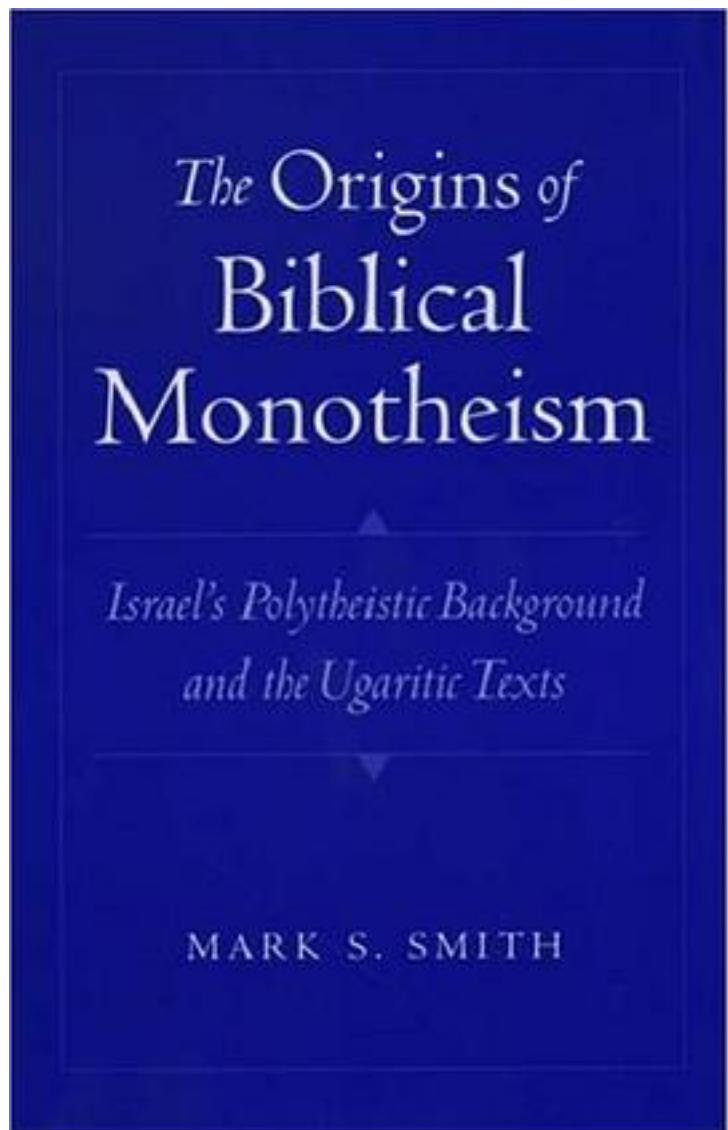


The Origins of Biblical Monotheism



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As the bible tells us, ancient Israel's neighbours worshipped a wide variety of gods. It is now widely accepted that the Israelites' God, Yahweh, must have originated as one among these many, before assuming the role of the one true God of monotheism. Mark Smith here seeks to discover more precisely what was meant by "divinity" in the ancient near-East, and how these concepts apply to Yahweh. Part One of the book offers a detailed examination of the deities of ancient Ugarit, known to us from the largest surviving group of relevant extra-biblical texts. In Part Two, Smith looks closely at four classic problems associated with four Ugaritic deities, and considers how they affect our understanding of Yahweh. At the end of the book he returns to the question of Israelite monotheism, seeking to discover what religious issues it addressed and why it made sense at the time of its emergence. He argues that within the Bible, monotheism is not a separate "stage" of religion but rather represents a kind of rhetoric reinforcing Israel's exclusive relation with its deity.

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