

Gods and Humans in the Ancient Near East

In this book, Tyson Putthoff explores the relationship between gods and humans, and between divine nature and human nature, in the Ancient Near East. In this world gods lived among humans. The two groups shared the world with one another, each playing a special role in maintaining order in the cosmos. Humans also shared aspects of a godlike nature.

Even in their natural condition, humans enjoyed a taste of the divine state. Indeed, gods not only lived among humans but also lived inside them, taking up residence in the physical body. As such, human nature was actually a composite of humanity and divinity. Putthoff offers new insights into the ancients' understanding of humanity's relationship with the gods, providing a comparative study of this phenomenon from the third millennium BCE to the first century CE. His book will be of interest to scholars and students of history, philosophy, theology and anthropology of the Ancient Near East and the biblical world.

Tyson L. Putthoff is an associate faculty member in the Schusterman Center for Judaic and Israel Studies at the University of Oklahoma. He is the author of *Ontological Aspects of Early Jewish Anthropology* and *Divine Embodiment in Pauline Anthropology*.

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TYSON L. PUTTHOFF
University of Oklahoma



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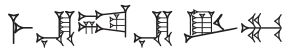
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To Judah John, Addie Pearl, Zevie Rose and Andi Lane.

You are my beloved.



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[More Information](#)

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xiii
1 Introduction: Self, Space and the Divine Embodiment Model	I
2 Godlike Bodies and Radiant Souls: Divine Embodiment in Ancient Egypt	14
3 Composite Beings and Sexy God-Kings: The Divinity of Humanity in Ancient Mesopotamia	48
4 Metallic Bodies and Deification by Ingestion: Material Embodiment in Hittite Anatolia	84
5 YHWH and His Theomorphic Body: The ‘Image of God’ in Israelite Anthropology	118
6 Divinity for All: The Godlike Self in Graeco-Roman Thought	156
7 Conclusion: Gods and Humans, Gods in Humans	190
<i>Bibliography</i>	199
<i>Index</i>	243

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Preface

In many ways, this book serves as the ‘prequel’ to my previous monograph (Putthoff 2017). There I looked at early Jewish beliefs about what happens to humans who encounter the divine directly. Throughout that project, I knew that there must have been even more ancient beliefs about similar matters. So I continued to expand my scope, during and after my doctoral work, to look at what others in the ancient world thought about such ideas. In this book, I therefore go farther back in near eastern history to look at the relationship between gods and humans and between the divine nature and human nature. In the third book in this project, also complete and soon to be in print, I explore the same ideas in the Apostle Paul’s writings.

In this book, I argue that, in the Ancient Near East, gods lived both *among* humans and *within* humans. To be sure, the two groups shared the world with one another, each playing a unique role in maintaining order in the cosmos. However, more than sharing the world with the gods, humans also had a share in their nature. Even in their natural condition, humans enjoyed a taste of the divine state. Indeed, gods not only lived among humans but they lived inside them, taking up residence in the physical body the same way they did inside images and statues. As such, human nature was actually a composite of humanity and divinity.

In an attempt to gain insight into how the ancients understood humanity’s relationship with the gods, this book will therefore take you from one end of the Ancient Near East to the other, and from the third mill. BCE to the first c. CE. I am quite sure that you will not agree with everything I suggest. If you do, please go back and read the book again, and surely you will find something you disagree with. Some of you will find the size

of the book refreshing, as it is not overwhelmingly long. Others of you will wish I had spent much more time in each culture or region of the Ancient Near East or in a particular primary text. Admittedly, this book will leave room for expansion, whether in my own work or by others equally or more qualified than I. Regardless of these disputable matters, and knowing that there are areas in my evaluations of the sources and suggestions for interpretations that will meet with certain critique, this book fills a necessary gap in our understanding of ancient conceptions of the human self and its relationship to the divine. My hope is that, albeit rapid and at times vexing, this journey across time and space will provide you with fresh ways of thinking about God, gods, humans and human nature.

Acknowledgements

Many people have taught, encouraged, critiqued and mentored me over the last decade and a half. Indeed, I will always be indebted to Stephen Barton, Mark Given, John Barclay, Robert Hayward and Lutz Doering. Their willingness to devote themselves to an eager but inexperienced graduate student like me remains truly inspiring. I continue to look to their example as academics in my own research and teaching.

During and after my time as a student, I have had the privilege to continue to learn from a remarkable group of scholars. Ben Wold, Crispin Fletcher-Louis and Michael Lakey have served, in many ways, as post-doctoral mentors. I have learned so much in the years following my PhD from these men, and I cannot thank them enough for their willingness to give of themselves to help me succeed in academia and in life. In the last couple of years, Daniel Snell, Alan Levenson, Rhonda Dean-Kyncl and Alisa Fryar have likewise shown me what it looks like to be a prolific scholar and successful academic as well as a genuinely good person. Not only have these men and women proven to be tough critics, treasured mentors and valuable dialogue partners, but they have proven to be wonderful friends as well.

I am especially grateful to Crispin and Michael for their thoughtful critique of the book. I truly cannot express how thankful I am to them for their willingness to read the manuscript thoroughly and to provide the much-needed feedback that they provided. Not only is the book much better because of them, but I am certain that I have grown as a person and as a thinker because of them as well.

A number of others have contributed to the strengths of this book, though of course I take full responsibility for its errors or weaknesses.

I am grateful for the conversations I had with Mike Seaman and Marlin Blankenship, especially during the formative stages of this book. In the latter stages, Justin Wollenberg helped me to clarify some issues that had proven difficult for me. I am also thankful to Joey Silver, for his friendship, generosity, support and always lively conversations over the last seven years.

I am thankful to my parents, John and Pam Putthoff, for their constant love, support and encouragement. They helped me see long ago the value of hard work in pursuing my goals. I am certain that without the lessons they instilled in me growing up, this book would never have made it to publication. I am also thankful to my father- and mother-in-law, John and Janna Boyer. Their continued support of my family has been priceless, and I am grateful for all that they have done for us.

Now, about my beautiful family. My sweet Judah John, Addie Pearl and Zevie Rose, thank you for sharpening my thinking, sparking my imagination and warming my heart in ways I never thought possible. Thank you for encouraging me when I let this book get the better of me. Thank you for teaching me how to enjoy life when I forget how. I love you. My beautiful Andi Lane, thank you for supporting me, encouraging me, pushing me and loving me the way you do. Thank you for being patient with me when I am not so easy to be around. Thank you for showing me what it must have been like to encounter the divine like those in this book. Thank you for being mine. I cannot imagine life without you. I love you. When I look at my family, it is easy for me to imagine why entire cultures, for thousands of years, believed that humans had an element of the divine within them. My beautiful family truly are living embodiments of the subject of this book, visible manifestations of the divine in my life. Judah, Addie, Zevie and Andi, this book is for you. I love you.

Lastly, I am forever grateful to Beatrice Rehl, Eilidh Burrett, Shalini Bisa, Charlotte Bryan, Vinithan Sedumadhaven and Trent Hancock for their tireless work and guidance throughout the publication process. Working with them has truly been a pleasure.

Abbreviations

Akk.	Akkadian
Aram.	Aramaic
BCE	Before the Common Era
c.	century, centuries
ca.	circa
CE	Common Era
Grk.	Greek
Heb.	Hebrew
Hitt.	Hittite
Lat.	Latin
mill.	millennium, millennia
Sum.	Sumerian
Syr.	Syriac
tb.	Tablet
tbl.	Table

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