RevEleTeo

Iconic, Aniconic Expressions and the Hebrew Bible

Expressões Icônicas e Anicônicas na Bíblia Hebraica

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical evaluation of the assumption in Brazilian Protestant reading about issues involving iconic versus aniconic debate in the Hebrew Bible grounded on an external and internal evidence to trace the development towards formless Yahwism. It is argued that the understanding of this process contributes to a better understanding of the Christian reception of this literary corpus and the formulation of incarnation theology.

Keywords: Iconic; aniconic; embodiment; god(s); deity(ies)

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta uma avaliação crítica da suposição da leitura protestante brasileira as questões relacionadas ao debate icônico versus anicônico na Bíblia Hebraica, com base em evidências externas e internas para rastrear o desenvolvimento do Yahwismo amórfico. Argumenta-se que a compreensão desse processo contribui para um melhor entendimento da recepção cristã desse corpo literário e da formulação da teologia da encarnação.

Palavras-chave: icônico; anicônico; encarnação; deus(es); deidade(s)

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Introduction

In 1957 Bultmann asked the following question: "Ist voraussetzungslose Exegese möglich?" (BULTMANN, Rudolf. Ist voraussetzungslose Exegese möglich? In: *Theologische Zeitschrift*. Leipzig, v. 13, 1957, p. 409-17). Personally, his positive answer seems correct "wenn „voraussetzunglos" meint: ohne daß die Ergebnisse der Exegese vorausgesetzt werden" (BULTMANN, 1957, p. 409) since no one should impose his or her own assumptions to the results of any research, as he added "In diesen Sinne ist voraussetzungslose Exegese nicht nur möglich, sondern geboten"; however, Bultmann also correctly pointed out that

In einem anderen Sinn ist freilich keine Exegese voraussetzunglos, da der Exeget keine tabula rasa ist, sondern mit bestimmten Fragen bzw. einer bestimmten Fragestellung an den Text herangeht und eine gewisse Vorstellung von der Sache hat, um die es sich im Texte handelt (BULTMANN, 1957, p. 409).

Not surprisingly, the role of the reader in the hermeneutical process has certainly attracted more attention in recent scholarship, although Gadamer already detected its importance when he claimed that

In Wahrheit gehört die Geschichte nicht uns, sondern wir gehören ihr. Lange bevor wir uns in der Rückbesinnung selber verstehen, verstehen wir uns auf selbstverständliche Weise in Familie, Gesellschaft und Staat, in denen wir leben. Die Selbstbesinnung des Individuums ist nur ein Flackern im geschlossenen Stromkreis des geschichtlichen Lebens. *Darum sind die Vorurteile des einzelnen weit mehr als seine Urteile die geschichtliche Wirklichkeit seines Seins* (GADAMER, Hans-Georg. *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1990, p. 281).

Certainly, reader-response approaches also apply to the way the Hebrew Bible (HB) was read by the early Christians. Despite the limitations of the findings of historical critical methods, one can still notice significant differences between the meaning intended for its original audience and that addressed to the new readers (or listeners) during the first century CE. As rightly stated by Joyce,

the OT must be allowed to be itself: it is not merely resource material for Christian theology; it is not simply a 'preparation for the gospel', to use a phrase often applied to it in the Christian tradition. The OT represents theology in its

own right, in the way it speaks about God, the world and humanity, addressing the issues and wrestling with the problems of OT times. The New Testament cannot be used as an absolutely normative key to the Old Testament. As we saw earlier, the NT is the product of a particular historical period, and naturally reflects and reacts to the concerns of that age. (The treatment of Psalm 110 in St Mark's Gospel is typical of the first-century Jewish exegesis of the Scriptures.) Truth cannot be conveyed in a cultural vacuum. As we have said, this should not be a cause of anxiety: it is inevitably true of all literature and does not prevent us from ascribing a very high degree of authority to the NT writings. It does, however, mean that the NT cannot be used as a definitive key to the literature of other ages (JOYCE, Paul. The Old Testament and its relationship to the New Testament. In: ROGERSON, John (Org.). *Beginning Old Testament study*. London: SPCK, 1998, p. 143).

In the same vein, the way in which history has been unfolded in a particular location inevitably affects how the Bible is read in that specific culture. This is clear in terms of the how Brazilian Roman Catholics and Evangelicals react to the presence of images in their respective worship, as one may notice that such contrast is not as strong in Europe. Obviously, the inclusion of icons from the Orthodox faith surely would have a place within this debate; however, this strand of Christianity did not have the same weight that both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism had in Brazil. Even after its independency on September 7, 1822, the relationship between Church and State continued virtually unshaken. According to the Brazilian Constitution of 1824,

Art. 5. A Religião Cathólica Apostólica Romana continuará a ser a Religião do Império. Todas as outras Religiões serão permitidas com seu culto doméstico, ou particular em casas para isso destinadas, sem fórma alguma exterior do Templo (Available at http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicao24.htm Accessed in: 05 January 2020).

To put the matter in another way, the Roman Catholic Church still was the official religion with basically the same powers developed over the course of almost three centuries during the colonial period, as Protestant worship was confined to the private sphere and its worshiping space was subjected to aesthetical restrictions. Such an impact still influences the way the Scripture is read amongst significant part of Evangelicals in Brazil nowadays without doing justice

to the biblical text (more specifically the HB). Thereby, this paper argues that such positions may obfuscate the ancient Near Eastern religious context, which also includes ancient Israel, as well as the complex process of composition, edition and transmission of the HB. For this reason, it is important to evaluate the theological development of this literary corpus.

1 Viewpoints

To some extent, the reader's perspective cannot simply be underestimated, but this by no means implies that such a viewpoint represents the author's intention. This was certainly true in terms of the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments and is far more complicated if one considers the long temporal, spatial and cultural gaps between the modern and ancient *Weltanschauung*. At this stage, the notion of "conceptional autonomy" alongside the distinction between "emic" and "etic" approaches alongside the differentiation between implicit and explicit theology may be instructive. The idea of conceptual autonomy goes back to Landsberger who in 1926 delivered a lecture in Leipzig with the goal of evaluating how much one could understand an ancient culture through the means of philology and distancing the observer from his or her own cultural bias. In order to do this, he suggested that to learn the foreign culture in question "müssen wir die Eigenbegrifflichkeit einer Kultur aufsuchen" (LANDSBERGER, Benno. Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der babylonischen Welt. *Islamica*. Leipzig, v. 2, 1926, p. 355-57). The contrast between emic and etic approaches was coined by Pike, who likewise proposed that whereas an emic approach attempts to scrutinize the subject of study within its own autochthonous cultural footings, an etic perspective aims to remove it from its indigenous milieu giving general explanations.[1] Feleppa, however, challenges the observant's aptitude in terms of describing the studied culture impartially[2] and Jensen even minimises the differentiation between emic and etic approaches suggesting that their significance only matters for methodological and theoretical purposes without any hermeneutical or epistemological value.[3] Both Feleppa and Jensen may have a point and appear close to Bultmann's ar-

1. PIKE, Kenneth L. *Language in relation to a unified theory of structure of human behavior*. Vol. 1. Glendale, CA: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1954, p. 8.
2. FELEPPA, Robert. Emics, etics, and social objectivity. *Current anthropology*. Wichita, KS, v. 27, 1986, p. 249-51.
3. JENSEN, Jeppe Sinding. Revisiting the insider-outsider debate: Dismantling a pseudo-problem in the study of religion. *Method & theory in the study of religion*. Aarhus, DK, v. 23, 2011, p. 47.

gument, in which no exegete is free of presuppositions.[4] They also are not far from Gadamer's sensitivity regarding the role played by the reader within the hermeneutical process,[5] but such awareness should by no means discard the achievements of biblical criticism, as Joyce convincingly argues.[6]

Whilst one should not be naïve in terms of historical reconstructions in the romantic sense, the advances of archaeological, linguistical and literary studies cannot be ignored. Emic and etic categories, therefore, should not be seen as mutually exclusive but complimentary perspectives in a way that makes the hermeneutic labour still necessary. For Ulin, this antagonism in traditional social theory where understanding and elucidation are distinguished is difficult to be maintained because it eclipses social and historical contingencies, which are present in any social inquiry and supresses the cross-cultural dialogue which is also vital for both the observant's own understanding and the subject of study.[7]

Another useful distinction is related to the concept of "theology" itself. As Barr and Schmid correctly argue, theology in a scholastic sense is an anachronistic notion to the HB, but both of them reject that this body of literature is atheological because this statement downplays its content which is by no means absent of theological reasoning.[8] Schmid, in particular, also calls attention to the paradigmatic shift in the area of humanities where theology used to hold a dominant role until not long ago, but since natural and exact sciences began to influence humanities largely (and subsequently affecting biblical studies) theology and hermeneutics have been just about neglected; nonetheless, instead of a subject related to one's personal conviction, he suggests that the presence of theological thinking in the HB is a matter concerning content assessment and should not be confined to canonical writings but stretched out to post--"canonical" corpuses.[9] An important fundamental distinction is related to the phenomenon theology as a conceptual fixed subject, especially in the way in

4. BULTMANN, 1957, p. 409.
5. GADAMER, 1990, p. 281.
6. JOYCE, 1998, p. 136-47.
7. ULIN, Robert C. Ulin. Beyond explanation and understanding: Anthropology and hermeneutics. *Dialectical anthropology*. Meadville, PA, v. 17, 1992, p. 253-69.
8. BARR, James. *The Bible in the modern world*. London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1973, p. 89-111; SCHMID, Konrad. *Gibt es Theologie im Altem Testament? Zum Theologiebegriff in der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft*. Theologische Studien 7. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2013, p. 45-48.
9. SCHMID, 2013, p. 51-52, 118-19.

which it has developed in Christianity because "'Theologie' ist dort grundsätzlich philosophisch oder zumindest von einer Affinität zur Philosophie geprägt. Sie sucht die Nähe zur Philosophie und formuliert so etwas wie die Wahrheitsfrage" (SCHMID, 2013, p. 54) Thereby, Schmid makes the following distinction; on the one hand,

Die erste Form von Theologie kann mit Lohfink in der Tat nur als implizite Theologie beschrieben werden, aber es bleibt gleichwohl ratsam, bei der Beschreibung der entsprechenden Phänomene auf den Theologiebegriff nicht zu verzichten, wenn man den Reflexionscharakter als konstitutives Merkmal von Theologie ansieht. Solche Formen von impliziter Theologie können auch unterschiedliche Grade anfänglichen Explizierens einschliessen (Ibid., p. 55).

On the other hand,

Theologie des Alten Testament im Sinne eines *genetivus objectivus* allerdings kann es nur als ein von aussen an das Alte Testament herangetragenes Unterfangen geben, was es aber keineswegs zu einem illegitimen Projekt macht. Auch eine Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache wird nicht von dieser selbst, sondern von aussen her entwickelt, stellt aber selbstredend ein legitimes wissenschaftliches Unterfangen dar. Allerdings entsteht innerhalb eines solchen Zugangs von aussen die Notwendigkeit, die jeweilige Perspektive, aus der nach einer Theologie des Alten Testaments gefragt wird, zu benennen (Ibid., p. 55).

For Schmid, both models are genuine projects of theological investigation applied to the HB, but his approach is restricted to the former and he argues that in the case of the latter it is important to define which theological tradition is being adopted beforehand.[10] This paper, however, shall avoid a rigid dichotomy, as Schmid's distinction can be analogically compared to the emic and etic distinction. But as the Bible has been incorporated by certain communities, what was originally studied from an emic point of view now changed into etic and vice versa. As a result, the use of both terms is not employed consistently in the field of biblical studies. For instance, whilst Davies uses the term emic in reference to the religious use of the Bible, Esler employs the same term for the

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10. Ibid., p. 55.

ancient perspective.[11] In this paper, an emic perspective concerns the ancient Near Eastern milieu in which the HB was produced whilst an etic outlook regards Brazilian historical Protestantism.

2 External and internal evidence

The shortage of images may be normal amongst some Protestant Christian groups, especially in Brazil, as a reaction against Roman Catholicism; however, in a similar way that the dichotomy between polytheism and monotheism connotes modern creations unknown to the biblical writers, Becking and MacDonald correctly argue that something similar can be said in terms of the iconic and aniconic debate, as these differentiations are products of the post-enlightenment.[12] Whereas such distinctions might have a didactical value, one cannot deny that the ancient Near Eastern world, where these texts were produced, was full of divine representations. In this sense, the complete disembodiment of the God of ancient Israel might be a misjudgement influenced by specific historical contingencies. Gericke, therefore, seems right by saying that the use of imported notions from classical theism and the Aristotelian metaphysical concepts of perfect being and the divine complexity misinterprets the HB's view of its main god.[13]

Generally speaking, texts involve a great deal of reasoning, which often speaks against or in favour of a particular perspective. This of course does not mean that the creation of artefacts does not have any thinking involved, but it is fair to say that there are different levels of thought engagement involved. Texts have rhetorical functions which are remarkably ideological or theological. Alongside the HB there were many other ancient Near Eastern texts, each portraying their side of the story accordingly to their own agenda. On this matter, Hallo is convinced that archaeological excavations in the ancient Near East (ANE)

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11. DAVIES, Philip R. *Whose Bible is it anyway?* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 204. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, p. 27-55; ESLER, Philip F. The madness of Saul: A cultural reading of 1 Samuel 8–31. In: CHERYL, J. Cheryl and MOORE, Stephen D. (Orgs.). *Biblical studies/cultural studies: The third Sheffield colloquium*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 266. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, p. 243-44.
12. BECKING, Bob. The return of the deity: Iconic or aniconic? In: Amit, Yairah et al. (Orgs.). *Essays on ancient Israel in its near Eastern context: A tribute to Nadav Na'aman*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006, p. 57; MACDONALD, Nathan. Aniconism in Old Testament. In: GORDON, R. P. (Org.). *The God of Israel*. University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 33-44.
13. GERICKE, Jaco. *The Hebrew Bible and philosophy of religion*. Society of Biblical Literature 70. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012, p. 293-342.

during the nineteenth century can elucidate biblical interpretation because of their shared intellectual culture with ancient Israel.[14] Chavalas, however, claims that it is important to recognise the distinctive nature of ancient Near Eastern literature in the comparative process with the HB and highlights that intertextual approaches still have to judge the extent of the relationship between these two literary corpuses.[15] Yet even within the HB itself it also is possible to find conflictive views, which only later were merged as a single volume. Thereby, one must discern the world where these texts were written from the literary world created by them. Although certain biblical texts give the impression of a harsh discourse against idolatry, such a sense sometimes occurs because of multiple supplementations which can be clearly identified by their shape and content,[16] as there are several occasions that the HB betrays such criticism revealing vestiges of anthropomorphic language to describe its deity. Some guiding principles offered by Grabbe are helpful to unveil the world in which the HB was written. Firstly, he argues that all sources should be considered and only after a full examination some of them may be dismissed; nevertheless, the preference should be given to the primary sources (e.g., archaeological findings).[17] Thus, apart from a few exceptions, biblical texts usually reflect secondary sources, which went through an editorial process, and Grabbe also highlights the importance of the "longue durée" alongside the differences between Israel and Judah.[18] Finally, Grabbe also accepts that any historical reconstruction is only provisional; thereby, its defence must be evaluated and is still subjected to revision according to new discoveries.[19]

The widespread presence of vast representations of deities in the ANE is something factual. Ancient Egypt, perhaps, features the most emblematic example of the presence of such representations, including anthropomorphic (e.g., Shu and Nut), zoomorphic (e.g., bull, ram and falcon) and bimorphic images of gods (e.g., hawk-headed and lion-headed anthropomorphic gods). The Louvre

14. HALLO, William W. (Org.). *The context of Scripture: Canonical compositions from the biblical world*. Vol. 1. Leiden: Brill, 1997, p. xxiii-xxv.

15. CHAVALAS, Mark W. The comparative use of ancient Near Eastern texts in the study of the Hebrew Bible. *Religion compass*. La Crosse, WI, v. 5, 2011, p. 150.

16. SCHMID, Konrad. *Literaturgeschichte des Alten Testaments: Eine Einführung*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008, p. 128.

17. GRABBE, Lester L. *Ancient Israel: what do we know and how do we know it?* London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017, p. 3-38.

18. GRABBE, 2017, p. 3-38.

19. Ibid., p. 3-38.

museum in Paris holds amongst its vast collection a Sphinx (traditionally a hybrid between a woman and a lion) of Amenemhet II from the twelfth dynasty and human forms of gods sculpted on the Osiride pillar similar to those found within the temple Ramesses II in Abu Simbel.[20] Such representations, however, were not an exclusive aspect of ancient Egypt, as such representations were found across the whole of Mesopotamia. Ornan provides an inventory of 220 images, which includes both anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic representation of different ancient Babylonian and Assyrian deities from the second and first millennia BCE.[21] Smith, likewise, confirms the presence of both anthropomorphic and theriomorphic representations in Ugaritic texts in which the latter could be divided into two categories. Whilst domestic animals (e.g., a bull, a calf and a bird) were used to represent deities, such as El, Baal and Anat, undomesticated monstrous figures (e.g., a snake) were employed to portray cosmic enemies, such as a dragon-snake (cf. CTA II III 26; I.5 V 17- 21; I 108,8; I.3 III 40-42).[22]

A crucial question is the extent of continuity and discontinuity between ancient Israelites and Canaanite cultural background. Whilst Albrightians tended to defend the historicity of the conquest narratives, other proposals have addressed some inconsistencies (e.g., re-dating, peaceful assimilation, different tribal settlements and internal revolts).[23] Currently, there is a growing consensus amongst scholars that monotheism is a product of a late phenomenon, although this does not mean that one group of exclusive Yahwistic cult already existed before the exilic period.[24] Gnuse, however, claims that this shift of scholarly position concerning monotheism is related to the acknowledgement

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20. WILKINGSON, Richard H. *The complete gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2003, p. 26-31.

21. ORNAN, Tallay. *The triumph of symbol: Pictorial representation of deities in Mesopotamia and the biblical image ban*. Orbis biblicus et orientalis 213. Fribourg and Göttingen: Academic Press Fribourg and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Göttingen, 2005, p. 227-84.

22. SMITH, Mark S. *The origins of biblical monotheism: Israel's polytheistic background and the Ugaritic texts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 32-33.

23. RAMSEY, George W. *The quest for the historical Israel*. Louisville, KY and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1981, p. 65-98.

24. Smith and Lang suggest the existence of a Yahweh-alone group, arguing that, like its neighbours, this group had Yahweh as their national deity, which later was diffused from Davidic times onwards SMITH, Morton. *Palestinian parties and politics that shaped the Old Testament*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1971, p. 15-56; LANG, Bernhard. *Monotheism and the prophetic minority: An essay in biblical history and sociology*. Social World of Biblical Antiquity Series 1. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983, p. 13-59.

that ancient Israel arose from the local population from the highlands during Iron age I through a relatively peaceful process instead of conquest incursions.[25] According to Dijkstra, this indicates elements of continuity between pre-exilic Israel and the Canaanites suggesting that the peak of an emerging monotheism only took place from the exilic period onwards, and became more expressive towards the end of the Second Temple period.[26] Since the Bible was inserted within the same background, one should not be surprised in finding interactions with some images mentioned above, although such interactions are not homogeneous (e.g., Êx 32; Nm 24:8; 1 Re 12:28; Sl 74:12-17; 148:7; Jó 26:13; Ap 12:13).[27]

As part of the process of assimilation of Yahwism into the Palestinian territory, the presence of representations corresponding to Yahweh would not be something completely unexpected. The fusion of Yahweh with El might be a good illustration of this case since 1 Re 12:28 mentions that ויועץ המלך ויעש שני עגלי זהב ויאמר אלהם רב־לכם מעלות ירושלם הנה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים. The fact that king Jeroboam mentions that Israel's gods freed them from Egypt seems a clear reference to Êx 32:4, which mentions that Aaron ויקח מידם ויצר אתו בחרט ויעשהו עגל מסכה ויאמרו אלה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים. As Day states, the representation of El as a bull appears to have been extended to Yahweh in the assimilation process and it may be an allusion to אביר יעקב (cf. Gn 49:24), although the bull image and the idea that Yahweh had a wife were rejected later.[28] Nonetheless, as Becking observes, Jeroboam's rival cult strongly indicates that Yahwism was not uniform and that there were probably different active branches.[29] It is, however, the anthropomorphic representations that seem to occupy significant part of the HB. Hamori believes that whilst this body of literature presents various anthropomorphic images (e.g., concrete, envisioned,

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25. GNUSE, Robert Karl. *No other gods: Emergent monotheism in Israel.* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 241. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, p. 23-61.
26. DIJKSTRA, Meindert. El, the God of Israel – Israel, the people of YHWH: On the origins of ancient Israelite Yahwism. In: BECKING, Bob et al. (Orgs.). *Only one God? Monotheism in ancient Israel and the veneration of the goddess Asherah.* London and New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, p. 89-92.
27. SMITH, 2001, p. 32-40.
28. DAY, John. *Yahweh and the gods and goddesses of Canaan.* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 265. Repr. London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, p. 34-41.
29. BECKING, Bob. The gods in whom they trusted… Assyrian evidence for iconic polytheism in ancient Israel? In: BECKING, Bob et al. (Orgs.). *Only one God? monotheism in ancient Israel and the veneration of the goddess Asherah.* London and New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, p. 153.

immanent, transcendent, figurative), her understanding is that it is unlikely that the biblical authors selected the images according to fixed categories because such categories frequently overlap and the biblical texts have the tendency of combining different images.[30] For her, the presence of אנשים/איש in two occurrences (Gn 18:1-15; 32:23-33) indicates human theophanies with references to both יהוה and אלהים.[31] Hamori claims that the anthropomorphic embodiment of the divine in the HB must be understood literally like other theophanies; yet its importance has to be considered analogically or within its context because these divine manifestations in realistic human form to Abraham and Jacob appears distinct from other occurrences suggesting that the divine role was an important factor for the use of anthropomorphic theophanies.[32] Here Sommer's notion of "divine fluidity" seems relevant, as he argues that, like many ancient Mesopotamian religions, these texts also contain depictions of many forms of physical representations of its main deity (e.g., Yahweh of Teman, Yahweh of Samaria, angel of God, a stone pillar erected in Bethel cf. Gn 28:18-19).[33]

Based on Sargon II Prism IV:32, Becking proposes that divine anthropomorphic images were confiscated as spoils from official temples and palaces during the Assyrian assaults in the northern capital of Samaria, although this does not rule out that cultic figures were still present at family households in conjunction to the worship of other Mesopotamian gods implemented by the colonisers.[34] Becking argues that "the theme 'return of the deity' was not just a literary *topos* in ancient Mesopotamia but also a reality", as "divine images were returned to the sanctuaries from which they were deported" (e.g., Marduk, statues from Syria were possibly taken to Egypt) and adds that "the carrying away of images into the exile were represented iconographically" even though "no representation of the return of images is known".[35] Thereby, while Judah was not completely unpopulated during the exile, it was surely absent of its deity, who later returned with כלי בית יהוה (cf. Ed 1:7).[36] A plausible explanation for the assi-

30. HAMORI, Esther J. *'When gods were men': The embodied God in biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature.* Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 384. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008, p. 26-34.
31. HAMORI, 2008, p. 4-5.
32. Ibid., p. 64, 128.
33. SOMMER, Benjamin. *The bodies of God and the world of ancient Israel.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 12-37, 38-79.
34. BECKING, 2001, p. 161-62.
35. BECKING, 2006, p. 55-56.
36. Ibid., p. 58.

milation of northern traditions in the HB is offered by Finkelstein, who proposes that a mass Israelite migration to the southern kingdom occurred after the fall of Samaria. This is supported by the expansion of settlements in Jerusalem and Judah alongside their demographic growth from the end of the eighth and the beginning of the seventh centuries BCE.[37]

Our last point concerns the ban of images in the HB. For Gnuse, the absence of images in early Yahwism could be related to limited resources in desert environment, as the first occurrences of Yahwistic worship occurred outside Palestine (Seir from the wilderness of Paran recognised later as Edom and Midian cf. Êx 18; Dt 33:2; Jz 5:2) before joining with Canaanite traditions.[38] Scarcity of resources, however, does not sufficiently explains the ban of images in the HB. Köckert, claims that the prohibition of images refers specifically to those related with worship, particularly depictions of Yahweh, adding that such vetoes appear to have happened only at a later stage, firstly in Dt 5 followed by Êx 20.[39] An important aspect noticed by Sommer, is the fact that Deuteronomistic and Priestly texts (e.g., Deuteronomy and Ezekiel) present some resistance regarding representations of God because of their tendency of highlighting a higher view of the divine and they also have an important editorial role in the current shape of the HB.[40] Middlemas even mentions that prophetic literature seems to employ strategic aniconic rhetoric (e.g., reducing the deities to objects; stressing the human construction to deny divinity; emphasising the material aspect of the idols; judging both the idols and their idolaters cf. Is 44:6-23; Jr 10:3-4) in their conflict against idols in the systematic enforcement of the exclusivist Yahwistic religion.[41] Sometimes language considered not politically correct to modern readers, such as disability, in the stigmatisation and marginalisation of the idols is used in the anti-iconic rhetoric (e.g., Is 6:9-10),[42] but it is important to bear in

37. FINKELSTEIN, Israel. Migration of Israelites into Judah after 720 BCE: An answer and update. In: *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*. Tel Aviv, v. 127, 2015, p. 188-206.

38. GNUSE, 1997, p. 194-96.

39. KÖCKERT, Matthias. Suffering from formlessness: The ban on images in exilic times. In: ed. BECKING, Bob and Dirk Human (Orgs.). *Exile and suffering: A selection of papers read at the 50th anniversary meeting of the Old Testament society of South Africa OTWSA/OTSSA*. Pretoria, August 2007. Oudtestamentische Studïen 50. Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2009, p. 36-38, 40.

40. SOMMER, 2009, p. 38-79

41. MIDDLEMAS, Jill. *The divine image: Prophetic aniconic rhetoric and its contribution to the aniconism debate*. Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2 Reihe 2 Reihe 74. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014, p. 53-54.

42. OLYAN, Saul M. The ascription of physical disability as stigmatising strategy in biblical iconic polemics. *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*. Providence, RI, v. 9, 2009, p. 1-15.

mind that this is only an issue from an etic perspective since the ancient is not troubled by such issues. According to Middlemas, such a reluctance regarding representations of the divine in prophetic literature is evident by the fact that most symbols employed within the worship appears without form and their function was exclusively to guide the worship instead of representing Yahweh; furthermore, the transformation of multiple image representations of the deity into metaphors mixing anthropomorphic and theriomorphic figures seems to be a literary device employed by the writers to communicate the incomparable nature Yahweh.[43] Yet there is still another important aspect intimately related to strategic aniconism, which is the absence of the temple during the exilic age. Ornan presents insightful explanation to this matter through some important remarks regarding the ancient Near Eastern culture observing that the presence of anthropomorphic representations of the gods were restricted to their respective sanctuaries whilst their theriomorphic images were represented beyond the realms of their temples, but sometimes the absence of anthropomorphic images of the deities in the palace was intended to glorify a particular ruler.[44] More striking, however, is the relationship between strategic aniconism and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple during the exilic age, when most of the current shape of the HB took place.[45]

Conclusion

If the use of icons suggests that the ancient Near Eastern deities had bodies, it would be natural to assume that their social relations and even emotions were also described in human terms (e.g., kingship).[46] The suzerain-vassal relationship was used to describe the god-human relations in Hittite culture (e.g., KUB 13.2 iii 21-32).[47] This model also influenced some HB scholars, such as Von Rad, Mendenhall and Eichrodt,[48] although Eichrodt exaggerated considering the notion of ברית as central to the whole HB and even imposing it on wisdom lite-

43. MIDDLEMAS, 2014, p. 89-90, 123-24.
44. ORNAN, 2005, p. 168-82.
45. Ibid., 174-82.
46. BUBER, Martin. *Königtum Gottes*. Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1956, p. 39-50; LIND, Millard C. *Yahweh is a warrior: The theology of warfare in ancient Israel*. Scottdalle, PA and Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1980, p. 23-33.
47. HOFFNER, H. A. Theodicy in Hittite Texts. In: LAATO, Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (Orgs.). *Theodicy in the world of the Bible*. Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2003, p. 90-94, 106-07.
48. VON RAD, Gerhard. Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuch. *Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament*. Stuttgart, v. 4, 1938, p. 37-68; MENDENHALL, George E. Ancient oriental and biblical law. *Biblical Archaeology*. Ann Arbor, MI: v. 17, 1954, p. 26-46.

rature.[49] Von Rad, however, challenged the idea that the HB has a centre and McCarthy argued that the concept of covenant is not uniform.[50] Nevertheless, one can argue that the juxtaposition between aniconic and iconic practices does not treat the issue properly because it misses the conflict between the textual and the external realities besides the fact that Brazilian Protestantism already reads such iconic features with some predisposition. Despite that, the understanding of this theological development may contribute to a better comprehension of the Christian reception of these texts and the formulation of the NT theology of incarnation.

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