

the character of Superman has a fluttering cape instead of wings, his superhuman feats have appeared in numerous media incarnations, such as in *Superman: The Movie* (dir. Richard Donner, 1978) and *Superman Returns* (dir. B. Singer, 2006). Other advanced extraterrestrial beings in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (dir. S. Spielberg, 1977), *Starman* (dir. J. Carpenter, 1984), and *Cocoon* (dir. R. Howard, 1985) have powers or appearances often associated with the supernatural.

Secularized angels also have some “fallen” binary opposites. Superman’s Kryptonian nemesis Zod (Terrance Stamp) in *Superman II* (dir. R. Lester, 1981) has all of Superman’s powers but is pure evil. In the six-part *Star Wars* series, virgin-conceived Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) grows to become a gifted Jedi Knight, but he chooses the dark side and becomes black-caped Darth Vader (although he finds redemption just before he dies).

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See also → Androgyne, Androgynous Beings;
→ Angel of Death; → Cherubim; → Gabriel;
→ Jaol; → Jeremiel; → Lucifer; → Metatron;
→ Michael (Angel); → Raguel (Angel);
→ Raphael; → Seraphim; → Uriel (Angel)

Anger

→ Virtues and Vices, Lists of; → Wrath of God

Anglican Chant

→ Chant

Anglican Liturgy

→ Liturgy

Anguish

→ Suffering

Aniam

A descendant of Manasseh and the youngest son of Shemida (1 Chr 7:19). The name (MT *ʾĀnīʾām*), though, is uncertain. LXX^B has Αλιαλεμ, while LXX^A has Ανιαν. If the vocalization in MT is correct, the name means “I am the [Divine] Kinsman.” That would be without parallel among Semitic names. It is more likely that *ʾny* should be interpreted not as *ʾānī* but as *ʾōnī* (“My Power”). Thus, the name, to be vocalized as *ʾŌnīʾām*, may be explained etymologically as “The [Divine] Kinsman is My Power.” Such a name has an analogy in *ʾNyhwh* (“YHWH is My Power”) attested in various Hebrew

inscriptions (see references in *Hebrew Inscriptions* 589).

The genealogy of Manasseh in 1 Chr 7:14–19 is not without problems and parallel lists in Num 26 and Josh 17 suggest corruptions in the 1 Chr 7 text. Two of the sons of Shemida, Shechem and Helek are listed as the sons of Gilead in Num 26:30–32, but as the sons of Manasseh in Josh 17:2. Given these misalignments as well as the fact that Aniam is missing from Num 26 and Josh 17, a long-standing proposal has been to equate Aniam with Noah, the daughter of Zelophehad (Num 26:33 and Josh 17:2).

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Aniconism

- I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
- II. Judaism
- III. Islam
- IV. As Problem for Visual Arts

I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

1. General. Aniconism can be defined as the absence of any material, two- or three-dimensional representations of living (human, floral, faunal), divine or hybrid beings. Aniconism is not identical with iconoclasm (removal and destruction of images), iconophobia (repugnance of images), anti-idolism/anti-idolatry (conscious hostility against idolatry), and is only connected with the prohibition of images where there is an explicit, conscious, maybe even legislative intention to cause, to regulate or to maintain the absence of images. The limits between iconism and aniconism are difficult to establish since they are closely connected to the definition of “representation,” “symbol,” “emblem,” and “image.” They also depend on the decision whether or not to classify images of plants, stars, animals, and objects or their combination as iconic (present writer) or aniconic (so Ornan: 176). Between the material presence-marker of a deity or a human being (living or deceased) in the shape of an unhewn stone, cultic standards with iconic elements, and a three-dimensional composite statue, there is a wide range of different possibilities. This is also the case for individual or social attitudes towards images which can range (at the same time and in the same social system) from worship, toleration, criticism to theoretical and/or practical hostility and tabooization. Mettinger (1995; modified 1997) suggests distinguishing “material aniconism” (steles) from “empty space aniconism” (empty thrones), and *de facto* aniconism (mere absence of images) from programmatic aniconism, arguing that the pre-exilic *de facto* material and empty space aniconism prepared the ground for the exilic-post-exilic express prohibition of images. But programmatic aniconism, intolerant of cultic images, better called anti-idolism/anti-idolatry, is not necessarily

the logical consequence of the prior existence of aniconic practices. Furthermore, the implied antagonism between “stele” and “image” is an artificial construction. Material remains of the history of religions in the ancient Near East, Palestine and Greece attest that aniconic cults exist parallel to iconic ones without any rivalry. Aniconism can be just one of the religious practices in a cultural system which can interchange with iconic cults according to different temporal/local needs or traditions. To postulate a basic rivalry between aniconic and iconic cults is a retrojection of modern debates which are already deeply influenced by the biblical and/or philosophical controversy about idols.

2. Archaeology. The archaeology of ancient Israel and Judah (Schroer; Keel/Uehlinger 2001; Uehlinger 1997) demonstrates that images of living beings (humans, plants and animals), idols of deities in anthropo-, theriomorphic or symbolic shapes and hybrids (e.g., Cherubim) as well as standing stones (e.g., Arad) with and without carving or painting belonged to the practical religious and daily life in the 1st millennium BCE (and the previous periods).

3. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. 1 Kings 6–7 attests to the depiction of plants, animals and hybrids in the iconography of the temple of Jerusalem, indicating that the HB/OT prohibition of images or anti-idolatric attitude does not intend to ban arts in a general sense. Biblical aniconism, which stands in contrast to thought and practice in the ancient Near East and Palestine itself, is a limited rejection of making material representations of the divine and has a clear cultic setting (anti-idolatry). The criticism of gods as artifacts and of worshipping artifacts as gods is a central topos in the works of Xenophanes and Heraklit, in Deuteronomistic-Deuteronomistic literature (Deuteronomy; Joshua; Judges; 1–2 Samuel; 1–2 Kings), Second Isaiah (Isa 40–55), Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Biblical idol-terminology is already characterized by anti-idolism: The HB/OT often uses technical terms (*pesel*, *massekā*) to indicate that the image is only a human artifact, or abusive or scoffing words to discredit them (e.g., *gillūlim* “dung pellets” Ezek 6:4 ff.).

Deuteronomistic-Deuteronomistic writers claimed that iconoclasm in Israel would be a sign of correct cultic practice and cause YHWH’s blessing (1 Kgs 15:12–13; 2 Kgs 10:26–31; 18:3 ff., 23*), while the making of cultic images would incur YHWH’s wrath on the people committing the sin (Exod 32; 1 Kgs 12:28–30; 16:26, 32–33; 2 Kgs 21:3, 7). This is a clear inversion of the ancient Near Eastern idolatric doctrine, since usually the making or restoration of a cultic image would make the gods rejoice (Berlejung 1998). The Deuteronomistic-Deuteronomistic polemics against the making of idols is part of the criticism of the Israelite/Judean kings who are blamed for repeating the paradigmatic

“sin of Jeroboam.” The kings and their idols are accused of being guilty for the loss of the promised land and for the exile. The later redactional additions to the book of Hosea (Hos 2:10; 4:17; 8:4–6; 10:5–6; 13:2; 14:4) criticize the northern cult as idolatrous, mainly by attacking the calf of Samaria/Bethel. In Ezekiel the anti-idolatric verses focus on the impurity of images (Ezek 22:3–4), which pollutes the holy city and the land. The most detailed rationalistic polemics against cultic images and deliberate antithesis against the theology of cultic images can be found in Second Isaiah (Isa 40:19–20; 41:6–7; 44:9–20; 46:5–7) and dependent passages (Jer 10:1–16; 51:17–18; Hab 2:18–19; Ps 115:4–8; 135:15–18; Deut 4:15 ff.). Idols are described as the result of a profane manufacture and as copies of visible earthly creatures. Arguing that the gods of the peoples were only self-made artifacts, the intended Judean reader should understand that YHWH was the one and only god and creator. In Second Isaiah, explicit monotheism and anti-idolatry are part of the same theological discourse. It has already been noted that the anti-idolatric texts do not argue with the prohibition of images (von Rad: 237), indicating that the prohibition and the anti-idolatric texts go back to different and independent traditions (Dohmen: 274–76) and were only joined in younger texts (Lev 19:4; 26:1; Deut 27:15). In the restoration of the cult of the Second temple, the Jerusalem-Babylonian connection apparently took care that no idols of YHWH were made. The function of the cultic image (to be the present deity) was replaced by the *mēnôrā* (Zech 4; van der Toorn 1997), the *tôrā* (1 Macc 3:48), the Deuteronomistic-Deuteronomistic *šēm*- and the priestly *kābôd*-theology. But the attractiveness of divine images remained a permanent problem also discussed in later wisdom literature (Bar 6; Sir 30:18–19; Wis 13–15). Anti-idolism became an important marker of Jewish identity in the conflict with the Seleucids (*Jubilees*; Additions to Daniel) and belonged to the program of the Maccabees (1 Macc 5:68; 13:47; 2 Macc 10:2; 12:40), who inflicted iconoclasm upon their conquered areas.

4. Prohibition of Images. The HB/OT attests several literary traditions of the prohibition of images (Deut 5:8 par. Exod 20:4; Exod 20:23; 34:17; Lev 19:4; 26:1; Deut 4:15–28*; 27:15), which reflect different traditions, aspects and steps of further interpretation. Both versions of the Decalogue contain the programmatic prohibition of idols – not of arts in general. The prohibition of idols is closely connected with the prohibition of worshipping other gods beside YHWH (Dohmen: 19, 276–79). It is an aniconic cult-program which presupposes iconic practice and can imply a programmatic iconoclasm against existing images (Deut 7:5, 25; Deut 12:3; Num 33:52; 2 Kgs 18:4; 23). The earliest date for the prohibition is difficult to establish but

actually there seems to be a consensus between scholars that there are no texts antedating Deuteronomic-Deuteronomic writing. The origin and intention of the prohibition of idols has to be connected with the explicit Judean monotheism of the exilic and post-exilic period (but see Frevel). In the exile the first commandment with the demand of the exclusive worship of YHWH was formulated. Consequently, the existence of the foreign gods was denied; they were materialized in their images which had to be eliminated from Israel. Marginalized as foreign cultic elements, idols of YHWH and of other local gods had to be destroyed. Thus, the prohibition of making idols is a later concretization of the first commandment. Not earlier than the 4th century BCE the prohibition was supplemented by an explicit rationale: Deuteronomy 4: 15–19 argues that Israel did not see YHWH's "shape" (*tēmūnā*), but only heard a voice at mount Horeb. Therefore, Israel was not to make a graven image (*pesel*). These late texts prove that the anti-idolatric program did not convince everybody at the same time and to the same extent.

5. Roots of Aniconism. There has been a lot of speculation about the roots of biblical anti-idolatry and the prohibition of images. The different explanations depend on the basic decision of whether or not scholars consider aniconism to be a characteristic belonging to the essence of Yahwism from the beginning of nascent Israel (e.g., Dohmen: 18, 276–77; Mettinger 1995: 174, 195–96):

a) If this is the case, the Israelites are considered to be people watching the idols "as outsiders." Images excavated in Israel are interpreted as results of import, foreign seduction, or growing decadence. The historical roots of aniconism then are connected with the (obsolete) construct of the nomadic origin of Israel (e.g., Bernhardt: 141–51; Dohmen: 239–43, 276) or with the stay in the desert (e.g., Preuß: 17–19, 289). Others refer to the aniconic cult of the Midianite god (e.g., Mettinger 1995: 168–74), ignoring that there were idols in Midian. Mettinger (see above) has tried to explain Israelite aniconism as part of a broader ancient Near Eastern aniconic tradition (for criticism see Loretz: 214–15; Lewis).

Since idols of the official cult are connected with kings and royal propaganda, some scholars have developed social-historical models in order to explain biblical aniconism. It is argued that anti-idolatry is rooted in the anti-monarchic tendency of the early Israelites (e.g., Hendel: 224–28). Renunciation of idolatry is considered part of the fight of early egalitarian Israel against the prevailing hierarchies of the Canaanite city-states (Kennedy: 141–42.). Since the presupposition of the egalitarian/anti-monarchical structure of early Israel is doubtful, these models are not convincing.

Other attempts to explain HB/OT aniconism or prohibition of images claim that YHWH's elusive

essence as transcendent, free, holy and dynamic god would principally exclude the possibility of being forced into any material representation (so e.g., Bernhardt: 152–54). But one has to take into account that ancient Near Eastern gods had the same characteristics which were never restricted by their idols. The idea that a god can be manipulated or controlled through that god's image is not an idolatric but already an anti-idolatric one.

The initial aniconic character of Yahwism is currently still under debate. While there seems to be good evidence for the pre-exilic goddess Asherah, until today no cultic image of YHWH can be identified without doubt. Within the HB/OT, attestations of cultic images in monarchic Judah are limited to the ark (e.g., 1 Sam 3: 3; 4: 4), Cherubim as guards and the empty (but see Niehr) throne (1 Kgs 6: 23–24; 8: 1–2), in the North in Samaria/Bethel/Dan the bull (1 Kgs 12: 26–32; Hos) and maybe a Danite image in Ephraim (Judg 17–18). This North-South difference could indicate a different iconographical tradition for YHWH of Jerusalem and YHWH of Samaria – at least excluding an aniconic YHWH tradition for the North (see also Sargon's II Nimrud Prism with the mention of deported Samaritan statues).

b) If scholars work on the basis of the conviction that the aniconic YHWH cult is a later development within the history of the (mainly Judean) religion which was iconic from its very beginning, they offer different explanations. It is then argued that the Deuteronomic theologians of the late-monarchic (Hezekiah/Josiah) and/or exilic period developed the aniconic veneration of YHWH in order to profile their own religious program mainly against the surrounding iconic empires and cultures (anti-Assyrian or anti-Babylonian; Berlejung 1998: 419–21). Others believe that the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple 587/586 BCE and the loss of YHWH's statue (existence unproven) lead to the end of the YHWH-image-tradition and brought forward alternative programs (Schmidt: 104–5). A development like this would be without parallels in the ancient Near East since the loss of cultic statues was as normal as their replacement (Berlejung 2002). On the base of the common observation that 1st millennium BCE Mesopotamia had the tendency to depict gods more often in symbolic than in anthropomorphic shape (Herles), Ornan has recently argued that there was an implicit aniconism in Mesopotamia which reached its peak from the 7th century BCE onwards. According to Ornan, the exiled Judeans came in touch with this Babylonian aniconism, took it over, and intensified it up to the proclamation of the prohibition of making images. The connection between anti-idolatry/aniconism and monotheism as late-monarchic/exilic/post-exilic shift in the history of Judean Yahwism (which had previously been polytheistic and iconic) has

dominated the discussion of the last decades, even though the dating for these developments differs considerably. Actually there are suggestions for diverting from monocausal and linear diachronic explanations and turning towards a more dynamic picture of Israelite religion allowing for local variations, polypraxes and polydoxies within Yahwism (Zevit).

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Angelika Berlejung

II. Judaism

■ Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism ■ From Rabbinic Judaism through to the Modern Period

A. Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism

Citing biblical precedent, Jews of the Second Temple period avoided and circumscribed "idols," i.e., the religious art and artifacts of other religions. In his groundbreaking 13-volume *Jewish Symbols in the*

Greco-Roman Period, Erwin R. Goodenough demonstrated that "Jews obviously favored some pagan symbols, definitely avoided others." This selective embrace of imagery played a formative role in the cultural positioning of Judaism within the Greco-Roman world. The progressively evolving antipathy towards the cultic object of the "Other" figured largely in the literature and art of the Second Temple period, leading to the avoidance of human figures on most Jewish monuments and coins, although Herod's Tyrian sheqel, with its head-portrait of Melquart and a Roman eagle, which he struck as the official coinage of the temple, was a notable exception.

With the successful Hasmonean revolt (167 BCE) against the Seleucid Antiochus IV, Judean dislike for "idolatrous" Greek religious imagery grew more pronounced and more public. Literary descriptions, as well as major excavations of later Second Temple Jerusalem demonstrate that Jews adopted and applied the aesthetic trends of the majority culture. Herod's temple in Jerusalem was constructed according to the model of public architecture in the age of Augustus, and was praised by both Jewish and non-Jewish sources. The distinguishing feature of the temple was the virtual lack of human or animal imagery in its decoration, in keeping with a strict interpretation of Jewish law that was prevalent at this time. Archaeological findings of Jewish figural art date to the 2nd century CE with a great many examples from Late Antiquity, such as the full-bodied images of biblical heroes and heroines and the controversial depiction of the hands of God in the 3rd-century CE Syrian Dura-Europos Synagogue. Besides synagogue art, Jews of the Second Temple period contributed to the sepulchral arts with carved sarcophagi, tombstones, and painted catacombs (such as the 1st–4th century CE Beth She'arim). The Mishnah (ca. 200 CE), recording rabbinic debates regarding "foreign worship," legislated against the creation and patronage of idolatrous objects, but nonetheless offered a liberal, if somewhat dismissive, attitude towards decoration as in the case of a decorative statue of Aphrodite in a bathhouse (*mAZ* 3:4).

The modern construction of ancient Judaism as an aniconic religion was the product of German Protestant scholarship in the 19th and early 20th centuries. I. Kant singled out Jews as the original aniconic people in an effort to set an ancient precedent for German Protestant discomfort with Catholic visual expressions of worship and spirituality, whereas G. W. F. Hegel disparaged the Jews for the same alleged aniconism. The archaeological discoveries of the early 20th century put an end to any claims of ancient Jewish aniconism, but presented a new host of problems for scholars trying to reconcile what they interpreted as uncompromising literary profanation of the divine image with the

abundance of representational Jewish visual expression of the same period. Scholars such as Goodenough and Morton Smith reconciled the unyielding rabbinic accounts against idolatry with the undeniable existence of a Jewish figural tradition as a class-divide between the aniconic elite and the mystical masses. In recent years, however, scholars have reassessed the contradiction between literary accounts and archaeological evidence by distinguishing between the complex cultic and monotheistic aesthetic practices in ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman societies.

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B. From Rabbinic Judaism through to the Modern Period

Contrary to a widespread assumption originating in 19th-century Eurocentric philosophy and Orientalist scholarship, it is now widely accepted that biblical and rabbinic Judaism did not adhere to beliefs or practices associated with absolute aniconism. We now acknowledge that Jewish culture has produced artists and that traditional Judaism does not harbor taboos against all forms of visual art, either secular or religious. Regarding two- and three-dimensional artifacts representing animate and inanimate models, rabbinic authorities in late antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages conformed to biblical precedents forbidding idolatry and unequivocally allowing the production and enjoyment of all other images.

Typical of late ancient rabbinic opinion is the tannaitic text describing one sage's controversial visit to a bathhouse in Akko adorned with a statue of Aphrodite. Defending himself, the sage is reported to have produced several arguments, "I did not enter her precincts, she entered my precincts. It is not said that the bath was made to adorn Aphrodite but that Aphrodite was made to adorn the bath... Finally, an object which is treated as a deity is forbidden [to use], but an object [like this Aphrodite] not treated as a deity is permitted." The sage therefore concluded that he had committed no sin in the presence of a statue that he considered to be not an object of worship housed in a temple but merely an aesthetically pleasing ornament for the bathhouse (*mAZ* 3:4).

The episode of Aphrodite is instructive. The rabbis were indeed aware that Israelite prohibitions against idolatry, including visual representations of the deity, are prominent in the Decalogue and throughout biblical literature. Exod 20:4–6 and Deut 5:8–10 unequivocally forbid both the making and the idolatrous worship of "a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in earth beneath, or that is in the water

under the earth." Deut 4:15–18 is no less emphatic in proscribing images considered idolatrous.

Equally prominent in biblical literature and therefore comprehensively addressed in talmudic and midrashic texts, however, are numerous examples of divinely enjoined two- and three-dimensional iconic representations of inanimate and animate objects, both flora and fauna. Regarding the tabernacle, e.g., Exod 25:18–22, describes sculptured figures called "cherubim"; 25:31–40, the seven-branched candelabrum, or menorah, that features "cups made like almonds, each with capital and flower"; and 26:31–37, an embroidered "veil of blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen, in skilled work shall it be made, with cherubim." Numbers 21:4–9 recounts the episode of a plague of serpents that afflicted the people, causing Moses to pray to God for a remedy and God commanding Moses: construct a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole. "Everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live. So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it up on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live." Regarding the royal palace, 1 Kgs 10:18–20 boastfully observes that King Solomon "also made a great ivory throne, and overlaid it with the finest gold. The throne had six steps, and at the back of the throne was a calf's head, and on each side of the seat were arm rests and two lions standing beside the arm rests, while twelve lions stood there, one on each end of a step on the six steps. The like of it was never made in any kingdom." Rabbinic authorities also commented favorably on other of Solomon's sculptured theriomorphs (1 Kgs 7:23–40).

Considered in their aggregate totality, these biblical passages reflect a strict policy of aniconism with respect to visual representations of the deity and a liberal policy encouraging iconism with respect to all other forms of religious and secular art. In the subsequent doctrinal and juridical discussions of these biblical passages in late ancient and medieval rabbinic texts, down to the present day, this two-fold pattern persists: idolatrous practices and visual representations of the deity are absolutely forbidden, but almost all other forms of religious and secular visual art flourished. In turn, these rabbinic texts reflect the abundance of artifacts discovered and analyzed by several generations of modern archaeologists, art historians, and historians of Jewish thought. These artifacts include numismatics, frescoes, mosaics adorning synagogues, illuminated manuscripts of religious and secular texts, the Passover Haggadah, diverse ritual objects, and decorated marriage contracts (*ketubbot*).

Typical of medieval rabbinic opinion is the responsum composed by Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg (ca. 1220–1293):

I was asked concerning the propriety of those who illuminate their holiday prayerbooks with pictures of birds

and animals. I replied: It seems to me that they certainly are not behaving properly, for while they gaze upon those pictures they are not directing their hearts exclusively to their father in heaven. Nevertheless, in this case, there is no trespass against the biblical prohibition, 'You shall not make either a sculpture or any image' [Exod 20:3], as we deduce from the [precedent] recorded in the Talmudic chapter, 'All the Statues,' regarding Rabbān Gamaliel [whose models of the moon's phases were considered unproblematic] 'because other people produced [the models] for him' [bAZ 54b]. Furthermore, there are no grounds for even the precautionary suspicion of [idolatry] regarding the illuminations [in prayerbooks], since they are merely patches of pigment lacking sufficient tangibility. We only have precautionary grounds to suspect [idolatry] with respect to a protruding, engraved seal, but not with an intaglio seal, and all the more so in this case where [the image of birds and animals in prayerbooks] is neither protruding nor intaglio. [The image in a prayerbook] is merely [flat] pigment. (Bland 2001: 292)

Against the background of these authoritative pre-modern texts, the fertile production and consumption of the visual arts throughout Jewish history ought no longer cause any astonishment or raise the objection of heterodoxy. That Jewish cultures have applied their strictures against representing the deity to the practice of all forms of visual art cannot be maintained. That the HB, as interpreted by the rabbinic traditions, is a manifesto for absolute aniconism cannot be historically defended. That the visual arts have always flourished within Jewish life cannot be gainsaid.

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III. Islam

Though the two are inseparably linked, "aniconism" should be distinguished from "iconoclasm." The latter term signifies the impulse to purge or exclude any kind of plastic image or visual representation from rites of devotion and sanctuary environments, while the former encompasses a much broader range of attitudes regarding figural representation or depiction (*taṣwīr*) in general, ranging from bland indifference to extreme hostility.

1. Foundations. Many have assumed that Islamic aniconism, like its Jewish counterpart, is anchored in the tradition's ancient hostility to idolatry, which played a formative role in the emergence of Islam in an environment in which the worship of idols was supposedly rampant. While some have suggested that the paganism of the *jāhiliyya* or

"Age of Ignorance" was deliberately exaggerated or even invented outright by early Muslim authors, a rich body of archaeological and textual evidence clearly attests to the popularity of cult images in Arabian polytheism in pre-Islamic times. Curiously, there is no explicit qur'anic mandate against figural imagery per se. What we see here instead, in virtually every passage that mentions *aṣṇām* or *awthān* (the plurals of *ṣanam* and *wathan* respectively; either term can be interpreted as "cult statues," though this is open to debate), is a conspicuous alignment of idol worship with other varieties of wrongdoing and error.

Notably, many of the qur'anic denunciations of *aṣṇām* and *awthān* are placed in the mouth of Abraham, and may thus be thought to be biblically or midrashically inspired (for example, the Qur'ān understands Abraham's father Azar to be a maker and seller of idols, a theme held in common with rabbinic tradition). One presumes that these allusions are intended to establish an unambiguous Abrahamic precedent for Muhammad's own iconoclasm, and the association of iconoclasm with Abraham remains potent today. Elias has convincingly demonstrated that the significance of the Taliban's campaign against the Buddhist artifacts of Afghanistan in 2001, which culminated in the much-lamented demolition of the monumental Buddhas of Bamiyan, cannot be properly understood without appreciating the Taliban's deliberate evocation of Abraham; this is signaled most of all by the fact that the campaign was deliberately timed to coincide with the Ḥajj season and Eid al-Aḍḥā, the Abrahamic associations of which are extremely conspicuous.

However, it is important to note that when the Qur'ān refers to the images putatively worshipped by the Prophet's contemporaries and that his followers are to avoid, it prefers more oblique terms such as *jibt* and *ṭaghāt* to describe their objects of worship and not *aṣṇām* or *awthān*; this potentially undercuts any attempt to cast Abraham's iconoclasm as a symbolic precursor to Muḥammad's. Nevertheless, the figure of Muḥammad is central to the phenomenon under consideration here in two ways. First, though other factors came into play later, it is reasonable to assume that traditions about the Prophet's purging the Ka'ba of idols after the "conquest" of Mecca in Ramadan 8/January 630 or his destruction of the sacred grove of the goddess al-'Uzza in the valley of Nakhla may have provided some impetus for (and thus the rationale behind) the development of a pervasive rejection of images in Islamic culture generally. Indeed, Muslim iconoclasts have often imagined their hostility to depiction to be mandated by the *Sunna*, and notably, the ḥadīth literature is far more explicit than the Qur'ān in its condemnation of *taṣwīr* as a matter of principle. Thus, numerous traditions in the ca-

nonical collections attest to Muḥammad's statements that artists will be punished on the Day of Resurrection and commanded to bring their images to life, or that angels avoid homes in which pictures are found.

Second, while violence against images was sporadic in the early and medieval periods, there has been a marked intensification not only of iconophobia but active iconoclasm in Islamic society in recent centuries; this is often manifest in the pious interventions commonly found in illuminated manuscripts, in which representations of living things are rendered "dead" through a decapitating pen-stroke, or faces erased completely (see → plate 16). There is some irony to the fact that the most acute case of Muslim public opposition to visual representation in modern times centered on the depiction of the Prophet by nonbelievers. This was vividly demonstrated by the so-called "Cartoon Controversy" that erupted after the publication of satirical cartoons of Muḥammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllandsposten* in 2005 and their subsequent republication by media outlets throughout the world. There is copious evidence from premodern Islamic cultures demonstrating that figural imagery – including portrayals of Muḥammad himself – was at one time acceptable, at least in private contexts; for many modern Muslims, however, the rejection of all figural representation, not least of all any portrayal of the Prophet whatsoever, is seen as absolutely essential to true Islam.

2. Early Muslim Aniconism and the Limits of Representation. It seems that the primitive Muslim community was largely indifferent to the question of representation, and that the deliberate rejection of images, at least in public contexts, was a direct response to the specific forms and uses of depiction in the communities of the late antique Near East that were assimilated into the Islamic polity after the Arab conquests. Hodgson sees a combination of factors contributing to a hostility to visual representation among pious circles: while *qur'ānic* passages denouncing idolaters surely provided some *justification* for iconophobia, the early Muslim reaction against visual depictions was primarily inspired, in his view, by the egalitarianism of the "Shariah-minded" (i.e., the proto-Sunni leadership), who denounced images on the basis of a "moralistic populism" that associated painting, sculpture, and other media of representation with luxury and royal excess. Thus, on one level, aniconism is analogous to the well-known prohibitions on the wearing of silk or gold to be found in the hadīth literature, and may have been a particular reaction against the opulence of the Sasanian court and the Persian aristocracy.

Aniconism was an even more pressing issue in the liturgical context, however, given the extreme popularity of icons and the cult of images in East-

ern Christian communities; the starkness of the mosque is surely a direct reaction against the overwhelming tendency towards idolatry in Syria, Egypt and elsewhere, which the early Muslims would have had endless opportunity to observe. Hodgson conjectures that the rejection of any kind of symbolism in specifically religious contexts is based in a concern not to allow any extraneous image or sentiment to intrude into what should be an exclusive focus on God himself in the act of worship. Insofar as *any* art, religious or secular, serves to create a moment of communion with the transcendent, a rigorist could argue that since God and his revelation are the sole manifestation of truth to his creatures, any art, figural or non-figural, infringes upon the absolute unity of the divine.

In contrast to Hodgson's characterization of Islamic aniconism, Grabar and others have emphasized a different animus behind the tendency to avoid figural imagery in public monuments. Beginning in the later 7th century, images may have been avoided in the decorative programs of such important Islamic sites as the Dome of the Rock and the Aqṣā Mosque primarily as a deliberate strategy of distinction, insofar as Byzantine monuments were readily identified by their proclivity to incorporate specific forms of visual expression, not least of all the icon. Muslim aniconism thus had clear political, if not polemical, implications. This would seem to be corroborated by the fact that the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (reigned 685–705), the builder of the Dome of the Rock, also undertook a more or less simultaneous "Islamicizing" reform of the currency employed in his empire, substituting a new aniconic style of coinage with conspicuously Islamic slogans for the Byzantine-style coins bearing figural images with Christian overtones that his predecessors had preferred. Intriguingly, Christian literary sources (admittedly less reliable than the numismatic evidence) impute iconoclastic campaigns of a peculiar kind to both 'Abd al-Malik's governor in Egypt and his son Yazīd II (reigned 720–24): both are said to have forcibly removed crosses from churches found in their domains.

The parameters of aniconic discourse in modern Islam have not changed much since 'Abd al-Malik's time. The rejection of images still serves the dual purpose of asserting power *within* the Muslim community, in that iconoclasts claim the moral authority supposedly contingent upon asserting a "pure" Islam, and challenging the hegemony of those *outside* the community, in drawing a sharp boundary between the pious, aniconic Self and the idolatrous Other.

The rise of a deliberate preference for aniconism in public and religious contexts in the late 7th century contrasts sharply with the perennial popu-

larity, or at least permissibility, of figural representation in “secular” contexts – the frescoes and sculptural decoration of Umayyad palaces, e.g., or the ubiquitous figural imagery deployed in manuscript illumination, which could even include depictions of the Prophet himself on account of their restriction to private use. The royal predilection for such figural art has little to do with the moral laxity of courts, as some would assume, and much more to do with Islamic culture’s receptivity to the established conventions of the iconography of power in the Near East. Diverse material evidence may be explained in this way, from Iranian princes’ patronage of silver vessels with hunting scenes, in clear imitation of Sasanian models, to the proliferation of royal portraiture in the early modern gunpowder empires, in clear imitation of western European models.

As Bulliet has shown, a regression to the figural in Islamic society may also be indicative of social tensions. His analysis of different pottery styles in evidence in early medieval Nishapur shows that factional rivalries between groups competing for social prominence could be manifest in the styles of pottery patronized by each group: one faction with roots in the traditional Islamic elite of the early conquest period seems to have favored a more characteristically “Islamic” aniconic ware with Kūfan precursors, while another, with more conspicuously “nationalist” attitudes, apparently preferred pottery decorated with traditional Iranian visual motifs, including the use of figural imagery.

From the caliphal period, down to the flourishing of painting in the 11th and 12th centuries, in which the depiction of living things was commonplace, virtually to the present day, Islamic aniconism often reflects not an outright rejection of the

figural so much as what Grabar terms an egalitarianism of form. Here, the figural may be no more and no less important than other visual elements such as the vegetal flourish and the arabesque. When the figural mode is employed, it may be marked by a conspicuous emphasis on color and line and a corresponding avoidance of the depth and weight that are so essential to Western naturalism – the “apotheosis of visuality,” as Hodgson puts it. In the end, such an approach is not opposed to but rather *complements* the outright avoidance of the figural characteristic of aniconism proper. Both may be considered to be animated by the same ethos: a conviction that human art, no matter how ingenious and masterful, can never adequately capture the reality of the living being shaped and inspired by the divine Creator.

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IV. As Problem for Visual Arts

Aniconism is the artistic practice of depictions without the use of anthropomorphic or figural forms, especially in reference to God. It is identified as the appropriate visual mode for those religious traditions that adhere to the injunctions against idolatry, visual ambiguities, and humanism.

See further → Iconoclasm; → Ten Commandments

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