

constant.⁵ In light of this, the category of religion, irrespective of the specific framework or definitional approach, is not helpful as a heuristic or organizing principle for the study of the Hebrew Bible, which has no word for “religion” (Barton and Boyarin, 2016). There is no religion in the Hebrew Bible in anything approximating an analytically useful sense.⁶ The central principles of that framework are incommensurate with the priorities and ideological foci of individuals living in first millennium BCE Southwest Asia. The division of their world into sociocultural domains, of which religion is simply one, sits at odds with the worldviews of non-Eurocentric and non-contemporary people and societies.

Unless otherwise noted, all the translations in this book are my own. I quote the Hebrew Bible (in transliteration) from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) edition of the Hebrew Bible. I also draw occasional quotations from the Rahlfs and Hanhart (2006) edition of the Septuagint, and from the NA²⁸ edition of the Christian scriptures.

⁵ Kocku von Stuckrad (2013, 17) provides the following discursive definition of religion: “RELIGION is the societal organization of knowledge about religion” (see also Neubert 2016, Hjelm 2020). This highlights the fact that the one and only feature shared among all those phenomena that are labeled religion—and only those phenomena that are labeled religion—is precisely that they are labeled religion. As a result, any analytically useful reduction to necessary and sufficient features—in other words, any *definition*—must isolate that one feature alone. Religion is whatever a given social group decides is religion.

⁶ A concern may be raised with my willingness to use mind emically (that is, from an insider’s perspective) while refusing to use religion in the same way. There are two reasons for this inconsistency. First, linguistic and conceptual proximates to the notion of the mind as the seat of cognition are frequently used in the societies I am interrogating, so the concept is not an entirely novel retrojection. The same is not true of religion. Second, I am concerned for the distortion that the application of the framework of religion has wrought within contemporary Hebrew Bible scholarship. I feel a convenient means of challenging that distortion is by demonstrating that the avoidance of the term poses no real threat to the integrity or clarity of the scholarship.