

identity that was left. To simplify things a bit, when I refer in general to the societies that occupied the regions prior to the Neo-Babylonian period, I will refer to *Iron Age Israel and Judah*. While this roughly covers the period between 1200 BCE and 586 BCE, I am primarily focused on the first millennium BCE, which covers the Iron Age II period. When speaking more specifically about the northern or southern kingdoms, I will refer to either Israel or Judah, and exclusively the latter from the exile on (unless I am referring to the Hebrew Bible's own use of "Israel" as a shared identity).

A final and perhaps unexpected lexical omission from this book is the term *religion*. Any attempt to reconstruct ancient ideologies and worldviews must engage with the imposition of modern conceptual frameworks to schematize the data, and religion is a framework employed by virtually all scholars to structure data regarding deities and their care and feeding. This significantly impacts the results of their reconstructions.² Every reference to religious *texts*, religious *beliefs*, religious *practices*, and to any other religious domains of experience evokes an entire suite of conceptual structures and content that will differ from reader to reader, but may not be warranted in any configuration, and may be significantly distorting. Far beyond simply shaping our discourse about these issues and the conclusions we reach, when these frameworks cease to be provisional heuristics that are consistently critiqued and compared to others, they can become cemented into our conceptual architecture, and they can govern how we are able to *think* and *communicate* about them. At that point, they become "stultifying conventions" (Saler 2000, 74–75) that might not only evade detection but might effectively marshal academic consensus and other power structures against their uprooting.³ Religion can be one such stultifying convention.

These conventions cannot be overcome through the continued application of the same theoretical models that have for so long fostered and nurtured them. Rather, what is required is the imposition of outside methodologies, and the most robust of those methodologies have demonstrated the socially constructed nature of the category of religion.⁴ If religion is to be gainfully studied going forward, it must be as a modern social construct that is discursively reified (that is, brought about or created through discourse), and not as a transhistorical and transcultural

² For examples of how the framework of religion influences our structuring of the data, see Nongbri 2008, 2013.

³ Scholarship that benefits from this prophylaxis is overwhelmingly produced by elite, white, straight, Eurocentric males, which privileges a small set of perspectives that tend to be more closely tied to the power structures that have given shape to the contemporary conceptualization of religion.

⁴ See Nongbri 2013 for one of the more accessible examples. For recent comments on the construction of this category in concert with the construction of the concept of politics, see Fitzgerald 2015.