The book (bound in two volumes; 1:1–771, from the beginnings to 587 B.C.E.; 2:i–ix, 772–1384) is overwhelming by its monumental size as well as the unparalleled erudition and dedication that went into it—and it represents only half of the volume that was initially intended. The other half, volume 4.2 by Max Küchler, on the archaeology and the surviving monuments of Jerusalem, and of equal size and impact, was published in 2006 (see http://bookreviews.org/pdf/5620_5936.pdf). The series Orte und Landschaften der Bibel (Biblical Sites and Regions) was conceived by Keel and Küchler in 1969 (11). Volume 1, the introduction to the Holy Land (and to the series), was published in 1984, volume 2 on the southern part of the country two years before, in 1982. Volume 4 on Jerusalem is now complete (in two parts and four volumes), while volumes 3 (the north) and 5 (Transjordan) are still in preparation.

The series was conceived as a set of handbooks for the educated pilgrim. The present volume is much more, a result of twenty-two years of research by a leading scholar into two topics that are presently hotly debated and will, for a number of reasons, most likely remain controversial for some time to come: the pre-Roman history of Jerusalem; and the origins and early history of biblical monotheism.
The work is still stuck with some egg shells from the pilgrim’s-guide stage. It tries to be both exhaustive and concise, but the scholarly literature is referenced in a summary and elliptic way that might make it difficult for some readers to trace it (or to get it by long-distance loan), and there is neither a general bibliography nor an index of authors (there are indices of subjects [1317–37] and of scriptural references [1338–55]). This feature, together with the fact that all this marvelous scholarship is presented in a “cruel and unusual” language (Keel’s personal variety of which is, however, both elegant and readable) might result in a somewhat diminished impact on the scientific debate, compared to the attention that Keel’s hypotheses and theories would deserve, and the mere amount of labor, time, erudition, and intelligence that went into the book. In addition, there is a pilgrim’s tendency to re-create the past real world as closely in the image and likeness of the biblical narrative as possible—or simply to believe everything that can possibly be believed, which is hardly compatible with a program of “objective knowledge of the past” that accepts that only measured and counted data counts and that narratives as well as pictures create reality rather than record it.

The book is two books in one. The book on the origins of monotheism ends with a summary (1270–82). According to Keel, (a) the pantheon of pre-Davidic Jerusalem consisted of its head, the sun-god, as well as a weather-god and a goddess. (b) The sun-god had an open-air sanctuary where the Dome of the Rock now rises; Solomon built a temple on the very spot for the sun god and introduced the Judean tribal deity YHWH (of the weather-god type) as another minor deity—or a replacement of Baal-Hadad? (c) YHWH and the sun-god amalgamated; Keel leaves the “when” and “how” open but assumes that the process was accomplished by the end of the eighth century. (d) Between Isaiah and Jeremiah, “universal monotheism” was conceived: YHWH, the patron deity of Judah, became the Lord of the Universe. (e) At the same time, “particular monotheism” emerged, which culminated in Deuteronomy and the “Josianic reform”—and the politics that led to the destruction of the state and the temple: because YHWH is the only “true god,” his people are the only “true people,” their success is guaranteed. (f) In the following history of Israel/Samaria and Judah and in the Hebrew Bible, one can observe the ongoing conflict between “particular” and “universal” monotheism.

In this construct, (a), (b), and (f) are not controversial among continental European scholars except in minor details. Those who find an active and distinct sun god in Pss 72 (probably Josianic) and 89 (525–450 B.C.E.? will object to Keel’s dating of the merger of YHWH and the sun (c). Even more problematic is (d). The endeavor starts with a misnomer: universal monotheism, insofar as it can be found in texts from the seventh century, is nothing else but YHWH’s rise to the position of supreme deity. Now YHWH occupies the position previously held by Ashur and Re, none of whom was—or is—conceived as a “mono-god” by many. It is quite true that this “YHWH-supremism” is
quite another thing than Akhenaton’s sun-monotheism (1275), but it is still less than the
“implicit monotheism” as formulated for the first time, as far as I see, at the end of the
second millennium B.C.E. in Egypt: “All gods are three: he who hides his name as Amun,
he is Re in his face, his body is Ptah.” Implicit monotheism denotes the assumption that
all gods are various incarnations, reflections, parts, or emanations of the One. Assumption
(e) is severely misleading. YHWH-supremism might have been first conceived in the
circles of Manasseh’s more or less loyal opposition; it became official theology under
Josiah and was indeed a re-creation of YHWH in the image and likeness of Ashur (1276–
77). This and nothing more might have happened under Josiah. Explicit monotheism,
that is, the assumption that all gods are false gods with the sole exception of our God, had
to wait for the “restoration” of Jerusalem around 525–445. At the beginning of the
restoration period, Jerusalem was a small fortress at the southern border of Benjamin;
Mizpah was the provincial capital, Bethel the provincial temple. Ezekiel 33:25; Jer 41:64;
48:13; Zech 7:2; and the evidence from Elephantine deny all historicity to the biblical
claim that the sanctuary of Bethel was already destroyed by Josiah. When it was indeed
destroyed, somewhere in the course of the first half of the fifth century, the Samarians
replaced Bethel immediately by the temple on Mount Gerizim. It is within the context of
the early restoration years that the transformation of monotheism from a philosophical
concept (known for a long time to the sages throughout the ancient Near East) into a
practiced religion makes sense, together with its denunciation of preexilic Israelite and
Judean religion, still practiced at Bethel and Elephantine, as “Canaanite paganism.”
Further, the differentiation between truth and reality, operational as it is in the distinction
of gods and a true God, presuppose most probably the mind’s acculturation to a
monetarian economy in which every thing has a value measured and attributed different
from its inherent (natural) virtues (e.g., to feed, warm, or protect). So, monotheism might
have indeed originated in Jerusalem (or, previously or simultaneously, in the Babylonian

2. See L. K. Handy, “Historical Probability and the Narrative of Josiah’s Reform in 2 Kings,” in The Pitcher
Is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström (ed. D. Edelman et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic
Press, 1995), 252–75; idem, “Josiah in a New light: Assyriology Touches the Reforming King,” in
Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible (ed. Steven W. Holloway; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 415–35.
3. See J. Blenkinsopp, “Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period,” in Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-
Babylonian Period (ed. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 93–107; E.
A. Knauf, “Bethel: The Israelite Impact on Judean Language and Literature,” in Judah and the Judeans in the
4. See J. Blenkinsopp, “The Judaean Priesthood during the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Periods: A
Judeans, 247–64
support group of the settlers of the Persian period), but in a different way from the one Keel proposes, who is a victim of the widespread but naïve assumption that the Prophets\(^6\) (Joshua–Kings) can be read as history in the same way as Gibbons, Ranke, or Braudel. They cannot, being ideological constructs of the Persian period, which contain bits and pieces of source material and (pertinent) memory; these fragments are reorganized in a manner radically different from the time of the Israelite and Judean monarchies or even the exilic period.\(^7\) The present reader of Jer 41:4–6 is made to believe that these Manassites and Ephraimites are heading for the (destroyed) Jerusalem temple; it takes a geographically observant reader, one-well informed on the religious history of Israel/Samaria, to note that the only temple these men could have wanted to visit was the temple of Bethel. The biography of Jeremiah, regardless of how much factual information it might contain, is Persian period hagiography, preaching a Persian period theology that did not yet exist in the seventh century.\(^8\)

The other book within the book, the one on history of Jerusalem, does not have a summary because such a synthesis is simply impossible for the time being. Keel gives detailed comments on the biblical texts that refer to the city, many other biblical texts, and some nonbiblical material (for which there is no index). All these should appeal to students of the Bible, notably for the iconographic material that is brought to elucidate them. But all this is just “prolegomena to a history of Jerusalem,” not history that, at least for me, is a social science that needs hard data, that is, data with—probabilistic and within the range of a reasonable confidence level undisputable—4D-ordinates. The history of Jerusalem’s civic development, demography, and economy will be written by archaeology someday. For now, there are more open questions than final answers. Today we do not know whether the transition between the LB and the Iron Age is closer to 1150 or 1125 and the transition between Iron I and IIA closer to 975, 950, 925, 900, or 875 (all these dates have their champions in the present discussion). What we know for sure, however, is that the dates 1200 and 1000 are meaningless. In addition, evidence comes in faster than the printing press can follow. Between receiving the book and writing this review, for example, two pieces of evidence dropped on my desk that support two minority opinions (both rejected by Keel as by nearly everyone else). The fill under the so-called

---

6. As far as “historical books” are concerned, the Hebrew Bible offers only Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles. The reframing of (Torah and the) Former Prophets in the Hellenistic/Christian Bible was a very productive but severe misinterpretation that should no longer bother students of the Hebrew Bible.


8. See commentaries as different as R. P. Carroll (OTL) and Georg Fischer (HTKAT).
Davidic Palace on top of the stepped structure is a mix of MB, LB, and Iron I debris. There is no environment known on the spur below the “palace” that could have produced it; in addition, fill is usually transported downslope rather than upslope. Ergo, the theory that Jerusalem in the LB and Iron I periods occupied the terrain of the present haram need not yet be abandoned. As for the Siloam channel, the prechannel “pool” was transformed into domestic architecture as soon as it was rendered obsolete by the new (and present) Siloam pool. Ergo, the starting point of the channel lay well within the (Manassite) lower city wall when work commenced, which had nothing to do with Hezekiah and the Assyrians.

The book is two books in one, and this is a problem. Keel’s proposal concerning the Jerusalemite origin of monotheism deserves careful consideration and discussion; should the scholarly community’s verdict come out, finally, against it, what would remain to link the “two books in one”? Is a very specific hypothesis sufficient to correlate two completely different histories: the history of a specific place with exact coordinates, and the history of a topic in the philosophy of religion that starts well before the Bible (in late second-millennium B.C.E. Egypt, to be precise), developed in Persia and Greece during the sixth–fourth centuries alongside the production of biblical literature, and leads well beyond the limits of the canon. A careful reading of the Tanak reveals a strong monotheistic tendency (notably in Deut 4 and Deutero-Isaiah) that is, however, far from being implemented without exception (and luckily so, for it shows how deep-rooted prebiblical Israelite and Judean polytheism was). If there were no other gods, their veneration need not be forbidden (as it is in the Decalogue), nor could one ask: “Who is like you among the gods?” (Exod 15:11). What about Christianity, a religion regarded as monotheistic by nearly all of its adherents but not by most Jews or many Muslims? A history of the origins of monotheism could make an intriguing project, but it should not stop before it tackles rabbinic Judaism and (at least early) Islam. Nor is Pompey’s visit to Jerusalem a point where the history of the city could stop: in the architecture, economy, and social life of the city, nothing of importance changed in 63 B.C.E. (it is just the year where the Old

11. The latter two groups would probably not agree with—or simply understand—Keel’s statement (1281): “Der strenge, bildlose jüdische Monotheismus … wurde durch den als Mensch erschienenen Christus und die Vorstellung zu dem in der Dreifaltigkeit der Personen zum in sich geselligen Einen gemildert.” The following section on Islam (§1843) is much too brief (fourteen lines).
Testament scholar ceases to regard further the history of Israel and hands the task over to his or her New Testament colleague). There are several caesurae in Jerusalem’s past—from within the scope of the book, 586 B.C.E. or 70 C.E.—but not 63 B.C.E. Rulers are of little import, as are prophets (unless they are created as heroes of books that were received into the literary heritage of the world). What really counts for most people are questions such as: How do I earn my breakfast? my rent? How can I convince my beloved to marry me? How do I feed my family? pay my taxes? bury my dead? And remain, in all of this, a more or less decent person? It is the answer to these questions, asked thousands of times, that constitutes the history of Jerusalem—and its present.

As the quotation in note 11 above illustrates, Keel intertwined a third book with the two just reviewed: a Christian theology of Jerusalem and monotheism, for a Christian audience. I can only express my great respect and full sympathy for what he has achieved in this field and wish this book of the three many readers— which stays, nevertheless, outside the scope of this review, because the personal religious attitudes of author and reviewer would necessarily become involved, which are of little significance to at least a part of the audience here addressed.