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Imagining Solomon's Temple: Aesthetics of the Non-Representable

Terje Stordalen

Logocentrism and aniconism

The contributions in this volume encircle an age-old question: How does one represent that which is conceived to be non-representable or not suitable for exposure? The conventional wisdom is that ancient Hebrew religion (as well as later Jewish traditions and their Christian and Islamic cousins) simply avoided pictorial representations of the divine – due to a preference for verbal over iconic media.¹ This view relies on a surface reading of the passage known in Reformed and Anglican traditions as the Second Commandment: '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. You shall not bow down to them or worship them [...]' (Deut. 5.8, cf. Exod. 20.4-6).² Moreover, the conventional view rests upon a particular perception of this command, illustrated by one commentator in this way:

Images are forbidden because they are inadequate, and thus false, representations of Yahweh's identity (Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 409; idem, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Contest*, 66–8). [...] Yahweh has revealed himself to his people through the word, not in a specific form (Deut. 4.12, 15–19). This dynamic of the God who speaks and whose words act, cannot be confined to a static representation. (Hartley 1992: 312)

This quote, with its internal reference to earlier exegesis, is an example of how the myth of biblical logocentrism is propagated in biblical studies.

The concept of 'logocentrism' goes back to the German philosopher Ludwig Klages of the 1920s, who saw a distinction between logocentric (shallow) and biocentric (deep) consciousness (cf. Kasdorff 1969: 69, 155). Recent intellectual exchange on logocentrism is more marked by Derrida's use of the word in his attack on a Platonic strand of thought in de Saussure (Derrida 1976: 6–26, etc.). Both Klages and Derrida used the concept to criticize dominant tendencies in classical Western philosophy, which explains why few current philosophers employ this term as a self-designation.

Within theology, however, several studies positively identify themselves as logocentric (like, recently, Gäde 2010). Indeed, George Aichele (2001: 29–30) identified widespread thought patterns in theological scholarship that come close to the philosophy that Derrida called ‘logocentric’. A plausible reason for the more positive standing of the concept in theology is the fact that Christ is envisioned as the incarnated *logos* (Greek for ‘word’, ‘concept’, ‘reason’) in the prologue to the Gospel of John. So, in theological language ‘logocentric’ might translate as ‘oriented towards the divine origin of the incarnated Christ’, or similar.

Derrida attacked idealistic philosophy, which he saw as a ‘logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being [...]’ (Derrida 1976: 11–12), and in addition understood written text as ‘the signifier of the signifier’ (i.e. signifier of voice), a ‘nonexterior, nonmundane [...] interpreter of an originary speech itself shielded from interpretation’ (pp. 7–8). In logocentrism as perceived by Derrida, there goes an immediate line from a text back to a spoken word, back to being and truth. Similarly, in Christian logocentric theology, the medium of revelation (signifier of the signifier) would be the Bible, heard as the *viva vox evangelii* (the living voice of the gospel) (Gäde 2010: 132). There goes a similar line from the textual witness of revelation, back to the actual revelation, which again aligns with ultimate truth. This displays Christ as *logos asarkos* (non-incarnated word), pre-existent, non-created and with divine qualities (Ibid., 134).

Logocentrism proposes that mental representations of the *logos* are more immediate and true than material representations: ‘There is [...] a good and a bad writing: the good and natural is the divine inscription in the heart and the soul; the perverse and artful is technique, exiled in the exteriority of the body,’ and ‘[t]he good writing has therefore always been *comprehended*’ (Derrida 1976: 17, 18). The implication is that ‘good’ writing is the only acceptable material (‘bodily’) medium suitable for representing the *logos*. Adjacent to such preference for comprehension and *logos* and the concomitant devaluation of matter lies the tendency to prefer verbal over non-verbal representations of the *logos*, which brings us to aniconism.

The term aniconism can be used in a narrow as well as a broad sense. In the narrow sense, aniconism names a view that avoids iconic representations of deity, especially for cultic purposes (Gaifman 2017: 338). Most experts today hold that this is the kind of aniconism promoted in the Second Commandment (see next section). In a broader and more general sense, however, aniconism denotes a general distrust in pictorial media. Perceiving biblical aniconism through the lens of logocentrism, the implication clearly would be that of a general, rather than a narrow, sense of aniconism. Perhaps this helps explain the staggering resilience of the untenable view of ancient Jewish culture as generally aniconic.

The above combination of logocentrism and aniconism has generated what Birgit Meyer in this volume calls the *mentalistic* view of religion. This perception of religion privileges words, teaching and ideas and tends to overlook or downplay the role of pictorial and other non-verbal media in defining and interpreting religion. Such a logocentric interpretation of aniconism should be recognized as belonging to the *modern* era, although it is often transcribed back into deep posterity by modern interpreters, for instance, in their interpretation of the Second Commandment:

The prohibition of images in ancient Israel has led to [...] the obvious dearth of the plastic arts within Jewish (and, indirectly, Muslim) tradition. [...] The theological reason is expressed well by Craigie: 'To attempt to represent and limit God by human form in wood or stone would be to undermine the transcendence of God' ([1976] 135). (Christensen 2001: 89)

This quote illustrates the mode of existence for this knowledge in biblical scholarship: commonly shared but rarely actually examined. The wide presence of pictorial media in the Iron Age Southern Levant has been richly documented over the last five decades, not least by Othmar Keel (1972) and his students (see next section). However, the common view still is that the religious practices enshrined in biblical texts (possibly by a learned minority) were different from those reflected in the archaeological record of the period (which are sometimes classified as 'Canaanite'). Thus, the view of words and texts as privileged media in *biblical* religion strangely seems to remain largely intact.

This chapter sets out on a case study examining the presumed biblical distrust in non-verbal media for representing the presence of the deity, focusing on a passage that should represent such distrust in a typical way. One challenge for making this examination is that the disciplinary machinery, and its corpus of knowledge, is tilted towards neglecting reflections of non-verbal religion in biblical texts. This void is not simply generated by the contents of the sources. It would, for instance, have been possible to explore the use of pictorial or performative media in biblical religion through the way these are reflected in biblical sources (Stordalen 2012, 2013). The near complete lack of such research renders scholarship unable, for the time being, to speak with confidence about whether the biblical ban on images did, in fact, imply a religious practice that excluded a prominent role for all other media (cf. Otten 2007: 33f). The time is more than ripe for a case study exploring the perceived relation between verbal and non-verbal media in one biblical passage. First, however, a brief recourse to the historical context.

Early Jewish aniconism in recent scholarship

The assumption that early Jewish societies were aniconic (in the wide sense) is clearly exaggerated. This view relies on much later rabbinic ideals: Jewish art in late antiquity was quite heterogeneous (Levine 2012). Likewise, medieval Jewish art featured a number of pictorial representations (Bland 2000, and see Bland's entry in this volume). This is now commonly accepted by experts in the field, and the general public could see a documentation, for instance, in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, Essays section (Boehm and Holcomb 2008).

Over the last five decades a parallel reorientation has taken place in research on pictorial media in early Israel. The reorientation relied on comparative research in ancient Levantine archaeology, Near Eastern iconography and biblical studies – as illustrated by Christoph Uehlinger in this volume (cf. also again Mathys 2013). The archaeological record of the Iron Age Southern Levant (Edom, Moab, Ammon, Israel, Judah, Philistia) is rich in pictorial representations (Keel and Uehlinger 1992).

Domestic religion was not aniconic, neither in the broad nor in the narrow sense. It was dominated by the use of figurines in various forms – certainly in the Iron Age, but to some extent also later. Particularly important were the Judaic Pillar Figurines (Kletter 1996), a form that was indigenous and characteristic to these territories (see Wilson 2012). The archaeological record also holds pictorial representations – like those in Kuntillet Ajrud (Meshel 2012). These and similar finds re-opened the question of whether there may have been iconic representations of deity even in official Hebrew religion, such as in the Temple of Jerusalem (see Uehlinger 1997). The claim for aniconism (in the narrow sense) in the Jerusalem Temple was usually backed by reference to the narrative of King Josiah's reform in 2 Kings 22–3. Recently, however, there has been a discussion of the historical value of this passage (Uehlinger 2005; Stordalen 2014). Today, therefore, even scholars who defend the conventional view of an aniconic cult in Jerusalem admit that the earliest form of aniconism probably did not promote an aniconic programme or reform. Programmatic aniconism, intolerant to all images of deity, is a fairly late conviction of a religious minority.³

To make a long story short, religion in the classical Hebrew era was not uniformly aniconic. Faith practices in households and local sanctuaries were hardly ever so, and it seems probable that the view of a normalized aniconic official religion was generated by later scribes. Aniconic ideals were predominant in the group behind the so-called deuteronomistic trajectories of the Hebrew Bible, and over time this group would dominate the redaction and reception of the collection.

Aniconism in context

Before coming to the actual case, we also need to consider the distinction between ideals and practices. The first may be governed by more or less utopian ideas. The second may aim to promote certain ideals, but will, in practice, be conditioned by historical, social and material circumstances. Take as example the most programmatically aniconic passage of deuteronomistic theology, a passage where Moses reinterprets what happened during the giving of the Torah – according to Knut Holter (2003), an elaborate attempt at interpreting the Second Commandment:

[T]he LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. [...] Since you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure. [...] (Deut. 4.12-16)

How would such a theological conviction be lived out in real life? That is a different question than asking what may have been the ideal world of someone reading (or writing) this passage. The deuteronomists did not live in a vacuum. Although their preferred service was that of a single deity worshipped without the use of images in a single central temple, they lived among people that had different ideals and practices (cf. above). More importantly, they shared concepts and sentiments, landscapes,

institutions and installations with their less-than-deuteronomistic neighbours. They would have been familiar with, respectful of and perhaps positive to religious emotions, practices and motives that fellow Israelites celebrated using cultic figurations. For instance, burials in the local environments of deuteronomistic scribes would often involve the use of figurines representing the dead kin, the deity and so forth (cf. Bloch-Smith 1992: 95–103). Are we to assume that deuteronomistic theologians would show disrespect for the dead kin of village peers, for instance, by refusing to take part in such funerals, not recognizing their validity, or by scorning the grief rituals? Moreover, to the extent that deuteronomists wished to interact with these neighbours (and deuteronomistic literature certainly leaves the impression that this is their intention), they would have to activate their command of general Hebrew linguistic, cognitive and other resources. So, in many ways they would be compelled to identify with their peers, at least in some measure.

In asking how deuteronomistic ideals were lived out in practice, we are asking for their cultural embeddedness. The interconnections of deuteronomistic theology are most visible in the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH; the sequence from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings in the Hebrew Bible). Although a deuteronomistic theological watermark is evident across the composition, the work incorporates and interacts with numerous sources, narrative cycles, characters and episodes that reflect views of Israel and Judah other than those preferred by the deuteronomists. Moreover, deuteronomistic theology constitutes itself as an interpretation of a past that was affirmatively shared with people from the former states of Israel and Judah. DtrH argues for re-conceiving a past that was already known by the addressee. Several passages promoting the deuteronomistic rhetorical strategy confirm this dilemma. For instance, the work starts with Moses giving one long speech (the book of Deuteronomy) in which he reinterprets the giving of the Torah at Sinai already narrated and experienced (also in the narrative world) in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. In this process the *torah* is redefined, in content and in form: In Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers *torah* is basically oral lore curated by Aaronitic priests. In Deuteronomy it becomes a written scroll (the Torah of Moses), now in the hands of Levite priests. The religious well-being of the Israelites no longer relies on their listening to the advice and instruction of (Aaronitic) priests, but on keeping the stipulations of the Mosaic *book* to the letter (Vogt 2006). Similarly, the book of 2 Kings reports that during the reign of Josiah the priests discovered a book of Moses in the Temple. This scroll had (inexplicably) fallen into oblivion but was retrieved during a renovation of the Temple (2 Kings 22–3). Josiah's reform consists of putting back into force the professedly original stipulations of Moses, as recorded in this book. In the prism of memory studies, this is an argument to reformat the past so as to legitimize contemporary political action (cf. Stordalen 2014). In both cases DtrH confirms the theological importance of the very institutions it aims to change – the Torah and the Temple cult. And so, the deuteronomists must interact with the public perception of these institutions. They did not invent a version of Hebrew religion *ex novo*; they related to existing symbols, narratives, beliefs, groups, practices, institutions – and to the religious charge of these symbols and institutions.

So, again, how would deuteronomistic aniconism be lived out in real life? In particular, did the deuteronomistic ban on representative images entail a devaluation

of alternative media and semiotic systems? A good place to probe this question is the part where the DtrH narrates the building and dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6–8) – a major religious institution with documented significance within and without deuteronomistic religion.

The Jerusalem Temple in deuteronomistic literature

Peter Vogt (2006: 227–31) argues that deuteronomistic theology marks a shift from the earlier cultic recognition of YHWH towards everyday recognition of the Torah of Moses. And indeed, when it comes to cultic practices and venues, deuteronomistic literature has somewhat of a blank spot as compared to priestly texts. While the book of Deuteronomy argues for limiting worship to a single, central temple (cf. Deut. 12), the emphasis is on abandoning local shrines. Not much is said about *how* to worship in that central place, except that tithe offerings should be brought (cf. Deut. 14.22–28 and 26.1–15) and seasonal celebrations be kept (Deut. 16.1–17). In the literary fiction of the book, Moses lived hundreds of years before the building of the Temple; so Deuteronomy consistently talks about ‘the place that the Lord is going to choose for his name to dwell’. But even considering that this framing might dictate a distance to actual temple cult, the book leaves the impression that ceremonial details are not very important. Accordingly, as documented by Gary Knoppers, many scholars have seen some form of religious devaluation of the temple in deuteronomistic theology (Knoppers 1995: 230–1, n. 8–11).

This relative silence notwithstanding, there are in fact echoes of the Temple’s significance in DtrH. Deuteronomy reflects an ideal sanctuary, featuring a ban on pictorial representations of the divine (as pointed out above).⁴ These texts would be heard as statements on temple design and practice. Similarly, the book describes the ark of the covenant and artefacts and practices to occur ‘before the Lord’⁵ – which could well refer to the cultic venue. So, there *is* a sanctuary implicitly reflected or imagined in Deuteronomy, and the reflection suggests a centralized cult for one single god celebrated without iconic representations of the deity.

An important passage late in the DtrH (2 Kings 22–3) narrates how stipulations professedly given by Moses hundreds of years earlier were rediscovered and implemented under King Josiah in the seventh century BCE. Once again, the emphasis is upon that which is going to be abandoned. Still, here too the ideal service is an aniconic cult for one god in the Jerusalem Temple. The narrative tacitly admits that cult before Josiah was neither aniconic nor centralized, and it addressed several deities. The argument in DtrH is that cult before Josiah had been perverted because earlier rulers had disobeyed the Mosaic commandments. The reported reformation in 2 Kgs 23.4–20 is violently iconoclastic, and this passage was an inspiration for later iconoclastic incidents.

In between the stories of Moses and Josiah sits the narrative of the construction of the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6–8). An audience immersed in the universe of DtrH would easily say those Mosaic stipulations that had been disobeyed prior to Josiah were originally established in the Temple of Solomon – all the more

so since the narrator of that passage has the Lord remind Solomon that the divine stipulations must be kept (1 Kgs 6.11-13). So, between the implicit ideal temple of Deuteronomy and the violent iconoclasm of 2 Kings 23, the story of the Solomonic Temple appears as a more tempered, and infinitely more detailed, middle ground. It is also the one text in DtrH that positively reports on the installations and activity in the Temple. Moreover, it is a story actively interacting with its cultural context and earlier sources relating to the Temple in Jerusalem. A reasonable interpretation is that the deuteronomists drew on to various theological and social ideals in order to generate 'enthusiastic support by all sectors of the people' (Knoppers 1995: 254) – possibly on a topic that was not on their own top-ten list (cf. Schweizer 2011). Looking for a text reflecting the playing out of deuteronomistic aniconic ideology in its real-life context (above), 1 Kings 6–8 is a very suitable candidate.

The story of the Solomonic Temple

Text and profile

The textual situation for 1 Kings 6–8 is complex (DeVries 2003: xlii–lx). These chapters contain source materials that were available to the redactor along with editorial comments and framings by deuteronomistic as well as by post-deuteronomistic hands. After the text had reached a stable stage there was a complex textual transmission, effecting a number of (smaller) differences between the Hebrew and the Greek versions. This means, we have two different versions, both featuring several voices. It is not uncommon in biblical literature that different voices in one text may express different focus and conflicting views.

So, how should we read such a text? I follow a triple strategy. First, I regard the Hebrew and Greek as separate versions that should not be mixed. Even though the Greek *could* be older in certain passages in 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings (Schenker 2004, but cf. Pietsch 2007), in this case I stay with the Hebrew. Secondly, I agree with Hurowitz (1992: 106–8) and others that the story is generally coherent and follows expected narrative paradigms. This allows for a continuous reading of the story across different layers. Thirdly, I also agree with DeVries (2003: xliii–xliv, 89, 92–3) and others that it is possible to identify deuteronomistic comments in chapters 6 and 7. Similarly, the best part of the prayer in 1 Kings 8 (i.e. from 8.14 onwards, and possibly parts of vv. 1–11) has a deuteronomistic ring. On the other hand, the detailed descriptions of construction and decoration in the main trajectory of 1 Kings 6–7 indicate sources close to the Temple, with full knowledge of the Temple complex. These would presumably reflect priestly experiences and preferences. All this allows for reading the text as a fairly coherent building account, largely with a priestly-like profile, but with occasional contrastive deuteronomistic comments.

The narrative of the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8) is clearly fictional, with a deuteronomistic profile (cf. Knoppers 1995: 299). Contrastingly, the narrative of the building and decoration (1 Kings 6–7) makes the impression of being realistic – or 'factual' (Van Seters 1997: 56, cf. 55–7). And yet, it is not possible to draw an unambiguous

blueprint of the Temple from the report (cf. Cogan 2000: 249–51; DeVries 2003: 89–93). A massive amount of scholarship has gone into attempts at figuring out the precise shapes and dimensions of the Temple, much of it by use of comparative textual and architectonic material. No definitive solution has been offered, but, for instance, the comprehensive study of Busink (1970) and the work of Bloch-Smith (1994) on Temple symbolism show that the contours of the Temple building and installations imagined on the basis of 1 Kings 6–8 are generally similar to those of contemporary temples (similarly Zwickel 2013). This confirms the impression of a realistic narrative.

It is difficult to date such a complex text, which must have been compiled over a long period of time. I am currently not discussing the age and character of any sources, only the date of the final story (before the text-historical developments).⁶ The Hebrew text in 8.8 contains a remark indicating that the Temple was still intact by the time of narration. That would imply a date for (that part of) the account prior to the fall of Jerusalem (586 BCE). However, this remark is missing in the Greek version, and it is hard to tell the historical value of this remark. In any event, the DtrH as a totality was concluded at the earliest a few decades after the fall of the Temple (cf. events reported in 2 Kings 25). So, at the time of the complete work, at least, the story of Solomon's Temple was that of a lost past – to be experienced not by sensation, but only through imagining one's being in the building on the basis of this narrative account. The text invites its audience to proceed from a textual description of a lost physical arrangement and perform an *imagination* of visiting the Solomonic complex. Extending this invitation to imagining, this story nicely illustrates the complex relations between text, physical matter, sensation and imagination being explored in this volume.

Narrative and framings

In general, the account 'follows the path that a visitor to the building might take and notes items observable on such a tour' (Cogan 2000: 248). Scholars reading the narrative in light of comparative material end up imagining the Temple somewhat in the fashion illustrated in Figures 1.1a and b. Assuming that ancient readers used a similar reading strategy, the itinerary they imagined would be like this: First, one entered two courts (not rendered in the figures): an outer great court (1 Kgs 7.12), accessible by males (cf. 2 Kgs 12.4; 23.2); and an inner court (1 Kgs 6.36, etc.), for common priests to conduct offerings (1 Kgs 7.38–39). In the inner court there was a huge bronze vessel formed like a lily and standing on twelve oxen (7.23–26) along with additional decorated items (7.27–47). Passing through the court one came to the house proper: the *hechal* – palace – of the deity. It had an imposing façade opening to the east (Figure 1.1a), featuring two large pillars named *Jachin* and *Boas*, richly decorated (1 Kgs 6.3; 7.12–21; Figure 1.1b: G and H). Past the pillars and through the vestibule (A), the plot opened to the great hall (B) known in English as *The Holies* (1 Kgs 6.17; 8.8–10). Access here was probably limited to priests in service (cf. Lev. 4.5–7, 16; Num. 31.54). The imagined past itinerant, however, was not restricted by this limitation, and hovered into the hall lined with cedar and cypress wood. The walls had 'carvings of gourds and open flowers' (1 Kgs 6.18) and 'engravings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, in the inner and outer rooms' (v. 29) – and so had the doors (vv. 32–35). The hall also featured an altar (6.20), lampstands and a 'table of the Presence' (7.48–51).

(a)

(b)

Figure 1.1a, b Reconstructions of (a) the front (opening to the east) of the Solomon's Temple and (b) the floor plan of the Solomon's Temple as imagined in 1 Kings 6–8. Illustrations from Greßmann, H. (1909). *Altorientalische Texte und Bilder zum Alten Testament, Band II: Bilder*, p. 38, Figs. 58 and 57.

Passing through the hall, the itinerant reached the Holy of Holies, in Hebrew, *debir*, the temple cella (1 Kgs. 6.19, 27; 8.6; Figure 1.1b: C). This was the focal point of the entire architectural complex, the place that would normally house a cult image of the deity to whom the temple was dedicated (Köckert 2009: 371–2, with much literature). The cella of the imagined Solomon's Temple was magnificent: 'Solomon overlaid the inside of the house with pure gold [...] drew chains of gold across, [...] overlaid the whole

Figure 1.2 Relief on the Sarcophagus of Ahirom, King of Byblos (Phoenicia), around 1000 BCE. Beirut National Museum. Photo: O. Mustafin. Wikimedia Commons.

house with gold [...] even the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary he overlaid with gold' (1 Kgs 6.21-22). Moreover, there were two large cherubim of olive woods '[...] in the innermost part of the house; the wings of the cherubim were spread out so that a wing of one was touching the one wall, and a wing of the other cherub was touching the other wall; their other wings toward the centre of the house were touching wing to wing' (6.27). Such mixed creatures are protecting divine abodes throughout ancient Near Eastern temple architecture and iconography (see Freedman and O'Connor 1995, cf. Figure 1.2, see more below, cf. also Figure 5.3b), and they are known also from the tent sanctuary in priestly literature (Exod. 25.18-19, etc.).

Underneath the cherubs sits the ark of the covenant (6.19; 8.6-21), and the cherubs and the ark could be seen to form a joint complex. The ark is known throughout biblical literature, and its symbolism and significance are complex (see Zobel 1974; for Deuteronomy see Wilson 2005). In priestly literature the ark has two winged cherubs on top, conceived of as a throne seat and serving as a meeting place between God and Moses (Exod. 25.19-22; 37.8-9, cf. Lang 1995). Much of this is reflected in DtrH too, but often in its pre-deuteronomistic sources. In some passages the ark represents the presence of the Lord (cf. Judg. 20.27; 1 Sam. 4.3-5). This is the case also in the opening of 1 Kings 8: the ark entering the cella means the glory of God taking possession of the house (8.10-11). There is a divine name associated to the ark: 'The LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the *cherubim*' (1 Sam. 4.4; 2 Sam. 6.2; 2 Kgs 19.15). This suggests that the cherubs on top of the ark were forming a royal seat, not unlike what is illustrated

on the Phoenician Ahiṣar Sarcophagus, from around 1000 BCE (Figure 1.2). It stands to reason, therefore, that the arrangement to be imagined at the heart of the Solomonic Temple is the ark underneath an empty seat, now formed by the wings of the two giant cherubs in the room (cf. Köckert 2009: 390–5). Tryggve Mettinger (1995) coined the phrase ‘empty space aniconism’ to denote this programmatically empty seat.

Corresponding to the empty seat, there is a symbolism of darkness (and hence: invisibility). While there are ten lamps standing in the great hall (B) (1 Kgs 7.49), the cella (C) is lacking in light. There are doors between the great hall and the cella (1 Kgs 6.31–2). Possibly for this reason, only the poles of the ark inside the cella (pitched towards the door) are visible from the hall (1 Kgs 8.8, but only in the Hebrew, see discussion of this entire complex in Schenker 2006). This dim cella corresponds to the convention that theophanies (incidents of divine self-revelation) occur in cloudy darkness.⁷ The motif of darkness also resonates with the possibly old poetic dedication of the house in 8.12–13 (my translation):

The Lord said, he would live in a dark cloud.⁸

I have verily built you a lofty house, a place for you to dwell for all time.

The dedication identifies the temple as a permanent place of theophany (lofty enough to house even the clouds), and the architecture secures the expected dimness at the site (cf. similarly Sweeney 2007: 132–3).

So much for the main account of the story. Let me now turn to the comments interacting with the main story. The redactor of 1 Kings seems not entirely comfortable with all the conventional symbolism. At salient points a deuteronomistic voice interferes with the report, framing and limiting the significance of the generous presentation of pictorial media in the Temple. For instance, in 6.11–13 the redactor slips in a note declaring that the Lord will only reside in the Temple if the Israelites keep the Torah: the significance of the Temple is subordinated to that of the Torah (cf. Vogt 2006: 83–93, 227–9, etc.). Likewise, in 8.27 the deuteronomist lets Solomon make an important point; the Temple is not *really* the House of God, for God exceeds even the heavens; only the *name* of God can reside in the Temple. This reflects a tendency to envision a programmatically transcendent deity (Weinfeld 1972: 191–9, etc.). While the scholarly concept of transcendence applied here needs to be qualified (Wilson 1995), the remark clearly challenges conventional sanctuary theology, where the Temple as such signals the presence of the deity (as in Psalm 46.5–6, cf. Hurowitz 2005: 97–8).

Approaching the focal point of the Temple complex the deuteronomistic redactor is not primarily concerned with the dim *debir* or the empty cherub seat. It is the box underneath that catches attention: ‘There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses had placed there at Horeb’ (8.9). With DeVries (2003: 123–4) I find here a deuteronomistic voice. Relying on ancient Near Eastern temple convention one could speculate that the deuteronomist had first penned out the presence of a statue or other significant representative items associated with the ark, and then underscored the deletion by stating what was (not) inside. In any event, the two tablets, holding the Decalogue, and so also the Second Commandment, sit in the place where a culturally literate audience would expect to find some material representation of the main divinity

of the Temple. In the deuteronomistic narrative, these tablets are the second set that Moses received at Horeb, inscribed by God Himself (Deut. 10.1-5). They shall also be our main focus as we move on to consider relations between verbal and non-verbal media in the Solomonic Temple.

Logocentric imagination of the Temple?

The text invites the audience to imagine visiting the Solomonic Temple. Would this imagined visit reflect a preference for verbal over non-verbal semiotic systems when it comes to representing deity? Scholars answering this in the affirmative point to the fact that the imagined cella features a void rather than a representative image (Mettinger 1995). Also, the two tablets at the focal point have been seen as a programme of sacred words in the centre (cf. Weinfeld 1972: 208-9, etc.). And yet, on closer inspection, none of this seems to be defensible.

First, the reader is invited to imagine a building complex loaded with decoration and symbolic artefacts. The account taps into common ancient Near Eastern symbolism (cf. Hurowitz 2005: 73-8, etc.) that was multi-medial – primarily various pictorial media, but also with verbal elements. The interplay between these different media produced the desired effect (for the general phenomenon, see Larsen 1979; Reade 1979). Secondly, the imagined Temple is dominated by the symbolism of graded holiness centred on the cella (Hurowitz 2005: 88-90, etc.). This was a spatial-architectural semiotic system, which was particularly prominent in Hebrew priestly theology (Jenson 1992). Hence, the reader's perception of a programmatic absence of God relies almost entirely on non-verbal communication.

Finally, there are the two tablets in the ark. Apparently, their most significant aspect was *not* their semantic qualities. The tablets did not contain the entire Torah – only the Decalogue. In Deuteronomy, Moses wrote a book while sojourning in the Transjordan, and he commissioned the Levites responsible for the ark (Deut. 31.9) to place that book 'beside the ark' (Deut. 31.26) – not within it. This Mosaic book is the focal point of deuteronomistic theology (Vogt 2006), but in the Temple narrative it is not mentioned at all. If the tablets in the ark signify the Mosaic Torah, they do so in a sort of symbolism that is clearly not simply verbal. More importantly, there were other texts holding the Decalogue, but none are imagined to be handled with the same reverence as the tablets. And the reason seems obvious: the tablets in the ark had been written by the finger of God (Deut. 9.10) – yet another idea that the deuteronomists shared with their religious environment (cf. Exod. 31.18). What singled the tablets out from all other documents holding the Decalogue were their artefactual qualities: they enshrined the prints, as it were, of the finger of the deity. They had been in closer material contact with the sacred than even Moses himself had been. He, according to biblical lore, got to see the Lord (Exod. 33.18-23, cf. 34.33-35), but the tablets had been touched by the finger of God. They are the closest one comes to a material representation of deity in deuteronomistic literature. And they sit at the centre of the Solomonic Temple.

In short, 1 Kings 6-8 invites its audience to imagine being in the Solomonic Temple, and the ensuing imagination does not at all seem to be imbued with a disdain for matter

or a preference for verbal communication. The pictures on walls, doors and pillars, the spatial symbolism encircling the sacred focal point, the huge cherubs forming an empty seat with a petrified 'fingerprint' of the deity in a box underneath – all this confirms the religious validity and significance of non-verbal sensation, experience and performance. The narrative invites the audience to imagine engaging one's sensory capacities: a bodily recognition of grades of holiness, perhaps a smell of incense and burnt offerings, a gaze at the bronze pillars, the rich illustrations, the gold works, the cherubs and the ark. If they were reading the entire DtrH the audience might also imagine hearing a recitation from the book of Moses in the outside court, perhaps once every seventh year (Deut. 31.9-11). But it seems unlikely that imagining this incident, somewhat removed from the centre of the plot, should signal to the implied itinerant that listening to words is more important than all other sensation at the place. So, despite passages like Deuteronomy 4 (above) and the hard-line reception of this passage in modern scholarship, the story of the Solomonic Temple, as commissioned by the deuteronomists, relies heavily on pictorial, spatial and other non-verbal semiotic systems in its attempt to account for the absence–presence of the sacred. In its interaction, positively and negatively with all these systems, the story of the Solomonic Temple presents itself as a historically credible example of how the deuteronomistic ban on images might have played out in culturally embedded, real-life contexts.

Aesthetics of the non-representable

If the arrangement of the imagined Solomonic Temple does not reflect a preference for verbal over non-verbal media, then what is it that motivates the programmatic absence and void at the heart of the Temple complex? Taking a lesson from Jacques Rancière (2004), I do presume that a given group of people typically develop regimes that (a) guide the forging of specific artistic strategies and artefacts, (b) give standards for how such artefacts were to be sensed and experienced, (c) promote specific ways of understanding the reality or significance of the art/artistic artefacts, and (d) disciplines the use and perception of art into promoting certain political interests. Since these points reflect only parts of Rancière's argument on the aesthetic regime of art, I have here opted to use the name regimes of sensation for such socially sanctioned formations of matter, practices and ideas.⁹

Several of the contributions to the present volume attest to the development of (quite distinct) regimes of sensation designed to represent that which is thought to be in some sense non-representable. This is the case, for instance, with the aesthetics of withdrawal from public view in Eastern Africa (Behrend), the recognizing by the heart in early Islamic tradition (Shaw), the restraining of media in order to discipline the sensorium in Orthodox Christianity (Luehrmann), or the aesthetics of representing religious realities as sublime in European art (Bukdahl). These are regimes of sensation with a desire to display what cannot, or should not, be represented *and* a complimentary anxiety to communicate precisely a sense of distance between the representation and that which it represents.

It seems to me, the imagined Solomonic Temple in 1 Kings 6–8 offers one variation of such a regime. For instance, the programmatically empty cherub throne and the

play of light versus darkness immediately seems comparable to the artistic strategies that Bukdahl in her chapter in this book identifies as strategies for displaying the sublime in European art (See esp. pp. 234–6). Deuteronomistic theology emphasized the transcendence of the deity. Even after God's name takes possession of the Temple the divine persona is still so distant that Solomon has to call upon God's eye to keep observing from a distance:

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Regard your servant's prayer and his plea [...] that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. (1 Kgs 8.27–9)

The passage illustrates a recurring oscillation between words and concepts on the one hand and tangible materialities and practices on the other. In a peak of abstraction, Solomon defines divinity through *via negationis*, a strategy shared across several layers of ancient Hebrew literature (cf. Labuschagne 1966). This concept of deity animates the entire deuteronomistic theology. However, when naming his hope for a lasting divine *presence*, Solomon uses categories of body, practice and space: God's eyes and ears ensure divine presence at the place where God could not dwell, provided God's servants pray directed to that place.

This configuration carries over into the imagined Temple as a totality. A continuous presence of the ear of the deity is presumed in arrangements for prayer and offerings throughout the court and in the great hall. Similarly, the awareness of the divine eye is suggested in the system for graded holiness and control of access around the Temple. The presence of the deity is explicitly indicated through the guarding cherubs all around the place. And yet, when the imagined itinerant reaches the focal point of the complex, materialities and practices as well as words dissolve into a void in so many registers:

1. In the central cella there is an empty seat for the Lord, a seat that is hardly visible due to the darkness.
2. There are no words. In Deuteronomy 4, the absence of divine form is compensated by a presence of divine speech. Similarly, in priestly literature the voice of God speaks to Moses from between the cherubs (cf. Exod. 25.22; Num. 7.89), but in 1 Kings 8 nothing occurs in the *debir*. It is possible that a similar notion of silence was entertained in the most elite priestly circles (Knohl 2006).
3. Underneath the seat is a box enshrining petrified prints by God's finger: marks left from a long past epiphany. While documenting a past material presence of the deity, the tablets simultaneously denote the historical distance and thus the absence of the divine finger in the Temple.
4. And alas, by the time the DtrH is finished, the Temple, the cherubs, the ark and the tablets were all gone. What was left was the readers' imaginations of the place where the echo of God's absent-presence used to dwell.

Why should there be a regime of sensation so bent on demonstrating the shortcoming of material representations of the deity? It seems impossible at the present to give a

commonly acceptable answer. What seems to be clear is that ancient Near Eastern deities were not perceived to be statically chained to their cult images: deities could abandon their temples as well as statues; iconic gods were as transcendent as aniconic ones. And yet, rituals for dedicating a statue as a cult image were very strong, establishing wide-ranging connections between the deity and the statue. This entailed potential danger for both parties. The deity could suffer humiliation (by the statue being captured or neglected). The community could risk having their relation to the deity severed through violence against the image (cf. Köckert 2009: 372–4, 380–1, 402–6). It seems possible that Hebrew religion in the Persian age, having experienced the destruction of the Temple and now being bent on protecting the sovereignty and elusiveness of the deity, would perceive all direct representation of the deity as a potential threat.

But it must be emphasized that in the Solomonic Temple imagined in 1 Kings, the hesitation to represent the deity in commonly accessible forms applies to all media, not just cult images. Words are no more capable of representing sacred presence than non-verbal media. At the centre of the Temple all representation dissolves into silence, invisibility, emptiness and historical absence. It is striking, indeed, that deuteronomistic theology, which made the *written* word (inevitably an artefact that could be ruined or lost) its focus, also moulds this story where neither speech nor tablets are in the end representing divine presence for the audience of the story. It is as if the deuteronomists attempt to protect the deity from the potential exposure brought even by their own bookish and verbal religion.

Conclusion

It is commonly agreed that the view of ancient Hebrew (and early Jewish) religion as uniformly rejecting the use of pictorial media is exaggerated. This chapter, however, targeted those parts of biblical Hebrew literature that most programmatically do represent an apparent ban on cultic images: the so-called deuteronomistic texts. Most biblical scholars think that at least these layers of biblical literature express a general preference for verbal over non-verbal media when it comes to representing the sacred.

Now, deuteronomistic theology was, of course, culturally embedded, and the task of editing the story of the Solomonic Temple (1 Kings 6–8) placed one deuteronomistic scribe at an intersection with priestly theology, encountering commonly shared cultural and religious preferences, inherited materialities and the social memory attached to these materialities. The story in 1 Kings 6–8 is also one of few passages in the entire DtrH that is sufficiently detailed to sustain an analysis of how the deuteronomistic ban on images would play out in architectural reality. The analysis suggests that deuteronomistic ideology was more tempered, nuanced and sensitive to situation than is commonly expected.

1 Kings 6–8 represents a regime of sensation grappling with how to represent what was perceived as non-representable, namely divine presence. In its struggle to relay this dimension, the text invites the audience to engage the interplay of textual and material media in order to produce a mental image that would represent the unseen in acceptable ways. The carrying medium is the text with words and concepts, but the text points to

spatial, architectural and symbolical media, as well as to sensations and emotions these might trigger. When it comes to the central point, the precise representation of the deity, this regime does not trust any medium. Instead, the strategy is to represent a simultaneous void in several registers. The central chamber of the Solomonic Temple is characterized by silence (no speech), invisibility (darkness), emptiness (the seat) and two artefacts (the tablets) enshrining a past material presence as well as its absence in the present.

It seems to me questionable whether this regime of sensation could even be classified as aniconic. Admittedly, there is a programmatic absence of iconic representation of the deity, and in that narrow sense the regime is perhaps aniconic. But there is a simultaneous absence of words and light, and yet we would not say the plot is anti-verbal. The empty seat is a void in only one of several coordinated media registers in the imagined Solomonic Temple.

There is, of course, no doubt that deuteronomistic literature emphasized the role of writings and books as compared to other strata of contemporary religion. However, the DtrH engages non-verbal semiotic systems also outside of the Temple narrative, for instance, when relating to people 'coming before the Lord' at the elected place, at specific times, with specific purposes and specific gestures (e.g. in Deut. 26.1-16; cf. 2 Kgs 19.14-34). Such recognition of the religious significance of time, space and materiality was no deuteronomistic characteristic: it is more intensely reflected in other strata of the Hebrew Bible. And yet, its presence also in deuteronomistic literature needs to be taken into account when drawing a profile of deuteronomistic religion and theology.