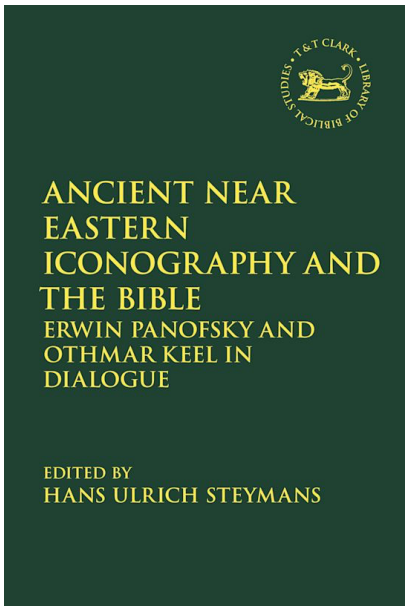
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Hans Ulrich Steymans, ed.

Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Bible: Erwin Panofsky and Othmar Keel in Dialogue

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The origins of the present volume can be traced to a workshop titled "Iconography and Iconology" held in Geneva and Bern during the 2015 European Summer as part of the Sixty-First Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale devoted to the topic "Text and Image."[1] The workshop's primary aim was to introduce Othmar Keel's adaptation of Erwin Panosky's iconographic method. Such an objective was based on the practical needs of addressing Keel's method to Assyriologists, as the conference attendees had a visit planned to the Bible + Orient Museum in Fribourg founded by Keel (xvi–xvii) and of filling a scholarly lacuna, as "Keel himself never wrote a textbook on the method of iconography he conceived" (xviii). The resulting volume holds the promise of being a "guide to the application of the method" (xviii) or a "textbook on Keel's iconographic method" (14) targeting biblical scholars (xix). Hans Ulrich Steymans, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament and the Biblical World at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, organized the workshop and edited the volume.

The book consists of eight chapters divided in three main sections. These are preceded by four lists (figures, tables, abbreviations, contributors), an editorial preface (xvi–xxi), and a foreword by Keel (xxii–xxiii). The chapters are followed by a comprehensive bibliography (267–306), an index of

1. Pascal Attinger et al., eds., *Text and Image: Proceedings of the 61e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Geneva and Bern, 22-26 June 2015*, OBO.SA 40 (Peeters, 2018).

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subjects and authors (307–15), and a scripture index (316–17), which includes a handful of ancient Near Eastern literature references.

Part 1 assesses in three chapters Keel's work and methodology. "Erwin Panofsky and Othmar Keel in Dialogue" (3–33), written by Steymans, functions as an introductory chapter, identifying the lacuna the book tries to fill and providing readers with context to understand Panofsky and Keel's methodologies. Their methods are summarized and contextualized according to their respective intellectual and reception contexts. Steymans's chapters have a wordy style with some digressions that might distract readers (e.g. the "definitions of some German expressions" [10] placed between the introduction and reception of Panofsky's model). The second chapter, "The Work of Othmar Keel" (34–55), is an updated version of a previously unpublished excerpt from Izaak de Hulster's Ph.D. dissertation.[2] The concise but judicious piece describes Keel's intellectual biography and distinguishes four phases of his work, from an iconographic-exegetical to a purely iconographic interest. The third chapter "An Overview of Othmar Keel's Use of Ancient Near Eastern Images" (56–64), by Jürg Eggler, describes the mechanisms behind Keel's image interpretation. After contextualizing Keel's work in biblical studies and distinguishing its three phases (thus differing from de Hulster), Eggler discusses Keel's methodology, whose focus lies, respectively, on the pictorial element (iconeme), the scene (type of image, theme, icon), and the decoration (icontext). The chapter helpfully points the relatively underexplored "linguistic nexus" (61) of Keel's oeuvre akin to textual criticism—arguably a result of Fribourg's intellectual environment.

Part 2 consists of two chapters presenting in parallell Panofsky's and (again) Keel's methodologies. The fourth chapter, "Erwin Panofsky's Iconology from Persistence to Change" (67–87), by Rafaelle Argenziano, is the volume's only art-historical discussion *stricto sensu*, thus moving the discussion away from the realms of biblical studies. Argenziano frames the modern iconological method derived from Panofsky as an interdisciplinary practice (68). Succinct and instructive, it describes the iconological tasks and challenges of the method while framing it against Panofsky's trajectory and his broader intellectual contexts. The fifth chapter, "A Pictorial Narrative Interpreted according to Othmar Keel's Iconographical Method" (88–157), another lengthy chapter by Steymans, targets biblical scholars interested "to relate ancient oriental images to the Bible" (88). By interpreting two silver bowls in three steps—assessing motifs or pictorial elements (96), constellations or the relationship (spatial and in actions) between represented entities (114), and iconology, where the images are discussed "in relation to philosophical, historical, and literary texts" (142)—Steymans attempts to advance Keel's second and third methodological steps.

Part 3 attempts with its three chapters to show the usefulness of Keel's method for Egyptology and ancient Near Eastern archaeology (and biblical studies?) through case studies. Keel describes his

2. See Izaak de Hulster, "Illuminating Images: An Iconographic Method of Old Testament Exegesis with Three Case Studies from Third Isaiah" (Ph.D. diss., University of Utrecht, 2008), 31–125.

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own method in the sixth chapter, "Problems of Iconographic Interpretation When Starting with a Text—A Case Study" (161–94), written with Florian Lippke. The chapter revisits a 1975 *Vetus Testamentum* article, refining it with the methodological concerns present in 1992's *Das Recht*[3] (xxiii). Profiting from linguistic and exegetical analogies, Keel and Lippke argue for a multilayered process of image interpretation that starts with the establishment of an image, which is then analyzed within the three-steps method. The first discerns (separately) the motif and the phenomenon depicted (166–67); the second construes the scene, image type, or theme through the relationship between motifs (175–76); and the third examines the communication pragmatics, decoration, or "icontext," described as a "*Sitz im Kommunikationsleben* (Setting in the life of communication)" (184). The test case points to the risks of too rapidly resorting to written sources. The seventh chapter, "An Archer Aiming at a Monster or Ninurta's Fight against Anzu" (195–250), is another lengthy contribution by Steymans and acts as the de facto conclusion for the anthology. Steymans attempts to place Keel's method within art-historical methods, focusing on relations with Near Eastern archaeology. The method application slightly differs from the fifth chapter's, having four steps: the assessment of motifs through their collection and identification (220); the scene or theme through the relation between motifs or "constellation" (230); the decoration or cultural context through their *Sitz im Leben* (237); and the meaning—the so-called iconological step—through the interpretation of the pictorial meaning (245). In the last step, comparisons with Mesopotamian and biblical evidence are drawn. Steymans concludes the book with an "Annotated Bibliography of Works of Art and Archaeology of Egypt and the Ancient Near East" (251–66), which, although broad and necessarily unsystematic, might come in handy to newcomers.

The volume addresses an issue discussed by many biblical scholars who have ventured into the analysis of ancient visual culture in the last thirty years, which might be characterized as the reproducibility of the Fribourg school methodology issue. Whereas the contributions of the Swiss research circle are well-known and received, their modus operandi remains elusive to scholars outside their inner circle.[4] While it is accepted that Keel's reticence about method was deliberate—either as a result of a personal trait,[5] a methodological option (de Hulster, 40), a writing style (Steymans, 19), or a way to address readership needs (Eggler, 57–58)—such discretion paired to the seminal character of the Fribourg school publications might have resulted, as Steymans argues (xviii), in a chasm between German and English-language biblical-iconographic works. (On the

3. Othmar Keel, *Das Recht der Bilder gesehen zu werden: Drei Fallstudien zur Methode der Interpretation altorientalischer Bilder*, OBO 122 (Universitätsverlag; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

4. See Eleanor F. Beach, "Image and Word: Iconology in the Interpretation of Hebrew Scriptures" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1991), 73; Izaak de Hulster, *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah*, FAT 2/36 (Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 2; Ryan P. Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts: Towards a Visual Hermeneutics for Biblical Studies*, OBO 280 (Academic Press, 2016), 21.

5. Brent A. Strawn, "Introduction: Othmar Keel, Iconography, and the Old Testament," in *Jerusalem and the One God*, by Othmar Keel, ed. Brent A. Strawn (Fortress, 2017), xxv n. 9.

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other hand, the reticence might have allowed international scholars to join and diversify the discussion.[6]) In any event, the discussion is relevant and the use of unpublished material a good addition, with the proviso they could have been attached or densely described to allow further discussion.

Yet some editorial choices might be questioned. On the one hand, despite providing useful contributions, the anthological genre may have undermined the purpose of serving as a guide. It allowed imbalances in quality and style between chapters, dissimilar interpretations of Keel's triadic method, and terminological inconsistences. While anyone in the field shall agree that the terminology of "interartistic approaches" is thorny,[7] should not a guide systematically address the issue? This is not done. Instead, the book shies away from "iconographic exegesis" and its textbook[8] supposedly for its "biblical studies" approach (xviii). But do not chapters 5–7 address how to draw comparisons with biblical texts? Are not biblical scholars the targeted public (xix)? To round up the issue, scholarly branches are missing, such as the "continental European product" (xix) called biblical iconography.[9] On the other hand, the disparity in size and style between Steymans's and the other contributions makes the latter read as secondary. Albeit legitimate and understandable, it is nonetheless ironic that the volume starts from the premise that "Keel himself never wrote a textbook on the method of iconography he conceived" (xviii) only to place his view on his method as a side chapter, which seems to deprive it from authoritative status.

In sum, the volume offers some good contributions and others that run a little behind the state of the art[10] and pushes a little further the knowledge about Keel's method. But is that the right question to ask? Considering that the Fribourg school never behaved as a "school" (de Hulster, 34), the question about their method cannot be answered looking at Keel's works alone. For example, Uehlinger had a hand in Keel's debated scheme.[11] In this sense, the unusual distinction made between Keel and the Fribourg school (e.g., xvii, 15), the contentious (and somewhat misleading) portrayal of Schroer's (17–25) and Uehlinger's (143–45) works, and the overlook of the Fribourg school methodological incursions decreases the volume's potential contribution.[12] While the

6. Silas Klein Cardoso, "The Genesis of Iconographic Exegesis," *CBR* 21 (2023): 193–94.

7. Klein Cardoso, "The Genesis of Iconographic Exegesis," 179–80. For the "interartistic approaches," see Silas Klein Cardoso, "Beyond the Image-Text Divide," *WO* Sonderheft.1 (2024): 15–36.

8. Izaak de Hulster, Brent A. Strawn, and Ryan P. Bonfiglio, eds., *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: An Introduction to Its Method and Practice* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).

9. See Silvia Schroer, "Ikonographie, Biblische," in *Neues Bibellexikon*, ed. Manfred Görg and Bernhard Lang (Benziger, 1998), 2:219–26; Angelika Berlejung, "Sources and Methods," in *T&T Clark Handbook of the Old Testament*, by Jan C. Gertz et al. (T&T Clark, 2012), 51–59.

10. The statement is troubling: "There is no real field in the humanities that studies the relations of the verbal and visual art" (142). If this was true forty years ago, this is not the case today, with multimodal and interartistic studies.

11. Keel, *Das Recht der Bilder*, 267 n. *.

12. E.g., Christoph Uehlinger, "Bildquellen und 'Geschichte Israels': Grundsätzliche Überlegungen und Fallbeispiele," in *Steine, Bilder, Texte*, ed. Christof Hardmeier, ABG 5 (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001), 25–77; Uehlinger, "Neither

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volume holds socioepistemic relevance, particularly as Steymans's contributions attest how Keel's works were developed in the university after his retirement in 2002 and how this path (dis)aligned to the one taken by the Fribourg school(ars), this volume does not fill the void of an iconographic textbook for biblical studies.

Eyewitnesses, Nor Windows to the Past, but Valuable Testimony in Its Own Right. Re-Marks on Iconography, Source Criticism, and Ancient Data Processing," in *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel*, ed. H. G. M. Williamson, PBA 143 (Oxford University Press, 2007), 173–228; Jürg Eggler et al., "Ikonographie," *WiBiLex*; Silvia Schroer, "Genderforschung, altorientalische Kunst und biblische Texte," *HeBAI* 5 (2016): 132–50; Thomas Staubli, "Ikonographische Quellen als Grundlagenmaterial für die Rekonstruktion anthropologischer Themen der Südlevante," in *Anthropologie(n) des Alten Testaments*, ed. Jürgen van Oorschot and Andreas Wagner, VWGTh 42 (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 241–64.

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