

Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus, 2 vol. By OTHMAR KEEL. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007, 1384 pp. ISBN 978-3-525-50177-1.

This is an outstanding work, which retraces in parallel the history of Jerusalem from the 2nd millennium until the first century BCE and the rise of the Judean monotheism in relation to the history of the city. The book consisting of 2 volumes also integrates almost all the available iconographic documentation related to Judean and Israelite history (it contains 725 illustrations). The author is the world's leading specialist in this topic and is able to offer new insights and new interpretation by making frequent use of this material.

The book starts with some introductory reflections about the way to study history today and about the concept of monotheism. Monotheism rises in an urban context and not in the desert, as often argued by scholars influenced by romanticism. Keel gives some geographical information about the location of Jerusalem followed by the question of the signification of its different names (Sion, mountain of Yahwe, etc.). Keel understands the name of Jerusalem as probably meaning “foundation of Shalem”, a Canaanite divinity of the sunset or the evening star, well attested in Ugaritic texts (50).

The major part of the work retraces the history of Jerusalem in twelve chapters. The first chapter deals with Jerusalem in the Middle Bronze (IIB, 1700–1540). Keel argues that at that time Jerusalem was an important Canaanite city with approximately 1800 inhabitants. Seals and other iconographic material give some information about the religious beliefs, which reflect the common Canaanite understanding of the world and the gods (importance of the weather-god and his consort). Chapter 2 describes Jerusalem's situation in the Late Bronze, where the city had come under Egyptian hegemony. Thanks to the Amarna letters, we are quite well informed about the political and social context of that time: Jerusalem was a “city state” ruled by a “king” whom the Egyptians considered to be a governor under the authority of the Pharaoh. The Egyptian influence also appears in the cultural and religious context (Egyptianizing scarabs). The name of the Jerusalemite ruler Abdi-heba indicates the importance of the Syrian Mother deity, already mentioned in the Ebla texts. The Egyptian influence increases during the 19th and 20th dynasties. This produces, according to Keel, a cohabitation of two religious systems: the Levantine system in which the role of the storm-god is preeminent and the Egyptian system in which the sun god plays a major role. These two lines will flow together in the cult of Yahweh. Chapter 3 addresses the question of the relation between Jerusalem and the Israelite tribes in the Early Iron period (1150–980). Keel thinks that the story in Josh 10* may contain historical and

military memories of a coalition of Benjaminite and Gabaonite tribes against the city state Jerusalem and Adoni-zedek, who is called “king of Jerusalem”. Apparently Jerusalem was considered to be located in the territory of Benjamin.

Chapter 4, which comprises 80 pages, is dedicated to David’s conquest of Jerusalem through which the city became the residence of the deity Yahweh. In spite of some recent critics Keel maintains a high age and some kind of historicity for most biblical texts that describe David’s rise to the throne and the events related to his succession (152–3). He fosters his position with the fact that archaeology provides us with sufficient written documents from that time, so that one can easily imagine that the original story of the beginnings of the monarchy have been composed under or shortly after David’s reign. He also argues that there are several critical and “unfitting” traditions (as for instance David’s relation with the Philistines), which could not have been invented at a later time. The affirmation, “es gibt heute keine Ernst zu nehmenden Historiker, die daran zweifeln, dass David existiert hat” (165) is more an apodictic statement than a demonstration of David’s historicity. The Tel Dan Stela by no means proves David’s historicity (if the common reading “house of David” is correct); it only shows that in the end of the eighth century the Judean monarchy could be called “house of David” in reference to its (historical or mythical) founder. Keel argues further that a late date of the “Court History”, which relates the troubles that arose in connection with the succession to David’s throne, is a minority view (160–1). This claim however does not take into account the current debate on this question: a growing number of scholars are inclined to locate this text at earliest in the 8th or 7th century or even in the Babylonian or Persian period.¹ The so-called “realism” of the story is not necessarily an indication of its historicity, as can be easily observed in the story of Esther. On the other hand, Keel is probably right that there are some historical souvenirs contained in the David-narrative, but this does not necessarily mean that these souvenirs were already written down (for what purpose?) during the tenth century BCE. David chose Jerusalem as a capital because this relatively small city was, contrary to other locations, already fortified when David made it his capital. Keel points out that David’s

¹ See the overview in Christophe Nihan and Dany Nocquet, “1–2 Samuel” in *Introduction à l’Ancien Testament*, ed. Thomas Römer, Jean-Daniel Macchi and Christophe Nihan; Le Monde de la Bible 49; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2004, 2009², 358–383, 370–3; and also Serge Frolov, “Succession Narrative: A “Document” or a Phantom.?” *JBL* 121 (2002): 81–104; John Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009.

kingdom was not a clear defined territory but more a sphere of influence (181). Jerusalem was a Canaanite city with a sanctuary for a sun divinity and a deity called Zedek (190-1), into which David introduced the deity Yahweh, whose origin must be located somewhere in the south (Judg 5:4–5). Yahweh was not a typical storm deity; he has many parallels with the Egyptian deity Seth and was mainly a god of war (203–212). 2 Sam 6, which according to Keel, contains a historical kernel, shows that Yahweh was introduced into Jerusalem by means of the Ark (220). The fact that David did not build a temple for Yahweh may be explained by the resistance of the local Canaanite aristocracy (Zadok, Nathan), who wanted to avoid a gain of power for Abiathar, the Judean priest of Yahweh (222).

Chapter 5 describes Solomon as builder of the temple and as fairy-tale king (234–337). Keel concedes that there are many fictive elements in the biblical description of King Solomon (236), but finds some historical elements in the list of the organization of the kingdom in districts (1 Kgs 4) as well as in the temple building narrative. The present description of the temple in 1 Kgs 6–8 reflects however more the theological agenda of the Deuteronomists than the construction of the tenth century BCE (266). An important testimony is the dedication of the temple whose original form can be reconstructed with the help of the Greek version in 1 Kgs 8:53 LXX (268). According to the original dedication Solomon built a house for Yhwh, because this divinity wanted to dwell in the darkness. The main deity of the temple was a sun god and Yhwh was first introduced in the temple as a secondary deity (284) and became only later Jerusalem's main deity. Keel also discusses different reconstructions of the form of the temple (286–330). He claims that there was no statue for Yhwh, but only an empty throne (302–306), a view that can be easily challenged. He admits however that from the beginning there was probably a female goddess (331).

Chapter 6 (338–369) deals with the situation of Jerusalem after Solomon's death until the fall of the Northern kingdom (930–725). After the campaign of Pharaoh Sheshonk the kingdom of Judah was apparently under Egyptian influence, as attested by Egyptianizing seals and other iconographic material. Contrary to the South, Israel, which according to the Deuteronomistic ideology broke away from Judah, did not accept the Egyptian hegemony. According to Keel, under the dynasties of the Omrides Judah and Jerusalem entered a relation of "cooperation" with Israel. But this is more the Deuteronomistic presentation of the facts. In reality, Judah was often a vassal of the North and Jerusalem remained a quite insignificant city.

Chapter 7 is entitled "Jerusalem and Assur" and deals with the Assyrian hegemony in the Levant from 730 to 625 (370–510). There is no doubt that

Jerusalem grew enormously (probably) in the second half of the eighth century. This may be due to refugees from the North after the Assyrian conquest of Israel, but also to the political and economic situation of Judah that forced the rural population to move to the capital (409–410). The reign of Hezekiah marks an important moment in the growth of Jerusalem. Most of the *lmlk* (“to the king”) — seals belong to his reign (416–417). These seals were found in Jerusalem, Lachisch and Ramat Rahel. During the Assyrian time, the latter was apparently a second capital of a sort. The question of Hezekiah’s religious reforms is disputed. Keel gives some credit to the Biblical presentation and admits that Hezekiah destroyed a snake-symbol attributed to Moses, which betrays Egyptian influence. The destruction should be understood as a sign of deception about the missing Egyptian support against the Assyrians. The Assyrian campaign to Judah in 701 is of major importance for the history of Jerusalem (470). Although the Assyrians destroyed most of Judah and deported an important number of Judeans, their siege of Jerusalem did not succeed. This event certainly played a major role in the belief of Zion’s inviolability. The destruction and reduction of the Judean territory by the Assyrians prepared King Josiah’s policy of centralization, since Jerusalem was the only remaining urban centre in the kingdom of Judah (473). The Deuteronomistic redactors of the book of Kings abhor Hezekiah’s successor Manasseh, although he certainly was a very good king, who submitted to the Assyrians and provided peace for his kingdom over several decades. Under his reign in Jerusalem an anthropomorphic statue of Asherah was introduced in the Jerusalem temple (479) and the veneration of Assyrian and Aramean astral deities was part of the state and popular cult. The Deuteronomists also blame Manasseh for having made his children pass through fire. Keel denies that there were ever child sacrifices in the Levant and thinks that there was perhaps a ritual of divination linked with a passing of children through fire (495–504). In my view there are important indications of human sacrifices in the Hebrew Bible, and the so-called deity Molek was originally Yahweh-Melek to whom those sacrifices were offered in exceptional situations.²

Chapter 8 (511–601) deals mainly with Josiah’s reform which was an important step towards a monolatric veneration of the deity Yhwh. Contrary to most of his German colleagues, Keel is quite confident that 2Kgs 22–23 can be taken as historical information. This chapter is however quite confusing; in the beginning Keel claims that the text in Kings was almost entirely written under Josiah (520), 25 pages later he is more cautious in regard to the

² T. Römer, « Le sacrifice humain en Juda et Israël au premier millénaire avant notre ère », *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 1, 1999, pp. 16–26.

historicity of 2 Kgs 22–23 (545–7). If I understand him correctly, Keel nevertheless thinks that the elimination of Assyrian cultic symbols and the centralization of the sacrificial worship happened under Josiah in the context of Anti-Assyrian politics. The first edition of the book of Deuteronomy and the so-called Deuteronomistic History also belong to this context; they were written in order to promote the reform.³ Keel believes that the note about the destruction of the competing sanctuary of Bethel reflects historical information (530), as does the report about the “cleansing” of the temple. Keel finds support for the Josianic reform in the Judean glyptic, which from the end of the seventh century BCE avoids anthropomorphic as well as zoomorphic representations of deities (548–52). The elaboration of an intolerant monolatry under the reign of Josiah was largely influenced by the rhetoric of the Assyrian vassal treaties. Keel detects two negative and three positive results of this evolution. The exclusive worship of Yhwh is enforced by horrible curses and by a segregationist ideology. The positive results are: the rejection of the divinization of celestial and natural elements, the centralization of the cult, and the idea that the divine will is to be found in the “book of the law” (599–601). These are theological statements, which not every reader may be willing to share.

The topic of chapter 9 is the time from the death of Josiah to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 (602–771). After Josiah was killed by Pharaoh, who considered him as an disloyal vassal (515), Egypt continued to control the Levant until 604 when the Babylonians drove them back and took over control. The book of Jeremiah reflects an ongoing discussion among the Judean aristocracy about the question of whether one should submit to the Babylonians or try to revolt with the help of Egypt. After a first siege in 597, Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 and an important number of the upper class was deported to Jerusalem. Keel estimates the importance of the deportees to have been between 17 to 27 per cent of the Judean population (617). The book of Ezekiel provides important information about the situation of the exiles and the difficult relationship between the Babylonian Golah and the population that remained in the land. There is clear archaeological evidence for the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah (757–60). The destruction of the temple was a major shock for the nationalist and “Zionist” party who urged for a theological reflection

³ Keel opts for the theory of Cross that the Deuteronomistic History was first edited under Josiah. He mistakenly counts the reviewer among those who date the entire Deuteronomistic History in the Persian period (596), see T. Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction*, London–New York: T & T Clark–Continuum, 2005.

about the character of Yhwh. Was he only the God of Israel, or the (only) God who decides the fate of all nations?

In chapter 10, which opens volume 2 (772–994) Keel deals with the Babylonian period (587–539). During this time Jerusalem and its environment were only sparsely inhabited. The Babylonians had replaced Jerusalem with the new administrative centre Mitzpa. Most of the Biblical documents are written by members of the Golah and suggest the (wrong) idea that Judah was totally empty during the exilic period. There are few indications about the situation in Jerusalem; the book of Lamentations may provide some insights as to the desolate condition of the city and its inhabitants. The deportees, who revised the books of Ezekiel and the so-called Deuteronomistic History among others claim to be the “true Israel” and consider the people in the land as rejected by Yhwh. The conflict was also an economic one, since the population that remained in the land considered the goods of the deportees as their own property. The Priestly document whose extent, according to Keel, comprises a story that begins with the creation (Gen 1) and ends with Moses’ death (Deut 34*) is a utopian construction, written outside Jerusalem (where?) during the Babylonian period (903–44), for a (new) life in the land around the (new) temple whose model had already been revealed to Moses. Cyrus’ defeat of the Babylonians is celebrated in Second Isaiah. The anonymous author of this collection, who reveals a monotheistic theology, presents the Persian king as Yhwh’s messiah. According to Keel the idea of the Yhwh’s uniqueness is however not an invention of the exilic period (947). Not everybody will follow him in this idea.

The topic of chapter 11 (950–1125) is “Jerusalem under the Persians (539–333)”. Even though most scholars consider the Persian era as the decisive moment for the birth of Judaism, extra-biblical sources about the situation in Judah and Samaria are very sparse (950–1). The archaeological evidence shows that the territory of Jerusalem did not exceed more than 4–5 hectares; that is only about 12 per cent of its extension in the eighth century BCE (953). The population of the Persian province of Yehud was around 30 000 people, 70 per cent less than the population of the seventh century (983). The Persians were quite liberal in religious affairs, but the theory of an imperial authorization in order to explain the publication of the Pentateuch under the Achaemenides remains very speculative (966–7). Keel certainly mentions that the religious authorities of Samaria also accepted this Pentateuch. It is difficult however to imagine that the whole Pentateuch was decided in Judah and that the only participation of the Samaritans was their acceptance of this document. Keel rightly emphasizes that Ezra is more a legendary than historical figure, so that the biblical account of the promulgation of the Law should not be taken as

reliable information (1077–1080). Nehemiah and his memoir seem to reflect more historical events, and his activity is a reminder of Solon's in Athen. Nehemiah was probably an influential member of the Babylonian Jews who wanted to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This shows that the unnecessary military refortification of Jerusalem was an initiative from the Diaspora (1070). Keel portrays Nehemiah as a “narrow-minded religious nationalist with autocratic and tyrannical tendencies” (1077). The books of Haggai and Zechariah attest to the attempt to make Zerubbabel a descendant of the Davidic dynasty (vassal-) king over the province of Yehud in the beginning of the Persian period. For unclear reasons this did not happen as indicated by his sudden disappearance in the biblical books. Yehud was ruled by Persian governors; some of whom are known. However, the claim of some scholars that it is possible to reconstruct the entire list remains unconvincing (984–986). The High Priest who controlled the religious activity of the Temple gained more and more influence. The reconstructed temple (Keel does not discuss the challenge of the traditional view that this rebuilding happened very early)⁴ became a spiritual centre for the Jewish Diaspora. It is difficult to reconstruct the dimensions and the look of this so-called Second temple that apparently was quite a modest building without any cultic image (1030–8). Even if the sacrificial cult had been restored, there was already a trend towards the replacement of the traditional cult through the reading of the Law; this happened in the synagogue whose origins remain unclear (the first identifiable synagogue in Palestine dates from the Hasmonean time).

The twelfth and last chapter (1126–1269) retraces the history of Jerusalem during the Hellenistic Period, from Alexander the Great to Pompeius (333–63 CE). For the historian, the situation is much more comfortable in regard to sources and documents. The domination of Jerusalem and Judah by Greek rulers, first the Ptolemeans, and later the Seleucids and the encounter of Judaism with Hellenism had two major consequences: the integration of the Hellenistic worldview into the Jewish religion (see the translation of the Torah into Greek during the 2nd century BCE and the biblical book of Qoheleth) on the one hand, and the resistance against the Greek culture and domination, which led to the Maccabean wars and the regaining of a certain political independence under the Hasmoneans. The theocratic conceptions of the Hasmonean rulers, who claimed to be kings and High priests and ironically adopted a Greek imperial ideology, met the resistance of groups like the Pharisees and the Essenians. They forced the population in the conquered regions

⁴) Diana Edelman, *The Origins of the 'Second' Temple. Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem* (Bible World), London: Equinox, 2005.

to convert to Judaism. After the victory against Antiochus IV in 164 the Hasmonians celebrated the “purification” of the Jerusalem Temple (Hanukka) and later they enlarged and embellished the sanctuary as well as the city of Jerusalem, which had both become the centre for all Jewish communities. Jerusalem at that time was indeed one of the most important cities in the East of the Roman Empire that tolerated the reign of the Hasmonians. But when the Romans brought the Seleucid Empire to an end, the Hasmonian kingdom was equally integrated into the Roman Empire. One wonders why Keel ends his history here and does not integrate the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 BC.

The conclusion entitled “instead of an epilogue” retraces the formation of monotheism in Jerusalem, which consists in the transformation of the national deity Yahweh into the god of all nations. Keel distinguishes a universal and a particularistic monotheism; both already existed before the exile and entered in a conflict after the fall of Judah and Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Keel admits that his presentation is not always neutral and that his sympathies go to the universalistic understanding of monotheism (1281). The book ends with several indexes and lists.

This work is really a tour de force and one has to admire the author for his knowledge and pedagogic capacities. Keel provides so much historical and iconographic information that his book belongs on the shelf of everyone who is interested in or doing research in the Hebrew Bible and the rise of Judaism. I do not know of any other comparable synthesis. One may however mention some more problematic aspects. The way in which Keel uses the Biblical material will not convince all scholars in the field, and one may object that he should have been more conversant with other views than his own. The idea of treating the history of Jerusalem and the rise of monotheism at the same time and in the same book does not always facilitate the understanding of the author’s interpretation of history. He also integrates many pages where he discusses the formation of most books of the Hebrew Bible. This may be an interesting point for students of the Hebrew Bible, but it also complicates the coherence of the presentation. This coherence may also suffer a little from the fact that some parts of chapters were former independent articles, which are now integrated in the book (see the list page 1316). A minor point is the listing of the paragraphs, which gives an impression of some pedantry. Perhaps the book would have been even better, had it been a little more concise. But all these remarks are not meant to downplay the importance of this outstanding work.

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