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Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God: In Ancient Israel ...

Keel and Uehlinger's unique study brings the massive Palestinian archaeological evidence of 8,500 amulets and inscriptions to bear on these questions. Vindicating the use of symbols and visual remains to investigate ancient religion, the authors employ iconographic evidence from around 1750 B.C.E. through the Persian period (c. 333 B.C.E.) to reconstruct the emergence and development of the ...

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The view of ancient Israelite religion as monotheistic has long been traditional in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, religions that have elaborated in their own way the biblical image of a single male deity. But recent archaeological findings of texts and images from the Iron Age kingdoms of Israel and Judah and their neighbourhood offer a quite different impression. Two issues in particular raised by these are the existence of a female consort, Asherah, and the implication for monotheism; and the proliferation of pictorial representations that may contradict the biblical ban on images. Was the religion of ancient Israel really as the Bible would have us believe? This volume provides a comprehensive introduction to these issues, presenting the relevant inscriptions and discussing their possible impact for Israelite monotheism, the role of women in the cult, and biblical theology.

The historical and literary questions about ancient Israel that traditionally have preoccupied biblical scholars have often overlooked the social realities of life experienced by the vast majority of the population of ancient Israel. Volumes in the Library of Ancient Israel draw on multiple disciplines -- such as archaeology, anthropology, sociology, and literary criticism -- to illumine the everyday realities and social subtleties these ancient cultures experienced. This series employs sophisticated methods resulting in original contributions that depict the reality of the people behind the Hebrew Bible and interprets these scholarly insights for a wide variety of readers. Individually and collectively, these books will expand our vision of the culture and society of ancient Israel, thereby generating new appreciation for its impact up to the present. Patrick Miller investigates the role religion played in an expanding circle of influences in ancient Israel: the family, village, tribe, and nation-state. He situates Israel's religion in context where a variety of social forces affected beliefs, and where popular cults openly competed with the "official" religion. Miller makes extensive use of both epigraphic and artefactual evidence as he deftly probes the complexities of Iron Age culture and society and their enduring significance for people today.

There is still much disagreement over the origins and development of Israelite religion. Mark Smith sets himself the task of reconstructing the cult of Yahweh, the most important deity in Israel's early religion, and tracing the transformation of that deity into the sole god - the development of monotheism.

Who was the mother goddess of the ancient religion of Israel, the spouse of the god Yahweh? Archaeological and literary-biblical studies refer to her as "Asherah," yet, they cannot explain why this name is not mentioned in the book of Genesis, a book that portrays the formation of Israel's religion. In this groundbreaking book, Dvora Lederman-Daniely provides an answer to this enigmatic question. Based on meticulous research she argues the goddess's name does appear in the book of Genesis but it is concealed within the name of the first human matriarch of the people of Israel: Sarai. Deciphering and identifying the forgotten and censored name of the divine spouse of Yahweh opens the door to a revolutionary understanding of the relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel, as perceived during the formation of the Hebrew people. Moreover, biblical images and metaphors are stripped back and their outrageous mythological content is laid bare. Through careful argument Lederman-Daniely excavates the very origins of Jewish customs and decrees exposing how they embody the ancient worship of a goddess who was Yahweh's spouse.

In this volume, Nathaniel Levtow articulately interacts with Mesopotamian and Israelite iconoclastic traditions, locating Israelite polemics against cult images among a spectrum of ancient West Asian literary genres and ritual practices that target the embodied deities of political opponents. Levtow argues that Israelite parodies of Mesopotamian iconic cult were not unique expressions of aniconic monotheism but assertions of Israelite political potency during and shortly after the Babylonian Exile. By interpreting Israelite icon parodies in this context, Levtow rejects the idea of "idolatry" as a static, native Israelite descriptive category and highlights the ability of Israelite writers to compose authoritative classifications of cult that profoundly influenced ancient and modern understandings of iconic worship practices. He concludes that biblical representations of iconic cult reveal dynamic acts of Israelite social formation and exemplify the enduring power of the cult image in ancient West Asian societies.

In this masterful commentary, respected biblical scholar Bruce Waltke carefully interprets the message of the prophet Micah, building a bridge between Micah's ancient world and our life today. Waltke's Commentary on Micah quickly distinguishes itself from other commentaries on this book by displaying an unprecedented exegetical thoroughness, an expert understanding of historical context, and a keen interest in illuminating the contribution of Micah to Christian theology. Tackling hard questions about date and authorship, Waltke contends that Micah himself wrote and edited the nineteen sermons comprising the book. Waltke's clear analytical outline leads readers through the three cycles of Micah, each beginning with an oracle of doom and ending with an oracle of hope, decisively showing that hope wins over doom. Learned yet amazingly accessible, combining scholarly erudition with passion for Micah's contemporary relevance, this book will well serve teachers, pastors, and students alike.

Images of the body in ancient Near Eastern civilizations are radically different from body images today, which in turn creates significant consequences for our understanding of the biblical notion of God's human shape and the frequent and widespread misconceptions therein. Andreas Wagner illuminates such frequent and widespread misconceptions, and reveals the sometimes distant pictorial world of ancient body images. He contrasts these with contemporary models and makes the matter of the Old Testament concept of God's human form accessible and clear. Wagner begins by introducing readers to aspects of anthropomorphism, the study of body parts, and Israel's basic understanding of the human body. He then turns specifically to the body of God, analysing why and how certain body parts are emphasized or regularly employed in the biblical text when it tries to describe God. Wagner draws out the theological aspects of the ways in which God's body is described as well as considering the diverse range of ancient Near Eastern perspectives on God, and the ways in which ancient cultures constructed and understood deities. Wagner concludes by looking at how the depiction of God in the Old Testament fits with the concept of mankind made in God's image. Enhanced by over fifty illustrations, God's Body will lead the debate in biblical anthropomorphism for years to come.

Revised thesis (Ph.D.) - Princeton Theological Seminary, 2001.

According to the Bible, ancient Israel's neighbors worshipped a wide variety of gods. In recent years, scholars have sought a better understanding of this early polytheistic milieu and its relation to Yahweh, the God of Israel. Drawing on ancient Ugaritic texts and looking closely at Ugaritic deities, Mark Smith examines the meaning of "divinity" in the ancient near East and considers how this concept applies to Yahweh.

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