

Conclusion

This book set out to answer a complex question: 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? Answering this question required a fundamental reevaluation of the concepts of deity and divine agency, which occasioned the development of a theoretical framework regarding both that departs in significant ways from consensus views within the study of the Hebrew Bible.¹ I have argued that conceptualizations of deity represented elaborations on the conceptualization of the partible and permeable human person, whose personhood and presence could be communicated—particularly after death—through socially constructed notions of loci of agency and through socially curated material media. This framework links the form and function of funerary and mortuary cults to those cults dedicated to deities, and it accounts for the intuitive perception that a deity’s presence could inhabit and be manifested through such media. It also accounts for the practice of addressing those media—as well as thinking and communicating about them—as if they were the deity themselves. The fifth through seventh chapters of the book then deployed that framework to interrogate the Hebrew Bible’s representation of YHWH’s presencing media.

As noted in the introduction, this framework is surely wrong in many ways that other scholars will no doubt be able to expose and correct. This book represents a crude draft of a map, not actual territory. It is primarily an argument for the usefulness and the potential of this framework and a plea for its further development and refinement. In this conclusion I’d like to review the way the framework has contributed to my argument, as well as some of the ways it could be useful to Hebrew Bible and other scholarship moving forward. In the introduction, I briefly discussed cognitive linguistics and the cognitive science of religion, describing two important frameworks—dual process cognition and

¹ At the same time, this approach is also not entirely novel. As noted in the introduction, Pongratz-Leisten’s (2011) essay on Mesopotamian concepts of deity and divinization had already productively applied Alfred Gell’s (1998) concept of distributed agency as well as a cognitive framework for personhood to the question in an Assyriological context.