YHWH THE PASSIONATE
THE MONOTHEISTIC MEANING AND ORIGIN OF
THE NAME YHWH

BY
S. D. GOITEIN
Jerusalem

The questions of the pronunciation, meaning and origin of the name YHWH recently have been treated in great detail in A. Murtonen’s monograph *A Philological and Literary Treatise on the Old Testament Divine Names* etc. (Helsinki 1952), in which also the same author’s study on “The Appearance of the Name YHWH outside Israel” 1), *Studia Orientalia* (Helsinki 1951) XVI: 3, is incorporated. Nevertheless — as is natural and as Dr. Murtonen himself emphasized — even this very extensive and fully documented work has not exhausted the subject. Of the items not quoted in it I would like to note Gardner’s article in the *Expository Times*, 1908/9, to which we shall have to come back later on, and two articles by M. H. Segal, published in *Tarbiz*, IX, p. 123-162 (Jerusalem 1938) and ib. XII, p. 97-108 2). Of the studies which have appeared since the publication of Murtonen’s book, mention should be made of E. Schild, On Exodus iii 14 “I am that I am” in *V.T.* IV (1954), p. 296-302, J. Philip Hyatt, “YHWH as the God of my Father”, *V. T.* V (1955), p. 130-136, especially 136, G. R. Driver, “The Interpretation of YHWH as a participle Form”, *JBL* LXXIII (1954), p. 125-131, and Z. Ben-Hayyim’s careful study on the pronunciation of the tetragrammaton by the Samaritans in *Eretz Israel*, III (Jerusalem 1954), p. 147-154.

The present writer, an Arabist, dares to add his own findings to the vast literature on the subject, not only because — as is perhaps natu—

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2) As a curiosity I would like to mention that the great Islamic scholar I. Goldziher also wrote about this topic: “Noch etwas über das Tetragrammaton”, *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, XXXIV (1870), p. 928-30; “Über das Tetragrammaton”, *Ungarisch-Jüdische Wochenschrift* I (1871), p. 139-40. Owing to the impossibility at present of using the Hebrew University Library on Mount Scopus, Jerusalem, I was unable to see these articles. A bibliographical reference to them is found in Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume I, Budapest 1948, 420-1 (A. Scheiber).
ral — he believes to have found the right solution, but also for methodological reasons. His explanation is based on a comparison with an Arabic root. However, the meaning of that root is brought out not so much by the dictionaries as by its actual use in Arabic literature. This shows that semantics should be based on familiarity with the life of a word and not on its standardized meanings. In general, it seems that the close connection between Biblical and Arabic studies, which had existed so long to the benefit of both, has loosened somewhat of late. This may be due to the great strain put on the biblical scholar by the enormous output in his own field and in the kindred subjects of the archaeology and the literatures of the Ancient Near East 1).

The point of departure for our observations are those passages in the OT which seem to indicate that the meaning of the name YHWH was still fully understood. A verse like Hosea xii 6 “And YHWH, the God of Hosts, His name (i.e.: reputation) is YHWH” makes sense only, if the word YHWH still meant something to those for whose ears the verse was intended. Therefore, Exodus xxxiv 14 “YHWH, His name is the Jealous” should not be understood as simply implying that the nature of YHWH was that of a jealous God, but that his very name actually meant this. The following discussion of the roots qn’ and hzy will demonstrate that this is indeed the case.

The translation of qn’ by “jealous” does not do justice to the rich contents of the word, which conveys two meanings, characteristic of the old Israelite and possibly of ancient man in general: the strength of an emotion and the exclusiveness of its direction. It denotes complete devotion either to one’s own aims or to another person. Therefore, the word can stand parallel either to Love, as in the Song of Songs viii 6, or to Hatred and Anger, as in Deuteronomy xxix 19.

Similarly hzy expresses strong feelings and passion, mixed with the idea of personal ambition and arbitrariness. “The mighty one says whatever his soul desires” (Micah vii 3). “God does not let the soul of the pious starve and repulses the desire of the wicked” (Proverbs x 3). For reasons which will be discussed at the end of the article, the root hzy has almost disappeared from Biblical Hebrew and is used in it only in a pejorative sense, as indicated in the examples adduced. In Arabic, however, the root had an extre-

1) A general discussion of the problem “Arabia and the Bible” is to be found in the present writer’s book Jews and Arabs: their Contacts through the Ages (New York 1955), 19-45.