Bruno Biermann, Silas Klein Cardoso,
Fabio Porzia, Christoph Uehlinger (eds.)

Challenging Dichotomies and Biases in the Study of the Ancient Southern Levant

VANDENHOECK & RUPRECHT

Cover image: Silas Klein Cardoso. Figures from Biermann, Fig. 1 (Drawing by U. Zurkinden; Courtesy: Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant), Fig. 6 (Drawing by D. Weinblatt; Courtesy: The Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University) Pyschny, Fig. 3 (Courtesy: Tel Dor Excavations), Klein Cardoso, Fig. 2 (Drawing by U. Zurkinden; Courtesy: Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant).
Cover design: SchwabScantechnik, Göttingen
Proofreading: Ute Wielandt
Typesetting: SchwabScantechnik, Göttingen

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

Inhalt/Contents

Introduction: Challenging Dichotomies and Biases in the Study of the Ancient Southern Levant*

Bruno Biermann, Silas Klein Cardoso, Fabio Porzia, and Christoph Uehlinger

The present volume investigates established dichotomies and paradigms in the study of the ancient southern Levant. The study of the region that encompasses the modern states of Israel, Jordan, and Palestine from the second to the first millennium BCE has been and continues to be imprinted by a series of paradigms stemming from its disciplinary field of origin, biblical studies, and its epistemological *locus* within Western rationality. This has contributed, on the one hand, to a disproportionate emphasis on biblical literature, to the text-centredness of historical (re)constructions, and to the sidelining of other source material, including material and visual cultures. On the other hand, this has fostered the indiscriminate use of far-reaching and arguably anachronistic frameworks that dissect the region into small ethnic units, project binary concepts of gender onto material finds, oppose datasets from *a priori* epistemic prejudices, and construe the southern Levant as the "Biblical World." Such a scenario has yielded significant distortions in the creation of interpretive models, analyses, and historical reconstructions, whether by prioritizing specific datasets over others or by framing phenomena in a reductive, dichotomic, and potentially biased manner. In response to these biases, this volume of *Die Welt des Orients* aims to contribute to the current trend of broadening relevant datasets and reinscribing into the field marginalized or neglected perspectives to foster a regional, more differentiated, and entangled understanding of the ancient southern Levant.

This volume thus aims at further problematizing passively accepted notions, which can be understood as long-lasting effects of established but potentially outdated if not possibly harmful ways of dealing with the study of the ancient southern Levant. Specialists from different fields accepted the challenge to question established paradigms and dissolve boundaries, especially in the shape of dichotomies, in our understanding of the region's ancient history. Assuming different theoretical and methodological approaches, each author contributes from their own perspective and sources to the critical questioning of paradigms and approaches, especially those that shape historical reconstructions by sim-

plifying complex, multi-faceted, and fluid realities into clear-cut dichotomies. By doing so, they advance a variety of perspectives while salvaging neglected or discarded aspects of well-known data, also sharing a concern for material datasets that tend to be sidelined by mainstream "biblicist" scholarship: archaeology, material and visual culture, and texts beyond the Hebrew Bible. The articles thus contribute to a certain decentering of the Bible in studying ancient southern Levantine societies and cultures. In turn, they argue for a multidimensional study of the southern Levant as a whole and its constituent social fabric.

Contributions are divided into four thematic sections, followed by two responses. The sections address different paradigms, biases, and particularly dichotomies. Fundamental dichotomies and corresponding biases addressed include text|image, general|particular, self|other, male|female, insider|outsider, and biblical|non-biblical.

1. Beyond the Image-Text Divide

The distinction between semiotic modes is central within Western rationality. On the one hand, scholarly disciplines typically assume that reality can be split into separate domains, each of which would have a particular "code" or "language." This typically entails the monomodal study of phenomena: "one language to speak about language (linguistics), another to speak about art (art history), yet another to speak about music (musicology), and so on, each with its own methods, its own assumptions, its own technical vocabulary, its own strengths, and its own blind spots."[1] On the other hand, methodologies assume that discriminating phenomena into smaller, intelligible parts would render the description and analysis of phenomena both more precise and more comprehensive. It is assumed that the whole is the sum of the parts and that, by deleting "aberrant data" such as contexts and subjects, the parts can predict the whole.[2] This results in the divorcing of data from themselves: codes are severed from their material bearers, and visual and verbal codes are studied independently, even when inscribed onto the same artifact. The underlying assumption seems to be that distinguishing "languages" and "codes" increases "scientificity."

Despite its persistency, such a simplifying paradigm has come under attack from many sides over the last decades. A series of philosophical disquietudes unsettled scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, provoking a number of cultural or philosophical "turns." While it is customary to narrate these

---

1 Kress and van Leeuwen 2001: 1.
2 According to Edgar Morin, the three principles of classical science, disjunction, reduction, and calculation, displace phenomena from their contexts and disregards subjects. As a result, the data become deterministic, i.e., supposedly it would be possible to predict outputs by knowing inputs (Morin 2023: 130–137, cf. Morin and Le Moigne 2000, Sousa Santos 2017: 49–54).

turns as paradigm shifts[3] or as new points of intellectual friction,[4] they also entail the blurring of frontiers between scientific fields and the destabilization of the conventional disciplinary landscape.[5] The blurring of frontiers has two significant outcomes. The first is the unraveling of significant gaps in studied phenomena. For instance, it seems insufficient today to study verbal or visual data only descriptively in their phenomenological aspect and within the specific domain they are thought to constitute; one must consider how these codes *act* in and *influence* the social world in which they are invented in the first place. The second is the dismantling of erstwhile pivotal dichotomies, such as subject|object, cause|effect, chaos|order, and form|content. Insofar as the studied phenomena do not fit into discrete disciplinary domains, disjunctive factors or criteria lose their reason to exist.

Given this wide scholarly scenario and its far-reaching implications in the study of the southern Levant, the two contributions of the first section address the dichotomy between image and text with a particular focus on biblical scholarship. Following the simplifying paradigm described above, an image-text divide seems to epistemologically constitute and methodologically shape the biblical-exegetical practice while also influencing the social-epistemic organization of the field. Accordingly, this section challenges the clear-cut, dichotomic distinction between the two modes and tries to show how it can hinder findings. The two articles suggest new venues to study phenomena *across* semiotic modes, as well as consider new facets, aspects, or dimensions of evidence.

In "Beyond the Image-Text Divide: In Search of a Multidimensional Approach to Compare Visual Artifacts and Biblical Texts," Silas Klein Cardoso discusses the constitution and pervasiveness of this divide. He introduces a research project that assessed interartistic approaches to the Bible, the exegetical perspective called "iconographic exegesis," "biblical iconography," "visual exegesis," or "holistic exegesis." Assessing and comparing biblical texts and visual data that supposedly originate from the same historical context, this perspective rests on the basic distinction between image(s) and text(s). Pointing out significant shortcomings of the distinction in practice, the article argues the divide also informs other interpretive dimensions, such as the history of scholarship and the devising of interpretive models. As a corrective, Klein Cardoso introduces a critical framework that aims to consider artifacts *more* holistically and without subsuming to a simplifying view of the whole[6] in a multidimensional approach.

Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme also questions the image-text divide with her case study titled "The Agency of an Altar: A Material Semiotics-Inspired Investigation of the Relationship between Fumigation Altars and Texts about

---

3 Rorty 1979: 264.
4 Mitchell 1994: 13.
5 Geertz 1980.
6 Morin 1992.

Incense Altars." Building upon insights from material semiotics, which assumes that "stuff" or non-human entities have an agency, meaning that they motivate people to (re)act, the article addresses two fumigation altars excavated at Iron Age II Arad and compares them to the literary descriptions of incense altars in Exodus 30. The article thus seeks, on the one hand, to reconstruct the sensescape of the Arad sanctuary and, on the other hand, to unravel the ritual experience the author of Exodus 30 was trying to create. De Hemmer Gudme's careful interpretation argues that both text and artifacts help to construe a sense of awe, emphasize a particular place and space, and also index the divine presence through the senses. Therefore, by diving into a series of overlooked aspects in the interpretation of the Arad altars and in the biblical data, the article shows how a productive and theoretically well-founded conversation between biblical texts and artifacts might produce novel insights into ancient southern Levantine religious practices.

2. Beyond Ethnicity

The second section challenges the emphasis on ethnicity applied to the study of ancient Levantine religion\s. The widespread criticism against the (mis)use of this notion, from humanities and social sciences to archaeology, so far had only a minor impact on religio-historical studies. The superposition of geography and ethnicity continues to be a rather common practice in the field. On one side, after significant efforts to historicize religion, at least since the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* at the end of the nineteenth century, geography has undeniably become a fundamental coordinate for scholars of religion\s. As Jörg Rüpke rightly notes, "the historiography of ancient religion has been space-sensitive since long."[7] However, on the other side, this sensitivity soon shifted from geography to ethnicity, with the former becoming subsidiary to the latter as a tool for providing a spatial framework for the various ethnic groups that constitute the social landscape. This shift is particularly evident in the context of the Levant, where geography, primarily due to recent and contemporary history, often takes the very specific form of an "ethnogeography." In other words, the Levant is understood as a space fragmented into many juxtaposed ethnicities and ethno-religious identities, to the effect that the region is often described through the metaphor of a "mosaic of peoples and religions." As a result, the study of religion\s in the ancient Levant suffers the epistemological limits of such an "ethnogeography," as if that particular space should always and inevitably be conceived divided by ethnic boundaries.

Drawing cultural and religious borders on maps and producing lists of peoples – a practice not so far from the "table of nations" from Gen 10 or the "but-

---

7   Rüpke 2021: 25.

terfly collector's" approach heavily criticized by anthropologists – is unsatisfactory in theory and in practice. While religious features can certainly serve aspects of identity and ethnicity in specific contexts, they can also draw our attention to interconnections and overlaps across and beyond the assumed borders, as both texts and material culture attest. As a result, the emphasis on borders and difference risks to prevent a full appreciation of the balance between the "common" and the "distinctive," the "general" and the "particular," and the concurrent dynamics of adopting and adapting.[8]

This is, for instance, particularly clear in the study of how gods and goddesses were conceptualized and represented in the ancient southern Levant, as showcased in this section. As specific types of ceramics were long considered characteristic for certain ethnic groups, in religio-historical research, certain deities are understood – in a longstanding practice deeply rooted in biblical literature – as exclusive (in an almost confessional sense) to certain groups or polities. Instead, by seriously considering the materiality of ancient Levantine deities in line with new trends in research that emphasize the notion of materiality – "material turn,"[9] "material religion"[10] –, this section fosters the understanding of divine beings as complex, entangled, and materialized entities, made up of eclectic elements from different origins, traditions, and inspirations. As such, they should be regarded as part of large networks instead of being reduced to the role of ethnic fossils.[11] Therefore, the focus can shift to the different actors involved in the process of creating and conceiving the divine, that is to say to the agency of ancient craftspeople and cult specialists and even worshippers and common users. Such an approach will corroborate scholars' awareness of the accumulation and production of *multiple* meanings and functions of the divine, which started in the past and continues to this day with the meanings and functions that we as scholars project on historical data.

In this section, two contributions explore alternative paths to the historical study of Levantine religion. They focus on overlapping areas and commonalities rather than boundaries and differences, and on human agency rather than ethnic ascriptions and putative identities.

Fabio Porzia, in "Beyond Ethnicity: Outline of a Renewed Approach to the Levantine Divine Landscape," sketches the programmatic lines and the methodological framework of such a renewed approach to the study of ancient Levantine religion. By introducing five heuristic notions – "gods as networks," "cultural infrastructure," "transposability," "Levant," "glocalization and adaption" – Porzia suggests shifting the focus from the mapping of city- or ethnic-based pantheons to studying the dynamics of regionalization and the existence of a Levan-

---

8 Porzia 2024: 11.
9 Mandell and Smoak 2019.
10 Laneri and Steadman 2023.
11 Guillon and Porzia 2023: 262–266.

tine divine landscape. This entails, on the one hand, considering the Levant as a valid conceptual space in the history of religion\s, a fluid and osmotic space to be sure, and to free it from the "mosaic" metaphor or from its reductive role of being the "cradle of monotheism." On the other hand, it implies the need to focus on processes of exchange between local, regional, and global elements (the latter within the limits of the analogical use of the notion of a "global" in the ancient Mediterranean world), characterized by both integration and demarcation, adoption and adaptation.

Katharina Pyschny, in "Cultural Hybridity Instead of Ethnicity: The Persian (and Early Hellenistic) Woman and Child Figurines as a Case Study," challenges the "ethnic" labeling of a specific class of material artifacts and its classification by categories such as "Eastern," "Greek," "Phoenician," "Egyptian," etc. The restudy of the chosen type of figurines – paying attention also to their very materiality and the miniaturization process – reveals that these figurines' typology, style, and iconography attest to cultural hybridity rather than clear-cut ethnic identities. Pyschny further suggests that these objects were open for a variety of receptions and interpretations by different social or local groups. The specific type of figurines, with all its sub-types, reflects continuities or phenomena of transition in chronological, typological, and iconographic respect, especially in a transregional perspective. Such complexity cannot be captured by conventional ethnic labeling. The woman and child figurines thus present an excellent example of the mixture of a "Western" motif and "Eastern" style while attesting typological continuities with both *dea gravida* and Isis-Horus iconography. Pyschny also explores the highly symbolic level of the woman and child imagery to explain the vast diffusion and fortune of this peculiar motif and artifact class.

3. Beyond Dichotomic Gender Constructs

The third section explores the role of gender in the study of the ancient southern Levant embedded into the broader ancient Near East. Past debates and research into gender in the ancient southern Levant were primarily concerned with women and goddesses, particularly in the framework of household religion, apotropaic rituals, and fertility, assuming essentialist connections between women, goddesses, and "unofficial" or "folk" religion.[12]

Gender – in very different constellations – has played a central role in the interest of biblical studies in archaeology throughout the past two centuries, especially in the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* since the late 19th century, after ancient Egypt and the Near East had been "rediscovered" through colonial expeditions, the displacement of antiquities, and excavations.[13] The discovery of archaeolog-

---

12 Cf. the deconstruction of this nexus by Stavrakopoulou 2017.
13 Nasrallah 2019.

ical material often included figurines representing nude females. Understood against a (supposedly) biblical blueprint of assumptions about "wrong" religion, the "pagan" confusion of religion and sex, and a (presumed) obsession of ancient religion with fertility and magic, these figurines were related to Levantine goddesses, fertility cults, and cultic prostitution, placing female divinities into the dichotomy of Canaanite (illegitimate) vs. Israelite (legitimate) cult.[14]

As a consequence, gender has been a crucial factor in the debates about the emergence of monotheism and the role goddess\es could have played in ancient Israelite religion. These debates were potentiated by the epigraphic finds from Kuntillet ʿAjrud (excavated in 1975–1976) and Khirbet el-Qom (excavated in 1967). The scholarly discussion on the character, status, or nature of Yahweh's A\asherah has been strongly framed by text-based (if not exclusively theological) concerns about monotheism and about Yahweh as the "One and only God."[15] As a result, A\asherah was often linked with "folk" or "household religion" and, in particular, women's "unofficial" religious practices.[16] The interest in A\asherah, femininity and goddesses more broadly coincided with the emergence of a historiographical concern for social and everyday life in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, the explicit aim of household archaeology to move beyond the study of palaces and temples coincided and converged with the feminist aim to recover the silenced voices of women.[17] While these approaches have brought light into previously neglected spaces and agents, they are often based on a household|public dichotomy correlated with a binary male|female gender dichotomy, resulting in problematic interpretations of both archaeological and biblical data.[18]

In the last decades, the theoretical perspectives concerning gender have diversified significantly in feminist, gender, and queer theory, as well as masculinity, womanist, and intersectional approaches. However, the reception of these approaches in the historical and archaeological study of the ancient southern Levant is still rather frail, to say the least, a gap addressed by the contributions in the third section, "Beyond Dichotomic Gender Constructs." The two contributions challenge the focus of gender-related research on women and goddesses through deconstructing the male|female dichotomy (Biermann) and advancing the study of gender through attention to mechanisms of feminization and masculinization utilized in imperial settings (Matić).

---

14 Hackett 1989; Frymer-Kensky 1992; Stark 2006; Keel and Schroer 2010; Budin 2011; Budin 2018.

15 Cf. most recently the analysis of the epigraphic material by Blum 2023.

16 Kletter 1996; Binger 1997; Frevel 1995; Hadley 2000; Becking *et al.* 2001; Dever 2005. On household archaeology and "religion" in general see Bodel and Olyan 2008; Albertz and Schmitt 2012; Albertz *et al.* 2014.

17 Most prominently for the archaeology of the southern Levant: Meyers 1988, and the revised version: Meyers 2012; cf. also Ackerman 2022.

18 Cf. Olyan 2010; Stavrakopoulou 2017 for the women-goddess-household religion paradigm.

Bruno Biermann, in "Beyond Binaries in Biblical Studies and Levantine Archaeology: Challenging Binary Binds in Epigraphy and Iconography," discusses the significance of Gender and Queer Theory for the historical study of gender in the southern Levant. His contribution argues for the importance of contemporary theories for destabilizing scholarly preconceptions of the past. The potential and limitations of Queer Theory for studying material and visual culture are demonstrated by means of deconstructing the male-female binary dominant in the interpretation of epigraphic and iconographic material from the Iron Age southern Levant.

Uroš Matić's contribution, "The Ones Who Could Not *Pwy*: Failed Masculinity of Syrian Princes in the *Tale of the Doomed Prince*," investigates the ancient Egyptian *Tale of the Doomed Prince* and masculinity as part of New Kingdom imperialist ideology involving literary feminization of foreign rulers and Egyptian marriage politics. Matiç is able to highlight the use of gender as a "frame of war" (J. Butler) beyond texts explicitly dealing with war, military campaigns, and conquests. In the *Tale of the Doomed Prince* and other contemporary texts, the superior masculinity of the Egyptian prince was contrasted to the inferior masculinities of Syrian princes. Matiç thus demonstrates that the use of the gendered binary "us"/"men"|"them"/"women" served the construction of Egyptian imperial ideology in its engagement with the Levant.

4. Beyond the "Biblical World"

Each of the aforementioned sections attempts to deconstruct and overcome a fundamental dichotomy (or plural dichotomies) in the study of ancient Levantine history, be they concerned with the cultural imaginary, with the domain of religion more specifically (understood as a practice of engagement with the divine both imagined and materialized), or with gender. Several, if not all, the dichotomies problematized have deep roots in the Hebrew Bible, and in the latter's effect not only on religious traditions to which the Bible has served as a major corpus for orienting worldviews, practices, and beliefs, but also more generally on "Western culture" at large. Modern scholars (whether biblical scholars or historians, anthropologists or philosophers) can hardly address the image|text divide without considering the biblical so-called "ban on images" and the latter's impact on deep-rooted anxieties regarding the status of images in religion, on crucial episodes of iconoclasm in history, and on concepts of "idolatry" used to classify, characterize, and delegitimate the religion of others.[19]

Speaking about "othering" and religion, there can be no doubt that the Hebrew Bible – not surprisingly for a corpus of ancient literature – is to a large degree a rather ethnocentric corpus, for which "Israel" represents the ulti-

---

19 Uehlinger 2019.

mate "We" and for which the dichotomic distinction of "Us" vs. "Them" is quite fundamental. Various collectivities (from early Christians through European settlers in North America and South Africa to modern Zionists) have claimed over time to represent "True Israel," "New Israel", etc. To be sure, there have also been attempts at alternative identifications: think of the purposeful if often contrasting self-fashioning of modern Arabs and Jews as "Semites" (an overarching genealogical taxon), the cultural movement of the "Canaanites" in modern Israeli history, the identification of non-Muslim Lebanese with ancient "Phoenicians," or the blending of a contemporary Palestinian political cause with a "Philistine" or "Canaanite" past.[20] To be sure, such identifications and appropriations are fascinating subjects for students of *modern* history, however pathetically misguided they may appear to the historian of the *ancient* Levant. Each in its own way, they exemplify and confirm the astuteness of Hobsbawm's theory about the "invention of tradition."[21]

There is no need to argue how much the history of dichotomic gender constructions has been framed by texts of the Hebrew Bible about what it means to be human (or divine) as "male and female" (Gen 1:26) and even more by what Western (especially Christian) religious anthropology read into the foundational myths of Genesis (and other books) over two millennia. To work on and ultimately overcome the dichotomies that are problematized in this issue of *Die Welt des Orients* may thus require a perhaps even more fundamental questioning (at least historicizing) of the Bible's preeminent role in shaping the Western religious and socio-cultural imaginary and mindset. This further entails critically reflecting on the Bible's impact – until this day and with partly detrimental consequences – on academic agenda-setting, not least in the historical study of the ancient southern Levant. What do scholars mean when they consider their research to investigate "the world of the Bible" or "Biblical World"? Should we let go of the concept of a "Biblical World" that still seems to drive so much historical scholarship on the ancient southern Levant, whether it uses the phrase explicitly or not? How much Bible-related or Bible-affected should we allow the *historical* study of the ancient southern Levant to be?

Christoph Uehlinger does not ask the question in such a straightforward and provocative way in his article titled "Beyond the 'Biblical World' Paradigm: Reflections on a Problematic Concept." His contribution is meant to be reflective rather than normative. But it *does* invite readers (whom we imagine to be historians, archaeologists, and biblical scholars…) to think about their own normative assumptions, if not agenda, and the selections and exclusions embedded in their professional practice. Uehlinger's essay ends with a factual observation: namely, that a significant portion of the southern Levant's ancient

---

20 See, e.g., Kaufman 2004; Hofmann 2011; Ohana 2012, 2014; Niesiołowski-Spanò 2016; Furas 2020.
21 Cf. Hobsbawm and Ranger [1983] [20]2012.

history – the history of ancient Gaza and its region – is underrepresented and has remained underproblematized in much recent research on the ancient history of the southern Levant. For sure not a random example, the point might remind us that not only does the writing of history happen in its own present; it is as much about imagining the past and inventing a memory as it is about forgetting, whether the latter be due to accidental oversight or to intentional offscreening.[22]

5. Broadening the Perspective

The volume concludes with two responses by Izaak de Hulster and Martti Nissinen, initially written for the workshop and reworked for the present volume. In "Jointly Moving Beyond Dichotomies: Knowledge Production, Complexity, and Agency," Izaak de Hulster reflects on issues raised by the contributions of Uehlinger and Klein Cardoso, such as the concept of "Biblical World" and non-hegemonic ("Southern") epistemologies, and also expands the discussion to positionality in the social-epistemic constitution of scholarly fields. De Hulster suggests, in this sense, rendering knowledge production as a communal effort in academia (and beyond?). In addition, his contribution highlights the importance of the New Testament and the Western Mediterranean, bringing to our attention the artificiality of temporal distinction in the study of the ancient world along the lines of the Christian biblical canon. The contribution also stresses the need to consider complexity in the study of the past. In this regard, de Hulster acknowledges the challenges of bridging the macro (social) and the micro (individual) and of using statistical models in the environment of humanities and social sciences. Finally, in addressing the other contributions in the volume, the article also suggests construing biblical literature as a "living tradition" and reiterates his original concept of "iconographic exegesis" as a still valid approach to bridging the image-text divide.

In "Beyond Binaries: Towards an Integrative Approach in Ancient Levantine Studies," Martti Nissinen expands the conversation beyond the original workshop and the viewpoints made in the contributions. In a careful assessment of the contributions but also of contributions that took place at the same conference – IOSOT 2022 in Zürich – where the workshop was initially placed, he enumerates the many dichotomies in which the study of ancient Levantine societies is embedded. He highlights the manifold contributions of a material view of artifacts (including texts and images), the concept of performance, queer perspectives, and the observation of agencies involved in social phenomena to dismantle these dichotomies. Nissinen demonstrates the historical contextuality of new scholarly movements by looking back at the "Biblical World" as a

---

22 See Connerton [1989] [19]2011; Erll 2010.

concept moving away from a strictly Bible-centered scholarship towards images and texts from the broader ancient Near East. This can be read as a well-placed testimony to not remain static in our scholarship now and in the future.

Together, the responses raise the issue of the positionality of scholarship and individual scholars, highlighting the importance of looking behind reductionist labels and identity markers in considering individual biographies embedded in collective and institutional frameworks. On the other hand, the responses show how charged especially Southern and Queer approaches are in contemporary scholarship and the nexus of feelings, thoughts, and actions they can evoke.

∗ ∗ ∗

Most articles published in this volume of *Die Welt des Orients* originate from a workshop titled "Beyond the 'Biblical World' Paradigm: New Approaches to Mediality, Religion, and Gender in the Southern Levant," organized by the undersigned on the occasion of the 24th Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT) held in Zurich in August 2022. Additional contributions were invited to compensate for cancellations and to broaden our workshop's perspectives.[23] The workshop was an initiative and a specific contribution to the congress by members of the SSSL project. It so happened that in 2022, all four of us were based at the project's leading house, the University of Zurich, which hosted the IOSOT congress. The SSSL project's core objective is to create an open-source online database of all provenanced stamp seals from the southern Levant. Its wider ambition has been to increase the value of the data by including a cluster of research modules (among them the conceptualization of ancient Levantine religion, gender history, iconography, and biblical exegesis), all of which were to be studied from an interdisciplinary perspective.[24] We hope that the present collection may contribute to this objective by expanding the conversation and by raising broad questions about the present and future study of history and religion in the ancient southern Levant.

Bruno Biermann, Münster/DE
Silas Klein Cardoso, Vitória/BR
Fabio Porzia, Roma/IT
Christoph Uehlinger, Zürich/CH

---

23 This is the case of the paper presented by Katharina Galor at the workshop, "Fashioning and Self-Fashioning Jewish Women's Bodies: Roman and Byzantine Period Visual and Material Identity Markers", that could not be included in this volume for being published as Galor 2024: 23–85. The original workshop also envisioned a response by Francesca Stavrakopoulou, who must withdraw for personal issues. We acknowledge and appreciate the contribution and support of these scholars in the early stages of this project.

24 For more information, see https://levantineseals.org.

Bibliography

Ackerman, S. 2022. Women and the Religion of Ancient Israel (The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library), New York.

Albertz, R. and Schmitt, R. 2012. Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant, Winona Lake.

Albertz, R., Nakhai, B. A., Olyan, S. M., and Schmitt, R. (eds.). 2014. Family and Household Religion: Toward a Synthesis of Old Testament Studies, Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Cultural Studies, Winona Lake.

Becking, B., Dijkstra, M., Korpel, M. C. A., and Vriezen, K. J. H. (eds.). 2001. Only One God? Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah, London.

Binger, T. 1997. Ashera. Goddesses in Ugarit, Israel and the Old Testament (JSOTS 232), Sheffield.

Blum, E. 2023. Götterpaar JHWH und Aschera – kultische Realität oder akademisches Konstrukt?, in: J. J. Krause, D. Markl, and K. Weingart (eds.), Die Entdeckung des Politischen im Alten Testament. FS Wolfgang Oswald (BZAR 29). Wiesbaden, 259–282.

Bodel, J. P. and Olyan, S. M. (eds.). 2008. Household and Family Religion in Antiquity (The Ancient World: Comparative Histories), Malden.

Budin, S. L. 2011. Images of Woman and Child from the Bronze Age. Reconsidering Fertility, Maternity, and Gender in the Ancient World, New York.

––. 2018: Finding a World of Women. An Introduction to Women's Studies and Gender Theory in Biblical Archaeology, in: A. Yassur-Landau, E. H. Cline, and Y. Rowan (eds.), The Social Archaeology of the Levant. From Prehistory to the Present, Chicago, 522–532.

Connerton, P. 2011 [1989]. How Societies Remember, 19th ed., (Themes in the Social Sciences), Cambridge, UK.

Dever, W. G. 2005. Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel, Grand Rapids.

Erll, A. 2010. Memory in Culture (Palgrave MacMillan Memory Studies), New York.

Frevel, Ch. 1995. Aschera und der Ausschließlichkeitsanspruch YHWHs. Beiträge zu literarischen, religionsgeschichtlichen und ikonographischen Aspekten der Ascheradiskussion (BBB 95), Weinheim.

Frymer-Kensky, T. 1992. In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth, New York.

Furas, Y. 2020. We the Semites: Reading Ancient History in Mandate Palestine, Contemporary Levant 5(1): 33–43.

Galor, K. 2024. Jewish Women between Conformity and Agency (Routledge Jewish Studies Series), London and New York.

Geertz, C. 1980. Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought, The American Scholar 49(2): 165–79.

Guillon, E. and Porzia, F. 2023. Ancient Gods Going Digital: On the First Steps of the On-Going ERC Project "Mapping Ancient Polytheisms," in: V. B. Juloux, A. Di Ludovico, and S. Matskevich (eds.), The Ancient World Goes Digital. Case Studies on Archaeology, Texts, Online Publishing, Digital Archiving, and Preservation (Digital Biblical Studies 6), Leiden, 247–85.

Hackett 1989, Can a Sexist Model Liberate Us? Ancient near Eastern 'Fertility' Goddesses, Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 5(1): 65–76.

Hadley, J. M. 2000. The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess, Cambridge.

Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T. 2012 [1983]. The Invention of Tradition, 20th ed., Cambridge and New York.

Hofmann, K. 2011. Canaanism, Middle Eastern Studies 47(2): 273–294.

Kaufman, A. 2004. Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon, London.

Keel, O. and Schroer, S. 2010. Eva – Mutter alles Lebendigen: Frauen und Göttinnenidole aus dem Alten Orient, 3rd ed., Fribourg.

Kletter, R. 1996. The Judean Pillar-Figurines and the Archaeology of Asherah (BAR International Series 636), Oxford.

Kress, G. R., and Van Leeuwen, T. 2001. Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication, London.

Laneri, N. and Steadman, S. R. (eds.). 2023. The Bloomsbury Handbook of Material Religion in the Ancient Near East and Egypt, New York.

Mandell, A., and Smoak, J. 2019. The Material Turn in the Study of Israelite Religions: Spaces, Things, and the Body, JHS 19: 1–42.

Meyers, C. L. 1988. Discovering Eve. Ancient Israelite Women in Context, New York.

––. 2012. Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context, New York.

Mitchell, W. J. T. 1994. Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation, Chicago.

Morin, E. 1992. From the Concept of System to the Paradigm of Complexity, Journal of Social and Evolutionary Systems 15(4): 371–85.

––. 2023. The Challenge of Complexity: Essays by Edgar Morin, ed. by A. Heath-Carpentier, Eastbourne, UK.

Morin, E. and Le Moigne, J.-L. 2000. A inteligência da complexidade, São Paulo.

Nasrallah, L. S. 2019. Material Culture and Historical Analysis, in: B. H. Dunning (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of New Testament, Gender, and Sexuality, Oxford, 59–75.

Niesiołowski-Spanò, Ł. 2016. Functional Ethnicity: Or, How to Describe the Societies of Ancient Palestine?, UF 47: 191–204.

Ohana, D. 2012. The Origins of Israeli Mythology: Neither Canaanites nor Crusades, Cambridge, UK.

––. 2014. The Israeli Identity and the Canaanite Option, in: K. Berthelot, J. E. David, and M. Hirshman (eds.), The Gift of the Land and the Fate of the Canaanites in Jewish Thought, New York, 311–351.

Olyan, S. M. 2010. What Do We Really Know about Women's Rites in the Israelite Family Context?, JANER 10(1): 55–67.

Porzia, F. 2024. Religion(s) in Seals. Old and New Challenges, NEA 87(1): 4–13.

Rorty, R. 1979. Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Princeton.

Rüpke, J. 2021. A Methodology for the Historiography of Ancient Religion, Revista de historiografía 36: 13–32.

Sousa Santos, B. de. 2017. Decolonising the University: The Challenge of Deep Cognitive Justice, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Stark, Ch. 2006. Kultprostitution im Alten Testament. Die Qedeschen der Hebräischen Bibel und das Motif der Hurerei (OBO 221), Fribourg and Göttingen.

Stavrakopoulou, F. 2017. The Ancient Goddess, the Biblical Scholar, and the Religious Past: Re-Imagining Divine Women, in: Y. Sherwood and A. Fisk (eds.), The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field, Oxford, 495–513.

Uehlinger, Ch. 2019. Beyond "Image Ban" and "Aniconism": Reconfiguring Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish Religion\s in a Visual and Material Religion Perspective, in: B. Meyer and T. Stordalen (eds.), Figuration and Sensation of the Unseen in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Contested Desires (Bloomsbury Studies in Material Religion), New York, 99–123.