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Vol. XLII, No.1

Half Yearly

Spring 1991

JOURNAL of JEWISH STUDIES

BM 1 .J63
Journal of Jewish studies.
42:1
Received on: 06-12-91
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY -
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

**PUBLISHED BY
THE OXFORD CENTRE FOR POSTGRADUATE HEBREW STUDIES**

ISSN 0022 - 2097

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Typeset in Times at Oxford University Computing Service

Journal of Jewish Studies

Edited by Geza Vermes

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*Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?**

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In the academic world of twenty or thirty years ago it was conventional to hold that the story of Judaism was one of a gradual, but inexorable, evolution from a Canaanite/Israelite pagan and mythological environment into the pure light of an unsullied monotheism. The point at which this breakthrough to monotheism was achieved was a subject of debate, but most scholars seem to have been agreed that it certainly took place. Moreover, Judaism in the post-exilic era was thought to have carried the process to such an extreme that excessive stress on the transcendental nature of God led Jews increasingly to perceive him as inaccessible to them. Israelite religion, and its successor, Judaism, was supposed to have made a decisive break with its pagan environment and so to have produced a wholly unique religion. I quote as an illustration of this position one of the better books of this era: T. C. Vriezen's *Religion of Ancient Israel*, published originally in 1963 and translated into English in 1967:

God in his oneness, his uniqueness, is so completely *other*¹ in character, in his mode of being-the-God-of-Israel, his all-controlling, all-governing relationship to this nation, his moral and supernal qualities, his faculties standing over and above the creation, his absolute power and holiness, that for the faithful of Israel nothing in the world offers to compare with him. That is why one is forced to say that monotheism in Israel is qualitatively and essentially something different in kind from monarchism, and even from the pantheizing monarchism of the ancient East.²

In the last twenty years or so there has been a radical change in the climate of Old Testament studies as scholars have come to realise that claims about the originality of ancient Israelite religion are virtually impossible to substantiate and relatively easy to demolish. Contrast Vriezen with this from Niels Peter Lemche's *Ancient Israel*, published in 1988:

All we can be sure of is that the Israelite conception of Yahweh during the period of the monarchy did not contain features which distinguish his worship from other types of religion in western Asia.³

* Presidential address to the British Association for Jewish Studies, Edinburgh, 21 August 1990.

¹ Author's italics.

² *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (London, 1967), p. 37.

³ *Ancient Israel* (Sheffield, 1988), p. 256.

Despite the changed climate in Old Testament studies of which Lemche's book is but one symptom, there still remains, however, a consensus that Judaism after the Exile represents a startling new development in the history of religion, and that it is the Jewish monotheistic conception of God that makes this religion stand out from all others. It will be my contention in this paper that it is hardly ever appropriate to use the term monotheism to describe the Jewish idea of God, that no progress beyond the simple formulas of Deuteronomy can be discerned in Judaism before the philosophers of the Middle Ages, and that Judaism never escapes from the legacy of the battles for supremacy between Yahweh, Ba'al and El from which it emerged.

I do not intend to proceed here by setting up a model definition of monotheism and then assessing the Jewish tradition against this yardstick. That would be too easy. Maimonides and the other Jewish philosophers knew a long time ago that Judaism would not match up to such a test; hence their massive effort to allegorize the tradition, just as the Greek philosophers before them had to allegorize Homer. What I propose to do instead is to try and observe the pattern of Jewish beliefs about God from the Exile to the Middle Ages to assess whether or not it is truly monistic. The results of my observations will lead me to the conclusion that most varieties of Judaism are marked by a dualistic pattern in which two divine entities are presupposed: one the supreme creator God, the other his vizier or prime minister, or some other spiritual agency, who really 'runs the show', or at least provides the point of contact between God and humanity. And even when, as in rabbinic Judaism, there clearly is one dominant divine figure, I doubt whether the picture of God presented to us is really unitary at all.

This reassessment of the supposed monotheistic nature of Judaism springs, in the first instance, from my work on Sefer Yeşira. Two aspects of this text are relevant here. Firstly, in a work which grew into its present shape between the third and eighth centuries C.E. and which purports to tell us how God created the world, there is no sign of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.⁴ The earliest manuscript of Sefer Yeşira has in §20 the following statement about how God created the world:

He formed substance from chaos and made it with fire and it exists, and he hewed out great columns from intangible air.

This statement is entirely congruous with what we find in Bereshit Rabba:

R. Huna said, in the name of Bar Qappara: 'If it were not written explicitly in Scripture, it would not be possible to say it: *God created the heaven and the earth. From what? From the earth was chaos (תהו), etc.*'

⁴ See my 'The Doctrine of Creation in Sefer Yeşira: Some Text-Critical Problems', forthcoming in the *Proceedings of the Congress of the European Association for Jewish Studies*, Troyes, 1990.

The position represented here by Sefer Yeşira and Rab Huna represents no advance whatsoever on Genesis chapter one. God creates order out of a pre-existing chaos; he does not create from nothing. Nearly all recent studies on the origin of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* have come to the conclusion that this doctrine is not native to Judaism, is nowhere attested in the Hebrew Bible, and probably arose in Christianity in the second century C.E. in the course of its fierce battle with Gnosticism.⁵ The one scholar who continues to maintain that the doctrine is native to Judaism, namely Jonathan Goldstein, thinks that it first appears at the end of the first century C.E., but has recently conceded the weakness of his position in the course of debate with David Winston.⁶ My view is that David Winston is correct to argue that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* came into Judaism from Christianity and Islam at the beginning of the Middle Ages and that even then it never really succeeded in establishing itself as the accepted Jewish doctrine on creation. Aristotelian views on the eternity of the world were perfectly acceptable in Judaism, as also were neo-platonist views on its emanation out of the One, because *creatio ex nihilo* could not be demonstrated from the Scriptures. Maimonides (*Guide*, II.26) concedes that rabbinic texts teach creation out of primordial matter and most commentators, starting with Samuel Ibn Tibbon, the first translator of his work into Hebrew, believe that Maimonides himself privately thought that the world was eternal.⁷

If then, before and even through the Middle Ages, Jews believed that God did not create the world out of nothing, where did the material for it come from? Clearly from the *tohu* and *bohu* of Genesis 1:2. But where did these come from? Either they were co-eternal with God, and hence compromised his unique status, or they came out of him. The Kabbalists were not afraid of drawing the latter conclusion, as we can see from the earliest text of the Kabbalah, the book *Bahir*:

There is in God a principle that is called 'Evil', and it lies in the north of God ... for the *tohu* is in the north, and *tohu* means precisely the evil that confuses men until they sin, and it is the source of all man's evil impulses.⁸

But where does this leave Judaism's supposed monotheism? Is a doctrine of monotheism conceivable without a doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*? Perhaps

⁵ See H. F. Weiss, *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie des hellenistischen und palästinischen Judentums* (Berlin, 1966); David Winston, 'The Book of Wisdom's Theory of Cosmogony', *History of Religions* 11 (1971), pp. 185–202; Georg Schmuttermayr, 'Schöpfung aus dem Nichts in 2 Makk 7,28?', *BZ* 17 (1973), pp. 203–28; Gerhard May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts* (Berlin, 1978).

⁶ 'The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo', *JJS* 35 (1984), pp. 127–35; and 'Creation Ex Nihilo: Recantations and Restatements', *JJS* 38 (1987), pp. 187–94. Winston defends himself against Goldstein in a reply published in *JJS* 37 (1986), pp. 88–91.

⁷ See Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 188 ff., 218 ff.

⁸ Translation cited from C. G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (London, 1965), p. 92. See also his *Das Buch Bahir* (Leipzig, 1923), pp. 116 f.

this is what has led scholars in the teeth of the evidence to suggest that *creatio ex nihilo* is at least presupposed in the Hebrew Bible, even if it is nowhere explicit. And if this doctrine is so weakly rooted in Judaism, even as late as the Middle Ages, then we can only conclude that Judaism never escaped from the Canaanite mythological background which all scholars now see behind biblical teaching on creation. The potentially evil *tohu* and *bohu* has always been there, limiting God's power and frustrating his purposes. However often he defeats it, it always comes back because ultimately it is as primordial as he is himself, perhaps, as the mystics thought, even a part of himself. When contemporary Jewish theologians attempt to confront the problem of the Holocaust by re-assessing God's omnipotence, they are not innovating.⁹ If my colleague John Gibson is correct, that is precisely the move made by the author of Job in the second speech from the whirlwind.¹⁰ But it does remove one of the most generally accepted components of monotheism.

In one other respect my studies on Sefer Yesira have led me to question generally accepted definitions of Jewish monotheism, and this is an issue which I raised in my last paper to the society at its conference in Oxford in 1988.¹¹ In that paper I argued that scholars have been wrong when they have stated that the experience of mystical unity with God is missing in Judaism because it is incompatible with Jewish definitions of monotheism. In order to write his text at all, the author of Sefer Yesira had to identify himself with God, because he claimed to know what God knows without making any reference to an experience of revelation. To quote that paper:

What SY, and later on the Kabbala, offers Jews is the opportunity 'to think God's thoughts after him', and hence in a real sense to experience imaginatively what it is like to be God.¹²

Moshe Idel in his *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988) goes even further than that in order to correct what he sees as the misleading impression given to the world of scholarship by Scholem's domination of the subject. He argues that the *unio mystica* can be found in Judaism even in its most extreme forms and he quotes an impressive array of texts to support his argument.¹³ Many of these presuppose that humans can become divine and dispose of the powers of God.

This theme of self-identification with God, once we start to explore it,

⁹ See e.g. Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust* (New York, 1981).

¹⁰ 'On Evil in the Book of Job', *ASCRIBE TO THE LORD: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter Craigie* (Sheffield, 1988), pp. 399–419.

¹¹ 'Was God a Magician? Sefer Yesira and Jewish Magic', *JJS* 40 (1989), pp. 225–37.

¹² 'Was God a Magician?', p. 234.

¹³ See chapter 4 of *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, entitled 'Unio Mystica in Jewish Mysticism', pp. 59–73.

leads us virtually everywhere in Judaism, from the style of biblical prose¹⁴ to the claims of Jewish magicians,¹⁵ but above all to the claims of the Hekhalot literature that a man, Enoch, ascended to heaven and was metamorphosed into Metatron, the 'little Yahweh'.¹⁶ The theme of the apotheosis of the wise man, the mystic, binds the Jewish mystical trend together with Jewish Apocalyptic of the post-exilic era, for the most widespread version of belief in the Afterlife in the post-Maccabean period assumed that the faithful would join the heavenly assembly and become like the 'angels', the 'sons of God', the stars.¹⁷ The Dead Sea Scrolls seem to assume that this is a goal attainable in this life¹⁸ as does the present tense phrasing of Luke 20:36:

those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die any more, because they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

The theme of 'becoming like one of us' reveals itself as the lurking sub-text of Judaism from Adam to Nachman of Bratslav. But how does this material square with the supposed transcendental monotheism of Judaism from the post-exilic period on? Not at all, as far as I can see!

Those, then, are the two areas in which my work on Sefer Yesira has led me to question generally accepted definitions of Jewish monotheism. Let us now expand the scope of this enquiry to cover the fields of Jewish angelology and Jewish magic. These are two areas where the steadily increasing weight of evidence makes very clear the continuity of Jewish religious belief and practice from its ancient Canaanite sources. Who were the angels and the archangels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim, Satan, Azazel and Mastema? The Hebrew Bible is quite clear on the fact that these figures belong to the class of divine beings *בני אלהים* / *בני אלים*, members of the 'host of heaven' (*צבא השמים*). Yahweh belongs to this class of beings, but is distinguished from them by his kingship over the heavenly host. However, he is not different from them in kind. This reflects the probable origin of Yahweh as one member of the heavenly host, namely the national god of the Israelite people, who became king of the gods when he was identified with El Elyon, the head of the Canaanite pantheon. This identification of Yahweh with El (*יהוה הוא האלהים*) is the essential theme of the Hebrew Bible. But Yahweh in Old Testament times had many rivals who are explicitly named in ways which make quite clear that these other gods were

¹⁴ See R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981), p. 157.

¹⁵ See 'Was God a Magician?', p. 235.

¹⁶ For references see 'Was God a Magician?', p. 235.

¹⁷ See e.g. Dan 12:3; Wis. Sol. 5:5; I Enoch 104:2.

¹⁸ See e.g. IQH 3:19–23; IQSb 4:22–6; IQS 11:7–9; cf. Jubilees 31:14.

believed to exist.¹⁹ He also, at least in popular belief, had a female consort.²⁰

One key text, Deuteronomy 32:8f., lays bare the structure of these Israelite beliefs, and also in the history of its text shows us the development from Yahweh to Elohim taking place. The original text here, as in the LXX and supported by the DSS,²¹ probably read:

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the gods (בני אלהים / בני אל²²). And Yahweh's portion was his people Jacob, Israel his allotted heritage.

The MT has removed the reference here to the gods or the angels and substituted 'the sons of Israel',²³ while in verse 9 it identifies Yahweh with Elyon by reading כִּי חֵלֶק יְהוָה whereas the LXX presupposes a Hebrew text which had כִּי חֵלֶק יְהוָה. As Lemche puts it, 'the Hebrew text identifies the "Most High" (Elyon) with Yahweh, while the Greek version apparently ranges Yahweh among the sons of the Most High, that is, treats him as a member of the pantheon of gods who are subordinate to the supreme God, El Elyon'.²⁴

In post-exilic and later Jewish sources, of course, there is no awareness that El Elyon²⁵ was ever anything other than Yahweh himself, but the pattern of belief revealed in this text persisted. So we find throughout Judaism the idea, itself probably of Canaanite origin²⁶ but with similar ideas in Greek religion,²⁷ that God has assigned the rule of each of the seventy nations of the earth to one of his angels, members of the heavenly host. But the knowledge of who these angels originally were was not lost in the tradition. The following comment on the *Shema* in Deut. R. is most instructive. I translate from Oxford Ms. 147, as edited by Saul Lieberman:²⁸

Hear, O Israel (Dt. 6:4). This refers to Lam. 3:24—'the portion of the Lord, says my soul'. What is 'the portion of the Lord'? When the Holy One, Blessed be He, shared out his world to the nations of the world, as it says, *When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance* (Dt. 32:8), and they each chose

their own god, one chose for itself Michael, one chose Gabriel, yet another chose the sun and the moon. But Israel chose for itself the Holy One, Blessed be He, as it is said, *For the Lord's portion is his people*, etc. (Dt. 32:8).

That the rabbis were well aware of the danger for Jewish belief in this identification of Michael, Gabriel etc. with the pagan gods is clear from the following midrash, also from Deut. R.:²⁹

When the Holy One, Blessed be He, descended to Mount Sinai, says R. Ammi from Jaffa, there descended with him 22,000 of the ministering angels, as it says רֶכֶב אֱלֹהִים רַבְתִּים אֶלְפֵי שָׁנָאן (Ps. 68:18). What is שָׁנָאן? The most beautiful and praiseworthy amongst them, namely, Michael and his group and Gabriel and his group. And Israel looked at them and saw that they were praiseworthy and beautiful and they were struck dumb. And when the Holy One, Blessed be He, saw them, he said to them, 'Do not go astray after one of these angels who came down with me; they are all my servants. I am the Lord, your God.'

That this was no theoretical danger can be seen, not only from Jewish magical texts where Michael and Gabriel etc. loom large, but also by references in non-Jewish texts to Jewish worship of the angels.³⁰ The rabbis had to mount a tremendous propaganda battle in the midrashim to downgrade the angels and stress Israel's superiority to them. Hence the theme, so comprehensively studied by Peter Schäfer, and so widespread in the midrash, of the rivalry between the angels and human beings. As Schäfer concludes, Israel and humanity are exalted in order to keep the angels in their place.³¹ Here also is the context for that phrase so often repeated in the midrash: 'not by means of an angel and not by means of a messenger'.³² I see no difference between the range and scope of rabbinic polemic against the angels and prophetic polemic in the Old Testament against the worship of other gods. The rabbis even had to ban the making of images of angels and other heavenly creatures, as well as the practice of sacrificing to angels. The archangel Michael is expressly mentioned in the latter connection.³³

One way of combating the danger of Jews worshipping angels was the development of the idea that angels are ephemeral creatures. A widely cited midrash on Lamentations 3:23 ('they are new every morning') has the angelic chorus created and destroyed every day. But somehow Michael and Gabriel could not be demoted in this fashion. As Gen. R. 78:1 puts it: 'all of the other angels change every day, but they do not'. Spinoza, that acute

²⁹ Lieberman, p. 68. Cf. P. Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen* (Berlin, 1975), pp. 47 f.

³⁰ See e.g. the *Kerygma Petrou* ('Neither worship him in the manner of the Jews; for they also, who think that they alone know God, do not understand, worshipping angels, the months and the moon'); E. Hennecke (trans. R. McL. Wilson), *New Testament Apocrypha* (London, 1965), vol. II, p. 100. See also Colossians 2:18.

³¹ Cf. *Rivalität*, pp. 51, 228 ff.

³² For a list of the texts, see Schäfer, *Rivalität*, pp. 48 ff.

³³ For the texts see Schäfer, *Rivalität*, pp. 67 f.

¹⁹ See e.g. Judges 11:24 (Chemosh); Jer. 46:15 (Apis); Jer. 49:1, 3 (Milcom).

²⁰ Lemche, op. cit., pp. 226 f.

²¹ See App. to BHS.

²² See BHS ad loc.

²³ Identifying the number of the nations (Genesis 10) with the number of Jacob's (Israel's) sons (Gen. 46:27).

²⁴ *Ancient Israel*, p. 226.

²⁵ The title Elyon is used in Deuteronomy only in ch. 32:8. The non-Jewish origin of the name can be seen in the fact that the only two uses of it in the Pentateuch are put on the lips of non-Israelites (Gen. 14:18 and Num. 24:16).

²⁶ See the reference to the 'seventy sons of Athirat' in the Baal Anat epic, J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh, 1977), p. 63.

²⁷ See Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (London, 1974), vol. I, p. 187.

²⁸ *Midrash Debarim Rabbah* (Jerusalem, 1940), p. 65.

biblical scholar, spotted this problem a long time ago when he remarked: 'we must remain in doubt whether Moses thought that these beings who acted as God's viceregents were created by Him, for he has stated nothing, so far as we know, about their creation and origin'.³⁴ We will come back shortly to the primordial nature of Michael and Gabriel.

None of this rabbinic polemic would have been necessary if lots of Jews had not continued the old Israelite pagan practices and simply substituted the angels for the Canaanite gods. The names and functions of many of these angels relate them to natural phenomena³⁵ and are exactly equivalent to the minor nature divinities of the Greek pantheon and the nature spirits ubiquitous in all human societies. In some cases, we can see the old Canaanite gods still there in rabbinic Judaism, even retaining their old titles. Prince Yam, for example, lives on in the Babylonian Talmud and in some of the midrashim, and his opposition to Israel is located precisely where we should expect it: at the Sea of Reeds, or, as my colleague Nicholas Wyatt prefers to translate ים סוף, 'the sea of extinction'.³⁶ The mythological overtones of the crossing of the ים סוף are thus preserved in rabbinic Judaism as are numerous other remnants of older Canaanite beliefs. Indeed, Irving Jacobs has argued that rabbinic Judaism has preserved intact the full version of the battle with the chaos monster which in the Old Testament has been broken into dislocated poetic fragments.³⁷ There are rich, as yet unexplored, pickings in rabbinic midrash for scholars interested in the Canaanite background to Israelite religion. This is one area where our specialization into Ugaritic scholars, Old Testament scholars, and Judaists, really lets us down. To appreciate the continuity one needs to be all three.

Let us look now at just one example of how Jewish angelology reveals a pattern of religion that is anything but monotheistic. In the account of the Exodus and the Crossing of the Red Sea in the Book of Jubilees chapter 48 there are three divine actors. At the beginning, the person who attacked Moses on his way into Egypt and forced Zipporah to circumcize their son is identified as Prince Mastema, not the Lord as in the biblical text. This is interesting since many commentators on Ex. 4:24-26 think that Yahweh is here identified with some sort of local demon. In what follows in Jubilees 48, we seem to be in the world of Homer's *Iliad*. The Egyptians, spurred on by Prince Mastema, pursue Israel, who are saved by the Angel of the Presence and God working together. The Angel of the Presence, who recounts the story to Moses, explicitly uses the plural and says, 'We saved Israel from his hand' (Jub. 48:13). Precisely the same form is to be seen behind Daniel chapters 8-12, where war on earth parallels war in heaven and the heavenly

שרים battle on behalf of their earthly protégés (Dan. 10:13, 20 f.). Admittedly, the intervention of God is decisive in determining the outcome, but the same goes for Zeus in the *Iliad*³⁸ and El in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle.³⁹ This same pattern is also extensively attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls, especially the *War Scroll*:

[Be brave and] strong for the battle of God! For this day is [the time of the battle of] God against all the host of Satan, [and of the judgement of] all flesh. The God of Israel lifts his hand in His marvellous [might] against all the spirits of wickedness. [The hosts of] the warrior 'gods' gird themselves for battle, [and the] formations of the Holy Ones [prepare themselves] for the Day [of Revenge] ...

(IQM 15:13 f.)

In one fragment of the *War Scroll*, Michael, Israel's champion, is quoted as saying, 'I am reckoned with the gods' (אני עם אלים אתחשב) 4Q491 fr. 11), presumably a necessary reassurance to the faithful.

This theme of heavenly opposition to God is continued in the rabbinic haggadah in which we find angels opposing God's plans for Israel at every stage. They tried to argue him out of creating human beings in the first place, then to stop Moses ascending to heaven to receive the Torah, and finally to stop the Shekinah descending to the Temple. The motive for the angels' actions is jealousy of Israel and is nearly always linked to discussions of Israel's election. The angels here, as in the non-rabbinic texts discussed earlier, are surrogates for the gentile nations and their gods. The rabbis adapted the earlier theme of the battles of the gods/angels in order to discuss and to justify Israel's election.

So when we look at Jewish angelology in the Second Temple and rabbinic periods what we seem to have is a development away from the monotheism which is more nearly attained in the Book of Deuteronomy. Some scholars explain the apparent proliferation of belief in angels in the post-exilic period as a reaction to the distancing of God from Israel consequent upon the adoption of a transcendental monotheism. A much more likely explanation is that Deuteronomy stands apart from the mainstream of Israelite and Jewish beliefs and witnesses to the views of a small coterie of priests and scribes, the group which Morton Smith called 'The Yahweh Alone Party'.⁴⁰ In terms of quantity, texts which attest to the kind of beliefs about angels which I have been discussing are far more numerous than those which stand in the tradition of Deuteronomy. They must be telling us what most Jews believed and probably always had believed.

³⁸ See Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 125 f.

³⁹ See J. C. L. Gibson, 'The Theology of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle', *Orientalia* 53 (1984), pp. 202-19.

⁴⁰ See his *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (repr. London, 1987).

³⁴ *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, ch. 2, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York, 1951), pp. 36 f.

³⁵ See e.g. I Enoch 60:17; Jubilees 2:2.

³⁶ For the texts see Schäfer, *Rivaitat*, pp. 56 f.

³⁷ See Irving Jacobs, 'Elements of Near-Eastern Mythology in Rabbinic Aggadah', *JJS* 28 (1977), pp. 1-11.

Texts and artifacts witnessing to the widespread use of magic by Jews in all periods are becoming available in ever-increasing numbers. Peter Schäfer, in an article in the latest issue of *JJS*, is promising us a rich harvest from the Cairo Geniza.⁴¹ Most of these texts cast a dark shadow over the supposed monotheism of Judaism. Take the text found on one hitherto unpublished amulet from the Geniza:⁴²

I further adjure and decree upon you, all you (various) types of male and female demons, male and female liliths, evil spirits, male and female harmful spirits, male and female, which are made from fire, from water, from air, and from earth. And very particularly you seven spirits which Ashmedai, the King of the demons, taught King Solomon. Those which penetrate the entrails of women and crush their issue ... In the name of El Shaddai, before whom you tremble and whom you fear. In the name of Michael, your master. In the name of Ashmedai, your King ... So that you depart, go away, flee and stay away from this woman.

Or this invocation from the text on a magic bowl now at the Hebrew University Institute of Archaeology:⁴³

In the name of Betiel and Yequiel, and in the name of " the Great, the angel, who has eleven names ...

What is striking about these texts is that the practitioners appeal to God and his angels without making any clear distinction between them. On the magic bowl Yahweh is even called an angel. This lack of differentiation between the divine beings is by no means unusual in the magic texts. Much more could be said, and will be said in future, as more of these texts are published, about how our increased knowledge of the extent and nature of Jewish magic must lead to a revision of our views on the nature of Judaism. However, I will conclude this brief reference to Jewish magic with some excerpts from a bowl text which will lead us into what I think is the most widely attested pattern of Jewish beliefs about God:

[By] your name I make this amulet that it may be a healing to this one, for the threshold (of the house) ... I bind the rocks of the earth, and tie down the mysteries of heaven ... I rope, tie and suppress all demons and harmful spirits ... In case I do not know the name, it has already been explained to me at the time of the seven days of creation ... you are roped, tied and suppressed, all of you under the feet of this Marnaqa son of Qala. In the name of Gabriel, the mighty hero, who kills all heroes who are victorious in battle, and in the name of Yeho'el who shuts the mouth of all [heroes]. In the name of Yah, Yah, Yah, Sabaoth. Amen, Amen. Selah.⁴⁴

⁴¹ 'Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages', *JJS* 41 (1990), pp. 75-91.

⁴² Schäfer, op. cit., pp. 84 f.

⁴³ Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1985), p. 135.

⁴⁴ Naveh and Shaked, pp. 159-61.

These three magical texts all come from the talmudic or later periods. They show religious beliefs untouched by those of Deuteronomy and the rabbis. They, and the many others like them, can hardly be described as monotheistic. Indeed, they are scarcely even 'monarchistic', to use Vriezen's term, since Yahweh is reduced to not much more than an efficacious magic name. The active roles are played by Michael, Gabriel and Yehoel. But who are they?

If, then, monotheism seems an inappropriate term with which to describe all the rich variety of Jewish beliefs about God, at least before the Middle Ages, what alternative description should be offered? It seems to me that something like 'a cooperative dualism' would be a more appropriate description than monotheism. The rabbinic term for it was the belief in 'two powers in heaven'. When Yahweh was identified with El and became the head of the pantheon, the pattern we saw behind Deut. 32:8 f. remained unchanged. Michael stepped into the vacant slot and became the number two in the hierarchy, the special representative of Israel and her protector against her enemies. As John Emerton pointed out as long ago as 1958, this is the clue to the imagery of the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man in Daniel 7.⁴⁵ From the Book of Daniel on, nearly every variety of Judaism maintained the pattern of the supreme God plus his vice-regent/vizier, or some similar agency who relates Israel to God. The names change but the roles remain the same. Sometimes the angel is Yehoel as on the magic bowl. Note this name! Yahweh is El. Sometimes it is Metatron. In 11QMelch it is Melchizedek. In Philo it is the Logos. For the mystics and the midrashim it is the Prince of the Presence or the *Sar Torah*, for the Kabbalah the Shekinah or the Sefirot, for the medieval philosophers the Active Intellect. For the rabbis it may suffice to quote the conclusion reached by Irving Jacobs in his study 'Near Eastern Mythology in Rabbinic Aggadah'. Discussing the myth of the divine combat with the chaos monster, he says:

Rabbinic legend, however, has preserved the more original form of the combat myth. The combination of the divine hero and his supporting deity is retained, although translated into acceptable terms. The national god and hero of the pantheon in the polytheistic versions becomes a prince of the celestial beings, who exercises a special guardianship over Israel. The supporting deity is God himself, who enables Gabriel's sword to vanquish Leviathan.⁴⁶

Hardly any variety of Judaism seems to have been able to manage with just one divine entity. Needless to say, this situation left many Jews confused, especially about the identity of the number two in the hierarchy. We all know the story of how Elisha ben Abuyah went up to heaven and, seeing Metatron seated at the entrance, mistook him for God himself.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ 'The Origin of the Son of Man Imagery', *JTS* 9 (1958), pp. 225-42. See Dan. 7:13 f., 10:21, 12:1 and also I Enoch 20:5 f., Test. Levi 5:6.

⁴⁶ Irving Jacobs, op. cit., p. 10.

⁴⁷ See *bHag.* 15a.

This is not surprising. In the Visions of Ezekiel, one of the earliest of the Merkabah texts, Metatron is seated in the third heaven and is identified as the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7.⁴⁸ In one of the Hekhalot texts he is identified as 'the god who appeared to Moses in the burning bush',⁴⁹ in others he is called יהוה הקטן (the little Yahweh).⁵⁰ Here is the context for the sustained rabbinic attempt to confront what they saw as the error of assuming the presence of 'two powers' in heaven. They were not, as earlier scholars thought, confronting the metaphysical dualism of Gnosticism and Zoroastrianism.

Most of this material has been ably studied by Alan Segal in his *Two Powers in Heaven* (Leiden, 1977) and by David Halperin in that important, but rather lengthy, book *The Faces of the Chariot* (Tübingen, 1988). Halperin, in particular, brings to light the rabbinic unease about much material in the Hebrew Bible which seemed to them too close to paganism for comfort and which they wished to keep from the attention of other Jews. The material which Halperin amasses on the demonic undertones of Ezekiel's *hayyot* and the Merkabah and their connection with the Golden Calf is particularly interesting for my purposes. As Halperin comments, in this material 'the wall between God and idols collapses'.⁵¹

The rabbinic answer to the 'two powers' heresy, apart from the widespread effort to counter it at the exegetical level, seems to have been to split up God himself into two aspects: the Attribute of Justice and the Attribute of Mercy. Following a practice first attested in Philo, these two attributes were designated by the divine names יהוה and אלהים. But with אלהים aligned with the Attribute of Justice and יהוה with the Attribute of Mercy the rabbis have preserved intact the dualistic pattern of Dt. 32:8f. Consider the following passages from Genesis Rabbah 8:4–5. The midrash has just explained in connection with an exegesis of Ps. 1:6 that in order to create humanity God had to associate himself with the Attribute of Mercy. It goes on:

R. Hanina did not explain the verse in this way. But [he said]: When He came to create the first human being He took counsel with the ministering angels. He said to them, 'Shall we make humanity?' (Gen. 1:26). They said to Him, 'What will be his nature?'

There then follows an exegesis of Ps. 1:6 at the end of which R. Hanina comments:

He revealed to them that righteous descendants would come from the first human being, but He did not reveal to them that wicked descendants would

come forth from him. For if He had revealed to them that wicked descendants would come forth from him, the Attribute of Justice (מידת הדין) would not have given permission for humanity to have been created.

Here God, in association with his Attribute of Mercy, has to conceal from his other aspect, the Attribute of Justice, his intention to create human beings.

This inner conflict within God, which is in reality a conflict between two gods, is reinforced even more sharply in the next paragraph in Bereshit Rabbah:

R. Simon said: When the Holy One, Blessed be He, came to create the first human beings, the ministering angels formed sects and parties. Some said, 'Let them be created', others said, 'Let them not be created', in line with Ps. 85:11—*Mercy and Truth confronted each other, Righteousness and Peace warred with each other*. Mercy said, 'Let them be created, for they will perform deeds of mercy'. Truth said, 'Let them not be created, for they are entirely false'. ... What then did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do? He took Truth and threw it to the ground.

The ministering angels then remonstrate with God for this disgraceful behaviour and start countering it with biblical texts. The paragraph ends as follows:

R. Huna Rabba of Sepphoris said: While the ministering angels were arguing with each other, keeping each other preoccupied, the Holy One, Blessed be He, created them. He said to them, 'What's the point arguing? I have already created humanity!'

So, in order to create human beings, God has to keep his own Attribute of Justice in ignorance and throw Truth to the ground. The rabbinic attempt to maintain the unity of God by identifying יהוה with his Attribute of Mercy and אלהים with his Attribute of Justice does not work. What we still have here in the Midrash—and this is only one of numerous examples⁵²—is the conflict between יהוה, the particular god of Israel, and אל, the head of the Canaanite pantheon, who stands for some kind of universal principle of justice above the heads of the other quarrelling gods. The ministering angels are the gods of the gentiles opposed in the divine assembly to the special privileges which יהוה wants for Israel. The atmosphere is that of Psalm 82. יהוה can only get his way by overthrowing אל, who stands for Justice and Truth, and that is precisely what happened in the history of Israelite religion. There was no way in which the election of Israel could be squared with the principle of equity and the rabbis knew it. One or the other had to give way. So in order to counteract the heresy of the two powers, whose roots indeed go back to the two names for God in the Hebrew

⁵² See A. P. Hayman, 'Rabbinic Judaism and the Problem of Evil', *SJT* 29 (1976), pp. 461–76.

⁴⁸ *The Visions of Ezekiel*, lines 71 ff., ed. I. Gruenwald in I. Weinstock (ed.), *Temirin*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1972), pp. 128 f.

⁴⁹ P. Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1981), §341.

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, §§15, 73, 405.

⁵¹ *The Faces of the Chariot*, p. 185.

Bible,⁵³ the rabbis had to incorporate this inbuilt logical contradiction into the personality of God. But is the result monotheism? In theory, maybe, but functionally it is not.

There is one other area in which the ancient Canaanite background to Israelite religion has imposed a lasting dualistic pattern upon Judaism. It is clear both from the Hebrew Bible itself and from extra-biblical literary, inscriptional and archaeological evidence that many, perhaps the majority, of ancient Israelites worshipped Yahweh alongside his female consort, his *asherah*. Biblical and post-biblical wisdom literature preserves some of the language of this earlier time in the way in which it speaks about personified Wisdom. Wisdom is a primordial being (Prov. 8:22–31) who sits beside God's throne as his consort (Wis. Sol. 9:4). She is the divine 'mother of all things' (Philo, *Leg. All.*, II.49). In Philo this figure becomes the Logos which he can even describe as a 'second god'.⁵⁴ The pattern was very useful for aligning Judaism with Middle Platonism and its distinction between the unknown supreme God and the demiurge. In rabbinic Judaism this second entity becomes the pre-existent Torah, the ground-plan of the universe, and God's instrument in creation (cf. Ber. R. 1:1). For the medieval philosophers it was the Active Intellect; for the Kabbalah the Shekhinah and the Matronit.⁵⁵ The dualistic pattern is nearly always there.

The fact that functionally Jews believed in the existence of two gods explains the speed with which Christianity developed so fast in the first century towards the divinization of Jesus. Some Christian authors used the Yahweh/Michael/Gabriel pattern and identified him with the number two figure in the divine hierarchy. The angel Christology of the Ebionites is undoubtedly in touch here with the earliest forms of Christianity. There is a nice quotation from the Gospel of the Hebrews which neatly shows this pattern at work:

When Christ wished to come upon the earth to men, the good Father summoned a mighty power in heaven, which was called Michael, and entrusted Christ to the care thereof. And the power came into the world and it was called Mary, and Christ was in her womb seven months.⁵⁶

Other, better-educated Christians, used the wisdom/logos archetype, which gave Christ his role in creation. Whether or not the Enoch pattern of assumption to heaven and metamorphosis into Metatron was also at work here is difficult to say, because of the still unresolved problem of the date of

⁵³ As late as the tenth century Saadya still felt it necessary to correct the misuse of the names יהוה and אלהים as support for the 'two powers' heresy, as well as correcting misunderstandings of Genesis 1:26. See his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* II.3, V.8.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of this in connection with the 'two powers' belief see Segal, *Two Powers*, pp. 159 ff.

⁵⁵ See Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York, 1967), and his 'Matronit: The Goddess of the Kabbala', *HR* 4 (1964), pp. 53–68.

⁵⁶ E. Hennecke, op. cit., vol. I, p. 163.

the Similitudes of Enoch. But the Melchizedek text at Qumran is early enough to justify us in believing that the ground for Christology had already been well laid in pre-Christian Judaism. Until Christianity tried, always unsuccessfully I think, to fit the Holy Spirit into the picture, it did not deviate as far as one might otherwise think from a well established pattern in Judaism. Is there any better explanation for why thousands of Jews in the first century so easily saw Christianity as the fulfilment of Judaism and so easily accepted that believing in the divinity of Jesus was perfectly compatible with their ancestral religion?

I conclude, then, that monotheism, as used, for example, by Vriezen in that passage with which I began this paper, is indeed a misused word in Jewish Studies. The pattern of Jewish beliefs about God remains monarchistic throughout. God is king of a heavenly court consisting of many other powerful beings, not always under his control. For most Jews, God is the sole object of worship, but he is not the only divine being. In particular, there is always a prominent number two in the hierarchy to whom Israel in particular relates. This pattern is inherited from biblical times. The attempt of the compilers of the Hebrew Bible to merge יהוה and אלהים never really succeeded.