-r-h*): “may El combat”?
- ❖ Root (*ś-r-r*) meaning “to rule, to govern”: “May El rule”. => corresponds to El’s role.



# Stele of Merneptah (around 1210 BCE)



- ❖ Tehenu (Libya) has come to ruin, Hatti is pacified;
- ❖ Canaan has been plundered into every sort of woe: Ashkelon has been overcome; Gezer has been captured; Yano'am is made non-existent.
- ❖ Israel is destroyed and his seed is not;
- ❖ Hurru (Syria) is become a widow because of Egypt.



- ❖ The name 'Israel' is given a determinative consisting of a man and woman:
- ❖ Name of a definite group rather than of a region or locality.

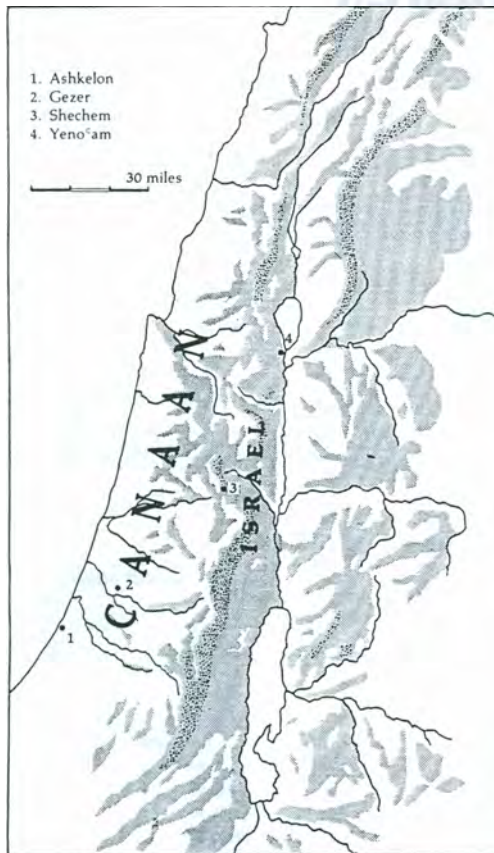


Fig. 1 Palestine according to Merneptah's stela.

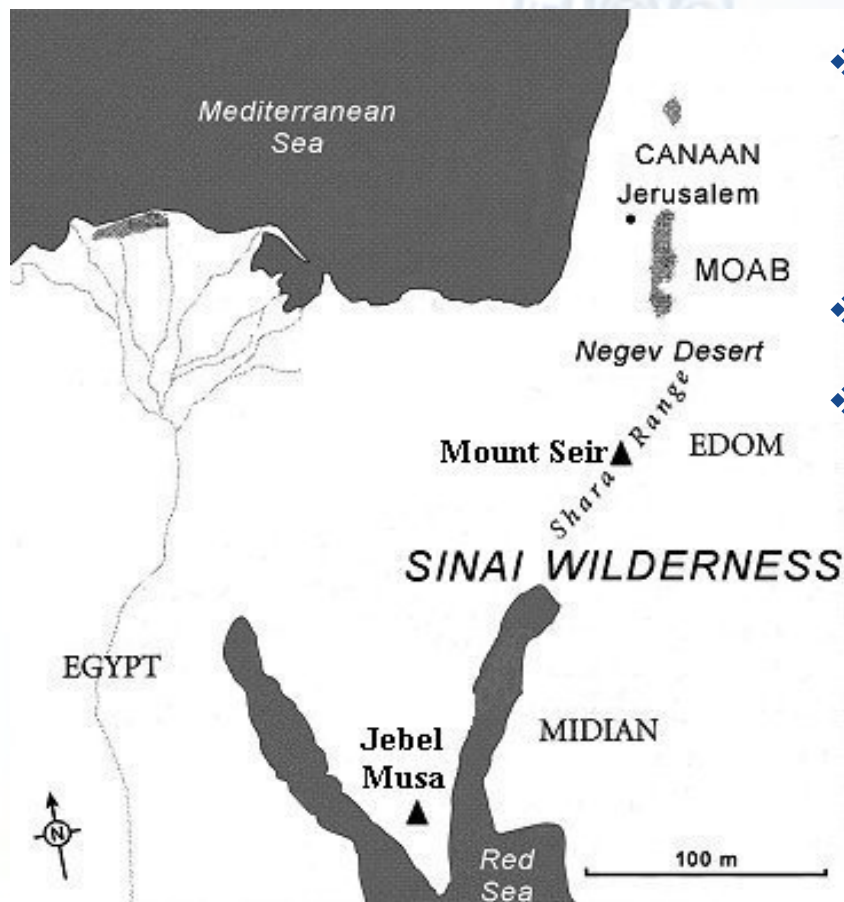
- ❖ **Israel: a group that was known by name to the Egyptians.**
- ❖ **No allusion to an “exodus”.**
- ❖ **Name indicates worship of El**
- ❖ **Yisra-el ⇔ Yisra-yahu (cf. Yirmeyahu = Jeremiah).**
- ❖ **Question: how did Israel meet Yhwh? Or: where did Yhwh come from?**

# ***Yhwh, a god from the “South” and the wilderness***

## ***Biblical evidence***

- ❖ Song of Deborah, Judg 5:
- ❖ 4 "Yhwh, when you *went out from Seir*, when you *marched from the region of Edom*, the earth trembled, and the heavens poured, the clouds indeed poured water. 5 The mountains quaked before Yhwh, he is *Sinai*, before Yhwh, the God of Israel."
- ❖ => Yhwh's origin is in Seir //Edom.
- ❖ Psalm 68 ("Elohistic Psalter"; takes up Judg 5):
- ❖ "8 O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness (*yēsîmôn* ), (Selah) 9 the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain before God, that is *Sinai*, before God, the God of Israel".
- ❖ Both texts: "*zeh Sinay*": "he is Sinai" => Sinai would be another name for Yhwh.
- ❖ Cf. pre-islamic deity "Dushara" (du-shara): he of (mount) Shara.





- ❖ For Judg 5 and Ps 68, the “Sinai” cannot be located in the Sinai peninsula.
- ❖ Somewhere in Edom.
- ❖ Deut 33: similar idea.



- ❖ He said: 'Yhwh came from *Sinai*, for them he shone forth from *Seir*, he was resplendent from Mount *Parân*; he arrived at Meribat of Qadesh\*; from his south toward the slopes\*\*, for them. Indeed, he loves\*\*\* his people\*\*\*\* ... he becomes king in Jeshurun, when the leaders of the people assembled—the united tribes of Israel. (Deut 33:2)
- ❖ \* The Hebrew expression *mēribhōt qōdeš* is difficult to understand. Some translate the massoretic text as 'he has come from the holy myriads' which really does not make much sense. The 'parallelism of members' would suggest that this expression has a geographic meaning. The Septuagint takes Qadesh as a proper name. Some scholars correct the Hebrew text, making it *mē'arbōt* ('of the steppes') which at any rate makes sense, or *mimmēribat* ['from Meribat'] which is also possible, since Meriba is mentioned in verse 8 which recalls the revolt of the people at this place (see also Ex. 17:7).
 

\*\*The end of this verse is virtually untranslatable. The massoretic vocalisation suggests something like: 'from his right hand a fire of law emerges'. The term *dāt* ('law') is a Persian loan word, which could mean that this might be a gloss or a later addition. The possible reading adopted here takes the word as a feminine plural '*ašdôt* which means something like 'the slopes', the place of transition between the mountains and the desert.
- ❖ \*\*\*The verb used here (ḥ-b-b) is a hapax; it appears as a proper name, like Hobab; a Kenite or even Moses' father-in-law (Num 10 :29 ; Judg 4 :11)
- ❖ \*\*\*\*According to LXX (singular); TM has the plural.



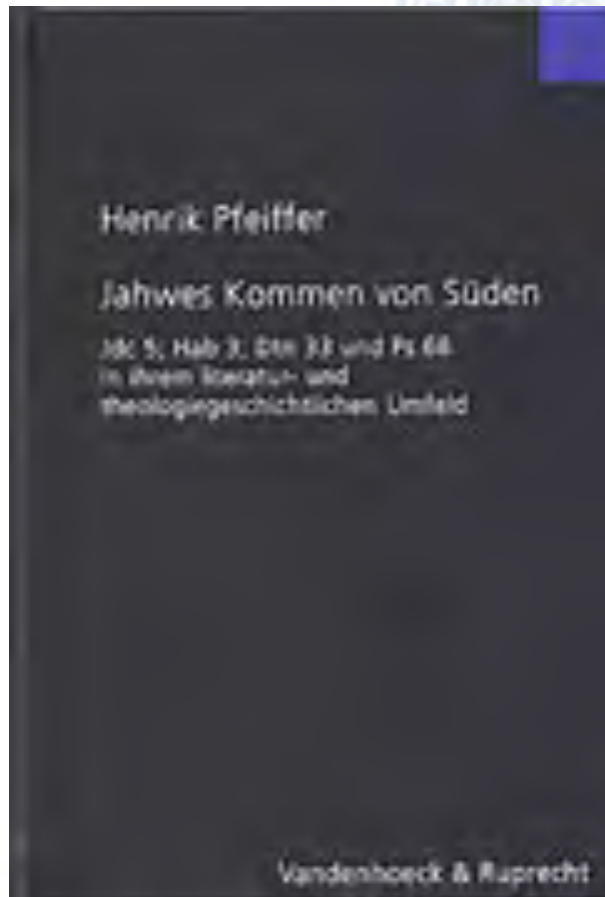
- ❖ Sinai // Mount Paran (only here and in Hab 3).
- ❖ The word *Parân* is used in the Hebrew Bible in different contexts and its precise localisation is impossible.
- ❖ Gen 21:21: Ismael; somewhere close to Egypt.
- ❖ Num 13: near the oasis of Qadesh:
- ❖ En el-qederat, which apparently had three phases of occupation: in the 10<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.



- ❖ ***Habakkuk 3:***
- ❖ **“3 God came from *Teman*, the Holy One from Mount *Paran*. (Selah) His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise ... 5 Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind. 6 He stopped and shook the earth; he looked and made the nations tremble. The eternal mountains were shattered; ... 7 I saw the tents of *Cushan* under affliction; the tent-curtains of the land of *Midian* trembled”.**
- ❖ **Teman: close to Mount Paran and Midian**
- ❖ **Gen 36: Teman: the name of a person or a clan in the genealogy of Edom.**
- ❖ **Locality or territory in Edom : Jer 49, 7.20; Ezek 25,13; Am 11,11-12; Ob 8-9**
- ❖ ***Teman* (from the root y-m-n) in the first instance simply means the ‘south’ in general, then ‘the south’ as the designation of a particular geographic area (‘the land of the south’)**
- ❖ **=> According to these four texts Yhwh is taken to be ‘located’ in the south, in the territory of the Edomites, or, more generally, in a territory situated southeast of Judah.**
- ❖ **=> tradition according to which Yhwh is a divinity associated with a mountain in the desert.**



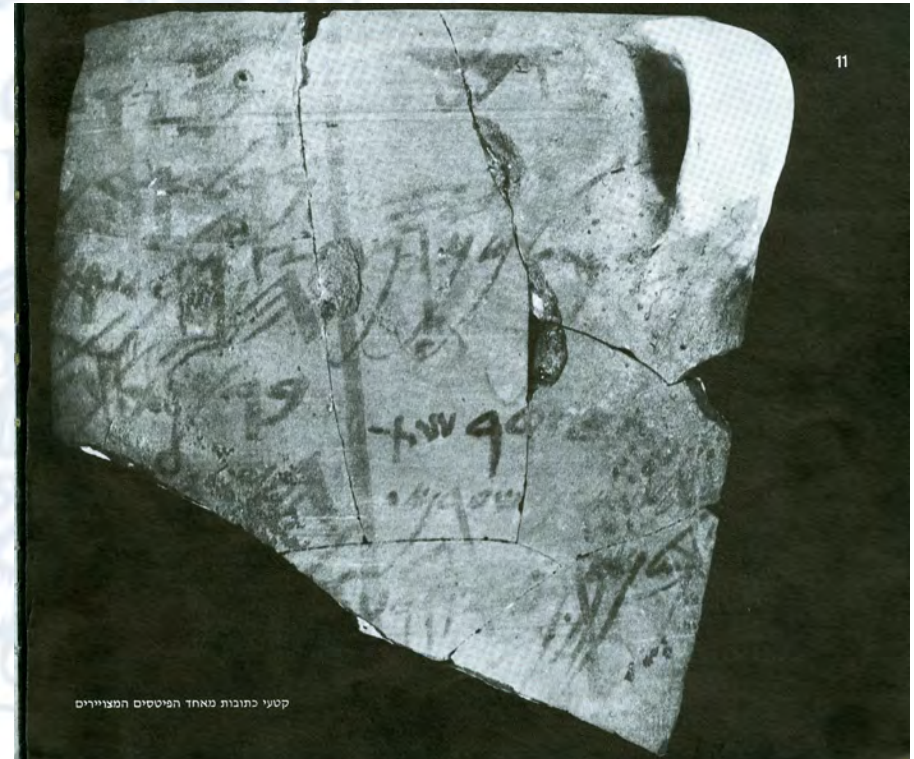
# Yhwh in the wilderness: a post-exilic invention ?



- ❖ H. Pfeiffer: the four passages presuppose the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in 587 BCE.
- ❖ These texts were created in order to soften the blow of the loss of the sanctuary of Yhwh in Jerusalem by transferring him outside the land of Judah.
- ❖ This idea seems anachronistic and is contradicted by factual evidence.



# Kuntillet 'Ajrud



# Kuntillet Ajrud

- ❖ “Yhwh of Samaria”.
- ❖ “Yhwh of (ha-)Teman”.
- ❖ Inscriptions from the early eighth century BCE.
- ❖ => the idea of a Yhwh from the South is not a post-exilic invention.



## ***The Israelite origin of the Exodus tradition***

- ❖ 1 Kgs 12: So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He said to the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. (v. 28-29):
- ❖ הִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הָעֵל וְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
- ❖ The plural, cf. also Exod 32:4, is intriguing.
- ❖ Yhwh in his different manifestations?
- ❖ => Polemical transformation of an original cultic exclamation in the singular.



|                                                                  |                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Exod 20:2                                                        | 1 Kgs 12:28                                                             |
| אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם      | הִנֵּה אֱלֹהֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הָעֵלִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם          |
| I am the Yhwh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt | Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt |

- ❖ A redactor could easily modify the verbal form of the root ‘-l-h in 1 Kgs 12:28 from a singular to a plural.
- ❖ The Northern cult in Bethel and Dan (and elsewhere) appears not only as “idolatrous” but also as “polytheistic”.
- ❖ I. Finkelstein, E. Arie: Dan became part of Israel only in the eighth century BCE.
- ❖ 1 Kgs 12, a transfer from the time of Jeroboam II.



## ***Hosea 12***

- ❖ **Date: probably eight century BCE.**
- ❖ **Negative presentation of Jacob.**
- ❖ **Whereas Jacob is connected to a deity that is called “elohim” or “el” (מֵלֶכֶת in 12:5 is probably a gloss that transformed the original “El” into a “messenger) Yhwh presents himself as the God from the land of Egypt.**
- ❖ **וְאַנְכִי יְהוָה אֵל הָיִךְ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם (12:10), cf. 1 Kgs 12,28 and the Decalogue.**
- ❖ **12:13-14: Jacob’s flight to Aram and his “slavery” because of a woman are contrasted to Yhwh’s prophet:**



וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב שְׂדֵה אֲרָם וַיַּעֲבֹד יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאִשָּׁה  
 וַיִּנְבִּיאַ הָעֵלָה יְהוָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם  
 וַיִּנְבִּיאַ שְׂמֵר וַיִּנְבִּיאַ שְׂמֵר

- ❖ Who is the prophet in v. 14?
- ❖ Related to the prophetic group that stands behind Hos 12.
- ❖ If it is Moses, why is his name not mentioned?



## ***An Exodus without Moses?***

- ❖ ***Nebiim, Ketubim***: more allusions to the Exodus than to the Patriarchal tradition.
- ❖ But few mentions of Moses. Psalms: 77:20; 90:1 [in the title]; 99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16,23,32.
- ❖ Sparse appearances outside the DtrH (and the book of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah): Isa 63:11-12 and Micah 6:4 (the other mentions in Jer 15:1, Mal 3:22 and Dan 9:11,13 relate to the law or Moses' function as an intercessor).



- ❖ **Did Moses become the hero of the Exodus only after 722 BCE?**
- ❖ **Judahite origin of Moses: cf. 2 Kgs 18:4: bronze serpent in the Jerusalemite temple made by Moses:**
- ❖ **“He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it; it was called Nehushtan” (2 Kgs 18:4).**
- ❖ **Numb 21:4-9: explanation of the statue associated with Moses.**
- ❖ **In the 7<sup>th</sup> century edition of the Exodus narrative, Moses is depicted as royal figure, a “Judahite Sargon”.**



# Hints to an older Exodus tradition ?

- ❖ An older non-Mosaic Exodus tradition cannot be reconstructed with the methods of literary criticism (in the sense of the German “Literarkritik”).
- ❖ Doublets or tensions that have intrigued commentators since very long time.
- ❖ Exodus 19: Sinai ⇔ Exodus 18: *har ha-elohim*.



# ***Yhwh and the wilderness according to the book of Exodus***



Shepherds with their flocks at the foot of Mount Sinai about 1900  
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- ❖ First encounter between Moses and Yhwh in the land of Midian.
- ❖ Midian, close to Edom.
- ❖ 1 Kgs 11: “17Hadad [in *Edom*] fled to Egypt with some Edomites ....18 They set out from *Midian* and came to *Paran*; they took people with them from Paran and came to Egypt ...
- ❖ => Midian between Edom and Paran.

# Moses' commission according to Exod 3

- ❖ **16 Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'Yhwh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have taken care of you and of what has been done to you in Egypt. 17 I said: I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'**
- ❖ **=> definitive way out of Egypt.**
- ❖ **Cf. however: v. 18 ... you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'Yhwh, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go a three days' journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to Yhwh our God.'**
- ❖ **Theme of a sacrifice for Yhwh.**



- ❖ **Exod 3:18 seems related to verse 12:**
- ❖ **<sup>12</sup> He [=Yhwh] said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve the god on this mountain.”**
- ❖ **The cult of Yhwh as a sign.**
- ❖ **But this sign does not really work because it will only be realized in the future.**
- ❖ **=> a redactor has tried to combine the motif of the worship of Yhwh on his mountain with the topic of the Exodus as an absolute departure from Egypt.**



# ***The motif of sacrifices for Yhwh in the wilderness***

- ❖ Exodus 5: Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “Thus says Yhwh, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.’”<sup>2</sup> But Pharaoh said, “Who is Yhwh, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know Yhwh, and I will not let Israel go.”
- ❖<sup>3</sup> They said, “The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to Yhwh\* our God, or he will strike us with pestilence or sword.”<sup>4</sup> But the king of Egypt said to them, “<Moses and Aaron>\*\*, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labours!”<sup>5</sup> Pharaoh said, “Now they are more numerous than the people of the land\*\*\* and yet you want them to stop working!”
- ❖ \* Missing in LXX.
- ❖ \*\*Possibly an addition.
- ❖ \*\*\* MT : “The people of the land is numerous” makes no sense. Maybe a *m’m* has been lost, so that one may reconstruct with SPt : “The people (of the Hebrews) is more numerous than the people of the Land (the Egyptians)”.



- ❖ **v. 1-2 and 3-4 contain two parallel negotiations: in v. 1-2 the Israelite spokesmen are Moses and Aaron; in v. 3-4 it is not clear who is speaking.**
- ❖ **Exod 3:16 mentions a negotiation conducted by the elders, one may conclude that v. 3-4 are part of an older narrative in the line of Exod 3:16.**
- ❖ **If one follows the original Greek, verses 3 and 4 only mention the “god of the Hebrews” without giving him a name. Apparently this god is a violent deity that is striking with pestilence and sword.**
- ❖ **Hab 3:5: “Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind”.**
- ❖ **Hab 3:7: “I saw the tents of Cushan under affliction; the tent-curtains of the land of Midian trembled”.**



- ❖ **Exodus 5: The answer of Pharaoh in v. 4 is less theological than his rhetorical question in verse 2: he only wants to avoid that the Hebrews are distracted from their labour.**
- ❖ **In v. 1-2 the sacrifice has been transformed into a pilgrimage festival.**
- ❖ **=> Link with the Passover (Exod 12).**
- ❖ **Theological conflict between Yhwh and the gods of Egypt.**
- ❖ **Pharaoh “does not know” Yhwh: cf. the priestly refrain: so that Pharaoh will know that I am Yhwh”.**



- ❖ **The idea expressed in verses 3-4 does not fit very well into its present context.**
- ❖ **The request for sacrifice, only a pretext (Wellhausen)?**
- ❖ **W.H. Schmidt: the passages mentioning the motif of sacrificing Yhwh in the wilderness are only sparsely linked to the Exodus narrative.**
- ❖ **An old/another tradition of Yhwh as a god in the wilderness ?**



- ❖ **6** That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters, as well as the scribes of the people,  
**7** “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. **8** But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; *that is why they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’...*
- ❖ **15** The scribes of the sons of Israel came to Pharaoh and cried, “Why do you treat your servants like this?  
**16** No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ Look how your servants are beaten! Your people act sinfully.” **17** He said, “*You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to Yhwh.’*  
**18** Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks.”



- ❖ **Exod 5:6-19: Egyptian taskmasters (v. 6) (הַנִּגְשִׁים), Egyptian scribes or supervisors (שֹׁטְרֵי), Israelite scribes (v. 14 שֹׁטְרֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל).**
- ❖ **In v. 15, the Hebrew foremen complain to the Egyptian king, and not Moses or Aaron: “The Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, ‘Why do you treat your servants like this?’”.**
- ❖ **M. Noth: this story contains perhaps the memory of an older or another Exodus narrative without Moses (and Aaron).**
- ❖ **Addition of a Moses-Aaron frame in v. 1-5 and 20-23.**



# Exodus 8

- ❖ **4 (8) Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, “Pray Yhwh to take away the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to Yhwh.”**
- ❖ **Plague of flies.**
- ❖ **21 (25) Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God in this land.” 22 (26) But Moses said, “It would not be right to do so; for the sacrifices that we offer to Yhwh our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we offer in the sight of the Egyptians sacrifices that are an abomination to them, will they not stone us? 23 (27) We must go a three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to Yhwh our God as he commands us.” 24 (28) Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to sacrifice to Yhwh your God in the wilderness, provided you do not go very far away. Pray for me.” 25 (29) Moses said, “I will leave you, and I will pray Yhwh and the swarms of flies will depart tomorrow from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; only Pharaoh should not deal again falsely by not letting the people go to sacrifice Yhwh.”**



- ❖ **Probably a late speculation.**
- ❖ **The expression “abomination (*tô‘ēbāh*) to Egypt” is attested in the HB on two other places in the Joseph story.**
- ❖ **Gen 43:32 : it is an abomination for the Egyptians to eat at the same table as the Hebrews; 46:34 shepherds of smallstock are an abomination for the Egyptians.**
- ❖ **=> Beginning of a hostile attitude against the Judeans of the Egyptian Diaspora during the Persian period.**



# Exodus 10

- ❖ <sup>24</sup> Pharaoh summoned Moses, and said, “Go, serve Yhwh. Only your flocks and your herds shall remain here. But your children may go with you.” <sup>25</sup> But Moses said, “You will give us sacrifices and burnt offerings (זִבְחִים וְעֹלֹת) to sacrifice to Yhwh our God.” <sup>26</sup> Our livestock will go with us; not a hoof shall remain here, for we must choose among them for the service of Yhwh our God, and we will not know what to use to serve Yhwh until we arrive there.
- ❖ Moses does not know yet how to sacrifice Yhwh.
- ❖ W.H. Schmidt: a “blind motif”.
- ❖ But this passage prepares Exod 18:1-12, where a Midianite priest is teaching the Israelites how to sacrifice Yhwh.
- ❖ The expression עֹלָה וְזִבְחִים in Exod 18 reminds of the זִבְחִים וְעֹלֹת of Exod 10.



# ***Exodus 18: the first sacrifice to Yhwh at the “mountain of God”***

- ❖ **<sup>1</sup>Jethro, priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moses learned all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people: Yhwh had brought Israel out of Egypt <sup>2</sup>Jethro, father-in-law of Moses, took Zipporah, the wife of Moses, when she had been sent back to him, <sup>3</sup>also their two sons: the name of the one was Gershom because he said: “ I am an immigrant living in a foreign land”; <sup>4</sup>the name of the other was Eliezer because “The god of my father has come to my aid and delivered me from the sword of the Pharaoh” <sup>5</sup>Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses with his sons and his wife came to Moses in the desert, to the place where he was camping at the mountain of god. <sup>6</sup>He said to Moses: “It’s me, your father-in-law, I come to you with your wife and your two sons” <sup>7</sup>Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed to him and embraced him. They asked each other how things were with each of them, and entered in the tent. <sup>8</sup>Moses told his father-in-law all that Yhwh had to the Pharaoh and to Egypt for the sake of Israel, all the tribulations they suffered on the road, and how Yhwh had delivered them. <sup>9</sup>Jethro rejoiced at all the good which Yhwh had done to Israel, and that he had delivered from the hands of the Egyptians. <sup>10</sup>Jethro said: “Blessed be Yhwh, who has delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and the hands of the Pharaoh \*and who has delivered the people from the hands of Egypt\* <sup>11</sup>And now I know that Yhwh is greater than all the gods. The evil which they did has fallen back on them. <sup>12</sup>Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses took\* a holocaust and sacrifices for god. Aaron and all the elders came to eat a meal with the father-in-law of Moses before the god [...] (27) Moses sent his father on his way and he went to his own country.” “YHWH” in the fragments of the Genizah at Cairo and in the Greek**
- ❖ **\* The Syriac, the Targum, and the Vulgate propose ‘brought a holocaust’ but this is also a dogmatic correction.**



- ❖ **Verses 1-12 (and 27): visit of Jethro to Moses and of a sacrifice offered to Yhwh;**
- ❖ **verses 13-26: establishment of judges on the advice of Jethro. => Later addition based on Deut 1.**
- ❖ **Abraham ibn Ezra: Exod 18 does not fit before Exod 19.**
- ❖ **Exod 18:12 presupposes the existence of an altar but this altar is not set up until Exodus 24:4.**
- ❖ **=> this story should be located in Numbers 10, just before the departing from Sinai.**
- ❖ **But if this was its original position, why would later editors have moved it to such an awkward place?**
- ❖ **=> There was some memory of a Midianite contribution to the cult of Yhwh which it was impossible to ignore.**
- ❖ **In order to include this memory it was placed before the 'true' revelation of Yhwh at Sinai.**



- ❖ **The location of Exod 18 at the “mountain of God” links back to Exod 3, where Yhwh appeared to Moses at the same mountain.**
- ❖ **Exod 3: Yhwh presents himself as “the god of Moses father”.**
- ❖ **Exod 18: Moses uses the same expression “god of the father” when explaining the name of Eliezer.**
- ❖ **Exod 18, in its present form, is a “late” text (see especially the “confession” of Jethro which recalls the confession of Rahab in Josh 2).**



# The tradition behind Exodus 18

- ❖ **<sup>1</sup>Jethro, priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moses learned all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people. <sup>5</sup>Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses with his sons and his wife came to Moses in the desert, to the place where he was camping at the mountain of god. <sup>7</sup>Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed to him and embraced him. They asked each other how things were with each of them, and entered in the tent. <sup>8</sup>Moses told his father-in-law all that Yhwh had to the Pharaoh and to Egypt. <sup>9</sup>Jethro rejoiced at all the good which Yhwh had done to Israel, and that he had delivered from the hands of the Egyptians. <sup>12</sup>Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses took a holocaust and sacrifices for god. All the elders came to eat a meal with the father-in-law of Moses before the god [...] (27) Moses sent his father on his way and he went to his own country.”**



# Jethro's encounter with Moses in Exod 18

- ❖ Discussions about the question of who was the 'chief celebrant' of this sacrifice.
- ❖ According to the Hebrew text it was Jethro, the Midianite priest, who took the initiative in a sacrifice for Yhwh.
- ❖ A later redactor inserted the "confession" of Jethro, which was then taken by Jewish commentators as a conversion of Jethro to the cult of Yhwh.
- ❖ => Exod 18 was the conclusion of an alternative tradition of the Exodus according to which the conflict between the Israelites and Pharaoh was about the request for sacrificing to the god Yhwh in the wilderness.
- ❖ Cf. Exod 15:22: mention of a three days' journey.



# Thank you !



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# Conclusion



- ❖ The HB contains several texts that reflect a tradition according to which Yhwh was a god residing on a mountain a three days journey away from the land of Egypt.
- ❖ This location fits another tradition that places the encounter between Israel and its god in a Midianite territory.
- ❖ To this one may add four poetic texts that locate Yhwh in Seir or Teman.
- ❖ The motif of the Hebrews who want to sacrifice Yhwh in the wilderness reflects a different tradition from the “official” Exodus tradition which is about a definitive departure of the Hebrews from Egypt.
- ❖ Although most of these texts underwent later reworking they conserve probably a historical memory that can be supported by extra-biblical evidence: Yhwh was, at the beginning, a “Southern god” residing in the wilderness.

