

The Origins of the Tetragrammaton:
Why is it spelled that way?
Why can't we pronounce it?

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HUC-JIR NY, October 27, 2003

“When they ask what [God's]
name is, what shall I tell them”
(Moses, Exodus 3:13)

1 Overview

- (1) Stages of writing:
 1. “Pre-historical,” c. 3500BCE: ???
 - (a) Counting?
 - (b) Keeping track of livestock?
 - (c) By definition, little is understood of these writings
 2. Logographic: Egyptian Hieroglyphic, c. 3000BCE (c.f. also Chinese, 1300BCE)
 - (a) By and large, one symbol for each idea.
 - (b) First really successful writing system.
 - (c) Required thousands of symbols.
 - (d) Inconvenient for the masses.
 3. Syllabic: Linear B

- (a) One symbol for each syllable.
- (b) Still required hundreds, or at least tens, of symbols.
- (c) Inconvenient for the masses.

4. Consonantal: Phoenician

- (a) About two dozen consonantal symbols.
- (b) Easy to write.
- (c) Hard to read.

5. Alphabetic: Hebrew

- (a) About two dozen symbols
- (b) Consonants (Y, W, and H) double as vowels. These were the Hebrews' "magic" letters.
- (c) Easier to write
- (d) Much easier to read

(2) Evidence

1. Hebrew

- (a) Izbet Sartah Abecedary (1200BCE?)
- (b) Gezer Calendar (950BCE?)
- (c) Mesha Stone (c. 850BCE)
- (d) Siloam Tunnel (end of 8th Century BCE)

2. Aramaic: numerous samples from the 9th Century BCE

3. Greek: Linear B (from 1450BCE) and "Greek" from 8th Century BCE

(3) Other Theories of the Alphabet

- 1. Greek was the first alphabet — assumes that dual-use symbols (Y, W, and H) don't count as vowels.
- 2. Aramaic was the first alphabet — no evidence.
- 3. Moabite was the first alphabet — "Moabite" looks just like Hebrew.

2 The Magic Heh

- (4) Genesis 17:1–8: אברם ('BRM) becomes אברהם ('BRHM) and שרי (SRY) becomes שרה (SRH)
- (5) אלים ('LYM) becomes אלהים ('LHYM).
- (6) Other Theory of 'LYM/'LHYM: אלהים ('LHYM) is the plural of אלים ('LYM). Drawbacks:
 - 1. Origin of אלים ('LYM) is unknown
 - 2. Relegates to coincidence insertion of a magic H into the name of the Hebrew Patriarch, Matriarch and God to make the name Hebrew

3 YHWH

- (7) YHWH consists only of the Hebrews' "magic" letters.
- (8) Hebrew literature shows independent evidence of "magic" letters (H).
- (9) YHWH does not appear in any pre-Israelite literature.
- (10) YHWH admits of no obvious etymology.
- (11) YHWH has a tradition of being "unpronounceable."
- (12) In the DSS, YHWH is often written in the older Phoenician script rather than the newer block script.
- (13) In some versions of the LXX, YHWH is written in Phoenician (rather than the Greek *Κυριος* = "Lord")

4 Conclusions

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