



JOURNAL OF LATE ANTIQUE  
RELIGION AND CULTURE

E-ISSN: 1754-517X; Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/issn.1754-517X>

Journal Website: <https://jlarc.cardiffuniversitypress.org>

Volume 11, 2017, 1-37; Volume DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/n.2017.10449>

**PHILOSOPHY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE.  
IS EMPEROR JULIAN'S *CONTRA GALILAEOS* A PLAUSIBLE CRITIQUE OF  
CHRISTIANITY?**

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10450>

Date Accepted: 5 June 2017

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**PHILOSOPHY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE.**  
**IS EMPEROR JULIAN'S *CONTRA GALILAEOS* A PLAUSIBLE CRITIQUE OF**  
**CHRISTIANITY?**

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**Abstract**

In *Contra Galilaeos*, Julian makes the case that in the writings of Moses Yahweh is not the 'Most High' God, but simply one of many national gods (the biblical term is 'angels' or 'sons of god/s', בני אל, בני אלים, or בני האלהים) of the ancient Near Eastern world, who received Israel as an inheritance from the hand of the Most High. Christians claim the Jewish Yahweh as their God, and appeal to the Hebrew writings to identify the qualities of that God; but Julian claims that the Jewish writings clearly depict Yahweh as a subordinate tribal god, who was neither the Creator (demiurge), nor to be identified with the God of Abraham, nor to be equated with the Most High (*Hypsistos*), apportioning God of Deut. 32:8-9. Julian extrapolates from this stunning premise that there is therefore no compelling comparison to be advanced between Yahweh, as depicted in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the God proclaimed by the Christians. Julian's argument will receive unexpected support from the 1929 archaeological findings of Ugarit, which have had a significant impact on helping to identify ancient Near Eastern gods alluded to in the documents of the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, Julian's analyses of the texts of the Hebrew Bible are sustained by nothing less than the accumulated mythological weight of the entire ancient Near East.

Since its incarnation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as the dream-child of Heinrich Schliemann, archaeology has made significant contributions to Jewish and Christian studies. Although archaeological discoveries have consistently confirmed the richness of the historical grounding and absolute intellectual relevance of religious studies, findings have rarely been decisive enough to affirm clearly any one interpretative tradition over another. Until Ras Shamra. Jewish studies, Christian studies, and by extension Islamic studies, stand now on the cusp of a new reformation in which the challenge shall be to rethink the relationship between the Hebrew Scriptures and the various religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), which claim derivative authority based on those original scriptures; between (1) Yahweh, the clan or tribal god of the Jews; (2) the God later painstakingly proclaimed first by the nascent Christian Church, then articulated through the philosophical ratiocinations of the Christian schoolmen; and finally (3) Allah, the All Merciful All Compassionate Creator (*i.e.*, all-

everything, or universalized) God of Islam.<sup>1</sup> This is a reformation whose foundation was laid in the fourth century by Julian, Pagan Emperor of the Roman Empire, and nephew to Constantine the Great. Construction upon that foundation, however, was to begin only in the twentieth century with the archaeological findings at Ugaritic Ras Shamra, which essentially substantiate Julian's arguments *contra Galilaeos*.

It is an obvious understatement to assert that, since its inception, there have been myriad and varied attacks directed against the Christian Faith and Christian Church. Of course, in the earliest days of the Judaeo-Jesus Movement and the budding splinter group that was to become the gentile Christian Church, there were the philosophical challenges. Since the time of the Macedonian Alexander in 323 BCE, the Mediterranean world had been immersed in such a pervasive culture of Hellenism that the language of both the Diaspora Jews<sup>2</sup> as well as the Jewish adherents of the blossoming Jesus movement, was Greek. The early followers of Jesus seem almost impetuous in their haste to break free, into this Hellenised world, from the narrow confines of their native Palestinian chrysalis; and over the next four centuries the explosion of diverse ideas and convictions from that early community was, finally, to morph into a *système de pensée*—the theological core at the heart of the Christian Church, whose doctrines, and then dogma, were woven around a series of formalized philosophical symbols called creeds.<sup>3</sup> This intellectual or doctrinal evolution, which focused on all the diverse philosophical ramifications of the *res Christi*, and which culminated ideologically in the Trinitarian pronouncements of the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, was largely reactive, in that it arose in response to highly charged philosophical challenges that poured forth from the profoundly Hellenised intellectual environment of the Mediterranean basin. The initial creedal responses articulated by the Christian Church, moved, it was claimed, by the Holy Spirit of God and accompanied by declarations of heterodoxy and condemnation to dissenting voices, were largely effective in stemming the tide of the philosophical challenges to the *res Christi*.

After the lull of a 'Dark Age', however, further philosophical challenges to the Christian *système de pensée* would flourish as a result of the clustering concatenation of new ideas and visions that would spring out of the rich intellectual and artistic earth

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<sup>1</sup> The Qur'an consistently identifies Allah as the God of Abraham and Moses, and the *ens realissimum* God of the Christian tradition (Anselm, Descartes, et al). To be sure, the assumption of the Qur'an is that these four Deities, Allah, the God of Abraham, the God of Moses, and the Christian God, are in fact one and the same Being. This fusion is also normative in the scholarly literature, as witnessed by Cunchillos' (*Ougarit. Le monde de la bible*, 37. Photocopy brochure prepared by the site managers of Ras Shamra, Syria) summary statement of Ugaritic mythology: "A [la] tête [du panthéon ougaritique] apparaît le dieu Ilu, le El de la Bible, le Ala du Coran." Julian's argument, therefore, which separates these Deities, is of utmost relevance to these three religions. For Allah as the God of Abraham in the Qur'an, see, for example, Surahs Al-Baqara (124-131, 136, 140), and Ibrahim; for Allah as the God of Moses, see i.a. Surah Al-Baqara (49-92, 136, 140); for Allah as the God of the Christians, see Surah Al-Baqara (87ff, 136, 140).

<sup>2</sup> Hellenic culture was so ubiquitous that somewhere around the middle of the second century BCE the diaspora Jews of Alexandria decided there was a need for the Jewish Tanak to be available to the Jewish diaspora community in the language of the Greeks, which translation became known as the Septuagint (LXX). For an analysis of the LXX and of the distinctly diaspora (as opposed to Palestinian) Jewish piety reflected in that translation, see Schoeps, 1961, 27ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lazarus-Yafeh, 1992, 3.

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of Renaissance Italy. In many respects these ‘new-fangled’<sup>4</sup> ideas corresponded to an older Hellenised vision from the pre-Christian world, which had been resurrected in the West as a consequence of the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453; but in all respects these in-flooding ideas sparked a groundswell of resistance—aesthetic, theological and spiritual, as well as epistemological or scientific—against the systematized, theocratic worldview that had been erected and transmitted, generation upon generation, by the Institution of the Christian Church. This new vision of the world inspired an aesthetic challenge to the older vision, which became manifest in the art and architecture of Italy (Renaissance); this new vision would gain added intellectual impetus as a result of a direct theological challenge to the historical authority and orthodoxy of the Catholic tradition in Northern Europe (Reformation); and finally this vision would transform itself into specific empirical disciplines during the seventeenth and eighteenth century span of scientific revolution and discovery, which would codify as a fundamental philosophical challenge to the Christian *Weltbild* in the nineteenth century scientific work of Charles Darwin (1859, *Origin of the Species*, and 1870, *The Descent of Man*). Perhaps the most eloquent philosophical translator of this scientific worldview in the nineteenth century would be Friedrich Nietzsche, who bitterly reproved the Christian Church for its insistence on other-worldly (*überirdische*) teachings, which were nothing less than an unconscionable denial of the obvious this-worldly relevance of the human animal.

In addition to philosophical challenges, however, there was a second type of challenge to the *fides Christiana*, which seems to have been all but ignored in the religious-historical literature, but which is hermeneutical in nature. This hermeneutical challenge to the Christian interpretative transformation of the Jewish Scriptures was launched perhaps most significantly in the fourth century by Julian (CE 331-363), the so-called apostate emperor of the Roman Empire.<sup>5</sup> In a fragmentary treatise entitled, *Contra Galilaeos*, Julian takes the LXX in hand, just as might any modern Protestant exegete in defence of the Faith, but instead of seeking to affirm Christian interpretation of the Jewish Writings, actually argues textually that Yahweh is not the supreme God of the Mosaic writings but only one of the subordinate national or tribal gods (in biblical terms, ‘angels’ or ‘sons of gods’, בני אלים, or בני האלהים), who received Jacob or Israel as his heritage from the hand of the Most High. In addition to arguing that the Jewish Yahweh occupies a problematic, because inferior, position in the hierarchy of gods, Julian will also argue, based on biblical texts, that it is impossible for any reasonable person to accept the angry, fearful god depicted in the Mosaic writings as the archetypal Moral Being held up for example by the followers of Jesus.

It is indeed a curious irony of history that the text of Julian’s *Contra Galilaeos* is extant only reactively—it exists uniquely in fragments dialectically encased in the writings of his bitterest Christian enemies. So it is in the bosom of Christian polemical writings that Julian’s *Contra Galilaeos* is transmitted to posterity; contained for us today in the very heart of Christian exposition is one of the most compelling challenges

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<sup>4</sup> To borrow Aristotle’s phrasing in regard to the notoriously “modern” ideas of Anaxagoras, *Met.* 989b6 (Loeb numbering): Αναξαγόραν ... καινοπρεπέστερος λέγων.

<sup>5</sup> According to Renan (1873, 491), we should not be surprised to discover Roman authorities, such as Julian, who display an active interest in things Jewish. The tradition seems to have begun already with the Roman generals Titus and Vespasian in the first century.

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to the Christian use, interpretation, and indeed appropriation and utter transformation of the Hebrew Scriptures. In Proverbs (6:25) it is written: “Shall any one bind fire in his bosom, and not burn his garments?” The proverb is all the more piquant because Julian’s interpretations and analyses of the Jewish Scriptures will receive unexpected support in 1929 from the stunning archaeological findings at Ugarit (Ras Shamra, Syria).

The Ras Shamra findings have had a significant impact on helping late twentieth century scholarship to identify more exactly specific gods in the hierarchy of divine beings of the ancient Near East. These are ancient Near Eastern gods with personal names who have been long lost—long suppressed—behind metaphorical translations in the Hebrew Writings, but who continue nonetheless to be present in those writings, having been absorbed into the Hebrew stories via the more ancient Ugaritic or early Canaanite framing of those later stories. For, “[i]n fact, both centers”, represented by Ugarit and Jerusalem, “grew out of a common cultural background.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Julian’s interpretations of the Mosaic writings, including his henotheistic framing and logically consequent subordination of Yahweh, are sustained by nothing less than the accumulated mythological weight of the entire ancient Near East.

Scholarly literature in the area of ancient Near Eastern archaeology and the Bible clearly shows that our understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures has been enormously enriched as a result of the discovery of the Ugaritic archives in Syria in 1929. Smith (2002, 25 & 28), for instance, writes: “The evidence of the similarities between Canaanite and Israelite societies has led to a major change in the general understanding of the relationship between these two societies. Rather than viewing them as two separate cultures, some scholars define Israelite culture as a subset of Canaanite culture.” And:

Israel inherited local cultural traditions from the Late Bronze Age... Although one may not identify the local deities prior to and during the emergence of Israel by equating Ugaritic religion with Canaanite religion, the Ugaritic evidence is pertinent to the study of Canaanite religion since inscriptions [...] indicate that the deities of the land included El, Baal, Asherah, and Anat, all major divinities known from the Ugaritic texts. (Smith 2002, 28)

Hence the relevance of reconsidering Julian’s short exposé, *Against the Christians*, in the light of Ugaritic findings and post-Ugaritic scholarship. The substance of the apostate emperor’s decisive condemnation of the Christians, whom he calls Galileans, is grounded in his criticism of the Christian interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Indeed, he claims that although the Galileans accept without qualification the writings of Moses as reliable and authoritative in matters of faith and doctrine, they are either woefully uninformed, or dangerously disingenuous about the true nature of the gods, and God, profiled in the scriptural texts.

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<sup>6</sup> Fisher, 1972, xvii.

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### Julian the Apostate Emperor

Nephew to Constantine I, the emperor who legalized Christianity in CE 313, and so-called apostate<sup>7</sup> emperor of the fourth century Roman Empire, Julian (CE 331-363) was trained in the Christian faith as a youth<sup>8</sup> and later seemingly abandoned that faith in favor of the Great God, who oversaw not only the time-honored and traditional gods of the Greeks and Romans, but also all the other gods of the other nations and tribes. For this reason he has been styled by Christian writers as the apostate emperor, epithet that would seem consistent with his self-styled *Christo perfidus Imperator*<sup>9</sup> and apostate.<sup>10</sup> Yet Julian will actually turn the accusation of apostasy against Greeks who, abandoning their own religion, converted to the faith of the Christians; he will claim that it is they who are apostate from the true religion.

In *Contra Galilaeos* 389[235D] he clearly includes himself in the category of those, precisely, “who have not given [themselves] over to the spirit of apostasy,” by converting to Christianity. Voltaire (1994, 134, lns. 115-116) probably reads this situation more astutely than most moderns when he writes: “On a reproché à Julien d’avoir quitté le christianisme dès qu’il le put faire sans risquer sa vie. C’est reprocher à un homme pris par des voleurs, & enrollé dans leur bande le couteau sur la gorge, de s’échaper des mains de ces brigands.”

From his rather unique perspective as a Hellenized, religious<sup>11</sup> but non-Christian emperor of an ever-more profoundly Christianized fourth-century empire, Julian for-

<sup>7</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, Chap. XXI, 103: The God “who gave [power] to the Christian Constantine gave it also to the apostate Julian, whose gifted mind was deceived by a sacrilegious and detestable curiosity, stimulated by the love of power.” Cf. Bowersock, 1978, 22, 116. Modern scholarship, however, seems to want to dispute whether or not Julian was an apostate, which is to say, whether he had ever really been a Christian in order to become apostate. For this, see Smith, 1995, 179ff.

<sup>8</sup> In *The Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates Scholasticus, Bk. III, Ch. 1, 76-77, one reads that when the emperor Constantius had suspicion that Julian was being swayed away from “religious sentiment” by philosophy, “Julian...became very anxious to lull the suspicions which had been awakened... He was shaved to the very skin, and pretended to live a monastic life: and while in private he pursued his philosophical studies, in public he read the sacred writings of the Christians, and moreover was constituted a reader in the church of Nicomedia. Thus by these specious pretexts he succeeded in averting the emperor’s displeasure.”)

<sup>9</sup> “Iulianus etenim Christo perfidus Imperator sic Photino haeresiarchae adversus Diodorum scribit:” *Epistulae Julianus*, #55: *To Photinus* (Loeb, vol. 3, 186).

<sup>10</sup> *Misopogon* 5.8, 28.28; *Epistulae* 10.3, 14.26, 84.14, 86.26, 86.32, 88.29, 89b.12, 89b.161, 89b.438, 89b.469, 98.70, 106.5; *Contra Galilaeos* 164.12, 165.11, 176.17, 177.1, 177.5, 197.7, 205.6, 207.6, 219.2, 222.11, 222.17, 223.1, 226.11. Cf. Riedweg, 1999, 70. Evieux, in his introduction to the French edition of Cyril of Alexandria’s *Contre Julien* (1985:34, 40), chooses to understate the question by explaining Julian’s apostasy from the Christian faith as a visceral reaction to the massacre of his family at the hands of Christians.

<sup>11</sup> Allard (1900, 200): “Précisément, à cette époque, et sur le coin de la terre d’Asie ou les circonstances avaient porté Julien, l’occultisme était très puissant. Vers lui avait en partie dévié le courant de la philosophie néo-platonicienne, si pure avec Plotin, noble encore avec Porphyre, grossie d’affluents bizarres et malsains sous l’inspiration de Jamblique et de ses disciples.” Likewise Smith (1995, 183) affirms that Julian was at least spiritual if not religious, for around 350/1, he says, “Julian was propelled towards Pergamum by a ‘spark of prophecy’ at Nicomedia.”

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mally opposed the onslaught of Christian belief in a fragmentary work entitled *Contra Galilaeos*, composed in Antioch during the winter of CE 362-3.<sup>12</sup> Setting forth arguments chosen from, *inter alia*, the standard anti-Christian, anti-Jewish arsenal so often employed by the pagan Greeks in their polemics,<sup>13</sup> Julian launches vituperative attacks against the Galileans, targeting both their inability to reason clearly and consistently from the writings of Moses,<sup>14</sup> as well as their inadequate speculative understanding of the structured and orderly nature of the world of gods.<sup>15</sup> Employing a variety of arguments that range from the condemnation of some of their curious populist practices,<sup>16</sup> to absolutely hermeneutically compelling analyses of the writings they consider sacred, Julian's most persuasive attack on the Galileans is by far the two-pronged argument grounded in the writings of Moses.

Julian first argues *hermeneutically*, turning "the weapons of the Jewish-Christian apologists against themselves,"<sup>17</sup> by declaring that any attempt to substantiate a claim for the divinity of Jesus is undermined from the start, and therefore condemned to failure, because the Christian interpretation and application of the Hebrew writings concerning Yahweh and the gods is fatally flawed.<sup>18</sup> Christians claim legitimacy for

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Smith, 1995, 190.

<sup>13</sup> Adler (1893, 600-601): "From the striking similarity in phrase and idea between the language of Julian and the discussions reported in the Talmud between Rabbi and heathen, the attacks of the Emperor upon Jewish monotheism appear to have formed part of the stock-in-trade of the polytheistic Platonists." Lods (1941,13) affirms that another "stock-in-trade" argument used by both Jews and pagans against Christians included the argument of miracles, which concludes that Jesus was a magician. Cf. Evrieux (in Cyril's *Contre Julien*, 1985, 49) for a list of such standard anti-Jewish rhetoric, and Schoeps (1963, 18ff) for a history of the Jewish-Christian debate.

<sup>14</sup> Adler (Ibid, 609): "It might appear strange that in a work professedly combating the Christian belief, so much space is occupied by remarks, complimentary and otherwise, upon Jews, Judaism, and the Old Testament." Cf. Labriolle (1942, 9): "C'est ainsi que ni Celse, ni Porphyre, ni Julien, ni aucun de ces implacables ennemis de la foi chrétienne qui, non contents d'exploiter la philosophie grecque, fouillaient les traditions juives pour y recueillir de quoi nuire à cette foi..."

<sup>15</sup> What Julian would like to claim as muddled reading of Hebrew Scriptures by the Christians, Koester (1987, 166) explains as a 'syncretistic phenomenon', which, he says, spared no religion of the period: "Christianity became deeply enmeshed in the syncretistic process, and this may very well have been its particular strength. Christianity began as a Jewish sect with missionary ambitions, but it did not simply arise out of Judaism, nor directly out of the ministry of Jesus. On the basis of these beginnings, however, Christianity, probably more than the other religions of its time, was able to adapt itself to a variety of cultural and religious currents and to appropriate numerous foreign elements until it was ready to succeed as a world religion—thoroughly syncretistic in every way."

<sup>16</sup> Julian argues against the cultus of the dead practiced by the Galileans (335Cff; 415ff). For more discussion on this ideas, compare Paul Allard (1900, 287): "Julien qualifiera si souvent le christianisme d'adoration des morts, de religion des tombeaux, et se montrera si animé contre les sanctuaries des martyrs." Riley (1995, 13-23), in addition to details relevant to more populist aspects of early Christian religion, such as belief in a substantial but incorporeal existence after death, discusses Jewish practices of the period, including their cult of the dead. He argues that, "As among the Greeks, the special dead in Israel received frequent pilgrimages. Their tombs were shrines and holy places, as are certain tombs of Biblical figures and venerated rabbis even today. Such cultus was continued by the early (and later) Christians, who visited the tombs of their special dead in turn."

<sup>17</sup> Riedweg, 1999, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Delitzsch will already elaborate this argument philosophically in 1920, in a small volume entitled, *Die Grosse Täuschung*, thus anticipating the findings of Ugarit by some ten years. Typical of

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their ‘new’ teachings by looking backwards into the ‘old’ Jewish Scriptures; but as their interpretative transformation of the Jewish Scriptures is extremely selective, which Julian seeks to demonstrate by his own textual analyses, this method turns out, at best, to be nothing more than a dubious religious-historical claim for legitimacy. Julian then argues *philosophically* against the legitimacy of Galilean belief from his own certainly more ‘enlightened’ neo-platonic conception of the world of gods.<sup>19</sup> So he exposes both the hermeneutical and speculative oddity of the peculiar Galilean belief of “trine-theism,” opposing this to the more traditional form of polytheism familiar to ancients in general, and the Greeks, Romans and Persians in particular.

It is an irony of western intellectual history that Julian’s attacks on the faith of the Galileans, and particularly their interpretation of the Jewish writings, were doomed to fade into almost unchallenged obscurity. The argument of *Against the Christians* has been preserved only in a bitter counter-polemic entitled *Against Julian*, which was composed by Cyril (ca. 378-444), Bishop of Alexandria, sometime between 439-441 CE.<sup>20</sup> Voltaire (1994:137) gallically understates the importance of Julian’s *Contra Galilaeos* when he writes: “Un tel écrit aurait pu renverser la religion chrétienne établie par Constantin, si Julien eut vécu longtemps pour le bonheur du monde: mais après lui le fanatisme triompha.” Indeed, the irony will be such that instead of destroying the philosophical and hermeneutical credibility of the Galilean phenomenon as he had intended, Julian’s own ‘religion’, the “Neo-Platonic Anti-Church with its Platonizing hierarchy,”<sup>21</sup> will furnish the nascent institution of the Christian Church with a philosophical model for idealizing and codifying its God. This will allow the Christian bishops, effectively and permanently, to separate this God from any conceptual contamination by association with the gods of paganism. In a further irony, it shall prove to be the case that the manner in which Julian organizes the institutions of pagan worship in the empire shall provide the model for the Christian Church’s future organizational or institutional structure.<sup>22</sup> Julian’s critique of the short circuit in the hermeneutical circle of the Christian faith, however, was not utterly futile. Indeed, his argument has received a rather curious vindication from twentieth century archaeological finds deriving from the ancient Near East.

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his argument is this statement: “Jaho, der Spezialgott Israels, der höchste unter allen Göttern—all das ist konsequent gedacht, aber diesen Partikulargott Jaho mit Gott, dem Weltgeist, dem allerhöchsten geistigen Wesen über all Völker der Erde, den Schöpfer und Regierer des Weltalls, zu vereinerleien ist eine Selbsttäuschung der alttestamentlichen Propheten und eine gar nicht auszudenkende Täuschung der Menschheit überhaupt” (71; cf. 72, 74).

<sup>19</sup> By the time Julian becomes emperor, according to Nock (1973, 159), “Paganism had moved largely towards a sort of monotheism...”

<sup>20</sup> See Evieux (in *Contre Julien*, 1985, 10-15) for a discussion on the dating of Cyril’s CJ.

<sup>21</sup> Popper, 1963, 302; cf. 23. Nock (1973, 135), however, disagrees with Popper about the primacy of Julian’s hierarchic organization, asserting that in the mystery cults, “[a] hierarchic organization did not exist except when [...] Julian in the sixth decade of the fourth century created it, following Christian precedents.” Likewise Nock (Ibid, 159): “Paganism had moved largely towards a sort of monotheism, and Julian’s revival depended on the giving to it of those features which had in Christianity been most effective, theological and moral dogma, hierarchic organization, and systematic works of charity and benevolence.”

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Toynbee, 1951, 202. Taking the opposite side Labriolle (1942:422; cf. 452) suggests, following Bidez and Nock (1964:100), that “Julien essayait de copier les institutions chrétiennes, pareillement il plagiait la doctrine ‘galiléenne.’”

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Not at all inconsistently with his status as an initiate of Mithraism,<sup>23</sup> Julian adheres to a syncretistic,<sup>24</sup> neo-Platonized framing of the intelligible world. He believes in the long-established Greek tradition of searching out truth or wisdom noetically, which is to say through reasoned enlightenment. It was therefore inevitable that he would find the sophistries of the Christian faith to be (philosophically) flawed and therefore ultimately unsatisfying intellectually. In the Christian Church's long practice of dogma-building, however, it was little likely that Julian's philosophical ratiocinations would arouse any great furore; for it has ever been that for Christians the predominant tradition of thinking about biblical authority and credibility has been to rely on the Bible's own *facultas se ipsum interpretandi*.<sup>25</sup> For all the interest one may bring to Julian's philosophical attacks on Christian faith, his greater and by far more damaging attack against the Galileans is hermeneutical.

Julian's rationalizing interpretation of the Greek myths clearly follows the precedent set by Palaephatus,<sup>26</sup> which is to say that, unlike the Euhemerists<sup>27</sup> who systematically humanized the ancient stories along with their gods and heroes,<sup>28</sup> Julian embraced an intellectualized and moralizing conception of the gods.<sup>29</sup> Julian's religious sensibilities were quite distinct from those of Greek popular religion,<sup>30</sup> but were entirely informed by his neo-platonic philosophy. His noetic conception of the world of gods and men was

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<sup>23</sup> On the conservative side of this question are Labriolle and Farney. Tentative, Labriolle (1942, 382) conjectures that Julian, "se fit initier, semble-t-il, au culte de Mithra dès l'époque de son séjour en Gaule, entre 355 et 360." More skeptical, Farney (1934, 69) infers that Julian was never really an adept of the cult of Mithra because, "it would seem," he acquired knowledge that was too superficial, only sufficient to recognize in Mithra "le Dieu qu'il avait choisi." On the other hand, both Cumont and Bidez are adamant. Cumont (1956, 89) affirms that, "the last pagan that occupied the throne of the Caesars, Julian the Apostate, was an ardent votary of this tutelary god, whom he caused to be worshipped in Constantinople." The most authoritative of the Julian scholars, Bidez (1965, 219) concludes: "Il se peut qu'en Gaule déjà, Julien fût affilié à la secte mazdéenne. [...] Mais c'est à Constantinople que, faisant ouvertement profession de sa foi nouvelle, il fut promu aux grades les plus élevés de l'initiation et qu'il devint [...] le grand maître des conventicules mithriaques."

<sup>24</sup> Koester (1987, 195): "In addition to the old identification of Sabazius [Phrygian (and Thracian) god] with Dionysus in Asia Minor, we find a frequent connection with Zeus and with Hypsistos ("The Highest God"), occasionally also with the Great Mother, and later with Mithras. Strange, and not yet explained, is the identification with Yahweh, the god of Israel." Julian would certainly wish to correct Koester's statement, substituting the God of Abraham for Yahweh, the god of Israel.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. H. Thielicke, "The Restatement of New Testament Mythology" in K.M.I, 149, quoted in Thiselton (1993, 3).

<sup>26</sup> For a brief introduction to Palaephatus and his thought see Palaephatus, 1996, 1ff. For a discussion on the significance of this "correcteur" of myths in the development of the Greek tradition of history, see Veyne, 1983, 77ff.

<sup>27</sup> For Euhemerus of Messene (340-260 BCE) and Euhemeristic criticism of myth, see Koester, 1987, 135, 154-156.

<sup>28</sup> Eusebius was an Euhemerist, as is so clearly evident in his treatment of Philo of Byblos.

<sup>29</sup> Compare, for example, Julian's (1998, 77ff.) argument concerning man's intellectual progression; he eventually transcends his initial bondage to myths about the gods, until he attains to the freedom of true knowledge. Cf. also Julian's Oration "To the Cynic Heracleios."

<sup>30</sup> Two excellent general resources for Greek popular religion are Jane Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1922; and Martin P. Nilsson, *Greek Folk Religion*, 1940, Phil: Univ. of Penn Press. For the Eleusinian mysteries, see George Mylonas' *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969

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consistent with the later platonic world of the divine that is perhaps nowhere<sup>31</sup> more formally articulated than in the speech Socrates attributes to Diotima in the *Symposium*.<sup>32</sup> In her famous lecture to Socrates Diotima, a Mantinean priestess, clearly differentiates between types of deities. There are the great gods and, by implication, the gods (μέγας θεός and θεός), who do not mingle with men;<sup>33</sup> and key to her argument in the *Symposium*, there is also a third type of deity who is somewhere between mortal and immortal, such as Eros (μεταξὺ θνητοῦ καὶ ἀθανάτου), whom she identifies as a great daimon (δαίμων μέγας<sup>34</sup>).<sup>35</sup> In like fashion, Julian also is careful not to confuse *theoi* and *daimones* in his writings;<sup>36</sup> rather, he consistently observes the distinctive

<sup>31</sup> Except perhaps in Hesiod, *Works & Days*, 120ff.

<sup>32</sup> Plato's *Symposium*, 202C-203A. Cf. Rochefort, 1957, 53: "C'est dans le Banquet de Platon que se rencontre la première référence à une croyance en ces divinités subalternes qui sera le point de départ de la dévotion aux démons, renouvelée au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère."

<sup>33</sup> *Symposium*, 202e: "God with man does not mingle (θεός δὲ ἀνθρώπῳ οὐ μίγνυται): but the spiritual is the means of all society and converse of men with gods and of gods with men."

<sup>34</sup> This expression, which seems to be a hapax legomenon in Plato, is only found twice in Homer. In *Odyssey* 5:421 the expression μέγα δαίμων is directly linked to Zeus. In the *Iliad* δαίμων, both with and without the article, is sometimes found to be interchangeable with θεός (Aias seems to prefer this usage: *Il.* 7:288 & 291; 377; 396); it is at least on one occasion contextually linked to Zeus (*Il.* 7:291); but it often seems to suffer the fate of succumbing to impersonal translation, e.g. as fate or heaven (*Il.* 9:600; 11:480; Compare the impersonal but mixed uses in *Od.* 9:339 (theos) and 9:381 (daimon)). On the other hand, θεός μέγας seems to be appropriately used of a variety of gods (*Il.* 16:531 (Apollo), *Il.* 21:248 (Skamander)), in addition to impersonally (*Il.* 19:410 (in conjunction with Moira)).

<sup>35</sup> *Symposium*, 202c-e. Cf. *Resp.* V 469, where, seemingly influenced by Hesiod in *Works & Days* (120 ff.), Plato equates daimoni to ghosts.

<sup>36</sup> For purposes of greater precision, unless otherwise indicated, the following groupings refer to citations from the Greek text of the *Belles Lettres* edition of Julian writings. From a very tentative overview of his writings it is evident that Julian consistently and clearly separates *theoi* from *daimones*. In the first grouping, which in fact corresponds to the majority of references, the separation between theos and daimon is respected whether Julian is quoting from another author or speaking himself. In Oration II, "The Heroic Deeds of the Emperor Constantius" Julian uses δαίμων quoting Homer (*I-1*, III, §8, 60, p.128.; *Od.* 20:66ff.), which maintains the distinction between gods and daimons. Likewise, in Oration VII, "To the Cynic Heracleios" (*II-1*, VII §15-16, p.65), Julian refers to Zeus as theos, but to Dionysos as daimon. In "The Caesars" (*II-2*, X, §26, 7-8, p.57) Julian juxtaposes the vocative 'O gods' (theoi) with the Latinesque qualification of a specific, minor 'deity' [ἡ μεταμέλεια] as 'divinity wise among all' [σώφρων δαίμων]. In a marvellous example from Oration XI, "On King Helios" (*II-2*, XI, §40, 25, p.102), Julian's general argument rests on the distinction between Helios, who is theos, and Ares, who (at least one might anticipate in this argument) is also theos, and the counter-factual possibility that the theos Ares could have been imitated by a daimon disguising itself as Ares. In "The Misopogon" (*II-2*, XII, §1, 6, p.156), in a usage that could be construed as impersonal, Julian refers to the Muse, another specific, minor 'deity', as daimon. In a letter Julian writes after arriving in Antioche, 'To the High Priest Theodore' (*II-2*, 89b [288A-305D], p.155-156), he systematically distinguishes between theoi and daimoni, referring to the latter either as a tribe of perverse daimons [πονηρῶν δαιμόνων φύλον], or in the singular as the Evil One [ὁ κακὸς δαίμων]. This, of course, will hark back to the argument he makes in "Against the Galileans" (Loeb 143A-B, p.354). When alluding to Deut 32:8-9, he identifies an entire hierarchy of divinities; "unless for every nation separately some presiding national god (and under him an angel, a demon, a hero, and a peculiar order of spirits which obey and work for the higher powers..." [εἰ μὴ καθ' ἕκαστον ἔθνος ἐθνάρχης τις θεὸς ἐπιτροπεύων [ἦν] ἄγγελός τε ὑπ' αὐτῷ καὶ δαίμων καὶ ψυχῶν ἰδιάζον γένος ὑπηρετικὸν καὶ ὑπουργικὸν τοῖς κρείττοσιν ἔθετο]. Finally, in "To the Uneducated Cynics" (*II-1*, IX, §17, 200B) Julian also alludes to a greeting in which one welcomes the Good One (ἐπὶ τούτου φασὶ τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἐπιγράφειν τοῖς ἑαυτῶν οἴκοις ἐπὶ τῶν προπυλαίων «Ἐἵσοδος Κράτητι, Ἀγαθῷ Δαίμονι»). In the second grouping of references, the usage is primarily of daimon and

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hierarchy of rank and class among deities.<sup>37</sup> It is therefore not surprising to observe that Julian constructs one of his principal arguments against the Galileans upon a hierarchical, i.e., henotheistic, interpretation of LXX Deut. 32:8-9. A translation of the Masoretic text of that passage reads: “When the Most High (עליון) apportioned the nations, when he divided humankind (בני אדם), he fixed the boundaries of peoples in relation to Israel’s numbers (למספר בני ישראל); for the Lord’s (יהוה) portion is his people, Jacob his allotted share.”<sup>38</sup> The Septuagint version contains a slight difference, which however is of some consequence. It begins by translating עליון with ὑψιστος, which is fair enough. But then it replaces the phrase “Israel’s numbers”, literally, “the numbers of the ‘sons of Israel’” (בני ישראל), with κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ, “according to the number of the ‘messengers of God’”. The implication seems to be that these are some kind of minor gods compared to the Hypsistos. This impression seems then confirmed when we read that יהוה, κύριος, is one of those gods, He whose allotted portion is Jacob, His people.

According to Julian’s analysis of this passage, too, Moses here draws a distinction between the superlative LXX god ὑψιστος (עליון, Elyon or Highest One), and Yahweh (יהוה, κύριος) who receives his tribal inheritance as one of the subordinate messengers or “angels” of God, ἄγγελοι θεοῦ. It is surprising, however, to observe that nowhere in Julian’s own writings, neither in his oration to the great King Helios nor even in his direct allusions to Deut. 32:8-9, does Julian ever employ the Greek superlative term ὑψιστος. It would seem, linguistically at least, that for Julian the very idea of ‘God’ is indicative of an inherently supreme type of being, but not automatically the ‘most’ supreme type of being. Nowhere in his writings does Julian ever use *hypsistos* to indicate ‘a’ or ‘the’ supreme god; instead, one finds *hypsistos* replaced with expressions such as ‘the god over all things’ (148C), ‘the god over all’ (253B), and ‘the only god’ (262B), periphrastic expressions that deliberately seem to avoid attributing a superlative quality to any specific god. Although the comparative/superlative hierarchy of the Mosaic divine world in Deut. 32:8-9 would have been, from the point of view of Julian’s combative intention, the most obvious argumentative strength of alluding to the Mosaic passage in the first place, the unexpected ‘flatness’ of Julian’s language may perhaps be attributable more to Cyril of Alexandria’s translation and transmission of Julian’s critique of the Christian faith, than to Julian’s actual, original, and otherwise

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seems to correspond to the impersonally translated notion of Fate, or Destiny, or the Deity. Two of these occurrences are found in Oration IV, “Consolation Upon the Departure of Sallust” (I-1, IV §3, 2, p.192; and I-1, IV §6, 21, p.200); one in Oration IX “To the Uneducated Cynics” (II-1, IX, §16, 10, p.166); and possibly one in “Misopogon” (II-2, XII, §1, 6, p.156). Julian also uses the concept of daimon in a third, literary or metaphorical, sense when in Oration VII, “To the Cynic Heracleios” (II-1, VII §5, 32, p.51), he refers to Plutarque as a demon of poetry. For a broader analysis of Julian’s demonology, see Puiggali, 1982.

<sup>37</sup> Compare, for example, Julian’s “Letter to a Priest,” in Loeb vol. II, 309ff., in which he argues that just as the body needs bodily points of reference (i.e., physical images) to perform service to the gods, so also there is a worship that cannot be offered “bodily wise” to those gods who, by virtue of being beyond the reach of need, occupy a higher rank.

<sup>38</sup> Compare Ecclesiasticus 17:17: “For every nation He appointed a ruler; but Israel is the Lord’s portion. (16:26-28). In its entirety, Deut 32:8f.LXX reads as follows: ὅτε διεμέριζεν ὁ ὑψιστος ἔθνη, ὡς διέσπειρεν υἱοὺς Ἀδάμ, ἔστησεν ὄρια ἔθνῶν κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ, καὶ ἐγενήθη μερὶς κυρίου λαὸς αὐτοῦ Ἰακώβ σχοίνισμα κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ Ἰσραήλ.

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unknown and unknowable choice of words.<sup>39</sup> So while it is well possible to imagine that Julian could have evolved his argument along the same lines as would later be used by Anselm in his argument for *Ens Entissime*—that than which no greater can be conceived, it would in fact appear that Julian himself had no such comparative or superlative conception of the divine.

There is a second criticism one may bring to Julian's *Contra Galilaeos*, which is his equivocation in attributing divine epithets. When Julian uses the neo-platonic expression 'creator' or 'begetter' (demiurge; δημιουργός) in the context of Deut. 32:8-9, he sometimes applies that term to the god designated by Moses as LXX ὕψιστος, which would therefore exclude its application to Yahweh as a subordinate angel of that god (115D). However, he also sometimes uses 'demiurge' to refer to Yahweh who, if he receives his inheritance from the ὕψιστος δημιουργός, cannot also be, following Julian's own logic, the 'creator' (ὕψιστος δημιουργός) from whom he receives that inheritance (99E). In the main, however, while these criticisms reveal in Julian's argument against the Galileans an unfortunately casual approach to language, they do not necessarily affect the over-arching hermeneutical substance of his argument.

### Julian's Argument against the Christians

To summarize what is perhaps his most interesting because still very compelling attack on the faith of the Galileans, Julian readily accepts the claim advanced by the Christians that, because they admit the Mosaic writings to be authoritative and because they affirm that the *res Christi* flows out of the wellsprings of Jewish history, the God they worship is identical with the Jewish Yahweh. In a cogent textual analysis of the Hebrew Scriptures, however, and particularly of the Song of Moses recorded in Deut. 32:8-9, Julian makes the case that, in point of textual fact, Yahweh is not the superlative God of the Mosaic imagination, but simply one of the national gods, or one of the "angels of God", who received Jacob or Israel as his heritage from the hand of the Most High. What is therefore suggested here is that behind the LXX translation ἀγγέλων θεοῦ lies the Hebrew reading "angels of God", or "sons of God", בני האלהים or בני אלים, rather than "sons of Israel", בני ישראל.<sup>40</sup>

Following a strictly faithful, i.e., literal reading of the Jewish writings, it thus becomes one of Julian's most effective arguments that the Christians fail to adhere, not so much to the monotheistically oriented Law of Moses, but rather to the clearly henotheistic, or more accurately monolatric, Mosaic worldview. In his commentary on Julian's *Discours de l'empereur Julien contre les chrétiens*, Voltaire (1994, 149 = CG99E) clearly grasps Julian's desire to recast, by means of a hierarchical realignment, the impoverished worldview of the Galileans into the familiar world of gods and

<sup>39</sup> Nock (1964, 34, nt. 2) says the term *hypsistos* "had been used of Jehovah by Hellenistic Judaisers, but was also applied to Zeus as the god of mountain tops."

<sup>40</sup> Voltaire's distinction between a Dieu and un Génie is useful in this context (cf. 1994, 158). The reading בני אלים is also suggested by modern scholarship as likely the more original one, as it suggests "that the chief god allocates the nations to lesser deities in the pantheon"; the reading "numbers of the sons of Israel" is considered "unintelligible as it stands"; cf. *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 419 ad v. 8. See also below in the following sections of this article.

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men known by the ancients: “Dans cent passages des livres Juifs vous trouvez un Dieu universel qui commande à toute la terre; dans cent autres passages vous ne trouvez qu’un Dieu local, un Dieu Juif qui combat contre un Dieu Philistin, contre un Dieu Moabite, comme les Dieux de Troye dans Homère combattent contre les Dieux de la Grèce.” Julian will argue that the successive bishops of the early Christian church, following the Pauline NT, had in fact abandoned or failed to comprehend in their interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures the clearly polytheistic hierarchy that delimits the god of Jacob (Israel).

In Deut. 32:8-9 Moses sings to Israel the story of the pairing of peoples (tribes) with their gods (בני האלהים). *Hypsistos*, or the Most High (עליון), in allotting to the sons of Elohim their inheritance and in separating the tribes or ethnicons consistently according to the number of the sons of Elohim, is thereby clearly distinguished by Moses from those divine sons—the Allotting God apportions an inheritance to his divine sons. These divine sons, the *b’ne elohim*, which the LXX has ever read as angels of god (ἄγγελοι θεοῦ), are the tribal or national gods among whom is numbered the god of Jacob—*i.e.*, a patriarchal god (a God of the Fathers) who will become the god of the Israelites. Julian will close this argument by asserting, notwithstanding Paul<sup>41</sup> and the Church bishops, that there is at the very least a clear textual, if not philosophical distinction to be drawn between the tribal or national god described by Moses (vs. 9), and *Hypsistos* (vs. 8), whom Julian will ultimately identify as the “great” God of Abraham (Gen 15). *Hypsistos* clearly transcends the ethnic interests of Yahweh, the tribal god of the Hebrews; therefore He also transcends the interests of Yahweh, God of the Galileans.

As a result of this first and most fundamental mis-reading, this first short circuit in the hermeneutical circle, Julian will argue that instead of laying claim to *Hypsistos*, the creator or begetter, the Galilean bishops mistakenly settled their trinitarian sights on an “other,” lower-ranked<sup>42</sup> national god, *i.e.*, Yahweh, the god of the Israelites. From among the pre-Israelite gods that “peopled” the land of Canaan, the Christians had unwittingly erred in identifying as their God a (Mosaic) tribal or national god (Yahweh) who had received a tribal inheritance (Jacob/Israel) from the Most High, instead of the (Abrahamic) High God who had distributed that inheritance to his sons. A second mistake then followed the first, when the Church bishops descended even further down the divine hierarchy by elevating to God status the man Jesus, whom they connected of course to Yahweh. One can well imagine Julian laughing *in petto* at the almost Aristophanic farcical quality of this series of material mis-identifications that would finally result in the Christian notion of God: 1) a Mosaic tribal god (Yahweh) in lieu of

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<sup>41</sup> Julian makes a clear distinction between the (High) god of Abraham and the (tribal) god of Moses. Paul, on the other hand, speaking only of faith in God (generic) and not of the identity of the god in whom one has that faith (e.g. in Romans he speaks of the God of Abraham; in Galatians of the god of Moses), does not make this type of formal distinction between the gods/God of the Hebrew Scriptures anywhere in his writings; which means, following Julian, that Paul also misread the writings of Moses.

<sup>42</sup> For this use of ‘lower’ in divine hierarchy in the ancient Near East, see L’Heureux (1979, 186): “In the language expressing delegation of power and authority in ancient Near Eastern myth, it is quite common to speak of the attributes of a “higher” god as being assigned to a “lower” god.” L’Heureux cites usage in Babylonian lore where “the essence of authority is “Enlil-ship,” but also *Enuma Elish* 4.4 “where Marduk become king of the gods and is told ‘thy word is Anu.’” Cf. Handy, 1996, 35-36.

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*Hypsistos*, a Great God; 2) Jesus linked triunely with an already mis-identified Mosaic tribal god; 3) and the Abrahamic and Julianic High God forgotten.

The structure of the argument in *Contra Galileos* is substantially philosophical in nature; Julian suggests that among the Christians the conceptualization of Yahweh is intrinsically flawed, as it is too limited to conform adequately to the idea of God. Yahweh, the god of the Jews and also by frank admission the God of the Christians,<sup>43</sup> is not of a quality sufficiently universal to be mistaken for a god such as the Mosaic *Hypsistos*. From this first premise Julian will draw the reasonable conclusion that if it is impossible to confound the Jewish Yahweh with *Hypsistos*, then it is equally impossible that the Christian God should be proposed and accepted as *Hypsistos*. The Jewish god is marked by his exclusive attention to the Jews; a High God, however, far from excluding all the other tribes under His lordship except the one Jewish tribe, would embrace inclusively all the tribes under His dominion.

If one were to accept that Yahweh is the creator-demiurge-*Hypsistos*, reasons Julian (343:106C), then it would also necessarily follow that, against all reason and moral expectation, the Christians must argue that the Creator had selected out only one tribe from among the myriads of peoples under His lordship; and to this one tribe alone the Creator deigned to give moral and religious guidance, as well as truth, thereby deliberately and cruelly abandoning the remaining nations of His world to ignorance and intellectual darkness. Because this is an unintelligible as well as morally indefensible action for a Creator-demiurge, who by His very universal nature should be committed to all of His peoples, Julian (344:106E) arrives at the second conclusion that, in opposition to the Galilean claim, the Jewish god is only a stripped-down version, a bare conception of the God of all things, τὸν τῶν ὄλων θεὸν ἄχρι ψιλῆς γούν ἐννοίας ὑμεῖς ἢ τῆς ὑμετέρας τις ἐφαντάσθη ρίζης.

Because the god described by Moses and embraced by the Christians is not sufficiently universal to be the Creator-*Hypsistos*, Julian proceeds to the additional conclusion that it is also ridiculous, both from a religious-historical as well as from a philosophical point of view, that this more limited god should be posited as the creator or begetter of all things. “Wherefore it is natural to think that the God of the Hebrews was not the begetter of the whole universe with lordship over the whole, but rather... that he is confined within limits, and that since his empire has bounds we must conceive of him as only one of the crowd of other gods.”<sup>44</sup> Pace Adler’s (1893, 596; cf. 608) dismayed objection that, in addition to the ‘sneering’ attitude reflected in his every word, Julian’s argument, “does not devote itself merely to an attack upon Christianity, but at the same time aims blows at the Mosaic books and teachings, especially at the narrative of creation.”

In order to signify correctly the importance of Julian’s later platonic or gnosticized language about the Creator, it is necessary to re-frame his thinking in the terms of early ‘Christian’ intellectual traditions. One plausible comparison would be to the popular

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<sup>43</sup> Smith, 1995, 193. It is significant to his argument that, “[i]n attacking Old Testament doctrines about the nature of God and his purposes in creating the world, [Julian] attacks notions to which Christians and Jews alike adhere.”

<sup>44</sup> 345:100C. All citations from *Contra Galileos* will be from Wright’s Loeb translation (Vol. III, 1993), giving first the page number, then the paragraph number and letter from the Greek text.

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Christian, albeit Gnostic, orator, Valentinus,<sup>45</sup> who believed in the distinction between the god who *appears* to the human imagination (*positiva*) and the god who *transcends* human knowledge (*negativa*). Armed with the desire to teach this secret insight (*gnosis*) into the transcendent god, Valentinus traveled from Egypt to Rome in ca. 140 CE. His teaching, which was naturally condemned as heresy by the Christian bishops, was to claim, much in the same manner as did Julian, that the God worshipped naively by the Christians was only “the image of the true God.”

Elaine Pagels (2004, 37) says of Valentinus that in his teachings he declared that, “what Clement and Ignatius mistakenly ascribe to God [he] actually applies only to the *creator*. Valentinus, following Plato, uses the Greek term for “creator” (*demiurgos*), suggesting that he is a lesser divine being who serves as the instrument of the higher powers. It is [...] the demiurge who reigns as king and lord, who [...] is the “God of Israel.” Nock (1964, xvi) confirms that in later Platonism, “the Creator is distinguished from Ultimate Deity [...] by way of subordination, and not, as in some Gnostic teaching, of alienation.”

To grasp the greater import of the claim that the Christian God is neither the creator and begetter of the whole universe, nor the One who exercises lordship over the whole, it is obviously important to realize that Julian’s argument hinges on his use of the word *δημιουργός*, the word that is translated creator or ‘begetter’;<sup>46</sup> for in the ordered world of neo-Platonism the demiurge is not a supreme One in the hierarchy of deities, either in terms of position, or importance, or age. The argument surrounding the demiurge is rather dispersed in *Contra Galilaeos*, but Julian argues, roughly, in the following manner.

It is evident (389:238C) that the god of Moses is narrowly focused and extremely restricted in terms of his relationships with the world, choosing only to deal with a single people, and that he forbade his chosen / assigned people “to serve all the gods save only that one, whose ‘portion is Jacob, and Israel an allotment of his inheritance (Deut 32:9),” i.e., himself. Yet it is equally apparent that there is a greater, unrestricted and intrinsic structure to the earth and its inhabitants, the very boundlessness of which suggests that this administrative framework is in fact initially derived from an extremely universal creative principle – a principle certainly more consistent with the comprehensive efficient idea of the platonic *δημιουργός* than with a tunnel-visioned tribal god who cannot see beyond his tribe of Jews. The administrative framework that Julian perceives through the world of gods and men is that God, Julian’s true High God or the God of Abraham, has given other gods and kindly guardians “of whom you have no knowledge, gods in no way inferior to him who from the beginning has been held in honour among the Hebrews of Judaea, the only land that he chose to take thought for...”<sup>47</sup> Likewise, continues Julian, it is obvious from history that the begetter has blessed the Greeks over the Jews, “both with respect to the soul and to externals (355:141D),” because unlike the Hebrews mentored by their god, the Yahweh-abandoned Greeks developed art, literature, philosophy, wisdom, politics, peace, and

<sup>45</sup> For this analysis of Valentinus see Pagels, 2004, 36ff.

<sup>46</sup> I cannot find that Voltaire alludes to this charged, neo-platonic nuance concerning the demiurge anywhere in his commentary on the *Discours de l’empereur Julian contre les chrétiens*.

<sup>47</sup> 355:141C.

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law—for Julian reminds the Galileans that God has sent lawgivers “not inferior to Moses” to the nations (355:143A).

The structure of the invisible world and of its different gods and peoples is therefore clearly discernable: the Begetter has laid out the model of the world of gods and nations in such a way that each ethnicon assumes the character of its patron god. Julian (345:115E) asserts that, “the nations over which the gods preside follow each the essential character of their proper god.” If this be not the case, he continues (347:116B), then there is in reality no administrative order in the world. For if the demiurge is the begetter of this order, and then has failed, either through inadvertence or deliberation, to exercise administrative lordship over the order, then Julian’s final question is damning.

...if these differences that are greater and more important came about without the aid of a greater and more divine providence, why do we vainly trouble ourselves about and worship one who takes no thought for us? For is it fitting that he who cared nothing for our lives, our characters, our manners, our good government, our political constitution, should still claim to receive honour at our hands? Certainly not.

Julian concludes (353:138A-C) that such a doctrine of God as that taught by the Galileans ends in rational absurdity; and, finding no evidence that the god of Moses and the Christians is sufficiently universal to be considered the creator God, Julian advances yet a third conclusion as requisite: that there must of necessity be a hierarchy among the gods and, following upon this, that the God of the Galileans must of necessity be an inferior god in that hierarchy. “[U]nless for every nation separately some presiding national god (and under him an angel, a demon, a hero, and a peculiar order of spirits which obey and work for the higher powers) established the differences in our laws and characters, you must demonstrate to me how these differences arose by some other agency.”<sup>48</sup> Arguing from within the framework of this divine hierarchy, Julian enumerates a series of textual objections to the Galilean claim that Yahweh is a High God. First, it is problematic to Julian that the Christians reject Homer and yet accept an equally ‘mythodic’ story—the Tower of Babel recounted in Genesis 11—concerning the confusion of languages. Accepting the methodological hypocrisy for the sake of the argument, Julian proceeds (351:135C) to analyse the story of Babel, asking suggestively whether it is reasonable to believe in a story that tells of men building a tower to reach up to the abode of God; then asking why such a ‘powerful’ God is so “afraid of the brutal violence of men” that He is moved therefore to confound their language. Such characterization, concludes Julian, demonstrates an inferior knowledge of what it means to be a truly universal being—God.

A second element of the story of Babel that is inconsistent with the Galilean claim that the Yahweh of Moses is the high or universal God, is that Moses does not assign the confusion of dialects to God alone, for Yahweh does not descend alone.

[I]t is evident that [Moses] assumed that the beings who descended with God resembled him. If, therefore, it was not the Lord alone but his associates with him who descended for the purpose of confounding the dialects, it is very evident that for the

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<sup>48</sup> 355:143A-B.

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confusion of men's characters, also, not the Lord alone but also those who together with him confounded the dialects would reasonably be considered responsible for this division (357:146A-B).

Julian finally concludes his hermeneutical exposition with a comparative argument, using as the crux of his comparison the obviously henotheistic hierarchy of the Babel narrative. "If the immediate creator of the universe be he who is proclaimed by Moses, then we [Greeks] hold nobler beliefs concerning him," writes Julian (359:148B-C), "inasmuch as we consider him to be the master of all things in general, but that there are besides national gods who are subordinate to him and are like viceroys of a king, each administering separately his own province; and, moreover, we do not make him the sectional rival of the gods whose station is subordinate to his." For these reasons he affirms that it is better to believe as the Greeks, "than to honour one who has been assigned the lordship over a very small portion, instead of the creator of all things."

In Book II of Plato's *Republic* Socrates establishes the principle that poets would not be allowed into the ideal city because they do not re-present the gods and their divine activities in such a manner that the citizens of that city would wish to imitate their actions. In a precisely analogous argument the neo-platonic Julian launches a philosophical attack on the Galileans' limited conceptualization of God by arguing that their god, in addition to being an inferior god in a divine hierarchy, is like the gods in the Socratic ideal city: the manner in which this god is depicted in the Hebrew Scriptures reveals a god that is not possessed of the type of moral qualities that would make him worthy of being worshipped. Moses, for example, repeatedly portrays the god of the Jews as a jealous god (e.g. Num 25:11; Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; 29:20; 32:16, 21); yet if Yahweh is the Creator-*Hypsistos*, and if the Creator characterizes himself as jealous only of his one particular tribe, then, pursues Julian (363:155D), it must also be the case that the Creator-*Hypsistos*, the one who created all the nations of the earth, in fact lacks the power to stop his chosen tribe from worshipping other gods. Yet this conclusion is obviously absurd.

Furthermore, continues Julian, it would also prove to be the case that the Creator-*Hypsistos* must be powerless to prevent the other nations from worshipping their gods as well. How is it, then, concludes Julian (363:155E), that "he did not restrain them, if he is so jealous and does not wish that the others should be worshipped, but only himself?" Either He was unable to do so, which explanation leads to impiety, or He did not wish to prevent other gods from being worshipped. In either case, reasons Julian, the idea of a Creator-*Hypsistos* who is also impotent before His own jealousy is an unacceptable, morally impoverished oxymoron in the faith of the Galileans. Such a god, however, conforms perfectly to the Greek stories about their gods. Had he chosen to pursue this line of attack yet further, Julian could have continued to impugn Yahweh's character and the immorality of his actions through a simple study of some of the Hebrew prophetic books, and especially chapters such as Ezekiel 16 and 23.

Julian first attacks the Christians philosophically, by arguing that their notion of God is conceptually flawed—it is by far too restricted to fit the idea of the Most High God. God, both Hebrew (Yahweh) and Galilean (God), is limited both geographically (associates with only one small tribe) and morally (displays traits such as anger and jealousy). Then, from this philosophical foundation, Julian challenges the Galileans

hermeneutically, by attacking their interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures; for, so they claim, these writings constitute the ground for the authority and credibility of Christian ideas and teachings. Not surprisingly, Julian begins his hermeneutical attack with the suggestion of a contradiction: that although the Galileans insist they are different from the Jews, they claim (393:253Bff) nonetheless that they are still, “precisely speaking, Israelites in accordance with their prophets, and that they obey Moses above all.” Julian argues that the teachings of the Galileans in fact do not agree either with the writings of Moses or with those of the Jewish prophets who later succeeded the great Law Giver.

Julian begins with the first and clearly most substantial difference between Hebrews and Galileans, which is the Galileans’ monotheistic ‘reading’ of the polytheistic Hebrew Scriptures. Julian restates his thesis that the Mosaic writings, especially Deut. 32:8-9, reflect the world of the gods as an ordered polytheism. Yet the Galilean conception of the divine worldview, in that it begins with the assertion of a monotheistic principle, diverges with this Hebrew conception; which means that in order to pretend agreement with the (polytheistic) Hebrew Scriptures, the Galileans must necessarily posit the existence of some type of philosophical entity, indeed something philosophically resembling a trinity, in order to escape the charge of polytheism. Julian cites the author of the Gospel of John as an example, because John clearly commits himself philosophically to this latter conceptualization by making claims for the divinity of Jesus.<sup>49</sup> The monotheistic principle of the Galileans is obviously in conflict with the henotheistic principle that frames the writings of Moses; which means that contrary to what they claim, the Galileans in fact do not make their teachings conform to the teachings of Moses. There is an irreconcilable structural antagonism between the philosophical conceptualization of a triune god developed by the Galileans, and the mythically charged, henotheistic architecture of the stories recounted in the Hebrew Scriptures, stories that are in every facet conform to the religious-historical worldview found in the ancient Near East.

Julian (253D; cf. 399:262Dff) points out a second difference between the teachings of the Galileans and the teachings of Moses and the prophets, one that concerns the possibility of a mortal woman, Mary, being the Mother of God (or even the Mother of a god). Although it was familiarly conceived in Greek and ancient Near Eastern religious and mythical narratives that intercourse happened between gods and men,<sup>50</sup> the resulting offspring of such a union was always a semi-divine, *i.e.*, a mortal of divine lineage, but not a god; hence the great warriors of antiquity such as Hercules, Achilles, Gilgamesh, *et al.* This Leitmotiv is also consistent with the narrative of Genesis 6:1-4 where the offspring of such an immortal-mortal union was a race of great warriors called Nephilim, “the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.”<sup>51</sup> Following out the thread of this second difference, Julian asks further whether and how, given a

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<sup>49</sup> 397: 262B.

<sup>50</sup> One need only think of the generations of men enumerated in Hesiod’s *Works & Days*, 110ff.

<sup>51</sup> For a discussion concerning the pre-Biblical generation produced by the intercourse of immortals and mortals, and the vestiges of that generation in the Hebrew Bible see, Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis, Handkommentar zum alten Testament* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1902), 49ff; Emil G. Kraeling, “The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1-4” in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Oct., 1947), 193-208; and two articles by O. Gruppe, “War Genes. 6, 1-4 ursprünglich mit der Sintflut verbunden?” in *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, Vol. IX (1889), 135-160; and, “Aithiopenmythen” in *Philologus*, Vol. XLVII (1889), 92-107, but esp. 104ff.

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polytheistic world where immortal-mortal unions have been a matter of at least mythological course, it is possible that Jesus can be unique, that is to say, the *only* begotten son of God. For the sake of this argument Julian assumes that the Jewish god is, as the Galileans claim, the supreme God; he then proceeds to show from the writings of Moses, again Deut. 32:8-9, that the Creator-*Hypsistos* had many sons. Moses taught, he writes (401:290E) “that there was only one God, but that he had many sons who divided the nations among themselves. But the Word as firstborn son of God or as a God, or any of those fictions which have been invented by you later, he neither knew at all nor taught openly thereof.” In a related, almost ‘throw-away’ point, Julian (253E) closes out this section of his argument by pointing out the obvious—that if Joseph is not the father of Jesus, then Joseph’s genealogy is not applicable to the birthright of Jesus.

It is necessary to return however to Julian’s thesis that the Mosaic writings, notably Deut. 32:8-9, reflect the world of the gods as an ordered polytheism, and that this Mosaic conception of the gods is divergent from the Galilean monotheistic<sup>52</sup> conception of the divine world. At least part of the integrity of this argument is linked directly to the language of Julian’s exegesis; for Julian is proposing a critical analysis of religious texts whose language, Hebrew, it would seem he does not know. The evidence is overwhelming that although Julian was thoroughly schooled in the Hebrew Scriptures, his knowledge was based only on his study of the Greek Septuagint; Julian knew no Hebrew. As to the depth of his scriptural knowledge, Adler (1893, 610) freely admits that, “It will be noticed that the Emperor, unlike any other monarch who ever ruled the Roman world was very well acquainted with the Old Testament.” Smith (1995, 183-184) goes even further when he writes: “And there is a testimony from the Pergamene stable itself: Eunapius, whose teacher Chrysanthius had also taught Julian, would have us believe that Julian’s study of Scripture in his teens was prodigiously deep. [...] Julian’s knowledge of Scripture supposedly confounded his Christian tutors.”

That Julian’s knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures seems secure, is granted by scholarly consensus. This is also the case with his knowledge of Greek and Latin. Adler (1893:602, nt.5), for example, concludes that Julian must have relied uniquely on the Greek LXX for his interpretative analyses of the Hebrew texts because, “The misreadings of the Hebrew that are met with in the LXX are almost everywhere followed by Julian”; this would seem to indicate that Julian’s knowledge of Hebrew was either inexistent or slight.<sup>53</sup> Adler (Ibid, 603, nt. 4) also argues, however, that while evidence shows that Julian followed neither the Vulgate nor the Hebrew versions of the Old Testament,<sup>54</sup> it is also clear that he, “was not following our present versions of the LXX.” Thompson (1950: 51-53) adds further clarification as to Julian’s language

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<sup>52</sup> Adler (1893, 597) misspeaks slightly when he says, “The head and front of the offending of the Jews is, in the eyes of Julian, their determined belief in the Unity of God. Again and again he attacks this teaching, striving to prove the superiority of polytheism.” This is, in reality, not an attack on the Jews, for Abraham is the father of this people and Julian praises the God of Abraham; rather, the attack is on the much more restricted Mosaic worldview, which it would seem, according to Julian, actually excludes the God of Abraham!

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Adler, Ibid, 607, 611-612.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 615.

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abilities, arguing that evidence from Eutropius (X.16.3) implies that while Julian certainly had *some* knowledge of Latin, his native tongue was in fact Greek.

Julian's argument, then, is that the Hebrew Scriptures (i.e., LXX), and especially Deut. 32:8-9, reflect the world of the gods hierarchically. Consequently, it necessarily follows that a principal argument advanced by the Christians, i.e., that they also accept as authoritative the writings of Moses and the prophets, is simply false. The conception of the gods in the Hebrew Bible differs fundamentally from the New Testament monotheistic conception professed by the Galileans. The full, actual weight of this argument is that the writings of Moses, which the Galileans claim to be the authoritative Word of God ("Bible") from which they claim to derive the Truth concerning their teachings about God, does not substantiate their claim about the Highness of Yahweh.

Julian (355:141C) has already demonstrated from Deut. 32:8-9 that the god of the Jews is in reality a national or tribal god within a hierarchy of other, equal divine beings; he is not the Creator-*Hypsistos*, whom Julian will equate with the God of Abraham and with his own conception of a Great God. Julian (389:238C) reminds the Galileans that Yahweh, through Moses, "forbade them to serve all the gods save only that one, whose 'portion is Jacob, and Israel an allotment of his inheritance.'" Yet the Creator-*Hypsistos*, counters Julian (355:141D), has given other gods and kindly guardians, "of whom you have no knowledge, gods in no way inferior to him who from the beginning has been held in honour among the Hebrews of Judea, the only land that he chose to take thought for..."

Furthermore, it is apparent that in contrast to Yahweh, this Most High God has not abandoned the Greeks for the Jews, but has blessed the Greeks over the Jews, "both with respect to the soul and to externals", because they have been allowed to develop art, literature, philosophy, wisdom, politics, peace, and law. Unlike the tribal god of Moses, the Creator-*Hypsistos* has sent lawgivers "not inferior to Moses" to the nations."<sup>55</sup> This Creator-*Hypsistos* exercises lordship over his entire creation; he is not a subordinate national god of the Jewish tribes. This is that Great God concerning whom Julian (423:354B) will write: "I revere always the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." For these latter "revered a god who was ever gracious to me and to those who worshipped him as Abraham did, for he is a very great and powerful God, but he has nothing to do with you. For you do not imitate Abraham..."

In *Contra Galilaeos* (382:222A), Julian enumerates a number of disgruntled claims against the Christians, among which he includes: "And yet the wretched Eusebius will have it that poems in hexameters are to be found even among [the Hebrews]" (καίτοι βούλεται ὁ μοχθηρὸς Εὐσεβίος εἶναι τινα καὶ παρ' αὐτοῖς ἑξάμετρα). Adler (1893, 607) spices up this passage a little when he assumes Julian's unstated conclusion: "The poetry of the Hebrews, of which in the original it is tolerably certain Julian knew nothing, cannot approach that of Greek or Latin literature; 'although,' adds Julian, 'the depraved Eusebius pretends that the Jews had hexameter verse and knew logic.'" There are several important pieces of information we can glean about Julian from this passage. First, it is clear that Julian studied the writings of Eusebius (born ca. 264 CE), which fact alone allows us to conclude fairly decisively that Julian's knowledge of Christian teaching was neither insubstantial nor uninformed. Second, by alluding to the "wretched Eusebius" in the context of the Hebraic composition of hexameter verse, it

<sup>55</sup> 355:143A.

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is clear that Julian is referring to a specific passage in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* (11.5.5), where this apologist and historian of the Christian Church writes: "There would also be found among them poems in metre, like the great Song of Moses and David's 118<sup>th</sup> Psalm, composed in what the Greeks call heroic meter." And, finally, because Julian had direct reading knowledge of Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*, it also seems very likely that he knew of Eusebius' euhemerizing "translation"<sup>56</sup> of Sanchoniaton's *History of the Phoenicians*, rendered through the Phoenician Philo of Byblos,<sup>57</sup> which is also recorded in this same Eusebian text. This series of connections will allow us eventually to make the indirect connection between the fourth-century CE emperor, Julian, and the religion of ancient Ugarit.<sup>58</sup>

### Julian in the Light of Ugaritic Scholarship

There is solid evidence that Julian was familiar with the Song of Moses as an actual title, a Mosaic hymn recorded in Deuteronomy 32; furthermore, that he was aware of the Eusebian claim that the Song of Moses was written in hexameter verse—which may explain why Julian chooses to allude so particularly and frequently to that specific 'poem' in the Hebrew Scriptures; and, finally, that he would conclude from the famous Song of Moses that the Christians commit an error who follow the Jewish tribal god and not the Creator-*Hypsistos*! Julian (355:141C) claims on the basis of his LXX reading of Deut. 32:8-9 that Yahweh, the god of the Jews and therefore also of the Galileans, is nothing more than a tribal god within a hierarchy of other divine beings, and that he is neither conceptually nor textually the Creator-*Hypsistos* either in Jewish belief or in Greek religion.

Rendered in the New Oxford Annotated Bible (2001), Deut. 32:8-9 reads as follows: "When the Most High apportioned the nations, when he divided humankind, he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the gods; the Lord's portion was his people, Jacob his allotted share." In considering the historical context of the Song of Moses, Freedman (1976, 55) gives Albright's dating of the poem as ca. 1025,<sup>59</sup> and concurs with that age, suggesting that the poem was obviously developed during the period of Monarchic Syncretism (tenth century or later), because it reflects "the

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<sup>56</sup> Eusebius, *Preparation of the Gospel*, (Vol. I, Bk I, Ch. X, 34b-41d). Cf. Hodges, 1876, 2ff. For a discussion of the specific details of the translation from Sanchuniathon to Philo, see René Dussaud, "La Mythologie Phénicienne d'après les Tablettes de Ras Shamra" in *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 1931, vol. 103, 365.

<sup>57</sup> Although the texts of Ras Shamra were redacted in approximately the thirteenth century BCE, Dussaud (1932:246) says that "ils nous conservent une tradition plus ancienne. Cette dernière s'est perpétuée jusqu'à la fin du paganisme, ce qui explique que Philon de Byblos ait eu à sa portée d'assez bons documents qu'il n'a, d'ailleurs, pas tenu à nous transmettre dans leur forme exacte."

<sup>58</sup> For an elaboration of this connection, cf. P. Walcot, "Hesiod's Theogony and the Hittite Epic of Kumarbi," *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. VI (Volume L of the continuous series), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956, pp.198-206.

<sup>59</sup> Although Freedman also reminds us (Ibid, 99, nt. 3) that "Albright makes several comments about the age of the poem, but does not fix a date."

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syncretistic tendencies of the religion of the monarchy.”<sup>60</sup> There can be no doubt that the Song of Moses belongs to the most ancient narrative section of the Hebrew Scriptures. However, there is an initial textual difficulty that bears upon the potential validity of Julian’s argument in reference to the Song of Moses (Deut. 32), in that the text of the Greek LXX differs from that of the Hebrew MT in the crucial area of verse eight. As already mentioned earlier, the Masoretic text in Deut. 32:8 was emended to read בני ישראל,<sup>61</sup> and only reflects an alternative to the most likely original reading in the textual apparatus, i.e., the *prb recte* reading בני אל or בני אלים, which is suggested by the interpretative LXX reading of ἀγγέλων θεοῦ. The LXX is the text to which Julian would have had access. Heiser (2001, 70), in agreement with most other textual critics,<sup>62</sup> argues that the LXX reading of the text is preferable based on linguistic findings as well as mythological parallels from Ugarit and other ancient Near Eastern civilizations.

Old Testament passages and comparative linguistic data show that the Hebrew Bible includes the concept of a divine assembly that is undeniably analogous to that at Ugarit... So there is no need in Deuteronomy 32:8 to opt for the Masoretic reading of ‘sons of Israel’ over ‘sons of God,’ which is attested in the Septuagint and 4QDeutq and 4QDeutj. In fact the “sons of God” reading makes much better sense in light of biblical history and Old Testament theology, especially that of Deuteronomy. The same cannot be said for the Masoretic reading.

Based on his study of the Hebrew Scriptures, and most particularly of the Song of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 32 (esp. 32:8-9), Julian will claim in *Contra Galilaeos* that the Christians had effectively erred in their choice of deity, materially mistaking

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Smith (2001:49), quoting E. Tov, who labels the MT text in Deut. 32:8 an “anti-polytheistic alteration.”

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Freedman, 1976, 78. Freedman writes that the occurrence of the divine name ‘el in vs. 8 is “highly probable... on the basis of the LXX and a Qumran document of Deuteronomy 32, i.e., bny’l (or ‘lthym) for bny ysr’l.” Nyberg (1938, 366) suggests the following reason for the MT correction of Deut 32:8: “Einer späteren Zeit war dieser Dytheismus anstößig, daher die Korrektur בני ישראל statt אל בני אל. Vs. 8, die die Identität zwischen dem ‘Eljon und Jahwe, [...] herstellen wollte; die Lesart אל בני אל, die die LXX bewahrt hat, ist ohne jeden Zweifel die ursprüngliche.” Eißfeldt (1963, 146) concurs that it is quite clear that in Deut. 32:8, “statt bene jisr’el “Israel-Söhne” zu lesen ist bene el “Gott-Söhne.” Cf. also Hermann’s (1960, 248) discussion on the text of Deut. 32:8, in which he concludes that, “Die LXX haben an der Stelle gegenüber MT einen bedeutend umfangreichern Text, dessen Vorbild, wie bei V. 8, unter dan Qumran-Fragmenten getreuer aufbewahrt ist.” Cf. Eißfeldt, 1958, 9, nt. 2. Finally, see Skehan (1951, 154): “It is difficult not to see in the MT recension of verses 8-9, despite its many defenders, a deliberate and tendentious modification of the primitive text”, although he also glosses the passage to create the difficult interpretation that the “Lord” (which I take to mean Yahweh) is also and at the same time the ‘Most High’: “Israel, however, is governed by no angel, but by the Lord Himself, directly.” Skehan (1951, 157), perhaps following Keil & Delitzsch (1973, 470), will translate Deut. 32:8-9: “When the Most High assigned the nations their heritage, [...] when he parceled out [...], He set up the boundaries [...] after the number of the sons of God; while [emphasis mine] the LORD’s own portion was Jacob...” Skehan’s translation ‘while’ in verse 9, a difficult translation given the LXX καί (although not unfitting for MT כִּי) flies in the face of Eißfeldt’s (1958, 9) recommendation that verse 9 be translated to conform more nearly to the LXX: “da ward Jahwes Besitz sein Volk, Jakob sein Losanteil.” Eißfeldt’s (Ibid, nt.2) justification for this translation is that, “Statt כי חלק ‘denn der Besitz’ ist – wie es scheint, von LXX vorausgesetzt – ויהי חלק ‘und es ward der Besitz’ zu lesen.” The LXX reading is καὶ ἐγένηθη.

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their god Yahweh, Israel's clan or tribal god, as the Creator-*Hypsistos*. Framed in fourth-century notions of pagan polytheism, Julian's argument will receive unexpected support from the archaeological findings of Ugarit, which have had a significant impact on helping to clarify and to identify more exactly specific gods in the hierarchy of divine beings that are apparent in the documents of the Old Testament, and especially in Deut. 32:8-9. With the notable exception of Skehan (1951, 154), who follows strictly the MT reading at this point, there is overwhelming scholarly consensus to support the henotheistic interpretation of Deut. 32:8-9. Indeed, Julian's interpretation of this passage is sustained by nothing less than the accumulated mythological weight of the entire ancient Near East.

In their analysis of this specific text Cross and Freedman (1948, 200) confirm simply that, "The conception of the lesser supernatural beings as guardians is common in the ancient Near East. This motif finds expression in Deut 32:8-9 (LXX)." Eißfeldt (1958:5) concurs: "In Dtn 32, 1-43 [...] beginnt [Moses] mit der Erinnerung an die von 'Eljon, 'dem Höchsten', vorgenommene Zuteilung der Völker an die Mitglieder seines Pantheons..."; and (Ibid, 9, nt. 1): "עליון 'Der Höchste' ist hier als Eigenname des obersten Gottes zu verstehen, der die Verteilung der Völker an die Mitglieder seines Pantheons, darunter an Jahwe, vornimmt." Eißfeldt (1963, 46) clearly maintains this interpretation because he writes again five years later that, "...so zeigt das Lied Moses Deuterion 32, 1-43, wo in Vers 8 statt *bene jisir'el* 'Israel-Söhne' zu lesen ist *bene el* 'Gott-Söhne', ganz deutlich, daß Eljon von Haus aus ein den anderen, auch Jahwe überlegener Gott ist."

Once one acknowledges the absolute ubiquity of henotheism in ancient Near Eastern religions and mythologies,<sup>63</sup> including the pre-Yahwistic Israelite religion(s), (which would seem to pose problems only to advocates of obstinately monotheistic religious beliefs), one is then confronted with the challenge to find a plausible explanation for what Nyberg (1938, 365) calls, "The greatest problem in the history of old Israelite religion," which is to explain Yahweh's transition from "a desert god on Sinai to a land god from Canaan." Stating that the Old Testament is only half conscious of this problem, Nyberg finds clear if only partial evidence of Yahweh's transition from Stammesgott to Landesgott recorded in Deut. 32:8-9, and then proceeds to draw the same conclusions as did Julian some sixteen centuries earlier. Nyberg (Ibid, 366) declares that this text supports a theogonic collision (zusammenstoßen) between Yahweh, originally a Stammesgott from the desert, and 'Elyon, a Canaanite Landesgott,<sup>64</sup> and that that collision was decisive for the history of religion.

Diese Stelle ist für die altisraelitische wie überhaupt die altsemitische Religionsgeschichte grundlegend. Der 'Eljon ist der höchste Gott und der Herr der Länder und der Grenzen; ihm unterstehen andere Götter, die seine Lehnsfürsten sind und ein jeder seine Gruppe von Blutsverwandten aus seiner Hand empfangen haben; einer von diesen Göttern ist Jahwe, der Israel als sein Erbteil empfangt.

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion on the four-tiered hierarchy in the pantheon at Ugarit, see Handy, 1996, 32ff.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. K. Euler's (1938:307ff, and esp. 309-311) discussion on North Syrian distinctions between Landes-, Stadt-, and Schutzgöttern [e.g. Schutzgott eines Königs (1938, 311)]. A Schutzgott [b'l bit] "ist zwar Gott eines Verbandes, der nicht identisch ist mit einer Stadt oder einem Land."

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### El, Baal, and Yahweh: The Most-High in Fusion?

The Ugaritic texts affix clear meaning to the epithet *elyon* (sometimes transliterated as *aliyn*, and variously rendered (see especially Gaster's 1932 translation of "The Combat of Death and the Most High") as Victor (Ug.) and Most High (Heb.), by applying that epithet consistently and uniquely to Baal.<sup>65</sup> However, the occasional application of *elyon* in parts of the Hebrew Bible as an epithet for Yahweh has led to some confusion in the scholarly literature.<sup>66</sup> According to DDD (1999, 15): "A passage from one of the Ugaritic texts describes the deity Baal as 'the Most High' and in this instance the short form 'ly, not 'lyn is employed: b'l 'ly (KTU 1.16 iii: 5-9)." The *DDD* understates the case, however, for in the Ugaritic texts Baal is often called 'Victor' (*aliyn*); "he is the god of life who overcomes his adversaries Mot and Sea (chaos)."<sup>67</sup> Kapelrud (1952, 49) gives the following derivation for *aliyan*: "As to the meaning of the designation *aliyn*, which has to be vocalized 'al'iyan, there is no longer any doubt: 'the One who Prevails'. Scholars agree in deriving the name from the root *l'y*, 'to prevail, to be strong'." Additionally Gray (1949, 72), perhaps extrapolating too freely, understands the meaning of the epithet '*al'eyn* to be "the wielder', i.e., of a weapon," as evidenced in figurines from Ras Shamra, Megiddo, etc.

It would seem reasonable to see here a conceptual transition from the Ugaritic idea of the 'victorious' warrior *aliyan* Baal, and his theogonic struggle to attain to the kingship of the gods,<sup>68</sup> to the Hebrew notion of El 'Elyon, the 'Most High' God, which epithet is eventually transferred monotheistically to Yahweh.<sup>69</sup> Schwally (1919, 355-356) claims that the probable meaning of the expression *el* + '*eljon* was 'god of the over-world' or 'god of the skies'. His conclusion therefore appears reasonable that, "Die bekannte alttestamentliche Gottesbezeichnung El 'Eljon wird hier am besten beiseite gelassen, da die gewöhnliche Übersetzung "der höchste Gott" keineswegs gesichert ist." Della Vida reinforces the reasonableness of Schwally's suggestion when, referencing the Sefire inscriptions of the eighth century BCE, he claims that El and Elyon are mentioned there as two distinct deities.<sup>70</sup> The evidence is extremely strong, he concludes, that the Canaanite El has connections with earth while Elyon is of a

<sup>65</sup> For 'Victor' parallels between Ugaritic and Hebrew texts, see Dahood in Rummel, 1981, §16, 18-19.

<sup>66</sup> According to W. Robinson Smith (1901, 38), "Sometimes two gods were themselves fused into one, as when the mass of the Israelites in their local worship of Jehovah identified Him with the Baalim of the Canaanite high places, and carried over into His worship the ritual of the Canaanite shrines, not deeming that in so doing they were less truly Jehovah-worshippers than before."

<sup>67</sup> Tromp, 1969, 203. For occurrences of *l'y* and variations in Ugaritic literature see Gordon, 1947, 243, no. 1059. Kapelrud (1952:47-50) is exhaustive in tracing all occurrences of *Aliyn b'l*. For the formation of the expression *aliyn* see Obermann (1948, 79-80, nt. 92): "I have long felt that *aliyn* merely represents *aliy* + *an*. Perhaps we have here to do with a formative of intensity or superlativeness, as in Aramaic '*illaya*, Hebrew '*elyon* < '*elyan*, "Most High." Cf. Bauer's note in "Die Gottheiten von Ras Schamra," 1933, 86, nt.1. As far as I can see in the literature, the French tradition with Dussaud (1932:255; 259ff.) and Virolleaud (cf. Nielsen, 1936, 105) is exceptional in their insistence on reading *Aleyin Ba'al* as "Aleyin (fils de) Ba'al," thereby identifying two separate deities.

<sup>68</sup> Nielsen, 1936, 106ff. Cf. Mullen, 1980, 9ff., 84ff; and Albright, 1968, 124ff.

<sup>69</sup> See Cassuto's (1971, 19ff.) explanation and supportive evidence for exchanges between (earlier) Ugaritic and (later) Hebrew literature.

<sup>70</sup> Della Vida, 1944, 3.

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“celestial character.”<sup>71</sup> Nielsen (1936, 17), on the other hand, disagrees with della Vida’s conclusion that El is connected with the earth; indeed, he argues rather that the Ugaritic literature furnishes, at the very least, indirect evidence “für die ursprüngliche Mondnature Els.” The possibility that the conceptualizations of El and Elyon are incompatible at a mythological level, however, while of comparative little importance to the Ugaritic articulation of *aliyan* Baal, is of great import for understanding the translation and application of Elyon in the context of the Hebrew Bible.

Although the literature largely substantiates the claim that the Ugaritic El emerges in the later Hebrew religion as El Elyon,<sup>72</sup> which epithet is eventually transferred to Yahweh, the elyon epithet becomes problematic when applied to El in the context of the Ugaritic documents; because the Ugaritic evidence so clearly links Baal to the epithet elyon. Gray (1965, 157) is fairly exceptional, although not alone, in reading the epithet *'al'eyn*, as also germane to El, the king of the Ugaritic gods. “In this royal figure, who is at the same time the Creator of Created Things (*bny bnwt*), we may recognize ‘El Elyon, called the Most High, who according to Eusebius’ citation from Philo of Byblos was senior god in the Canaanite pantheon, or El Elyon, El the Most High, Creator of Heaven and Earth...” Virolleaud (1968, 553) marshals additional supportive evidence from epithets to suggest that in RS 24.252, “*rpu.mlk. 'lm*,” the epithet *Rpu*, the king of the world, “désigne sans doute le Père des dieux,” *i.e.*, El.<sup>73</sup> He also links this reference with the rather predictable *ab.w il*,<sup>74</sup> ‘father and god’ epithet, as well as with another superlative epithet for El found in the newer RS texts, which is *ilm.rbm*, “master of the gods”<sup>75</sup> Nielsen (*op. cit.*, 26) also claims that, “Der Gott Israels war ursprünglich sachlich und sprachlich mit dem früheren altsemitischen Hauptgott identisch, indem die monotheistische Reform wie fast immer in der Religionsgeschichte, so auch später bei den Arabern, sich um den Hauptgott konzentriert.”

It seems more probable, however, that to identify El as the ‘Most High’ in the Ugaritic literature, as does Gray, is to extrapolate the later Hebrew monotheistic significance of ‘El Elyon and to introduce that later concept into the much earlier henotheistic poems of Ugarit. The textual evidence from Ugarit is consistent in presenting the victorious warrior, Baal, as *aliyan*. Gaster, for example, transliterates into Hebrew, translates into English, and analyses the Ugaritic poem entitled, “The Combat of Death and the Most High,” which is clearly a story about Baal. “In our version of the story,” writes Gaster (1932, 858), “Elyon Ba’al,<sup>76</sup> deity of fertility, is

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Albright, 1940, 175.

<sup>73</sup> This however is a problematic interpretation, for according to DDD 135, “Baal is called *rpu* in his capacity as leader of the *rpum*, the Rephaim.” For a discussion as to the identify of the Rephaim, and a select bibliography, see N.J. Tromp, “Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Netherworld in the Old Testament,” in *Biblica et Orientalia*, vol. 21, 1969, 176-210, and esp. nt. 1. Cf. Cassuto, 1971, 15.

<sup>74</sup> Virolleaud, 1968, RS 24.271 A1.

<sup>75</sup> Apparently found only in RS 24.272. Ibid., 564.

<sup>76</sup> It may perhaps be of interest to the discussion concerning the conceptual transition from the Ugaritic *aleyn b[’l* (Driver’s transliteration (inter alia 74, iv I\*23)) to the OT עליון [Alyon], or ‘Most High’ God, to note that Gaster transliterates the Ugaritic *aliyn* with Hebrew *elyon*, hence producing כעל אלאיך (1932, 860,1; 861,13,30,36... passim) in lieu of the expected עליון, which is standard usage in the Hebrew Bible.

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assailed by Moth (BH מוֹת), deity of blight and decay, and sent away. Elyon is later restored, through the intervention of other deities, and vanquishes Moth and his allies, apparently imprisoning them and leaving them to entreat mercy.”<sup>77</sup> So the textual evidence of the literature does not support Gray *et al* in coupling the Hebrew epithet ‘Most High’ to the Ugaritic concept ‘Creator of Created Things’.<sup>78</sup>

Moreover, deriving his argument from *Keret* II,3:5<sup>44</sup>, Rémi Lack (1962, 48) argues that well before the composition of the Hebrew Scriptures, Ugaritic literature already applied to the young, foreign-born<sup>79</sup> god Baal the clear and unequivocal epithet ‘ly or Most High. According to Lack’s argument, the literature from the Ugaritic period contains indications that the young *aliyan* Baal disputes the kingship with El, the supreme god of the pantheon, who has already at this point in history become old, already become more or less *deus quiescens*.<sup>80</sup> Profiting from Nyberg’s suggestions of parallels between the Ugaritic *Keret* and the Hebrew Bible’s Book of *Hosea*,<sup>81</sup> and his consequent emendations to *Hosea* 7:16 and 11:7, (and perhaps 10:5), Lack (Ibid, 48) advances his analysis into the OT period, and writes that, once these passages from the Hebrew Bible are emended following Nyberg, they read respectively: “they turn toward the Most High,” and “he invokes the Most High,” which allows the later *Hosea* text to conform more nearly to an earlier Ugaritic parallel. Both of these emendations, he says, “indiquent une concurrence avec Jahvé.” Thus the argument of *Hosea* (7:16; 11:7), which the Nyberg-Lack emendation would encourage, would clearly wrap itself around a theogonic type clash between the Hebrew god Yahweh and Baal ‘Elyon, the Victor (or backward-seeing LXX ‘Most High’) Baal of the Ugaritic texts. It is perhaps against scholarly (religious? mythological?) expectation, yet the Ugaritic materials name Baal Victor (*aliyan*), and not El, who is nominally the supreme authoritative head of the Ugaritic pantheon.

Following the majority of scholars, Lack argues that, “Elioun philonien a de grandes chances d’être Baal (Baalsamen<sup>82</sup>) auquel Philon, selon l’usage de son temps, applique l’épithète ‘ypsistos’,”<sup>83</sup> although there are still some who continue to maintain that this epithet is not applied unreservedly to Baal in the Ugaritic literature.<sup>84</sup> Therefore its use is not without ambiguity; which of course leads scholars into a confusing explanation of roles.<sup>85</sup> This is shown by Smith, who interprets Deuteronomy 32:8-9 as casting

<sup>77</sup> Tromp (1969, 202-203) draws a parallel between the Ugaritic and OT versions of this story: “Is 25,8 uses characteristic b’l to describe Yahweh’s victory over Death [...]”

<sup>78</sup> B II 11, B III 32, A III 5.

<sup>79</sup> Nielsen, 1936, 108.

<sup>80</sup> De Vaux (1969:507) likewise affirms that in the great poems of Ras Shamra, “El joue un rôle assez effacé et son autorité est battue en brèche par celle d’un jeune dieu, Baal.”

<sup>81</sup> H. Nyberg, *Studien zum Hoseabuch* (Uppsala, 1935) 58ff, 90, 120. Cf. Driver, “Hebrew Al (High One) as a Divine Title,” 92.

<sup>82</sup> Gressmann (1918, 212-213) reads Baalsamen as a terminus technicus, and presents persuasive evidence that Baalsamen is, “Hauptgott” or “an der Spitze der Götter” or “das Haupt der Götter.” Cf. Hermann, 1960, 247.

<sup>83</sup> Lack, 1962, 56; cf. 57.

<sup>84</sup> DDD 295: “One example of the fluidity of this epithet [‘Elyon] is in its application to the Canaanite deities El and Baal.”

<sup>85</sup> As Bauer (1933, 86) notes: “In den mythologischen Texten besteht über das Wesen des Ba’al insofern eine gewisse Unklarheit...”

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“Yahweh in the role of one of the divine sons, understood as fathered by El, called Elyon.”<sup>86</sup> Lack cautiously explains this confusion in an illustration from a reconstructed fragment of the Ugaritic poem *Sahar and Salim*. Indeed, from a consideration of fragment i I 3 of this poem, which Driver restores to read: *ytnm.qrt.l'ly[nym]*, “let glory be given to the exalted ones,”<sup>87</sup> Lack (1962, 48) concludes that, “‘l pouvait s’appliquer à des dieux différents selon le rang que leur donnait celui qui parlait.” Likewise, in his notes on Deut. 32:8, Levinson<sup>88</sup> claims that the “Most High, or Elyon, is the title of El, the senior god who sat at the head of the divine council in the Ugaritic literature of ancient Canaan.” Advancing beyond the borders of Ugarit, Lack (op. cit., 49) offers as additional evidence linguistic usage apparent from south-Semitic (Northern and Southern Arabia) inscriptions, that sometimes both ‘ly and ‘l are found applied to El, which, he says, is by far the most common element of south Arabian theophoric names.

In the final analysis, however, the claim that the *aliyan* epithet is applied to both El and Baal in the Ugaritic literature goes against the grain of the evidence; for in their article on “‘Elyon,” Elnes and Miller (*DDD* 1999, 295) maintain in the strongest language that although there are numerous attestations that *link* El and ‘Elyon both in biblical and extra-biblical literature, in fact “El is nowhere referred to as ‘Elyon in the extant Ugaritic literature.” Likewise, enumerating the various epithets of the Ugaritic ‘El, Cross shows that ‘El was described as father and creator, the ancient or eternal one, and the compassionate one; but there seems to be no occurrence of the epithet *aliyan* in relationship to El.<sup>89</sup> Indeed some of these epithets, such as king (*malku*) and bull (*toru*) refer exclusively to ‘El in the literature.<sup>90</sup>

From this overview of the literature it would seem indisputable that Baal is the primary recipient of the formalized epithet *aliyan* (Victor or Most High) in the Ugaritic literature. Under these circumstances, perhaps one reasonable way to interpret this epithet (Heb. עליון; Gaster אלאין) is in its most literal sense, physically the ‘highest’, and not hierarchically, rendered with the capitalized ‘Most High’. This idea has some support from the Ugaritic texts, which tell the story of a journey accomplished by Attr or Athtar to the palace of El:<sup>91</sup> “Verily he set his face toward El at the source [of the rivers, amid the channels of the two oceans, he penetrated] the fields of El and went into the pavilion of the king [father of years, he did homage at El’s feet].”<sup>92</sup> Situated “‘a thousand fields, ten thousand acres’ of distance from Mount Sapan,”<sup>93</sup> at the source

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<sup>86</sup> Smith, 2001, 143. Cf. Niehr (1996, 45): “Under the influence of Ugaritic mythology a quasi-dogmatic view came into being, according to which YHWH had reached his status as supreme god by taking over traits from the gods El and Baal as they are depicted in Ugaritic mythology. Furthermore, some scholars believed (and still believe) that YHWH was identified with El, one of the supreme gods of Ugarit.” Niehr (Ibid, 46) holds, following the trail blazed by Rendtorff (1966), that it is untenable at this point in the “history of research since 1966” that in “considerations of YHWH’s status as supreme god,” scholars should continue “to take Ugaritic mythology as their unobjectionable starting point.”

<sup>87</sup> Driver, 1956, 121.

<sup>88</sup> Levinson prepared the notes for Deuteronomy in The New Oxford Annotated Bible, 2001. Cf. 301.

<sup>89</sup> Cross, 1980, 15-20.

<sup>90</sup> Mullen, 1980, 22-44; cf. Albright, 1968, 120.

<sup>91</sup> Driver, 1965, 77, nt. 5. Cf. Gray, 1949, 76.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. Baal III\* c 5; cf. VI I\* 11-. (p. 107).

<sup>93</sup> Oldenburg (1969, 106); cf. UM 51:V:84-86. Albright (1940:163) links Ezek. 28:2 to El’s watery throne. D. W. Aiken, “Philosophy, Archaeology, and the Bible. Is Emperor Julian’s *Contra Galilaeos* a Plausible Critique of Christianity?” *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 11 (2017) 1-37, ISSN 1754-517X; <https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10450>; <https://jlarc.cardiffuniversitypress.org/>

of the rivers amid two oceans, El's water-bound throne, which is perhaps subterranean,<sup>94</sup> is naturally less elevated than Baal's lofty throne, which is situated on the heights of Mount Saphon (cf. RS 24.253: *b'l spn*<sup>95</sup>). "Baal is seated, (having) as throne (his) mountain"<sup>96</sup>; it therefore follows that, without necessarily having the hierarchical supremacy over the gods that seems the prerogative of El, it is still Baal, simply and literally because he is seated on an immense throne in the higher regions of the world, who is the 'most high' one of Ugarit.<sup>97</sup> Indeed this notion of sheer size (height and simple largeness) would also seem to be implied in *Baal* III i 25ff. (Driver 1956, 111), when Athirat attempts to install Athtar upon the throne of the dead Baal. Verses 28-37 read:

Thereupon the terrible Athtar went up to the recesses of the north,/ he sat on the seat of the victor/ Baal [*aleyn b'l*]; (but) his feet reached not/ to the stool, his head reached not/ to its top. And the terrible Athtar answered: 'I cannot be king in the recesses of the north. [*l amlk.bsrrt.spn*]' / The terrible Athtar came down, came down/ from the seat of the victor Baal/ and became king of the earth, god of it all.<sup>98</sup>

This interpretation of *aliyan* as a indicator of size or height or geographical position rather than of rank in a hierarchy, would also seem to be confirmed by biblical usage; for in Isa 14:13-14 one finds: "You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of El; I will sit on the mount of assembly, on the heights of Zaphon; I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like 'Elyon.'" It is probable that this text is framed by a Baal myth,<sup>99</sup> in which case it would reflect the

<sup>94</sup> Oldenburg (Ibid, 104ff; cf. 144) detects an agon between El and Baal, with the result that El changes residences from Sapon to some lower, indeed subterranean place. Cf. especially 107: "The word *thmtm* "the two deeps" occurs in the same form in another Ugaritic text in the phrase *sr' thmtm*, meaning "surging of the ground water [UM I. Aqht:45]. The Hebrew word [...] means "the deep," mostly including the great primordial ocean on which the earth rests, and whence all waters of the earth arise. It generally refers to the subterranean supply of sweet-water, the source of the fountains, springs, and rivers that come out of the earth." Cf. Albright, 1968, 120-121. More recent parallel studies between Ugaritic and Hebrew, however, would seem to warrant a shift from a 'local' rendering (esp. 607:2-3; cf. 49 I:4-6 and 51 IV:20-22) of the prepositions to a 'directional' rendering. For this, see Dahood in Rummel, 1981, 22-23.

<sup>95</sup> Virolleaud, 1968, 592. Cf. Schaeffer (1966:9), speaking of the god lists, refers to Baal Saphon, "c'est-à-dire Baal du mont du Nord, autrement dit du Djebel Akra ou Mont Casius."

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 1968:558, RS 24.245: "*b'l.ytb.k.tbt.gr.*"

<sup>97</sup> Dussaud (1941, 102) separates *Aliyan* from Baal. Likewise, his analysis of the literature leads him to infer quite the opposite concerning the most high 'position' of Baal. "Or, les primitives Cananéens vénéraient sous le nom d'*Aliyan* ('al'iyn) un dieu [...] qui dispensait l'eau des sources, des puits et des cours d'eau, et dont la demeure (zeboul) était placée dans les profondeurs de la terre."

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Oldenburg's (1969:42) interpretation of this passage: "the gods may have turned to the morning star, 'Attr, to give rain like the Rider of the Clouds, Ba'al. 'Attr, however, was not able to compensate for Ba'al's rain, but had rather to descend from Ba'al's exalted throne and assume his inferior function of giving dew to the earth." For a discussion on *Attr*, see Gray's (1949) article "The Desert God *Attr* in the Literature and Religion of Canaan," esp. 76ff.

<sup>99</sup> Oldenburg sees many things behind Isa 14:13-15, except a reference to a Baal myth. He (1969:42) applies this passage both to 'Attr, who "covets the kingship over the pantheon, but comes to a miserable end," and to El (Ibid, 104, nt.4). Pope (1955:103-104), who states categorically that "nowhere in the Ugaritic texts is El clearly connected with Mount Sapan," believes that "the ultimate mythological

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possibly theogonic occasion on which Baal physically and geographically surpassed El, so that *aliyan* Baal became the ‘most high’ of Ugarit.<sup>100</sup>

### Elyon, Hypsistos et al. – A Henotheistic World

It is in the context of fixing the identity of Elyon-*Hypsistos* that we make the transition to the criticisms levelled by Julian against the Galileans. Although Julian is using the LXX<sup>101</sup> as the text of disputation with the Christians, it is also clear that one of the intellectual resources behind his argument concerning *Hypsistos* is Eusebius’s *Praeparatio Evangelica*. It is Eusebius who quotes Philo of Byblos, who in turn paraphrases the Phoenician priest Sanchuniathon, through whom early Canaanite beliefs were transmitted to the Greeks;<sup>102</sup> for the name “Eliun-Hypsistos is a Greek transliteration and translation of the Phoenician divine name ‘Elyon.’”<sup>103</sup> Dussaud traces the genealogical evolution of the deity, ‘Most High’ (*i.e.*, Aliyan/‘Elyon), from his roots, which are lost for evidentiary purposes in the mists of antiquity,<sup>104</sup> to his emergence in the Ugaritic poems as the composite Victor-*aliyan* -Baal, and thence into the world of the Hebrew Bible where the LXX shall render him the ‘Most High’: “Elioun est une très ancienne entité qui a été supplantée par El, son fils, qui lui-même sera remplacé par ses propres enfants... Il n’est donc pas surprenant qu’un écho de ces conceptions mythiques se rencontre dans Deutér., XXXII, 8, où l’on nous dit qu’Elioun a réparti les territoires entre les nations suivant le nombre des fils de El.”<sup>105</sup> The better genealogical evidence, however, indicates an additional intercalary generation between Elyon and El.<sup>106</sup>

The precise identification of the god Elyon in the Hebrew Bible is not without its difficulties. According to DDD (1999, 14), “2 Sam 22:14 (=Ps 18:14) and Ps 21:8 unequivocally associate Elyon with the divine name YHWH.”<sup>107</sup> There is a caveat,

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background of [Is. XIV 13-15] is a theomachy [...] in which El and his champion (Prince Sea) and his cohorts were defeated and banished to the netherworld.”

<sup>100</sup> Cf. DDD, 1999, 295.

<sup>101</sup> Origen also relied on the LXX, which means that he also had the “sons of God” tradition in Deut. 32:8-9. Cf. Skehan, 1951, 162.

<sup>102</sup> For the history and problematic of Philo of Byblos and Sanchuniathon, see Eißfeldt’s 1939 monograph entitled *Ras Shamra und Sanchunjon* (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag) and his 1952 monograph entitled, *Sanchunjon von Beirut und Ilumilku von Ugarit* (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag).

<sup>103</sup> Oldenburg, 1969, 9. Cf. Dussaud (1941, 113), who charts the comparative genealogy of Elioun/Hypsistos through Philo of Byblos as follows: out of Elioun (Hypsistos) and Berouth comes Ouranos; out of Ouranos and Ge comes El/Kronos.

<sup>104</sup> Pope (1955, 52, 57) affirms, following Dussaud (1949, 231), who accepts the genealogy proposed by Philo of Byblos (Gifford, 36 b-d, pp. 40f.) that, “It is now clear that ‘elyon was originally a celestial deity quite distinct from El, corresponding to Alalu of the Hurrian theogony in Hittite, and thus older than El by two divine generations.”

<sup>105</sup> Dussaud, 1941, 170.

<sup>106</sup> Pope (1955, 15, nt. 84; cf 56): “According to the ancient theogony, [...] El was the grandson of Elyon. It seems likely that El Elyon is really a compound name blending the two originally distinct gods.” Cf. Lack, 1962, 51; Pope, 1987, 223-224.

<sup>107</sup> This is substantiated by Cross (1980, 52): “the creator god of Jerusalem was ‘El, and later, at least, the epithets ‘elyon and ‘eli both became standard epithets of Yahweh alongside his alias ‘El.” Likewise:

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however, for the same author cautions that it is equally clear that the name Elyon is not original to Yahweh, but seems to have originally made its debut either as the name of an ancient Canaanite deity probably distinct from Ugaritic El, or as a divine epithet, which “only with the passage of time made its way into early Yahwistic religious traditions.”<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, in the notes on Deut. 32:8-9 in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (2001, 301), one reads: “Most High, or Elyon, is the title of El, the senior god who sat at the head of the divine council in the Ugaritic literature of ancient Canaan.”

From the overview of the name/epithet Elyon provided by Cross,<sup>109</sup> it seems fairly certain that in the Patriarchal narrative Elyon was compounded with El (esp. in Gen 14:18ff.), and that Elyon was connected to Jerusalem. As to how the expression *'el 'elyon* is best translated, Cross (Ibid, 47) writes that “we may take the epithet *'el 'elyon* to mean ‘the God ‘Elyon’, or ‘El, the highest one’, or conceivably ‘the highest god.’” Cross clearly favors *'elyon* as an epithet rather than as a personal god name, because Hebrew Bible usage depicts *'el 'elyon* as a creator god. Sakkunyaton uses *ilyoun* (*'elyon*) of an old god paired theogonically in the generation of gods preceding Heaven and Earth; however, Cross (Ibid, 51) claims that this cannot be the case, for “the old god is not the active creator, god of the shrine of Jerusalem. Nowhere does such an old god appear in the pantheon lists or in the lists of gods given sacrifices.”

Lewy (1934, 60) has persuasively argued that there is good reason to identify *'elyon* with the old god *Slm*, whom Gray (1949, 77) considers to be “one of the hypostases of ‘Attr the Venus Star”, the son of ‘Attr, consort of ‘El. Historically, *Slm* has connections with the Ugaritic solar cult, which was supposedly subsumed by the Israelites into their religion when they established themselves in the land of Canaan. It is also clearly evident in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Ezek. 8:16) that some form of solar cult continued to exist up right up to the destruction of the temple in the sixth century.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, Josiah’s reforms, which took place around 620 BCE, were in fact, at least in part, to eradicate the solar cult (cf. 2 Kgs 23:11; Deut 4:19). Eißfeld (*KS*, 2:145-6) reads Judg 6:11-32 in a way that would seem to indicate “that in Ophra once a ba’al salom was worshipped, the protector of health and prosperity.” Lack (1962, 44), however, following Nyberg,<sup>111</sup> expands the identification of *Slm* to include other deities, which has the effect of stressing the importance of this god in the religions of the ancient Near East: “‘Al, ‘El-Elyon, ‘El-Sadday, Salim et Sidq sont une seule et même divinité: le grand dieu de tout l’Amourrou, dont le siège aurait été Jérusalem. Il a été entièrement absorbé par Jahvé, le dieu de clan des tribus israélites venues du désert. David a été intronisé à Jérusalem dans une double relation à Jahvé, dieu du clan, et à ‘Al, dieu du pays.” Virolleaud (1968, 584) reads *Slm* as *slm* in the context of RS 24.271, *slm.slm I[1]/ [s]lm.il sr*, which he understands to be a salutation (i.e., salaam, shalom) preceding the name of the god El,

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(Ibid, 60; cf. 71-72): “it is clear that the Yahweh epithets, ‘El, Sadday, and ‘Elyon are associated in the earliest strata of biblical poetry as if interchangeable and are used again in the archaizing literature of the Exile.”

<sup>108</sup> Elsewhere in DDD (1999, 293-294) one reads that, “the epithet may conceal a reference to a separate deity, possibly an older god with whom Yahweh came to be identified. This has been argued, for example, with reference to Gen 14:18, Num 24:16 and Deut 32:8.”

<sup>109</sup> Cross, 1980, 46ff.

<sup>110</sup> DDD, 1999, 932.

<sup>111</sup> Nyberg, 1938, 356.

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although it is unclear why *slm* could not equally well reference the god *Slm*.<sup>112</sup> Rosenberg (1965, 166[6]), on the other hand, makes a compelling argument for the importance of *Slm* at the time of the Monarchy.

That David paid homage to the deities of Jerusalem is seen from the names that he bestowed upon his children. His third son he named Absalom, ‘the Father is Salim,’ showing thereby his devotion to Salim/Sulman, the god, revered by peoples of both Semitic and Hurrian stock from a very early period, whose name is preserved in Jerusalem ‘the Foundation of Salim.’ The son whom he designated to succeed him on the throne he called Selomoh, ‘belonging to Salim.’ Selomoh or Solomon actually bore two names, one which dedicated him to Salim and the other, Yedidiah, linking him to Yahweh the god of Israel (II Sam. 13:25).

*Slm* is in fact an ancient god, which directly responds to Cross’s concerns about the venerability of any possible identification of a specific god as the Most High. Lewy argues that according to the traditional interpretation “le *El ‘eljon qoné samajim wa’ares* ‘le dieu suprême, le fondateur du ciel et de la terre’ qui, par l’organe de Malkisedeq, a béni Abram, est identique avec Jahvé.” He does also maintain, however, that this tradition is flawed; because to judge by the grammatical form of *El ‘eljon*, which indicates that it was never a proper name, behind this expression, *El ‘eljon*, “il se cache une autre divinité...”<sup>113</sup> Lewy concludes his argument by returning to Melkisedeq, king of the city of Salem (i.e., Jerusalem) and priest of the ‘Most High’ who blesses Abraham (Gen. 14:18) in the name of the ‘Most High’. The ‘Most High’ of Melkisedeq’s blessing, argues Lewy, ought also to be the ‘old god’ of the city: “l’ancien dieu de la ville de *Salem* doit avoir porté lui aussi le nom de *Salem*.”<sup>114</sup> Lewy says that these same epithets of *El ‘eljon* and *qoné samajim wa’ares* that were given to Yahweh in the biblical literature, were also ascribed to the god שלם, “un autre seigneur divin de Jérusalem, plus ancien, et dont le culte englobait un vaste territoire au delà des frontières de la Palestine.” The biblical redactors, however, were compelled to repress traces of this god “pour la bonne raison que la loi ne permettait plus l’existence d’un שלם à côté de Jahvé.”<sup>115</sup> For Lewy then, *El eljon* is not to be identified with any less deity than שלם, who, “à l’époque préisraélite, a été vénérée à Jérusalem à titre de créateur du monde et de roi des dieux et qui passait pour le dieu suprême du territoire situé entre le Nil et l’Euphrate.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Compare Driver (1956:120, O.i 2) wysmm.bn.sr[m...], “and fair, royal ones (nt. 5: “Literally ‘sons of kings and princes’”) with RS 24.271 [s]lm.il sr. The linkage between *slm* and *sr* in both cases is not uninteresting; nor is the transliteration of *slm*, which Driver translates as a god’s name while Virolleaud translates it as a rather out-of-place greeting.

<sup>113</sup> Lewy, 1934, 60.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 64.

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### God (Yahweh) versus GOD (Elyon-Hypsistos) in Julian

Whatever the final specific name-identity the scholarly consensus finally settles upon, Julian's argument about the universal nature of the Creator-[*Elyon*]-*Hypsistos* will, it seems, be ultimately vindicated; for in the words of Nyberg, "In the final analysis, El 'Elyon is an all-encompassing sky-god who possesses the entire earth, and who does not just reign in the small city-states."<sup>117</sup> It is clear that in Deut. 32:8-9 Julian is reading the LXX ὄψιστος for the Hebrew עליון. H. Niehr (in DDD, 1999, 371) gives a brief overview of the transmigration of this ancient Near Eastern god into his Hellenized form.

The identification of Yahweh and Baal shamem is demonstrated by the installation of the cult of Baal shamem under his hellenistic name of Zeus Olympios in the temple of Jerusalem under Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 BCE, which was not a pagan measure but the result of an intra-Jewish prohellene development. Its goal was not to replace Yahweh by another god or to introduce a new god into the temple of Jerusalem. Yahweh himself was henceforth to be venerated as Baal shamem with the character of a universal god.

It is possible to reconstruct Julian's thinking about the relationship between the various gods, and how he arrived at the conclusion that the *Hypsistos* of Deut. 32:8-9 corresponds neither to the Jewish Yahweh nor to the God of the Galileans. Julian understands that in Deut. 32:8-9 Moses is making the clearest possible distinction between the Great God *Hypsistos*, the God who allots nations according to the number of his children (i.e., the tribal gods), and Yahweh, who is clearly one of the subordinate clan gods receiving his inheritance from his Most High father. It would seem, however, that a certain material confusion or perhaps fusion arose in the historical transition from the subordinated Yahweh of LXX Deut. 32:8-9, to the Most High god of the Jews in the Diaspora, who were influenced by the LXX. These believed that their Yahweh was supreme, and used "ὁ ὄψιστος as a divine name for the God of their fathers."<sup>118</sup> Finally, this Hebrew Most High evolved into the Galilean God, whom they mis-identified as *Hypsistos*, equated with Yahweh, and addressed as Father.

Julian is aware through his reading of Eusebius that the Phoenician Philo of Byblos gives a Greek god-name to Elyon-*Hypsistos*, which is to say Kronos. Kronos is certainly not, by his standard attributes, the Creator-*Hypsistos* of Greek religion; but in the now familiar passage from the *Praeparatio Evangelica* (1.10:15-30), of which Julian was certainly aware, Eusebius details Philo's depiction of Kronos as the offspring of Elioun (=Elyon). To Elioun Philo attributes the status of *Hypsistos*, while he identifies Kronos with Elos, which is to say El;<sup>119</sup> so it is clear that Philo does not equate Kronos with *Hypsistos*, notwithstanding that kingship will fall to Kronos after he deposes his father Ouranos. According to Cumont<sup>120</sup> there is some evidence that the Phoenician Philo may

<sup>117</sup> Nyberg, 1935, 58.

<sup>118</sup> DDD, 1999, 439.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. DDD, 1999, 15.

<sup>120</sup> In Boll, 1919, 342-343.



have confused the Phoenician god El, grk. Ἡλιος, with the Greek sun god *Helios*, hence (mis)reading [h]elios for elos, which would explain what Cumont holds to be a mistake in Philo. Cumont also maintains that there is sufficient inscriptional evidence for the melding of El and Helios, and concludes that Philo's further blending of Kronos and H[e]lios-Ἡλιος-El would be attributable to a Greek misunderstanding. Textual evidence from Julian's writings, however, such as Oration IV – "Hymn to King Helios," would seem to indicate that for Julian, 'God' is certainly the Mithraic Helios; likewise, if the Phoenician Philo did indeed confound his Greek gods, an assertion which Boll flatly denies,<sup>121</sup> then at least Julian did not follow him in that error.

The argument of the *Contra Galilaeos*, Julian's hermeneutical challenge against the Christian interpretation of the Jewish Writings, is largely vindicated by the archaeological findings of Ugarit; and Jewish, Christian, and Islamic studies stand on the brink of a necessary reformation. There is now at hand striking evidence to challenge the traditional relationship assumed to exist between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Jesus Movement, between Yahweh, the tribal God of the Jews, and the God proclaimed by the Christian Church. The argument that Julian has advanced, and for which recent archeology offers some considerable substantiation, is that although the Galileans accept without qualification the writings of Moses as reliable and authoritative in matters of faith and doctrine, they are either uninformed or disingenuous about the true identity and nature of the gods profiled in the Hebrew Scriptures, and they are therefore in error about Yahweh.

Julian's arguments in *Contra Galilaeos* are both hermeneutical and philosophical. In contrast to the interpretations of later monotheistic traditions, Julian argues that the Hebrew Scriptures clearly portray the Israelite Yahweh, and therefore the Christian God, as occupying an inferior position in the hierarchy of ancient Near Eastern gods. Julian also compellingly argues that it is impossible for a reasonable person to accept the idea that somehow the angry, fearful, and jealous god depicted in the Mosaic writings can possibly be transformed into the Supreme Moral Being proclaimed by the Jesus Movement. Similarly, to whatever degree the Islamic tradition confounds its Allah with the God of Moses or the God of Abraham or Yahweh or the Christian God, it then also follows that this later theological tradition as well is affected by the ramifications of Julian's argument.

Julian's interpretations and analyses of the Jewish Scriptures will receive unexpected vindication in 1929 from the voluminous archives found at Ugarit (Ras Shamra, Syria). The stories contained in these archives have already had a significant impact on later twentieth century scholarship, helping it to identify ancient pre-Israelite Near Eastern gods who have gone for the most part unnoticed, transformed by the metaphors and non-theophoric translations in the Hebrew Bible, but who are present nonetheless, absorbed in the ancient Ugaritic or early Canaanite framing of those later Israelite stories. Julian's interpretations of the Mosaic writings, including his henotheistic framing of and logically consequent subordination of Yahweh, are vindicated by the accumulated mythological weight of the entire ancient Near East.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 343ff.

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