



Golden Calf Narrative: Deuteronomist Ideology of Jeroboam Reformation

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Abstract

Jeroboam 1st is depicted as the prototype for all future evil kings, who are regularly accused According to the books of Kings. Jeroboam accused of established two sanctuaries; Bethel and Dan to rival the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. These shrines then provoke vehement censure and sin of Jeroboam become paradigmatic of northern apostasy. Underlying the negative depiction of Jeroboam's cult, however, scholars have found subtle details suggesting that Jeroboam's cult was traditional and even Yahwistic in nature. His calves may be best understood as familiar Canaanite vehicles for the invisible deity enthroned above them – in this case, Yahweh – comparable to the cherubim in southern cult of Judah. Jeroboam priesthood likely included Levites. And his choices of Dan and Bethel, too, apparently reflected a sensitivity to honor venerable memories of pre-monarchic era. This research aims to explain what Jeroboam did was not a violation of the Yahwistic system of Israel at that time. The establishment of God in Bethel and Dan did not disconcert the status of Yahweh in the treasures of Israel, instead of a form of a political assertion that separated Israel from the arrogance and the power of Judah. By using the method of analyzing historical criticism and literacy, the result is a new perspective of understanding Jeroboam's reform in Israel - merely a political movement alone. Jeroboam never removed Yahweh from the treasury as the god of Israel. Instead, he retained Yahweh as God who was declared to have led Israel out of Egypt.

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Introduction

First Kings 12:25-33 label as controversial text for it is not so easy to understand. Until recently, I believe most Christians understood this text as Israelites uprising story led by Jeroboam against Jerusalem then establish the worship of other deities besides Yahweh at Bethel and Dan. The erection of golden calves at Bethel and Dan was interpreted as the making of

“other gods”.¹ Jeroboam’s errors and sins were further increased for bringing Samaria back into idolatry by establishing a rival temple outside of Jerusalem. According to E.T. Mullen, JR, the phrase “the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned and which he caused Israel to sin,” as a standard phrase for the Deuteronomist condemnation of the kings of Israel.²

However, when we look at the text in 1 Kings 12:24, 28, we find there is divine legitimacy to what Jeroboam did. His legitimacy clearly prohibited Judah from going to war with his brother from Samaria, “Listen all Judah, God caused all this to happen,” followed by the claim of legitimacy in verse 28, which explains that the God worshipped in the form of golden ox in Bethel and Dan prove the same God, similar or identic to the God who led Israel out of Egypt. These two divine statements unequivocally assert that no theological claim of worship of Yahweh was violated in Jeroboam’s reformation; he is even described as maintaining true worship of Yahweh. As James W. Watts said: the second Temple period, however, the story of golden calf posed no dangers to the growing force of Aaronide priestly ideology. It reinforced certain key priestly themes such as God’s presence in tabernacle or temple cult.³

Therefore, all claims made by Jerusalem that Jeroboam had broken the Yahwistic tradition must be questioned. Is it true that this claim of Judah can be accounted for theologically reason only? Or does this claim have political significance – the hegemony power of Jerusalem’s leaders to maintain slavery over the Joseph’s tribe? Will the economic importance of Jerusalem as the axe of worship from the entire tribe of Jacob, which has been running, be under threat when the ten Northern tribes have equal places of worship of their own? In my opinion, the political and economic interests of Jerusalem were the main drivers of the negative assessment of the place of worship established by Jeroboam.

The method used in the writing of this article is literature studies by conducting a simple literary analysis of 1 Kings 12:25-33 synchronously. This method is expected to be able to read the functions and traditions of the text from the point of view of Deuteronomist writers around 600-500 BC, in their efforts to re-read Israel’s failure to follow Yahweh, which led them to exile.

¹ Ralph W. Klein, “Golden Calf traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.” In *Themes In Biblical Narrative*, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2019), 26.

² E. Theodore Mullen, JR, “The Sins of Jeroboam: A Redactional Assessments,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly Journal* 4, no. 2 (1987), 214. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43717408>.

³ James W. Watts, “Aaron and the Golden Calf in the Rhetoric of the Pentateuch.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 3 (Fall 2011), 14. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41304211>. About Golden Calf see The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “golden calf”. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 3 Jul. 2008, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/golden-calf>. Accessed 4 March 2022.

The literary method was chosen by the author for it was considered more appropriate to discuss the narrative of Jeroboam contained in the book of Kings carefully, especially looking at the angles or glasses of the writers who retell the story hundreds of years after its events occurred.

Discussion

I Kings 12:25-33 Context

First Kings 12:25-33 narrative was interesting story of Jeroboam which is attempted to be examined or approach by history and literature methods. The narrative that occupies a central position in the whole story of Israelites kings according to Bruce K. Waltke is better arranged in chiastic form – as follows:

- A. Ahijah of Shiloh Announces Jeroboam's kingship (11:26-40)
 - B. Closing Formula for Solomon's reign (11:41-43)
 - C. Political disunity: Rejection of Rehoboam (12:1-20)
 - D. A Judahite prophet's confirmation (12:21-24)
 - X. Cultic Inovations (12:25-33)
 - DI. A Judahite (Shemiah) prophet's condemnation (13:1-10)
 - CI. Prophetic disunity: Rejection of Judahite prophet (13:1-10)
 - BI. Closing Formula for Jeroboam's reign (14:19-20)
 - AI. Ahijah of Shiloh Announces Jerobam's reign (14:19-20)⁴

Chapter 12:25-33 (X), we found the word 'sin' טַשְׂאוֹתָךְ was a central point of this chiastic form. Thus, both Jeroboam's narrative structure and the story of Jeroboam's golden ox itself – presenting sin and its devastating effect – which can be explain as the way to to destroy himself and the subsequent kings of Israel.

However, using a synchronic approach might contribute a solid foundation in relation to the method of historical criticism to find real history and not history according to certain individuals or groups containing particular interests. In relation to the synchronous approach, I Kings 12:25-33 must be understood in light of the political situation from the Solomon era to Rehoboam as a new king of Jerusalem. This passage presented Rehoboam's meeting with the Israelites in Shechem, where they asked the king to remove the force labor burden that had been

⁴ Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 712.

inflicted upon them – especially against the tribe of Joseph. First, we find Rehabeam consults with senior advisors. The results of the first consultation recommended Rehoboam grant Israel's request. However, dissatisfied with the outcome of the first consultation, the king requested a consultation with the young advisers – the advisers who recommended the addition and folding of the burden of slavery on the existing tribe of Joseph. Rehoboam's response to the tribes of Israel created a great rebellion that led to the splitting of the kingdom in two. According to J. Maxwell Miller and John Hayes – quoted by Robert B. Coote, the figures and villagers of Israel and the king of Egypt formed a long enough line to make a revolution against David's house. Together they agreed on Jeroboam I's ambition to advance their plan of seceding from Judah. It is important to note that the people of Israel (10 Northern tribes) played a large and cyclical role in this revolution; partly on the basis of their true power and partly on the basis of their identical identity dating from Israel's past as the largest combined tribes of Jacob; a role that cannot be underestimated even though the emphasis here lies on Jeroboam's role and figure.⁵

If Coote's argument is correct, then David's acclamation as king of Judah so far has not received the acceptance or approval of acclamation in the Northern tribes. And for that reason, perhaps after becoming king of Judah – and in an attempt to win votes from the Northern tribes, David sent a grateful message to the people in Jabesh-Gilead, for what they had done to Saul and his son when they were killed in battle. David's message to the Gileads, who were Saul's allies and loyalists, could be seen as a kind of political maneuver to widen and strengthen David's influence in the Northern tribes.

I found it is possible that David sent the above message 'sincerely' without political charge, and at the same time, we might believe that Saul's loyalists – who later made Ishbaal or Ishiboset king in his father's place (2 Sam. 2:10), still did not give David complete trust, and for that reason, all these matters became a strong signal that the schism between Samaria and Judah never ended. Samaria never declared itself fully subject to the power of Judah, even though David was in complete control. Even after this declaration has been announced, Abner as Saul's loyalist, still hoped to secure the Northern tribes that were included in Saul's legacy – as part of an effort to stem David's plan for Hegemony of power throughout Israel.⁶ This argument can be seen in the narrative of David's elevation to the king of Judah at Hebron, which was met with

⁵ Robert B. Coote, *Demi Membela Revolusi*, (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, UKSW, 2011), 89.

⁶ Alison L. Joseph. "The Deuteronomistic History and Israel's Kings." *The Bible and Interpretation*, 2016. <https://bibleinterp.arizona.edu/articles/2016/07/jos408019>. Retrieved November 16, 2020.

resistance by the appointment of Saul's descendants who still existed – which seemed to be a guarantee of Saul's continued dynasty in the North. As a result, there was a long war between the families of David and Saul, with a considerable duration recorded in Chronicles. For the Northern tribes, the war with David added a bigger burden because they also had to fight with the Philistines. The variety of enemies Israel had to face led to David's victory in the war over them. Although David was 'visibly' able to unite between Samaria and Judah as a result of his war victories, we still see the two tribes always keeping their distance from each other. We are wise enough to see Absalom's rebellion supported by the Northern tribes against his father is a clear signal that between Israel and Judah has always been in the status quo. This status quo eventually ended when Rehoboam did not give ear to a senior royal adviser.⁷

Israel was described as getting away from Judah when the news of Abner's death was spread throughout the Northern tribes. David did send empathy for Abner's death – as well as showing unhappiness with Joab, but the fact that David was responsible for Abner's death cannot be hidden. The fact that Abner was stronger and more influential than Ishboset contributed greatly to the North as well as a great advantage to David – Abner's death resulted in David's position having a minimum opponent in an attempt to expand his power. Ishboset's death came at a later time, putting the Northern tribes to an end without a leader and forced to enter or follow the rule of David and his descendants. This was evident when they – the elders of Israel came to David seven years after he ruled Hebron and made him king over Israel (2 Sam. 5ff).

However, the movement of the elders of Israel to appoint David king of all Israel and Judah at that time was seen as an attempt to secure their territory from the Philistine forces that had historically always interfered with their territory. The unification of Israel and Judah could be said to be the unification of two different territories – Judah with Israel, and not merely political unification. This becomes David's real problem; that is, the modern confederation that he must fight for or establish to maintain and build tribal unity that is still in the form of ancient confederations into a new nation-state model.⁸ The importance of maintaining tribal unity in this new confederation is increasingly evident as Israel continues to seek to liberate itself. The Philistines were defeated, so there was no formidable enemy they should fear. The heavy burden

⁷ Alison L. Joseph. "The Deuteronomistic History and Israel's Kings".

⁸ Bernhard Anderson, *The Living Word of the Old Testament*, (Britain: Bodmin, 1957), 177.

the kingdom imposed on the people – especially in the Solomon era, further led to the turmoil of freedom from these Northern tribes. The freedom they longed for was impossible through the negotiations because David seemed to enjoy his position as king of all Israel. Thus, the only way to gain independence is the path of rebellion

Deuteronomist, who wrote and edited the event, pointed out the presence of indications of a bad relationship between Israel and Judah; which has even begun long before the Rehabeam era, as I have explained before. In the period of the Judges, southern tribes rarely joined the Northern tribes in the war against the Canaanites. In my opinion, the main reason for the absence of mutual cooperation was the lack of trust between the two tribal groups which ended in escalation of hostilities among them - which was very noticeable in David and Solomon time - which then broke out in the culmination point of confrontation between Rehoboam and Jeroboam.⁹

In a closer context, Solomon's expressive actions marked the beginning of the division, as illustrated in 1 Kings 12:1-20. Rehoboam decided to follow Solomon's idea – by giving Israel a heavier burden, especially in the tribes of Joseph's descendants. The Northern tribes described in 1 Kings appear to be nothing more than Solomon's colonial areas – where they could be squeezed and given heavy burdens – especially the massive work of forced labor. So, it's no surprise that when there's a chance of segregation, they rebel. Jeroboam, who became the head negotiator with Judah, was eventually appointed king of Israel – and ended by separating himself and the whole northern tribes from Judah.

Finally, we notice Jeroboam's appointed as king of Israel not only gaining political legitimacy from Israel he also gaining legitimacy from the voice of God through the text 1 Kings 12:24. The prophecy in this text gives Jeroboam firmness to rule over the tribes of Israel, for it is God who makes all this happen. Although he was not of David's family, God made him king with the promise of blessings that had to be accompanied by showing obedience.

Deuteronomist Influences

The story of Israelite's unite monarch if interpreted as confessions or theological claims, which ultimately raised the question of whether this narrative was a true story with

⁹ Paul S. Ash. "Jeroboam I and the Deuteronomistic Historian's Ideology of the Founder." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (1998): 16–24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43723181>.

accountable facts or, in fact, was limited to Deuteronomist propaganda alone for so much visible the texts that appear have been edited long after the events told occurred. This does not deny that biblical texts do not hold historical information from the events that took place, for we also know that many traditions or texts are neatly preserved which are thought to date from the 9th-5th century BC – and all this news becomes the kitchen of the kings' information on the religious history of Israel and Judah. Brevard S. Child gives an important account of Deuteronomist's powerful influence in the material of the Book of Kings:

“Even before the entrance into the land the consequences of disobedience to the divine law recorded by Moses were rehearsed in detail before the people (Deut. 28). The culmination of disobedience was explicitly described as being ‘plucked off the land and’ ‘scattered among all peoples’ (vv. 63f). The editorial shaping of the books which follow offers a theological interpretation of Israel’s history in terms of the working out of the stipulations of the Book of the law. Not only is the correspondence between the prophecy and fulfillment continually made clear, but at crucial points in the history long ‘Deuteronomist’ speeches are inserted, which interpret theologically the course of Israel’s history in the light of the Book of the Law (Deut. 27f.; Josh. 1.2ff.; Judg. 2.6ff.; 1Sam. 12; 1 Kings 17 and 24).”¹⁰

Deuteronomist's powerful influence is, however important in observing this text—especially when we read the books of Kings from the Moses view as the author of Deuteronomy. The Old Testament historical books must have been compiled in a certain way to evaluate Israel in a Deuteronomist background – which also gave rise to the curiosity of whether Jeroboam was the main actor in this beautiful and powerful scheme? In my opinion, the audience of 1-2 Kings, which is the address of this book, is already familiar with a series of ambiguous, difficult, and contradictory texts. They may be witnesses of the fall of Israel, the rise of Josiah, the failure of reformation, and the throwing of Judah from Jerusalem to Babylonia. If this analysis is correct, then the historians of Deuteronomy seem to pay more attention to the receding interpretations and fall of the kingdom until the time of exile, which of course, the texts they build ultimately have a great space of ignoring the existing reality.¹¹ In other words, these texts were written to serve the religious and social-political interests of the time, especially in Judah. All indicators appear when the editors try to get the reader to understand the bad relationship between Judah and Israel – which is evident when we take a closer look at the phrase “to this day” in 1 Kings 12:19. The sentence indicates the reorganization of a series of events with a particular model and importance; at the same time comes from an era long after the real events occurred. Therefore,

¹⁰ Brevard S. Child, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, (Fortress Press, 1979). 231-232.

¹¹ E.W. Heaton, *The Hebrew Kingdoms*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 69.

we can deduce that the narrative described in this passage is an event that occurred around the 900 BC, whose position or setting was determined by the editors who operated around the exile arena – probably written by several prophets who lived around 600-500 BC; which we can assume are responsible for the redaction of the manuscript.

Golden Ox Narrative in 1 Kings 12:25-33 and Exodus 32

The narrative of the two texts above is often associated with the worship of the false deity. But for the Israelites, this figure is believed to be God – thus, it would point to the relationship between Yahweh and the golden ox as an identical god, which could perhaps be regarded as a means of justification as well as a theological parameter to the idea of Yahweh worship through the images of divinity forbidden in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. In other words, the making of the golden bull statue is not a means to worship god; ideas are clearly forbidden in the Pentateuch, but rather they regard it as worship of god itself.¹² In the case of Aaron's golden ox, the narrative clearly informs that Yahweh's priests were the group responsible for making the golden ox at the request of the Israelites which was used in the festival or feast to Yahweh. Although there was a poor judgment of the writer of the Pentateuch through Moses' eyes, this event did not remove the legality and loyalty of Israel's worship to the God they knew as Yahweh who brought them from Egypt.

Comes to the similarities in form and content of Aaron and Jeroboam's golden oxen narrative, John W. Davenport, ensures that these two narratives have much in common (parallel) through the following evidence created by John Davenport.¹³

1. Both golden oxen images occupy the center of the stage (Ex. 31:4 ff; 1 Kings. 12:28 ff),
2. Both are said to be “this is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt”. (Ex. 32:5; 1 Kings. 12:33),
3. Both oxen has hg celebration or festival (Ex. 32:5 ff; 1 Kings.12:33),
4. The sacrificial offering was given before two gods (Ex. 32:6; 1 Kings. 12:33),
5. Both of them get negative responses, even curse (Ex. 32:7-35; 1 Kings. 12:30; 13:1-32; 14:1-20),

¹² Yehezkiel Kauffman, *The Religion of Israel: From its Beginning to the Babylonian Exile*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961), 13.

¹³ John W. Davenport, *a Study of the Golden Calf Tradition in Exodus 32*, (Princeton Theological Seminary, 1973). 84-85

6. Jeroboam's children's names, Abijah and Nadab are named after Aaron's son, indicating their parents were worshippers of Yahweh.

The golden ox made at Sinai certainly preceded Jeroboam's reformation. The parallels emerge from these two records clearly indicate Jeroboam was influenced by the Aaron's golden ox made at Sinai. The declaration "this is your god, o Israel, who brought you out of Egypt", has conclusively linked it to the Sinai event. Aaron made the altar before making the golden ox, he threw a feast to the Lord and asked the people of Israel to continue making and offering sacrifices before the golden ox. The same ritual was done by Jeroboam who not only invited Israel to hold an ordinary feast, but a special feast for Yahweh. The golden ox in their thinking did not negate Yahweh, but rather as a real representation of Yahweh who was with them. Jeroboam used the Sinai episode in his reformation because he believed this moment was the original color of the Israelites in their devotion to Yahweh.¹⁴

Jeroboam, like Aaron, made a golden ox and introduced him to Israel as a "god" to be worshipped "... this is you, o Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." Is it possible this account be called the act of sub-conducting of God? If you read from the Deuteronomist perspective; Judah's loyalist; this act of Jeroboam was indeed the rebellion against Yahweh. The prophet Amos indeed criticized Bethel and his temple for inadequate reasons; instead criticized for his formality or liturgy unmarked by love and justice (Amos 3:14; 4:4; 4:5-6). In his confrontation with the priest Amazia at Bethel, the issue was not about the golden ox worshipped there, but rather whether Amos' role as God's prophet functioned when he prophesied about the fate of Jeroboam II who would die in the war, which was followed by the word Israel going into exile. Of all the words of the prophet, not once did Amos mention the practice of the golden ox in Bethel as a sign of turn away from Yahweh.¹⁵

Let take closer look to the phrase "these are your gods o Israel, who led you out of the land of Egypt," these provocative phrases found in 1 Kings 12:28 and Exodus 32:4, indicating that those sentences describing the presence of God in the life motions of the Israelites which became their ritual creed. These sentences theologically in the Old Testament describes the nature of God's presence in Israel as being in the midst of the people. When Solomon built the temple, he said 'the heavens cannot accommodate God, let alone the temple he made.' Here and

¹⁴ Jung Jin Chun. *Reading the Golden Calf Episode in the Theological and Critical Perspective*. Dissertation. (Faculty of Arts and Humanities, School of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Bristol, 2000).

¹⁵ Paul S. Ash. "Jeroboam I and the Deuteronomistic Historian's Ideology of the Founder": 16-24.

there in the context of the tabernacle (Moses and David), there was never any information that God dwelt or ישב in the tabernacle, but he was praised or ibc in the temple. From these arguments we can see the possibility placing of golden oxen in Bethel was an iconograph alternative to the god of Israel; Yahweh who reigned and was clearly seen in the form of a golden ox that present among his people; in the sense that he was present to be worshipped, praised and not dwelled in. Thus, it will be no matter when Yahweh was present in Jerusalem and at the same time present at Bethel.

Yahweh or Elohim described as the ox (or buffalo) was exist long before Jeroboam era. Jacob called his god ‘abir Yakub’ or strong one from Jacob – which is the description of the horn or buffalo (Genesis 49:24 and Isaiah 1:24). Whether the golden ox is intended as a representation of Yahweh himself or Yahweh on the throne is not seen in any account in the book of Kings, it is likely that Yahweh’s iconography in the form of the Golden ox made by Jeroboam was intended to place Yahweh as God recorded in the Exodus – become an alternative Yahweh who could be present in Bethel and Dan to prevent all the Israelites avoid pilgrimage to Jerusalem. For Jeroboam, Yahweh could be present anywhere without being bound by his cult in Jerusalem. For this reason, it is certainly impossible that Jeroboam would leave Yahweh for anther god. To that end, Judah’s condemnation was ultimately more politically and economically nuanced instead of violations of morals and religious order claims. Jeroboam never abandon Yahweh and turned to other Canaanites god – especially he did not worship idols – which proved to be lack condemnation from Yahweh’s prophets against him. What Jeroboam did should have been read as cultic innovation towards the worship of Yahweh in the light or spectacles of Israelites (Samaritan) society which was in fact ‘different’ from the model of worship in Jerusalem all along.¹⁶

For Ezekiel Kauffman, it is impossible to associate Jeroboam’s golden ox with idolatry, which is summarized as follows:

Kaufmann denies a connection with idolatry: “In essence, then, there is no difference between the calves and the cherubs. . . . Yet they are not stigmatized as idolatrous by the Bible.” In evaluating this view, we should be careful to note from the outset that there is no mention in the biblical text that Jeroboam suggested the calves were a pedestal for God or that they were a parallel to the cherubim. If Jeroboam had specified such, the theory might be on firmer ground. Furthermore, there are other scholars who have

¹⁶ Robert Karl Gnuse. *THE ELOHIST: A Seventh-Century Theological Tradition*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017).

looked into the religions of the Ancient Near East, and have observed that ‘high gods’ were often represented in animal form by the ancient Semites. For instance, H. G. Guterbock has examined the religious texts contained in the royal archives of the Hittite capital at Boghazkoy (belonging to the two centuries of the New or Great Hittite Empire (c. 1400 – 1200 BC). In these, he has observed that the main god of the Hittite thesis is the weather God, which is related to a bull form.¹⁷

The selection of Bethel and Dan as centers of worship also needs more careful attention – especially in relation to the Yahwistic tradition. Bethel is well known in biblical narratives as the place where Jacob met God – where he made ‘home to god’ there (Gen. 28:10-22). Bethel was also famous as the place where the judges held a war with the tribe of Benjamin in the event of Gibeah. The judges placed Bethel as the location to seek and meet God. The location where the Ark of the Covenant God was and served by Phinehas Aaron’s grandson (Judges 20). In addition, famous prophets such as Samuel, also known as judges at Bethel, where he or the people of Israel met God. To that end, some theological points to support the relationship between the golden ox and Yahweh – in addition to the similarities of the two golden oxen in the different narratives above, can be stated as follows:

To begin with, Jeroboam made a golden ox so that the Israelites would stay home instead of going to Jerusalem offering sacrifices to YHWH. In this case Jeroboam did not introduce any god other than YHWH, he only attempted to provide an alternative location to make offerings to Yahweh other than in Jerusalem. In Addition, the criticism that came against Jeroboam’s cult must be read that the cult he created was indeed to worship Yahweh. For the criticism that arose against the cults of Bethel and Dan was more because Jerusalem had rivals. Furthermore, as indicated in the equation of the two cults above, the naming of Jeroboam’s son sounds very Yahwistic: Abijah (Yahweh my father). Although this may follow Israelites tradition – at least it retains its Yahwistic tradition. In conclusion, Elijah, Elisha, and Jehu were hard-liners of Yahwistic, but there is not a single record that states they criticized Jeroboam’s golden ox. This could not have happened if the two golden oxen installed in Bethel and Dan were an abomination to the Lord, or came from the gods of the nation around Israel.

¹⁷ John W. Davenport, *a Study of the Golden Calf Tradition in Exodus 32*; Kauffman, *The Religion of Israel*, 270.

Poly-Yahwistic

Stephen L. Cook believed Sinaitic theology, which was the forerunner of Yahwism theology has not been the official Christian and Catholic theology, even to the era of reformation. Instead, Sinai theology became the official theology of Israel in the era of the book of Hebrews in its written form, and this only happened in the early days of Judaism. Nevertheless, Cook saw the roots of the emergence of Yahwism had begun to be present at some important events of Israel; which began with the coup of the priest Jehoiada, the reformation of King Hezekiah, the reformation of King Josiah and in the era of the finalization of the scriptures.¹⁸

Yoyada's coup that killed queen Atalia was considered a success even that pushing Sinai theology into Judean society at the time, as seen in 2 Kings 11, which is also indicating an update of the covenant bond between Yahweh and Israel; that is the renewal of the Sinai covenant bond. The reformation landed Sinai theology on Israel through what is known as the "people of the land," a group of a small army that joined several other small groups to fight in the determination of the leader of Judah. We found in Micah 3:12; Yer. 26:17, the term "people of the land" reappears, which, according to Klaus Koch, was a supporter of Jehoiada in his Sinaitic reformation.¹⁹

The reformation of Hezekiah at the end of the 8th century BC was two of the three great reforms that had occurred in Israel. According to 2 Kings 18:4, Hezekiah dismantled the *bamot* scattered throughout Judah, destroyed the cult statues of Asherah and Baal, and in 2 Chronicles 29, continued by renewing the covenant bond with Yahweh and at the same time proclaiming the centralization of worship to the exculpate Yahweh in only one place – Jerusalem.²⁰ Cook also saw there was a kind of strong Yahwism influence from the North (Israel) through Micah and Hosea to this reformation of Hezekiah. This northern influence can be seen in some of Hosea's prophecies and in the book of psalms – such as Psalm 50:2 which indicates "God shines from outside Zion." Hezekiah, according to Cook, considered the words of Hosea and Micah important, so he gave a positive response in the form of advocating for the Sinai theology that

¹⁸ Stephen L. Cook, *The Sosial Roots of Biblical Yahwism*, (Boston: Leiden Brill, 2004), 45-64.

¹⁹ Klaus Kloch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic: A polemical work on a neglected area of biblical studies and its damaging effects on theology and philosophy* (Studies in Biblical Theology, 2012), 66.

²⁰ 2 Kings 18-23

the two prophets brought about in his reformation,²¹ which at the end, this kind of reformation – considered the greatest reform in Judah’s history in an attempt to renew the Sinaitic covenant.²²

From Cook’s analysis, there are many worship of Yahweh in the era of the monarchy. In addition, we also see the emergence of religious diversity – especially Yahwistic diversity in Israelites discourse – more specifically in the Persian era, which can be proved from the book of Chronicles that also records the presence of religious diversity and cultic addressed to Yahweh. Diversity in the worship of Yahweh in the late Persian and early Hellenistic eras was present as a result of geographical segregation between the Jewish communities of Samaria, Judah, Babylonia, Egypt (Elam, Alexandria), and so on. Judaism does not have central points of worship in this era. History records the presence of four Jewish temples, and perhaps others in this Persian and Hellenistic period.²³

These Yahwistic temples included - the Temple of Yahweh in Elephantine and Egypt – where the Jews built this temple around 525 BCE, and was destroyed in 410 BCE.²⁴ The elephantine papyri promised direct and unbiased access to a Jewish community as it had been in real life.²⁵ After that the Temple at Mount Gerizim – the temple of God – which follows Josephus’ interpretation – was built in the Hellenistic era. But archaeology assumes the temple was built around the middle of the 5th century BC, and lasted until the Ptolemy era. The temple was heavily influenced by Phoenician culture and religious systems. Then we found the Temple of Jerusalem, which was renovated in 515 BC under the government of Zerubbabel, which also continued in the era of Nehemiah. Fourth, there is BYT YWH in Idumea. In ostraca Idumea, there is a record of the destruction of BYT YWH in Idumea, the exact location around Qirbet el Qom or Makkada. Judging by the epigraphy comparison, this temple appeared in the Babylonian or Persian period. This Idumean text also references the presence of God’s temple

²¹ Georg Fohrer in “History of Israelite Religion”, has the same analysis.

²² Georg Fohrer in “History of Israelite Religion”; Cook, *The Social Roots of Biblical Yahwism*, 45-64.

²³ Bezael Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 292.

²⁴ Stephen G. Rosenberg, “The Jewish Temple at Elephantine,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67, no.1 (2004): 4-13, 9. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4149987>.

²⁵ Karel Van De Torn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews: Behind the Story of Elephantine*. (New Haven And London: Yale University Press, 2019), 1

(temple of Uzza) and temple of Nabu in the southern.²⁶ Meanwhile, the northern (Samaritan) temple or Yahwistic sanctuary in Gerizim was built slightly later than its competitor in Jerusalem as a proves to be of decisisve important for understanding the Yahweh's existence.²⁷

Based on the above findings, we can deduce that in the Persian and early Hellenistic periodes, the Israelites had several Yahweh temples. The presence and competence of the Yahweh temple in this period may (or certainly) be a threat to the identity of the Jerusalem temple known as the real center of Yahwism. The presence of some of Yahweh's temples outside of Jerusalem indicates the re-emergence of poly-Yahwism – the variety of Yahwism from one temple to another.

This perspective, of course, creates confusion to the Chronicle's claim about the centralization of Yahwism theology – that priests have always been centered on one temple – Jerusalem during the monarchy – along with the unique recognition that Yahweh was also present in other sanctuaries (2 Chr. 1; 33:13).²⁸ Furthermore, according to the Chronicles, Yahwistic diversity was part of the “dispersion” that occurred as a result of exile, in which Chronicles requested the release of Israel from Yahweh. Whether this book is trying to present an explanation or precisely make polemic against all current circumstances that appear is not certain. What is certain is that the existence of the Yahweh temple or Yahweh's religious diversity in the Persian and Hellenistic eras has been a problem for The Chronicle – in the context of the Jerusalem temple.

This re-emergence of poly-Yahwism in the Persian and Hellenistic era in my argumentation had strong roots in Israel – long before the nation entered the monarchy. Poly-Yahwism has existed since it emerged or introduced itself to Israel. Yahweh is said to have come from Sinai, rising and shining from Seir and Paran (Deut. 33:2) – even some Late Bronze Age texts from Egypt link Yahweh with Sasu, which have been assumed to be a people living in the approximate area south of Judah.²⁹ Judges 5:4-5, describe Yahweh galloping from Seir and Edom.³⁰ Habakkuk 3:3 illustrated the Lord came from Teman, from his holy mountain Paran.

²⁶ Andre Lemaire, “New Aramaic Ostraca from Idumea and Their Historical Interpretation,” in *Judah and Judeans*, (Wynona Lake: 2006), 416-417.

²⁷ Peter Altmann, *Economic in Persian-Period Biblical texts*. (Tubingen: Mohr Siebek, 2016), 301-302.

²⁸ Peter Altmann, *Economic in Persian-Period Biblical texts*; Lemaire, “New Aramaic Ostraca, 416-417

²⁹ De Gruyter, *The Origins of Yahwism*, (Boston: CPI books GmbH, Leck, 2017), 269.

³⁰ Charles L. Echoels, “Tell Me, O House”: *The Song of Deborah*. (New York, London: T. & T Clark, 2008), 12, 64.

Kuntillet Ajrud Inscription, clearly states Yahweh came from Shomron (Samaria?).³¹ Yahweh, whose texts above come from the southern Palestinian territories (Sinai and Edom), became Israelites unique god – not owned by the Canaanites. The goal that I want to achieve is “Yahweh diversity” in Israel is an inevitability. Yahweh is ‘probably’ just one, basically having many nicknames and names – living in different geographically – as well as different periods. The geographical differences and different periods present in Yahweh’s worship certainly gave rise to different interpretations of Yahweh – especially in the religious system of Israel itself and how such context is an important background for understanding the major ways Yahwism developed throughout Israelite tradition.³²

Noticing the argument above, we can ultimately give Aaron’s consent interpreting Yahweh in the form of the Golden Calf – also Jeroboam, regardless of the law ‘not to make the image and likeness of God, that appears in the construction of Decalog interpretation. Yahweh to Jeroboam and Aaron – also to Israel, who built many Yahweh holy sites in the Persian and Hellenistic eras, could not be confined in a Jerusalem cage. Yahweh was present wherever the people wanted to make the temple and wanted to worship it.

Jeroboam’s first motivation was to revolutionize the house of David based on “injustice” that Rehoboam had from Solomon. Behind the cum laude praise given to Solomon, injustice and the error of using power are also present at the same time. The Northern tribes -- which had supported the David dynasty, became a land of tax breaks and work that led to Israel’s sense and determination of independence. With the support of the Egyptian people and king, Jeroboam managed to secede from Judah – even gaining legitimacy through God’s prophecy – that this had to happen and by the permission of Yahweh.

The consequences of this separation are of course many; one of them Israel would be ‘reluctant to make a pilgrimage to the Jerusalem temple, such as held festivals to Yahweh there. The thought and selection of a new shrine is a must. Bethel and Dan, are prime candidates to maintain the Yahwistic tradition of Israel that has been entrenched since the Exodus. Yahweh must be present in the midst of Israel. The absence of the ark of the covenant of God, replaced by the golden ox – which was seen as of similar value to the ark in the temple of Jerusalem. Yahweh

³¹ Judith M. Hadley, *Yahweh's Asherah in Light of Recent Discoveries*. Dissertation. (England: University of Cambridge, 1989), 160.

³² Shawn W. Flynn, *A Story of YHWH: Cultural Translation and Subversive Reception in Israelite History*. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 48.

remained the deity of Israel. Theological methods and approaches inevitably undergo changes and differences, but the essence of the liturgy remained unchanged.

From those perspectives, the curses of the prophets of Judah became irrelevant. Their renunciation wrapped in the cloth of Deuteronomist ideology may have to be read from a different angle - the angle at which Jerusalem gets its political, religious, and economic rivals. Yahweh's prophets, such as Elijah, Elisha, and the reformer Jehu, never once criticized the practice of worship at Bethel and Dan, by the reason that they understood, Jeroboam had succeeded in continuing the patriarchal tradition that made Bethel and Dan the place where they met or found God - which was followed by creating a memorial as a consequence of the bond of promise that would be fulfilled and obedience to be shown. Quoting from Cross's, Jeroboam's only mistake or sin was to make Jerusalem's temple a competitor.

Conclusion

First Kings 12:25-33 narratives which tells of the establishment of the temple at Bethel and Dan to defend the worship of Yahweh, is an echo of the narrative of Exodus 32 concerning Aaron who erected the golden ox as a form of God's presence among the restless people of Israel at that time. However, these two narratives are often treated discriminatorily with the label of worship of other god other than Yahweh; primarily from the writers of Judah (Jerusalem).

Despite the negative and discriminatory statements from Moses in Exodus 32, as well as the theological condemnation of the Deuteronomist writer who used the pages of Judah and Jerusalem as shields of condemnation against Jeroboam when erecting the bull in Bethel and in Dan, we find that what Jeroboam and Aaron did never proved they were enemy of Yahwism. On the contrary, Aaron and Jeroboam exposed themselves as Yahwism loyalists by establishing what they believed to be evidence of their God's coming on the earth. Especially in the phrase 'o Israel, this is the Lord (Yahweh) who brought you out of Egypt...' very powerfully gives theological legitimacy of what Jeroboam did legitimately in God's eyes.

The criticism came more than the efforts of the Deuteronomist to re-interpret and rhetorical condemnation for their failure to maintain the status quo of the Temple at Jerusalem as the only place God was present in the tribes of the son of David. In addition, the establishment of rival temples at Bethel and in Dan, politically weakened the position of Judah (having lost the support of 10 Northern tribes) in an effort to defend their territory from the

surrounding nations that always aggressively attacked. Another question that arises from the establishment of a rival temple in Israel is the 'economic instability of Judah; especially Jerusalem, because of the loss of Yahweh worshippers who came to Jerusalem carrying the sacrificial sheaf, as well as distributing capital in the city during their presence.

In the end, despite his disobedience to violates the law of the central sanctuary (which was clearly stated by Deuteronomist), we found Jeroboam never removed Yahweh from the order of worship or liturgy of Israel. Yahweh remains their God. The establishment of a new place of worship in Bethel was an attempt by Jeroboam to limit the movement of Israel towards Judah, as well as protect them as a result of the reformation he did when separating the 10 Northern tribes with Judah. God at Bethel and Dan was a cultic innovation from Jeroboam to the Israelites without abandoning the essence of Israel's Yahwism. As Van Winkle wrote, "Jeroboam's cultic innovations frame the story of the man of God from Judah as predecessor for establishing the festival day on the 15th day of the 8th month, appointed non Levitical priests at high place (then followed by David appointed Zadoc as a high priest), and finally a king who maintained *bamoth* as places to meet god.

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