« Under the sign of the Moon »

SIN THE GOD OF Abraham, YAH THE GOD OF Moses

THÉRÈSE Ghembaza

« *I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as the Almighty God*

*But I did not make myself known to them by my name YHWH»*

*Exodus 6 : 3*

**INTRODUCTION**

In Mesopotamia God made himself known to Abraham as El Shaddai*[[1]](#footnote-1)* and in Egypt he revealed himself to Moses, but by a different name. So, if there was a continuity between Abraham and Moses, the question remains whether their god was the same deity.

For this, we will refer to the discoveries of archaeologists for the epochs to which we can reasonably report these episodes of the Bible (Torah for Jews, Old Testament for Christians),[[2]](#footnote-2) especially those of the Yahwist source.[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. **Historical approach to Abraham’s** **story**

The Yahwist source where God is constantly referred to by the YHWH tetragram provides most of *Genesis* for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Abraham's cycle includes the verses of *Genesis 12 to 25.* The book of *Genesis 11, 31* (Priestly source) reports that Terah, Abram's father, issued from the town of Ur[[4]](#footnote-4) of Chaldeans in southern Mesopotamia, had left his native country with his clan to go to the land of Canaan and that he had finally settled in Harran in northern Mesopotamia.[[5]](#footnote-5) After Terah’s death, God said to Abraham (Gen *12, 1*): « Go from your country, from your kinship, and from your father's house, to the country I will show you. I'll make you a great nation”. So, Abraham and his relatives left Harran to settle in the Land of Canaan. God appeared again to Abraham and said, "To your descendants I will give this country. There Abraham built an altar to Yahweh who had appeared to him. » *Gen 12, 4-6.*

The Yahvist document is said to be the oldest in the Pentateuch, but it cannot be older than the 7th Century B.C. However, the accounts of Abraham seem to take place in the context of the ancient Babylonian empire that succeeded the Third Dynasty of Ur. The most well-known ruler of that time was King Hammurabi, author of the code of laws of the famous Louvre stele whose prescriptions, already existing in the Sumerian empire, were partly included in the Ten Commandments attributed to Moses. After Hammurabi's death, his empire moved towards decline until a very difficult economic and social context in its extreme South, which obliged some inhabitants to emigrate to the North. Among them could have been Terah, Abraham's father, with his tribe.

In this context, it remains to know whether the god of Abraham, claimed by all the Patriarchs, was indeed the same as the god YHWH, which revealed himself to Moses in the Burning Bush episode (*Ex 3: 2-6*) to order him to bring out the Children of Israel from Egypt. The Torah is formal on this point: The Priestly source (*Ex 3:15)* reports *"*Youwill speak thus to the Sons of Israel: YHWH the god of your fathers, the god of Abraham, the god of Isaac and the god of Jacob sent me to you." But further (*Ex* *6:2-3),* the Yahwist source adds: "God addressed the word to Moses. He said: I am YHWH, I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the Almighty God, but by my name YHWH I did not make myself known to them." If he was the same god, he had changed his name by changing of country.

**II. Sin-Nanna the great Moon god in Mesopotamia**

Now it turns out that the epithet of "Almighty God" was particularly applied to Sin-Nanna, the Moon god in Mesopotamia throughout the Bronze Age. The father of the great King Hammurabi was himself called Sin-muballit.

Sin-Nanna was one of the most important deities in the pantheon of Mesopotamia, without having ever played a major role in mythology. He was subordinated to his father the great god Enlil, but the other two great astral deities, the goddess Inanna/Ishtar and the solar god Utu/Shamash were considered his children. Because of the importance of the Moon cycle in the calendar of religious worship, the god Sin-Nanna kept a prominent place throughout Mesopotamian history, and his great shrine in the big city of Ur, was one of the main places of worship in the region.

He was sometimes depicted as an old man with a long beard and most often symbolized by a crescent of Moon, generally horizontally, with both ends pointing upwards (the form that the moon takes increasing or decreasing in the sky at the latitudes of the South Mesopotamia). This crescent moon also looked like a pair of horns, which is to be related with the bovine and fertilizing aspect of the Moon god, supposed to own a large number of cows (the stars that surround it).

He had two major sanctuaries in Mesopotamia: At south, in Ur presently in Iraq near Nasiriyah; and in Harran, in the northwest, presently in Turkey near Sanhurfa. Indeed, these two cities correspond to the starting point and point of arrival of the first migration of the Abraham’s tribe (*Gen 11: 28-31*).

***III. The Hebrews in Egypt and Exodus***

The book of Exodus *(Ex: 1:11)* mentions the Egyptian city of Pi-Ramesses[[6]](#footnote-6) east of the Nile Delta, on the route taken by the Hebrews to leave Egypt. In a first time this information led to set the Exodus under the reign of Ramesses II (so-called "literary" theory based on the text of the Torah). But there is now some unanimity on the so-called "archaeological" theory that places the Biblical Exodus at the time of the expulsion of the Hyksos, Asiatic[[7]](#footnote-7) invaders who occupied Northern Egypt for a hundred years between the end of the Middle Kingdom and the beginning of the New Kingdom, c. 1550 B.C. At that time, a couple of rulers of Asiatic origin governed Upper Egypt from Thebes and it can be supposed they were close relatives of the northern occupiers[[8]](#footnote-8). Their Moon god Ah[[9]](#footnote-9) was particularly honored in Egypt from the end of the 17th Dynasty after the advent of this couple of rulers, King Seqenenre and Queen Ahhotep on the throne of Thebes. All their children bore a birth name that began with Ahmes "born of Ah," the Moon, and the name of their mother Queen Ahhotep meant "the one who honors the god Ah."

We know that the god of Hebrews revealed himself to Moses by the name Yahweh, but the meaning of the tetragram YHWH in Hebrew is apparently incomprehensible. It is however assured that it contains a form of the verb to be. If we consider that its first part (in Latin alphabet) would be the name of the Moon god Iâh, its second part could be an archaic form of the verb to be[[10]](#footnote-10), meaning « I am ». Indeed, Henri Meschonnic indicates that the Tetragram would have in part to do with the name of an older Semitic deity, Yah. He based on the fact that יה (Yah, or Jah in German language) is a synthetic spelling found several times in the Pentateuch (see *Ex 17:* *16*) instead of YHWH[[11]](#footnote-11). In Madian, God had said to Moses, "I am Yah" and Yah appears for the first time in the Song of Moses (*Ex. 15 : 2*) and shortly thereafter in *Ex. 5 :16*.

**IV. The Moon god Ah in Egypt**

The god Ah was never the subject of any particular worship in Egypt. It was primarily found as the first name of the mother of King Montuhotep of the 11th Dynasty[[12]](#footnote-12), in his Egyptian form of the crescent Moon with horns facing down. In fact, it appears that he was a family deity, promoted to the rank of dynastic god by the last rulers of the 17th Dynasty who were of Asiatic origin. From the beginning of their reign, Ah was represented in his Asiatic form, a full Moon in a crescent with horns turned upwards, until the 22nd year of reign of their son and successor, Pharaoh Ahmose. Afterwards he regained his Egyptian form with the horns turned down. He was then assimilated to the great god Thot, himself with lunar connotations, from the reign of Thuthmose I ("born of Thot"), the third pharaoh in the 18th Dynasty, where after him three other kings bore the same name.

His appearance in Egypt as a dynastic god in his Asiatic form was therefore ephemeral and the problem is where he was come from precisely. It can be objectively assumed that he was brought by the last rulers of the17th Dynasty, themselves related to the Hyksos rulers of the Delta come from Syria-Palestine (Retenu in Egyptian).[[13]](#footnote-13) This region was made up of powerful city-states, often at war with each other for commercial interests. The mother city of the Hyksos could be the fortress called Sharruken in Egyptian hieroglyphs, which was besieged and taken by King Ahmose of Thebes (first king of the 18th Dynasty) after a long siege of three years. This city is currently identified with the archaeological site of Tel-el-Ajul near Gaza[[14]](#footnote-14).

But one of the most important cities of the region in the second part of theSecond Millennium was the fortified oasis of Jericho which was excavated in the 1950s by the American archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon. She dated the destruction of the city[[15]](#footnote-15) circa 1550 B.C., which was confirmed by the carbon-14 analysis. In arabic the name of the city is : أريحا Rīḥa or Arīḥā ; in hebrew : יריחו Yerīḥo. The name Jericho could derive from the name of the Cananean moon god Yarikh, which could mean that this very ancient city was one of the first centers of worship of the lunar deities[[16]](#footnote-16).

**CONCLUSION**

The Yaweh form of the Israel god was mainly used in the Kingdom of Judah in southern Israel, close to Sinai and Midian. So, it could be the place of origin of the cult of the Moon god Ah who appeared in Egypt in the mid-16th Century B.C. It turns out that it was at that time that the Exodus of Hebrews took place, as it was the last rulers of this dynasty[[17]](#footnote-17) who drove out the Hyksos, the largely Amorites occupiers[[18]](#footnote-18) of Lower Egypt, they dominated for more than one century according to the Turin Papyrus [[19]](#footnote-19).

Kamose-Moïse le libérateur **Le cycle de Moïse (Ex 1 à Nb 22)**

*Ainsi, les traditions bibliques les plus anciennes et quelques indices provenant de textes égyptiens concordent-ils sur l'origine méridionale du yahwisme introduit en Canaan avec le groupe de Moïse, auquel le théonyme particulier « Yahwéh » a été révélé alors qu'il était gendre de Jethro, prêtre madianite***.**

*Le culte israélite ancien s'exprimait surtout à l'occasion de deux grandes fêtes de la pleine lune : celle du printemps (la Pâque, liée à l'Exode) et celle de l'automne (fête de la récolte).*

**(André Lemaire « Le Yahwisme ancien)**

**Dans le Coran, il est appelé le dieu tout-puissant et miséricordieux Ya-Sin** (Sourate 34). Ce sont deux lettres de l’alphabet arabe ou bien les deux dieux Lune de la Torah ?

1. El Shaddai (first occurrence in *Gen 17: 1*) was translated in greek by παντοκράτωρ: pantokrátôr «The Almighty God» in the Septuagint. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This account is said to have been written in the 7th century BC by Jews returning to Canaan after their exile in Babylon. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. According to the documentary hypothesis systematized in the 19th century by the German exegete Julius Wellhausen, the first five books of the Old Testament, forming the Pentateuch or Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) originate from four different sources: the Yahwist document (source J according to German spelling), the Elohist document (source E), the Deuteronomist document (source D) and the Priestly document (source P). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Currently in Iraq. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Currently in southeastern Turkey. This route was certainly not the most direct to go to Canaan (coast of the Levant), but it was necessary to make this long detour by the North to avoid crossing the deserts of Arabia and Syria where these pastors had found no pasture for their herds of small cattle. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The city of Pi-Ramesses built by Ramesses II in the 13th century BC. was right next to the ruins of Avaris, the ancient Hyksos fortress conquered and dismantled by Pharaoh Ahmose in the 16th Century BC. In the 7th Century, at the time of writing of the Torah, only the memory of the ramesside city had survived. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A term used by Egyptologists to refer to people of Middle East formerly known as Asia Minor (Little Asia) by Romans. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See my articles online: <http://www.antiqua91.fr/wa_files/2e_20partie_20Hyksos_20Corrig_C3_A9e_20en_202014.doc>  
   and <http://www.antiqua91.fr/wa_files/KAMOSE-Mo_C3_AFse.doc> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ah is the conventional transcription of the name of the Moon god in Egyptian hieroglyphs. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Some people assumed that Yahweh (YaHWéH) (*Ex 3:14*) could come from the Hebrew root HâYâH (to be). However, the root of the word is not HYH, but HWH which in Hebrew means "desire." So, one can think that Yahweh comes from Amorite dialects spoken by the Patriarchs, in which HWH (as in Aramaic) means "to be". [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Henri Meschonnic. *Gloires. Traduction des psaumes*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2001, Préface. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Graffiti of Schatt el Rigal at Jebel Silsileh. In Silke Roth, *Die Konigsmütter des Alten Ägypten von der Frühzeit bis zum Ende der 12. Dynastie*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The foreign origin of these sovereigns of Thebes and their direct kinship with the Hyksos rulers of the North is still disputed, despite the assertion of the Egyptian priest Manetho that the 17th Dynasty included both Theban kings and Hyksos: "Pastors, brothers from Phenicia, foreign kings who even took Memphis ”. In fact, it was after the flight of Antef (VII) Nubkheperre, the last Egyptian king of Thebes, that Asiatic rulers seized the throne of Upper Egypt remained vacant. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In the Bible (*Jos 19: 1*) Sharouken is one of the thirteen cities given as an inheritance to the tribe of Simeon at southwest of the Dead Sea. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. [Kenyon, Kathleen Mary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathleen_Kenyon) (1957). [*Digging Up Jericho*](https://books.google.com/books/about/DIGGING_UP_JERICHO.html?id=_z33N1QsSHEC). [London,](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London,_England)England: [Ernest Benn Limited](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Benn_Limited). pp. 213-218. [ISBN 978-0510033118](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Yarikh (also written as Jerah, Jarah, or Jorah, Hebrew spelling ירח) is a [moon god](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lunar_deity) in [Canaanite religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canaanite_religion) whose [epithets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epithet) are "illuminator of the heavens"', "illuminator of the myriads of stars" and "lord of the sickle". The latter epithet may come from the appearance of the crescent moon. The name of the city of [Jericho](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jericho) may derive from the name Yarikh, or from the Cannanite word for moon, Yareaẖ and may be connected with [Kušuḫ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ku%C5%A1u%E1%B8%AB" \o "Kušuḫ), the Hurrian moon god. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Their northern relative (Apophis Aaqenenre) ruling Avaris worshipped only Seth, the great god of storm and chaos for Egyptians, whom he had no doubt likened to Teshub the great god of the storm and king of the gods in the Hurrite pantheon. This Asiatic king rejected all the other gods of Egypt and persecuted their Egyptian priests (Papyrus Sallier I et Flavius Josephus from Manéthon *Contra Apionem*, I: 248-249). This could be seen as a first example of intolerance by a monotheistic people. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. However, some presence of Hurrian people could happen in the cosmopolite inhabitants of Avaris, the Hyksos capital city in the Delta (See: Von Beckerath, J. *Untersuchungen zur politische Geschichte der 2nten Zwischenzeit in Ägypten*. V. J.J. Augustin, Gluckstadt, New York, 1965). Van Seters, J. *The Hyksos. A new investigation*. Yale University Press, New haven, London, 1966).  
     [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. K.S.B. Ryholt, *The Political Situation in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period*, vol. 20, Copenhague, Museum Tusculanum Press, coll. « Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications », 1997, 463 pages. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)