

the stultifying molds in which the study of deity in the Hebrew Bible has been confined.

The main question I address in this book is related to the last dichotomy listed above: how is it that cultic images and certain divine representatives can appear to be simultaneously identified *with*, as well as distinguished *from*, the deities they index? As an example, Num 10:35–36 states that as the ark of the covenant set out each day, Moses would declare, “Advance, O YHWH! Your enemies shall scatter!” As it returned each day, he would declare, “Bring back, O YHWH, the ten thousand thousands of Israel!” In 2 Sam 7:2, David laments that he dwells in a house, while “the ark of the Deity dwells within curtains.” Four verses later, YHWH responds through the prophet Nathan, stating, “From the day I brought the children of Israel up out of Egypt until this very day, I have not dwelled in a house, but have traveled around dwelling in a tent.” These passages indicate the deity’s own presence and actions were directly entangled with those of the ark.

Some cultic objects are identified with the deity, but in ways that are not authorized. Exodus 32:8, for instance, has YHWH explain that the Israelites referred to the molten calf as, “your deities, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!” The text condemns worship of the calf, but the identification of the deity with a material object requires no explanation in the text, and is consistent with the treatment mentioned above of YHWH’s relationship to the ark. Similarly, there are several narratives in the Hebrew Bible in which the messenger of YHWH is identified as a messenger in one verse, but then identified as YHWH in another. For example, Exod 3:2 explains that a “messenger of YHWH” appeared to Moses, but in verse 6 this messenger declares, “I am the Deity of your father, the Deity of Abraham, the Deity of Isaac, and the Deity of Jacob.” This is different from other appearances of the messenger, such as Exod 23:20, where YHWH explicitly describes it as a separate entity: “Look, I am sending a messenger before you, to protect you along the way.”

This ostensible paradox is more implicit and ambiguous in the Hebrew Bible than it is in texts from regions like Mesopotamia, where the evidence is far more widespread and explicit and extends to texts that prescribe lengthy ritual processes by which the deity was “installed” within a wide variety of often elaborate cultic objects. Largely because of the abundance of material remains in Mesopotamia bearing on this question, it has been most thoroughly addressed by scholars working within the field of Assyriology.³ Patterns emerging from that field reveal significant progress regarding the conceptual foundations of the relationship of the deity to its cultic images, yet substantial methodological obstacles remain. As a result of the material and ostensibly artistic channels in which these phenomena

³ For engagements with this phenomenon in other fields of study, see Bird 2014 (early Christianity); Mylonopoulos 2010; Platt 2011 (ancient Greece and Rome); Davis 1997 (modern India); Bynum 2015 (Roman Catholicism); Whitehead 2013 (England).