

Prophetic Attitudes towards Divine Images and Aniconism in Deuteronomy¹

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Abstract: This paper examines prophetic attitudes towards aniconism in conjunction with the so-called Second Commandment (considered part of the First Commandment in Jewish and Catholic traditions) in Deuteronomy 5 and its exposition in Dt. 4 in order to shed new light on the discussion. The differences between the statements in Deuteronomy attest to growing concerns about stabilizing the divine image in any singular form. The prophets supported the image ban, but they also expanded definitions of aniconism beyond the manufacture of idols and images occurring in the natural order. To resist idolatry, which is the benchmark for a right relationship with God according to Deuteronomy (and also Ezekiel), the divine image must be as multivalent as creation. When seen in this light, the findings of this investigation with its focus on divine imagery support arguments that suggest that the concept of aniconism is more fundamental to biblical concepts of religion and identity than even monotheism.

A great number of interpretive issues arise when one considers in more detail passages relating to divine images in Deuteronomy 4 and 5. In particular, two questions have been raised that I wish to address in the context of this paper. One is textual and deals with whether there is an insertion from a later time in the so-called Second Commandment.² The other deals with the nature of the worship addressed by the Second Commandment and the parenthesis in Deuteronomy 4, namely, of its relevance to issues related to the worship of foreign deities and Yahwistic practice. Following a close examination of the image ban in the Second Commandment and the parenthesis, I consider issues of aniconism in practice and the use of idolatry³ as a measuring line drawn by the *Golah*.

The Image Ban in Deuteronomy

The book of Deuteronomy seemingly contains differing attitudes to the prohibition against images. Let us first look at the Second Commandment. In the Ten Commandments the first and second verses are closely related and if we consider them as they appear in Deuteronomy, the proximity is even closer.⁴

7 ...You shall have no other gods before me. 8 You shall not make for yourself an idol whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 9 You shall not bow down to them or worship them ... (Deut 5:7–8, selected)

¹ The following represents a working paper and I reserve the right to make changes or alterations before the presentation. Citations only with authorial permission.

² I use the so-called here because the Second Commandment reflects the division of the material according to Protestant and Eastern Orthodox traditions, which consider that the First Commandment addresses exclusive loyalty to God, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Deut 5:7) and the Second Commandment to prohibit the creation of sculpted images or idols of a deity, “You shall not make for yourself an idol” (Deut 5:8). In Lutheran, Catholic, and Jewish interpretation the two are one commandment, “You shall not worship other gods or idols” (paraphrased). Ten Commandments are reached in the Lutheran and Catholic traditions by separating out the commandments between coveting the neighbour’s spouse and coveting the neighbour’s house, land, or servant. There is equally the related issue that the Old Testament actually makes reference to ten words and not to commandments *per se*.

³ I use the terminology of idol and idolatry as shorthand with reference to divine images used in worship contexts. In so doing, I do not make any derogatory claims about their existence or lack thereof.

⁴ Weinfeld, 1991: 243–45.

When we take a brief glance at the same series of statements in Exod. 20, an important distinction becomes apparent. Deuteronomy's "You shall not make for yourself an idol, *which* bears any likeness" (Deut 5:8), varies ever so slightly from the articulation of Exodus, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, *or* any likeness ..." (Exod 20:4, italics added).

A conjunction, *waw explicitum*, between the word for 'idol' and the phrase 'any likeness' appears in the Exodus passage that is not found in the same verse in Deuteronomy. The implications of this distinction become clear in the continuation of the commandment, "You shall not bow down to *them* or worship *them*" (Deut 5:9 = Exod 20:5, italics added).⁵ In Exodus the antecedent for the plural 'them' is very clearly the two things mentioned in the previous verse, namely, the 'idol' and the 'likeness' (Exod 20:4). In contrast, the antecedent in the Deuteronomy reference is less clear because the plural 'them' is unlikely to be made in conjunction with the singular reference to an 'idol, which bears any likeness.' On this basis, many interpreters have suggested that the antecedent refers, in fact, to the 'gods' mentioned in, "you shall have no other gods" (Deut 5:7), whereas others suggest that the other gods and idol are both intended as referents. The textual ambiguity represents a distinction that has implications for how we understand aniconism in ancient Israel.

Verse 8 with its reference to the *pesel kol temunah*, "an idol bearing any likeness" interjects a ban against cultic images into the commandment and uses language consistent with Deuteronomy 4 and nowhere else. Cogent arguments, therefore, have been raised that the reference to the image bearing idol is an insertion from a later time and from the same hand as Deuteronomy 4.⁶ At the same time, the verse abbreviates language found in chapter 4 and could also reflect an early articulation not yet elaborated, but a debate about this takes us too far afield. The point, though, as Angelika Berlejung has examined most thoroughly, is that gods were worshipped with divine images in the ancient world.⁷ So, I will still infer, then, that the other gods includes the worship of their divine images, even should the explicit expression thereof be attributed to a later redactor. In Deuteronomy, the line between prohibitions against the worship of other gods and idols is blurred, so that, when taken literally, the commandment to avoid the construction of divine images is an extension of the prohibition against the worship of gods other than Yahweh.

More pertinent to our purposes here, when taken at face value, then, the first two statements in the deuteronomistic Decalogue do not say anything prescriptive about acceptable worship practices for Yahweh.⁸ In other words, the verses refer only to the worship of other gods—do not venerate deities other than Yahweh or their idols because Yahweh is a jealous God. In the extant literature from ancient Israel a variety of traditions about aniconism appear, but what is clear is that the worship of gods other than Yahweh and their idols were rejected, but Yahwistic images were acceptable, only later to be rejected.

⁵ On 'them' as a reference to the other gods of 5:7 and always to foreign gods, see Zimmerli 1963: 236–38; Moran 1967: 553–54. Cf. Hossfeld 1982: 23–24.

⁶ The insertion of Deut. 5:8 has long been argued. E.g. Zimmerli 1963; Knapp 1987: 36–37; Otto 1996; Holter 2003; Veijola 2004: 106; Köchert 2007: 277–78.

⁷ Berlejung 1997; 1998. Cf. Weinfeld 1991: 291; Frevel 2003: 34; Feder 2013: 257–58.

⁸ Mettinger 1997: 177, states this somewhat differently, "The question whether an image of YHWH is forbidden is not dealt with *explicitly* in the Decalogue." Cf. Frevel 2003: 46.

Aniconism in ancient Israel corresponding to the Second Commandment (Dt. 5)

At one time in the tradition of ancient Israel, images were allowed to be used in Yahwistic religious practice.⁹ It has been generally recognized, for instance, that Moses initiated the use of the bronze serpent or Nehustan in worship (Num. 21:4–9), which was later removed as part of a cult reform associated with King Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:4). In the book of Judges, Micah had an idol constructed and established with a priest in a shrine. Later the idol is taken away by the Danites and established with a priesthood traced back to Moses in Shiloh, a Yahwistic city (Judg. 17–18). In addition, King Jeroboam of the Northern Kingdom established statues of bull calves in Bethel and Dan as Yahweh symbols to direct worship away from the Jerusalem Temple (1 Kgs 12:25–32). In the Southern Kingdom, the First temple contained the symbols of the Cherubim Throne and the Ark of the Covenant, which represented divine presence in the Holy of Holies (2 Kgs 6).¹⁰

It is also possible that a cultic statue of Yahweh was present in the First Temple, but our evidence is too limited to be certain. Certainly before the Ark was settled in the Temple, it was the cultic object that most closely corresponded to an idol. It symbolized divine presence and could be paraded about as idols also were in the ancient world.¹¹ Tellingly, early prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, and Amos do not express animosity towards the worship of images, but instead railed against the worship of foreign deities and syncretism. Similarly, the castigation of the worship of Baal and other cultic objects through the allegorical language of adultery participates in this type of ideology in Hosea (Hos. 2:10[8], 15[13], 19[17]; possibly also 7:16; 11:7 cf. 4:12, 17–18).

These tantalizing pieces of information suggest that Yahwistic cultic symbols were acceptable within worship settings, but the veneration of other deities either alongside of or in exclusion to Yahweh were not. Deuteronomy 5 seems to stem from the thought that accompanied the time when the worship of foreign gods was rejected.¹² Since cultic statues or idols often accompanied worship of these gods, the symbols were also prohibited.

There were several different cultic reform movements in ancient Israel referred to in the biblical communal-written memory that by and large targeted other gods and their physical representations. In addition to cultic reforms associated with the ninth century kings Asa (1 Kgs. 15:9–14) and Jehoshaphat (1 Kgs. 22:41–51),¹³ Jehu eradicated the worship of Baal in the Northern Kingdom (2 Kgs 10:18–28), Jehoiada also targeted Baal worship in the Southern Kingdom (2 Kgs 11:17–18), Hezekiah reformed the cult of the Southern Kingdom by removing symbols and places of worship dedicated to deities other than Yahweh (2 Kgs 18:4; cf. 21:3), and Josiah destroyed cultic images and other sanctuaries in order to centralize worship to Yahweh in the Jerusalem Temple (2 Kgs 23:4–20). Most of these reform activities were directed at deities other than Yahweh. At some point in the history of ancient

⁹ Zimmerli 1974; Mettinger 1979; Hossfeld 1982: 270–71.

¹⁰ On Cherubim Throne, Keel 1977;

¹¹ E.g. Mettinger 1995: 196; Niehr 1997: 81–82, 85–86; Na'aman 1999, Levitow 2008: 132–43; Herring 2013: 67–93.

¹² Mettinger 1997: 176 n. 12, 177, regards the so-called Second Commandment to be an inexplicit example of programmatic aniconism with respect to Yahweh imaging and cites Houten in support. Here I differ from Dohmen 1987; Dick 1999, who see the reference to a cultic image and also exilic, when the cultic image is thought to be associated with Yahweh and not foreign gods.

¹³ Dick 1999: 10.

Israel, the worship of divine images connected to Yahweh worship came to be rejected.

The Image Ban in the Deuteronomy Parenthesis (Dt. 4)

Deuteronomy also contains an interpretive paraphrase of the image ban in chapter 4.

15 Since you all did not see any form (*kol temunah*) when Yahweh spoke to you at Horeb... 16 do not act corruptly by making for yourselves an image, in the form of any figure (*pesel temunah kol semel*)—the likeness (*tabnit*) of male or female, 17 the likeness (*tabnit*) of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness (*tabnit*) of any winged bird that flies in the air, 18 the likeness (*tabnit*) of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness (*tabnit*) of any fish that is in the water under the earth. 19 And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them...(Deut 4:15–20)

The explanation of the image ban in Deuteronomy 4 clarifies that images of Yahweh are included in the prohibition against idols.¹⁴ In so doing, it clears up the ambiguity related to the divine referent of the deuteronomic second commandment. The image ban applied not just to foreign gods and their idols, but also to Yahwistic images in the shapes of all kinds of things found on the earth as well as natural phenomena visible in the night sky.¹⁵ In addition, the expansion provides a rationale for the Commandment against idolatry. The image ban is justified on the basis of the lack of a visible form when Yahweh appeared in the fire. In addition, it offers a sociological construct that prohibited Yahwistic practice on the basis of the worship of images.

At the same time, the deuteronomic exposition draws out more specifically what types of idol shapes faithful adherents to Yahweh are to refrain from constructing and using in religious practice. Instead of the more vague prohibitions in the deuteronomic Ten Commandments against a sculpted image in any shape found “in the heaven above, or on the earth below, or that is in the water under the earth”, the exposition clarifies that forbidden forms include those in the shapes of human beings, animals, birds, creeping things, and fish as well as objects appearing in nature that could not be constructed by human hands, like the sun, the moon, and the stars. So, in fact, nothing on earth or in heaven is to be made comparable to Yahweh.

The biblical writers rejected idol creation and worship as an authorized part of Israelite practice. It is one of the features that distinguished ancient Israel from its neighbours. To be sure, there are examples of aniconic traditions in the ancient world, but they were neither as prevalent nor as sweeping as in ancient Israel.¹⁶ In addition, numerous studies now reveal that the use of images or iconism co-existed with resistance to idols or aniconism throughout the ancient Near East. The representations or depictions of gods and goddesses were replaced by symbols, like the sun, instead of a physical likeness, sometimes even on the same tablet, as on the Sippar Tablet, for example. There is evidence that sun worship was also practiced in honor of Yahweh in ancient Israel. The writers of Deuteronomy 4 rejected the veneration of natural images and joined the prohibition of the worship of heavenly bodies to the prohibition

¹⁴ Holter 2003: 43–46, 54, 69, 111–112, has argued that Deut. 4 attacks the use of divine images of foreign deities and not of Yahweh on the basis of the scarce use of *semel* in the HB/OT and his understanding that it always refers to foreign deities. There is no time in the present discussion to address his arguments in the presentation, but the objections to images is within statements about the right understanding of the worship of Yahweh and the deity’s relation to ancient Israel, which certainly suggests that vv. 15ff should be understood with reference to Yahweh.

¹⁵ Cf. Hossfeld 1982; 2003; Dohmen 1987.

¹⁶ Famously, Akenaton, see recently Assman, but also discussed in relation to the Persian deity, Ahura Mazda.

against constructed divine images in order to equate the two ideas in terms of significance.

Further Application of Aniconism and its Correlation to Dt. 4

Shifting attitudes towards Yahweh symbols from general acceptance, to the outright rejection of, divine images appear in a number of places in the Old Testament. One prominent example of the rejection of Yahweh images is found in the book of Hosea.¹⁷ Although a number of prophecies in Hosea characterize the worship of idols and Baal with the metaphor of adultery as mentioned already (e.g. Hos 4:2; 8:4; 13:2), the critique of the Bull Calf statue never utilizes this language.¹⁸ Instead, the rejection of the statue as a legitimate Yahweh cult object is made through the identification with Baal (13:1–3) and also through language found consistently in the prophetic Polemic Against Idol passages (8:1–6; 10:1–6).¹⁹ The singular passage in which the Calf statue is linked to Baal (13:1–3), begs the question of whether syncretism is, nevertheless, the problem with the Bull Calf Statue as presented in Hosea. Against a syncretistic view, however, is that a series of rhetorical strategies are found in literature about deities other than Yahweh and idols that effectively distorts their presentations in order to dissuade their worship. One such is found in the correlation of Baal and Molek in Jeremiah (32:35) and I have argued that a similar strategy is apparent here.²⁰ The reference to Baal appears in order to imply that the Bull Calf Statue is of foreign origin and therefore illegitimate, when in reality it was an accepted cultic image of Yahweh. The linkage with Baal appears alongside other material that corresponds to the prophetic idol polemics and focuses on the material composition of the statue and its human origin, also to dissuade its legitimacy. The arguments of foreignness and materiality are examples of intolerant aniconism used in conjunction with the Bull Calf. Thus, the Bull Calf Statue represents a legitimate Yahwistic cultic object, not syncretistic worship, and likely stems from a different hand and context than the castigation of Baal elsewhere in Hosea.²¹

The final form of the Book of Hosea, then, corresponds to the different expressions of illicit worship found in Deuteronomy. The rejection of following or going after other gods corresponds to the same theme found so prevalently in Deuteronomy in general as well as in the Second Commandment of Deut 5 (vv. 7–9). The rejection of physical symbols also of Yahweh in Hosea corresponds to the deuteronomic parenthesis in Deuteronomy 4 (vv. 15–20). The prophet rails against the worship of the foreign deity, Baal, rejects the manufacture and veneration of idols and cultic objects more generally, and Yahwistic cultic images.

Something similar happens with respect to Yahweh symbols in the Southern Kingdom. I have outlined this on a number of occasions elsewhere and will only mention it briefly here.²² In the Book of Ezekiel, the Cherubim Throne as a valid cultic symbol is rejected over the course of the book. Tellingly, the throne chariot

¹⁷ Hossfeld, 1982: 270–71; Middlemas 2014: 59–66.

¹⁸ The majority of interpreters regard the Bull Calf statue as a Yahwistic image, but a debate has arisen over whether it represents a symbol of Yahweh or the pedestal on which the invisible deity stood. The little evidence that we have points to the former interpretation, but a more in-depth discussion thereof is outside the scope of this presentation. Cf. Hossfeld 2003: 21; Köchert 2003: 273; Feder 2013: 259–60; Middlemas 2014:63–66.

¹⁹ Toews 1993: 155–70; Middlemas 2014: 59–63.

²⁰ This is a strategy of distortion that I have point out in Middlemas 2005: 106–109 and 2014: 46–48.

²¹ Contrary to the findings of Feder 2013: 260–62.

²² Middlemas, 2010a';2010b; 2014: 69–80.

does not return with the deity's presence to the restored and purified Temple at the conclusion of the collection. Moreover, Yahweh's continued presence is predicated on the complete rejection of idolatry, "now let them put away their idolatry...and I will dwell in their midst forever" (Ezek 43:9, selected passages).

In addition, the Ark of the Covenant, the other symbol that served as the equivalent of Yahweh's presence also disappears around the time traditionally known as the Exile and is otherwise demoted to a container rather than a symbol of divine presence in Deuteronomy.²³ Concomitantly, in Jeremiah the city of Jerusalem takes the place of the Ark²⁴ and language formerly used for the Ark in Ezekiel is co-opted for the restored Temple itself.²⁵ Thus, another cultic object spoken of in conjunction with the First Temple fails to continue as a valid symbol of divine presence after the Exile.

This raises the question of why the Cherubim Throne and the Ark of the Covenant were rejected for use in cultic practice because they do not provide representations of Yahweh and are not idols in the traditional sense. The two symbols were closely associated; the Cherubim Throne stood in the Holy of Holies and formed a seat for Yahweh when present in the Temple and the Ark served as its footstool (1 Kgs 6:19, 23–28; 8:6–7). Together they provided a visual means from which to imaginatively construct Yahweh as a human being, even as a king on the throne. Archaeology from the ancient world has yielded evidence to support such a graphic image. Thrones flanked by cherubim or seraphs had flat or tilted seats, with the flat seats providing the resting place for an idol.²⁶ In addition, reliefs and bullae depict various gods seated on thrones. The Cherubim Throne and the Ark of the Covenant together provided the throne and the footstool for the deity's presence, imaged as a human being (Isa 6:1). Yahwistic cult objects that could be used to project a particular divine image were rejected and removed in biblical tradition.

Aniconism in Practice

Based on the textual evidence of the omission of the Cherubim Throne and the Ark of the Covenant, I have suggested that a concerted effort was made in the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem to close down possibilities for visualizing the deity Yahweh in a fixed form. Concerns about imaging Yahweh in a specific form coincided with increased concerns about idolatry giving rise to a type of intolerant aniconism. During the exilic period, a series of polemics against idols equated gods other than Yahweh with lifeless statues, so that monotheism and aniconism went together, along with creation theology as is recognized more recently.²⁷ Symbolic representations that projected stabilized images of deities, of other gods and also of Yahweh, were rejected in ancient Israel.

At the same time, however, concerns about idolatry did not coincide with the eradication of all acceptable divine symbolism in Yahwism, but rather changed its interpretation. In the book of Ezekiel, the cherubim reappear, but only on the walls of the sanctuary, distinctly not as a throne in the Holy of Holies. The cherubim engraved

²³ The prophet Jeremiah even indicated that the Ark would not be replaced with another comparable symbol, "It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made" (Jer 3:16).

²⁴ "At that time, Jerusalem shall be called the throne of Yahweh" (Jer 3:17).

²⁵ "This [the Temple] is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever" (Ezek 43:7).

²⁶ E.g. Mettinger 1995.

²⁷ On the contribution of creation theology to conceptualizations of Yahweh and its link to monotheism and aniconism, see Schaper 2014. For a contradictory perspective, see Petry. 2007.

on the walls suggested guardianship and divine holiness (Ezek 41:18, 20, 25), rather than projecting an image of the presence of the deity as a king on a throne. Similarly, other symbols that do not evoke an actual image of Yahweh appear acceptable in this period and include the Menorah in Zechariah (Zech 4:1-14) and the Shew Bread in Numbers (Bread of the Presence e.g. Num. 4:7; check vv. 8, 16 cf. Exod. 25:30). These cultic objects indicated divine presence, but no longer presented a way to visualize the actual form of the deity. Thus, aniconism begins to extend to acceptable and unacceptable images of Yahweh, with a preference to avoid depictions of a stabilized image of the deity that would conjure up mental idols, as it were. The elevation of the Torah as the mediator of Yahwistic presence, note the importance of the Torah Scroll even today in the synagogue, may also belong to this same type of thought.²⁸

One of the things that I examined in *The Divine Image* is that the rejection of images led concomitantly to distancing Yahweh from stabilized objects and was met with attention to multiplying the amount and variety of mental images of the divine image. Concerns about stabilizing the image of God find expression in incomparability passages in Second Isaiah and the use of metaphor and multiple imaging to flit between divine mental iconographic pictures in order to prevent the stabilization of any single image. Idolatry, then, becomes associated with mental iconography or the equation of Yahweh with a stabilized representation, but the consideration thereof would take us too far afield from the task at hand.

The Image Ban and its Role in the *Golah* Interpretation of the New Jerusalem

According to Deuteronomy 4, which is one of the few passages that elaborates on the image ban, theological and sociological reasons are given for the prohibition of the construction and worship of idols as well as the veneration of natural bodies. The theological reason is that Yahweh is formless, “since you saw no form when Yahweh spoke to you out of the fire” (Deut 4:15). As Nathan MacDonald has shown, the idea is not that Yahweh is only transcendent and located in the heavens, but rather, a voice is heard from the heavens and a fire represents the place on earth through which a formless Yahweh makes contact with an elect people.

In addition, the passage provides a sociological reason for the image ban. Practitioners of the Yahweh cult in ancient Israel are distinguished on the basis of religious practice from other ethnic groups, “all the peoples everywhere under heaven” (Deut 4:19). The election of Israel is based on the events of the Exodus story, “Yahweh has taken you and brought you out of the iron-smelter, out of Egypt, to become a people of God’s very own possession” (Deut 4:20). It is well known that the story of the Exodus and warnings against other gods are major themes that connect the literature of the Deuteronomistic History. This paper highlights the role of idol worship, specifically, the rejection thereof, in forming a base line that marks loyal adherence to Yahweh worship and thus to the community.

Because idol worship is elevated to mark a distinction between ancient Israel and the nations, or between what we do as opposed to what they do, the author clarifies what constitutes idol worship in a more particular way. A people set apart for the worship of Yahweh are not to make or worship images in the form of men and women, animals, birds, snakes, and fish, in addition to refraining from the veneration of natural images like the sun, moon, and stars. Aniconism in the sense of the

²⁸ MacDonald 2003: 197–204; Feder 2013: 269.

prohibition against the use of Yahwistic images in religious practice is recapitulated and clarified in Deuteronomy 4. The re-statement or the pre-statement, depending on your perspective of the integrity of the image ban in the Second Commandment, elevates the importance of the image ban to a determinative practice for inclusion in the community of the “true Israel.”

Back in 2005, I had already noted that a significant amount of literature commonly traced to the exiles in Babylon castigated and condemned to destruction or unimportance other Judahite communities on the basis of accusations of the worship of other gods and divine images after the fall of Jerusalem.²⁹ At that time, I questioned how much this information could be used to reconstruct popular religious practices in the sixth century BCE, as in Susan Ackerman’s study of “popular religion”, for example. To be sure, the *Tendenz* to discredit those communities from influence on the social, political, and religious future of Persian period Yehud raises questions about the use of this data for purposes of historical reconstruction.

I had also noted that a particular passage in Isaiah 57 sought to discredit a mountain or another cultic location that seemed to compete with the deity’s chosen place of Jerusalem. In that argument, I showed how the attribution of illicit worship practices were associated with this alternative place, which I considered a cipher for Bethel or some other cultic location operative in the Benjamin region in the Templeless period, in order to condemn it. A concerted effort to return the center of religious and political influence to Jerusalem was partly made possible through the association and ascription of illicit and idolatrous worship practices.³⁰ The more important point in the context of this paper is that cultic practices considered to be abominable are used associatively to discredit another cultic location. The use of illicit ritual practices, then, becomes a marker for what is considered legitimate in Yahwistic practice and what is not, and relates equally to places as well as people.

The association of illicit worship practices in order to condemn what could be considered legitimate religious observance is a practice attested during this time. For example, the cult of Baal is associated with child sacrifice in one passage in Jeremiah in a *Golah* redacted text to clearly delegitimize the veneration of Baal. There is no time to trace these arguments in any detail, but I mention them here because a growing body of evidence is emerging that shows how idolatry and apostate worship practices are associatively being used to condemn religious practices as well as the people who observe them by the *Golah*. Idolatry, then, becomes a measuring line for what is considered legitimate Yahwistic practice. Furthermore, idolatry serves to demarcate the community along lines drawn in favor of the perspective of the Babylonian exiles and is, of course, particularly relevant to that community as many recent studies show.³¹

²⁹ Middlemas 2005: 72–121.

³⁰ Noted summarily in conjunction with other strategies to refocus on the importance of Jerusalem in Middlemas 2009.

³¹ E.g. MacDonald 2003, Römer 2003; Levitow 2008, Herring 2013, Nicholson 2014. NB: The dating of image ban to the Exile and thereafter is generally agreed, e.g. Frevel 2003, et al.

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