ABRAHAM HALEVI'S COMPENDIUM ON THE GENERIC NAME OF GOD IN THE TANAKH

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Abstract

The present article *analyses the study of the grammatical and lexical features of God's generic name contained in the classic Jewish compendium authored by Abraham ben Daud Halevi and situates it against the disquisitions of Judah Halevi, Maimonides and Joseph Albo. These mediaeval compendia were comprehensive presentations of the Jewish tradition devised as instruments for cultivating the Jewish identity. In the Hebrew Bible both* אלוה *and* אלוהים *could denote not only God of Israel but also different agents of power such as judges, leaders, nobles, the mighty, angels or idols, depending on the context. Therefore, this topic merited examination within the framework of the Jewish tradition.*

Key Words: Generic Name of God; History of Hebrew Grammar; History of Hebrew Lexicography; Abraham ben Daud Halevi; Judah Halevi; Maimonides; Joseph Albo

Historical and Theological Context

God's generic name (אלוהים/אלוה) was studied in the Jewish tradition for various reasons. Firstly, both אלוה and אלוהים could denote not only God of Israel but also different agents of power such as judges, leaders, nobles, the mighty, angels or idols, depending on the context. In principle, אלוהים/אלוה might stand for the object of worship (true God versus false god[s]), for intermediaries between God and humankind (angels) and for religious or social leaders.[1] Actually, in some passages (e.g. Exod. 4:16, 7:1; Exod. 22:27/28; Ps. 82:1-6) it was impossible to interpret אלוהים as denoting true God or false gods without undermining the tenets of the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, even the ancient Christian theologians, who were not proficient in Hebrew but rather relied on the Septuagint, on the Vulgate or on the Peshitta, had to explicate those passages in the light of their context and they felt compelled to recognise non-divine denotations of אלוהים.[2]

Secondly, regardless of its specific meaning, אלוהים at times occurred with plural verbal, adjectival, participial, pronominal or imperatival forms in the Tanakh. Grammatical features of אלוהים, which in terms of parsing was a plural form of the singular אלוה, merited examination because from the perspective of the Jewish tradition, the Scripture must be expounded in accordance with the concept of the absolute unity of God, while any

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[1] In the historical setting of the Hebrew Bible it is better to speak of religious and social leaders.

[2] As exemplified by: Aphraates, "Demonstratio XVII," in *Patrologia Syriaca*, vol. 1, ed. Rene Graffin (Paris: Didot, 1894), 787-796 [3-6]. Augustinus Hipponensis, "In Psalmum LXXXI enarratio," in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina*, vol. 37, ed. J-P Migne (Paris: Migne, 1865), 1046-1051 [Ps. 82 /LXX 81/]. Eusebius Caesariensis, "Commentaria in Psalmos," in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca*, vol. 23, ed. J-P Migne (Paris: Migne, 1857), 981-990 [Ps. 82 /LXX 81/]. Theodoretus Cyrensis, "Quaestiones in Exodum," in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca*, vol. 80, ed. J-P Migne (Paris: Migne, 1860), 243-244 [XVII (Exod. 7)]. Ibidem, 273-274 [LI (Exod. 22)]. Idem, "Interpretatio in Psalmos," in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca*, vol. 80, 1527-1530 [Ps. 82:1-6 /LXX 81:1-6/].

interpretation which might compromise or challenge this concept, deserved to be dismissed. As regards the plural grammatical forms connected with אלוהים, Philo of Alexandria[3] studied them out of exegetical curiosity, whereas the Babylonian Talmud[4] did it more for apologetic reasons.

Thirdly, unlike God's very name (יי), which was unique and which was predicated only of God of Israel, אלוהים was the most generic name of God among all divine appellations attested in the Tanakh.[5] Therefore, Jewish sages attempted to explore this name to understand how the Scripture spoke of the Divinity as revealed to human beings and as thought of by human beings. Consequently, by delving into the meaning and function of the generic name of God in Hebrew, the Jewish tradition intended to fathom some attributes of the Godhead as depicted in the Tanakh.

God's generic name was examined in the classic Jewish lexica,[6] grammars[7] and biblical commentaries (especially those on Gen. 1:1 where אלוהים surfaced for the first time)[8] which were produced in the Middle Ages. The present article analyses the study of the grammatical and lexical features of God's generic name contained in the classic Jewish compendium authored by Abraham ben Daud Halevi and situates it against the disquisitions of Judah Halevi, Maimonides and Joseph Albo. These mediaeval compendia were comprehensive presentations of the Jewish tradition devised as instruments for cultivating the Jewish identity. Given that the literature both on the origin of the Jewish Hebrew scholarship[9] and on the generic name of God[10] is vast, the present article is preoccupied

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3   Philo Alexandrinus, "De opificio mundi," in *Opera quae supersunt*, vol. 1, ed. Leopold Cohn and Paul Wendland (Berlin: Reimer, 1896), 24-25 [24]. Idem, "Legum allegoriarum libri I-III," in *Opera*, vol. 1, 90 [II, 1]. Ibidem, 134 [III, 31]. Idem, "De confusione linguarum," in *Opera quae supersunt*, vol. 2, ed. Cohn and Wendland (Berlin: Reimer, 1897), 261-264 [33-36]. Idem, "Quis rerum divinarum heres sit," in *Opera quae supersunt*, vol. 3, ed. Cohn and Wendland (Berlin: Reimer, 1898), 37-38 [33]. Idem, "De fuga et inventione," in *Opera*, vol. 3, 124-126 [13-14]. Idem, "De mutatione nominum," in *Opera*, vol. 3, 161-163 [4]. Idem, "Philonis Quaestionum. et solutionum. quae in Genesi: Sermo I," in *Paralipomena Armena*, ed. Joannes Baptista Aucher (Venice: Lazari, 1826), 12-14 [XV-XIX]. Ibidem, 34-37 [LII-LIV].

4   "סנהדרין," in תלמוד בבלי, vol. 13 (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1862), 38v [No. 38b]. "מגילה," in תלמוד בבלי, vol. 5 (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1860), 9r [No. 9a]. "סופרים," in תלמוד בבלי, vol. 13, 48v [I, VIII].

5   Abraham ben Daud Halevi, *Das Buch Emunah Ramah oder der erhabene Glaube*, ed. Simson Weil (Frankfurt am Main: Typographische Anstalt, 1852), 56-57 [II, II, III]. Judah Halevi, *Das Buch Kusari*, trans. Judah ibn Tibbon (יהודה אבן תיבון), ed. David Cassel (Leipzig: Voigt, 1869), 84-85 [II, 2]. Maimonides, *More Nebuchim*, vol. 1, trans. Judah ibn Tibbon (Vienna: Schmid, 1828), 56r-60r [I, 61-63]. Joseph Albo, ספר העקרים (Warsaw: Goldman, 1870), 92v-95r [II, XXVIII].

6   Jonah ibn Janah (יונה אבן גינאה), *Sepher Haschoraschim: Wurzelwörterbuch der Hebräischen Sprache*, trans. Judah ibn Tibbon, ed. Wilhelm Bacher (Berlin: Itzkowski, 1896), 32 [s. v. אלוה]. David Kimhi, *Radicum liber sive Hebraeum bibliorum lexicon*, ed. Johann Heinrich Raphael Biesenthal and Fürchtegott Lebrecht (Berlin: Bethge, 1847), 17 [s. v. אלה]. Menahem ben Saruq (מנחם בן סרוק), מחברת מנחם, ed. Herschell Filipowski (London: Hebrew Antiquarian Society, 1854), 24-25 [s. v. אל]. Ibidem, 25 [s. v. אלוה]. Solomon Parhon (שלמה פרחון), *Lexicon Hebraicum*, vol. 2, ed. Salomo Gottlieb Stern (Pressburg [Bratislava]: Schmid, 1844), 4v [s. v. אלה].

7   Kimhi, ספר מכלול, ed. משה העכים and יצחק ריטטענבערג (Lyck: פעטצאלל, 1862), 7r [שער דקדוק הפעלים, IV]. Ibidem, 11v-12r [שער דקדוק הפעלים, XI].

8   Abraham Berliner, ed., *Raschi: Der Kommentar des Salomo b. Isak über den Pentateuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1905), 1 [Gen. 1:1]. Abraham ibn Ezra, "בראשית ספר," in מקראות גדולות חמשה חומשי תורה, ספר בראשית (New York: פריעדמאן, 1970-1971), 4 [Gen. 1:1]. Nahmanides, "בראשית," in פירוש הרמב"ן על התורה, vol. 1 (New York: [s. n.], 1958-1959), 19 [Gen. 1:1]. Hezekiah ben Manoah, "בראשית ספר," in ספר חזקוני על חמשה חומשי תורה (Lemberg [Lviv]: Schrenzel, 1859), 2v [Gen. 1:1]. Bahya ben Asher (בחיי בן אשר), "בראשית ספר על ביאור (Lemberg [Lviv]: Salat, 1864), 3v [Gen. 1:1]. Isaac Abravanel (יצחק אברבנאל), "בראשית," in פירוש התורה (Warsaw: לעבענזאהן, 1862), 4r-5r [Gen. 1:1 (אלוהים)]. Obadiah Sforno, "בראשית," in באור יקר ונחמד על חמשה חומשי תורה (Warsaw: Syporne, 1856), 5v-6r [Gen. 1:1].

9   Bacher, *Abraham ibn Esra als Grammatiker: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Hebräischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strassbourg and London: Trübner, 1882). Idem, *Die Anfänge der Hebräischen Grammatik* (Leipzig: Brockhaus,

with the primary sources, namely, with the aforementioned compendia, and it analyses the biblical passages, which were adduced there with reference to the meaning and use of אלוהים, in the light of the Jewish exegetical tradition.

The present essay is structured after four classic, Jewish, mediaeval compendia authored by Abraham ben Daud Halevi, Judah Halevi, Maimonides and Joseph Albo. Those compendia to varying degrees examined grammatical and lexical features of God's generic name in the Tanakh and they evoked various biblical passages which in the present article were analysed in the context of the Jewish exegetical tradition. It should be noted that the emphasis was put on Abraham Halevi's compendium because it treated extensively of this subject matter. From the theological point of view, the present article aims to discover the trajectory of meaning related to the generic name of God as it emerged within the framework of the Jewish tradition which, in this essay, is considered to be the most natural context for interpreting the Tanakh.

Abraham ben Daud Halevi on אלוה/אלוהים

In his compendium Abraham ben Daud Halevi (אברהם בן דאוד הלוי)[11] studied the signification and use of אלוה/אלוהים. From his point of view, אלוהים was a plural form of אלוה which stemmed from אל conveying a sense of power and ability. Consequently, he asserted that אלוהים was plural in terms of parsing and that such a use of the plural number was intended to amplify the feature(s) of a noun (דרך ההגדלה). Since אלוה originated from אל, אלוהים communicated the idea of strength (חזק), driving force (כח המניע), majesty (הגדולה), exaltation (התרוממות), lordship (האדנות) and reign (הנשיאות). To illustrate his thesis, Abraham ben Daud Halevi referred to Deut. 10:17 (אלהי האלהים ואדני האדנים), Josh. 22:22 (אל אלהים יי), Ps. 88:5 (אין איל) and Dan. 11:36 (אל אלים).

Deuteronomy 10:17 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

According to Abraham ben Daud Halevi, in Hebrew the plural number was one of the linguistic means of amplifying certain feature(s). In Deut. 10:17 (אלהי האלהים ואדני האדנים) a sample of the typical Hebrew superlative was found. In Hebrew the superlative is modelled on "the X of [all] Xs" (e.g. the master of all masters = master supreme). Formally speaking, אדני in Deut. 10:17 was the construct state of a plural form of the noun אדון albeit the

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1895). Idem, *Die Hebräische Sprachwissenschaft vom 10. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Trier: Mayer, 1892). Shimeon Brisman, *A History and Guide to Judaic Dictionaries and Concordances* (Hoboken: KTAV, 2000). Franz Delitzsch, *Isagoge in grammaticam et lexicographiam linguae Hebraicae* (Grimma: Gebhardt, 1838). Ludwig Geiger, *Das Studium der hebräischen Sprache in Deutschland vom Ende des XV. bis zur Mitte des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (Breslau: Schletter, 1870). Magne Sæbø, ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. I/1-2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996-2000). Leopold Rosenak, *Die Fortschritte der hebräischen Sprachwissenschaft von Jehuda Chajjug bis David Kimchi: X. bis XIII. Jahrhundert* (Bremen: Diercksen and Wichlein, 1898).

[10]　N A Dahl and Alan F Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 9, no. 1 (1978):1-28. Anne E Draffkorn, "Ilani/Elohim," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76, no. 3, 1957:216-224. Cyrus Herzl Gordon, "אלהים in Its Reputed Meaning of >Rulers<, >Judges<," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 54, no. 3 (1935):139-144. Ari Mermelstein and Shalom E Holtz, ed., *The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015). Murray J Harris, "The Translation of Elohim in Psalm 45:7-8," *Tyndale Bulletin* 35, 1984:65-89. Michael S Heiser, "Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158, no. 629 (2001):52-74. Jan Joosten, "A Note on the Text of Deuteronomy 32:8," *Vetus Testamentum* 57, no. 4 (2007):548-555. Helmer Ringgren, "אלהים," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 267-284.

[11]　Abraham ben Daud Halevi, *Das Buch*, 19-20 (Hebrew text) [I, V]. Ibidem, 83-93 (Hebrew text) [II, VI, I].

Samaritan text[12] read ואדן in lieu of ואדני. The Septuagint[13] and the Targumim[14] construed אדני as singular. Moreover, the LXX translated אלהי האלהים as "God of gods" (θεὸς τῶν θεῶν) and אדני האדנים – as "Lord of lords" (κύριος τῶν κυρίων).[15] The Targum Onkelos interpreted אלהי האלהים as "God of leaders" (אלה דינין) and אדני האדנים – as the "master of kings" (מרי מלכין). Such a rendition obviated the danger that readers might suppose that the LORD was god-in-chief in the midst of other gods or lord-in-chief in the midst of lords.

Philo[16] touched upon Deut. 10:17, operating however with the Greek rendition (βασιλεῦ τῶν θεῶν) different from the LXX. For Philo, the expression "king of gods" (βασιλεῦ τῶν θεῶν), which in his tract stood for the Hebrew אלהי האלהים, indicated that God as the absolute Ruler of the universe was to be distinguished from the phenomena (such as the Sun or the Moon) which were subordinate to him and which human beings dared to call 'gods' on account of their splendour.

Commenting upon Gen. 20:13[17] and Josh. 24:19,[18] Rashi (רש״י) observed that אלוהים in itself expressed the authority (שררה), whereas in Hebrew the plural number was instrumental in conveying a sense of majesty. To illustrate his thesis, Rashi referred to Gen. 39:20 (אדני יוסף), 42:30-33 (אדני הארץ) and Exod. 21:29 (בבעליו), 22:14 (בעליו) where the plural forms of אדון and בעל highlighted human authority. Rashi also cited expressions from Deut. 5:23/26 (אלהים חיים) and 10:17 (ואדני האדנים) as indicative of the divine glory. In those verses the forms, which were plural in terms of parsing, denoted single phenomena which was evident from the context and which was supported by the fact that those plural forms functioned as subjects of singular verbs. Thus, in Gen. 39:20 the verbs ויקח and ויתנהו were singular, whereas in Gen. 42:30 and 42:33 אדני הארץ was appositive to the singular noun האיש which was the subject of singular verbs דבר and ויאמר, respectively. In Deut. 10:17 both אלהי האלהים and אדני האדנים were predicated of a singular form of the personal pronoun (הוא) which was appositive to God's very name.

Abraham ibn Ezra (אברהם אבן עזרא)[19] examined Deut. 10:17 in his commentary on Gen. 1:1,[20] saying that אלהי האלהים attested to in Deut. 10:17 was synonymous with the expression "God of hosts" (אלהי הצבאות) found in Hos 12:6 and in Amos 3:13; 6:14, while both phrases denoted "God of angels". In Abraham's opinion, human beings, who were tasked with dispensing justice, could also be called אלוהים, namely, judges because they stood proxy for God who was thought of as the chief Judge. Similarly, in his commentary on Deut. 10:17 Nahmanides (רמב״ן)[21] contended that האלהים were angels and האדנים – the host of heaven in the expressions אלהי האלהים and אדני האדנים, respectively.

[12] Benjamin Blayne, ed., *Pentateuchus Hebraeo-Samaritanus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1790), 472 [Deut. 10:17].

[13] Henry Barclay Swete, ed., *The Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1887), 364 [Deut. 10:17].

[14] Berliner, ed., *Targum Onkelos*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Kauffmann, 1884), 206 [Deut. 10:17]. Adolf Brüll, ed., *Das samaritanische Targum zum Pentateuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Erras, 1875), 219 [Deut. 10:17].

[15] The same strategy of interpretation was adopted in the Samaritan Targum.

[16] Philo "De confusione linguarum," 262 [34]. See: Idem, "De specialibus legibus (I)," in *Opera quae supersunt*, vol. 5, ed. Cohn and Wendland (Berlin: Reimer, 1906), 74 [9].

[17] Berliner, ed., *Raschi*, 40 [Gen. 20:13].

[18] Rashi, "ספר יהושע" in מקראות גדולות ספר יהושע (Lublin: שנײדמעסער, [s. a.]), 168 [Josh. 24:19].

[19] Abraham ibn Ezra, "ספר דברים" in מקראות גדולות חומשי תורה ספר דברים (New York: פריעדמאן, 1970-1971), 131 [Deut. 10:17].

[20] Abraham ibn Ezra, "ספר בראשית" 4 [Gen. 1:1].

[21] Nahmanides, "ספר דברים" in מקראות גדולות חומשי תורה ספר דברים, 130 [Deut. 10:16-17].

Joshua 22:22 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

In Josh. 22:22 (אל אלהים יי) various names of God were tied together and a sequence אל אלהים יי occurred there twice. As regards Josh. 22:22, the Septuagint[22] translated the first occurrence of that sequence as a predicative sentence (ὁ θεὸς θεός ἐστιν κύριος) in which אלהים was construed as an emphatic apposition to אל, while the second occurrence thereof was rendered purely emphatically (ὁ θεὸς θεὸς αὐτὸς). On the other hand, Aquila's and Symmachus' versions[23] interpreted אל אלהים as ἰσχυρὸς θεός, thus highlighting the generic meaning of אל. The Targum[24] to Josh. 22:22 retained the Hebrew original as far as the aforementioned sequence was concerned.

The grand Midrash on the Book of Genesis[25] explained that three appellations found in Josh. 22:22 (אל אלהים יי) were intended to reveal the majesty of one and the same God from every angle without undermining his absolute unity which was secured by a singular apposition. Indeed, a singular form of the personal pronoun (הוא)[26] and a singular form of the participle (ידע),[27] namely, "the One who knows" (הוא ידע), were appositive to אל אלהים יי which occurred twice in Josh. 22:22. Moreover, the Midrash discussed Josh. 22:22 in connection with Josh. 24:19 (אלהים קדשים) where God's generic name was modified by a plural form of the adjective (קדשים). This fact, according to the Midrash, was exploited by those who ventured to challenge the concept of the absolute unity of God. From the perspective of the Midrash, the unity of the Godhead was fortified within the purview of Josh. 24:19 because in the words following אלהים קדשים, the latter was referred to not as 'they' [i.e. gods] (המה) but rather as 'he' [i.e. God] (הוא).

Commenting upon Josh. 22:22, Rashi[28] remarked that in the aforementioned passage אל אלהים יי signified the LORD who was God of all אלהים, plausibly, of all angels (אל כל האלהים). In his commentary on the same verse Kimhi (רד״ק)[29] interpreted אל אלהים as typical of the superlative constructions which in Hebrew were patterned on "the X of [all] Xs". For instance, in Hebrew the king of kings meant king supreme, whereas the lord of lords meant lord supreme. Therefore, for Kimhi, אל אלהים occurring in Josh. 22:22 denoted the LORD who was the King of kings (מלך מלכים) and God of angels given that in אל אלהים Kimhi explicated אל as God, while אלהים signifies angels (המלאכים).

Psalms 88:5 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

In Ps. 88:5 (אין איל) Abraham ben Daud Halevi contended that איל should be derived from אל which conveyed a sense of might, strength and power. The Septuagint[30] translated אין איל as helpless or powerless (ἀβοήθητος) which implies that the LXX interpreters construed איל

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[22]　Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 1, 468 [Josh. 22:22].

[23]　Frederick Field, ed., *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt: Sive veterum interpretum Graecorum in totum Vetus Testamentum fragmenta*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1875), 389 [Josh. 22:22 (Aquila and Symmachus)].

[24]　Paul de Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae chaldaice* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1872), 29 [Josh. 22:22].

[25]　Julius Theodor and Chanoch Albeck, ed., *Bereschit Rabba mit kritischem Apparat und Kommentar: Parascha I-XLVII* (Berlin: Poppelauer, 1912), 63 (n. "5") [No. 8 פרשה (Gen. 1:26-27)].

[26]　Not the plural one (הם).

[27]　Not the plural one (ידעים).

[28]　Rashi, "ספר יהושע," 155 [Josh. 22:22].

[29]　Kimhi, "ספר יהושע," in מקראות גדולות ספר יהושע, 155 [Josh. 22:22].

[30]　Swete, ed., *The Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 329 [Ps. 88:5/LXX 87:6/].

as אל in its most rudimentary denotation. Symmachus' version[31] rendered אין איל by means of the adverbial participle οὐκ ἰσχύων (without/not being strong). This translation also indicated that איל was interpreted in terms of might, strength and power. The Targum[32] to Ps. 88:5 and the Midrash[33] on Ps. 88:5 read איל the same way. Commenting upon Ps. 88:5, Rashi[34] associated איל from Ps. 88:5, אילותי from Ps. 22:20[35] and לאל from Gen. 31:29[36] with אל conveying a sense of might, strength and power. In their commentaries on Ps. 88:5 Kimhi[37] and Abraham ibn Ezra[38] equated איל with כח (power) and און (stamina).

Daniel 11:36 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

Dan. 11:36 (אל אלים) spoke of a king blaspheming against the very God (על כל אל ועל אל אלים). Obviously, the expressions על כל אל and על אל אלים were parallel to one another. According to Abraham ben Daud Halevi, constructions such as אל אלים or אל אלהים accentuated God's majesty by picturing God as the One who was אל supreme, namely, the One who was the power of all powers. The Greek versions[39] translated על כל אל as "against the very God", while על אל אלים – as "against God of gods". Commenting upon Dan. 11:36, Saadia Gaon (סעדיה גאון acronymised as רס"ג)[40] and Abraham ibn Ezra[41] identified אל אלים with the LORD.

Abraham ben Daud Halevi on Particular Denotations of אלוה/אלוהים

Furthermore, Abraham ben Daud Halevi observed that in some passages אלוהים denoted not God but the angel(s) or leader(s) representing God in the world. Thus, he adduced the following loci as proof of the non-divine denotations of אל/אלוה/אלוהים: Gen. 6:2-4 (notable persons); Gen. 48:15-16 (angel); Exod. 12:12 (idol[s]); Exod. 22:8 (leader[s]); Judg. 11:24, 16:23, 17:5, 18:24 (idol[s]); Ezek. 17:13 (strongmen of the land); Ps. 82:6-7 (the wise); Ps. 88:5 (a sense of power); Job 38:7 (celestial bodies).

Genesis 6:2-4 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

Abraham ben Daud Halevi interpreted בני האלהים from Gen. 6:2-4 as "notable persons" (האנשים הנכבדים) which was consisted with the Jewish exegetical tradition. In Gen. 6:2 the Septuagint[42] translated בני האלהים as angels of God (οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ) though a variant "sons of God" (οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ) was attested as well.[43] In Gen. 6:4 the LXX read "sons of God".[44] As regards Gen. 6:2, Theodotion's version[45] preferred "sons of God", while

[31]   Field, ed., *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt: Sive veterum interpretum Graecorum in totum Vetus Testamentum fragmenta*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1875), 239 [Ps. 88:5 /LXX 87:5/ (Symmachus)].

[32]   "Targum," in *Biblia sacra polyglotta*, vol. 3, ed. Brian Walton (London: Roycroft, 1656), 226 [Ps. 88:5].

[33]   Salomon Buber, ed., מדרש תהלים (Jerusalem: וגשל, 1976-1977), 380 [Ps. 88, II (Ps. 88:5)].

[34]   Rashi, "ספר תהלים," in מקראות גדולות ספר תהלים (Lublin: [s. n.], [s. a.]), 338 [Ps. 88:5].

[35]   Ibidem, 81 [Ps. 22:20].

[36]   Berliner, ed., *Raschi*, 64 [Gen. 31:29].

[37]   Kimhi, "ספר תהלים," in מקראות גדולות ספר תהלים, 338 [Ps. 88:5].

[38]   Abraham ibn Ezra, "ספר תהלים," in מקראות גדולות ספר תהלים, 338 [Ps. 88:5].

[39]   Swete, ed., *The Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894), 570 [Dan. 11:36 (LXX)]. Ibidem, 571 (n. 36) [Dan. 11:36 (Theodotion)].

[40]   Saadia Gaon, "ספר דניאל," in מקראות גדולות ספר דניאל עזרא נחמיה (Lublin: אוצר הספרים, [s. a.]), 107-108 [Dan. 11:36].

[41]   Abraham ibn Ezra, "ספר דניאל," in מקראות גדולות ספר דניאל עזרא נחמיה, 107-108 [Dan. 11:36].

[42]   Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 1, 9 [Gen. 6:2-4].

[43]   Field, ed., *Origenis*, vol. 1, 22 [Gen. 6:2/3 (LXX)].

[44]   Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 1, 9 [Gen. 6:2-4].

Aquila's version[46] proposed "sons of gods" (οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν θεῶν). Symmachus' revision[47] explicated האלהים from Gen. 6:2 as the "sons of the mighty" (οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν δυναστευόντων). In Gen. 6:2 and 6:4 the Targum Onkelos[48] interpreted בני האלהים as "sons of leaders" (בני רברביא), while the Samaritan Targum[49] offers "sons of rulers" (ברי שלטניה).

The grand Midrash on the Book of Genesis[50] mentioned that a 2nd-century sage, Simeon bar Yochai (רשב״י), interpreted בני האלהים as "sons of judges (דיינים)", condemning anyone who would dare to speak of "sons of God" (בני אלהיא) in the literal sense as if the LORD could ever sire anyone. Similarly, Yalkut Shimoni (ילקוט שמעוני) suggested that בני האלהים were "sons of judges".[51] Pirke attributed to Rabbi Eliezer[52] drew on the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan[53] which in Gen. 6:4 identified הנפלים with two angels who were said to fall from heaven and to get involved with the daughters of men. The Pirke elaborated upon this subject, assuming that in Gen. 6:2-4 בני האלהים and הנפלים were identical with those fallen angels. However, from the exegetical point of view, it is debatable whether in that narrative בני האלהים and הנפלים were synonymous. The same Pirke affirmed that in the Scripture the expression בני האלהים regularly denoted either Israelites as God's children (e.g. Deut. 14:1) or God's angels.

Saadia Gaon[54] construed בני האלהים in Gen. 6:2-4 as "sons of nobles (אצילים)". Rashi[55] interpreted בני האלהים as sons of princes (השרים) and leaders (השופטים), noticing that in the Tanakh אלוהים communicated a sense of lordship and authority (לשון מרות) either with reference to God or with reference to human or angelic beings. In his commentary on Gen. 6:2-4 Abraham ibn Ezra[56] distinguished three traditional interpretations of בני האלהים and propounded his own exposition as well. According to the first interpretation, בני האלהים were sons of leaders (השופטים) who were meting out God's justice (משפט אלהים) in the world. According to the second interpretation, in Gen. 6:2-4 אלהים denoted the LORD himself and therefore בני האלהים were the LORD's children, namely, those who were living a holy life on earth as typified by Deut. 14:1. The third interpretation presupposed that בני האלהים were sons of Seth, whereas the daughters of men came from Cain's family. According to the interpretation invented by Abraham ibn Ezra, בני האלהים were those men who had insights into the divine and who by virtue of such a supernal knowledge could find women that were a perfect fit for them and that gave birth to heroes (גבורים).

Genesis 48:15-16 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

Since in Gen. 48:15-16 המלאך was appositive to האלהים, Abraham ben Daud Halevi concluded that in Gen. 48:15 אלהים denoted God's angel, and he opined that God was on a regular basis employing his angels to deal with human beings. Therefore, in his view, the

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45 Field, ed., *Origenis*, vol. 1, 22 [Gen. 6:2/3 (Theodotion)].

46 Ibidem, [Gen. 6:2/3 (Aquila)].

47 Ibidem, [Gen. 6:2/3 (Symmachus)].

48 Berliner, ed., *Targum*, vol. 1, 6 [Gen. 6:2-4].

49 Brüll, ed., *Das samaritanische*, 6-7 [Gen. 6:2-4].

50 Theodor and Albeck, ed., *Bereschit Rabba mit kritischem Apparat und Kommentar: Parascha I-XLVII*, 247-248 [No. 26 פרשה (Gen. 6:2-4)].

51 ספר ילקוט שמעוני," in "ילקוט בראשית (Vilnius: Romm, 1863), 36 [No. 43].

52 פרקי רבי אליעזר (Warsaw: זיסבערג, 1874), 36-37 [No. 20 /22/].

53 "Targum Jonathan," in *Biblia sacra polyglotta*, vol. 4, ed. Walton (London: Roycroft, 1657), 11 [Gen. 6:2-4].

54 Saadia Gaon, "בראשית," in פירוש על התורה ועל נ״ך (London: Gad, 1959-1960), 11 [Gen. 6:2].

55 Berliner, ed., *Raschi*, 12-13 [Gen. 6:2-4].

56 Abraham ibn Ezra, "ספר בראשית," 81-83 [Gen. 6:2].

narratives about God engaging humankind would freely switch between God and his angel(s). The LXX[57] translated האלהים in Gen. 48:15 as κύριος (the LORD), while המלאך – in Gen. 48:16 as ἄγγελος (an angel). The Targum Onkelos[58] rendered האלהים in Gen. 48:15 by means of God's very name, while המלאך from Gen. 48:16 was interpreted as an angel.

Philo[59] elaborated upon Gen. 48:15-16, juxtaposing this locus with Gen. 11:7 and sharing his philosophical concerns. In his view, God was the cause (source) of good only and his attitude towards humankind was always benevolent. Therefore, God could not directly relate to evil but rather must be absolutely insulated from evil and from evil forces. Thus, God was compelled to use his proxies to carry out his judgment albeit God's disciplinary actions were designed for the benefit of human beings and were not evil. Since God's judgment might have the appearance of evil in the eyes of those who did not know him, God had to employ his agents to establish discipline in the world with the intention of benefiting humankind. Those proxies that were appointed by God and that were distinct from him, functioned as a sort of firewall by virtue of which God could be isolated from the sphere of evil.

As regards Gen. 11:7, Philo[60] argued that the LORD said "let us ..." to his agents whom he commissioned to go down and to confuse the language. God's agents or proxies were thought of by Philo in both personal and impersonal (abstract) terms. Consequently, it is legitimate to say that for Philo, those agents were philosophical categories which were symbolised by personal intermediary beings that in the Tanakh were known as angels. Thus, Philo adduced Gen. 48:15-16 as proof of this thesis, claiming that in v. 15 the action of sustaining Jacob was attributed to God[61] because it was absolutely good, whereas the action of shielding Jacob from all evil must be ascribed to the angel(s) acting on God's behalf because God himself could not be involved in fending off evil without relating to evil or to evil forces.

Commenting upon Gen. 48:15-16, Rashi[62] cited the narrative recorded in Gen. 31:11-13 where in v. 11 God's angel was speaking to Jacob, while in v. 13 God was speaking to Jacob. For Rashi, since God was dealing with human beings through his angels, a switch between God and God's angel(s) in biblical narratives was natural. In his commentary on Gen. 48:15-16 Abraham ibn Ezra[63] made reference to Exod. 23:20 in which the LORD was said to send his angel in order to guard his children.[64] Analysing Gen. 48:15-16, Kimhi[65] wrote that God was acting in the world through his angels who represented him and who were sent by him to protect and to guide his children. Moreover, Kimhi quoted Ps. 34:7/8 in which the LORD and the LORD's angel were portrayed in such a way that they switched between one another, while shielding and delivering God's children. Glancing at Gen. 48:15-16, Hezekiah ben Manoah (חזקיה בן מנוח)[66] ascertained that there was no contradiction

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[57] Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 1, 97 [Gen. 48:15-16].

[58] Berliner, ed., *Targum*, vol. 1, 56 [Gen. 48:15-16].

[59] Philo "De confusione linguarum," 263-264 [36].

[60] Ibidem.

[61] Philo used θεός instead of the LXX κύριος.

[62] Berliner, ed., *Raschi*, 93 [Gen. 48:16].

[63] Abraham ibn Ezra, "ספר בראשית," 612 [Gen. 48:16].

[64] Expounding Exod. 23:20, Abraham ibn Ezra spoke of angels as of God's messengers and agents in relation to human beings. Abraham ibn Ezra, "שמות," in מקראות גדולות שמות (Union City: Bros, [s. a.]), 386-387 [Exod. 23:20].

[65] Kimhi, *Kommentar zur Genesis*, ed. Abraham Ginzburg (Pressburg [Bratislava]: Schmid, 1842), 88r [Gen. 48:16].

[66] Hezekiah ben Manoah, "ספר בראשית," 49r [Gen. 48:15-16].

between Gen. 48:15 speaking of God and Gen. 48:16 speaking of God's angel because God carried out the action of delivering mentioned in v. 16 through his angel.

Exodus 12:12 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

For Abraham ben Daud Halevi, אלהי מצרים from Exod. 12:12 denoted Egyptian idols (הצלמים). In Exod. 12:12 the Septuagint[67] translated אלהי מצרים as gods of Egyptians, while the Targum Onkelos[68] – as the idol(s). The same exposition was enshrined in the grand Midrash on the Book of Exodus[69] and in the Mekhilta.[70] Additionally, the Midrash presented Num. 33:4 (באלהיהם) as a text parallel to Exod. 12:12. In the case of Num. 33:4 the LORD brought judgment on "their [i.e. Egyptians'] gods (LXX)[71] or idols (Targum Onkelos)[72]". Abraham ibn Ezra[73] was inclined to interpret אלהיהם in Num. 33:4 as idols, while Joseph Bekhor Shor (יוסף בכור שור)[74] mentioned that in the Tanakh the mighty (גדולים) and leaders (דיינים) could be called אלהים, and he adduced Exod. 22:8 (האלהים יבא) as proof of his thesis. Therefore, Shor tended to explicate אלהיהם in Num. 33:4 as leaders of Egyptian society (שופטים). The Babylonian Talmud[75] evoked Exod. 12:12, articulating that in the Scripture even an idol might be denominated as אלוה, depending on the context.

　　Following the Mekhilta, Rashi[76] clarified that in Exod. 12:12 אלהי מצרים denoted idols. Abraham ibn Ezra[77] interpreted אלהי מצרים from Exod. 12:12 in the same way, comparing it to Num. 33:4 (באלהיהם). Nahmanides[78] recapitulated this prevailing interpretation cum the reference to Num. 33:4, and adding that in view of Isa 24:21 (צבא המרום במרום)[79] אלהי מצרים might also be understood as the heavenly princes (שרי מעלה) who were shielding Egyptians. This 'celestial' explanation was subsequently advanced by Obadiah Sforno (עובדיה פורנו).[80] On the other hand, Hezekiah ben Manoah[81] maintained that אלהים in Exod. 7:1 (נתתיך אלהים לפרעה), 12:12 (אלהי מצרים) and in 2 Sam. 7:23 (הלכו אלהים) denoted human agents of power (sing. שר), either good (Exod. 7:1; 2 Sam. 7:23[82]) or bad (Exod. 12:12). In his *Book of Roots* David Kimhi[83] juxtaposed אלהיו from 2 Sam. 7:23 with אלהי from Exod. 12:12 (אלהימצרים), realising that אלהים in those passages could be interpreted at least in two ways

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[67]　Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, 126 [Exod. 12:12].

[68]　Berliner, ed., *Targum*, vol. 1, 72 [Exod. 12:12].

[69]　"מדרש שמות רבה," in ספר מדרש רבות על התורה (Leipzig: Wienbrack, 1864), 221 [No. 15 פרשה (Exod. 12:12)].

[70]　Isaac Hirsch Weiss, ed., *Mechilta: Der älteste halachische und hagadische Kommentar zum zweiten Buch Moses* (Vienna: Schlossberg: 1865), 10r [No. 7 משפטים (Exod. 12:12)].

[71]　Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 1, 330 [Num. 33:4].

[72]　Berliner, ed., *Targum*, vol. 1, 189 [Num. 33:4].

[73]　Abraham ibn Ezra, "במדבר," in מקראות גדולות במדבר (Union City: Bros, [s. a.]), 441 [Num. 33:4].

[74]　Joseph Bekhor Shor, "ספר במדבר," in פירוש על ויקרא ובמדבר (London: Hamadfis, 1959-1960), 132-133 [Num. 33:4].

[75]　"נדרים," in תלמוד בבלי, vol. 9 (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1861), 25r [No. 25a].

[76]　Berliner, ed., *Raschi*, 122 [Exod. 12:12].

[77]　Abraham ibn Ezra, "שמות," 157 [Exod. 12:12].

[78]　Nahmanides, "שמות," in מקראות גדולות שמות, 156-157 [Exod. 12:12].

[79]　Expounding Isa 24:21 (צבא המרום במרום), Rashi and Joseph Kara (יוסף קרא) spoke of celestial princes (שרים), while Abraham ibn Ezra and Kimhi – of celestial messengers (מלאכים) that could plausibly be equated with angels. Rashi, "ספר ישעיה," in מקראות גדולות ספר ישעיה (Lublin: אוצר הספרים, [s. a.]), 197 [Isa 24:21]. Joseph Kara, "ספר ישעיה," in מקראות גדולות ספר ישעיה, 197 [Isa 24:21]. Abraham ibn Ezra, "ספר ישעיה," in מקראות גדולות ספר ישעיה, 197 [Isa 24:21]. Kimhi, "ספר ישעיה," in מקראות גדולות ספר ישעיה, 197 [Isa 24:21].

[80]　Sforno, "שמות," in מקראות גדולות שמות, 157 [Exod. 12:12].

[81]　Hezekiah ben Manoah, "ספר שמות," in ספר חזקוני על חמשה חומשי תורה, 11r [Exod. 12:12].

[82]　Moses and Aaron, to be exact.

[83]　Kimhi, *Radicum*, 17 [s. v. אלה].

which was noteworthy from an exegetical perspective. Commenting on אלהיו in 2 Sam. 7:23, Kimhi[84] recognised that אלהיו could signify either the idol(s) worshipped by Egyptians (literally: Egypt's idol[s]) in the light of Exod. 12:12 or Egyptian leaders (literally: Egypt's leaders) in the same way as אלהים was said to denote leaders (שופטים) in Exod. 22:27/28 (אלהים לא תקלל).

Exodus 22:8 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

In Exod. 22:8 Abraham ben Daud Halevi explicated האלהים and אלהים as leaders (sing. השופט) which coincided with the traditional Jewish elucidation of אלהים in Exod. 22, especially, in Exod. 22:7-8 and in Exod. 22:27/28 (אלהים לא תקלל). Nonetheless, in Exod. 22:8 the Samaritan text[85] replaced האלהים with God's very name (יי) and אלהים – with האלהים. Similarly, the Septuagint[86] translated both אלהים and האלהים as θεός, while Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion[87] interpreted אלהים as θεοί (gods). On the other hand, the Targum Onkelos[88] and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan[89] translated both אלהים and האלהים as the judge(s) [sing. דיין]. The Mekhilta,[90] the Babylonian Talmud[91] and Yalkut Shimoni[92] did likewise and this interpretation was espoused by the mainstream of the Jewish exegesis.[93]

Judges 11:24, 16:23, 17:5, 18:24 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

According to Abraham ben Daud Halevi, in Judg. 11:24 (אלהיך), 16:23 (אלהיהם), 17:5 (אלהים), 18:24 (אלהי) אלוהים denoted idols (הצלמים) which was evident from the context of those passages. Judg. 11:24 contrasted Chemosh, who was called "your god" (i.e. idol), with "our God" (אלהינו) who was the LORD (יי). In this verse the LXX[94] resorted to the generic θεός, while the Targum[95] clarified that "your idol" (טעוותך) was meant. In Judg. 16:23 אלוהים referred to an idol called Dagon. Again, the Septuagint[96] employed the generic θεός, whereas the Targum[97] preferred to speak of "their idol".

In the light of the narrative, of which Judg. 17:5 was a part, בית אלהים described a house of idols, namely, a temple dedicated to idols. As previously, the LXX[98] translated this

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[84] Kimhi, "ספר שמואל ב," in מקראות גדולות ספר שמואל (Lublin: שניידמעסער, [s. a.]), 301-303 [2 Sam. 7:23].

[85] Blayne, ed., *Pentateuchus*, 197 [Exod. 22:8/9].

[86] Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 1, 147 [Exod. 22:8/9].

[87] Field, ed., *Origenis*, vol. 1, 119 [Exod. 22:8/9 (Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion)].

[88] Berliner, ed., *Targum*, vol. 1, 84 [Exod. 22:8].

[89] "Targum Jonathan," 144 [Exod. 22:8].

[90] Weiss, ed., *Mechilta*, 98v [No. 15 משפטים (Exod. 22:8)].

[91] "סנהדרין," 2v [No. 2b]. Ibidem, 3v [No. 3b]. Ibidem, 4v [No. 4b]. Ibidem, 56v [No. 56b]. "בבא קמא," in תלמוד בבלי, vol. 11 (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1861), 84r-84v [No. 84a-84b].

[92] "שמות," in ילקוט שמעוני מדרש על תורה נביאים וכתובים, vol. 1 (Warsaw: גאלדמאן, 1876), 198-200 [No. 345-346 (Exod. 22:8)].

[93] Berliner, ed., *Raschi*, 158 [Exod. 22:8]. Samuel ben Meir (רשב״ם), "שמות," in מקראות גדולות שמות, 367-369 [Exod. 22:8]. Abraham ben Maimonides (אברהם בן הרמב״ם), "פירוש ספר שמות," in פירוש על בראשית ושמות (London: Sassoon, 1957-1958), 350 [Exod. 22:8]. Nahmanides, "שמות," 366-369 [Exod. 22:8]. Shor, "ספר שמות," in *Kommentar zum Pentateuch*, vol. 1, ed. Adolph Jellinek (Leipzig: Gerhard, 1856), 129 [Exod. 22:8]. Sforno, "שמות," in באור יקר ונחמד על חמשה חומשי תורה, 9r [Exod. 22:8]. Furthermore, האלהים and אלהים in Exod. 22:8 were classified as non-divine (חול) in the treatise attributed to Maimonides. Maimonides, ביאור שמות קדש וחול (Berlin: דביר, 1923), 20 [No. 21-22 (Exod. 22:8)].

[94] Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 1, 508-509 [Judg. 11:24].

[95] De Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, 51 [Judg. 11:24].

[96] Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 1, 521 [Judg. 16:23].

[97] De Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, 57 [Judg. 16:23].

[98] Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 1, 523 [Judg. 17:5].

expression as a house of θεός, while the Targum[99] – as a house of idols. Expounding Judg. 17:5, Rashi[100] affirmed that in the aforementioned verse בית אלהים signified an idolatrous temple, and he maintained that in the Micah narrative (i.e. in Judg. 17:1-18:31) אלוהים was used in its non-divine (חול) denotation except for Judg. 18:31 (בית האלהים) where the LORD's sanctuary in Shiloh was referred to. Rashi's remark was rooted in the Babylonian Talmud[101] which stated that in the Micah narrative God's very name (יי), which always denoted God of Israel, was *eo ipso* used in a sacred way (קדש),[102] while אלוהים, except for Judg. 18:31, referred to idols.[103] Later, the proposition, that in Judg. 17:5 בית אלהים depicted a temple dedicated to idols, was espoused by Gersonides (רלב״ג)[104] and by Kimhi[105] who quoted the Targumic rendition of that passage and who recapitulated the Talmudic reference. As far as Judg. 18:31 is concerned, the Septuagint[106] translated בית האלהים as a house of θεός, whereas the Targum[107] emphasised that, unlike Micah's shrines, the sanctuary in Shiloh was the LORD's temple (בית מקדשא דיי). This natural interpretation was subsequently reflected in the commentaries written by Kimhi[108] and by Gersonides.[109]

Since Judg. 18:24 declared that "my gods" (אלהי) were made, it was clear that in the aforementioned verse אלוהים denoted idols granted that the LORD was the Creator, not a creature. The LXX[110] highlighted this fact by employing τό γλυπτόν (a carved image) which was a technical term for an idol. On the other hand, Theodotion's version[111] read "my gods". The Targum[112] to Judg. 18:24 proposed a figurative interpretation "my [object of] awe (דחלתי) which I made" provided that the Aramaic דחלא could denote either a relationship of awe or an object of awe with reference either to true God or to the idol(s).[113]

Ezekiel 17:13 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

In Ezek. 17:13 Abraham ben Daud Halevi elucidated אילי הארץ as strongmen of the land (החזקים שבארצות) which was congruous with the Targum[114] and with the LXX.[115] Although from a contemporary perspective it is debatable whether אילי in that verse must be parsed this way, the ancient translations made the connection between אילי and the root אל conveying the idea of might, strength and power. Besides, the Talmudic references to Ezek.

99 De Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, 58 [Judg. 17:5].
100 Rashi, "ספר שופטים," in מקראות גדולות ספר שופטים (Lublin: שניידמעסער, [s. a.]), 138-139 [Judg. 17:5].
101 "שבועות," in תלמוד בבלי, vol. 16 (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1863), 35v [No. 35b].
102 See: Judg. 17:2-3, 17:13, 18:6. This interpretation was fully supported by the Targum. Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, 58 [Judg. 17:2-3]. Ibidem [Judg. 17:13]. Ibidem, 59 [Judg. 18:6].
103 See: Judg. 17:5, 18:5, 18:10, 18:24. This assertion was only partially substantiated by the Targum which however could not be discussed within the compass of the present article. De Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, 58 [Judg. 17:5]. Ibidem, 59 [Judg. 18:5]. Ibidem [Judg. 18:10]. Ibidem, 60 [Judg. 18:24].
104 Gersonides, "ספר שופטים," in מקראות גדולות ספר שופטים, 138-139 [Judg. 17:5].
105 Kimhi, "ספר שופטים," in מקראות גדולות ספר שופטים, 138-139 [Judg. 17:5].
106 Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 1, 527 [Judg. 18:31].
107 De Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, 60 [Judg. 18:31].
108 Kimhi, "ספר שופטים," 150-151 [Judg. 18:31].
109 Gersonides, "ספר שופטים," 150-151 [Judg. 18:31].
110 Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 1, 526 [Judg. 18:24].
111 Field, ed., *Origenis*, vol. 1, 461 [Judg. 18:24 (Theodotion)].
112 De Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, 60 [Judg. 18:24].
113 Jacob Levy, *Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Targumim und einen grossen Teil des rabbinischen Schrifttums*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Baumgärtner, 1867), 167 [s. v. דחלא].
114 De Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, 387 [Ezek. 17:13].
115 Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 3, 416 [Ezek. 17:13].

17:13 implied that אילי in the aforementioned verse stemmed from אל and communicated a sense of gravity.[116] Consequently, both Rashi[117] and Kimhi[118] interpreted אילי הארץ in Ezek. 17:13 as "princes of the land" (שרי הארץ).

Psalms 82:6-7 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

In Ps. 82:6-7 Abraham ben Daud Halevi interpreted אלהים as wise persons (החכמים). To understand his point, it is necessary to analyse the function of אלהים in the whole psalm in the light of a series of parallelisms. According to Ps. 82:1, God (אלהים) stood in the assembly of אל, namely, God was giving judgment among אלהים. Granted that in Ps. 82:1b God's judgment took place among (בקרב) אלהים, אלהים must be construed as denoting plural beings. Since אלהים from Ps. 82:1b was parallel to אל from Ps. 82:1a, אל might be understood collectively, namely, as denoting a body (group) of beings denominated as אל. Furthermore, Ps. 82:6 proclaimed that Israelites were אלהים, to wit, the sons of the Most High (בני עליון). From the parallelism it is evident that the status of being אלהים was concomitant with the status of being God's children. In the context of that psalm this status was viewed as a moral obligation to act justly, especially as far as the underprivileged were concerned.

In Ps. 82:1 the Septuagint[119] claimed that God (θεός) stood in the assembly of gods (ἐν συναγωγῇ θεῶν), giving judgment among gods (ἐν μέσῳ θεοὺς). As regards Ps. 82:1a, Aquila's version[120] interpreted אל collectively and adjectivally by virtue of which God was said to stand in the assembly of the mighty (ἐν συναγωγῇ ἰσχυρῶν). On the other hand, it seems that in Ps. 82:1 Symmachus' version[121] explicated both אלהים and אל in terms of amplification, presuming that God stood "in the assembly of God", *videlicet*, God was his own court and acted on his own behalf as a court to himself. Consequently, in Ps. 82:6 the LXX translated אלהים as gods (θεοί).

The Targum[122] offered a coherent exposition of אלהים and אל in Ps. 82, announcing that in Ps. 82:1 God presided over an assembly of the righteous (צדיקין) who were fluent in the Torah and that God was giving judgment among the honest judges (דינין). Thus, in Ps. 82:6 the Targum stated that Israelites should be considered to be (חשיבין) like (כ) angels (מלאכיא). In other words, Israelites were called to earn a reputation for their righteous way of living which should resemble that of heavenly (i.e. good) angels. The same reasoning was reflected in the Midrash on the Book of Psalms[123] and in the Pirke attributed to Rabbi Eliezer.[124] The Babylonian Talmud[125] interpreted עדת אל in Ps. 82:1a as the assembly of Israel, while אלהים in Ps. 82:1b – as judges.

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[116] "יבמות," in תלמוד בבלי, vol. 7 (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1860), 21r [No. 21a]. "בבא בתרא," in תלמוד בבלי, vol. 20 (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1864), 88v [No. 88b].

[117] Rashi, "ספר יחזקאל," in מקראות גדולות ספר יחזקאל (Lublin: שנײדמעסער, [s. a.]), 132 [Ezek. 17:13].

[118] Kimhi, "ספר יחזקאל," in מקראות גדולות ספר יחזקאל, 131 [Ezek. 17:13].

[119] Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 2, 323 [Ps. 82:1-6 /LXX 81:1-6].

[120] Field, ed., *Origenis*, vol. 2, 234 [Ps. 82:1-6 /LXX 81:1-6/ (Aquila)].

[121] Ibidem [Ps. 82:1-6 /LXX 81:1-6/ (Symmachus)].

[122] "Targum," in *Biblia sacra polyglotta*, vol. 3, 218 [Ps. 82:1-6].

[123] Buber, ed., מדרש תהלים, 368-369 [Ps. 82:1-6].

[124] פרקי רבי אליעזר, 98 [No. 47].

[125] "ברכות," in תלמוד בבלי, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1859), 6r [No. 6a]. "סנהדרין," 6v [No. 6b]. Moreover, the latter tract interpreted Ps. 82 in the light of 2 Chr. 19:5-11.

Commenting upon Ps. 82:1, Rashi[126] wrote that God acted as a chief judge among other judges (הדיינים) but he did not specify whether those associate judges were earthly or heavenly magistrates. Thus, Rashi interpreted אל in Ps. 82:1a and אלהים in Ps. 82:1b as judges, while in Ps. 82:6 he explicated אלהים as angels.[127]

Abraham ibn Ezra[128] was inclined to interpret עדת אל in Ps. 82:1a as the assembly of Israel (עדת ישראל), working on the assumption that אל simply qualified the assembly (God's assembly, the assembly belonging to אל [i.e. to God]). Actually, the Babylonian Talmud[129] explicated עדת אל as the assembly of Israel. In Hebrew the construct chain, as exemplified by Ps. 82:1a (עדת אל), could easily communicate the idea of Israel as the community defined by the Covenant with God.[130] In Ps. 82:1b and in Ps. 82:6 Abraham ibn Ezra[131] suggested to explicate אלהים as angels among whom God was judging and who were pictured as the sons of the Most High. He added that in the Scripture angels could be called אלהים because they were God's agents and they carried out God's orders and God's judgment in the world. Besides, Abraham ibn Ezra summarised an alternative interpretation according to which אלהים in Ps. 82:1b signified judges in the same way as in Exod. 22:27/28.

In his commentary on Ps. 82:1 Kimhi[132] asserted that those among whom God was portrayed as giving judgment, were earthly leaders (השופטים) or earthly judges (הדיינים).[133] Since those leaders proved to judge unjustly, God called them to take their mission seriously and to honour his precepts through their actions. Based on the Babylonian Talmud,[134] Kimhi presumed that Ps. 82 corresponded to 2 Chr. 19:5-11 which described Jehoshaphat's admonition against perversion of justice. Following 2 Chr. 19:5-11, Kimhi avowed that those who would dispense justice, were authorised by the LORD to carry out this noble task, and thus were bound by God's commandments. Expounding Ps. 82:6, Kimhi[135] attempted to bring together the juridical and angelic interpretation. Consequently, those judges (השופטים) who abode by God's law, could be called אלהים on the stipulation that in the Tanakh אלהים was used with reference to those who represented God in the world and who acted on his behalf. For Kimhi, to be אלהים in Ps. 82:6 meant to be the sons of the Most High, namely, to live according to God's will. From Kimhi's perspective, the way of living, which was designed by the LORD for his children, including his judges, who were mandated by God to administer justice in accordance with his law, reflected that of good angels. Abraham ben Daud Halevi's proposition, that in Ps. 82:6-7 אלהים might be interpreted as the wise, did not contradict the prevailing Jewish exposition of that psalm because wisdom defined as a moral aptitude was what God expected from Israelites and from judges dispensing justice on his behalf.

Job 38:7 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

Expounding Job 38:7, Abraham ben Daud Halevi discerned a parallelism between כוכבי בקר and בני אלהים. Therefore, he concluded that in the aforementioned verse sons of אלהים

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[126] Rashi, "ספר תהלים," 320-321 [Ps. 82:1].

[127] Ibidem, 322 [Ps. 82:6].

[128] Abraham ibn Ezra, "ספר תהלים," 320-321 [Ps. 82:1].

[129] "ברכות," 6r [No. 6a].

[130] The same was true of the genitive case in Greek.

[131] Abraham ibn Ezra, "ספר תהלים," 320-322 [Ps. 82:1, 82:6].

[132] Kimhi, "ספר תהלים," 320-321 [Ps. 82:1].

[133] It appears that Kimhi used these two appellations interchangeably.

[134] "סנהדרין," 6v [No. 6b].

[135] Kimhi, "ספר תהלים," 321-322 [Ps. 82:6].

denoted morning stars (celestial bodies) as God's creatures. The same exposition was adopted by Abraham ibn Ezra.[136] Nonetheless, the Septuagint[137] and the Targum[138] translated בני אלהים as angels. This might imply that the ancient Jewish interpreters construed כוכבי בקר as a figurative expression standing for angels. On the other hand, Aquila's and Theodotion's versions rendered בני אלהים as sons of God.[139]

Abraham ben Daud Halevi on God's Proxies

In addition, Abraham ben Daud Halevi cited the example of the biblical narratives (e.g. Gen. 16:7-11, 18-19, 28:12-13, 31:11-13; Judg. 6:11-14) in which God (depicted either as אלוהים or as יי) and the angel(s) were inextricably intertwined with one another and appeared interchangeably. He pointed out that such an interface was caused by the fact that the angel(s) acted on behalf of the Divine in the world (e.g. Exod. 23:20-21).

Judah Halevi

In his compendium Judah Halevi (יהודה הלוי)[140] declared that אלוהים signified the one or those who would govern or rule (sing. מושל) something or the one or those who would be in a position to judge (sing. דיין). Thus, אלוהים conveyed a sense of power (כח), which, depending on its degree, could be predicated of created human or angelic beings or of the Creator. Halevi recognised אלוהים as the plural form of אלוה which was coined to express the plenitude of power (קבוץ הכחות) by means of the plural of majesty and which could also be applied to the idol(s) styled this way by idol worshippers.

    Judah Halevi derived אלוה from איל and אל which, in his opinion, communicated the idea of power and strength. In addition, אל could assume the plural form אלים which should be viewed in the same way as אלוהים. Furthermore, Halevi argued that such biblical expressions as אלהי האלהים or אדני האדנים depicted God as the One who was holding sway over all his powers and who encapsulated all of them. Although God's very name was unique and referred to God of Israel, Halevi realised that at times it was applied to the instruments of the LORD's presence, for instance, to the LORD's ark (e.g. Num. 10:35-36).

Maimonides

In his *Guide for the Perplexed* Maimonides (רמב״ם)[141] admitted that in Exod. 22:7-8 אלוהים denoted leaders (השופטים). He added that in some passages אלוהים could also signify angels provided that God was ruling over angels (שופט על המלאכים). Consequently, a widespread expression, אלהי האלהים was interpreted by Maimonides as "God of the angels". Moreover, Maimonides recalled that the Hebrew appellation מלאך could denote a human messenger (e.g. Gen. 32:3/4)[142] or a prophet (e.g. Judg. 2:1;[143] Num. 20:16).

    From Maimonides' perspective, God governed the world through the angels that represented him and that carried out his will. Thus, in Gen. 1:26 and in Gen. 11:7 God said

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[136] Abraham ibn Ezra, "ספר איוב," in מקראות גדולות ספר איוב (Bnei Brak: ספרי קודש מישור, 1990), 208 [Job 38:7].

[137] Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 2, 591 [Job 38:7].

[138] "Targum," in *Biblia sacra polyglotta*, vol. 3, 76 [Job 38:7].

[139] Field, ed., *Origenis*, vol. 2, 69 [Job 38:7 (Aquila and Theodotion)].

[140] Judah Halevi, *Das Buch*, 298-345 [IV, 1-25].

[141] Maimonides, *More Nebuchim*, vol. 2, trans. Judah ibn Tibbon (Vienna: Schmid, 1828), 12v-14r [II, 6].

[142] Human denotation was stressed by the Targum Onkelos which translated מלאכים as אזגדין. Berliner, ed., *Targum*, vol. 1, 35 [Gen. 32:3/4].

[143] The Targum interpreted מלאך as נביא. Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, 35 [Judg. 2:1].

"let us..." to his angels, engaging them either by having a consultation with them (Gen. 1:26) or by sending them to confuse the language (Gen. 11:7). Such an interpretation was, as Maimonides noticed, recorded in the Babylonian Talmud[144] and in the grand Midrash on the Book of Genesis.[145]

Joseph Albo

In his compendium Joseph Albo (יוסף אלבו)[146] explained that אלוהים described a "master of ability" (המורה על היכולת), namely, the One who was vested with special powers. Therefore, it was obvious to Albo that אלוהים could refer to the Creator as to the One was vested with all the powers or to the created agents of power such as human judges (הדיינים) or angels (המלאכים).

Furthermore, Albo ascertained that since the LORD was governing the world through angels, many biblical narratives mentioned God and his angel(s) interchangeably. For instance, Exod. 13:21 spoke of the LORD going in a pillar of cloud, whereas Exod. 14:19 – of God's angel (מלאך האלהים) doing likewise. Similarly, in Judg. 6:11-27 the LORD and God's angel were talking to Gideon alternately. The same interplay between God and his angel(s) occurred in Gen. 31:11-13 and in Exod. 3:2-4.

Conclusion

The compendia, which were studied in the present article, offered an adequate exposition of אלוהים/אלוה in the Hebrew Bible though it was less extensive than that found in the Jewish mediaeval lexica and grammars. In those compendia the multi-faceted denotation of אלוהים/אלוה was analysed in the light of the biblical passages which illustrated iconic aspects of the meaning thereof. In principle, אלוהים/אלוה could denote the divine, idolatrous or human agent(s) of power.

While expounding the Scripture, the authors of those compendia relied on the Jewish exegetical tradition, primarily, on the Targumim, Midrashim and on the biblical interpretation evidenced in the Babylonian Talmud. Furthermore, the exegesis propounded by the authors of those compendia coincided with the mainstream of the Jewish ancient and mediaeval exegesis. By analysing the biblical passages, which were referred to in the aforementioned compendia, in the light of the ancient Jewish translations (the LXX cum its revisions and the Targumim) and in the light of the classic Jewish literature (Midrashim, Talmudim, Pirkes, etc.) and commentaries, the continuum of the Jewish tradition could be discerned and studied. This tradition established itself as the ceaseless process of rereading the Scripture and the classic Jewish literature which surrounded the Tanakh, bearing testimony to the history of biblical interpretation in the context of the Covenant.

Finally, the compendia in question proved to be attentive to the literary features of the biblical narratives in which God and God's angel(s) occurred interchangeably. This interplay was explained as a consequence of the theological function of angels as the instruments by means of which God was governing the world, carrying out his will and interacting with human beings.

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[144] "סנהדרין," 38v [No. 38b].

[145] Theodor and Albeck, ed., *Bereschit Rabba mit kritischem Apparat und Kommentar: Parascha I-XLVII*, 54-67 [No. 8 פרשה (Gen. 1:26-27)].

[146] Albo, ספר העקרים, 25r-29v [I, XI]. Ibidem, 92v-95r [II, XXVIII].

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