The character Melchizedek appears in Genesis in a very episodic fashion. He crosses the sky like a meteor, nobody knowing where he comes from or where he is going to. We know only that he was king of Salem, priest of the god 'el 'Elyon who was identified with Yahweh, that to the father of the faithful he takes bread and wine after the latter's victory over the pagan kings. At about the time of the Christian era and the first centuries A.D. various speculations were made about this mysterious personnage. We will examine the various stages of this.

I. Melchizedek, a Canaanite priest-king

The pericope of Genesis 14, 18-20 has not ceased to intrigue the historians of Israel. First of all, how is the name Melchizedek to be interpreted? At first sight, the form of this anthroponym would seem to indicate that we are in the presence of a theophoric name. But where is the divine name? In the first element $\text{Mlk}$, or in the second $\text{Dq}$? In fact, $\text{Mlk}$ is known as a divine name particularly in anthroponyms at Assur, Mari and also at Ugarit. It has been assimilated to Nergal and is thus an infernal god 1). More generally, a divine name is now seen to be present in $\text{Dq}$, the second element. In fact it appears in composition in the theophoric names at Ugarit: $\text{Adn}$, $\text{Il}$, $\text{B}$ (PRU II, no. 140,8), $\text{Il}$ (PRU II, 37,4; 131,1); $\text{B}$ (PRU II, no. 46,6; 125,5). In the Punic onomastic of Carthage, we find $\text{Spin}$ and in the Amorite names may be found $\text{A}-\text{hi-\text{-}}\text{sa-du-uq}$; $\text{I}$-$\text{li-\text{-}}\text{sa-du-uq}$.


At-teri-ša-du-u[ŋ] etc.'). In Philo of Byblos, the god Συδωκ, Σαδωκός appears in isolation:

"From Šdq come the Dioscures or the Cabires or the Corybantes or the Samothracas".

In another passage, one reads:

"After those, Misor and Šdq, that is easy and just; they invented the use of salt".

LAGRANGE makes this comment on the passage:

"Sydyk was doubtless the Phoenician Šedeq, but this name has so far only been found as the name of an individual; a god Šedeq has not yet appeared in Phoenician inscriptions" ²).

Since the publication of LAGRANGE's book, things have changed. Specialists now admit the existence of a god Šdq. Besides HUFFMON ³), SCHMID ⁴), WIDENGREN ⁵) etc., one may mention in particular ROSENBERG who recently devoted a complete monography to this divinity ⁶). Consequently the name of Melchizedek can be explained in this way, as also names of similar form: my king is Šdq, my lord is Šdq, 'El is Šdq etc. Other writers do, it is true, prefer to understand: my king is justice, my lord is justice etc. on the analogy with ὁ πρόειρος, Yahweh is justice ḫ), i.e. Jehozadak (1 Chron. 6, 14).

In support of the first explanation, some exegetes have drawn attention to the name of Sadoq which appears at the time of David-Solomon at Jerusalem as a priest (2 Sam. 8) ⁸). His name is undoubtedly a hypocoristic abridged from the type Āhīṣaduq, Adonisaduqa. He must have been one of the staff of the Jebusite temple, before the time of David, as a priest of the god Šdq.

In the Biblical text, Melchizedek is the priest of 'El 'Elyon. In the Jewish monotheistic perspectives this god had been identified necessarily with Yahweh. 'Elyon, translated by ὁ πρόειρος, the Most High,

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¹) Herbert B. HUFFMON, Amorite personal names in the Mari texts, Baltimore 1965, pp. 256-257.