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General and Proper Names for God(s) in the Hebrew Bible

Abstract: Ancient Israel used several designations and names for God(s). Many of them are of common Ancient Near Eastern origin. There are some systematic treatments of individual names concerning both the question of the origin, history and single problems of designations and names *'ēl*, *'ēlôah*, *'ēlôhîm* and *yhwh*, however without explicit interest in comparative evaluation of their mutual relationships. It is furthermore true that very little of source critical research or thinking is in evidence under consideration of the nature of narrative and poetic texts. Any discussion about the meaning of these terms begins with the recognition that they were used as general and proper names. There are several criteria for solving the question whether the designations and names for God(s) are used in a particular text as proper names. One important criterion is the use of the terms without or with the definite article. The most important criterion, however, is the literary and poetical nature of the texts containing designations and names for God(s). The emphasis of the article is on literary properties of biblical texts in order to show more clearly in which cases divine designations and names are used as generic terms or as proper names denoting specifically the God of Israel. For this reason, it is important also to notice in which cases designations and names are used individually or in combination with other designations and names.

Key words: general names, proper names, attributes, analogy, compound constructions, the Tetragrammaton YHWH

Povzetek: **Splošna in osebna imena za Boga/bogove v hebrejskem Svetem pismu**

Stari Izrael je uporabljal več nazivov in imen za Boga/bogove. Številni med njimi imajo skupen izvor v starem Bližnjem vzhodu. Obstaja nekaj sistematičnih obravnav posameznih imen glede vprašanja izvora, zgodovine in posamičnih problemov glede nazivov in imen *'ēl*, *'ēlôah*, *'ēlôhîm* in *yhwh*, toda brez izrecnega interesa za primerjalno presojo njihovih medsebojnih odnosov. Razen tega je evidentiranih zelo malo raziskav o kritiki virov in mišljenju ob upoštevanju narave pripovednih in pesniških besedil. Vsaka diskusija o pomenu terminov se začneja z ugotovitvijo, da so jih uporabljali kot splošna in osebna imena. Obstaja več kriterije za razrešitev vprašanja, ali so nazivi in imena za Boga/bogove v določenem besedilu v rabi kot osebna imena. Med pomembnimi kriteriji je raba terminov brez ali z določenim členom. Najpomembnejši kriterij pa je lit-

erarna in poetična narava bibličnih besedil, ki vsebujejo nazive in imena za Boga/bogove. Težišče članka je na literarnih značilnostih bibličnih besedil, da bi pokazali bolj jasno, v katerih primerih so božanski nazivi v rabi kot splošni termini ali osebna imena, ki označujejo specifično Boga Izraela. Zaradi tega je pomembno tudi, da ugotovimo, v katerih primerih so nazivi in imena v rabi individualno ali v kombinaciji z drugimi nazivi in imeni.

Ključne besede: splošna imena, osebna imena, atributi, analogija, sestavljenke, tetragram YHWH

1. Introduction

The fundamental question of the Hebrew religion is: »Who is really God?« Many aspects of characterization of the only God of Israel can be derived from the emphasis on God's working in history, Israel's being chosen among the nations, their deliverance from slavery in Egypt and on visions of God's final victory in the end of times. But, in the final analysis, *ʾēlōhîm* was simply characterized as God absolutely. Once the point is reached that *ʾēlōhîm* is acknowledged to be the only God, the issue of anthropomorphism, of the principle of analogy and of poetic or more generally literary means of expression, enters the center of discussion.¹ How, then, to justify the many attributes and epithets assigned to God absolutely? The key to answering this question lies in the fact that humans have no access to the essence of God; therefore they assign to God attributes on the basis of their own limited experience with life in relations. As David Kaufmann claims, humans attribute to God all essential qualities out of their own mind and sentiment.² It seems logical that the primary theological conclusion is that God is the Almighty, the Ruler of the Universe. This presupposition implies that God is the origin of all other powers.³

¹ Irena Avsenik Nabergoj deals especially comprehensively with the issue of reality and truth of God and His Creation, as perceived both in philosophical and theological discourses from the antiquity to the present, and especially in literary means of expression. See her articles of 2014 and 2015 on semantics of reality and truth in *Bogoslovni vestnik*, and her second doctoral dissertation: Irena Avsenik Nabergoj, *Resničnost in resnica v literaturi, v izbranih bibličnih besedilih in njihovi literarni interpretaciji* [Reality and Truth in Literature, in Selected Biblical Texts and Their Literary Interpretation], presented by Jože Krašovec in *Bogoslovni vestnik* 75, no. 2 (2015): 389–395.

² See 1982 [1877], 157–158: »Mit einer einzigen Ausnahme sind alle in der Schrift vorkommenden Namen Gottes nicht wesentlich sondern relativ, d. h., da sie nicht aus der Betrachtung seines eigenen Wesens gewonnen, sondern aus Rückschlüssen aus dem Gegebenen der Welt ihren Ursprung nehmen, nur Ausdrücke verschiedener Beziehungen des Schöpfers zum Geschaffenen. Sie sind Bezeichnungen göttlicher Wirkungen, in der Form von Eigenschaften darum ausgesprochen, weil aus solchen bei den Menschen jenen analoge Handlungen zu entspringen pflegen. Wie wenig Gott durch diese Namen in dem Sinne, den wir damit verbinden, bezeichnet wird, zeigt z. B. der Name Erbarmender, was Gott seinem Wesen nach ebensowenig als Eiferer sein kann. Sie drücken nur die Affectionen aus, die wir nach menschlicher Anschauung in Gott als Wurzel der von ihm ausgehenden Wirkungen voraussetzen, keineswegs aber sein Wesen selber.«

³ See Kaufmann 1982 [1877], 159–161: »So drückt der Name Elohim unsere Vorstellung aus, die in uns durch die Betrachtung der über die gesamte Natur sich erstreckenden göttlichen Allmacht hervorgerufen wird, dass Gott Herrscher sein müsse. Wir bedienen uns eben dieses Wortes zur Bezeichnung jedes

On the level of the experience of existence various kinds of analogy are possible. Analogical use of divine names means that designations and names used for God(s) assume the role of symbols. Irena Avsenik Nabergoj makes an important point by dealing with analogy and symbolism as fundamental means of expressing reality and truth in her monograph study and in her article (2013).⁴ Thomas (Cardinal) Cajetan is one of rare authors who dealt with analogy of names. In the beginning of chapter two of his work *The Analogy of Names and the Concept of Being* he provides the definition:

»Analogous by attribution are those things which have a common name, and the notion signified by this name is the same with respect to the term but different as regards the relationships to this term. ... There is a diversity of relationships, but the term of those relationships is one and the same.« (1953, 15)

The problem of designations and names of God in the Hebrew Scriptures is a complex one.⁵ The scope of this article permits only a few suggestions concerning both the question of the origin and history of the use of designations and names 'ēl, 'ēlōah, 'ēlōhîm and yhwah and the significance of the divine name YHWH for the faith of ancient Israel, Judaism and Christianity. Of special interest is the question of meaning of individual designations of and names for God in the context of other questions which relate to the development of Ancient Near Eastern cultures and of Israel's tradition. Recognition of the range of meaning of terms and names for gods/God, as they appear alone or in combination with other divine designations or names, makes it possible to expose the use of them in its origin and translations in various combinations. The choice of one or more designations and names is not only a source-critical but also a crucial literary question. Instead of the established meta-literary address to the problem of function and the meaning of designations and names in source-analysis this research is essentially based on recognition of the importance of literary criteria in searching for the meaning of individual designations and names in their use in a variety of literary genres and modes.

The texts, in which the divine names are used, indicate that they stand for both common and proper nouns. There are several criteria for solving the question

Herrschers, sei es, dass seine Herrschaft die Welt umfasse, sei es dass ihr Gebiet ein beschränkteres sei, wie etwa eine Sphäre oder eine der vier Naturen oder gar das eines menschlichen Richters. [...] So erklärt sich die Pluralform des Namens Elohim, da dieser ehemals die einzelnen als Götter verehrten Naturkräfte oder deren Zusammenfassung bezeichnete, später aber zum Ausdruck der Urquelle aller dieser Kräfte, des Herrschers der Welt und einzigen Gottes, verwendet wurde.«

⁴ In her article in the journal *Synthesis Philosophica* 28, no. 1-2 (2013), 196, Irena Avsenik Nabergoj explains: »Art and science developed according to the principle of analogy, and in the area of philosophy the concept of the »analogy of being« (*analogia entis*) appeared. It became all the more obvious that literature is an organic link between objective and subjective truth which could only be expressed by means of a symbol, by analogy. Literary critics speak in theoretical terms of the ambiguity of symbols, words and word chains, and ultimately of hermeneutic theory examining the literal meaning and the various aspect of metaphorical meaning. In this fact lies also the reason for the tremendous significance of symbol and allegory. The essence of a symbol is that rather than offering an immediate way of representing truth it provides an analogous representation of truth.«

⁵ The author turns to the forms of divine names in his monographs study *The Transformation of Biblical Proper Names* on various occasions of his dealing with phonetic problems of biblical proper names.

whether the generic terms *'ēl* and *'ēlōhîm* are proper names in a particular text. One important criterion is the use of the terms without or with the definite article. The most important criterion, however, is the broader and larger context of literary creations. Only literary structures clearly show the choice of designations for God as common nouns or as individual names of one God. The majority of humankind has believed that there are many gods. This understanding implies that designations for gods are common nouns. Only when used by monotheists does the term »God« determine an individual name exclusively in relation to one God. In such cases attributes, or a union of attributes, are understood not in their generic or common but in an absolute sense. It is striking that poetic and narrative texts attribute to designations and the names of God a variety of names and qualities and associate with each designation or name specific concepts and characteristics. The great number of attributes employed in various combinations and in various poetic and narrative texts manifests most clearly the inexhaustible richness of God's qualities in the minds of the believers. (Krašovec 2010)

2. The Designations and Names *'ēl*, *'ēlōah*, *'ēlōhîm* in Semitic Languages and in the Hebrew Bible

It is not clear how far back the use of the most important biblical designations and names for God in antiquity goes. In the early stages of all the major branches of the Semitic family of languages, the oldest term for gods/God is *'ēl* (from *'ilu*), which is normally used as a proper name of a particular deity (Cross 1997). In Ugaritic Canaanite myths, the term *'ēl* occurs as the personal name of the highest god, and sometimes also as the common noun »god.« The etymology of the term is obscure, but, being the dominant Semitic generic appellative or proper name for God, the term *'ēl* expresses primarily a divine power elevated over all other divine or extra-divine powers. The divinity *'ēl* is the head of the Canaanite pantheon and represents the primordial structure of the cosmos and a society that is patriarchal in its order. Frank M. Cross concludes: »He is the primordial father of gods and men, sometimes stern, often compassionate, always wise in judgment« (1997, 253). In the Hebrew Bible, the term *'ēl* appears predominantly as a generic appellative of deity, with about the same semantic range as the term *'ēlōhîm*. The term *'ēl* (preferably with compounds) is used in about 200 places, mainly in poetic and archaic or archaizing texts. Cross points to the probable final effect of using the term *'ēl* in the constellation of Hebrew monotheism against a polytheistic cultural environment: »The wide overlap in attributes, epithets, and names of Yahweh with El suggests that Yahweh originated as an El figure, splitting apart from the old god as the cult of Israel separated and diverged from its polytheistic context« (1997, 260).

The term *'ēl* is used when God is contrasted with the human (Num 23:19; Isa 31:3; Ezek 28:9; Hos 11:9; Job 25:4), or when predicates of compassion and grace are attached to the term (Exod 20:5; 34:6.14; Ps 86:15). Of special interest is the

combination of the term with some other divine designations, attributes and names of which *'ēl* is the first element: *'ēl-bērīt* »God of the Covenant« (Judg 9,46); *'ēl 'ēlīm* »the God of gods« (Dan 11:36); *'ēl 'ēlōhīm yhw̄h* »god of gods, the LORD« (Josh 22:22 twice; Ps 50:1); *'ēl 'ēmet* »faithful God« (Ps 31:6); *'ēl 'ēmūnāh* »a faithful God« (Deut 32:4); *'ēl dē'ōt* »a God of knowledge« (1 Sam 2:3); *'ēl gādōl yhw̄h* »a great God is the LORD« (Ps 95:3); *hā'ēl haggadōl hagibbōr (wēhānōrā')* »the great, the mighty (and the awesome) God« (Deut 10:17; Jer 32:18; Neh 9:32); *'ēl gibbōr* »Mighty God« (Isa 9:5); *hā'ēl haggadōl wēhanōrā'* »the great and awesome God« (Neh 1:5); *'ēl-hāy* »the living God« (Hos 2:1; Ps 84:3); *'ēl hannūn wērahūm* »a gracious and merciful God« (Jon 4:2; Neh 9:31); *'ēl yhw̄h* »God the LORD« (Ps 85:9); *'ēl salē 'ī* »God my rock« (Ps 42:10); *'ēl 'elyōn* »God Most High« (Gen 14:18-20.20; Ps 78:35); *'ēl 'ōlām* »the everlasting God« (Gen 21:33); *hā'ēl 'ōsēh pele'* »the God who works wonders« (Ps 77:14); *hā'ēl haqqādōš* »the Holy God« (Isa 5:16); *'ēl qannā'* »a jealous God« (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24); *'ēl qannō'* »a jealous God« (Josh 24:19); *'ēl qannō' wēnōqēm yhw̄h* »a jealous and avenging God is the LORD« (Nah 1:2); *'ēl rahūm (wēhannūn)* »a God merciful and gracious« (Exod 34:6; Deut 4:31; Ps 86:16); *'ēl rō'ī* »God seeing me« (Gen 16:13-14); *ēl-šaddīq* »a righteous God« *'ēl šaddāy* »God Almighty« (Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; Exod 6:3); *'ēl haššāmāyim* »God of heaven« (Ps 136:26). Of interest is finally the use of the term as the first or the last element in theophoric names: Elijah, Elisha, Elihu; Israel, Ishmael, Samuel, etc.

Probably derived from the common Semitic word *'il-* »god« are the Hebrew words *'ēlōah* and its expansion in plural *'ēlōhīm* (Ringgren 1997; van der Toorn 1999). The singular form appears 57 times in the Hebrew Bible, most frequently in the book of Job, and 100 times in the Aramaic sections in the form *'ēlāh*. In several passages it has the appellative function. It is usually assumed that the term *'ēlōhīm*, which is much more often used as a generic appellative or name for God, is a plural form of *'ēl*. Then *'ēlōah* would be a late singular derived from the form *'ēlōhīm*. The word *'ēlōah* occurs in the Hebrew Bible 57 times, predominantly in post-exilic literature, whereas the word *'ēlōhīm* occurs 2570 times in all kinds of biblical literature. The form *'ēlōhīm* is usually considered an abstract plural denoting *one* God absolutely in the sense of *pluralis excellentiae* or *maiestatis*, to be distinguished from the numerical plural denoting *gods*.⁶ This name for God is generally interchangeable with *'ēl* as well as the personal name YHWH. Interchange between the personal names *'ēlōhīm* and YHWH is most clearly marked in the beginning chapters of the book of Genesis 2:2b–3:24. In this passage the narrator regularly uses the compound *yhw̄h 'ēlōhīm* (2:4, 5, 7, 9, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22; 3: 1, 8 twice, 9, 14, 21, 22), but in the dialogue between Eve and the serpent in 3:1-5 the narrator uses the term *'ēlōhīm* alone (three times) as the proper name for God.

⁶ See E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 15th impression (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), § 124 g. One of the arguments for the understanding given at this place is the following: »That the language has entirely rejected the idea of numerical plurality in *'ēlōhīm* (whenever it denotes *one* God), is proved especially by being almost invariably joined with a singular attribute.«

The term *'ēlōhîm* (often with compounds) is used both in relation to gods and demons and to humans who are only creatures and therefore cannot be gods. This approach includes assertions of incomparability, reproof of idols and rejection of any kind of hubris. Assertions of incomparability are characteristic of hymnic literature, especially of Deutero-Isaiah and Psalms. The contrast between God and all other subjects of power includes the contrast which exists between the followers of God and their opposers who are rebels against God. A good example of this type of presentation of the true God is the oracle of Ezekiel against Tyre in chapter 28. Verse 2 quotes the words of the king of Tyre as an expression of his hubris: »I am a god (*'ēl*); I sit in the seat of the gods (*'ēlōhîm*), in the heart of the seas.« The prophetic answer to this blasphemy follows immediately: »Yet you are but a man (*'ādām*), and not god (*'ēl*), through you compare your mind with the mind of a god (*'ēlōhîm*).« We note that the term *'ēl* is used in an absolute sense, whereas the term *'ēlōhîm* is first used in a polytheistic and then in a monotheistic sense. The main subject of the prophets is reproof of idolatry of the Israelites. We note that, in general, the terms *'ēl* and *'ēlōhîm* are interchangeable in the Hebrew Bible, but the term *'ēl* occurs mainly in poetic and archaic texts.

Many aspects of characterization of the only God of Israel can be derived from the emphasis on God's working in history, Israel's being chosen among the nations, their deliverance from slavery in Egypt and on visions of God's final victory in the end of times. But, in the final analysis, *'ēlōhîm* was simply characterized as God absolutely. Once the point is reached that *'ēlōhîm* is acknowledged to be the only God, the issue of anthropomorphism, of the principle of analogy and of poetic or more generally literary means of expression, enters the center of discussion. On the level of the experience of existence various kinds of analogy are possible. As David Kaufmann claims, humans attribute to God all essential qualities out of their own mind and sentiment.⁷ He argues that the designation Elohîm assumed various stages of dominion in the span from the multiplicity of natural forces to the Unity of God as the Almighty, the Ruler of the Universe, and hence the origin of all other powers.⁸

Compound constructions show how far the words for God were interchangeable. In Ps 29:1 and 89:7, for instance, we find the phrase *bēnē' 'ēlîm* »sons of the

⁷ See Kaufmann 1877=1982: 157: »Mit einer einzigen Ausnahme sind also alle in der Schrift vorkommenden Namen Gottes nicht wesentlich, sondern relative, d. h., da sie nicht aus der Betrachtung seines eigenen Wesens gewonnen, sondern aus Rückschlüssen aus dem Gegebenen der Welt ihren Ursprung nehmen, nur Ausdrücke verschiedener Beziehungen des Schöpfers zum Geschaffenen. Sie sind Bezeichnungen göttlicher Wirkungen, in der Form von Eigenschaften darum ausgesprochen, weil aus solchen bei den Menschen jenen analoge Handlungen zu entspringen pflegen.«

⁸ See Kaufmann 1982 [1877], 159–161: »So drückt der Name Elohîm unsere Vorstellung aus, die in uns durch die Betrachtung der über die gesammte Natur sich erstreckenden göttlichen Allmacht hervorgehoben wird, dass Got Herscher sein müsse. Wir bedienen uns eben dieses Wortes zur Bezeichnung jedes Herschers, sei es, dass seine Herrschaft die Welt umfasse, sei es dass ihr Gebiet ein beschränkteres sei, wie etwa eine Sphäre oder eine der vier Naturen oder gar das eines menschlichen Richters. ... So erklärt sich die Pluralform des Namens Elohîm, da dieser ehemals die einzelnen als Götter verehrten Naturkräfte oder deren Zusammenfassung bezeichnete, später aber zum Ausdruck der Urquelle aller dieser Kräfte, des Herschers der Welt und einzigen Gottes, verwendet wurde. ... Von ähnlicher Bedeutung ist der Name El, der seiner Abstammung nach Stärke bezeichnet.«

gods« (NRSV »heavenly beings«), while in Gen 6:2, Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7 for the same meaning we find the phrase *bēnē (hā)ʾēlōhîm*. Further illustrative examples are: *ʾēl ʾaḥēr* »another god« (Exod 34:14), *ʾēlōhîm ʾaḥērîm* »other gods« (64 x); *ḥay ʾēl* (Job 27:2), *ḥay hāʾēlōhîm* (2 Sam 2:27), both meaning »as God lives«; *ʾēl ḥay* (Josh 3:10, Hos 2:1, Ps 42:3), *ʾēlōhîm ḥay* (2 Kings 19:4, 16, Isa 37:4, 17); *ʾēlōhîm ḥayyîm* (Deut 5:23, 1 Sam 17:26, 36, Jer 10:10, 23:36), all meaning »the living God«; *mî ʾēlōah mibbalēʾādē yhw̄h* (Ps 18:32[31]), *mî-ʾēl mibbalēʾādē yhw̄h* (2 Sam 22:32), both meaning »Who is God except the LORD«; *mî-kāmōkāh bāʾēlîm yhw̄h* »Who is like you among the gods, o Lord?« (Exod 15:11), *ʾēn-kāmōkā bāʾēlōhîm ʾādōnāy* »There is none like you among the gods, O Lord« (Ps 86:8). In Deut 32:17 we read: »They sacrificed to demons, not God (*lōʾ ʾēlōah*), to deities (*ʾēlōhîm*) they had never known«; in Deut 32:21, differently: »They made me jealous with what is not god (*bēlōʾ-ʾēl*), provoked me with their idols.« It is not possible to recognize any rule for the use of the three words for God, but it is striking that the term *ʾēl* occurs mainly in poetic and archaic or archaizing texts.

The Hebrew Bible contains a number of construct expressions, namely, compounds of double proper names or designations of God, sometimes extended with additional appellatives. The aim of construct expressions is to emphasize the supreme authority, qualities or attributes of God. To avoid tautology, translations do not have always a literal version of all words composing a set phrase. We follow mainly the NRSV: *hāʾādōn yhw̄h ʾēlōhîm* »the Sovereign, the LORD, God« (Exod 34:23, Isa 51:22); *ʾādōnāy yhw̄h šēbāʾôt* (Isa 3:15, 10:23, 24, 22:12, etc.); *hāʾādōn yhw̄h šēbāʾôt* »the Sovereign, the LORD of hosts« (Isa 1:24, 3:1, 10:16, 33, 19:4); *hāʾādōn yhw̄h ʾēlōhē yiśrāʾēl* »the LORD God, the God of Israel« (Exod 34:23); *ʾēl ʾēlōhîm yhw̄h* »God of gods, the LORD« (Josh 22:22 [twice], Ps 50:1); *yhw̄h ʾadōn kol hāʾāres* »the LORD, the Lord of all the earth« (Josh 3:13); *yhw̄h ʾēlōhîm* »the LORD God« (Gen 2:4, 5, 7, 8, 3:23); *yah yah* »the LORD GOD« (Isa 38:11); *yah yhw̄h* »the LORD GOD« (Isa 12:2, 26:4). It is noteworthy that in the Hebrew Bible composite names are theophoric, referring to or actually mentioning the Deity, either by the name of *ʾEl* or by the name of *yhw̄h*. This phenomenon in itself clearly shows that in the Bible assertions about God are simultaneously assertions about humans and vice versa. First to be mentioned is the phrase *ʾādōnāy yhw̄h šēbāʾôt* (Isa 3:15, 10:23, 24, 22:12, etc.). The word in plural *šēbāʾôt* is usually rendered by the word »hosts.«

3. The Personal Divine Name *yhw̄h* and Its relation to the Name *ʾēlōhîm* in the Hebrew Bible

The history of the Tetragrammaton YHWH is by far the most complicated. Extra-biblical evidences in West Semitic, Assyrian and Egyptian sources, which occur in several forms and spellings, form an appropriate starting point for dealing with the origins and forms of this biblical Divine Name in its shorter or longer forms – *yhw̄h*, *yhw*, *yhh*, *yh*, *yw*, etc (Freedman, O'Connor and Ringgren 1986, 501–513; van der Toorn 1999).

The earliest extra-biblical evidence is the Mesha inscription from the 9th century BCE, reporting of the king of Moab: »And I took from there the vessels of Yahweh (*yhw*) and dragged them before Chemosh.« On the basis of philological considerations and Greek transcriptions the supposed original pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton is *yahweh*. This form of the divine name appears in the Hebrew Bible 6828 times as a designation of the God of Israel, often in formulaic usage as the second element: *'ādōnāy-yhw*, etc.; the name appears 50 times in the short form *yāh*. In the post-exilic time the name YHWH was gradually replaced by the term *'ādōnāy* »the Lord« as a *pluralis maiestatis* that can be taken also in absolute sense (of all, par excellence).⁹ The abstract usage of *'ādōn* in the singular appears very early as a formulaic divine epithet: *hā'ādōn yhw šēbā'ōt* (Isa 1:24; 3:1; 1016, 33; 19:4), etc.

The Tetragrammaton YHWH is considered to be the personal name of the God of Moses, for it was revealed to him at the moment he was called to be the deliverer of Israel from the Egyptian slavery. The name »God of Israel« is, however, not used only in relation to Israeli worshippers, but also generally in relation to other subjects. At various times there must have been various occasions and reasons for a particular usage of designations and names for God. It is striking that the personal divine name YHWH appears also in God's encounter with the non-Israelite Balaam (Num 22:8, 13, 18, 19, 22, 24, 31-32, 34-35) and the ass upon which he was riding (22:23-28). In the second account of Creation and in the narrative of Fall (Gen 2:4b-3:24) the name YHWH appears as the compound name, together with the term *'ēlōhîm*, translated into English as LORD God (2:5, 7, 9, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22 and 3:8 (twice), 9, 14, 21, 22; only in the conversation between the serpent and the woman (3:1-5) does *'ēlōhîm* occur by itself. The constant interchange between YHWH and *'ēlōhîm* in the narrative of the Creation and the Fall may carry a universal understanding of God who »created the heavens and the earth« (Gen 1:1) and characterize God as God absolutely.

According to the documentary theory, the difference in regard to the divine names employed prove that they belonged originally to two separate works, later fused by redactors into one narrative. Umberto Cassuto prefers to assume existence of various epic poems and of certain rules in using divine names. He argues:

»The variation in the employment of the two names, *YHWH* and *'Elōhîm* in the book of Genesis is subject to certain rules which I have been able to determine and formulate with precision. These rules are based on the difference in the nature of the two names, for they are not of the same type; the name *YHWH* is a proper noun that denotes specifically the God of Israel, whereas *'Elōhîm* was originally a generic term and became a proper noun among the Israelites through the realization that there is only One God and that *YHWH* alone is *'Elōhîm* ['God'].« (1978, 86-87)¹⁰

⁹ For the background of the form *'ādōnāy* in itself and in relation to other designations of God, see Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar*, § 87 g, 102 m, 135 q.

¹⁰ In the continuation, on page 87, Cassuto explains some of the rules governing the use of the two Names in the book of Genesis:

The narrative of theophany on Mount Horeb (Exod 3:1-5) deserves a more detailed treatment. The mention of the »angel of the LORD« who appeared to Moses (v. 2) means a manifestation of YHWH. In verse 4 there is a sudden change in the use of the divine name YHWH: »When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God (*'ēlōhîm*) called to him out of the bush ...« In verse 6 (repeated in verse 15), YHWH addresses Moses by using only the general and vague understanding of the term *'ēlōhîm*: »I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.« According to Exodus 3:14, God revealed his name to Moses in a descriptive form: *'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh* »I am who I am.« The revelation of God's name *'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh* »I am who I am« in Exodus 3:14 is connected with the preceding statement that YHWH is identical with the God of the ancestors (3:6).

The divine name YHWH is of central importance also in the elevated diction of the narrative of the renewed call of Moses in Exodus 6:2-8. In contrast to Exodus 3:14, YHWH / *'Elōhîm* (v. 1) spoke here to Moses by using a self-identification formula and not in a theophany: »I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty (*'ēl šadday*), but by my name 'The LORD (*yhwh*)' I did not make myself known to them« (vv. 2-3). The self-revelation formula »I am the LORD« is repeated three times in verses 6, 7, 8. The iteration of the solemn formula indicates an emphatic assurance that God will fulfil his promises. Brevard S. Childs states:

»The P writer had a concept of a development of Israel's religion and one which differed from that of the earlier sources. God had revealed himself in stages by means of different names. To the Patriarchs he appeared as El Shaddai, but only to Moses was the new name Yahweh made known.« (1974, 112)

The divine name YHWH is generally thought to be a verbal form derived from the root *hwy*, later *hyh*, »to be, to exist, to become.« Most scholars think that the verb was originally a causative (hiphil) formation. At a certain stage of development the name had the form *yahwī* or *yahwē*. Since the Hebrew verbal system dictates the ending *ē*, we can conclude that the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton in the biblical period was *yahwēh*. In Hebrew, the names exhibit chiefly *hiphil* and *polel* forms. In initial position, the element has two forms: *yěhō-* and

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- a) The Tetragrammaton occurs when Scripture reflects the concept of God, especially in His *ethical* aspect, that belongs *specifically to the people of Israel*; *'Elōhîm* appears when the Bible refers to the abstract conception of God that was current in the international circles of the Sages, the idea of God conceived in a general sense as the Creator of the material world, as the Ruler of nature, and as the Source of life.
 - b) The name *YHWH* is used when Scripture wishes to express that direct and intuitive notion of God that is characteristic of the unsophisticated faith of the multitude; but *'Elōhîm* is employed when it is intended to convey the concept of the philosophically minded who study the abstruse problems connected with the existence of the world and humanity.
 - c) *YHWH* appears when the Bible presents the Deity to us in His personal character, and in direct relationship to human beings or to nature; whereas *'Elōhîm* occurs when Holy Writ speaks of God as a Transcendental Being, who stands entirely outside nature, and above it.

yô-, used mainly in theophoric proper names.¹¹ The longer form is obviously original. The shortening of the longer form is probably caused by the taboo status of the divine name YHWH. The pronunciation of the longer form sounded when uttered aloud as if the reader were pronouncing the unspeakable divine name. To guard against such pronouncement, an attempt was made to omit the letter *He* so that the first part of compound names was altered from *yĕhô-* into *yô-*. The alterations were only partially carried out and in most cases the primitive orthography has survived. At the end of a name, the Tetragrammaton also has two forms: *-yâhû* and *-yâh*, obviously both deriving from the form *yahw*. Here too priority must be assigned to the longer form.

Interpretation of the origin and significance of the divine name YHWH remains a classic crux in Old Testament scholarship (Childs 1974, 60–70). Many scholars focus their attention on Ancient Near Eastern parallels and fail to distinguish between a reconstructed history of common intercultural features and Israel's own history of tradition. Brevard S. Childs complements the comparativist method by proposing:

»An alternative solution is to take seriously Israel's own tradition when it interprets the divine name in a manner which is in striking discontinuity with the Ancient Near Eastern parallels. Such a view would certainly recognize the Ancient Near Eastern cognates of the divine name and even reckon with a long prehistory of the name before its entrance into Israel, but it remains open to the possibility that a totally new meaning was attached to the name by Israel.« (1974, 64)

Attempts to explain convincingly the name *yhwh*, its etymology and its use both in non-biblical Semitic languages and within the biblical canon include the more fundamental issue of naming as a linguistic, philosophical and theological category. When Philo of Alexandria deliberates about the role of names in general and about the reasons for changing names in some biblical cases (for instance Abraham and Sarah) he pays special attention to this passage and argues that names are used »by licence of language« only as a substitute, as a symbol, for the essence of things and beings, for a created being cannot apprehend even the essence of created things and beings. In 2.10-14 he argues:

»And why should we wonder that the Existent cannot be apprehended by men when even the mind in each of us is unknown to us? For who knows

¹¹ It is striking that in the Hebrew Bible numerous composite names are theophoric, referring to, or actually mentioning, the Deity, either by the name of 'El or by the name of YHWH. This phenomenon in itself clearly shows that in the Bible assertions about God are simultaneously assertions about humans and vice versa. There are many personal names compounded with the divine name YHWH in initial position. The names are given here in alphabetical order, without taking notice of the fact that two or more persons have often the same name in the Bible: Jehoaddah, Jehoaddan, Jehoaddin, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jehohanan, Jehoiachin, Jehoiada, Jehoiakim, Jehoiarib, Jehonadab, Jehonathan, Jehoram, Jehoshabeath, Jehoshaphat, Jehosheba, Jehozabad, Jehozadak, Jehu, Jehucal, Jehudi, Joab, Joah, Joahaz, Joash, Joiada, Joiakim, Joiarib, Joram.

the essential nature of the soul, that mystery which has bred numberless contentions among the sophists who propound opinions contrary to each other or even totally and generically opposed? It is a logical consequence that no personal name even can be properly assigned to the truly Existent. Note that when the prophet desires to know what he must answer to those who ask about His name He says 'I am He that is' (Ex iii. 14), which is equivalent to 'My nature is to be, not to be spoken.' Yet that the human race should not totally lack a little to give to the supreme goodness He allows them to use by licence of language, as though it were His proper name, the title of Lord God of the three natural orders, teaching, perfection, practice, which are symbolized in the records as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. [...] For those who are born into mortality must needs have some substitute for the divine name, so that they may approach if not the fact at least the name of supreme excellence and be brought into relation with it. And this is shown by the oracle proclaimed as from the mouth of the Ruler of all in which He says that no proper name of Him has been revealed to any. 'I was seen,' He says, 'of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, being their God, and My name of *Lord* I did not reveal to them' (Ex. vi. 3). For when the transposition is reset in the proper order it will run thus, 'My proper name I did not reveal to thee,' but, He implies, only the substitute, and that for reasons already mentioned. So impossible to name indeed is the Existent that not even the Pontencies who serve Him tell us a proper name.« (1988, 146–149)

Philo illustrates his argument by pointing to the narrative of Jacob's nocturnal encounter with a mysterious antagonist at Penuel and his wrestling with him »until the breaking of the day« (Gen 32:22-32). The struggle, for which Jacob was totally unprepared, was indecisive until the opponents touched Jacob's hip. The point of the narrative is that Jacob nearly defeated the heavenly being thanks to the magical power he received from the supreme Power, from YHWH himself. When Jacob discovered something of the divine nature of the antagonist, the most elemental reaction of his longing for God was to ask for the power of blessing from him. The idea is that his future life will be no longer determined by his own plans and power, but by the purpose and power of the divine blessing which means divine redemptive presence. In this context, understanding the relationship between word and symbol in naming things, persons and the supreme God is of central interest (vv. 27-30). The heavenly being asked Jacob: »What is your name?« He answered: »Jacob.« The heavenly being expressed the divine will to change his name: »You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.« Now Jacob asked his mysterious antagonist: »Please tell me your name.« But the heavenly being answered by the question: »Why is it that you ask my name?« Instead of revealing his name, the opponent blessed Jacob. At this point, Philo argues (2.14–3.15):

»'It is enough for thee,' he means, to profit through my benediction, but

as for names, those symbols which indicate created beings, look not for them in the case of imperishable natures.« Think it not then a hard saying that the Highest of all things should be unnameable when His Word has no name of its own which we can speak. And indeed if He is unnameable He is also inconceivable and incomprehensible.« (1988, 150–151)

Gerhard von Rad argues in more general terms:

»In the entire section which follows one must bear in mind that the ancients did not consider a name as simply sound and smoke. On the contrary, for them the name was closely linked with its bearer in such a way that the name contained something of the character of the one who bore it. Thus, in giving his name, Jacob at the same time had to reveal his whole nature. The name Jacob (at least for the narrative) actually designates its bearer as a cheat (cf. chs. 25.26; 27.36). Now he is given a new name by the unknown antagonist, a name of honor, in which God will recognize and accept him. The name Israel, which will be given to Jacob once more (ch. 35.10), is here interpreted very freely and contrary to its original linguistic meaning ('May God rule') in such a way that God is not the subject but the object of Jacob's struggle.« (1972, 321–322)

In relation to the revelation of the divine name YHWH to Moses in Exod 3:14 we note the explanation by Ronald E. Clements:

»The insistence that this new name belongs to the God who had been worshipped by Israel's ancestors under other names introduces a vital unifying factor. [...] The deity, previously known by a variety of names and titles, now has one mysterious and supreme name. What this new name means is of little consequence, since all emphasis is placed on its significance for the people who were henceforth entitled to invoke the help it offered.« (2007, 52)

Once it is accepted that the revelation of the divine name YHWH to Moses does not refer to existence or reality of God, it is all the more important to acknowledge that the revelation refers to God's presence, his manifestation in historical events. It contains the essence of God's purpose of Israel and encompasses the whole redemptive power of God.¹² Moses was well aware that Israel cannot survive without God's presence. In the moment of the greatest crisis of relation between YHWH and the tribes that came from Egypt to Mount Horeb, the theme of God's presence among his people became a question of »to be or not to be« (Exod 32–34). When God decided to withdraw his presence as a sign of judgment, Moses engaged himself to bring them to repentance and was willing to offer even his

¹² Gerhard von Rad argues: »From the very start Israel was debarred from elevating the name into the realm of 'mystery.' So she was not in a position to appropriate the name of Jahweh and make it the object of an abstruse mythology or of speculation: it was to be understood only in historical experience« (1975, 186).

own life. In an emotional intercession of the highest intensity, Moses hoped that God's face or presence would accompany the people in the Promised Land. The gravity of the crisis is reflected in God's reaction to Moses's intercession. When God took the initiative and called him to the peak of the mountain, the narrator stated: »The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend« (33:11). But when Moses himself took the initiative and asked God for his presence among the people, the former statement was turned into its opposite. The narrator reports in verses 18-20:

»Moses said, 'Show me your glory (*kěbôdekā*), I pray.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness (*ṭûbî*) pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, *The Lord* (*běšēm yhw̄h*); and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.'«

The anthropomorphic style of the dialogue serves to bring to the climax the Hebrew understanding of God, with special emphasis on his freedom. Brevard S. Childs states:

»The name of God, which like his glory and his face are vehicles of his essential nature, is defined in terms of his compassionate acts of mercy. The circular idem per idem formula of the name – I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious – is closely akin to the name in Ex. 3.14 – I am who I am – and testifies by its tautology to the freedom of God in making known his self-contained being.« (1974, 596)

Some time in antiquity, Jews have regarded this name as unspeakably holy and therefore unsuitable for use in public reading. For the taboo reading *yahwēh* they introduced the substitute name *'ădōnāy*. This is indirect evidence for reading the vowel *a* in the first syllable. In order to avoid violating the taboo against pronouncing the name *yhw̄h*, the Masoretes wrote the form *yěhōwāh* for the substitute name *'ădōnāy*, or *yěhōwih* for the substitute *'ēlōhîm*, which also does not violate the taboo. Paradoxically enough, in order to avoid pronouncing the divine name YHWH correctly the scribes introduced an incorrect form of spelling. So in the Renaissance period the impossible form *yěhōwāh* came into being. This explains the fact that the correct pronunciation of *yhw̄h* was lost from Jewish tradition some time during the Middle Ages. Only in recent times have scholars begun to try to discover the correct pronunciation. Herbert C. Brichto points to the strange fact that we are not able to find out when the substitutions for YHWH were first introduced:

»It is remarkable that neither in rabbinic literature nor in modern scholarship do we come across surmise as to when these substitutions for YHWH were first introduced. If we ourselves begin to speculate on this question we soon find ourselves asking some other questions, of equal or greater difficulty. Such as, how was YHWH pronounced before the substitution? Or,

why a substitution in the first place? An when we ask this last question we find ourselves recalling having been taught sometime, somewhere, by someone, that the substitution for YHWH is due to its having at some remote time in antiquity come to be regarded as too holy to pronounce. ... And in the absence of a tradition written or oral, we are driven to further conjecture: how it came about that an entire people accepted the notion that one of its names for God had become too holy to pronounce.« (1998, 5–6)

We note that literary and metaphorical designations of God have referential, denotative, meaning and imply both limitation and great potentiality of language. The Hebrew Bible is a collection of texts that are written by humans for communication to humans by attributing human traits to God. It is true that anthropomorphism is a necessary consequence of the inadequacy of human language in relation to God, but the statement in Gen 1:27 that God created humankind in his image means that there is likeness between God humans. Máire Byrne argues:

»In the Hebrew Bible there is the prevailing idea that humans are made in the image of God as Gen. 1.27 states, 'so God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.' In the same way as we can find out something about the artist by looking at their paintings, by understanding the essence of humanity we can try to form a clearer idea of God. God is therefore not anthropomorphic; rather, as human beings, we are theomorphic.« (2011, 19)

In this context, John Barton emphasizes the paradox of biblical perception of God:

»There is likeness between God and human beings, summed up in the formula that they are made in God's image, and this is paradoxical because the very same religion that affirms this also stresses more than any other the strict *incomparability* between the human and the divine.« (2007, 35)

Consideration of all titles and epithets of God in various kinds of biblical literature shows the whole spectrum of consideration and feeling in relation to God. The belief that God is the Almighty, the Creator and the Sovereign with redemptive purpose for Israel and the world explains why divine justice is balanced against forgiving love. Divine justice and mercy go hand in hand and cannot be separated. Though it is difficult to summarize the character of God on the basis of construct expressions alone, the question what God is can be completed by means of recognizing confrontation with individual negative gods and demons, such as Satan, Diabolos, etc., who oppose YHWH. The theomorphic human nature is well reflected in describing the personal otherness of the God who interacts with the people, as expressed in Mic 4:5: »For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god (*'ēlōhāw*), but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God (*yhwh 'ēlōhênû*) forever and ever.«

In connection with divine names, in the Hebrew Bible, mention may be made also of the Hebrew word *'ādôn* and the Aramaic word *mara'* »lord.« The words usually concern the relation between a lord and his subordinates and denote a

personal exercise of power over men and things. It seems justified to assume that in the later period of transmission of the text the word »Lord« replaced several older divine designations and names. This holds true especially for the pronominal form *'ādōnāy* »my Lord« (attested in the Hebrew Bible about 450 times), which exclusively denotes the God of Israel. In the LXX, the Greek word *Kúrios* is a strict translation of the cases where in the Hebrew Bible the word *'ādōn* or *'ādōnāy* is used. As a rule, however, this word is used as an equivalent for the divine name YHWH. We note also that in the LXX, the Greek word *Θεός*, occurring 3984 times, almost always refers to the name YHWH.

4. Conclusion and Implications

The Hebrew term *šēm* »name,« which occurs 643 times in the Hebrew Bible, refers to a designation of a person, an animal, a plant, and reputation and progeny. Names of human persons and deities are closely associated with their nature or properties. Certain deities in the Ancient Near East were celebrated for the multiplicity of their names or titles. Of central importance in the Hebrew Bible are the designations and names *'ēl*, *'ēlōah*, *'ēlōhīm* and *yhwh*. They were employed also by the religions of other Semitic nations, partly as compounds in combination with various titles and epithets. Plurality of designations, names and epithets is to be understood as the result of a combination of different cycles of traditions having different usages whose bases are unknown to us. In the Bible, some divine names are employed in both the generic and the specific sense; others are used only as the personal name of the God of Israel. By referring to the sole God of Israel, they were agents of a miraculous change in the conception of God within the whole Ancient Near East. The narrative of God's self-revelation to Moses in Exod 3 shows that the information about the Divine Name was preceded by the explicit initiative by Moses to know what God's name was (Exod 3:13-14).

There was no tendency in ancient Israel to confer other names upon her God to stand alongside the name YHWH. The historical experience of Israel in relation to YHWH and literary modes and forms of expression allow, however, for presentation of the Divine Name from different angles by using many designations, titles, and epithets from old traditions and from current innovations as fuller forms of address. Significance and connotations of many names and appellatives can be best discernible by consideration of the way and the context in which they have been used. Literary structures show the choice of designations for God as common nouns or as individual names of one God.

The available Ancient Near Eastern literary sources and the Hebrew Bible show that the various names for »gods« and the One God, as well as combinations of names for deities and the Divinity, would be available to authors and editors, poets and historians to express various aspects of gods or of the One Divinity. It is unquestionable that the specific proper name YHWH became predominant among Israel's tribes. Now the question arises why would literary, especially poetic texts

preserve several names for a single God. The Hebrew religious tradition possessed and preserved several names for a single god. God is said to be »great,« »powerful,« »righteous,« etc.¹³ Distribution of two main names, Elohim and YHWH, shows that many other names are featured in close association with these two names, frequently in a single context. It is striking that poetic and narrative texts attribute to designations and the names of God a variety of names and qualities and associate with each designation or name specific concepts and characteristics. Attributes employed in various combinations and in various poetic and narrative texts manifest most clearly the inexhaustible richness of God's qualities in the minds of the believers. Many divine names and the many designations, appellatives, titles and epithets attached to divine names in various literary contexts present a total sum of qualities attributed to God as the One Divinity in all his relations. This explains why the main divine names and designations are interchangeable. Designations for gods are common nouns, only when used by monotheists does the term »God« determine an individual name exclusively in relation to one God.

It is justified to claim that names themselves are very rarely significant in themselves.¹⁴ The designations are significant as expressions of concepts of the divine held by the ancient Israelites.¹⁵ Names for God are used primarily within sacred literary texts. Literary structures clearly show the choice of designations for God as common nouns or as individual names of one God and hint as to how we should look for different nuances in the varying expressions for God. Attributes, or a union of attributes, are understood not in their generic or common but in an absolute sense. The absolute sense of the divine names means also that they have a symbolic meaning as the highest value and object of love for believers. The more a name has an exclusive value the more pressing is the question what is in a name. The frequently referenced part of William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* (Act II, Scene II) seems to imply that the names of things do not affect what they really are. Juliet argues:

»What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet.«

Applied to many designations and names for God this argument may imply that various names and combinations of names used for God do not express only var-

¹³ Dionysius the Areopagite enumerates in his work *The Divine Names* 1.6 many more »names.« See Rolt 2004, 61–62: »... is not the secret Name precisely that which is above all names and nameless, and is fixed beyond every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come? On the other hand, they attribute many names to It when, for instance, they speak of It as declaring: 'I am tha I am,' ...«

¹⁴ Graham I. Davies points out that it is »a common mistake to think that names in the Bible regularly convey the essence of the person to whom they belong. ... But what people often do not realize is that this is the exception rather than the rule« (2007, 139).

¹⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein raises deep issues for semantic theory of names when he explains in his *Philosophical Investigations* (§ 79) what he would understand by the name »Moses«: »I shall perhaps say: by 'Moses' I understand the man who did what the Bible relates of Moses or at any rate, a good deal of it.« (*Ich werde etwa sagen: Unter »Moses« verstehe ich den Mann, der getan hat, was die Bibel von Moses berichtet, oder doch vieles davon*) (1984, 284).

ious aspects of the One Divinity but also the inner unity of the Divine Being. Both the recognition of the absolute Divine Being and of the absolute or ethical value prompts us »to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language« (Wittgenstein 1965, 11).

The word *šēm* »name« in relation to God, and especially self-revelation of his name using the expression »my name« (*šēmî*) in Exodus 6:3, manifests God's determination that he will act for the sake of his »name.« This idea is central in Ezekiel 20 (vv. 9, 14, 22, 44), where God assures that, in all limitations of human actors, he fulfils his purpose »for his name's sake« (cf. Jer 14:7, 21; Isa 48:9, 11; Ps 25:11; 79:9, etc.). God is bound to vindicate his »name« or »character« before Israel and before the world by fulfilling his redemptive purpose. It follows from the nature of the absolutely One God that vindication of his name or honour is the primary expectation of created beings. It is a matter of principle that humans cannot know anything about the essence of God. They can speak of God only analogically by using poetic images that are based on their limited experience.¹⁶ However, all basic attributes seem to be intrinsically connected with the Deity which is supposed to be the Creator and the Ruler of the universe and therefore by nature incompatible with any evil power.

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¹⁶ Avsenik Nabergoj 2015, 324, points well to the methodological issue of grasping the meaning by considering both literary and »canonical« contexts of words and images used to express any kind of truth: »To understand the dimensions of the meaning of the concept of truth, it is not enough to analyze the structure of the poem, which in some respects resembles that in non-biblical literature from antiquity to the present. The key to gaining insight into the main emphases lies in the fact that the biblical literary text has its place in the canon of the Bible. It is therefore understandable that within Jewish and Christian communities literary texts of the Bible were interpreted symbolically and often allegorically.« See also Avsenik Nabergoj, »Images of Jews in Slovenian Literature between Memory and Metaphor.« In *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 23, no. 2:239–254, where she exposes the role of symbol that transcends the historical and sociological framework.

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