The Genesis of Iconographic Exegesis

Silas Klein Cardoso ⓘ

University of Zurich, Switzerland; University of Bern, Switzerland

Abstract

The article presents the genealogy and maps *Iconographic Exegesis* or *Biblische Ikonographie*. From social-material lenses, it addresses the foundation and development of the perspective, often construed as the explanation of the Bible with contemporary pictorial material. Starting with Othmar Keel and the Fribourg Circle's works and reaching scholars from other academic environments, such as South Africa, Germany, the United States, and Brazil, the paper describes the transformation of the perspective from research interest to research circle and its formalization as a subspecialization within Biblical Studies. The outlook highlights commonalities and particularities of the perspective and its enabling factors and comments on its characterization and definition.

Introduction

At first sight, the ability to interpret images may not be seen as a desirable addition to an academic field that receives its name from a literary artifact. The interpretation of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament (HB/OT), however, is not only concerned with literary matters, but with the world in which it was created. From the late 1970s on, a growing number of studies helped establish ancient visual remains as assets to interpreting biblical texts and the so-called "biblical world" (e.g., Frevel 1989: 73–83; Dever 1995: 48–49;

Corresponding author:

Silas Klein Cardoso, University of Zurich, Kantonsschulstrasse 1, Zurich 8001, Switzerland. University of Bern, Länggassstrasse 51, Bern 3012, Switzerland.
Email: silasklein@gmail.com

Uehlinger 2001; Hartenstein 2005; Berlejung 2012: 28–30, 52–57; 2022: LXIX). This perspective might be called iconographic exegesis (IE; see below). However, despite providing seminal studies, IE remains paradoxically under the radar. The lapse might be explained by the unreadiness—or unwillingness—of biblical scholars to deal with non-verbal media. Nonetheless, given the groundbreaking character of these works and the increasing interest in this perspective, it deserves a thorough treatment. The present article fills this gap by presenting a genealogy of IE and mapping its main works from a social-material perspective. After preliminary remarks on terminology and approach, the different phases of IE will be presented, beginning with its intellectual predecessors (called here "Primeval History") and then followed by the three phases of IE as a research interest ("The Ancestor"), as a research circle ("The Generations"), and in its ongoing institutionalization ("The Households").

Preliminary Remarks

Outlining the history of IE is not without challenges. The first obstacle is how to characterize the perspective. IE was defined as "an interpretive approach that explains aspects of the Hebrew Bible with the help of ancient Near Eastern visual remains" (Hulster, Strawn, and Bonfiglio 2015a: 20). However, the last two decades saw other ways of portraying the same group of works; for example, as a perspective (Cornelius 2016: 784), methodology (Töyräänvuori 2020: 51; see Hulster 2011), discipline (Klingbeil 1999: 8), and "partial philosophical turn" (Bonfiglio 2016: 1–5). These different characterizations reflect the changing status of the endeavor (Klein Cardoso 2021: 4–6). In addition, different scholarly traditions understand the practice differently. Despite deriving their origins from the same scholarly works, IE differs from its German-language counterpart, *Biblische Ikonographie* (BI; also *Ikonographie Palästinas*). If IE was devised as a *step* within the historical-critical exegesis (Hulster 2009; 2011), and only after a decade expanded to an *interpretive approach*, BI reflects either a *comparative synthesis* of research on texts and images (Schroer 1995; Hartenstein 2005: 200; Eggler et al. 2006) or *an independent field of study* that deals with iconographical material focused on the cultural context where the biblical texts were produced or narrated (see Berlejung 2012). The latter is analogous to the neighbor discipline *biblischen Archäologie*/*Archäologie Palästinas*. However artificial scholarly classifications might be, the separation between IE and BI seems counterproductive regarding taxonomic efforts and their differences seem more attached to scholarly traditions than to assumptions or practices. Therefore, this study does not use IE as a descriptive terminology but as an umbrella term for inter-artistic comparative practices correlating biblical texts and ancient images. The result is a broader selection of works, including even some that do not self-ascribe or refuse the label. In other words, by approaching iconographic exegesis as a perspective, I am also including works labeled as *Bibel und Ikonographie* (Keel 1985b), *Biblische Ikonographie/Biblical Iconography* (Schroer 1995: 220; Berlejung 2012: 52–57; see Berlejung 2022: LXIX–LXX), *Ikonographie* (see Eggler et al. 2006)*, integral visual exegesis* (Beach 1991: 16), *pictorial exegesis* (Weissenrieder, Wendt, and Gemünden

2005: viii), and "a type of holistic exegesis" (see Keel 1998a: 219, translated by the author).

The second challenge in outlining the history of IE is how to approach and describe its history of scholarship. Previous authors privileged biographic or community-centered approaches (e.g., Uehlinger 2000; Hulster 2008: 21–164) or employed the metaphor of "waves" (e.g., Bonfiglio 2016: 2–5; Saari 2020: 4–7). However insightful, these accounts did not capture the uneven dynamics of the field. For almost fifty years, the different origins of scholars, divergent organization of scholarly networks, and the general avoidance of methodological discussions created dissimilar scholarly practices for academic groups in different regions. For these reasons, I approach the topic through social-material lenses. In other words, I analyze how societal dynamics—that is, biographical, social, epistemic, economic, religious—and tools of knowledge come together to produce knowledge (see Bourdieu 1999; Clark 2006; Levine 2017) and how they helped to shape IE. To assess this social-material facet, this article employs two metaphors based on the biblical book of Genesis. The first metaphor, applied in the description of predecessors, the work of Keel and his network (the "Fribourg Circle") is genealogical and portrays *knowledge as heritage*. That is fitting since Keel can be considered a kind of "founding father" to the field, meaning that subsequent scholars built on (e.g., Hulster, Strawn, and Bonfiglio 2015b) or reacted against him (e.g., Frevel 1989: 73–83; Beach 1991: 36–39, 70–73). The second metaphor, which describes the expansion beyond Switzerland and the independent development in other regions, is the metaphor of *households* (sociology of knowledge would use the term "tribes," see Becher and Trowler 2001; Maffesoli 2016). On the one hand, the metaphor makes visible the scattering of practices and methodological particularities that emerged in places such as South Africa, Germany, the United States, Brazil, and Finland. On the other hand, the territorial background of the metaphor (see Salmond 1987: 82) evinces the link between the social-material and political-epistemological aspects of knowledge production and reception (for tensions in creation/reception of knowledge, see Bourdieu 1993: 133–138; Fricker 2007).

The Phases of the History of IE

Primeval History: Predecessors

The ancient roots of using images to interpret the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament dates back to late antiquity (Keel 1992a: 359–360; 1997a: 131–135; see Keel 2017a: 27). In this period, the practice sought to illustrate the historical realities of the biblical world by providing faces of biblical characters and portrayals of biblical events. In the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, visual encyclopedias followed the same practice, approximating the material findings from the archaeology of biblical lands (Schroer 1995: 220–223; Schroer and Keel 2005: 13–16). Even though Gressmann's *Altorientalische Bilder zum Alten Testament* (*ABAT*; 1927) and Pritchard's *The Ancient Near East in Pictures: Relating to the Old Testament* (*ANEP*; 1969) helped to compile and organize the material that was eventually used by later scholars while also proving a selection of visual sources to be compared to biblical texts, none of these movements were as influential as

the theological developments of the comparative approaches from the beginning of the twentieth century, especially of the so-called "History of Religions School." According to Keel, "the comparative work done by Gressmann, Jeremias, Gunkel, and other scholars was based on a liberal theology that assumed that any expression of the human spirit could contain potential insights into the nature and deeds of God (*revelation generalis*)" (Keel 1992a: 371). Gressmann, in that sense, "saw the biblical texts primarily as religious texts from the perspective of their origin and their effect, and religion for its part as a special component of cultural life" (Schroer and Keel 2005: 14, translated by the author). Despite reactions against the movement, its seeds helped establish a path that contemporary scholars can now walk upon.

The Ancestor: Othmar Keel

Keel can be seen as IE's "founding father." While his "exceptional powers" (or charisma, see Weber 1978: 241) are usually linked to his use of iconographic material in a highly logocentric field, his academic authority actually stems from a complex of factors meeting in and around him (for the social-material construction of charisma, see Barnes 1978: 15; Clark 2006: 14–19).

Biographically, Keel's Catholic background gave him a distinctive lens with which to read the Bible not just as the word of God (*Wort Gottes*) but also as the image of God (*Bild Gottes*) (Keel 1997b: 9) in a time when the interpretive mainstream in HB/OT studies was Protestant. The change would not have been possible without the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). The Council helped to finalize the long process of integrating historical-critical methods into Catholic biblical interpretation and, as a result, "the interpretation of the Bible by Catholic scholars in the second half of the twentieth century began to rival that of their Protestant and Jewish peers" (Fitzmyer 2008: 6; see Flynn 2020: 29–35). Furthermore, the Council was pivotal to Keel's establishment as one of the first lay professors at the Theological Institute of Fribourg, Switzerland.

From social and institutional standpoints, Keel benefited from many professional partnerships. Even before assembling his team for the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) projects in 1981 (see "The Generations"), he teamed up with Küchler, another professor in Fribourg studying the iconographic interpretation of the Bible (see Küchler 1986; 2014) to inaugurate the book series *Orte und Landschaften der Bibel* in 1969. This network was amplified by Keel's constant correspondence with experts in neighboring fields and strengthened with the SNFS projects and personnel.

Finally, one must also consider the intellectual *momentum* of images in the humanities in the 1970s. Images had become focal points of many scholarly incursions in the twentieth century, especially in Switzerland and Germany (Burke 2001: 11–12; see Levine 2013). Before and after the great wars, the intellectual movement transformed images from illustration into sources and, later, into an analytical category that could help interpreters understand cultures. This movement, which was influential in Keel's work, was labeled a "pictorial turn" in most of the English-speaking world and an "iconic turn" in the German-speaking world.

The Breakthrough: A Visual Grammar of the Biblical World View. Keel first considered images to be social-psychological archetypes, pieces of a bigger puzzle that constituted localized but pervasive worldviews. Keel started on this path by analyzing ancient Near Eastern images and texts through phenomenological-Eliadean lenses (Schroer and Keel 2005: 17). Even without pictures, his Ph.D. dissertation offers a telling example of this phase. In *Feinde und Gottesleugner*, backed by C. G. Jung's *Tiefenpsychologie*, he tried to escape from the historicism that dominated previous interpretations of the "enemies" often mentioned in the Psalms. These interpretations tried to identify these "enemies" with specific historical figures. Keel, in contrast, assumed that one should access the culture as a whole to understand specific (re)actions (Keel 1969; see Keel 1997c). Therefore, in the book, he understands "image" as a *Bild* or pattern, and connected these (literary) images to a particular *Weltanschauung* (Keel 1969: 29–30).

This provided the basis for the seminal *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament* (Keel 1972 [Eng. 1997d; Spa. Keel 2007a]), the intellectual foundation of IE (Pury 1978: 161–164; Uehlinger 2000; Hulster, Strawn, and Bonfiglio 2015a: 20). Keel's assumption that images revealed summaries of concepts or mental images was inspired by the art-historians Schäfer and Frankfort (Keel 1997d: 7, 12), who created "grammars" for the interpretation of pre-Greek art (see Brunner-Traut 2002: 421). In other words, their analyses of ancient art as a language, with specific syntactical and semantic patterns, seems to have cognitively triggered Keel to compare patterns of visual (ANE art) and linguistic (Psalms) representation.

That is not to say that the comparisons were unproblematic. Keel's critique of von Däniken's work—the ground plan for *Bildsymbolik* (compare Keel 1970; 1972)—is a telling example. Whereas Keel argued that von Däniken disregarded the different genres of biblical texts, Keel himself did not show the same diligence with images, often dislocating them from proper historical-artistic frameworks (e.g., Keel 1970: 36–46, 49). It is hardly surprising, in that sense, to read Keel arguing in 1972 that "to the serious student, iconography can in no way replace the study of written sources" (Keel 1997d: 8). Conversely, two decades later, Keel stated that "the testimony provided by a culture's pictorial representations must not be immediately and permanently placed under the guardianship of texts" (Keel 1992b: xi–xii, translated by the author). This can also be explained by Keel's strong historically centered exegetical background that not only saw phenomenological approaches with suspicion—the only reason for him taking this path was the assumed lack of images to enable direct historical comparisons—but also an *a priori* centralization on texts. In contrast, modern practitioners used *Bildsymbolik* for other reasons, such as the interpretation of long-term historical processes. The interpretation of metaphors, however, benefits today from the more accurate histories of motifs (*Motivgeschichten*) produced in the last decades, together with a social-psychological approach to connecting images and texts.

The Emergence of Iconographic Exegesis. On a sabbatical in Jerusalem in 1975, Keel realized that local, miniature art existed in ancient Palestine/Israel in the form of "many thousands of scarabs, scaraboids, button seals, cone seals and cylinder seals, almost all decorated with images, that have come to light in Israel" (Keel 1977a: 11–12, translated by the author). This represented a turning point and arguably the most prolific period in the Swiss-based IE that lasted from 1974 until 1986. "He now tried to differentiate

[iconographical sources] more rigorously on a chronological and regional basis, to achieve greater historical-critical precision" (Schroer and Keel 2005: 17, translated by the author). A decade of exegetical studies in various literary genres followed, defining IE in almost every way. Within a decade, Keel covered the main genres of the Hebrew Bible: narratives (Keel 1974a), proverbs (Keel 1974b), visions (Keel 1978a), and legal codes (Keel 1980a). The circle came to an end with the return to the poetry of Song of Songs (Keel 1984; 1986a).

The search for historical precision started before the Jerusalem sabbatical, which was planned as a way to seek accurate historical data (Schroer and Keel 2005: 17). In two publications, Keel used ancient images to illuminate the meaning of obscure concepts, inverting the approach from macro-to-micro of *Bildsymbolik* to micro-to-macro, akin to historical-critical methods. In *Die Weisheit "spielt" vor Gott*, iconography is used to illuminate the meaning of *měśaḥeqet* (to play) in Prov. 8.30 (Keel 1974b). In *Wirkmächtige Siegeszeichen,* as the German title reveals, he analyzed four "victory signs"; that is, the meaning of *kîdōwn* (scimitar) (Josh. 8.18, 26), the raised hands of Moses (Exod. 17.8–13), the symbolic act of Elisha with the bow and arrow (2 Kgs 13:14–19), and the horns of Zedekiah (1 Kgs 22.11) (Keel 1974a; for an expanded English summary, see Keel 1999). Especially for the latter, he aimed to show the "demonstrable dependence on ancient Oriental or ancient Egyptian pictorial art in some OT motifs" (Keel 1974a: 7, translated by the author), which resulted in a kind of iconography-based source-criticism (see the phrasing in Keel 1974a: 135).

With the systematic study of stamp seals (see Keel 1986b), the correlation between literary and iconographic motifs received a control method (Uehlinger 2000: 401–402). In this regard, *Jahwe-Visionen & Siegelkunst* can be seen as a landmark for using images from a delimited space and time (Keel 1977a). Two movements enabled this stage. The first is the limitation to the most common southern-Levantine classes of artifacts, whereas 37 percent of *Bildsymbolik*'s images comes from wall reliefs, *Jahwe-Visionen* has 50 percent of seals and only 17 percent of reliefs. The second was the choice of research topics beyond the grasp of philology. The lexical units referring to ethereal creatures or supernatural entities—namely, the cherubim, seraphim, and the visions in Ezekiel—are arguably better assessed and visualized through iconography than by the etymological studies. This change of focus made it possible to see images as materializations of ancient mental imagery while proposing dates for the texts in which these related images appear. In a field fascinated with history since the nineteenth century (Sæbø 2015), the substitution of the phenomenological approach of *Bildsymbolik* by the historical approach of *Jahwe-Visionen* was well-received (Görg 1977: 13; Pury 1978: 161; Weippert 1978: 43).

While the empiric work by Keel on the iconography of seals was soon recognized and reached other fields (Uehlinger 1993a: xix, n. 38), his methodology was initially criticized (see Görg 1977; 1978; 1985; Weippert 1978). Keel famously preferred bottom-up approaches and avoided what he called discussions *in abstracto* (Keel 1978b: 40). Still, his interpretative framework was consistently founded on two assumptions. The first assumption is that texts and images, as cultural products, evolve as cultural processes instead of natural ones. The main reactions to *Jahwe-Visionen* may have provoked this elaboration. Weippert, for example, pointed out that "neither pictures nor texts were

created with the aim of mutual interpretation; rather, they both try to trace and describe facts [*Sachverhalten*] through their own means" (Weippert 1978: 53–54, translated by the author). Weippert's questioning seemed to be founded on the assumption that symbols refer to facts and events. Although Keel's rejoinder did not address these questions (Keel 1978b), his *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob* (Keel 1978a) can be seen as a response and a methodological leap. In the book, Keel criticizes the practice of using scientific manuals to explain biblical texts, specifically Job 38–41 (Keel 1978a: 5, 11–12). A similar argument appeared in *Deine Blicke sind Tauben*, where he states that "although nature triggers feelings, when it comes to concrete expression, the poem or the painting, the artist is primarily guided by artistic models, which in the best case he modifies (from nature) according to the law of 'pattern and correction'" (Keel 1984: 23, translated by the author). The assumption that "art is born of art, not of nature" showed the relationship between images and texts to be more complex while providing an analogous method of analysis for both (Gombrich 1961: 22; see, for example, Keel 1984: 23; 1985a: 27; 1992a: 25; 1994a: 27). As a result of this assumed symmetry between the culturally embedded production of texts and pictorial art, the history of motifs became a key for unraveling the meaning of biblical texts in Keel's future scholarship. *Jahwes Entgegnung*, in this regard, shows how God's answer to Job can be clarified through the "lord of the animals" motif (Keel 1978a). Subsequently, in *Das Böcklein in der Milch seiner Mutter und Verwandtes*, the prohibition of cooking the kid in mother's milk (Exod. 22.28b-29; 23.19b; 34.26b; Deut. 14.21c; 22.6; Lev. 22.28) is illuminated by the "suckling caprids" motif (Keel 1980a).

The second assumption of his interpretative framework is based on is the characterization of culture as a symbolic system. Keel's comparisons assume that the different content sources (i.e., verbal and non-verbal) are part of the same cultural system. While the term "symbolic system" appears only later in Keel's work (Keel 1990: 403; 1992b: xii; Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 7–9; see Keel 1997a: 124–125), the core idea that texts and images are "cultural symptoms" is assumed from *Jahwes Entgegnung* on. In fact, the main three conceptual inspirations for Keel are linked to the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* of Cassirer (1955), who proposed that "all cultural activities of mankind, including myth, language, or science, are related to meaning through symbolic forms" (Juenghani 2020: 143). First, Keel's iconological interpretation was built upon the work of Panofsky, a colleague of Cassirer from the Hamburg School (Levine 2013). Second, Keel's historical-religious works used Geertz's idea of a symbolic system, for whom the main aim was discovering the "role of symbolic forms in human life" (Geertz 1973: 29). Third, Keel also drew on Assmann's concept of *Konstellation*, that is, the sum of reference points ("icons") that developed and give constancy to a myth, which was also inspired by Cassirer (Assmann 1982: 38; see Assmann 1995; 1977). Both studies on Song of Songs (Keel 1984; 1986a) are built upon the idea of symbolic system and organized through "concentric circles." To Keel, each "interpretative circle" represents a distinct interface of comparison: the first is the immediate literary context, the second is the biblical book, the third is the HB/OT, and the fourth is the land where the text was supposedly written. In the latter, images come to the arena since "the natural world has innumerable aspects, but culture is interested in only a few of them," leading to the priority of cultural aspects over natural and the resulting need to "study the pictorial images in seals, amulets, ivories, and

other valuables with which the well-to-do people who wrote the Song were daily surrounded" (Keel 1994b: 27).

All in all, the possibility of a high-resolution historical comparison between images and texts spawned IE, enabling the clarification of lexical items (e.g., LeMon 2013; Eichler 2015; 2019; Eggler and Uehlinger forthcoming) and the illumination of textual *continua* with images (e.g., Uehlinger 1987; 1996a; 2003; Eggler 1998; Staubli and Schroer 2000; Schroer 2004a; Staubli 2005; Maier 2009; Bonfiglio 2012; Hulster 2015; Hunziker-Rodewald 2015; Jeon 2019). The next logical step was to produce exegetical commentaries, the dreamed *Bildkommentar zum Alten Testament* project (on reactions, see Schroer 1984: 179–180; Cornelius 1987: 219; Uehlinger 2000: 402). However, the project failed as only a reduced number of scholars were ready or willing to iconographically comment on biblical books. That forced Keel's migration to catalog efforts and historical-religious incursions. Still, the period was prolific. Systematic trial-and-error incursions into biblical and visual genres resulted in a better comprehension of the place of images and texts within ancient Near Eastern and Israelite/Judean culture, and were also instrumental for learning the hermeneutical difficulties of the endeavor. If one can say that the path or the creation of a commentary series would be easier with an *a priori* theoretical reflection that would probably result in a smaller number of stand-alone iconographic exegetical studies. In any event, it is significant that Keel's biblical phase ended with sketches in method, not just acknowledging the need to interpret images by themselves (Keel 1992b; see Keel 1997d: 8), but also integrating texts and images (Keel 1984; 1986a).

Cooperation and Interdisciplinarity for a History of the Religion of Israel. Despite the considerable number of discovered stamp seal-amulets (*Stempelsiegel-Amulette*), records of these finds were scattered throughout numerous publications or were inaccessible due to robbery, destruction, poor storage, or poor cataloging. This endangered the work of IE since "a global presentation of Canaanite-Israelite iconography… presupposes a systematic treatment of the smaller works of art—especially the seals" (Keel 1992a: 372). The solution came with the (hitherto unfinished) *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel* (CSAP, Keel 1995a; 1997e; 2010a; 2010b; 2013; 2017b; see Eggler and Keel 2006). Between 1981 and 2013, eight research projects were funded by SNSF to catalog seals from controlled excavations in Palestine/Israel. The interdisciplinary and cooperative work in this phase opened many academic branches.

If the cataloging efforts did not mean a complete "parting ways" with biblical exegesis, the emancipation of visual sources made Keel redirect his attention to the history of the religion of ancient Israel. Methodologically, *Das Recht der Bilder gesehen zu werden* marks the transition from studying the interaction between texts and images, where texts still played a significant role, to studying images by themselves (Keel 1992b). In three case studies, he argues that one should not rashly search for texts to interpret images, even when images appear together with texts. This methodological principle became the consensus among IE scholars (see Sass and Uehlinger 1993). Empirically, the three research projects undertaken by Keel and others between 1981–1991 produced stand-alone studies on motifs, mostly published in the series *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus*

Palästina/Israel (Keel and Schroer 1985; Keel, Keel-Leu, and Schroer 1989; Keel, Shuval, and Uehlinger 1990; Keel 1994c) as well as historical reconstructions that appeared as the result of lecturing opportunities (e.g., Keel and Uehlinger [1992] 2010; Bernett and Keel 1998; Keel 1998b). The latter, despite the methodological distinction between image and text, demonstrates a clearer use of biblical texts. Still, from the organization to the argument, these works prioritize archaeological evidence over texts. Texts, in this regard, are used for comparison in a later stage that also assumes cultures are symbolic systems (the very reason for Keel calling the approach "holistic"; see Keel 1998a: 219).

By the time of his retirement in 2002, Keel had combined history of religion and his theological agenda to propose a "vertical ecumenism" (*vertikale Ökumene*), that is, the shift of interreligious discussions from a horizontal-synchronic to a vertical-diachronic orientation (Keel 2002; 2020; see Keel and Staubli 2005). The proposal, which is the backbone to his histories of Jerusalem (Keel 2007b; 2014 [Eng. 2017a]), is the culmination of decades studying foreign influences in Jerusalem's cultic traditions (e.g., Keel 1993) and his long-standing project of a history of Jerusalem for educated pilgrims, *Orte und Landschaften der Bibel,* started in 1969.

The Generations: The "Fribourg School"

The generations (*tôlēdôt*) of Keel became known as the "Fribourg School," a group recognized in biblical studies for systematically using ancient Near Eastern images to illuminate biblical terms, concepts, and texts (Schroer 1995: 225–226; Uehlinger 2000; Eggler et al. 2006; Hulster 2011; the label origins are uncertain, see Klein Cardoso 2021: 7, n. 13). Members usually assigned to the group are Winter, Schroer, Uehlinger, Staubli, Herrmann, Eggler, and Münger (Hulster 2008: 125–131). While the geographical aspect of the label is appropriate, the use of school is misleading since the different backgrounds and interests of the scholars do not match the homogeneity expected from a "school." Uehlinger characterized the group instead as "a hub of international learning and a research group organized among partners" (Uehlinger 2000: 406, translated by the author). Given the collaboration with experts from different fields regarding similar topics, which created a highly interdisciplinary environment, I typify the group in the late-1980s and early-1990s as a *research circle focused on stamp seals*; that is, a group with "a disorganized, spontaneous growth of interest in a new development, as a result of which a network begins to coalesce and its defining doctrines to crystallize" (Becher and Trowler 2001: 93–94).

As mentioned above, the Fribourg Circle came into existence through the stamp seals cataloging projects funded by the SNSF between 1981 and 2013, which brought together scholars from several disciplines. Besides the diversity mentioned above, many factors prevented the crystallization of a "school." Regardless of overlaps in interests, the group's core moved from Fribourg before doctrines could be established and were scattered into different life paths: Winter moved to Luzern in 1982, Schroer became a full Professor of Old Testament in Bern in 1997, and Uehlinger became full Professor of History of Religions/Comparative Religion in Zürich in 2003. This was caused by natural career

developments and institutional caps and decisions. If Schroer's move in 1997 to the (then) Protestant Theological Faculty of Bern already caused fundamental changes, Uehlinger's move to Zurich's Protestant University in 2003 had even more dramatic consequences. On one hand, his non-appointment to Keel's chair of Old Testament Studies and the Biblical Cultural Environment (*Lehrstuhl für Altes Testament und Biblische Umwelt*) caused a discontinuation in Keel's long-standing work in Fribourg. On the other hand, despite still being situated in the Theological Faculty, the Zurich chair in History of Religions/ Comparative Religion was placed in the newly founded Department of Religious Studies, which did not require engagement with biblical texts. This was certainly a different environment from Fribourg, as demonstrated by Uehlinger's *Probevorlesung* (Uehlinger 2003). Zurich's Protestant environment also instigated a stricter secularized approach to the history of ancient Israelite religion (see Uehlinger 2015b). These shifts diversified the group and Swiss practices. Since there is no clear causality, but waves of interest that influenced these scholars and were influenced by them, the three sections below reveal intertwined phases and topics from the last three decades that are deemed as foundational to the Fribourg Circle.

New Grounds for Histories of Religion. The history of religion is possibly the most influential area of the group. *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole* (GGG, Keel and Uehlinger 2010 [1992; Eng. 1998]) remains one of the most used books of biblical exegesis, being called at the time of its release "an unrivaled handbook" (Miller 1994: 505) and "the first religious history of Palestine from the 2nd to the middle of the 1st millennium B.C. [to be founded] on an empirical basis" (Knauf 1994: 298, translated by the author). The four-volume *Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israels und der Alte Orient (IPIAO)* by Schroer already achieved the desired status of *summa iconographica* (Cornelius 2006). Not-withstanding, despite being evident that what set these scholars apart is "a new source province" (i.e., iconography, Knauf 1994: 298), two realizations helped to build these works.

The first realization was that there *were* images in Israel (Schroer 1987a). Even today, ancient Israel's *Bilderverbot* is often taken for granted, and it is still a subject to study, to understand its historical background and hermeneutics in an ancient Near Eastern context (e.g., Berlejung 1998; Ornan 2005; Frevel, Pyschny, and Cornelius 2014). The topic is pivotal for the discipline since the assumed absence of images in ancient Israel fueled two long-standing academic conceptions; namely, a pious anachronistic view of religious practices and concepts of (a masculine singular) God and a logocentric approach to the HB/OT and the society that produced it (Toorn 1997: 16; see Uehlinger 2015a: 393). While Keel already dealt with this issue in the 1970s (Keel 1977a: 1), a definitive answer only came with Schroer's Ph. D. dissertation entitled *In Israel gab es Bibel* (Schroer 1987a). She analyzed the information on figurative art given in the HB/OT and concluded that: (1) there is information about art made locally in the HB/OT, (2) that the ancient Israelites were aware of classes of artistic artifacts, and (3) material evidence supports these claims (Schroer 1987a). The work is programmatic since, from an "exegetical" (i.e., textual) discussion, Schroer undermined objections to the use of visual artifacts and indirectly argued for iconographic analysis. The dissertation title unsurprisingly became

proverbial. Combined with other works of the time (e.g., Dohmen 1987), the existence of images in ancient Palestine/Israel became more broadly accepted, and triggered new discussions, for example, on the Jerusalem temple's image (e.g., Uehlinger 1996b; 1997; Keel 2001) and the *Bilderverbot* (e.g., Uehlinger 1993b; 2003; 2019a).

The second realization was the potential of visual data to provide evidence for the life of people who are not "great men, that is, the *happy few"* (Uehlinger 2001: 71; translated by the author; see also Schroer 2008a). This realization demonstrates both the cultural-historical orientation of the group and its feminist (and later gender theory-related) agenda. Feminist theory was fundamental to the group given the blatant neglect of women in historical-religious reconstructions and the plethora of findings that needed to be critically assessed (something not detected in DiPalma 2017). Winter's *Frau und Göttin* (1987 [1983]) is a telling example since it explicitly follows a feminist exegetical assumption that the HB/OT could be "depatriarchalized" if read critically (Winter 1987: 4–5). The novelty of Winter's research was in surveying the prominent constellations of images connected to the goddess, proposing an elaborate profile with traits linked to war and motherhood. The "male counterpart" of Winter's work was abandoned by another student (see Winter 1987: ix) but was later assumed by Cornelius from Stellenbosch, who interpreted the male deities Reshef and Ba'al and, after, the female goddess (Cornelius 1994; 2008; for images of goddesses, see also Schroer 1987b; 1989). However, Winter's and Cornelius's works, respectively observing the interpretative (iconological) and descriptive (iconographic) aspects of the imagery, did not use a framework derived from gender theory, which possibly hindered interpretative nuances in the plurality of categories of female deities (see Uehlinger 2019b: 10, n. 8). In this regard, one must emphasize that a gender perspective goes beyond source compilation or identification of iconographical profiles and implies a transdisciplinary approach. This is well-illustrated with the catalog *Eva,* where Schroer disentangles the modern hermeneutical matrix that too rapidly associates, on the one hand, corporeality (*Körperlichkeit*) to femininity (*Weiblichkeit*), and, on the other hand, masculinity (*Männlichkeit*) to power and reason (*Macht und Ratio*) (Schroer 2004b). Schroer's discussion utilizes art history, exegesis, theology, archaeology, and anthropology to unravel critical and neglected issues in interpretation, such as the concept of an idol and its attributed feminine association, the role of archaeological context in the determination of function, the possible identification of female figurines with (mother-)goddesses, ancestress, priestesses, or worshipers, as well as the meanings of male and female nudity in artistic representation throughout ancient Palestinian/Israelite history. In this regard, works like Schroer's (2006; 2008a; 2011a; 2014; 2016) and Uehlinger's (2019b) solved many hermeneutical and methodological puzzles that enabled the integration of female deities into larger historical reconstructions (e.g., Keel and Uehlinger 2010 [1992]; Keel 1998b; Schroer and Keel 2005; Schroer 2008b; 2011b; 2018).

Making the History of Israel Visible. The Fribourg Circle was also important since it brought an end to the era of the invisibility of the visual in the history of Israel. Even with an increasing attention to archaeological excavations in Israel and Palestine, images were not interpretative priorities for biblical scholars during the 1960s through the 1980s. This

uncharted territory made methodological reflections and the study of artifacts an imperative to the group, and resulted in works dealing with broader sketches for a history of Israel (e.g., Schroer 1997) and individual studies (e.g., Keel and Uehlinger 1994; Uehlinger 2005; 2007).

Following the discussion of the 1990s and 2000s on the choice, hierarchization, and interpretation of sources in different seminars in historical methodology in western Europe, the Fribourg Circle, as specialists in ancient Palestinian/Israelite visual sources, helped change the status of visual data for historical reconstructions (Dever 1995; Toorn 1997). In biblical studies, this development had three stages. The first two were mentioned above; namely, Keel's use of the local art of ancient Palestine/Israel to interpret the HB/OT for the first time (Keel 1977a) and the "exegetical proof" that there were images in ancient Palestine/Israel (Schroer 1987b). The third was qualified discussion in those methodological forums, a role well represented in Uehlinger's works (Uehlinger 2001; 2005; 2007), who, unlike Keel, demonstrated an inclination towards methodology from the beginning (Uehlinger 1990; see Keel 1992b: 267, n.*), and was inspired by cultural history, the *Annales* tradition (Uehlinger 2001; 2005; 2007), and, more recently, by visual and material religion approaches to religious history (Uehlinger 2015a; Uehlinger 2019a).

In this context, whereas Keel sought to understand, for example, miniaturization practices in ancient Levantine art (Keel 1989) and Winter's pairing of narrative texts and cylinder seal imagery (Winter 1987: 367; see also Staubli 2015a), Uehlinger contributed to the perception of the "conscious communication pragmatics" (Berlejung 2022: LXIX). In other words, to the fact that "[like] texts, images have their 'vocabulary' (image semantics), their 'syntax' and their 'style,' and, like those they follow a 'rhetoric' specific to the genre, they have a certain function, and they pursue a certain, genre-specific purpose (image pragmatics)" (Uehlinger 2001: 40, translated by the author). The entanglement of theory and empirical knowledge of sources created a new standard for using images in the field, making possible historical-hermeneutical discussions of subaltern or marginalized groups (see Schroer 1997; 2006; Uehlinger 2007; 2008).

A final aspect is the extensive empirical work of the group. The understanding of local art in ancient Palestine/Israel is largely dependent on the work by these scholars. Despite not being directly linked to the interpretation of the Bible, these efforts created an infrastructure for IE. Keel's inaugural interpretation on Keisan's glyptics (1980b) opened room for many more contributions. Publications on stamp seals began to diversify, with works being produced on specific stamp seals, groups of seals (Keel 1986b; 1994a, problems of research (Keel 1995b), and seals anthologies (Keel 1995a; 1997e; 2010a; 2010b; 2013; 2017b; Eggler and Keel 2006). The following generations linked somehow to the Fribourg Circle studied other image-carriers, including Egyptian amulets in ancient Palestine/Israel (Herrmann 1994; 2002; 2006; 2016), Samarian ivories (Suter 2011; 2015), Transjordanian figurines (Hunziker-Rodewald, Nunn, and Graichen 2018; see Hunziker-Rodewald 2012), Samarian coins (Wyssmann 2013; 2014; 2019), cylinder seals (Keel and Lippke 2016; Lippke 2019; see Keel 2006), and stamp seals from later periods (Klingbeil 1992; see Schroer and Wyssmann 2019: 192).

Reframing the Anthropology and Zoology of the HB/OT. In the realms of HB/OT anthropology, the Fribourg School works are relevant for reframing scholarship that had remained static through the 1970s. The standard work of the previous generation by Wolff was found to contain a theological-systematic bias (Schroer and Staubli 1998: 12), leading to his work being labeled a theological anthropology of the OT (see Janowski 2019: 17–19). In contrast, the works of Schroer and Staubli propose a historical-anthropological approach. If Staubli's is a first approximation to the anthropology of HB/OT from Fribourg, investigating the relational nature of the "nomads" (Staubli 1991; 2020), the topic was revigorated in *Körpersymbolik* (Schroer and Staubli 1998) and expanded in the ninety short chapters of *Menschenbilder* (Staubli and Schroer 2014). These studies assumed that ancient Near Eastern art could provide better access to the nexus between thought, worldview, and language. Additionally, since ancient art is more chronologically and geographically relatable for being found in archaeologically secure contexts, they assume that "knowledge of the graphic traditions of the culture in question furthers, and sometimes corrects the more profound understanding of central terms of an ancient language" (Schroer and Staubli 2013: 8; see also Schroer 2003).

Despite not being labeled as such, Schroer and Staubli's use of the concept of constellations anticipated the *Konstellative Anthropologie* later suggested by Assmann (2012) and Janowski (2019). The metaphor of constellation provides a modular structure for understanding concepts of humanity in ancient Levantine societies. Staubli recently proposed an adapted version of Panofsky's iconology for anthropology, where each level corresponds to one "anthropological dimension": the semantic/motif is related to appearance; the syntax/scene to human relationships; and the grammar/decoration ("*ikontext*") to the interpretation of humanity (Staubli 2015b: 244–252).

Using constellations and relying on studies of motif development has practical consequences. The first is the reorganization of categories. For example, combining images of animals and humans (*Tier-* und *Menschenbilder* or "humanimals") is not unreasonable, despite running contrary to western thought (Lippke 2017: 165–168; see also Schroer and Staubli 2013: 7; this also applies to the study of emotions as shown in Kipfer and Schroer 2015; Kipfer 2017; 2021). A second outcome can be seen in the organization of works. Here, understanding of culture as a symbolic system plays a significant role. While the organization of the works have a theological emphasis, justified by the institutional placement of the authors and the original media (radio talks and essays in a Catholic magazine), this certainly does not make the works less historical. Even in short incursions, such as Schroer's booklet on animals, the interpretation follows a nuanced historical background (Schroer 2013). Moreover, even if not direct outcomes, Staubli and Schroer (2014) and Schroer (2013) were written in the context of Schroer's three historical-religious projects, which spawned the four volumes of *IPIAO*. As a result, instead of being confined to one discipline, the integrative perspective is profitable to both the study of the history of religion and theology. Combined with schematic works, such as the forthcoming *Iconography of Deities and Demons in the Ancient Near East* (IDD) by Eggler and Uehlinger, these anthropological works provide valuable resources for IE.

The Households: Iconographical Exegetical Cultures

If the diaspora of scholars within Switzerland already created ripple effects, its practice outside Switzerland became even more diversified due to different contexts, levels of reception, and research interests. This scattering and the independent efforts that developed created different domains and practices that are here represented as "households." This label aims at emphasizing fragmentation and regionality. While this implies stronger boundaries in relation to other fields for shared interests, characterizable as a "multitude of villages," communication involves the creation of networks (Maffesoli 1996: 139). Therefore, each of these so-called households reacted differently to the works by the Fribourg Circle, and were organized around particular gravitational centers, each with their own emphases and practices. From a social-epistemological perspective, this stage in IE scholarship history has "a more systematic structure of communication, recruitment, and training, during which small internal interest groups appear and external boundaries become more firmly staked out" (Becher and Trowler 2001: 94).

Two aspects of this new phase are notable. The first is the creation of a space for specialized discussion in the form of the "Iconography and HB/OT" panels at SBL/EABS that began in 2007, which gave visibility to the topic and evinced different approaches (Hulster and Schmitt 2009; Hulster and LeMon 2014). The second is the use of IE beyond the original circles (e.g., Doak 2019: 97–98; Prokop 2020: 4–5), which can be seen as the first step towards a yet unfulfilled phase of "institutionalization and routine" (Becher and Trowler 2001: 94), a process begun by the Fribourg scholars, who created two publishing series in Fribourg (OBO, OBO.SA) and the infrastructure of image anthologies (e.g., CSAP, CSAJ, IPIAO). This was also achieved recently with the production of instructional material (Hartenstein 2005; Berlejung 2012; 2019; Hulster, Strawn, and Bonfiglio 2015b), and the creation of a more stable designation outside the German-speaking world: Iconographic Exegesis (Hulster 2008; 2009; 2011). The following sections describe three strands in this phase and outline the key works that belong to it.

Faces of the Divine and Religious Practices. The history of the religion of Israel remains the primary general focus of IE scholars. One might contend that, since they are not focusing on the interpretation of the *texts* of the Bible, these works are not real iterations of IE; however, they either stem from historical-exegetical interests or have exegetical implications. This interest of IE scholars in history of religion may be explained by the influential books produced within the perspective (e.g., GGG), which used primary visual data to understand later biblical texts (Toorn 1997; Uehlinger 2001: 31–39; 2015a: 393; Strawn 2016: 90–94; Klein Cardoso 2019: 51–59), and by the institutional context of Christian theological departments of the practitioners. These influences helped establish two entangled but distinctive focuses in historical-religious research.

The first focus is on discovering the image of the "biblical God." Several explanations can be suggested for this phenomenon, such as the western concept of religion that equalizes the character of the [biblical] God to the religion, the fact that many biblical texts argue for the irrepresentability or hidden face of God, the modern dependency on visual media, and/or recent archaeological findings (e.g., Kuntillet ᶜAjrud). Some works with

this focus have dealt with the conceptualizations of deities and their "character," identifying visual profiles (e.g., Frevel 1995; Keel 1998b; Cornelius 1994; 2008; Münnich 2009), functional or visual similarities (see Cornell 2020), or their cults' historical-geographical development (e.g., Ottermann 2007; Keel 2007b; Wyssmann 2013; Berlejung 2017; Klein Cardoso 2020). This discussion on the visual profiles of deities also extends to assessments of the *Bilderverbot* in general (e.g., Berlejung 1998; Frevel, Pyschny, and Cornelius 2014; Hulster 2012; 2017), in specific cases (e.g., Frevel 1995), and are also used to investigate historical-religious developments (e.g., Klein Cardoso 2020; Lewis 2020; Schmitt 2020). In these works, philological and literary considerations are brought together with iconographical profiles to suggest spheres of action of different deities in ancient Palestine/Israel. There is an underlying assumption that despite only appearing later, mental images from biblical descriptions are present in earlier visual material, a premise which thus requires constant revisions and a nuanced understanding of both pictorial and textual images of deities instead of simplistic associations of representational and mental images (see Hartenstein 2008: 287). That is the case, for example, of the so-called "*Herr der Tiere*" equalized with Job's Yahweh by Keel (1978a), an opinion challenged by Neumann-Gorsolke (2012: 96–149; see Kang 2017), and the association with Asherah and her symbol that was challenged by Frevel (1995; see Winter 1987; Schroer 1987b; rejoinder in Keel 1998b).

Such questions are complemented by a second focus on practices and patterns of cult which is frequently aligned with modern critical theory. Schmitt, who worked extensively in the genre (e.g., Schmitt 2009; 2011; 2017), expanded his work from places of worship to a broader regional portrait of the religions of ancient Palestine/Israel in the Iron Age, distinguishing cultic territorialities in a synchronic fashion (Schmitt 2020). In addition to a study of the profile of deities, Schmitt also integrated architectural remains as "images" (Schmitt 2009; 2020: 130; see Schmitt 2001), a strategy also used by other scholars (Schroer 2007; 2017; Garfinkel and Mumcuoglu 2013; Prokop 2020). This refocusing from images to artifacts also applies to other subjects. For example, Zwickel investigated cult places (1994), incense-burning practices (1990), and female musicians (2019), making joint use of archaeological and HB/OT data, while Leuenberger analyzed the concept and theology of blessing (*Segen und Segenstheologie*) in ancient Israel in an informed and well-devised semiotic approach (Leuenberger 2008). In contrast to the former focus, these works typically prioritize archaeological data over biblical data, resulting in different reconstructions. The approach addresses historical-religious concerns such as local manifestations of cult (Klein Cardoso 2019), gender in a historical perspective (e.g., Ottermann 2007; Purcell 2020a; 2020b), and the political-religious use of children in ancient rhetoric (Riley 2018; 2020; see Schwyn 2000).

Assessing Mental Images: Metaphor Interpretation and IE. Metaphor interpretation is crucial to IE given the themes treated and the comparative method employed. Since cultural patterns are variable, "one can determine which aspects a particular culture perceives in a given phenomenon only by examining the pertinent documents from that culture as fully as possible" (Keel 1994b: 26–27). As a result, long-standing iconographic traditions and regional and chronological profiles are used to understand stereotypical discursive

constructions (Schroer 2014: 130). This entails two assumptions. First, that metaphors bridge "the gap between image and text, [... and provide] picturing, figurative and visualizing language, expressed in images" (Hulster 2009: 177; see also Strawn 2008; Klingbeil 2009). Second, that "metaphors are more comprehensible if viewed in light of iconographic motifs" (Schroer 2014: 129–130). Therefore, contemporary metaphoric-iconographical works employ a wide range of approaches, from theological (e.g., Brown 2002; Keel and Schroer 2008 [Eng. 2015]) to cognitive-linguistic (Klingbeil 1999; Strawn 2005: 5–16; LeMon 2010: 4–22).

Various IE scholars use iconography to explain biblical metaphors referring to God. These works typically face two challenges. On the one hand, the interpretation of divine portraits often represents an exercise of disambiguation between human and divine profiles (e.g., Uehlinger 2008; Wyssmann 2013; Bonfiglio 2012; 2015). On the other hand, to understand HB/OT texts, one needs to know as much as possible about the material and spiritual life of people in ancient Israel (Schroer 2017: 300). Klingbeil's *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven* dealt with metaphors of "God as warrior and god of heaven" in the psalms, counterpointing this with pictorial material from the ancient Near East, and assuming that "biblical metaphors of God are a reflection of the *Gottesbild* [image of God] or *Gottesvorstellung* [imagining of God]" (Klingbeil 1999: 28). Strawn's *What is Stronger than a Lion?* dealt with leonine metaphors in the HB/OT and aimed to "contribute to a more adequate understanding of Israel's God" (Strawn 2005: 22). He assumed that metaphors were *culturally* contextual. LeMon, building upon Brown's concept of "iconic structure," analyzed *Yahweh's Winged Form in the Psalms,* considering congruent motifs of Syro-Palestinian art, and suggesting that "more than one iconographic trope can stand behind the image of Yahweh in the winged form *within a single psalm*" (LeMon 2010: 192, italics in original).

Similar methods have been applied to analyze biblical literary depictions beyond descriptions of the heavenly sphere. For example, Doak (2019) focuses on human images, specifically heroic bodies, while DiPalma (2020) explores the animalistic Nebuchadnezzar found in the book of Daniel. Other works deal with the meaning of vegetation and its relationship with religion. A significant milestone is *Das Kleid der Erde,* edited by Neumann-Gorsolke and Riede (2002), which collected essays on the meanings of plants in the life of ancient Israel. Another example can be found in Osborne, who surveyed the prophetic books to analyze how tree metaphors were used to characterize (righteous) kings, compared with the depiction of kings in ancient Near Eastern art (Osborne 2018). With the same structure, *Gefährten und Feinde des Menschen* analyzes the meaning of animals in biblical texts (Janowski, Neumann-Gorsolke, and Glessmer 1993). Additionally, various scholars have also focused in a similar way on neo-testamentary traditions (Theißen 1989; von Gemünden 1993).

Rethinking Foundations: Theory and Method. Possibly because of Keel's emphasis on empirical analyses and the field's *habitus*, theoretical and methodological studies of IE are not abundant. The lion's share were produced either to introduce the topic (e.g., Görg 1985; Keel 1985b; Hartenstein 2005; Weissenrieder and Wendt 2005), or to assess specific research questions (e.g., Beach 1991; Uehlinger 2005; Hartenstein 2008;

Klingbeil 2009; Hulster 2009; Staubli 2015b; but see Uehlinger 2001). At the same time, the methodological works mark a generational shift since many newcomers from several contexts engaged with the topic from this methodological gap (e.g., Beach 1991: 73; Hulster 2009: 2; Bonfiglio 2016: 21). These contributions are of methodological (i.e., related to the *modus operandi*) or theoretical (i.e., related to assumptions and implications) nature.

Two methodological works in the United States and the Netherlands tried to integrate ancient Near Eastern visual remains into existing exegetical methods. Beach's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation *Word and Image* proposed what could be termed a visual form criticism, that is, a method that brought together Knierim's form criticism and Panofsky's iconology, the latter corrected by semiological insights from Langer (Beach 1991: 142–146). The work is arguably the first deductive (top-down) approach to IE. De Hulster's *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah*, a Ph.D. dissertation defended in Utrecht in 2008 and published in 2009, sketched an "iconographical method of exegesis" (Hulster 2009: 2), coining the term "iconographic exegesis." Building upon Keel's oeuvre, Hulster assumed that by interpreting what images communicate, one can understand the mental map of culture (Hulster 2009: 339). That said, his deductive, top-down approach, learned terminology, and judicious method helped to systematize IE and accommodate visual elements in historical-critical exegesis. Noteworthy is Hulster's discussion of images in a broader sense (2009: 197–200; see Bonfiglio 2016: 172–176), which makes it possible to correlate visual artifacts and "mental images" (see Hulster 2009: 253, esp. Fig 3.21).

Three other methodological works were written aiming to avoid previous works' "interpretative fragmentation" (see Keel 1992a: 367–368). LeMon, in his Ph.D. dissertation defended at Emory in 2007 and published in 2010, identified literary fragmentation in Keel (1977a; 1977b; 1978a; 1992b; 1998b), Keel and Uehlinger (1998), Klingbeil (1999), and Strawn's (2005) works (LeMon 2010: 15, nn. 60–62). While some critiques are misplaced (e.g., Keel 1978a; Keel and Uehlinger 1998), LeMon's overall assessment seems accurate. His solution was to elaborate on Brown's (2002) iconic structure concept, "which entails understanding the psalm as composed of a constellation of literary images in the same way that an artistic scene is comprised of numerous motifs that come together to convey meaning" (LeMon 2010: 16). In that sense, he sought congruence with the constellation of artistic and literary motifs, avoiding a one-to-one relation (LeMon 2010: 192). Another Emory dissertation dealing with the fragmentation issue is Chan's *The Wealth of the Nations* (Chan 2017), which tried to systematize the use of visual material in tradition history. He criticized the fact that tradition history was primarily understood as a verbal phenomenon (but see Schroer 1986; Uehlinger 1988; Hulster 2011; Berlejung 2012: 38–39) and opted for a broader understanding of *tradition* that "refer to concepts, notions, and constellations that are inherited from the broader intellectual environment" (Chan 2017: 8). He thus proposes to "eschew comparison of isolated items" in favor of investigating the manifestation of literary and iconographic complexes of tripartite constellations (e.g., instead of "king," investigating "[1] foreigners bringing [2] wealth to a [3] king as an act of homage," Chan 2017: 151). Recently, Saari, in a Ph.D. dissertation defended in Helsinki, Finland, expanded LeMon's use of iconic structures to include narratives (Saari 2020). To do so, she drew on narrative criticism and

narratology, analyzing the structure, storyline, and characters and characterizations. This approach acknowledges the differences between ancient narrative practices and the intricacies of the HB/OT textual transmission (Saari 2020: 27–34).

In the wake of previous German scholars who have criticized Keel's correlation practices, Neumann-Gorsolke made another critical methodological contribution (Neumann-Gorsolke 2012). In *Wer ist der "Herr der Tiere,"* she analyzed assumptions behind the use of the so-called master of animals motif and its relationship to the HB/OT in Keel's (1978a) historical and Lang's (2001; 2002) phenomenological approaches, distinguishing their different ways of using images. According to her, while Keel conceived motifs as iconographic types (*Bildtyp*), Lang dealt with them as conceptions of deities (*Göttertyp*), assuming that deities' roles existed structurally. She agrees that one should apply independent research efforts in both images and texts before its comparative use (see Keel 1992b; Sass and Uehlinger 1993) but argues that text and image inter-artistic comparisons must be made from recognizable and nameable correlations (Neumann-Gorsolke 2012: 209–212).

Bonfiglio tried to establish a more apt conceptual framework for IE with his *Reading Images, Seeing Texts* (Bonfiglio 2016). Engaging with visual theory, he assessed modalities of image-text relationship (namely, congruence, correlation, and contiguity; see Bonfiglio 2016: 69–89) and the concept of image (Bonfiglio 2016: 171–226). Although lacking engagement with German-language works, the resulting nine principles show the importance of using images in the historical endeavor (topics n. 1–2), the particular ways of using images comparatively (n. 3–4), the particular nature of images (n. 5–7), and their uses for the history of the religion of Israel (n. 8–9) (Bonfiglio 2016: 318–319; see the overlaps with the nine principles outlined in Keel 1984).

Concluding Remarks

Through social-material lenses, IE represents a clannish subdomain within biblical studies. Built on the desire to illustrate the so-called biblical world, it was born from the need to understand mental images behind biblical lexemes within a symbolic system and grew to comprehensive explorations of biblical texts with the help of visual artifacts. Various factors helped to form the perspective, including the material (e.g., visual sources), institutional (e.g., University of Fribourg, SNSF projects, EABS/SBL conferences and panels), intellectual (e.g., "visual/iconic" turn, interdisciplinarity), theoretical (e.g., symbolic systems, constellations), and religious (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, Jewish). The combination helped to form a research circle in Fribourg, Switzerland, which expanded and touched Stellenbosch (South Africa) and Atlanta (USA), established its epistemological frontiers in the first thirty years and, today, outgrew the limits of a research circle, rehearsing the first steps towards its institutionalization and routine, to form an almost self-sufficient intellectual domain.

Nevertheless, in many ways, Keel's prolific oeuvre still cast shadows on its interests and procedures. Despite new centers and challenges, biblical *Weltanschauungen*, metaphor interpretation, and the history of the religion of Israel remain the main lines of inquiry. Even with advancements in theory and method by the so-called "IE's second wave," the

institutional place of IE within biblical studies remains limited. It is possible to argue, from the overview above, that what unites IE is not the sources, and most certainly not the theory or method, but the shadows of an ancestor, Keel. The Swiss scholar represents a mythical figure and, as Moore and Sherwood sharply argued concerning biblical studies, "a discipline's myth of origins powerfully predetermined its practices" (2011: 130). If this predetermination is not problematic *per se*, it can prevent expanding the research efforts to other topics and generate misleading characterizations. Concerning the latter, if Bonfiglio rightly pointed out that IE resembles a "visual turn" in biblical studies (2016: 2)—even paradoxically calling it "partial"—the efforts for operationalization, training, and diversity ask for a different definition. In other words, there *was* a visual turn that affected biblical studies, which can be seen in the use of the visual as an analytical category (Bachmann-Medick 2016: 17–18; see Schroer and Staubli 1998; Brown 2002; LeMon 2010; Staubli and Schroer 2014; Hartenstein 2016) and, following this visual turn, a subject matter specialization using ANE images and HB/OT emerged and was later divided among method-based subspecialisms (Becher and Trowler 2001: 65–72, on terminology).

From the same scholarly history, however, it seems indisputable that the critical ability to interpret ancient Near Easter images can offer to the biblical scholar not only a unique glimpse of the so-called "biblical world," but a culturally contextualized interpretation of the contemporary and later biblical texts. In specific cases, such as in the practices concerning the history of the religion of Israel and the anthropology of HB/OT, it could even help supply the sources otherwise lacking for particular times and places. Still, iconographic exegesis is as diverse as the analyses focused on textual manifestations. To that extent, one should be conscious of the research questions and the possibilities of using images and which images to use in this effort. The many examples above, which should not be read as an evolutionary narration but as a map comprising hotspots and research strands, will help readers find their way within this fascinating perspective.

Abbreviations

AAT	Agypten und Altes Testament
ABAT	Gressmann, H. 1927. *Altorientalische Bilder Zum Alten Testament* (2ed. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter).
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte
ADAJ	Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
ANE	Ancient Near East
ANEP	Pritchard, J. B. 1969. *Ancient Near Eastern Pictures Relating to the Old Testament.* (2ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press).
AOAT	Alten Orients und des Alten Testaments
AThANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BASOR	Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research
BB	Biblische Beiträge
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge

Bildsymbolik Keel, O. 1996. *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament. Am Beispiel der Psalmen* (5th ed. Zürich: Neukirchen).

BN *Biblische Notizen*

BTS Biblisch-theologische Studien

BZAW Beihefte zur Zeitschrift fur die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

CB Coniectania Biblica

CBET Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology

CBQ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

CSAJ Eggler, J., and O. Keel. 2006 *Corpus der Siegel-Amulette aus Jordanien. Vom Neolithikum bis zur Perserzeit. In Zusammenarbeit mit Daphna Ben-Tor, Denyse Homès-Fredericq, Melanie Jaggi, Nancy Lapp, Stefan Münger, Christoph Uehlinger und mit Zeichnungen von Ulrike Zurkinden-Kolberg* (OBO SA 25. Freiburg/Schweiz / Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg / Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).

CSAP 1995a, 1997a, 2010a, 2010b, 2013, 2017. *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel. Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit. Eiletung* (OBO SA 10, 13, 27, 31, 33, 35. Freiburg/Schweiz / Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg / Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).

Die Weisheit Keel, O. 1974a. "Die Weisheit 'spielt' vor Gott. Ein ikonographischer Beitrag zur Deutung des meṣaḥäqät in Sir 8,30f," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 21: 1–66.

EABS European Association of Biblical Studies

FAT Forschungen zum Alten Testament

FCB2 A Feminist Companion to the Bible. Second Series

FRLANT Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments

FZPTh Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie

GGG Keel, O. and C. Uehlinger. 2010. *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israel aufgrund bislang unerschossener ikonographischer Quellen* (6 ed. QD 134. Freiburg im Bresgau: Herder) [Eng. 1998. *Gods, Goddesses and Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press)]

HB / OT Hebrew Bible / Old Testament

HeBAI *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*

HSK Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft

IDD Eggler, J. and C. Uehlinger (eds.), forth. *Iconography of Deities and Demons in the Ancient Near East: An Iconographic Dictionary with Special Emphasis on First-Millennium BCE Palestine/Israel* (Zurich).

IE Iconographic Exegesis

IEJ *Israel Exploration Journal*

IEQ Israel Exploration Quarterly

IPIAO	Schroer, S. 2005 [w/ Keel], 2008b, 2011b, 2018. *Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israels und der Alte Orient. Eine Religionsgeschichte in Bildern* (Fribourg: Schwabe; Bibel + Orient Museum).
JAJS	Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements
Jahwe-Visionen	Keel, O. 1977a. *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst. Eine neue Deutung der Majestätsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und 10 und Sich 4* (SBS 84/85. Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk).
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JNSL	Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages
JSOT	Journal for the Study of Old Testament
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBO.SA	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis. Series Archaeologica
OLB	Orte und Landschaften der Bibel
ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
QD	Quaestiones Disputatae
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLRBS	Resources for Biblical Study
SBM	Stuttgarter Biblische Monographien
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibel Studien
Siegeszeichen	Keel, O. 1974b. *Wirkmächtige Siegeszeichen im Alten Testament. Ikonographisch Studien zu Jos 8, 18–26; Ex 17, 8–13; 2 Kön 13, 14–19 und 1 Kön 22, 11* (OBO 5. Freiburg/Schweiz / Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg / Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
SNSF	Swiss National Science Foundation
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series
VWGTh	Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie
WiBiLex	*Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet*
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
ZDVP	*Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*
ZKTh	*Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*

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ORCID iD

Silas Klein Cardoso https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8266-8693

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