

Who were the Kenites?

MARLENE E. MONDRIAAN (UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA)

ABSTRACT

This article examines the Kenite tribe, particularly considering their importance as suggested by the Kenite hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, the Kenites, and the Midianites, were the peoples who introduced Moses to the cult of Yahwism, before he was confronted by Yahweh from the burning bush. Scholars have identified the Cain narrative of Gen 4 as the possible aetiological legend of the Kenites, and Cain as the eponymous ancestor of these people. The purpose of this research is to ascertain whether there is any substantiation for this allegation connecting the Kenites to Cain, as well as contemplating the Kenites' possible importance for the Yahwistic faith. Information in the Hebrew Bible concerning the Kenites is sparse. Traits associated with the Kenites, and their lifestyle, could be linked to descendants of Cain. The three sons of Lamech represent particular occupational groups, which are also connected to the Kenites. The nomadic Kenites seemingly roamed the regions south of Palestine. According to particular texts in the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh emanated from regions south of Palestine. It is, therefore, plausible that the Kenites were familiar with a form of Yahwism, a cult that could have been introduced by them to Moses, as suggested by the Kenite hypothesis. Their particular trade as metalworkers afforded them the opportunity to also introduce their faith in the northern regions of Palestine. This article analyses the etymology of the word "Kenite," the ancestry of the Kenites, their lifestyle, and their religion. The research leads to the conclusion that the Kenites could be linked to Cain, and also supports the Kenite hypothesis, thereby suggesting that they introduced the faith of Yahwism to Moses, and thus indirectly to the Israelites.

A INTRODUCTION

Although presently not so much in the forefront in scholarly debates, the question of the origin of the Yahwist religion of the Israelites has, as yet, not been resolved. Scholars have, thus, reached no consensus regarding this contentious matter. Handy¹ is of the opinion that anyone who ventures to

¹ Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 3.

explain religious traditions where there is virtually no reliable source material and "not a single living devotee of the culture to consult," exhibits some audacity. Despite the varied and fragmented data currently available on the religious life of the Syro-Palestinian people of the second and first millennium B.C.E., scholars endeavour to create a coherent religious vision.

In 1872 the Dutch historian of religion, Cornelis P. Tiele, advanced the idea of the Kenite hypothesis in an attempt to explain the origin of the Yahwist religion. During the late nineteenth century Karl Budde developed the classic formulation of this theory in Germany. "In its classical form the hypothesis assumes that the Israelites became acquainted with the cult of Yahweh through Moses,"² a figure who probably gained knowledge about Yahweh through his Kenite father-in-law Jethro, a Midianite priest,³ who, consistent with a tradition in Exodus, worshipped Yahweh.⁴

There are scattered references to the Kenites in the Hebrew Bible. They are mentioned only a few times in the Pentateuch, in Judges and Samuel, and once in Chronicles. Yet, they are linked to one of the most important events in the lives of the Israelite people, albeit indirectly. The Kenite hypothesis postulates that Moses was introduced to the cult of Yahweh, before he was confronted by Yahweh from the burning bush. Scholars, in support of the Kenite hypothesis, advance that these nomadic peoples from the regions south of Palestine venerated Yahweh, even before tribes migrating, or escaping, from Egypt were introduced into the cult of Yahweh.

This article analyses available information concerning the origin of the Kenites, their lifestyle, and their religion. Their particular occupations as cattle breeders and musicians who lived in tents, as well as their craft as metalworkers and smiths link them to the descendants of Cain. In Numbers 24:21-22 the name Cain is specifically associated with the Kenites. Scholars have identified the Cain narrative of Genesis 4 as the possible aetiological legend of the Kenites, and Cain as the eponymous ancestor of these people. The Kenites lived and roamed mainly in the peripheral areas south of Palestine; according to particular texts in the Hebrew Bible Yahweh came forth from certain regions south of Palestine. Evaluation of relevant biblical material supports the connection between Cain and the Kenites and also lends some credibility to scholarly proposals advancing that Moses was introduced to the cult of Yahweh by the Kenites.

Although the Hebrews obviously would have been interested in the origin of their worship of Yahweh, there is no general tradition that can be

² Karel van der Toorn, "Yahweh," *DDD* 910-919.

³ Exod 2:16, 21; 3:1; 18:1.

⁴ Exod 18:10-12. According to different traditions in the Pentateuch, either the name Yahweh, or the name Elohim is applied in the text.

authenticated. While some scholars support the Kenite hypothesis, other scholars suggest that Yahweh and Canaanite *El* were associated at an early stage. According to the latter theory, the patriarchal “gods of the fathers” were identified by the name of the patriarch; the god was therefore artificially linked genealogically to the particular patriarch. These gods were mainly known by the epithet *El Shaddai*. Scholars, such as Cross,⁵ conclude that Yahweh was originally a cultic name or epithet of *El*; at a particular time characteristics of Yahweh and *El* probably assimilated or were synchronised. This hypothesis, however, does not explain the recurring traditions in the Hebrew Bible indicating that Yahweh came from the South, from Edom, Seir, Sinai, Teman and Mount Paran;⁶ the particular regions where the Kenites resided. Extra-biblical Egyptian records,⁷ as well as the analysis of the name YHWH, also point to a southern origin of Yahweh.

B PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The enigmatic origin of Yahweh and Yahwism has not yet been resolved. Although “the Hebrew Bible presents a clear schematic outline on the history of Israelite religion,”⁸ this traditional biblical view can hardly be called historical. If the cult of Yahweh did originate amongst the Kenites, and Midianites, as particular biblical traditions seem to indicate, it is significant that the Kenites are marginalised in the Hebrew Bible. The purpose of this research is to analyse available material on the Kenites, particularly regarding their origin, lifestyle, and religion, thereby evaluating the credibility of the Kenite hypothesis, and the role they played in the advancement of early Yahwism.

C WHO WERE THE KENITES AND WHERE DID THEY COME FROM

The Kenites were a nomadic or semi-nomadic tribe of coppersmiths who inhabited the rocky country south of Tel Arad, which was an important city in the eastern Negev. As early as the thirteenth century B.C.E. they made their

⁵ Frank Moore Cross, “Yahweh and the Gods of the Patriarchs,” *HTR* 55 (1962): 225-59. See also Frank Moore Cross, “𐤏𐤍 ʿēl,” *TDOT* 1:242-61.

⁶ Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4; Ps 68:8; Hab 3:3.

⁷ Two Egyptian texts, dated the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C.E., mention “*Yhw* [*Yahu*] in the Land of the *shasu*.” According to Beth A. Nakhai, “Israel on the Horizon: The Iron I Settlement of the Galilee,” in *The Near East in the Southwest: Essays in Honor of William G. Dever* (ed. Beth A. Nakhai; AASOR 58; Atlanta: ASOR, 2003), 131-151, these texts provide “the earliest evidence for the god Yahweh and linking him with these nomadic people” – namely the *Shasu*. Therefore, in the earliest known reference to the land of Edom, the inhabitants were called the *Shasu* tribes of Edom. See also Van der Toorn, “Yahweh,” 911.

⁸ Andrew D. H. Mayes, “Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and the History of Israelite Religion,” in *Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. John Raymond Bartlett; London: Routledge, 1997), 51-66.

livelihood as metal craftsmen. There may be some resemblance to the modern Arab tribe, the Sleib, who travel, somewhat gypsy-like, as smiths or tinkers.⁹

1 Etymology of the word Kenite

During the latter part of the nineteenth century – in 1894 – Bernard Stade identified the Cain narrative of Genesis 4 as the aetiological legend of the Kenites.¹⁰ When Eve “conceived and bore Cain” she declared, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.”¹¹ The name Cain, קַיִן, is a derivation from the word “gotten” or “acquired,” *qānîti*, קָנִיתִי. The name recurs later in Num 24:21-22 in the oracle of Balaam. In this text Cain, קַיִן, is associated with the Kenites, קֵינִי. The name has its etymology in a root *qyn*.¹² The word means “spear.”¹³ A similarly spelt root appears in fifth century B.C.E. South-Arabian tribal, clan, and personal names. The root, meaning “smith,” is also found in later Aramaic and Arabic.¹⁴ In cognate Semitic languages it means “tinsmith” or “craftsman.”¹⁵ In 2 Sam 21:16 a *keino*, קֵינוֹ, is mentioned, which could refer to a spear or metal weapons in general.¹⁶ The name could also be related to Ugaritic *qn*, meaning “reed” or “shaft.” The name Cain, likewise, might be connected to *qayn*, a Thamudic¹⁷ deity. It is uncertain whether there is any link between *Qayn* and the South Arabian deity *Qaynān*, *Kenan*.¹⁸ In the genealogical lists of the antediluvian heroes, Kenan, *Qênān*, is named as the son of Enosh.¹⁹ Etymologically the name could be derived from Cain, with a diminutive ending *-ān*. *Qênān* could be interpreted as meaning “smith,” “javelin” or “little Cain”; the Arabian *Qaynān* was probably a patron deity for smiths and metalworkers. The only information about Kenan found in the Hebrew Bible, is recorded in Genesis

⁹ George M. Landes, “Kenites,” *IDB* 3:6-7.

¹⁰ Gary Nolan, “The Role of the Kenites in Israel’s History” (D.Th. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982), 14. See also article by Bernard Stade, “Das Kainszeichen,” *ZAW* 14 (1894): 250-318.

¹¹ Gen 4:1.

¹² Richard S. Hess, “Cain,” *ABD* 1:806-07.

¹³ William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (based upon the lexical work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 318.

¹⁴ Hess, “Cain,” 1:806.

¹⁵ Yigal Allon, “Kenites,” *EncJud* 10: 906-07.

¹⁶ Avraham Negev and Shimon Gibson, eds., *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* (rev. and updat. ed.; London: Continuum, 2001), 281.

¹⁷ John Huehnergard, “Languages: Introductory Survey,” *ABD* 4:155-70. The Thamudic language is a dialect of preclassical North Arabian. It comprises approximately a thousand pictograms and has been found in West and Central North Arabia, particularly in the region of Midian. It dates from the sixth century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E.

¹⁸ Bob Becking, “Cain,” *DDD* 180.

¹⁹ Gen 5:9-14; 1 Chr 1:1-2.

5:12-14: he fathered Mahalalel, as well as other sons and daughters, and lived for nine hundred and ten years.²⁰

2 Ancestry of the Kenites

Kunin²¹ indicates that “two primary kinds of genealogies are found in Genesis: segmentary genealogies and linear genealogies (or pedigrees).” Segmentary genealogies trace the lines of descent from a particular ancestor, and are typical of societies whose social structure is built on lineages. Linear genealogies, on the other hand, follow a single line of descent, tracing only significant ancestors. Origins of nations are all described in segmentary genealogies, with the exception of that found in Gen 4:17-22, which some scholars consider to be the tribal genealogy of the Kenites, thereby accepting Cain as the eponymous ancestor of this tribe. The Kenite genealogy was probably an independent source of their origin which was later incorporated into this text. To support this theory, scholars quote Num 24:21-22 wherein the name Cain is applied parallel to Kenite. There is, however, no evidence that the Kenites associated themselves with Cain as their primeval ancestor, or that the Israelite narratives relating to Cain, were shared with the Kenites.²² According to Exod 3:1 and Judg 1:16, there is a connection between the Midianites and the Kenites;²³ the latter were perhaps regarded as a clan of the Midianites. 1 Chronicles 2:55 links the Kenites and the Rechabites. Linear genealogies share a similar form, consisting of lists of seven or ten lineal descendants which segment into three lines, such as the list identified in Gen 4:17-22; seven linear descendants are recorded from Cain to Lamech, concluding with the three sons of Lamech.²⁴ Aufrecht²⁵ mentions that “the Ancient Israelite manipulated genealogical information to produce a particular view of the past that conformed to his or her present need.” Genealogical traditions among Ancient Near Eastern nations were well developed with consistent patterns. Biblical genealogies are, however, completely different with no established pattern or priority for a particular form.²⁶ “A number of scholars suggest that Gen 4:17-24 once

²⁰ Bob Becking, “Kenan,” *DDD* 479-80.

²¹ Seth Daniel Kunin, *The Logic of Incest: A Structuralist Analysis of Hebrew Mythology* (JSOTSup 185; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 182.

²² Kunin, *Logic of Incest*, 182-3.

²³ Exodus 3:1 refers to Jethro, Moses’ father-in law, as a priest of Midian, while Judg 1:16 names him a Kenite.

²⁴ Kunin, *Logic of Incest*, 182-3.

²⁵ Walter E. Aufrecht, “Genealogy and History in Ancient Israel,” in *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie* (eds. Lyle M. Eslinger and Glen Taylor; JSOTSup 67; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 205-35.

²⁶ Aufrecht, “Genealogy and History,” 211-12, 214-16, 218.

circulated orally and functioned as a genealogy of the Kenite tribe."²⁷ Cain and the Kenites are also linked in Judg 4:11. Heber, the Kenite, is said to have separated from Cain;²⁸ he is also identified with the sons of Hobab, the Kenite, or Midianite, father-in-law of Moses. Scholars therefore conclude "that Cain is simply another name for the Kenite tribe."²⁹

3 Lifestyle of the Kenites

Despite the varying degrees of comment by scholars on the origin of the Kenites, there are many traits of the Kenites that could link this tribe to Cain.

Westermann³⁰ indicates that, when the origin and growth of a civilisation is built into its genealogy, "one presupposes a development in its achievements." As mentioned, linear genealogies consist of either ten or seven lineal descendants. The number seven obviously describes a totality. Genesis 4:17-22 designates seven generations of the primeval period. In a further development of this genealogy the beginning of urban civilisation is described with the report of the building of the first city.³¹ The genealogy is concluded with the seventh generation, the three sons of Lamech.³² These sons represent different occupational groups, which require mobility to a certain extent. Therefore, taking the building of a city into account, four separate lifestyles are reflected.³³ The first son of Lamech was Jabal, who was the "father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock."³⁴ The second son was Jubal, "the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe."³⁵ Tubal-cain was the last son, "the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron."³⁶ Thus Jabal and Jubal, the children of Cain's wife Adah, and their descendants were cattle breeders and musicians who lived in tents, while Tubal-cain, son of Zillah, and his descendants were smiths and metalworkers. Palestinian folklore was familiar with two Cains who represented radically different lifestyles: Cain the city

²⁷ Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 156.

²⁸ English Bible translations (such as the English Standard Version) of Judg 4:11 read "Now Heber the Kenite separated from the Kenites" The Hebrew text reads, Heber the Kenite separated from Cain (והחבר הקיני נפרד מקין).

²⁹ Wilson, *Genealogy in Biblical World*, 156.

³⁰ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion; London: SPCK, 1984), 342; trans. of *Genesis (Kapitel 1-11)* (2nd German ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974).

³¹ Gen 4:17.

³² Westermann, *Genesis*, 342.

³³ J. Maxwell Miller, "The Descendants of Cain: Notes on Genesis 4," *ZAW* 86 (1974): 164-174.

³⁴ Gen 4:20.

³⁵ Gen 4:21.

³⁶ Gen 4:22. Tubal-cain is a compound name, of which the second noun indicates the trade. See Allon, "Kenites," 10: 906.

builder, together with his son Enoch, and prototype of the settled farmer, and Cain, the name-giving ancestor of the Kenite metalworkers.³⁷ The founding of a city is considered to be an element of sedentary civilisation. In contrast, the group associated with Lamech represents the nomads.³⁸ The Kenites were tent dwellers, herders, musicians, and metalworkers.³⁹ Their traditions thus depict Cain as their eponymous ancestor.

One of the hallmarks of the early development of civilisation in the Ancient Near East was the ability to manipulate ores to produce strong metals. While experimentation in metallurgy started at a very early date, it became a successful, although primitive, science during the third millennium B.C.E. “The beginnings of metallurgy is regarded in many places throughout the world as of the utmost importance in the history of humankind.”⁴⁰ It has a prominent place in Sumerian, as well as Greek and Roman myths.⁴¹ In Mesopotamia none of the ores was locally available and therefore, presumably, would have been obtained through trade. High-quality articles such as weapons and jewellery were manufactured out of chemically complicated metal alloys. Mines and mining areas from antiquity were discovered in eastern Anatolia. Trade routes were developed and gateway cities progressed along these routes.⁴² Anatolia was known for its rich iron ores and also had some copper. According to Assyrian documents, a nation, Tubal, traded in copper in Asia Minor and produced metal objects. It seems that Tubal-cain could be identified with Tubal, which is also mentioned in Ezek 27:13. The el-Amarna Letters refer to a region in northern Syria as the “Land of Copper” where copper was mined.⁴³

During the thirteenth century B.C.E. the Hittites discovered a process to extract iron from its ores. At that stage the Hittite Kingdom had expanded to include virtually all of Asia Minor. Their political dominance, however, declined dramatically following disputes concerning royal succession.⁴⁴ By the end of the thirteenth century B.C.E. the great powers of western Asia, including the Hittite Empire, collapsed. Egypt withdrew from Canaan. Although international trade probably suffered, it is unlikely that it was discontinued.⁴⁵

³⁷ Miller, “Descendants Cain,” 169.

³⁸ Westermann, *Genesis*, 327, 330.

³⁹ Baruch Halpern, “Kenites,” *ABD* 4:17-22.

⁴⁰ Westermann, *Genesis*, 333.

⁴¹ Westermann, *Genesis*, 333. Some gods in the myths are depicted in battledress.

⁴² Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, “Trade in Metals in the Third Millennium: Northeastern Syria and Eastern Anatolia,” in *Resurrecting the Past: A Joint Tribute to Adnan Bounni* (ed. Paolo Matthiae, Maurits Van Loon and Harvey Weiss; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1990), 117-28.

⁴³ Negev and Gibson, *Holy Land*, 335.

⁴⁴ Negev and Gibson, *Holy Land*, 231, 281, 335, 337.

⁴⁵ J. David Schloen, “Caravans, Kenites, and *Casus belli*: Enmity and Alliance in the Song of Deborah,” *CBQ* 55 (1993): 18-38.

Scholars have suggested that the Kenites were a group of metalworkers who left the Hittite Empire with its downfall and introduced the art of metallurgy to the Israelites.⁴⁶

The Kenites, or Qenites, were a non-Israelite community or clan, who frequented the Wilderness of Sinai. Scholars generally agree that the etymology of the term "Kenite" implies that they were migrating smiths. In Arabic, Syriac and Palmyrene the root *qyn* can form the basis for words meaning "to forge," "metalworker." Tubal-cain, a descendant of Cain, is identified as the founder of metallurgy, and therefore the first metallurgist.⁴⁷ The Kenites also wandered in the Negev, Midian, Edom, Amalek, and northern Palestine. A region was named after them.⁴⁸ There may be an indication in "Balaam's song"⁴⁹ that the Kenites "dwelt in the rock," not far from Punon,⁵⁰ one of the main sources of copper,⁵¹ identified with Feinan, south of the Dead Sea. This "rock" also appears to be a reference to the mountains of Edom and Midian, and could denote the Edomite mountain fortress Sela,⁵² close to rich copper deposits.⁵³ The Kenites' presence in the southern regions is confirmed by the discovery of a Hebrew ostrakon at Arad,⁵⁴ wherein the place name Kinah, as well as Ramoth-Negev, is mentioned.⁵⁵ Kinah,⁵⁶ which was situated not far from Arad,

⁴⁶ Frank S. Frick, "The Rechabites Reconsidered," *JBL* 90 (1971): 279-87.

⁴⁷ Halpern, "Kenites," 17-18.

⁴⁸ 1 Sam 27:10.

⁴⁹ Num 24:21.

⁵⁰ Negev and Gibson, *Holy Land*, 413. Punon was on the route of the exodus (Num 33:42-43). The region is reasonably rich in water and arable soil, as well as rich copper mines. These mines were worked in both protohistorical and later historical periods. Archaeological surveys indicate that mining took place from the Chalcolithic to the Byzantine periods. Slag heaps, crucibles and mining installations have been found there.

⁵¹ Negev and Gibson, *Holy Land*, 281.

⁵² Sela means "rock," and was an Edomite fortress city. This site has been identified with the Nabataean rock-city Petra, which lies halfway between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. Another site for Sela has also been proposed, close to Buseira, biblical Bozrah. It is possible that both locations served as capitals for Edom at different times. See Wann M. Fanwar, "Sela," *ABD* 5:1073-4.

⁵³ Allon, "Kenites," 10:906.

⁵⁴ Negev and Gibson, *Holy Land*, 42-44. Arad was an important city in the eastern Negeb, on the border of Judah and on the main road to Edom. During the Early Bronze Age II there was a large fortified city on the site. During Iron Age II a new settlement was founded on the ridge of the ancient city. William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 29, indicates that the site of Arad is identified with Arabic Tell 'Urad, approximately twenty-nine kilometres east of Beer-sheba.

⁵⁵ Negev and Gibson, *Holy Land*, 281.

⁵⁶ Rüdiger Liwak, "Kinah," *ABD* 4:39-40. Kinah is one of the cities mentioned in the list of cities in Josh 15, as the inheritance of Judah (Josh 15:20-22). It was situated in

may be linked to colonisation by Kenites of the eastern part of the Beer-sheba Valley.⁵⁷ Judges 1:16 mentions that the descendants of the Kenites went up “from the city of the palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negev near Arad.” Kenite families evidently occupied settlements or cities in the South. Narratives from the time of David refer to the cities of the Kenites.⁵⁸ These probably included Kinah,⁵⁹ and possibly Kain,⁶⁰ on the border of the Wilderness of Judah.⁶¹

The Kenites, identified as metalworkers and coppersmiths thus lived as nomads or semi-nomads.⁶² According to the *Song of Deborah*,⁶³ it is clear that the Kenites dwelled in tents and kept cattle.⁶⁴ “The ease with which one branch of the Kenite community moved from the South to the North – Judg 4:11 – could be taken as a confirmation of their itinerant pastoralism.”⁶⁵ Evidence of their nomadic tendencies can be recognised in certain textual references, namely, Moses’ Midianite, or Kenite, father-in-law kept flocks;⁶⁶ Heber, the Kenite, “pitched his tent” and his wife Jael lived in a tent;⁶⁷ at the time of Saul the Kenites lived in the Wilderness of Judah and avoided the arable soil;⁶⁸ the Rechabites, who were related to the Kenites, lived in tents in opposition to agriculture.⁶⁹ The curse on Cain from the soil was probably perceived by the Kenites as the origin of their nomadic lifestyle.⁷⁰ Despite this judgement,

the Negev on the Edomite border (Josh 15:21-32). Wadi el-Qéni is mentioned as a possible site of biblical Kinah; it has been connected recently with Khirbet Ghazze, which is six to seven kilometres south-west of Arad. The site was strategically important on the road to Edom. It consisted of a sizeable fortress. Excavations yielded ostraca similar to those found at Arad. One of the ostraca found at Arad indicates Kinah as one of the logistic centres of the area.

⁵⁷ Liwak, “Kinah,” 4:39.

⁵⁸ 1 Sam 27:10; 30:29.

⁵⁹ Josh 15:22.

⁶⁰ Josh 15:57.

⁶¹ Allon, “Kenites,” 10:907.

⁶² Landes, “Kenites,” 3:6.

⁶³ Judg 5. The *Song of Deborah*, dated the end of the twelfth century B.C.E., is one of the oldest compositions preserved in the Hebrew Bible. It is therefore more or less contemporary with the events it describes. Schloen, “Caravans,” 20-21, is of the opinion that, although the historicity of the poem cannot be established, it is difficult to believe that it does not celebrate an actual battle.

⁶⁴ Judg 5:24-25.

⁶⁵ Karel van der Toorn, “Ritual Resistance and Self-assertion: The Rechabites in Early Israelite Religion,” in *Pluralism and Identity: Studies in Ritual Behaviour* (ed. Jan Platvoet and Karel van der Toorn; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 229-259.

⁶⁶ Exod 3:1.

⁶⁷ Judg 4:11, 17-18.

⁶⁸ 1 Sam 15:4-8.

⁶⁹ Jer 35.

⁷⁰ Nolan, “Kenites,” 15, 28-29.

Yahweh gave Cain the assurance that "if anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold," and Yahweh "put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him."⁷¹ "Cain's mark is the most apparent symbol of his ambivalent and marginal character. Regardless of whether the author intended some "physical" identifier, the mark is a "stigma" of sorts."⁷² Tribal marks serve to protect a person and indicate to which tribe he belongs; each member of the tribe was thus safeguarded by such a mark.⁷³ The special sign of Yahweh could, therefore, have identified the Kenites, and, consequently, they worshipped Yahweh under his protection.⁷⁴ Israelite tribes who lived in tents are traced back to Jabal. According to tradition, they had herds of cattle. This particular way of living as nomads suited the Kenites' profession as metalworkers and coppersmiths. Although tents were thus one of the basic structures in the Ancient Near East, important for domestic, sexual, cultic, military, and agricultural purposes, they are very seldom preserved in the archaeological record. A Midianite tent shrine at Timnah is a notable exception.⁷⁵

The nature of mining and trade in metal products prevented the smith from establishing a permanent domicile or to become involved in agriculture. He usually moved on when the supply of ore was exhausted.⁷⁶ "Metallurgists in antiquity, as a rule, formed proud endogenous lines of families with long genealogies," and their technical lore "was handed down and guarded jealously from generation to generation."⁷⁷ The biblical tradition gives the impression that a close link existed between the Kenites and Midianites, metalworking also being a distinctive feature among certain Midianites, particularly the group among whom Moses settled.⁷⁸

Although our knowledge of mining activities in the biblical period is limited, it seems that the Kenites and other semi-nomadic tribes who dwelt in the South,⁷⁹ held a kind of monopoly on copper mining and the production of copper artefacts. Important sources of copper were in the southern Arabah,

⁷¹ Gen 4:15.

⁷² Paula M. McNutt, "In the Shadow of Cain," in *The Social World of the Hebrew Bible: Twenty-four Years of the Social Sciences in the Academy* (ed. Ronald A. Simkins and Stephen L. Cook; Semeia 87; Atlanta: SBL, 1999), 45-64.

⁷³ James George Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend and Law* (London: Macmillan, 1923), 33-4.

⁷⁴ Nolan, "Kenites," 16.

⁷⁵ Negev and Gibson, *Holy Land*, 501.

⁷⁶ Frick, "Rechabites," 285.

⁷⁷ Frick, "Rechabites," 285.

⁷⁸ F. Charles Fensham, "Did a Treaty Between the Israelites and the Kenites Exist," *BASOR* 175 (1964): 51-54.

⁷⁹ South of Palestine, Sinai Peninsula, and regions where tribes such as the Midianites dwelled.

Sinai, and Punon. Excavations at Tel Arad revealed a large amount of metal objects and remains of copper metallurgy that could be dated back to the beginning of the fourth millennium B.C.E. The nearby Valley of Beer-sheba was the centre of copper metallurgy, and copper ores from both Feinan and Timnah were well known in the Early Bronze Age.⁸⁰ Egyptians exploited the mines in Sinai, and in the Early Iron Age at Timnah. The mines at Timnah were formerly attributed to Solomon, but recent research indicates that they were quarried at least two centuries earlier.⁸¹ A smelting camp of Early Iron Age I was found in the Timnah Valley. Copper smelting furnaces, as well as all the necessary metallurgical equipment have been excavated. The particular technological processes that had been applied, have been reconstructed. The Egyptians operated the mines and smelters jointly with the local inhabitants; these included Midianites, Kenites and Amalekites who preserved metallurgical traditions that could be traced back to prehistoric times.⁸²

4 Religion of the Kenites

Yohanon Aharoni, who excavated at Arad, revealed a raised platform, probably an altar, in the centre of the uncovered village. He identified this village in Stratum XII⁸³ as the most likely establishment of the Kenites. The altar base in the centre of the village “may reflect in some way the priestly background of this ancient clan.”⁸⁴ Herzog and other archaeologists⁸⁵ indicate that during the tenth century B.C.E. the Israelites built an altar at Arad. They used the few remaining stones of a previous altar, which preserved an even earlier cultic tradition of a platform that may have been a Kenite shrine in the twelfth century B.C.E.. Dever,⁸⁶ however, is of the opinion that this site had no Late Bronze Age occupation. During the late tenth century B.C.E. a small, isolated village was founded on the ruins of an Early Bronze Age city.

The classic formulation of the Kenite hypothesis was developed by Karl Budde during the late nineteenth century in Germany.⁸⁷ According to this theory, consistent with a tradition in Exodus, Moses’ Kenite⁸⁸ father-in-law

⁸⁰ Andreas Hauptmann, Friedrich Begemann and Sigrid Schmitt-Strecker, “Copper Objects From Arad: Their Composition and Provenance,” *BASOR* 314 (1999): 1-17.

⁸¹ Negev and Gibson, *Holy Land*, 281, 305, 335, 337, 365.

⁸² Negev and Gibson, *Holy Land*, 507-8.

⁸³ Ze’ev Herzog et al., “The Israelite Fortress at Arad,” *BASOR* 254 (1984): 1-34. Stratum XII at Arad represents Iron Age I – twelfth to eleventh century B.C.E.

⁸⁴ Herzog et al., “Fortress at Arad,” 1, 3, 6.

⁸⁵ Herzog et al., “Fortress at Arad,” 33.

⁸⁶ Dever, *Early Israelites*, 29.

⁸⁷ Karl Budde, *Religion of Israel to the Exile* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1899), 17-25, 35-8, 52-60.

⁸⁸ Judg 1:16; 4:11.

Jethro, a Midianite priest,⁸⁹ worshipped Yahweh. This Moses-type figure thus became acquainted with Yahweh through his father-in-law. The British scholar Rowley⁹⁰ argues that Jethro was a priest of Yahweh. Exodus 18⁹¹ indicates that Jethro rejoiced for all the good that Yahweh had done to Israel, and declared that now he knows that Yahweh is greater than all the gods. Jethro thereafter brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God.⁹² Moses later introduced the Israelites to Yahweh. A fundamental difference existed between the Kenites and the Israelites therein that the Israelites had chosen Yahweh as their God, whereas the Kenites had served their god from time immemorial.⁹³

A strong point of this classic hypothesis is the recurring biblical tradition of Yahweh's geographical link with the South:

- Deut 33:2, "The Lord came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran."
- Judg 5:4, "Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom."
- Ps 68:8, "the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel."
- Hab 3:3, "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran."

This theory, that the Yahwistic cult originated in the South, is supported by the thesis propounded by a number of scholars, namely that the name Yahweh emanated from the regions south of Palestine. One of the suggestions by scholars is that the name Yahweh developed from a well-known Arabic interjection *Ya* combined with *huwa*, the third person masculine personal pronoun; *Ya-huwa* thus meaning "Oh He." The god concerned is therefore spoken of as the mystical "He." Ancestors of the North Sinaitic tribes may have called their god "He," and worshipped him with the cultic cry *Ya-huwa*, "Oh He."⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Exod 2:16, 21; 3:1; 18:1.

⁹⁰ Harold Henry Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel: Its Forms and Meaning* (London: SPCK, 1967), 43-8.

⁹¹ Exod 18:9, 11-2.

⁹² Exod 18:12. The contents of Exod 18:1-27 is ascribed to the Elohist, but mixed with the J-narrator, which explains, to a certain extent, the reference to Yahweh and Elohim in the same context. See Willem Boshoff, Eben Scheffler, and Izak Spangenberg, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Context* (Pretoria: Protea, 2000), 104.

⁹³ Budde, *Religion of Israel*, 35.

⁹⁴ For a discussion of hypotheses postulating that the name Yahweh originated in the southern regions, see Marlene E. Mondriaan, "The Rise of Yahwism: Role of Marginalised Groups" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pretoria, 2011), 237-9.

The Kenite hypothesis is furthermore supported by data obtained from Egyptian records. As mentioned earlier in this article, fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C.E. Egyptian texts refer to “*Yhw* [*Yahu*] in the Land of the *shasu*,” while the twelfth century B.C.E. papyrus Anastasi VI links the *Shasu* tribes and Edom.⁹⁵ The latter region was in the “South,” a territory frequented by the Kenites. It is therefore possible that a connection existed between the *Shasu* tribes and the Kenites and thus, by implication, linked the Kenites and *Yhw*.

Scholars have disparate views concerning the Kenite hypothesis. Abba⁹⁶ confirms that there is no general agreement amongst scholars regarding the credibility of the Kenite hypothesis. Houtman,⁹⁷ for instance, contends that Jethro’s confession⁹⁸ is no proof that he was a Yahweh worshipper, whereas West⁹⁹ is of the opinion that “the Kenite hypothesis obviously has its strengths and should not be rejected out of hand.” Albertz¹⁰⁰ surmises that “we may suppose that the Midianites or Kenites were already worshippers of Yahweh before the Exodus group joined them.” Similarly, Mowinckel¹⁰¹ argues that “it is certainly a fact that both Qenites and Midianites were worshippers of Yahweh.” In contrast to the positive arguments, Wyatt¹⁰² is of the opinion that “the so-called Kenite hypothesis can hardly be regarded as certain . . . , and with regard to its attempt to explain the rise of Mosaic-Yahwism, it must be regarded as being very flimsy.”

In the centre of Timnah’s copper industry an Egyptian mining temple, dated fourteenth to twelfth century B.C.E., dedicated to the Egyptian goddess *Hathor*,¹⁰³ was excavated. After the initial destruction of the temple it was reconstructed, showing distinct Semitic features. A high place was also

⁹⁵ For more information on this papyrus and the relevant text, see William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., eds., *Archival Documents from the Biblical World* (vol. 3 of *The Context of Scripture*; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 16-7.

⁹⁶ Raymond Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” *JBL* 80 (1961): 320-8.

⁹⁷ Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus* (vol. 1; trans. Johan Rebel and Sierd Woudstra; HCOT; Kampen: Kok, 1993), 96-7.

⁹⁸ Exod 18:11.

⁹⁹ James King West, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (2nd ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1981), 159.

¹⁰⁰ Rainer Albertz, *From the Beginnings to the End of the Exile* (vol. 1 of *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*; trans. John Bowden; London: SCM, 1994), 51-55.

¹⁰¹ Sigmund Mowinckel, “The Name of the God of Moses,” *HUCA* 32 (1961): 121-33.

¹⁰² Nick Wyatt, *The Mythic Mind: Essays on Cosmology and Religion in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature* (London: Equinox, 2005), 10.

¹⁰³ According to Roy Willis, ed., *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide* (London: Duncan Baird, 1993), 51, *Hathor*, among the most complex of deities, was the patron of lovers. Her headdress characteristically has a pair of horns with a sun disc between them.

uncovered close to this small Semitic-type sanctuary. Among the finds were so-called Edomite pottery, probably of Midianite origin, and many copper offerings, which include a copper serpent with a gilded head; this serpent was probably a Midianite votive serpent.¹⁰⁴

D CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to analyse and evaluate material regarding the origin, lifestyle, and religion of the Kenites, who, according to the Kenite hypothesis, worshipped Yahweh before the Israelites did and, furthermore, introduced Moses to the cult of Yahweh. According to available information, it seems conceivable that the Cain narrative in Gen 4 could be recognised as the aetiological legend of the Kenites; Cain therefore being their eponymous ancestor. Cain's descendants, according to the lineage of Lamech, represent the specific occupational groups with which the Kenites are attributed, namely being tent dwellers, herders, musicians, and metalworkers. Their particular trade as smiths necessitated nomadism and travel, which in its turn, created opportunities to spread the cult of Yahwism, specifically also to the northern regions. Two instances in the Hebrew Bible substantiate the premise that the Kenites could have transmitted their religion to the North, namely the reference to Heber, the Kenite, who settled in the North, and to Jehonadab ben Rechab, a Rechabite, related to the Kenites, who assisted Jehu in a coup in the Northern Kingdom.

Certain Egyptian texts link *Yhw* with the *Shasu*, who roamed the southern areas of Palestine, particularly Edom. These regions were also inhabited by Kenites, Midianites, and other, mostly peripheral, tribes. The *Shasu* probably consisted of members from these different tribes (including Kenites) who seemingly were early adherents of the Yahwistic cult. The Kenites are, furthermore, connected to Cain, who received a protective "mark" from Yahweh and they were thus also safeguarded by the sign of Yahweh. This special sign identified the Kenites; they therefore worshipped Yahweh under his protection. The tribe could thus be associated with the origin of Yahwism.

After initial positive references to the Kenites in the Hebrew Bible, they virtually disappear. A possible reason could be that in the ancient cultures smiths and artisans were viewed with some fear; they were often spurned and regarded as dangerous sorcerers with supernatural powers. Magic, or sorcery, among the Israelites was forbidden by law, and its practitioners were put to death.¹⁰⁵ These smiths were, furthermore, also considered to be from inferior tribes who were, with their families, marginalised in the socio-economic sphere. The corresponding marginal characteristics are evident in the biblical portrayals of the Kenites, Midianites, and Rechabites. It is, however, significant

¹⁰⁴ Negev and Gibson, *Holy Land*, 507-8.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Exod 22:18.

that in the post-exilic First Book of Chronicles, the Kenites are referred to as scribes, a select group of professionals, as described in 1 Chr 2:55, “the clans also of the scribes who lived at Jabez: the Tirathites, the Shimeathites and the Sucathites. These are the Kenites who came from Hamath, the father of the house of Rechab.”

Despite sparse information, the connection between the Kenites and Cain, their particular lifestyle as well as a plausible link with “*Yhw* [*Yahu*] in the land of the *shasu*,” and a territorial association with Yahweh, lend credibility to the Kenite hypothesis. It is therefore conceivable that they worshipped Yahweh before the Israelites did, and introduced Moses to the cult of Yahwism.

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Marlene E. Mondriaan, Department of Ancient Languages, University of Pretoria, 0002, South Africa. *E-mail*: justusvw@gmail.com.