KAREL VAN DER TOORN

God in Context

Forschungen
zum Alten Testament
123

Mohr Siebeck

Forschungen zum Alten Testament

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God in Context

Selected Essays on Society and Religion in the Early Middle East

Mohr Siebeck

Karel van der Toorn, born 1956; 1985–98 professor of ancient religions in the Universities of Utrecht and Leiden; 1998–2004 dean of the faculty of humanities at the University of Amsterdam; 2006–11 president of the University; currently faculty professor of religion and society at the University of Amsterdam.

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Preface

One of my teachers took his life's motto from a saying of Jesus preserved only in the Gospel of Matthew. "Every scribe who has become a disciple for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matt 13:52). If a scribe is a scholar, this holds good for me. What is new and what is old – this book, too, contains both new and old. The old, though, is not so old. And the new, in the end, is not so new. Reading yourself in an attempt to decide what is worth preserving and what is rubbish is like looking into the mirror. One of the things you discover is that you have not changed all that much. Marcel Proust wrote that novelists were each the author of just one book, even if they had many publications to their name. The present selection of essays is the one book I have written. It is about God – God in context, as the title says. Those words reflect the fascination I once felt for someone way above me – sort of a super father. And they echo my increasing interest in the people that invented that god as well as the many other gods they believed in.

In a way, I started as a theologian and turned into an anthropologist with an unusual interest in the past. To me, religion is like poetry, but somehow less elitist and more real, full of charm and danger. I love the beauty of ritual and fear the constriction of routine. I love the power of fantasy and fear the belief in beliefs. I love the devotion to someone other and fear the loss of self. I love the belief in ultimate values and fear the surrender of rationality. I am, in a word, ambivalent about religion. It is a power for good and for bad. It is, at bottom, a very human thing. In my mind, religion is not about gods but about the men and women that invented them and by their belief and rituals kept them alive. These people make up the other world I like to visit in order to see my own world in a different light. Looking back, this is perhaps the greatest reward to be derived from the study of history, religion, and the history of religion. They are neither an escape from, nor a legitimation of, the present. We may look at the past as at something we have left behind, but it looks back at us and questions our view of the world. In a somewhat similar fashion, religion is a mirror too. We do things our way, but history and religion remind us we may be blind to the essence.

Most of the essays in this volume have appeared in print before. In a way they are the footprints of my research ventures over the years. The book's division in three parts reflects what turned out to be my main interests: Religion and Society in Early Israel – Scribal Culture – Deities and Demons. By and large, I have not

made significant changes in the studies here assembled. There was no point in rewriting what I had written. Yet none of the chapters is completely identical with the original publication. I have made stylistic adaptations, updated references, and corrected mistakes. Nevertheless, these essays remain close to the original publications – so close, in fact, that I have added in the text, in square brackets, a reference to the page numbering in the original publication. The reader should be aware, though, that there is no instance of a one-to-one correspondence between previous publication and the studies here presented.

As always, there are people to thank. If it had not been for my friend and colleague Mark S. Smith, this volume would not have seen the day. I owe him an immense debt of gratitude. Thanks also to David Vonk for his help in preparing the manuscript and to Jip Zinsmeister for her advice about various topographical issues.

Amsterdam, March 8, 2018 Karel van der Toorn

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Part Three
Deities and Demons

Abbreviations

A	tablets in the collections of the Aleppo Museum
AAA	*Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology*
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AB	Anchor Bible
AbB	*Altbabaylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung*. Edited by F. R. Kraus et al. Leiden, 1964–
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
ABL	R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters*
AbrN	*Abr-Nahrain*
ÄgAbh	Ägyptologische Abhandlungen
AEM	Archives épistolaires de Mari
AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*
AfOB	Archiv für Orientforschung: Beiheft
AHw	*Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*. W. von Soden. 3 vols. Wiesbaden, 1965–1981
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature*
ALASP	Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palästinas
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
AnSt	*Anatolian Studies*
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AoF	*Altorientalische Forschungen*
AOS	American Oriental Series
ARM	Archives royales de Mari
ArOr	*Archiv Orientální*
AS	Assyriological Studies
ASJ	*Acta Sumerologica* (Japan)
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
Atiqot	*^{c}Atiqot*
Aug	*Augustinianum*
AuOr	*Aula Orientalis*
AuOrSup	Aula Orientalis Supplements
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BaghM	*Baghdader Mitteilungen*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*

BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge
Ber	*Berytus*
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, Stuttgart, 1983
Bib	*Biblica*
BibB	Biblische Beiträge
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BIN	*Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of James B. Nies*
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament. Edited by M. Noth and H. W. Wolff
BLMJ	Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem
BM	British Museum
BO	*Bibliotheca Orientalis*
BRL	Biblisches Reallexikon. 2d ed. Edited by K. Galling. HAT 1/1. Tübingen, 1977
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BT	*The Bible Translator*
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BWL	*Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. W. G. Lambert. Oxford, 1960
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago,* 1956–2010
CahRB	Cahiers de la Revue Biblique
CANE	*Civilizations of the Ancient Near East.* Edited by J. Sasson. 4 vols. New York, 1995
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CIL	*Corpus inscriptionum latinarum*
CIS	*Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum*
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
COS	*The Context of Scripture*. Edited by W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997–2002
CT	*Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*
DBSup	*Dictionnaire de la Bible: Supplément*. Edited by L. Pirot and A. Robert. Paris 1928–
DDD	*Dictionary of Deities and Deities in the Bible*. 2d revised ed. Edited by K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst. Leiden, 1999
DNWSI	*Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*. J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling. 2 vols. Leiden, 1995
DUL	*A Dictionary of he Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*. 3d revised ed. G. del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín. Leiden, 2015
EA	El-Amarna tablets. According to the edition of J. A. Knudtzon, *Die el-Amarna-Tafeln*. Leipzig, 1908–1915. Reprint Allen, 1964.

	Continued in A. F. Rainey, *El-Amarna Tablets, 359–379.* 2d revised ed. Kevelaer, 1978
Emar	*Recherches au pays d'Aštata, Emar VI.1–4*. D. Arnaud. Paris, 1985–1987
EPRO	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain
ERC	Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations
ErIsr	*Eretz-Israel*
FAOS	Freiburger Altorientalische Studien
FLP	tablets in the collections of the Free Library of Pennsylvania
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HAL	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. *Hebräisches and aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*. Fascicles 1–5. Leiden, 1967–1995
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HKL	*Handbuch der Keilschriftliteratur*. R. Borger. 3 vols. Berlin, 1967–1975
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HR	*History of Religions*
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
IB	*Interpreter's Bible.* Edited by G. A. Buttrick et al. 12 vols. New York, 1951–1957
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDBSup	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume.* Edited by K. Crim. Nashville, 1976
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
IM	tablets in the collections of the Iraq Museum, Baghdad
JANESCU	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JEN	Joint Expedition with the Iraq Museum at Nuzi
JEOL	*Jaarbericht van het vooraziatisch-egyptisch gezelschap (genootschap) Ex Oriente Lux*
JESHO	*Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JPOS	*Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
K.	tablets in the Kouyunjik collection of the British Museum
KAI	*Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. H. Donner and W. Röllig. 2d ed. Wiesbaden, 1966–1969

KAR	*Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts*. Edited by E. Ebeling. Leipzig, 1919–1923
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
KlPauly	*Der Kleine Pauly*
KTU	*The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts*. Second enlarged edition. Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster, 1995
KUB	*Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi*
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSS	Leipziger semitische Studien
MAOG	*Mitteilungen der Altorientalischen Gesellschaft*
MARI	*Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires*
MDOG	*Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft*
MIOF	*Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung*
MSL	*Materialen zum sumerischen Lexikon*. Benno Landsberger, ed.
MT	Masoretic Text
MUSJ	*Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*
MVAG	Miteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-ägyptischen Gesellschaft. Vols. 1–44. 1896–1939
N.	tablets in the collections of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
NABU	*Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires*
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NEAEHL	*The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. Edited by E. Stern; 4 vols. Jerusalem, 1993
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NTT	*Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift*
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OLZ	*Orientalische Literaturzeitung*
Or	*Orientalia*
OrAnt	*Oriens antiquus*
OTL	Old Testament Library
PAPS	*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*
PBS	Publications of the Babylonian Section, University Museum, University of Pennsylvania
PEFQS	Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement
PSBA	*Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*
Qad	*Qadmoniot*
RA	*Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
RAI	Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
RHA	*Revue hittite et asianique*
RHPR	*Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*
RHR	*Revue d'histoire des religions*
RS	tablets from Ras Shamra, Ugarit
RSO	*Rivista degli studi orientali*
RSV	Revised Standard Version

SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature, Dissertation Series
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature, Symposium Series
SEL	*Studi epigrafici e linguistici*
Sem	*Semitica*
SH(C)ANE	Studies in the History (and Culture) of the Ancient Near East
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions (supplement to *Numen*)
Sm	Tablets in the collections of the British Museum
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
StPB	Studia post-biblica
StudOr	Studia Orientalia
Sumer	*Sumer: A Journal of Archaeology and History in Iraq*
TA	*Tel Aviv*
TAD	*Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*. 4 vols. Edited by B. Porten and A. Yardeni. Jerusalem, 1986–1999
TCL	Textes cunéiformes. Musée du Louvre
THAT	*Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. 2 vols. Stuttgart, 1971–1976
TLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
TQ	*Theologische Quartalschrift*
TRu	*Theologische Rundschau*
TUAT	*Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments.* Edited by O. Kaiser et al. Gütersloh, 1984–2001
TUAT NF	*Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments, Neue Folge.* Edited by B. Janowski et al. Gütersloh, 2004–
TWAT	*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Stuttgart, 1970–1995
TWNT	*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament.* Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Stuttgart, 1932–1979
UBL	Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
UrET	Ur Excavations: Texts
VAB	Vorderasiatische Bibliothek
VAS	Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler
VAT	tablets in the collections of the Staatliche Museen, Berlin
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
W.	field numbers of tablets excavated at Warka
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	World Bible Commentary
WD	*Wort und Dienst*
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WO	*Die Welt des Orients*
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
WZKM	*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*
YBC	Tablets in the Babylonian Collection, Yale University Library
YOS	Yale Oriental Series, Texts
YOSR	Yale Oriental Series, Researches
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie*
ZAW	*Zeitschrit für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

Part One
Religion and Society in Early Israel

1. Trends in the Study of Israelite Religion

Considering the nature of its subject, it is unlikely that the study of religion, whether pursued from a historical or a comparative perspective, will ever become the model of dispassionate scholarly inquiry. Those involved in it have always, in one way or another, a personal stake in the matter. That is why studies of religion are not merely windows on the subject under scrutiny; they also mirror the views and fascinations of the researcher and his or her society.

What holds good for all religious studies, is emphatically true of the study of Israelite religion. Since both Judaism and Christianity claim to be the heirs of the Israelite religion, the latter is often classified as a period in the history of living religions. Its position is perceived as fundamentally different from that of, say, Babylonian religion, which no living religion claims as its ancestor. Whereas the study of other ancient Near Eastern religions takes place predominantly in the Faculty of Arts, the history of ancient Israelite religion is usually the territory of the Faculty of Theology. It is, in the wider sense of the term, a theological discipline. The fact that it flourishes almost exclusively in places with a strong Jewish community or a predominantly Christian (and more especially Protestant) culture – Europe, North America, Israel, and South Africa – gives fuel to the idea that the study of Israelite religion serves the ideological interests of people for whom the Jewish, or the Christian, tradition has personal relevance. In this respect, the history of Israelite religion resembles Church History. Both disciplines, Israelite religion and Church History, frequently fulfil ideological functions. They produce the past that is called upon to explain and to legitimize current views and practices in Judaism and Christianity.

The history of Israelite religion is a field of study, therefore, that is by nature sensitive to changing ideological needs, styles and fashions. To an outsider, it is somewhat surprising that a subject for which the main sources of information have been the same for many centuries [224] is nonetheless the theater of ever new constructions of the past. It suffices to look at the surveys of recent research, published every ten to twenty years by the British Society for Old Testament Study, to realize the changes through which the history of Israelite religion has gone in the past century.[1] In their forewords, the editiors of these surveys do not

[1] See *The People and the Book* (ed. Arthur S. Peake; Oxford: Clarendon, 1925); *Record and Revelation* (ed. H. Wheeler Robinson; Oxford: Clarendon, 1938), esp. 187–302; *The Old*

fail to point out the new data that have become available only recently. They are right. It cannot be denied that the increase in information on Israelite religion has been substantial. The discoveries of ancient Ugarit (Ras Shamra, 1929), Mari (Tell Hariri, 1933), Ebla (Tell Mardikh, 1964), and Emar (Tell Meskene, 1972) have provided a wealth of data on the historical-religious milieu of Israelite religion. Epigraphic material from Khirbet el-Qom and Kuntillet ᶜAjrud, to mention only two of the more spectacular finds of the last thirty years, has given us an insight into Israelite religion unaffected by the bias of the Bible. Yet for all its importance, the new evidence is not commensurate to the shifting modes in the history of Israelite religion. The reason for the series of transformations in the perception of Israelite religion lies at a deeper level. It springs from the fascinations and preoccupations of contemporary scholars and their audience. Israelite religion caters to the need for a historical model that suits the concerns of the consumers of that model. When these concerns change, the model changes too.

Let us try to substantiate this thesis by discussing four foci of interest in the history of Israelite religion since the 1960s. When we look at the development of the history of Israelite religion from about 1870 onward – not a random point in time, but the moment around which the History of Religions gained official recognition as an academic discipline in Europe – we can distinguish three periods. The first runs from 1870 to 1920. It was a time of optimism in which the history of the religions of humankind was treated as the history of God's progressive revelation, culminating in the teachings of Christianity, the end of all religion. Israelite religion, from this point of view, was an important step towards this dénouement. The second period, ranging from about 1920 to 1960, had lost the naive confidence in the notion of progress. History was no longer regarded as the theater of God's revelation, nor was the [225] history of religion. Under the influence of the so-called dialectical theology (also known as the Neo-Orthodoxy, inspired by Karl Barth), pride of place was given to biblical theology. Israelite religion was deemed almost irrelevant. However, from the 1960s onward, the third period, there has been a reversal of fortune, promoting a sense that we should go back to history – not history as it should have been (which is what biblical theology stood for) but history as it really was. Champions of the new history of Israelite religion put particular emphasis on the neglected sides of that history: popular religion, the role of women and goddesses, and the like.

This periodization of the study of Israelite religion in three parts calls for some further comment. Looking at the histories of Israelite religion in the first period, one is struck by the evolutionary perspective most authors adopt. Isra-

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Testament and Modern Study (ed. Harold Henry Rowley; Oxford: Clarendon, 1951); *Tradition and Interpretation: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study* (ed. George W. Anderson; Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), esp. 351–384; *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives. Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study* (ed. Ronald Ernest Clements; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

elite religion is really a stage in a process. Rudolf Smend, in his very influential textbook on Israelite religion, distinguishes three phases in Israelite religion: the religion of the beginnings, the religion of the prophets, and lastly the religion of the postexilic era, which is the religion of the Jews.[2] This analysis has an overt Christian bias. The rise of Judaism in the postexilic period is regarded as a sign of decline, a compromise between the pure religion of the prophets and popular superstition. The postexilic decline leads to Judaism, whereas the prophetic legacy has prepared the way for Christianity. The combined influence of the philosophy of Hegel, the mood of optimism feeding on the myth of progress, and a matter-of-course sense of Christian superiority produced histories of Israelite religion that were in reality thinly veiled apologies of the Christian faith. The history of Israelite religion, thus construed, gave Judaism and Christianity their raison d'être, Judaism being the heir to the post-prophetic and legalist religion of Ezra, while Christianity preserved the spirit of the noble prophets, the champions of monotheism and morality.

The Great War and the Great Depression broke the mood of optimism. The philosophy of Nietzsche was more congenial to the spirit of the times than that of Hegel. History was no longer an open book from which God's intentions could be read. Many theologians saw no other way of salvaging the Christian religion than to separate the history studied by historians (German *Historie*) from the history of salvation (or *Heilsgeschichte*, as it was often referred to). Following in [226] the footsteps of Karl Barth, they argued that all human religion was by nature idolatrous. True worship of God was not a human invention. It had to be revealed by God himself, "senkrecht von Oben," directly from above. As a matter of consequence, the history of Israelite religion had only limited relevance for Christians. As a religion, it was just as tainted as any other. God's revelation was not in Israel's religion, but in a series of specific events in its history, known to us only indirectly by their echo in the Bible. What Christians needed, therefore, was a biblical theology that would recapture the essence of God's revelation. If Israelite religion was of little importance to Christians, other Near Eastern religions were completely devoid of interest. The only purpose they might serve was to be the dark foil against which God's revelation stood out. A characteristic monograph of this second period is called *The Old Testament Against its Environment* – a title that is significant in more than one respect.[3]

Since the study of Israelite religion was a predominantly theological discipline, the heyday of the Biblical Theology movement produced hardly any histories of Israelite religion. The few books that were presented as such were often, in fact, theologies of the Hebrew Bible. Modern textbooks on Israelite

[2] See Rudolf Smend, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1893; 2d ed. 1899).

[3] See G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament Against its Evironment* (London: SCM, 1950).

religion duly deplore the lack of serious research into the history of Israelite religion until the 1960s. In retrospect, however, we have to admit that the separation of Religionsgeschichte and Heilsgeschichte was a beneficial corrective to the older period. For such men as Smend, there was little difference between the historian of religion and the theologian. By restricting God's revelation to the Heilsgeschichte, the theologians of the second period left the study of religion to the secular historian. They thus opened the way – unintentionally perhaps – for a history of Israelite religion that would be free from theology.

Freedom from theology is not the same as freedom from ideology, however. Indeed, it would be a serious misrepresentation of the facts to imply that the modern study of Israelite religion, starting around 1960, has reached the stage of perfect objectivity. Contemporary generations of historians of Israelite religion also have their agenda. Though their motives can be quite different from one another, there is a common concern that inspires the work of many of these scholars. One might call it the desire to discover the historical reality underneath the crust of what has been presented as biblical [227] theology. The current history of Israelite religion dismisses the theological constructions of the past as unreal and heavily biased. Its practitioners are especially eager to salvage those aspects and elements of Israelite religion that have suffered neglect, or even denial, by earlier scholars. It is, at core, a counter narrative.

This characterisation of the current study of Israelite religion can be substantiated by the analysis of four themes that are prominently present in the debate on the historical reality of Israelite religion. These themes, or foci of interest, are (1) family religion; (2) the cult of the goddess; (3) religious iconography and the rise of aniconism; and (4) the continuity between Israelite and Canaanite religion. The rest of this survey will be dedicated to a discussion of the developments and trends in these four areas.

Family Religion

The last twenty years have seen a growing awareness of the fact that many textbooks on Israelite religion fail to do justice to their subject because they tend to narrow their focus to one strand of religion only, viz. the official religion as constructed by the later orthodoxy. Yet there is, in Israelite religion as in nearly every historical religion, an internal pluralism – pluralism because the diversity is often tacitly condoned by most of the participants in that religious system.[4] It is thus possible to speak of "domestic religion," "city religion," "royal religion," and the like. Despite this plurality of religions, the differences between them

[4] See Günter Lanczkowski, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 30–35.

should not be construed as oppositions. All these "religions" are aspects of an overarching religious system.

Many recent studies of the multilayered nature of Israelite religion frame the internal diversity in terms of an opposition between "official" and "popular" religion.[5] Rainer Albertz, one of the pioneers in this field, speaks in the title of his first book on the subject about "personal devotion" as distinct from "official religion."[6] In connection with Mesopotamian religion, Wilfred G. Lambert makes a comparable distinction by using the terms "state" and "private" religion.[7] Other [228] subdivisions have also been defended.[8] In his *History of Israelite Religion*, Albertz makes a case for a division in three: alongside "personal" and "official" religion, there would also have been the category of "local" religion.[9]

In my own work on "popular religion" in Israel, I prefer to use the term "family religion."[10] My choice of that term follows from the fact that the opposition of popular *vs*. official is of little use when dealing with religions that have no established body of doctrine. It is difficult to draw the line between official and popular in Israelite religion, especially since such a distinction – assuming it could be made – does not coincide with the distinction between normative and deviant as made by the biblical authors. The diversity within Israelite religion is better classified by its social setting. One could thus distinguish the religious practices performed by the family from those performed by the state; the religion of the one profession, such as the scribes, might be set off against that of the other; urban religion might be contrasted with rural religion; and in this way a series of oppositions could be delineated. What we call "private religion" amounts to family religion when we turn to Israel. It must be borne in mind that in the an-

[5] Note, e. g., the title of a collection of essays, *Official and Popular Religion: Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies* (ed. Pieter Hendrik Vrijhof and Jacques Waardenburg; The Hague: Mouton, 1979). For Israelite religion see Judah B. Segal, "Popular Religion in Ancient Isarel," *JJS* 27 (1976): 1–22, who contrasts "popular religion" with "the established cult."

[6] See Rainer Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1978).

[7] See Wilfred G. Lambert, "The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon," in *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (ed. Hans Goedicke and Jim J. M. Roberts; Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins, 1975), 191–200, esp. 191.

[8] See Aage Westenholz, "The Earliest Akkadian Religion," *Or* 45 (1976): 215–216. He distinguishes four "layers:" popular religion, the religion of practitioners not attached to the temple, the religion of temple practitioners, and the official religion of the ruling family.

[9] Thus Manfred Weippert, "Synkretismus und Monotheismus," in *Kultur und Konflikt* (ed. Jan Assmann and Dietrich Harth; Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), 143–157, esp. 153; Rainer Albertz, *Religionsgeschichte Israels* (2 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 1:40–43.

[10] See Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel* (SHCANE 7; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

cient world "a person was not an individual in our sense of the word."[11] People were first and foremost members of a group, the principal one being the family.

Israelite family religion consisted of two elements, viz. the cult of the ancestors and the devotion to a local god. The Israelite cult of the dead has been the subject of a good many recent monographs and articles. Their number is such that one is justified in speaking of a trend.[12] In spite of one or two dissenting voices,[13] there is something approaching a consensus that the cult of the dead was a vital element in Israelite religion at least until about 600 BCE. In the eyes of their living offspring, the dead had certain supernatural qualities, for which reason they could be called *ʾĕlōhîm*, "divine beings, gods." They possessed such special powers as foreknowledge, available to their living descendants [229] through necromancy.[14] Represented by statuettes, called *tĕrāpîm* or simply "gods,"[15] the ancestors embodied the family identity throughout the generations. New members of the family, such as the manumitted slave adopted into the family of his master, were officially presented to these ancestors in a rite of passage.[16] Since the family land was the inheritance of the ancestors, the Israelites lived off the accumulated efforts of their forebears.[17] The continued care and honor for the dead was felt to be essential for a long and happy life on the land they had left to their descendants.[18]

The second element of family religion is the worship of "the god of the fathers." In the Bible, this designation is used for Yahweh in his capacity as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was adopted by Albrecht Alt to serve as the title of a famous monograph that appeared in 1929.[19] Alt argued that the religion of the patriarchs, which preceded the religion of Moses, consisted of the vener-

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[11] See Cees H. J. de Geus, "The Individual in Relation to Authority in Ancient Israel," *Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin* 46 (1989): 53–71, quotation from p. 54.

[12] See the bibliography at the end of Theodore J. Lewis, "Dead," *DDD*, 223–231 and add the articles collected in *TQ* 77/2 (1997), an issue entitled *Der Umgang mit dem Tod in Israel und Juda* edited by Herbert Niehr.

[13] Note. e. g., Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994).

[14] See Josef Tropper, *Nekromantie: Totenbefragung im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (AOAT 223; Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989).

[15] See Hedwige Rouillard and Josef Tropper, "TRPYM, rituels de guérison et culte des ancêtres d'après 1 Samuel XIX 11–17 et les textes parallèles d'Assur et de Nuzi," *VT* 37 (1987): 340–361; Karel van der Toorn, "The Nature of the Biblical Teraphim in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 203–222; Oswald Loretz, "Die Teraphim als 'Ahnen-Götter-Figur(in)en' im Lichte der Texte aus Nuzi, Emar und Ugarit," *UF* 24 (1992): 133–178.

[16] See Herbert Niehr, "Ein unerkannter Text zur Nekromantie in Israel," *UF* 23 (1991): 301–306.

[17] See Theodore J. Lewis, "The Ancestral Estate (*naḥălat ʾĕlōhîm*) in 2 Samuel 14:16," *JBL* 110 (1991): 597–612.

[18] See Oswald Loretz, "Vom kanaanäischen Totenkult zur jüdischen Patriarchen- und Elternehrung," *Jahrbuch für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte* 3 (1978): 149–203.

[19] See Albrecht Alt, *Der Gott der Väter* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1929).

ation of a god with no local attachments, whose cult was inherited patrilineally. This anonymous deity, known by such epithets as "the Fear of Isaac" or "the Mighty One of Jacob," was later identified with Yahweh, the god who revealed himself to Moses. This thesis is now being increasingly abandoned, in the light of the fact that the oldest biblical records that we have are from the tenth century BCE at the earliest. The distance between them and the presumed patriarchal religion is such that the historian can only speculate what it looked like. Rainer Albertz and Hermann Vorländer took up Alt's idea, compared it with the Mesopotamian data on "the god of the father," and found that what Alt had regarded as a historical phase of Israelite religion was, in fact, one strand among many. Devotion to a personal god, celebrated as the creator of the believer and his family, coexisted in the period between, say, 1000–600 BCE with the state cult performed in the national temples.[20] In a study of the prayers of the individual, Erhard Gerstenberger emphasized the role of local kin groups (families, clans) as the social milieu of this type of religious involvement.[21] [230]

More recent studies of family religion suggest that the god worshipped by the kin group was usually not a wandering deity (an assumption based on the notion of the early Israelites as nomads or semi-nomads), but a local god venerated in a local sanctuary.[22] He could be called Baal or Yahweh, but in either case the identity of the god was primarily local. His proper name was followed by a toponym or the name of the clan that worshipped him. Such Baal names as Baal-Perazim or Baal-Shalisha illustrate the practice.[23] It came as a surprise to many when inscriptions from Kuntillet ʿAjrud, discovered in 1976, showed that manifestations of Yahweh were likewise distinguished by a toponym. The texts mention "Yahweh of Samaria" and "Yahweh of Teman," and thus open up the possibility that other forms of Yahweh were worshipped alongside these two. In a contribution to the Festschrift for Frank Cross, Kyle McCarter makes a convincing case for the cult of "Yahweh in Hebron" and "Yahweh in Zion," as two other distinct Yahweh manifestations mentioned in the Bible.[24] The plurality of Baals we find in the Bible might well have been matched by a plurality of Yahwehs. The Deuteronomic confession that Yahweh is One (Deut 6:4) takes on a new significance against this background.

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[20] See Hermann Vorländer, *Mein Gott: Die Vorstellungen vom persönlichen Gott im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (AOAT 23; Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975); Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit*.

[21] See Erhard Gerstenberger, *Der bittende Mensch: Bittritual und Klagelied des Einzelnen im Alten Testament* (WMANT 51; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980).

[22] See Van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 236–265.

[23] See Van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 236–242.

[24] See P. Kyle McCarter, "Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy: Biblical and Epigraphic Data," in *Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1987), 137–155.

Goddesses in Israel

Since the publication of a book called *The Hebrew Goddess* in 1967, there has been a substantial stream of studies investigating the place of goddesses in Israelite religion.[25] The reason for this fascination with goddesses is not hard to fathom: in the 1960s and 1970s there was a growing awareness that religions with a male god only maintain and reinforce the subservient position of women living under its impact. "If God is male, then the male is God," to quote a famous slogan from the period.[26] Scholars of ancient Near Eastern religions, including the religion of Israel, began to pay closer attention to the worship of goddesses. Whereas earlier generations of scholars had regarded such worship as a blemish upon the blazon of Israelite religion, the [231] younger generation, moved by feminist sympathies, came to see it as an asset. Whilst they denounced the Bible as a patriarchal document, they did not neglect to check it for traces of women's religion, directed specifically at goddesses.

The evidence for the worship of goddesses is twofold: literary (including the epigraphic data) and archeological. It reveals that two goddesses enjoyed particular prominence in Israelite religion, viz. Asherah and Anat. Anat, also known in the Bible as "the Queen of Heaven," has been familiar to biblical scholars ever since the discovery of Aramaic papyri from a Jewish military colony in Upper Egypt at Elephantine. One of the Elephantine papyri recorded an oath by Anat-Yaho, i. e. "Anat of Yaho," Anat being the name of a goddess, and Yaho a shortened form of Yahweh.[27] The same goddess could also be referred to as Anat-Bethel, Bethel being the personified standing stone worshipped by the Syrians and identified with Yaho at Elephantine. This Anat-Yaho is none other than the Queen of Heaven whose cult is denounced by Jeremiah (Jer 7:17–18; 44:15–19).

It has long been the prevailing opinion in the scholarly literature on the subject that the religion of the Jews in Elephantine was a syncretistic deviation. The widespread confidence that the "real" Israelite religion – evidently a qualification that can hardly be called objective – was without a goddess received a blow when archeologists discovered several Hebrew inscriptions containing a reference to "Yahweh and his Asherah" (**yhwh wʾšrth*), Asherah being a major West Semitic goddess. The first inscription associating Yahweh with Asherah was found in 1967 at Khirbet el-Qom in the Judean hill country.[28] The second

[25] See Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York, N. Y.: Ktav, 1967).

[26] See Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1973).

[27] For the Elephantine papyri, see the superb edition by Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (4 vols.; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1986–1999). For Anat-Bethel, see *TAD* C3.15:128; for Anat-Yaho, see *TAD* B7.3:3.

[28] For a discussion of the text and references to relevant literature see Judith Hadley, "The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription," *VT* 37 (1987): 50–62; Shmuel Ahituv, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions* (The Biblical Encyclopaedia Library 7; Jerusalem: Bialik, 1992), 111–113;

site which has yielded epigraphic evidence of Asherah as the companion of Yahweh is Kuntillet ʿAjrud, located in the northern Sinai, some 50 km south of Kadesh-Barnea. She is invoked in blessings alongside "Yahweh of Teman" (perhaps to be translated as "Yahweh of the South") and "Yahweh of Samaria."[29] [232]

The most striking aspect of Israelite religion revealed by the epigraphic finds is the presence of Asherah alongside Yahweh.[30] In the Hebrew Bible, the term *ʾăšērâ* can be used as the name of the goddess Asherah, but it can also refer to the wooden pole erected as her symbol (and as such comparable to the standing stone for a male god). Though scholars are still divided over the issue, a majority takes the expression "his Asherah" in the texts from Kuntillet ʿAjrud as the name of the goddess. The argument according to which proper names cannot have a personal noun as a suffix is invalid: deities can very well be individualised by their attachment to a place, a group of people, or a related deity.[31] On the assumption that Asherah is indeed the name of a goddess, the texts from Kuntillet ʿAjrud are evidence of the fact that Yahweh had Asherah as his divine consort.

The literary evidence for Asherah (and, in some texts, Anat) as consort of Yahweh, calls for a reassessment of the interpretation of the many fertility figurines (most notably the so-called pillar figurines and the Astarte plaques) found in Israel.[32] They are best understood as cheap imitations of cult images used for devotion and protection. Some of the Astarte plaques depict the goddess within a frame. Though the frame has been interpreted as a bed,[33] it could also – and perhaps more plausibly – be seen as a schematic representation of the shrine. The plaques, then, are not just replicas of the image, but of the image in context.[34] In

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Johannes Renz and Wolfgang Röllig, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik* (Second revised ed.; 3 vols.; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2016), 1:202–211.

[29] See Renz and Röllig, *Handbuch*, 1:59–61, 62–63, 63–64.

[30] Studies on Asherah include Steve A. Wiggins, *A Reassessment of 'Asherah': A Study According to the Textual Sources of the First Two Millennia BCE* (AOAT 235; Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993). This book appeared in an updated version in 2007, see Wiggins, *A Reassessment of Asherah: With Further Considerations of the Goddess* (Gorgias Ugaritic Studies 2; Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2007); Christian Frevel, *Aschera und der Ausschliesslichkeitsanspruch YHWHs* (2 vols.; BBB 94; Weinheim: Beltz Athenaeum, 1995); Raz Kletter, *The Judean Pillar Figurines and the Archaeology of Asherah* (BAR International Series 636; Oxford: Tempus Reparatum, 1996).

[31] See Paolo Xella, "Le dieu et 'sa' déesse: l'utilisation des suffixes pronominaux avec des théonymes d'Ebla à Ugarit et à Kuntillet ʿAjrud," *UF* 27 (1995 [1996]): 599–610.

[32] See Kletter, *The Judean Pillar Figurines*; Karel van der Toorn, "Goddesses in Early Israelite Religion," in *Ancient Goddesses: Myths and Evidence* (ed. Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris; London: British Museum Press, 1998), 124–156.

[33] See Miriam Tadmor, "Female Cult Figurines in Late Canaan and Early Israel," in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays* (ed. Tomoo Ishida; Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1982), 139–173.

[34] See Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole: Neue Erkentnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonograhischer Quellen* (Quaestiones Disputatae 134; Freiburg: Herder, 1992), esp. 113–118.

our own time, people visiting pilgrimage centers such as Lourdes, do not like to leave empty-handed. Healed or not, they often procure for themselves a souvenir of their visit in the form of a devotional picture or a miniature replica of Our Lady of Lourdes. There is no reason to believe that people acted differently in the past. Their souvenirs, then, would have been images of Asherah and Anat, and perhaps even one or two different goddesses.

The new perspective upon Israelite religion opened up by the discovery of Asherah as the official consort of Yahweh, is quite spectacular and new. And yet one wonders whether it is primarily to the epigraphic finds from Khirbet el-Qom and Kuntillet ʿAjrud that the Hebrew goddess owes her rehabilitation. The principal data on Anat have long been known, and there is no lack of references and allu[233]sions to Asherah in the Bible. It is the fortunate coincidence of new epigraphic data and the current interest in women's religion and goddesses that has led to new insights into Israelite religion. Whether these new insights will satisfy the champions of women's studies is doubtful, however. Neither Asherah nor Anat ever fulfilled a role in Israelite and Judaean religion comparable to that of the national god Yahweh. Whether it be the one or the other, they were never more than his partner. The superiority of the male is evident. Scholars hoping for a religion in which men and women are equal, will draw little comfort from the fact that Yahweh had a consort.

The Cult of Images

In Israel gab es Bilder, says the title of a book by Silvia Schroer that appeared in 1987.[35] Although the title of the monograph is a statement of fact, it assumes programmatical overtones when read in the context of the iconographical project of the Fribourg School of which Schoer's book is a product. From the 1960s onward, the Biblical Institute of the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, embarked upon a systematic exploration and interpretation of the iconographical remains from Palestine. Led by Othmar Keel, a team of dedicated scholars set out to convince students of ancient Israelite religion that they were well advised not to ignore the information on Israelite religion provided by the iconographic data. Since the latter constitute a source of information independent of the Bible (and therefore free from biased editing), they allow a privileged perspective on early Israel.

The success of the Fribourg School can be measured, some twenty-five years after its inception, by the reception of a book by Keel and Uehlinger that can be regarded as a kind of provisional Summa of the school, viz. *Göttinnen, Götter*

[35] See Sylvia Schroer, *In Israel Gab es Bilder: Nachrichten von darstellender Kunst im Alten Testament* (OBO 74; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987).

und Gottessymbole.[36] This, in the words of one reviewer, is "the first true history of Israelite religion," because it is based on authentic evidence contemporary with the period described.[37] Such praise is not entirely felicitous because Keel and Uehlinger did not intend to write a history of Israelite [234] religion.[38] Yet the view that a thorough knowledge of the iconography is a prerequisite for a scholar of Israelite religion, has gained wide acceptance.[39] Publications by the Fribourg School, such as *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament* (1972, by Othmar Keel), *Frau and Göttin* (1983, by Urs Winter), the above-mentioned *In Israel gab es Bilder* (1987, by Silvia Schroer), and *Das Recht der Bilder gesehen zu werden* (1992, by Othmar Keel), not to mention numerous primary studies particularly devoted to stamp seal carvings,[40] have had a cumulative and ultimately decisive impact on the study of Israelite religion.

The discovery of the iconography as an unduly neglected source of information on religion in Palestine, corresponds to a general tendency in the history of religions. The author of a recent German introduction to the scholarly study of religion, takes a strong stance against the research methods that prevailed in the past. The study of religions began as a study of texts, and to a large extent has remained so right up to the present day. Though texts should not be ignored, their study must be supplemented (and counterbalanced, in many cases) by a study of religious practice and (especially when dealing with extinct religions) the iconography.[41] The exclusive preoccupation with texts is a Christian, and

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[36] See Keel and Uehlinger, *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole*.

[37] See Ernst Axel Knauf, review of O. Keel and Chr. Uehlinger, *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole, Bib* 75 (1994): 298–302, quotation from p. 299.

[38] See the comments by Christoph Uehlinger, "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for Yahweh's Cult Images," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Veneration of the Holy Book in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Karel van der Toorn; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 97–155, esp. 99–100, note 10.

[39] Thus William G. Dever in a number of contributions, e. g., "Material Remains and the Cult in Ancient Israel: An Essay in Archeological Systematics," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Carol L. Meyers and Michael O'Connor; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 571–587; "The Contribution of Archaeology to the Study of Canaanite and Early Israelite Religion," in *Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1987), 209–247. The approach advocated by Dever, or one much like it, was followed by Gösta Ahlstrom, see his *Royal Administration and National Religion in Ancient Palestine* (SHANE 1; Leiden: Brill, 1982); "An Archaeological Picture of Iron Age Religions in Ancient Palestine," *StudOr* 55 (1984): 117–145. See also John S. Holladay, Jr., "Religion in Israel and Judah Under the Monarchy: An Explicitly Archaeological Approach," in *Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1987), 249–299.

[40] An almost comprehensive bibliography on studies originating from this "school" appears in Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger (ed.), *Altorientalische Miniaturkunst* (2d ed.; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1996), 181–187.

[41] See Hans-Jürgen Greschat, *Was ist Religionswissenschaft?* (Urban Taschenbücher 390; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1988), esp. 50–51. Cf. Henry W.F. Saggs, *The Encounter with the*

more specifically Protestant, heritage. It has led to a high regard for the so-called book religions and an attendant neglect of religions not endowed with a body of canonical writings. In an era in which the television and the silver screen have proved that images often have an impact beyond that of words, the iconography in this context can no longer be dismissed as a series of images in the margins of the written word. The image has been recognized as an independent message. It is no longer inferior to the text, and may under some circumstances take precedence.

In view of the revalorization of the religious image, it is almost inevitable that scholars will return to an issue that seemed to have been settled long ago. If there were images in Israel, many of them [234] religious, were there also images of Yahweh? Though the question might strike some readers of the Bible as blasphemous, it is one that merits serious consideration. Until quite recently, the prevailing view among the specialists was that the Israelite cult was aniconic; the principal cult symbols were standing stones (Hebrew *maṣṣēbôt*), but they were not iconic in the usual sense of the word. The bull image in the temple of Bethel (and Dan?), referred to in the Book of Hosea as the "Calf of Samaria" (Hos 8:6, cf. 10:5), was not an image of Yahweh but a huge pedestal upon which the god was invisibly present. This traditional interpretation of the biblical data allowed scholars to surmise that the prohibition of graven images, albeit late in the form we have it in Deuteronomy and Exodus, reflects an ancient and perhaps Mosaic tradition. In a study of Israelite aniconism that appeared in 1995, Tryggve Mettinger has argued that the programmatic aniconism (or the anti-iconism of the Bible) is rather late, but that de facto aniconism goes back a long way in the history of Israelite religion.[42]

The consensus on the absence of Yahweh images in Israel has probably never been without its dissenters. An example in point is the well-known Norwegian scholar Sigmund Mowinckel, who argued that the rejection of images was a very late phenomenon in Israel, and that the temple of Jerusalem had long harbored an image of Yahweh.[43] In recent years this minority view has gained new momentum. Oswald Loretz, for instance, in a study on the Canaanite background of Psalm 27 that appeared in 1985, argues that the expression "to behold the beauty of God" (Ps 27:4) can hardly mean anything else than the veneration of a cult

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Divine in Mesopotamia and Israel (London: The Athlone Press, 1978), esp. 24–26: Fritz Stolz, *Grundzüge der Religionswissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), esp. 79–84. The list could be supplemented with dozens of titles concerning Greek religion, where iconography has a better-established stature.

[42] See Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (ConBOT 42; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995).

[43] See, e. g., Sigmund Mowinckel, "À quel moment le culte de Yahvé à Jérusalem est-il officiellement devenu un culte sans images?," *RHPR* 9 (1929): 197–216.

statue of Yahweh.[44] He elaborated this idea in 1992 in a monograph on anthropomorphic cult imagery in Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and Israel.[45] The thesis claiming a cult statue of Yahweh in preexilic Israel and Judah, in the temples of Samaria, Bethel and Jerusalem, has since also been defended by several authors, including Herbert Niehr (inaugural lecture at Tübingen, 1993),[46] Brian Schmidt (1995),[47] and Christoph [236] Uehlinger (1997).[48] The main arguments advanced in favor of the assumption that there were cult statues of Yahweh in Israel and Judah, are the biblical references to a statue of Yahweh's consort Asherah, expressions about seeing God that imply the presence of an image, the interpretation of the Golden Calf as a divine image ("This is your god …"), and references to Israelite cult images in Assyrian documents.

The debate on Israelite aniconism is far from closed, as the reactions to Mettinger's study show.[49] If a prediction may be ventured, it is likely the future will see a growing number of scholars accepting the possibility that in preexilic times Yahweh was represented by a cult statue. It would fit the tendency to attach greater value to religious images than scholars did in the past (when divine images were usually referred to as "idols"), as well as the growing consensus about the relatively late date of the programmatic aniconism of the Bible.

The Continuity With Canaanite Religion

The prevailing spirit of comparative studies between 1920 and 1960 – insofar as comparative studies were being done – was one of contrast. Whereas the previous period in the study of Israelite religion had presented the other religions of the ancient Near East as representing a preliminary stage for the biblical faith, the proponents of the biblical theology movement emphasized the profound differences between the religion of the Bible and those of the surrounding na-

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[44] See Oswald Loretz, *Leberschau, Sündenbock Asasel in Ugarit und Israel: Leberschau und Jahwestatue in Psalm 27, Leberschau in Psalm 74* (UBL 3; Altenberge: CIS Verlag, 1985), esp. 73–75.

[45] See Manfried Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, *"Jahwe und seine Aschera": Anthropomorphes Kultbild in Mesopotamien, Ugarit und Israel. Das biblische Bilderverbot* (UBL 9; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1992).

[46] An adapted English version of the Antrittsvorlesung of Herbert Niehr is to be found in van der Toorn, ed., *The Image and the Book*, 73–96.

[47] See Brian Schmidt, "The Aniconic Tradition: On Reading Images and Viewing Texts," in *The Triumph of Elohim* (ed. Diana V. Edelman; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 75–105.

[48] See Christoph Uehlinger, "Israelite Aniconism in Context," *Bib* 77 (1996): 540–549, esp. 547–548; Uehlinger, "Anthropopmorphic Cult Statuary."

[49] See Uehlinger, "Israelite Aniconism"; Oswald Loretz, "Semitischer Anikonismus und biblisches Bilderverbot," *UF* 26 (1994 [1996]): 209–223; Victor Hurowitz, "Picturing Imageless Deities: Iconography in the Ancient Near East," *BAR* 23/3 (1997): 46–51, 68–69; Theodore J. Lewis, "Divine Images and Aniconism in Ancient Israel," *JAOS* 118 (1998): 36–53.