

The study on the realities of ancient Israel/Palestine has changed significantly in recent decades. This applies in particular to the so-called Second Temple period, especially the Persian and Hellenistic times. The key change here is related to the process of redefining the place of the bible as a key source of knowledge about the past. Researchers dealing with this subject – biblical scholars as well as historians and archaeologists – are gradually abandoning the research paradigm, dating back to the end of the 19th century (Wellhausen) and the mid-20th century (Albright and Noth). The paradigm shift in research involves the inclusion of extra-biblical sources in research on the history, culture and religion of the people living in Palestine. The crucial role here is played by the extra-biblical texts and the archaeological material – especially iconography.

The project aims to re-evaluate data on religious reality in ancient Israel/Palestine during the Persian and early Hellenistic periods. The starting point for the project is the conviction that the realities of religion and worship cannot be treated as a static phenomenon, but rather have to be studied as a dynamic phenomenon. Therefore, when reconstructing the phenomena of religion and worship, their changeability over time should be taken into account. Moreover, religious phenomena cannot be reconstructed solely on the basis of biblical data. A wide variety of extra-biblical sources must be included. Third and finally, religious phenomena in ancient Israel/Palestine should be treated as a process in which traditional beliefs and old forms of worship, as well as novelties, including those from the outside world, were equivalent factors influencing the content and form of religious and cult activity. Since there are no grounds to believe that religion and worship were isolated from the outside world during this epoch. On the contrary, religious phenomena in ancient Israel/Palestine should be viewed as a result of continuous dialogue with the environment.

The project will be carried out by two research teams, established respectively at the University of Warsaw and the Humboldt-University in Berlin, under the supervision of Łukasz Niesiołowski-Spanò and Katharina Pyschny. The teams will work on selected textual (Warsaw: written extra-biblical and biblical sources) and iconographic material (Berlin: seals, coins, and figurines).

The aim of the project is to reconstruct the world of religious imagery and cult practices of ancient Israel/Palestine in the 5th–3rd century BCE. This will be possible thanks to the confrontation of source material from the era (texts and iconography) with biblical literature. The reconstruction of the world of religious imagery and cult practices in the 5th–3rd centuries on the basis of these sources will allow for a better interpretation of biblical data. This research will allow to reconstruct the world of religious realities that accompanied the writers of the Bible, and therefore constituted points of reference for them – both inspirations and objects of polemics.