

**THE ORIGIN AND
INTERPRETATION OF THE
TETRAGRAMMATON**

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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
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BY
HANS H. SPOER

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

PREFACE.

THE problem which the question after the origin and interpretation of the Tetragrammaton offers to the historical student of the Old Testament is one of the most fascinating ones of the many which the Jewish Scriptures present. Unfortunately the material from which to work is not very large. As the sources outside of the Old Testament are of a rather doubtful value, we are compelled to base our investigations mainly upon the few statements contained in the Jewish writings and the study of the historical development of (1) the political status of the Hebrews, and (2) the religious belief of the Hebrews.

I count myself happy that my teacher, Professor Prince, has permitted me to choose this subject for my dissertation. My most hearty thanks are due to him for the kind interest which he has always taken in my work and for his suggestive instruction.

I also gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to my teacher, Professor F. Brown. To his inspiring teaching I owe my love for the historical study of the Old Testament. His kind interest has never been wanting, and to him I owe many valuable suggestions.

My thanks are also due to my teacher, Professor Osborn, for his teaching and the kind interest he has taken in my work.

This dissertation was completed in the summer of 1899. Circumstances prevented me from referring to the latest literature on the subject.

HANS H. SPOER.

NEW YORK, October, 1901.

THE ORIGIN AND INTERPRETATION OF THE TETRAGRAMMATON.

The most primitive name of God found in the Old Testament is אלה . The root of the word is doubtful. The question of the etymology is very intricate and the conclusions are dubious. Some derive the word from the stem אל ;¹ others derive it from the stem לה , with reference to אל ,² though the meaning they give to this root varies. This name is very rarely used in prose. According to E אל was the God of the patriarch Jacob, whose center of worship was Bethel, Gen. 31:13; 35:1-3. In early poetry אל seems to have become a proper name. It is used 217 times.

The divine name אלהים is a *pluralis majesticus*. It is characteristic of Ephraimitic writers. J uses it chiefly in poetry, *e. g.*, Gen. 3:1b, 3, 5; 9:27; 39:9; 44:16; Deut. 32:17, 39. P employs it in Genesis 78 times. אלהים is used to signify the God of Israel 2,400 times; it designates rulers 170 times, *e. g.*, Exod. 21:6;³ "angels," אלהים (בני ה) Job 1:6, "divine beings") Gen. 1:27; "gods," *e. g.*, Exod. 18:11. The question arises now, Is Elohim connected with El? The probability that אלהים is a plural of אל is very strong. There exists in biblical Aramaic² a number of words with two consonants which insert a ה in forming the plural form, *e. g.*, אב "father," plur. אבהון ; שם "name," plur. שמהון ; also Syriac:³ אב "father," plur. אבהון ; אמ "mother," plur. אמהון ; אנד "female servant," plur. אנהון . We have also a Hebrew word which forms the plural in this manner: אמה "female servant," plural form אמהות .

¹ Gesenius, *Thesaurus*; F. Hitzig, *Zeitschrift für wiss. Theol.*, Vol. XVIII; T. Noldeke, *MBAW.*, 1880, p. 774.

² Against this interpretation see *ZAW.*, Vol. XI, pp. 181 sq.

³ Cf. Marti, *Grammat. d. bibl. Aram.*, § 76.

⁴ Cf. Brockelmann, *Syriache Grammatik*, § 118.

In this way we may also account for the ה in אֱלֹהִים. The *ô* is due to the fact that the primitive Semitic *ô* has perpetuated itself only in rare instances, having usually changed into *ô*.⁴ Nöldeke thinks that there may be a possible connection between אֱלֹהִים and אֱלֹהִים.

Another name given to God is אֱלֹהֵינוּ. This name occurs 52 times in the Old Testament. Of these it is found 42 times in the book of Job. In pre-exilic times this name is employed only twice, Deut. 32:15, 17, provided this poem is not post-exilic. In fact, such words as אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, and אֱלֹהֵינוּ, which are of a very late origin, would forbid us to regard Deut., chap. 32, as being pre-exilic. Cornill⁵ says: "We scarcely dare take an earlier date for the poem than the end of the Babylonian exile, if we have not to assign it to a much later date." Ps. 18, in which this name occurs, I believe belongs to a period not prior to that of Ezra and Nehemiah, perhaps to a very late period. Dhm. *in loco*, regards the psalm as "sehr jung," and assigns it to the second century, to the times of the Hasmoneans. It is remarkable, however, that אֱלֹהֵינוּ is employed only once in the whole psalm, while in all the other cases the ordinary term for God is used. In the parallel passage, 2 Sam. 22:32, we have אֱלֹהֵינוּ; it leaves, therefore, no doubt that אֱלֹהֵינוּ is an insertion by a later editor. The other passages where the word אֱלֹהֵינוּ occurs as a designation of the God of Israel are Pss. 50:22; 114:7; 139:19; Prov. 30:5; Isa. 44:8; Hab. 3:3; Neh. 9:17. None of these passages is pre-exilic. Hab., chap. 3, does not belong to the genuine prophecy, but is a much later addition. This shows that אֱלֹהֵינוּ has not been used in the Old Testament previous to the times of the exile nor during the exile. Therefore, if אֱלֹהֵינוּ is the singular form of אֱלֹהִים, the very curious fact presents itself to us that the plural form has been in use centuries before even anyone thought of using the singular form. It is much easier, however, to account for the form אֱלֹהֵינוּ as being an artificial poetic singular obtained by inference from Elohîm. אֱלֹהֵינוּ is used a number of times, not of the God of Israel, but of a heathen deity, *e. g.*, 2 Chron. 32:15; Dan. 11:37-39; Hab. 1:11; 2 Kings 17:31, *Kethib*; Job 12:6. Hab. 1:11 does not belong to the genuine prophecy; vs. 5-11 were inserted by a later hand. Hence all the passages in which אֱלֹהֵינוּ occurs are late.

⁴ Cf. Stade, *Hebräische Gram.*, § 17a.

⁵ *Einleitung*, 4th ed., 1896, p. 64.

The name אֲדֹנָי, signifying "my Lord," was a divine name in Judah at an early period. When it referred to God it was always written with a Qamets in the final syllable, but with Pathach when it had reference to man. The word is an intensive plural denoting excellency, as is also אֱלֹהִים. It occurs 485 times in the Old Testament. In later times copyists substituted this name for יְהוָה.

צְבָאוֹת, used with יְהוָה, another name for God, seems to have originated from the conception of יְהוָה as the God of the covenant of David. As צְבָאוֹת he is the god of the battle array of Israel. Some, however, refer it to the heavenly hosts and hosts of Israel. But the conception that he is the God of the heavenly hosts is a much later conception. The name signifies "God of hosts," God being implied. Altogether it occurs 285 times.

By these few which I have chosen from the many names given to the Israelitish deity in the Old Testament, we see that each one signifies something definite. As אֱלֹהִים he is either the Strong One or "the one whom men strive to reach," "das Ziel aller Menschen Sehnsucht und alles Menschenstrebens."⁶ As אֱלֹהִים he is the true God κατ' ἐξοχήν. As צְבָאוֹת he stands in a definite relationship to David and Israel. This leads us to the conclusion that the different names given to God were not mere designations by which the Israelite could address his deity, but, as was also the case among all primitive peoples, the name either expressed a characteristic of the person or god to whom it was given, or it expressed a certain relationship between the person or the god thus named and the people.

The most important name given to the Israelitish deity in the Old Testament is the one expressed by the tetragrammaton יְהוָה. Whence does it come and what does it mean?

The name Yahweh is explained by some⁷ as being connected etymologically with the Indo-Aryan "Jovis." It is, then, derived from δῶ "to shine," hence Yahweh would signify the "bright ether." This name is also declared to be ideally, though not etymologically, related to "daeva," "deus." Thus the name

⁶ Lagarde, *Orientalia*, Vol. II, p. 3; *Gött. Nachrichten*, 1882, p. 173.

⁷ Von Bohlen, *Genesis*, p. ciii; Vatko, *Die bibl. Theol. wissenschaftl. dargest.*, p. 672; J. G. Müller, *Die Semiten in ihrem Verhältnisse z. d. Channiten und Japhethiten*, 1872, p. 163; Schlottmann, *Buch Hiob*, c. 12, 8ag. [For a recent statement of this view, with some new features of special interest, see Thomas Tyler, "The Origin of the Tetragrammaton," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. XIII, pp. 581-94.—EDITORS.]