

Stephen L. Herring

Divine Substitution

Humanity as the Manifestation of Deity
in the Hebrew Bible
and the Ancient Near East

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Abstract

Divine Substitution: Humanity as the Manifestation of Deity in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East, by Stephen L. Herring, is an investigation of ancient conceptualizations of divine presence. Specifically, this thesis investigates the possibility that the ancient Mesopotamian conceptualization of cultic and royal statues, thought to actually manifest the presence of gods and kings, can likewise be found in ancient Israel. Despite the overly pessimistic view of the later biblical authors, material objects were almost certainly believed to extend and manifest the presence of God in pre-exilic Israel. Likewise, the later polemics against such cultic concepts demonstrate Israel's familiarity with this type of conceptualization. These polemics engaged in the rhetoric of mutilation and destruction of cultic representations, the erasure and re-inscription of divine names, and the rhetorical deconstruction of the specific Mesopotamian rituals thought to transform the dead statue into a living god. Though the biblical reflection of these concepts is more often found in the negative commentary regarding "foreign" cultic practices, S. Herring demonstrates that these opinions were not universally held. At least three biblical texts (Gen 1:26 f.; Ex 34:29–34; and Ezek 36–37) portray the conceptualization that material images could manifest the divine presence in positive terms. Yet, these positive attestations were limited to a certain type of material image – humans.

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August 13, 2013

Stephen L. Herring

1. Introduction: Representation and the Real

1.1 Summary and Outline

“On the day when the god was created...”
(STT 200, line 2)

Thus begins the seventh century BCE Sultantepe Tablet used on the second day of the Mesopotamian *mīs pi*, or “Mouth Washing,” ritual. The initial statement does not refer to the absolute creation of the god, but the transformation of a cultic statue into the god on earth. This text is but one of a multitude of ancient examples that point toward a significant difference between the ancient Mesopotamian understanding of representation and our own modern assumptions, which typically hold that representation and reality are logically and ontologically distinct. This thesis investigates the possibility that the Mesopotamian understanding of representation is likewise attested and, more importantly, condoned in the Hebrew Bible. The first step in this process involves looking at the concept of representation in Mesopotamia, be it cultic or royal (Chapter 2). We will then turn to ancient Israel and examine those texts that portray this type of cultic dependence on divine representation negatively (Chapter 3). Here, we will attempt to argue that the ancient Israelite cult was dependent on cultic representations and that even the later polemics and parodies betray a thorough knowledge of the cultic conceptual system of Mesopotamia and a willing participation in the rhetoric typical of iconic cults. The final section consists of a re-investigation of three well-known texts in the light of our previous conclusions on the role of representation in Mesopotamia and the negative reflection of this concept in Israel (Chapter 4). These three texts share one defining characteristic: They appear to equate, in some way, living humans with Israel’s god by means of a comparison to cultic images. Although the presence of the cultic image analogy in these texts has been observed before, the possibility that these

texts reflect a conceptualization of divine representation found in ancient Mesopotamia has been neglected.

1.2 Cultic Images and Semiotics in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies

The absence of such an attempt is somewhat surprising given the recent recognition, in both biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies, that there exists a great divide between the ancient Near Eastern understanding of representation and our own, which, traditionally speaking, depends so heavily on a Platonic view of representation as *mimesis*. In recognition of this fact, some recent investigations have applied various postmodern philosophical theories to the ancient conceptualization of divine images in an attempt to explain their understanding more fully. Generally speaking, these systems have an advantage over past attempts, since they place a much greater emphasis on the role of interpretation.

In biblical studies, the semiotic system of C. S. Peirce has, perhaps, been the most influential in recent years.¹ Peirce defines a “sign” as anything that,

...stands for something to the idea which it produces, or modifies. Or it is a vehicle conveying into the mind something from without. That for which it stands is called its *object*; that for which it conveys *meaning*, and the idea to which it gives rise, its *interpretant*.²

Simply put, for Peirce, a sign is anything that functions like one, i. e. anything that “gives rise” to an interpretant (the “sign-in-the-mind” of the viewer).³ What has drawn the most attention from scholars of the Bible and the ancient Near East, however, is Peirce’s classification of signs based on the way in which they

1 See, e. g., M. Halbertal and A. Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1992); C. D. Evans, “Cult Images, Royal Policies and the Origins of Aniconism,” in *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström* (eds. W. S. Holloway and L. K. Handy; JSOT 190; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 192–212; T. Mettinger, *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (CBOTS 42; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995), esp. 20–22.

2 C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (eds. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1931–58), 1:339 [italics his].

3 Peirce held to three basic elements in his semiotic system: 1) “sign” (the material representation); 2) “object” (what is represented by the “sign”), and; 3) “interpretant” (the idea/interpretation caused by the ‘sign’). According to D. Greenlee, Peirce’s interpretant is “any sign which interprets another sign, whether that interpreting sign be a thought in somebody’s mind, a written translation, a sentence spoken, or anything else that is interpretive” (*Peirce’s Concept of Sign* [The Hague: Mouton, 1973], 26).

denote what they represent (i. e. the sign's object).⁴ In his numerous notations on signs,⁵ Peirce distinguishes three ways in which a sign can stand for its object: 1) the "symbol," according to Peirce, is a sign that "would lose the character which renders it a sign if there was no interpretant."⁶ Or, again, a symbol denotes its "object" by means of an association of general ideas.⁷ Thus, the symbolic relationship between sign and object rests upon conventionality or arbitrariness, regulated by culture; 2) the "icon" is a weakly motivated or unmotivated type of sign. It is "a sign that conveys an idea by virtue of its very close reproduction of the actual object or event."⁸ Whether natural or cultural, some resemblance between the sign and its object is important for the interpretation; and 3) the "index" is "a sign which would, at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant."⁹ The index is an unmotivated sign. The indexical relationship between a sign and its object is "established through experience or pragmatic understanding of the material world."¹⁰ For example, the presence of smoke is an indexical sign of fire and the presence of wet streets is an indexical sign of rain. Thus, Peirce's three-fold classification includes not only motivated, culturally conceived signs (symbol and, to a lesser extent, icon), but also unmotivated signification (index and, to a lesser extent, icon).¹¹ Further, since all signs are

4 Peirce discusses many different sign typologies in his writings. Best known, however, are his three interlocking categories based upon his own phenomenological categories: 1) quality of feeling; 2) reaction/resistance and; 3) representation/mediation. The first sign typology is based on the phenomenological category of the sign itself (e. g., qualisign, sinsign, legisign), the second on the way the sign denotes its object (icon, index, symbol), and the third on how the sign stands for its object to its interpretant (rheme, dicisign, argument). See, C. S. Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings* (eds. N. Houser et al.; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1992–98), 2:289–99.

5 One of the chief difficulties in using Peirce, according to Greenlee, is that his numerous attempts to define what it means to be a sign are scattered about his published and unpublished papers and that, further, "he nowhere in his writings offers a single complete analysis of the general principles of signification." Nevertheless, "all of the different definitions consistently maintain one position on the essential principles or conditions of the theory...that signification require an object functioning significantly, that this object represent another object, and that it 'determine' an interpretant" (23).

6 C. S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (ed. J. Buchler; New York: Dover, 1955), 104, cf. pp. 112–5.

7 Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 2:249; cf. Greenlee, 93.

8 M. Gottdiener, *Postmodern Semiotics: Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 12; cf. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings*, 104–7.

9 Peirce, *Philosophical Writings*, 104.

10 Gottdiener, 12.

11 In contrast to F. Saussure, who refers only to the "arbitrary" or "unmotivated" relationship between the signifier and the signified (i. e. Peirce's "symbol").

interpreted by another idea (i. e. the interpretant), which is itself a sign, meaning is always “a volatile process of interpretation.”¹²

In one recent study, T. N. D. Mettinger uses Peirce’s system to clarify the differences between iconic and aniconic representations of deity.¹³ He determines that aniconic representations are either examples of indices or “conventions” (“symbol” in Peircian terminology), while iconic representations are, unsurprisingly, examples of icons.¹⁴ However, given that Peirce’s classification of signs into symbols, icons, or indices remains based on the level of proximity between the sign and the reality that it attempts to represent, it is not all that useful when applied to a system that appears to reject the binary opposition of representation and real. As we shall see, in many cases, the referential relationships dictated by such definitions do not seem ultimately to matter. Mettinger admits as much when he recognizes that, in Mesopotamia, both iconic and aniconic representations appear to function conceptually in the same way and produce the same results.¹⁵ While Peirce’s system may aid us in understanding how the form of the representation relates to the entity represented, we should not make the mistake of drawing the conclusion that this relationship naturally dictates how the representation functioned.¹⁶ As we shall see, in many cases there appears to be very little that separates the different forms of cultic representation in ancient Mesopotamia. Be it cultic statue, standing stone, or even cultic symbol, the divide between the representation and the real is often not apparent.¹⁷

12 Gottdiener, 14. This Peircian concept was taken up by later semioticians under different labels, e.g., “polysemy,” “multivocality,” etc. Some argue that Peirce’s “interpretant” is comparable to J. Derrida’s “différance” (see, e.g., C. Atkins, *Reading Deconstruction, Deconstructive Reading* [Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1983], 81), which is based on Saussure’s theory that a sign has meaning only in relation to other signs (i. e. in opposition). J. Sheriff, however, argues that it is not the “interpretant” that is comparable to Derrida’s use of “différance,” but the “ground of representamen.” Peirce’s “ground” is, in effect, the context or system in which the sign is being interpreted (*The Fate of Meaning: Charles Peirce, Structuralism, and Literature* [Princeton: Princeton University, 1989], 56–57 and n.3).

13 Mettinger, *No Graven Image*, 21 f. Peirce’s system has been applied most often to the discussion on the Israelite rationale for the prohibition against similarity-based representations (e.g., see, Halbertal, 38 f.; cf. T. Lewis, “Syro-Palestinian Iconography and Divine Images,” in *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East* [ed. N. H. Walls; ASOR 10; Boston: ASOR, 2005], 71 n.7).

14 Mettinger, *No Graven Image*, 21.

15 Mettinger, *No Graven Image*, 47.

16 Cf. Mettinger’s warning that the presence of aniconic representation should not lead us to conclusions about the theological implications of an aniconic stance by taking “*aniconic iconography* as an immediate expression of some *aniconic theology*” (*No Graven Image*, 22 [italics his]).

17 This distinction and its helpfulness for determining the ancient conceptualization of representation will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 3.

Due to this last point scholars, such as A. Berlejung,¹⁸ apply H.-G. Gadamer's understanding of the difference between an "image" (*Bild*) and a "copy" (*Abbild*) to the ancient Near Eastern concept of cultic images. According to Gadamer, the function of a copy is solely to point to the original (*Urbild*). Thus, the copy will resemble its original and will be cancelled out upon achieving that goal. It is a means to an end and, like all means, loses its function when it reaches its goal.¹⁹ This is not the case for the image:

Was dagegen ein Bild ist, hat seine Bestimmung überhaupt nicht in seiner Selbstaufhebung. Denn es ist nicht ein Mittel zum Zweck. Hier ist das Bild selber das Gemeinte...Die Darstellung bleibt vielmehr mit dem Dargestellten wesentlich verbunden, ja, gehört zu ihm hinzu.²⁰

The primary characteristic of the image, then, is not the physical resemblance, but the ontological inseparability ("ontologische Unlösbarkeit")²¹ that exists between the image and what is represented. For Gadamer, this is nowhere as obvious as in a religious image, since "[a]n ihm wird zweifelsfrei klar, daß das Bild nicht Abbild eines abgebildeten Seins ist, sondern mit dem Abgebildeten seinsmäßig kommuniziert."²²

The ontological relationship that exists between the image and the original results in an increase in being for the thing represented; the image is equated to an "emanation" or "overflow" of the represented entity.²³ In this sense the image, for Gadamer, is to be distinguished from the "symbol" (*Symbol*), which also functions to make present that which it represents. Symbols, unlike images, are merely representatives ("bloße Stellvertreter") in that they must be known if one is to understand what they indicate.²⁴ The symbol, then, is important only in so far as one understands what it is representing. The image, on the other hand, has

18 *Die Theologie der Bilder: Herstellung und Einweihung von Kultbildern in Mesopotamien und die alttestamentliche Bilderpolemik* (OBO 162; Freiburg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 6–8.

19 H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1965), 132.

20 "An image, however, is not destined to nullify itself, since it is not a means to an end. Here, the image itself is what is meant...Rather, the representation remains essentially connected with what is represented, indeed, it is part of it (Gadamer, 132).

21 Gadamer, 133.

22 "[i]n it is clear without any doubt that the image is not a copy of a copied being, but ontologically communicates with what is copied" (Gadamer, 136).

23 Gadamer, 134.

24 Gadamer, 147. In this way, the symbol is like a "sign" (*Zeichen*) in Gadamer's philosophy. The sign functions only to point away from itself to that which is represented. The obvious distinction between the image and the sign, therefore, is similar to the difference between the image and the copy – in viewing the image, the viewer has already reached the original and so there is no need to be pointed elsewhere (Gadamer, 134).

significance in and of itself, apart from the represented person or thing. In this way, the image has “im ästhetischen Sinne des Wortes ein eigenes Sein.”²⁵

As we shall see, the ancient Mesopotamian conceptualization of representation is very much like Gadamer’s *Bild*, where the real presence of the entity represented participates in the representation and, thus, the representation has its own being. In Mesopotamia, the ontological life of the image is not only aesthetic. Indeed, the distinction between what is “real” and what is “representation” becomes blurred, so that the image is, itself, treated as a living thing.

To date, the most comprehensive attempt to understand the ancient Mesopotamian conception is Z. Bahrani’s *The Graven Image*.²⁶ Bahrani does not limit her investigation to cultic images. Instead, she attempts to explain the entire system, including the cuneiform system of writing, as well as royal and divine representation (whether living or statue) by recourse to a number of post-modern philosophical theories. Bahrani begins her study on representation by applying theories of deferred and pluridimensional referentiality to the Babylonian cuneiform script. She argues that the relationship between sign and signified in the cuneiform script “was not unidirectional in the thinking of the Mesopotamians... (but) is perhaps better conceived, metaphorically, in terms of a circle or a chain of signification.”²⁷ In other words, for the ancient Mesopotamians, one could encounter the same concept, thing or referent through different signifiers. Her argument is based on the seemingly “unlimited possibilities for signification” inherent in cuneiform script, where any one sign (or combination of signs) could evoke a number of different meanings. They could, for instance, be read for their pictorial quality, either directly or, more often, *pars pro toto* (i. e. metonymically or synecdochically). Such “pictograms” could also be used in isolation or in combination to indicate other meanings by association (i. e. metonymically or metaphorically).²⁸ Finally, these same signs could be read for their phonetic value (i. e. homophonically) to evoke even different referents. The multiple possibilities inherent in any one sign helps explain the Mesopotamian hermeneutics of omen and dream interpretation, where all the possible relationships between sign and signified were employed. The scholars responsible for interpreting these messages from the gods explored the entire range of relationships between sign and signified (homophony, metonymy,

25 “in the aesthetic sense of the word, its own being” (Gadamer, 133).

26 *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2003).

27 Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 111.

28 E.g., a picture of a foot could refer to walking, a picture of a triangle could metonymically refer to a woman or girl, or a line drawing of a mountain could refer to a foreign land. Likewise, one could combine the later two examples to indicate a slave girl (Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 112).

synecdoche, metaphorical, iconicity, etc.).²⁹ The idea that one could encounter the same things or phenomena through multiple signs is related to the system of divination – the belief that the gods had written messages into creation.³⁰ Thus, everything, from normal occurrences to unusual events to dreams, could be “read” in an attempt to retrieve some divine message. Any sign (written or otherwise), therefore, could be interpreted based upon resemblance (“including areas of iconicity and homophony”) and association (“including metonymy, synecdoche, and metaphor”), neither of which seems to have been thought to grant more direct access to the signified.³¹

Bahrani, then, uses this belief that the gods had encoded all of creation with signifiers and that these signifiers could be interpreted by various means to support the multivalency of royal and cultic representation in ancient Mesopotamia. Bahrani rejects the concept of representation as *mimesis*, where the representation is a secondary imitation of reality and functions to point away from itself, to an original reality. Instead, much like Gadamer, Bahrani notes that the “image” (Akk. *šalmu*), in ancient Mesopotamia, is better defined as “a doubling or a multiplication, but is not a copy in the sense of mimetic resemblance; rather it is a repetition, another way that the person or entity could be encountered.”³² Bahrani defines the image as “a mode of presencing.”³³ In this way, it is a part of the “system of circulating presence”³⁴ and, thus, is one of a number of ways in which the thing or person can be accessed:

[I]mage and name, and the organic body double of a person were all ways of encountering that person. A body double..., a wax or clay effigy, or a statue of durable materials...can be likened to the iconic or homophonic substitute signifier, which functions by means of resemblance. Likewise, things related to magical substitution (fragments of attire, fingernails, sand taken from one’s footprint) as well as offspring or seed are metonymic extension of a person.³⁵

As with the cuneiform script, there does not appear to be any one signifier that gives more direct access to the entity represented than another. However, there

29 Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 115. This was true not only of dream and omen interpretation, but could also be carried over into names (see, J. Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning and the Gods* [trans. Z. Bahrani and M. Van De Mieroop; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992], 94).

30 Cf. J. Bottéro, “Symptômes, Signes, Écritures,” in *Divination et Rationalité* (ed. J. P. Vernant; Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), 161.

31 Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 113.

32 Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 135.

33 Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 137.

34 Just as the signified could be accessed by means of a number of signs, in the cuneiform script, depending on how it was interpreted, so the thing or person could be accessed by means of various representations, see, e.g., Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 129.

35 Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 128.

does seem to be the assumption that the combination of as many signifiers as possible produces a representation that can become a full and valid substitute of the represented entity.³⁶ Thus, the transformational process, the making of the image through the encoding of signifiers, is very important for the ancient Mesopotamian conceptualization of presence-through-representation. This fact was well recognized even by later biblical polemicists, as we shall see.

We will look more closely at the concept of representation in ancient Mesopotamia in Chapter 2. While our investigation will also take into account the complicated nature of representation in the ancient Near East, we will not spend a great amount of time attempting to explain fully the concept by means of modern or postmodern philosophical categories. Although the use of these systems has highlighted the complex nature of the conceptualization, they nevertheless tend to “collapse” and “fall short” when applied to the ancient Mesopotamian evidence.³⁷ Thus, for example, the idea that a representation can function as a valid substitute for a represented entity cannot be fully explained by Peircian terminology, which relies on levels of proximity between the sign and reality. Further, although Gadamer recognized that an “ontological communion” exists between the image and its original and that the image has significance even apart from the represented entity, this tends to be for him an aesthetic reality. Again, there is no mistaking the representation for what is real. Even Bahrani must redefine many terms in her attempt to explain the ancient phenomena.³⁸ One of the chief difficulties in a task such as this is the use of modern terminology to explain ancient concepts. The danger of using terms like “icon,” “symbol,” or “index” to distinguish between different forms of cultic representation is that they have the potential of implying a different conception regarding the degree of presence contained/manifested by the representation. Thus, whenever possible we will use the more general term “representation” to refer to cultic stones, trees, and statues.³⁹ The term “image” (or “divine image,” “cultic image,” etc.), however, will be retained to refer to divine statuary (primarily reflecting the translation of Akk. *šalmu* / Heb. צֶלֶם).

Perhaps surprising to some, there are actually many helpful modern analogies in trying to grasp this ancient belief.⁴⁰ One of the most useful, however,

36 Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 137.

37 See, e.g., *Graven Image*, 204. Note also Mettinger’s own confession, *No Graven Image*, 22.

38 E.g., in contrast to mimetic iconicity, Bahrani labels the *šalmu* as a *simulacrum* “because it substitutes for the real itself” (*Graven Image*, 137). But this is at odds with the Platonic definition. See also below, p. 36 n.71.

39 Even this is not entirely satisfactory as the term “representation” already implies a distinction from the “real,” a distinction that may not be relevant to the ancient conceptualization.

40 See the multiple examples in D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989). On the remarkable 48 day con-

remains the Eucharistic analogy, in which bread and wine become the real presence of the divine Jesus.⁴¹ The benefit of this analogy is that many in the West are intimately familiar with it. Despite the fact that many of these people operate, day in and day out, on the assumption that what is represented is ontologically distinct from the representation, for a brief period of time they suspend this assumption and grant that somehow these material objects have actually become the manifestation of their god.

1.2.2 Methodological Notes

The goal of the present thesis is to investigate the possibility that certain texts in the Hebrew Bible reflect aspects of this Mesopotamian conceptualization of representation. By necessity, therefore, we will be comparing two different cultures, ancient Israel and Mesopotamia. In order to make this argument as tight as possible, we will first examine the evidence in the wider context of biblical material in order to demonstrate that divine representations (stones, symbols, and even statues) were present and served as the central cultic representation for the Israelite cult(s) throughout Israel's history. In other words, we will suggest that divine representations in ancient Israel would have functioned exactly like the cult statues, symbols, and stones of other ancient Near Eastern cults. It is important to point out at the beginning that due to the nature of the written sources complete assurance in this conclusion is not possible. Rather, we must be content with plausibility. In this way, we hope to demonstrate that, despite the overly negative commentary of the biblical sources, it is more plausible that divine representations were the norm in pre-exilic Israel and that these representations would have functioned as the localized presence of the deity in question. We will also discuss many biblical texts that clearly demonstrate intimate knowledge of the conceptualization of divine images in Mesopotamia, and more importantly, the function and importance of the transformational ritual that was used to turn the human-made object into the god.

When we turn to the texts that will occupy the majority of this thesis, we will attempt to demonstrate not only literary and conceptual parallels that reflect some of the Mesopotamian concepts and concerns, but also the historical connections between the two cultures. In order to do this, we have chosen three

separation ritual for the marble image of Sai Baba in Madras city, see J. P. Waghorne, "The Divine Image in Contemporary South India: The Renaissance of a Once Maligned Tradition," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (ed. M. Dick; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 211–43.

41 This analogy has been made by a number of recent scholars. See, e.g., T. Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (eds. P. D. Miller et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 22–3.

passages that either belong to or are related to the Priestly material (P) in the Hebrew Bible, whether written (Gen 1), edited (Ex 34:29–35), or otherwise (Ezek 36–37).⁴² Thus, one of the chief assumptions of this thesis is that the Babylonian exile had a particularly important influence on the final development of the Priestly stratum of the Hebrew Bible (whether ultimate or penultimate). This is not to say that the Priestly stratum is not diverse, incorporating some pre-exilic traditions, but that these traditions have been supplemented, modified, and edited through a lengthy transmission process during and, possibly just after, the exilic period.⁴³ The renewed debate over the nature of the Priestly material in the Pentateuch will have little impact on this thesis, so long as it is granted that the “stratum” consists both of longer written compositions (e.g., Gen 1:1–2:4a; Ex 25–31, 35–40, etc.) as well as editorial/redactional work that amplified and explicated older texts in, especially, the book of Exodus.⁴⁴

42 Ezekiel’s relationship to ancient Mesopotamian literature and concepts will be independently established below (chap. 4.3). Thus, in terms of historical connection, the relationship between Ezekiel and the Priestly stratum is of secondary importance. We will, further, leave open the question on Ezekiel’s influence on the Priestly stratum. It will be suggested, however, that the “image of God” analogy appears to be better developed and more universal in the Priestly ideology.

43 Despite debate in some circles, a date in, or shortly after, the Babylonian Exile remains the consensus for the Priestly stratum. See, e.g., J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch* (London: SCM, 1992), 26, 238; F. Crüsemann, *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law* (trans. A. W. Mahnke; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 282 f.; N. Lohfink, *Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy* (trans. L. M. Maloney; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 98 n.5; E. Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 221; F. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1997), 325; M. S. Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 41–3, 174; E. Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1998), 218–20.

44 It seems to me, then, that these two conceptions could fit equally well into the view that the Priestly tradition (P) consists of an originally independent narrative (P^G) that was supplemented (P^S) and subsequently worked into older material by a Priestly editor (R^P) and the view that the Priestly tradition consists of only a redactional or “compositional” layer (P, or according to Blum, K^P) of an existing narrative corpus, since many who hold the latter view have little difficulty assigning some larger compositions to the tradition. Most scholars, on both sides of the debate, view the Priestly redaction as a penultimate, if not ultimate, stage in the formation of the Pentateuch. For discussions, convenient summaries, and bibliographies of this current debate, see N. Lohfink, *Theology*, 143–7; R. E. Clements, “Pentateuchal Problems,” in *Tradition and Interpretation* (ed. G. W. Anderson; Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 102–4; R. W. Klein, “The Message of P,” in *Die Botschaft und die Boten: Festschrift für Hans Walter Wolff zum 70. Geburtstag* (eds. J. Jeremias and L. Perlt; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981), 57–58; E. Zenger, *Gottes Bogen in den Wolken: Untersuchungen zu Komposition und Theologie der priesterschriftlichen Urgeschichte* (SB 112; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1983), 32–35; D. A. Knight, “The Pentateuch,” in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* (eds. D. A. Knight and G. M. Tucker; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 285–6; K. Koch, “P-Kein Redaktor! Erinnerung an zwei Eckdaten der Quellenscheidung,” *VT* 37 (1987), 446–56; Blum, *Studien*, 229–32; M. Vervenne, “The ‘P’ Tradition in the

Given the nature of this thesis, which will be investigating three distinct texts for conceptual similarities to each other and ancient Mesopotamia, these and other such introductory comments will be dealt with more fully in their respective sections.

Pentateuch: Document and/or Redaction? The 'Sea Narrative' (Ex 13,17–14,31) As A Test Case," in C. Brekelmans and J. Lust (eds.), *Pentateuchal and Deuteronomistic Studies* (BETL 94; Leuven, 1990), 21–25; Nicholson, *Pentateuch*, 196–221.

2. Image and Presence in Mesopotamia

2.1 Introduction

Regarding contemporary interpretations of ancient Mesopotamian conceptualizations, Z. Bahrani writes, “[t]he axiomatic notion that representation is a means of imitating real things in the world must be set aside, as much as possible, in dealing with works of art from Near Eastern antiquity, even if this means risking an emphasized alterity with all its consequences.”¹ In other words, the modern understanding that representation is a form of *mimesis*, a mere copy of a “real” object which exists outside of its referent must not cloud our interpretation of the ancients’ conception. Ancient texts and inscriptions paint a more complicated picture. T. Jacobsen, in his groundbreaking article “The Graven Image,” asks, “What, then, was the cult image?” His answer reveals the complexities surrounding the concept of representation in Mesopotamia:

[A] cult statue is a foreshadowing of and a stage in divine presence, a theophany. Here the god can be found, can be approached... We must think... in terms of a purely mystic unity, the statue mystically becoming what it represents, the god, without, however, in any way limiting the god, who remains transcendent. In so “becoming,” the statue ceases to be mere earthly wood, precious metal and stones, ceases to be the work of human hands. It becomes transubstantiated, a divine being, the god it represents.²

More recently, M. Dick points to the many examples in Mesopotamian literature where references to the deity by name effectively refer only to the statue of a deity and, following up on Jacobsen’s use of Eucharistic terminology, makes the analogy:

1 Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 122.

2 Jacobsen, “Graven Image,” 22–3.

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Divine Substitution is an investigation of ancient conceptualizations of divine presence. Specifically, Stephen L. Herring investigates the possibility that the ancient Mesopotamian conceptualization of cultic and royal statues, thought to actually manifest the presence of gods and kings, can likewise be found in ancient Israel. Though the biblical reflection of »foreign« cultic practices is often negative, Herring demonstrates that this opinion is not universally held: At least three biblical texts portray the conceptualization that material images could manifest the divine presence in positive terms. Yet, these positive attestations were limited to a certain type of material image – humans.

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